

Merced River Planning Unit

Outdoor Recreation

Two relatively large recreation areas, the Lake McSwain and Lake McClure Recreational Areas, are located within seven miles of the Merced Falls Planning Unit. The proximity of these two large recreation areas favors the continued use of the planning unit for local, low volume day use activities. These activities would support local interest in promoting the rural and open character of Merced Falls and its environs. Moreover, the recommended recreation enhancements not only aim to meet current recreation needs, but also anticipate future needs of an increasing population associated with the recently opened University of California Merced campus, located approximately 30 minutes away. All enhancements recommended by the Stewardship Council would be coordinated with recreation studies during upcoming relicensing efforts.

Potential Measure:

- *Assess the potential to extend a trail from the county bridge to the River's Edge Fishing Access in coordination with adjacent landowners.*

Possible recreation enhancements would include those that promote the recreation experience in the area. The Stewardship Council recommends an assessment of the potential to extend a walking trail along the northern portion of the Merced Reservoir, connecting the Merced Falls and River's Edge Fishing Accesses. Since a paved trail already exists from the Merced Falls Fishing Access to the county bridge, only a half-mile extension would be needed to reach the River's Edge Fishing Access. As this trail extension would pass through private lands, its development would need to be coordinated with adjacent landowners, as right-of-way easements would be required in the event that the trail is developed.

Potential Measures:

- *Add amenities to the PG&E-owned portion of the proposed trail in the northern section of the reservoir.*
- *Enhance facility amenities at the River's Edge Fishing Access.*

The Stewardship Council also recommends the addition of day use amenities on the PG&E-owned portion of the trail west of the county bridge. These amenities would include locating a bench, drinking fountain, and trash receptacle for the benefit of trail users. At the River's Edge Fishing Access, the addition of amenities, such as picnic tables and benches, would improve the recreation experience at this site. To support angling, an ADA fishing platform would be provided for fishing enthusiasts.

Potential Measure:

- *Develop a recreation and interpretive program for youth groups.*

The Stewardship Council recommends exploring the potential to utilize the planning unit to host local school groups and youth programs, particularly for day use recreation. Participants would be able to enjoy water-based activities at Merced Falls Reservoir such as boating, fishing, and swimming. Additionally, interpretive opportunities related to the history of the San Joaquin Valley in one of the last remaining areas with grasslands and riparian woodland would be developed to provide outdoor education to these groups, as well as other members of the public.

Fish, Plant, and Wildlife Habitat

Potential Measure:

- *Conduct surveys outside the relicensing study area to identify biological resources and enable their protection.*

As previously mentioned, the vast majority of grasslands and riparian woodland have been lost in the San Joaquin Valley, putting increased habitat value on the patches that remain. The Stewardship Council recommends conducting surveys outside the relicensing study area to identify biological resources. Additional surveys would be conducted of vernal pools in the northern portion of the planning unit to better understand this important habitat, which hosts various special status species. The results of these surveys would provide the baseline information for any necessary habitat enhancements for species as well as for their protection. If necessary, a wildlife and habitat management plan would be developed in coordination with expected relicensing studies.

Potential Measure:

- *Investigate the impacts of grazing to determine necessary habitat enhancement measures.*

While no grazing exists within the project area, cattle and horse grazing are found on adjacent private lands. Impacts of grazing on adjacent lands to planning unit lands would be assessed to determine the need for habitat enhancement measures such as erosional control to protect project waterways, riparian habitat, and water quality.

Preservation of Historic Values

Potential Measure:

- *Conduct surveys outside the relicensing study area to identify cultural resources and enable their protection in coordination with Native American entities.*

The Stewardship Council also recommends that surveys be conducted outside the relicensing study area to identify cultural resources and enable their protection. Only a small portion of the planning unit has been surveyed for cultural resources, so this measure would support the necessary protection and enhancement of cultural resources in the Merced River Planning Unit. Documentation of cultural sites should be coordinated with Native American entities and upcoming relicensing efforts.

Open Space

Potential Measure:

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

Additionally, 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 recreation development and are therefore not expected to decrease the scenic quality of the viewsheds.

Sustainable Forestry

None recommended.

Agricultural Uses

None recommended.