

## **Auberry Service Center Planning Unit**

### **Agricultural Uses**

#### **Potential Measure:**

- *Evaluate the potential for grazing opportunities on the undeveloped portion of the planning unit.*

The Fresno General Plan (2000) does not show the area around Auberry to contain any prime or unique farmland nor any farmland of statewide or local importance. However, like much of the foothills in Fresno County, the planning unit could accommodate grazing. The property is fenced from its previous grazing lease; even though there is limited connectivity to surrounding grazing areas, there may be interest from ranchers or individuals nearby to use the undeveloped portion of this property for grazing. Such an action would counteract the increasing residential development on adjacent lands and preserve agricultural uses and open space in this rural town. Therefore, the Stewardship Council recommends evaluating the potential for grazing opportunities on the undeveloped portion of the planning unit with a buffer from the Service Center.

A grazing operation on these 30 acres would unlikely be commercially viable by itself due to the parcel's size and limited forage. Assuming a moderate productivity of roughly 2,000 pounds/acre of annual available forage, the site would allow for a maximum of 50 animal unit months (AUMs), enough for 50 cows for a month, or four cows for an entire year. The small amount of available forage would unlikely be an inducement to the average rancher, unless there was grazing on adjacent properties, and to our current knowledge, the surrounding private properties are all industrial or residential. However, Auberry is located in a rural area, and there may be ranchers interested in a portion of land to graze their livestock for a few months or use it as a staging area. Options would need to be investigated with local ranchers, and water necessary for grazing would need to be coordinated with PG&E, as PG&E used to provide water to the property several years ago. Using grazing as a vegetation management tool would also benefit habitat management.

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

#### **Potential Measure:**

- *Conduct surveys of undeveloped planning unit lands to identify biological resources and enable their protection.*

The biological resources of the site, with its native mature and young oak trees and grassy slopes, provide opportunities for enhancement through protection. Protecting these natural resources would preserve this beneficial and locally relevant habitat for oak woodland-grassland species. This habitat could harbor up to 300 species of birds, mammals, amphibians, and reptiles that depend on oak woodlands for food and shelter, making it worthy of future surveys and enhancements. The Stewardship Council recommends conducting surveys of the planning unit to identify biological resources and enable their protection.

### **Potential Measure:**

- *Develop a wildlife and habitat management plan for the planning unit that includes noxious weed management.*

Once recommended surveys are completed, potential habitat enhancement 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. Considering recent and future development on adjacent properties, this parcel can preserve an example of characteristic oak woodland landscape and provide shelter and habitat for native species. Limited grazing would likely enhance the vegetation, since it would keep the groundcover of annual grasses down, creating better conditions for oak saplings, as long as they are protected from the livestock through boxes or other means. Monitoring of species and/or habitats would also be a component of the plan. Management of any noxious weeds identified during surveys would also be completed as part of the recommended wildlife and habitat management plan.

## **Outdoor Recreation**

### **Potential Measure:**

- *Evaluate the potential to add a small day use area with basic facilities in a shaded area close to the road.*

The beautiful natural environment with large shade trees also provides a desirable setting for recreation. The proximity to local residences and the accessibility provided by paved County roads adds to the potential for recreation enhancements within this planning unit. As an unincorporated town, Auberry has few public facilities. The only local park facility is the elementary school playground. The Auberry Service Center Planning Unit is one of the few planning units that provide an opportunity to create a recreation facility to serve an adjacent community. The Stewardship Council recommends evaluating developing a small, publicly accessible day use area in the undeveloped portion of the parcel. The recommended location for this day use area is a flat, open area with scattered large trees and a gate. The planning unit is within a two-mile radius of other public facilities, such as a library and a museum, and many residences, including the adjacent trailer park, making it easily accessible for local residents by foot and bicycle. The size of the day use area would be limited to minimize habitat disturbance, allow for potential grazing of the planning unit, keep with the rural character of the area, and preserve a natural buffer to the Service Center. The recommended day use area would be close to the existing paved road and would include a small gravel parking area and basic day use facilities such as picnic tables, trash receptacles, and a vault restroom.

### **Potential Measure:**

- *At the potential day use area, install interpretive signage regarding hydropower operations in the watershed, native species and habitat values (oak and grassland ecology), and grazing history and benefits to habitat protection.*

In addition, interpretive signage about the native species and habitat values, and the grazing history and hydropower history in the watershed would be installed to enhance the enjoyment of visitors and the potential for educational uses of the site. There may be a potential to engage local youth in creating and maintaining interpretive panels, such as signs identifying tree species. The addition of interpretive signage should be coordinated with relevant agencies. The addition

of day use and interpretive enhancements would allow for picnicking, wildlife viewing, nature study, and small gatherings. Consideration would need to be given to security concerns related to the Service Center.

**Potential Measure:**

- *Assess the potential for youth program opportunities.*

Due to the scenic quality of the planning unit and proximity to Auberry, there are likely excellent opportunities to educate youth on a variety of topics within the planning unit. The planning unit is located within a mile of Auberry Elementary School and is therefore easily accessible to local youth. The Stewardship Council recommends assessing the potential for youth programs within the planning unit. Programs could teach youth about topics such as hydroelectricity and other renewable energy sources, as well as native species and oak woodland habitat. As mentioned above, local youth could also help design recommended interpretive displays.

## 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. The planning unit has a high potential for open space preservation due to its location in a growing rural community. The rural character of the community attracts people from the Clovis-Fresno area, and the population in the Auberry area has grown by approximately 10% between 1990 and 2000, according to census data. Although the Auberry area still has plentiful open space, most of the land surrounding the community is in private ownership and could be developed in the future. Thus, open space preservation would be an important enhancement on this parcel. This enhancement could be achieved through the application of conservation easements in conjunction with grazing. Any agricultural uses or potential future recreation uses are expected to be developed within the character of the area and not conflict with the scenic quality of the viewshed.

## Preservation of Historic Values

**Potential Measure:**

- *Incorporate cultural resource protection measures in the conservation easements to protect any cultural resources found in the future in coordination with Native American entities.*

No information on cultural resources within the planning unit has been identified, and local Native American representatives have not commented on this parcel. The old house onsite is currently the only known feature of the planning unit with a potential historical value, due to its potential age. In the case that the house is NRHP eligible, appropriate measures to protect its value should be implemented. The Stewardship Council recommends incorporating cultural resource protection measures in the conservation easements to protect any cultural resources that are found in the future. Development of appropriate cultural resource protection measures would be coordinated with Native American entities.

## **Sustainable Forestry**

None recommended.