

## Kennedy Meadows Planning Unit

The following recommendations will need to be re-evaluated given the recent fire at the Kennedy Meadows Pack Station.

### 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.*

Although forest resources are present on the lands in this planning unit, its small size makes substantial timber harvesting unlikely. Riparian and meadow habitat, sedimentation considerations, as well as the potential for conflicts with recreation uses in this area were also taken into consideration. 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 holistic watershed management, supporting the enhancement of other BPVs over the long term. The forest management plan would be compatible with existing recreation uses as well as recommended habitat enhancement measures and cultural resource protection goals. This plan should be completed in coordination with the fuels, noxious weed, and wildlife and habitat management plans.

#### Potential Measure:

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

Although the wildfire hazard in this area is relatively low, the Stewardship Council recommends the development of a fuels management plan. The fuels management plan would ensure long-term forest health and reduce fuel loading and fire hazard throughout the planning unit. Coordination with adjacent USFS management would foster a holistic approach to the forest, habitat, and recreation resources in this area. As part of the existing lease for the Kennedy Meadows Resort, the lessee is required to perform fuels management in areas around buildings and structures. Therefore, the Stewardship Council recommends only performing fuels management in areas not already managed by the lessee and coordinating development of the fuels management plan with the lessee.

### 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. Conservation easements would describe all prohibited uses 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.

## **Preservation of Historic Values**

### **Potential Measures:**

- *Conduct surveys of the planning unit to identify cultural resources and enable their protection.*
- *Develop a cultural resources management plan for the planning unit.*
- *Coordinate with Native American entities when conducting cultural resource measures.*

Since the Kennedy Meadows area was not surveyed for cultural resources as part of the recent relicensing, the Stewardship Council recommends conducting surveys of the planning unit to identify cultural resources and enable their protection. Given that many of the buildings associated with the Kennedy Meadows Resort were constructed prior to 1950, they may also be eligible for historical status and protection. Documentation of cultural sites should be coordinated with local Native American entities. Assuming that recommended surveys identify cultural sites within the planning unit, the Stewardship Council recommends developing a cultural resources management plan for the planning unit to ensure that 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 coordinated with local Native American entities.

## **Outdoor Recreation**

### **Potential Measure:**

- *Develop a recreation management plan for Kennedy Meadows to determine if and how existing recreation uses could be improved to enhance the recreation experience.*

Kennedy Meadows is so popular that it runs the risk of being “loved to death” with so many visitors and equestrian trips originating from the pack station. By improving existing facilities and providing additional facilities, this parcel can provide sustainable recreation for years to come. Since Kennedy Meadows receives a high volume of visitors in the summer, recommendations include recreation studies such as existing use, carrying capacity, projected use, and latent demand surveys, followed by the development of a recreation management plan. These studies, along with consultation with relevant agencies, would provide information about visitor needs and determine if and how existing recreation uses could be improved to protect resources and enhance the recreation experience. Recreation studies would also indicate if recommended facilities, such as trails, day use facilities, and additional interpretive signage, are in demand and if they would be feasible given the carrying capacity of the area.

### **Potential Measures:**

- *Provide day use facilities including picnic tables that provide scenic river or mountain views.*
- *Add an interpretive trail along the river.*

The pack station currently provides 20 cabins for overnight visitation, and there are several USFS campgrounds nearby. The Stewardship Council recommends providing day use facilities including picnic tables and a short trail to serve these visitors. Interpretive signage on the trail could educate visitors regarding topics such as the history of water storage the area; habitat values of the meadows, forest, Middle Fork Stanislaus River (MFSR), and nearby wilderness; pack station and pioneer history; and Native American history in the area, thereby enhancing the overall visitor experience. The USFS Central Stanislaus Watershed Analysis noted that as a highly visited area, this landscape has excellent potential for expanding interpretation and education. Installing interpretive signage along a trail or by the MFSR would take advantage of this opportunity. Picnic tables would be sited at places along the trail and within the parcel that could provide scenic river or mountain views. These facilities would disperse use throughout the parcel and away from the trailhead pack station area, which currently receives the most concentrated use.

### **Potential Measure:**

- *Assess the potential for youth program opportunities.*

Due to the outstanding opportunities to see and learn about varied habitats, endangered species, cultural resources, and nearby wilderness values, there are excellent opportunities to educate youth on a variety of topics within the planning unit. Therefore, the Stewardship Council recommends assessing the potential for youth programs. Programs could teach youth about topics such as wildlife and botanical resources, including threatened and endangered species, as well as cultural resources and the heritage of the area.

### **Potential Measures:**

- *Assess facilities management and operations for BPV enhancement possibilities.*
- *Assess the use of alternative energy sources at the pack station.*
- *Require consistent maintenance and cleaning of the trail to enhance the recreation experience.*

The Stewardship Council would assess lease facilities management and operations for BPV enhancement possibilities to ensure that protection and enhancement of all existing values is being met. For example, the existing pack station operations may have the potential to be enhanced in terms of energy use, trail maintenance, and parking. The current power source for the pack station is an on-site diesel generator. Alternative energy sources such as solar panels or burning biomass would be explored to minimize noise levels from the generator as well as provide an educational opportunity for visitors on the subject of renewable energy technology. Altering the energy source at the pack station would need to be coordinated with the lessee. Reduction of horse manure on trails would also be required to provide cleaner trail conditions and thereby enhance the visitor experience, particularly for those hiking in the area. As the summer recreation season goes on, manure can build up on the trail, creating unpleasant conditions for hikers. Additionally, in light of the recent fire at the Kennedy Meadows Pack Station, management and operations would be reviewed to ensure appropriate safety plans are in place.

**Potential Measure:**

- *Assess the potential for public use of part of the pack station parking area.*

The Stewardship Council would also evaluate the potential for public use of part of the parking area for non-pack station visitors. Having a small number of designated public parking spaces for short-term parking (e.g., 2 hours) would provide public access to day use activities in the area including fishing, wildlife viewing, and short hikes.

## **Fish, Plant, and Wildlife Habitat**

**Potential Measures:**

- *Conduct surveys of outside the relicensing study area to identify biological resources and enable their protection.*
- *Develop a wildlife and habitat management plan for the planning unit.*

Though many biological resource studies were conducted for the Spring Gap-Stanislaus Project relicensing, often these studies focused only on resources within the FERC boundary. The Kennedy Meadows Planning Unit is currently completely outside the FERC boundary and therefore has not been comprehensively surveyed as part of the recent relicensing process. Relicensing studies did, however, include the area of the planning unit that is located within 200 feet of the MFSR. Therefore, the Stewardship Council recommends conducting surveys of the planning unit to identify biological resources and enable their protection. 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 Yosemite toad, mountain yellow-legged frog, willow flycatcher, and great gray owl, and recommended surveys may reveal additional special status plants and wildlife. Once recommended surveys are completed, potential habitat enhancement and restoration opportunities can be identified and developed into a comprehensive plan describing goals and objectives for habitat and species, as well as measures to enhance and protect habitat for both wildlife and plant species. 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 noxious weed, forest, recreation, and fuels management plans.

**Potential Measure:**

- *Assess opportunities to enhance cottonwood recruitment and bank stabilization if this requirement is not included in the New License Order.*

The FERC Final EIS included measures to develop a detailed, three-phased plan for stabilizing banks and restoring riparian vegetation in the Kennedy Meadows section of the MFSR. If not included in the New License Order as a requirement, opportunities to enhance cottonwood recruitment would be included in the recommended wildlife and habitat management plan. Cottonwood trees are important for stabilizing streambanks along the MFSR as well as for providing food resources, hiding cover, and movement corridors for wildlife.

**Potential Measure:**

- *Develop a noxious weed management plan for the planning unit.*

Although the Final EIS for the Spring Gap-Stanislaus Project includes development of a noxious weed management plan as well as a visitor education and information plan to increase visitor

awareness of this problem, the Kennedy Meadows Planning Unit area will not likely be included because it is not currently located within the FERC boundary. The Stewardship Council therefore recommends developing a noxious weed management plan for the planning unit to eradicate existing infestations of noxious weeds such as cheatgrass where possible and implement preventative measures to minimize the spread of weeds in the future. This plan would also provide for consistency in management of noxious weeds with adjacent management and should be coordinated with the USFS, Central Sierra Partnership Against Weeds, and the Tuolumne County noxious weed programs. This plan should be completed in conjunction with fuels, forest, and wildlife and habitat management plans.

**Potential Measure:**

- *Restructure the parking area to protect sensitive habitat and minimize erosion.*

The pack station and adjacent Emigrant Wilderness are popular recreation destinations, but parking can be considerably limited given the number of vehicles driving to the Kennedy Meadows Planning Unit. The Stewardship Council recommends ensuring that parking does not impact sensitive habitat or cause erosion. To accomplish this, gravel parking areas could be redesigned and restructured somewhat to provide a maximum number of spaces while protecting sensitive areas. In addition, areas where off-road driving has occurred should be revegetated and bouldered to restrict vehicles to designated roads. These restrictions would provide a complementary use of the area's resources in view of the preservation goals of nearby wilderness areas. Restructuring the parking area would protect sensitive habitat and minimize erosion, with overall disturbed areas being reduced if feasible. Such restructuring would need to be accomplished in coordination with the lessee.

## **Agricultural Uses**

**Potential Measure:**

- *Evaluate the potential for continued pass-through cattle staging in the Upper Meadow, consistent with relicensing requirements regarding streambank stabilization and restoration.*

In their Final EIS, FERC recommended monitoring the effects of grazing at Kennedy Meadows on cottonwood recruitment and survival or that livestock grazing and staging could simply be prohibited on PG&E lands at Kennedy Meadows. Although the New License Order has not yet been issued, the FERC Final EIS noted that a growing body of evidence suggests that cottonwood recruitment is closely linked to streamflow patterns. Thus, the identified decline in cottonwood recruitment and survival may be due to flows in the Middle Fork Stanislaus River and not necessarily due to pass-through grazing. If PG&E decides to prohibit livestock grazing and staging on their lands at Kennedy Meadows in lieu of monitoring as part of relicensing, the Stewardship Council would evaluate the potential of continued pass-through cattle staging in the upper meadow, consistent with any future FERC license requirements regarding streambank stabilization and restoration. The FERC Final EIS includes development of a three-phased plan for stabilizing banks and restoring riparian vegetation in consultation with USFS, DFG, and the State Water Resources Control Board (SWRCB). If continued pass-through cattle staging is determined to be compatible with bank stabilization and restoration goals, monitoring would likely be required to ensure that unanticipated effects do not impact bank stability. Continuation of pass-through cattle staging at Kennedy Meadows would maintain access between two adjacent USFS grazing allotments.