

Lower Bear Area Planning Unit

Recommendations would need to be re-evaluated if the Amador Water Agency develops concrete plans to expand Lower Bear River Reservoir Dam and thereby raise the reservoir level (the 2006 Mokelumne Amador Calaveras Integrated Regional Water Management Plan identifies the reservoir as a future water supply).

Fish, Plant, and Wildlife Habitat

There is a potential for protection and enhancement of biological resources, particularly outside the FERC boundary where less focus has been given during the recent relicensing process. Recommended measures further enhance habitat protection and habitat quality through the use of sustainable forestry management techniques, continuity of management with adjacent landowners, and possible habitat restoration and enhancement opportunities.

Potential Measure:

- *Conduct surveys of lands outside the FERC boundary to identify biological resources and enable their protection.*

Though many biological resource studies were conducted for the Mokelumne Project FERC relicensing, these studies likely focused only on resources within the FERC boundary and did not include the entire planning unit. Therefore, the Stewardship Council recommends conducting surveys outside the FERC boundary to identify biological resources and enable their protection.

Potential Measure:

- *Develop a wildlife and habitat management plan for the planning unit.*

The Stewardship Council also recommends using biological resource survey data to create a wildlife and habitat management plan. The planning unit contains potential habitat for several special status species including mountain yellow-legged frog, willow flycatcher, northern goshawk, American marten, and California spotted owl, and recommended surveys may reveal additional special status plants and wildlife. Once recommended surveys are completed, potential habitat enhancements and restoration opportunities can be identified and developed into a comprehensive plan describing goals and objectives for habitat and species, as well as measures needed to enhance and protect habitat for both wildlife and plant species. This plan would specifically emphasize continuity of management with adjacent USFS spotted owl Protected Activity Centers (PACs), deer summer range habitat connectivity, and management for northern goshawk. Identifying and protecting late successional stands for the purpose of habitat enhancement for spotted owl would be one component of providing continuity with adjacent management. This plan would also include the continued management of Cole Creek for native trout and mountain yellow-legged frog populations in coordination with existing USFS management efforts. Monitoring of species and/or habitats would also be developed as a component of the plan. The wildlife and habitat management plan should be developed in conjunction with the noxious weed, forest, and fuels management plans. Recommended habitat protection measures would also protect cultural resources.

Potential Measure:

- *Develop a noxious weed management plan for areas not included in the FERC-mandated Noxious Weed Plan.*

Preparation and implementation of a Noxious Weed Plan was mandated as part of the Mokelumne Project FERC License Order for the FERC project area. This plan was prepared in 2002 and approved by Eldorado National Forest. The noxious weed survey area included USFS land inside the FERC boundary as well as adjacent planning unit lands. The Stewardship Council recommends preparation and implementation of a noxious weed management plan for those areas of the planning unit not covered by the FERC license required Noxious Weed Plan. This measure is recommended to eradicate existing populations of noxious weeds where possible and implement preventative measures to minimize the spread of weeds in the future. This plan would also provide for more consistent management of noxious weeds with adjacent management and should be coordinated with PG&E and the USFS. This plan should be developed in conjunction with the fuels, forest, and wildlife and habitat management plans.

Potential Measure:

- *Support future Upper Mokelumne River Watershed Authority efforts to preserve water quality and identify protection and improvement projects that are most critical.*

The Stewardship Council also recommends supporting future Upper Mokelumne River Watershed Authority (UMRWA) efforts to preserve water quality, water supply, and the environment in the Upper Mokelumne River Watershed. The UMRWA Project developed a water quality database to establish a baseline for a watershed water quality assessment of the Upper Mokelumne River and identified management measures for agencies to implement to maintain and improve source water quality in the watershed.

Potential Measure:

- *Manage Cole Creek parcels to complement surrounding Mokelumne Wilderness values.*

The Stewardship Council recommends managing inholding areas as well as areas bordering on the Mokelumne Wilderness by Cole Creek to complement surrounding wilderness values. The Cole Creek parcels have three unique aspects: they are within and adjacent to the Mokelumne Wilderness, they are not encumbered by the FERC boundary, and they include special status species habitat. It is recommended that this area be managed to complement the surrounding wilderness values of the Mokelumne Wilderness and to protect the existing high value resources that the site provides. This would include managing recreation as primitive, not allowing motor vehicle use, protecting cultural resources, maintaining a visual quality of preservation (e.g., any trails and other related improvements should be designed to be as obscure as possible), maintaining the natural condition of timber stands, and generally preserving the wilderness character of the land.

Sustainable Forestry

Potential Measures:

- *Evaluate existing timber inventory data and supplement as appropriate.*

- *Develop a forest management plan for the planning unit to promote natural forest development and structural and physical diversity in forests for long-term ecological, economic, social, and cultural benefits.*

The Stewardship Council recommends developing a forest management plan for the planning unit through the evaluation of existing forest inventory data and supplemental information, when appropriate. In addition to supporting natural forest development, the forest management plan would promote watershed management, supporting the enhancement of other BPVs over the long term. The forest management plan would be compatible with both current and recommended recreation uses, areas of biological and cultural importance, as well as wilderness values surrounding the Cole Creek parcels. Identifying and designating late successional stands for the purpose of habitat enhancement for the spotted owl would also be incorporated into forest management practices. The forest management plan should be developed in conjunction with the fuels, noxious weed, and wildlife and habitat management plans.

In areas where timber extraction is consistent with the forest management plan, timber harvesting techniques would be promoted that maintain mosaics of forest stands of different age, size, and rotation period. In addition to utilizing PG&E's uneven-age selection harvest system, harvesting practices and a monitoring program would be included to protect watercourses and lakes and promote the restoration and conservation of natural forests. Post-harvest, a monitoring plan would be developed to ensure that forest management and the proposed harvesting schedule would be consistent with the forest management plan, promoting natural forest development in perpetuity.

Potential Measure:

- *Develop a fuels management plan to ensure long-term forest health and reduce fuel loading and fire hazard throughout the planning unit.*

Management of fuels is very important in reducing high fire risk in this planning unit. Therefore, the Stewardship Council recommends developing a fuels management plan for this planning unit. The fuels management plan would ensure long-term forest health and reduce fuel loading and fire hazard throughout the planning unit. Coordination with adjacent landowners and USFS management would promote an integrated approach to management of the forest, habitat, and recreation resources in this area. This plan should be developed in conjunction with the noxious weed, forest, and wildlife and habitat management plans.

Potential Measure:

- *Develop a fire management and response plan for the planning unit to ensure fire preparedness.*

Although the Lower Bear Area Planning Unit is remote, many recreationists use the area, particularly at the Bear River Resort. This area also has a recent history of fire and was evacuated during the "Power Fire" in 2004. Therefore, the Stewardship Council recommends developing a fire management and response plan to ensure fire preparedness and enhance fire prevention. The plan would outline appropriate actions to take when a fire occurs as well as reporting procedures. The fire management and response plan should be coordinated with any existing fire preparedness plans in the area, particularly with the USFS (who manages most of the adjacent lands and recreation facilities).

Open Space

Potential Measure:

- *Apply permanent conservation easements to ensure a higher level of open space protection.*

The Stewardship Council recommends preserving open space values through permanent conservation easements and management of inholding and other lands bordering the Mokelumne Wilderness to complement adjacent wilderness values. Conservation easements would describe all prohibited uses throughout the planning unit to maintain open space values, including the level of uses allowed. Recommendations include only minor additions of recreation facilities and are not expected to decrease the scenic quality of the viewsheds.

Agricultural Uses

Potential Measure:

- *Evaluate the potential for grazing opportunities within the planning unit, in coordination with adjacent USFS grazing allotments.*

The planning unit is predominantly steep and consists of disconnected parcels; however, there is some potential for grazing within this planning unit in coordination with adjacent grazing allotments. The USFS Bear River and Pardoe grazing allotments are located in this area. Informal grazing may already be occurring within the planning unit from adjacent allotments due to the lack of fencing. This measure would evaluate the potential to formalize this use. Therefore, the Stewardship Council recommends evaluating the potential for grazing on the planning unit lands in coordination with adjacent USFS grazing allotments. Although the amount of acreage needed to graze cattle is dependent on available forage and overall allotment condition, grazing at higher elevations typically requires substantial amounts of land. Generally, a minimum of about 20,000 acres is needed at a 5,000-6,000 foot elevation in the Sierra Nevada to graze a herd of about 100-200 cattle. Thus, any grazing would need to be in coordination with an existing adjacent grazing allotment.

Grazing within the planning unit may necessitate the use of fencing to better manage livestock distribution and keep cattle out of sensitive areas. As Lower Bear River Reservoir is a drinking water supply source, care would also need to be taken to avoid the potential for reservoir water contamination related to livestock use. If grazing is determined to be feasible within the planning unit, a rangeland management plan should be developed that includes goals and objectives and a monitoring and adaptive management strategy, and specifies grazing practices that may address topics including soil and water conservation, erosion control, pest management, nutrient management, vegetation management, and habitat protection.

Preservation of Historic Values

Potential Measures:

- *Conduct surveys outside the FERC Project APE to identify cultural resources and enable their protection.*
- *Coordinate with Native American entities when conducting cultural resource measures.*

It is likely that cultural resource surveys conducted for relicensing efforts were limited to the FER Project Area of Potential Effects (APE), generally defined as all lands within the FERC boundary. Therefore, lands outside the APE were likely not surveyed. There is a high likelihood of cultural sites outside the APE, and therefore the Stewardship Council recommends conducting surveys outside the APE to identify cultural resources and enable their protection. This would particularly include the parcels by Cole Creek, which are located completely outside the FERC boundary. Documentation of cultural sites should be coordinated with Native American entities.

Potential Measures:

- *Develop a cultural resources management plan for areas not already included in the FERC-mandated HRMP.*
- *Coordinate with Native American entities when conducting cultural resource measures.*

Although a Heritage Resources Management Plan (HRMP) is being developed as part of FERC relicensing, this plan will only include measures to avoid and mitigate impacts to resources within the APE. Assuming that recommended surveys identify additional cultural sites within the planning unit, the Stewardship Council recommends developing a cultural resources management plan for areas not included in the FERC license required HRMP to ensure that all cultural resources are provided adequate protection in the future. The plan would include appropriate measures for the identification, evaluation, and treatment of cultural resources (archaeological and historical), as well as traditional use areas. Treatment measures could include avoidance, specific protective measures (e.g., fencing), site monitoring, and methods to preserve, restore, or enhance cultural resource values through conservation easements, management agreements, or through public interpretation and education programs. Development of the cultural resources management plan should be consistent with the FERC license required HRMP and should be coordinated with Native American entities.

Outdoor Recreation

Under Stewardship Council recommendations, existing recreation opportunities would continue, and several new and enhanced recreation opportunities are recommended. Continued recreation uses would include allowing ongoing access for the Silver Bear Snowmobile Trail. The trail is a very popular winter recreation activity in the area and is mostly on adjacent USFS lands; however, it crosses planning unit lands in several places.

Potential Measure:

- *Add new day use/fishing access by the dam at Lower Bear River Reservoir.*

Measures to enhance the recreation experience in the Lower Bear Area Planning Unit include the addition of a formal day use/fishing access area at Lower Bear River Reservoir. Fishing from the dam and shoreline at Lower Bear River Reservoir is a popular activity. This measure would provide day use amenities (including picnic tables) to enhance the fishing experience. Prior to implementation, studies would be completed to evaluate the need for such a facility as well as determine if a suitable location exists. Additionally, the recommended location for a day use/fishing access area is within a parcel that is currently leased by the Bear River Resort. It would need to be determined if modification to the Bear River Resort lease would be possible to use a portion of the parcel for the recommended facility.

Upper Bear River Reservoir is currently a low use primitive recreation area. It is recommended that recreation activity remain concentrated at Lower Bear River Reservoir and for Upper Bear River Reservoir to maintain low use levels to protect riparian and terrestrial habitat values. The Federal candidate mountain yellow-legged frog is found at Upper Bear River Reservoir, making additional access and recreation use in this sensitive area potentially inadvisable. Potential issues associated with additional use in this area include increased sedimentation along the shore zone and potential disturbance of egg masses. Mountain yellow-legged frogs are generally associated with undisturbed streams, pools, and lake shores.

Potential Measure:

- *Assess the potential for youth program opportunities.*

Due to the existing recreation facilities, outstanding opportunities to see and learn about wildlife, cultural resources, and proximity to the Mokelumne Wilderness, there are excellent opportunities to educate youth from nearby towns such as Jackson and Pioneer on a variety of topics within the planning unit. Two youth camps currently exist along Lower Bear River Reservoir (Camp Ritchie and Camp Winton), indicating that this area is a suitable and well-liked location for youth activities. In particular, the Cole Creek parcels could be used as a wilderness gateway opportunity for students and could be used as an outdoor classroom; however, difficult access and unmaintained trails may hinder this opportunity. Therefore, the Stewardship Council recommends assessing the potential for youth program opportunities within the planning unit. Programs could educate youth on topics such as wildlife and botanical resources, including threatened and endangered species, cultural resources, wilderness, and the history of fire and subsequent restoration in the area. Youth program opportunities could educate students on the outstanding resources in their local area and hopefully encourage a sense of pride and protection of these resources.

Potential Measure:

- *Enhance public recreation access at the LDS camp.*

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints' (LDS) Camp Ritchie provides excellent camp facilities on the north side of Lower Bear River Reservoir for use by their members. The Stewardship Council recommends enhancing public access to Camp Ritchie. The LDS camp is considered to be an exclusive use because it is only opened to a small portion of the general population.

Potential Measure:

- *Review allowed uses on the premises at the Bear River Resort for BPV enhancement possibilities.*

The Bear River Resort is open to the general public at a reasonable fee and provides a marina, boat rental, camping, day use, and OHV use. Although the Bear River Resort is available to the public, the Stewardship Council recommends reviewing allowed uses on the Bear River Resort premises for BPV enhancement possibilities. Though there are 30 trailer sites available for rent by the public from the resort lessee, it appears that more permanent use is occurring at some of these sites, making these sites unavailable to the public on a year-round basis.

Potential Measures:

- *Formalize or close unauthorized OHV trails to protect biological resources.*

- *Formalize or close unauthorized OHV trails to protect cultural resources.*

Recommended measures include additional management of existing recreation uses. Unauthorized OHV trails in this planning unit cross from PG&E to USFS lands, and therefore decisions to either formalize or close these trails should be made jointly. The USFS has not yet made decisions regarding formalizing or closing unauthorized OHV routes on USFS lands, so the Stewardship Council recommends coordinating with the USFS on any OHV route decisions to create consistency in management. If it is determined that unauthorized OHV trails are to be closed, vehicles should be restricted to established roads, and damaged areas should be revegetated. Measures should be taken to continue to manage unauthorized uses through the use of gates, bouldering, and revegetating closed trails. Management of unauthorized OHV trails would reduce potential sources of road sediment and thereby protect water quality, biological resources, and cultural resources.