

Middle Fork Stanislaus River Planning Unit

Outdoor Recreation

Potential Measure:

- *Assess public recreation demand and preferences to identify what types of recreation facilities are desired/needed.*

Although the License Order for the Spring Gap-Stanislaus Project has not yet been issued, FERC's Final EIS has recommended focusing recreation improvements at locations other than those within the MFSR Planning Unit, such as Pinecrest Lake, which receives a high number of visitors. Since FERC's Final EIS recommends enhancements and a recreation implementation plan only for the Pinecrest Lake area which does not include the planning unit, a limited evaluation of public recreation demand and preferences would be the first step in assessing what types of facilities are in demand and would be used by the public within the planning unit. This would consist of interviewing a small sample of anglers, OHV users, and whitewater boaters and eliciting their opinions about existing and recommended facilities. In addition, opportunities for recreation enhancement that may have been identified in the past should be reconsidered in light of the measures recommended by the Stewardship Council, including fish stocking at Stanislaus Forebay. Ongoing illegal uses, safety issues, monitoring challenges, and difficult access would be taken into account when considering enhancement measures and ongoing management would be necessary for maintenance and potential patrol of any new facilities.

Potential Measures:

- *Assess stocking Stanislaus Forebay with fish to maintain the recreational fishery.*
- *Assess providing picnic tables and a restroom at Stanislaus Forebay if it remains a local fishery.*

FERC's Final EIS recommends the installation of a fish screen at the intake to the Stanislaus power tunnel to protect fisheries within the MFSR. FERC acknowledges that this measure will, over time, cause a decline in the Stanislaus Forebay fishery, a local fishing spot. The Stewardship Council recommends assessing fish stocking at Stanislaus Forebay, in consultation with DFG, to preserve recreational fishing at this site (providing fish for put-and-take angling). As the forebay is remote and currently receives low recreation use, the demand for such recreation opportunities would first be assessed. If determined to be in high enough demand, stocking would be performed adaptively to determine the species and number of fish to stock in the forebay. Stocking of coldwater fish such as trout would require continuous stocking, while stocking of warmwater fish such as bass and bluegill could potentially be self-sustaining. While unlikely, there is concern, however, with stocking warmwater predator fish in the case that they get out of the forebay. Consultation with DFG would be required to determine the appropriate species for stocking in the forebay as well as establishing bag limits. If Stanislaus Forebay is stocked and continues to be a local fishing area, the Stewardship Council recommends assessing opportunities to enhance the Stanislaus Forebay area with picnic tables and a restroom. It would need to be determined if such facilities could be reasonably maintained given the forebay's remote location and history of vandalism.

Potential Measure:

- *Monitor OHV use at Stanislaus Forebay and determine the extent of future use and management.*

The Spring Gap-Stanislaus Final License Application noted that OHV use was one of the main recreation uses at Stanislaus Forebay. The extent of OHV use in the area is unknown; thus, the Stewardship Council recommends monitoring OHV use at the Stanislaus Forebay and determining if enhancements or restrictions are warranted. Enhancements may include adding staging areas, designating trails, or adding signage to inform recreationists of appropriate trails and roads for their use. Ongoing management would be necessary for maintenance and potential patrol of these new facilities. Alternately, if monitoring indicates that OHV use is detrimental to biological or cultural resources, OHV use may be further controlled or even restricted from the area.

Potential Measure:

- *Install interpretive signage regarding cultural and biological resources at the footbridge by Spring Gap Powerhouse.*

The Stewardship Council also recommends installing interpretive signage at the existing footbridge that crosses the MFSR to increase public awareness, appreciation, and stewardship of historic resources, including the historic tramway and metal shop. The history of flooding in the Stanislaus River Canyon would also be featured on interpretive signs including photos illustrating the canyon's environment prior to flooding. The USFS's Central Stanislaus Watershed Analysis noted that interpretive opportunities are very few in this area and possible opportunities exist with Wild and Scenic characteristics of the MFSR. Installing interpretive signage by the MFSR footbridge would take advantage of this opportunity.

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.*

Planning unit lands outside the FERC Project Area of Potential Effects (APE) were not included in cultural surveys conducted during the relicensing process. The APE only included lands within the FERC boundary and in the immediate vicinity of Spring Gap Forebay and Powerhouse and Stanislaus Forebay and Powerhouse. There is a high likelihood of cultural sites outside the APE; therefore, the Stewardship Council recommends conducting surveys outside the APE to identify cultural resources and enable their protection. Documentation of cultural sites should be coordinated with Native American entities.

Potential Measures:

- *Develop a cultural resources management plan for areas not included in any future FERC-required plan.*
- *Coordinate with Native American entities when conducting cultural resource measures.*

Assuming that recommended surveys identify cultural sites within the planning unit, the Stewardship Council recommends developing a cultural resources management plan for those areas within the planning unit that are not included in any future FERC license required plan. A cultural resources management plan would be developed 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. Additional security measures would also be explored to protect resources from vandalism and trespassing, as well as promote general safety in this remote area. The plan would include working with local tribes to maintain access for gatherings. Development of the cultural resources management plan should be coordinated with Native American entities and should be consistent with any future FERC license required plan.

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 holistic watershed management, supporting the enhancement of other BPVs over the long term. The forest management plan would be compatible with current and recommended recreation uses, as well as areas of biological and cultural importance. Forest management practices would protect late successional trees and areas of biological and cultural importance, particularly in areas adjacent to USFS spotted owl Protected Activity Centers (PACs). This plan should be developed in conjunction with the fuels, noxious weed, and wildlife and habitat management plans.

Due to the presence of USFS spotted owl PACs on adjacent lands, steep slopes, and hydroelectric facilities in much of the planning unit, minimal timber harvesting would be implemented. 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 for lands not included in any future FERC-required 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 fire risk in this high fire hazard area. FERC's Final EIS recommends that a fuels treatment plan be developed by PG&E for Stanislaus National Forest lands within the FERC boundary. The Stewardship Council recommends developing a fuels management plan for lands not included in any future FERC license required 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 landowners and USFS management would foster a holistic approach to the forest, habitat, and recreation resources in this area. This plan should also be consistent with any future FERC license required plan.

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.

Fish, Plant, and Wildlife Habitat

Potential Measures:

- *Conduct surveys of lands outside the FERC boundary 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. Therefore, the Stewardship Council recommends conducting surveys outside the FERC boundary 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 habitat for several special status species including foothill yellow-legged frog and osprey, as well as potential habitat for special status plants. 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 habitat and species goals and objectives, as well as measures needed to enhance and protect habitat for plant and wildlife 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 the noxious weed, forest, and fuels management plans. The recommended

wildlife and habitat management plan would include measures to protect late successional habitat for the spotted owl, particularly adjacent to USFS spotted owl PACs. This measure would provide consistency with adjacent USFS management.

Potential Measure:

- *Develop a noxious weed management plan for lands not included in any future FERC-required noxious weed management plan.*

The Final EIS for the Spring Gap-Stanislaus Project recommends development of a noxious weed management and monitoring plan to control and contain the spread of noxious weeds and plant diseases that are the result of project activities. The Stewardship Council recommends developing a noxious weed management plan for lands not included in any future FERC license required noxious weed management and monitoring plan to eradicate existing populations of noxious weeds, including yellow star-thistle, 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 developed in conjunction with fuels, forest, and wildlife and habitat management plans and should be consistent with any future FERC license required plan.

Agricultural Uses

Potential Measure:

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

The Stewardship Council also recommends evaluating the potential for grazing on planning unit lands in coordination with adjacent USFS grazing allotments. The planning unit is predominantly steep, consists of disconnected parcels, and has extensive areas of hydroelectric facilities; however, there is some potential for grazing within this planning unit in coordination with adjacent grazing allotments. Consideration would need to be taken to avoid any conflicts between grazing, hydroelectric operations, recreation uses, and sensitive biological and cultural resources. If grazing is determined to be feasible within the planning unit, a rangeland management plan should be developed that includes goals and objectives; 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.