

Kings River Planning Unit

Fish, Plant, and Wildlife Habitat

Potential Measure:

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

The planning unit does not contain any FERC Project lands and as a result surveys for habitat or species have likely not been conducted. Thus, little specific biological information is available. Taking into account nearby FERC Project assessments, regional plans of the area, and the planning unit's prominent location on a wide bank of the Kings River corridor (this parcel is the only relatively large, level area in this stretch of the canyon), the area likely contains habitat resource values with potential for enhancement. Therefore, 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.*

The Stewardship Council recommends using biological resource survey data to develop a wildlife and habitat management plan. The planning unit contains potential habitat for several special status species, 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 to enhance and protect habitat for both wildlife and plant species. Monitoring of species and/or habitats would also be a component of the plan. The wildlife and habitat management plan should be developed in conjunction with the noxious weed and fuels management plans. The wildlife and habitat management plan would include measures to protect late successional or other suitable habitat for the spotted owl. This measure would provide consistency with nearby USFS-designated spotted owl Protected Activity Centers (PACs).

Oak woodland is the main vegetation community within the planning unit. California's oak woodland habitats are considered threatened due to development, firewood harvesting, and agricultural conversions. This habitat type supports a range of dependent wildlife species, as oak woodlands are home to more than 300 species of terrestrial vertebrates, as well as thousands of species of invertebrates. In addition, woodland habitats moderate temperatures, reduce soil erosion, facilitate nutrient cycling, and sustain water quality and thus prove beneficial for habitat enhancement. In 2001, the California Legislature passed the California Oak Woodland Conservation Act, which supports the preservation of this habitat type. The wildlife and habitat management plan would include a description of all native oak species, estimates of the current and historical distribution of oak woodlands, existing threats, and status of natural regeneration and growth trends. Based on this information, measures to protect and preserve this habitat would be developed.

Potential Measure:

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

The Stewardship Council also recommends developing a noxious weed management plan for the planning unit to eradicate existing populations of noxious weeds if identified within the planning unit and implement preventative actions 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. This plan should be developed in conjunction with the fuels and wildlife and habitat management plans.

Preservation of Historic Values

Potential Measures:

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

Since the planning unit is located outside of a FERC boundary, no assessment of cultural resources has been conducted. To develop a better baseline understanding of existing cultural resources, including ethnobotanical sites, the Stewardship Council recommends surveying the planning unit to identify cultural resources and enable their protection. The site was used as a homestead in the beginning of the century, which may provide for some historic resources. In addition, representatives of the Mono Tribe mentioned at a community meeting in July 2006 that an important cultural site is located on a nearby stream up the river. This may indicate further cultural sites in the area, especially since the planning unit is located on the only relatively large and level piece of land in the river corridor. Documentation of cultural sites should be coordinated with Native American entities.

Potential Measures:

- *Develop a cultural resources management plan consistent with the Haas-Kings River Project CRMP.*
- *Coordinate with Native American entities when conducting cultural resource measures.*

The Stewardship Council also 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. The cultural resources management plan should be consistent with the Haas-Kings River Project Cultural Resources Management Plan (CRMP), which dictates protocol guidelines for proper inclusion of the Native American community.

Measures listed in the Haas-Kings River Project CRMP include: informing the Mono people of any archeological research planned in the area; monitoring by a member(s) of the Mono community for any archeological excavation or testing or construction that requires an archeologist in the project area; retrieving artifacts and treating burials in accordance with the

USFS and current laws (Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act of 1990); providing Mono people with the opportunity to select a representative to serve as an advisory member for habitat management related issues; making every effort to avoid disturbing known plant resources currently used by Mono people in traditional lifeways; and acknowledging the desire of the Mono people to use Native American plant resources in the vicinity of project features in the project area, subject to USFS regulations.

Sustainable Forestry

Potential Measure:

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

The Stewardship Council recommends developing a fuels management plan for the 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 USFS management would provide a consistent approach to the management of forest, habitat, and recreation resources in this area.

Agricultural Uses

Potential Measure:

- *Evaluate the potential for reviving agricultural uses of the former Keller Ranch homestead.*

Some potential for enhancement of agricultural uses may exist within the planning unit, as it lies within the range of a USFS grazing allotment, and crops were grown on the flat portion of the property until the Keller Ranch homestead was sold to the San Joaquin Light and Power Corporation in 1925. However, the potential for these uses appears limited; part of the planning unit and the surrounding lands are steep, and the parcel is located far away from the nearest cattle staging area. In addition, the size of the parcel reduces the likelihood that the planning unit could provide for economically viable grazing operations. Other agricultural uses such as maintaining a small orchard on the flat area of the property may not be commercially viable either; however, restoration of such use could be assessed. Therefore, the Stewardship Council recommends evaluating the potential for agricultural uses in the planning unit.

Since the parcel was formerly used as a homestead and a land surveyor description estimated the soils as suitable for a variety of agricultural crops, the Stewardship Council recommends investigating the idea of restoring some of the uses, such as maintaining an orchard. The useable, flat portion of the parcel is rather small (30-40 acres), so use of the area for agriculture may be more beneficial for educating visitors on historic use of the site rather than for providing significant agricultural or economic value. The remote location and small size of the parcel may turn out to be cost prohibitive for reviving agricultural uses; however, this area receives a fair amount of use and public attention, particularly in the summer that could warrant showcasing parts of the historic Keller Ranch homestead.

Although grazing the approximately 80-90 grazable acres of the planning unit may not be a commercially viable agricultural use either, there could be potential for it on a limited basis as a

vegetation management tool in coordination with the wildlife and habitat and noxious weed management plans. Further investigation into the feasibility, benefits, and costs of such measures would need to be completed. 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.

Outdoor Recreation

Potential Measure:

- *Coordinate with the USFS on potential use of the planning unit for additional recreation facilities and/or water access based on future monitoring results/need and the results of the land survey.*

Existing recreation use currently taking place adjacent and partially on the planning unit (parking) is important and has high beneficial public value. The potential for enhancement is limited, however, as the three outfitters accommodate the need for whitewater rafting opportunities and occupy the water access areas available and necessary for this type of operation. Public put-ins and fishing opportunities are also located in the surrounding area. Nearby USFS campgrounds provide adequate public access and recreation opportunities for the general public, limiting the potential for additional recreation facilities on the planning unit. However, the Stewardship Council recommends making a portion of the lands available for recreational uses and facilities, should a need arise for them in the future. The Stewardship Council recommends close coordination with the USFS for this measure as future recreation needs will be identified based on recreation monitoring of existing USFS recreation facilities.

Potential Measure:

- *Perform a land survey and coordinate permits with the USFS for continued property use by whitewater outfitters.*

In addition, the Stewardship Council recommends a land survey and review of the planning unit boundary, which may yield information that some of the planning unit indeed has more water access than currently believed and that the whitewater rafting base camps are actually located on the planning unit. Based on these surveys, the current use agreements with the USFS will likely need to be updated to reflect current use and users. If surveys determine that whitewater facilities are located on planning unit land or that the planning unit has more water access than currently believed, this may create opportunities to further enhance recreational uses within the planning unit.

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 do not include any

development of new permanent recreation facilities that would decrease the scenic quality of the viewsheds. 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.