

Kern River Planning Unit

Agricultural Uses

Potential Measure:

- *Evaluate the potential for grazing opportunities within the planning unit, in coordination with adjacent grazing operations and the Sequoia National Forest.*

A 100-acre area located on a ridge-top in the northwest portion of the main parcel is adjacent to the Sequoia National Forest. This rolling grassland area is similar in character to the adjacent USFS grazing allotment. The 100-acre area would unlikely be commercially viable for grazing by itself due to the parcel's size, access issues, and limited forage; however, with an adjacent, year-round USFS grazing allotment abutting PG&E property, the potential exists to allow grazing to expand onto planning unit lands. The USFS Oak Flat allotment is grazed by one rancher who owns an adjacent ranch. Opportunity to enlarge the adjacent USFS grazing allotment would be assessed in coordination with the Sequoia National Forest and the current allotment holder. Using grazing as a vegetation management tool could also provide additional benefits for fuel load and habitat management.

Fish, Plant, and Wildlife Habitat

Potential Measures:

- *Develop a noxious weed management plan for the planning unit consistent with the FERC-recommended weed management and vegetation management plan.*
- *Develop a wildlife and habitat management plan for the planning unit.*
- *Extend protection measures developed for Shevock's golden aster onto lands outside the FERC boundary.*

With FERC relicensing nearing completion, numerous assessment studies have been completed on lands within the FERC boundary. In addition, a number of monitoring plans, plant and wildlife surveys, and endangered species protection measures are recommended by FERC to protect native plant and wildlife species. Two measures recommended for the 55 acres within the FERC boundary would be expanded to include the remaining 598 acres of the planning unit. The FERC-recommended weed management and vegetation management plan will address the treatment of noxious weeds within the FERC boundary, which means there is currently no management of noxious weeds outside the FERC boundary. To protect native species, the Stewardship Council recommends developing a noxious weed management plan for lands outside the FERC boundary within the planning unit. This plan will be consistent with the FERC-recommended weed management and vegetation management plan. The second recommended measures would extend protection measures for Shevock's golden aster to the entire planning unit. In addition, the Stewardship Council recommends developing a wildlife and habitat management plan for the planning unit to enhance protection of native plant and wildlife species.

Outdoor Recreation

Potential Measure:

- *Install signage and fencing at turn-out parking areas.*

The fast-flowing waters of the lower Kern River are responsible for numerous drownings. Although even expert boaters are at risk, search and rescue personnel warn, in particular, about swimmers being caught off-guard by the river due to ignorance about the strength of the river and underwater barriers that can trap them. Accident reports describe waders and floaters on tubes being suddenly washed away from what seemed to be safe shallows near shore. Therefore, the Stewardship Council recommends updating infrastructure to enhance safety and limit river access at the two informal turn-out parking areas in the canyon. Installing additional signs, fences, or other barriers would limit river access for potentially dangerous activities such as swimming, wading, or tubing. Signage would warn of safety hazards associated with swift flows while fencing or other barriers would discourage river access. Whitewater boaters generally access this river segment by portaging around the Kern River Powerhouse diversion dam, and thus would continue to have access to the run.

Potential Measure:

- *Remove and rehabilitate user-created trails at turn-out parking areas.*

The relatively few expert boaters that use the Kern River 1 (KR1) whitewater run use informal take-out locations on both sides of the river near the Kern Canyon Powerhouse. Take-outs are found at the roadside parking area along Highway 178 and on the opposite bank immediately below the powerhouse, which is accessed by Rancheria Road. It is believed that the majority of kayakers take-out along Highway 178 by climbing the steep, rocky bank on the user-created switchback trail. The trail is eroding due to its steepness and lack of standard trail design features and is not safe to use. Its presence may encourage sightseers and swimmers to clamber down to the river from the roadside pull-out. The north river bank below the powerhouse is considerably lower and less steep than the south river bank below the Highway 178 parking area. The Stewardship Council recommends closing and rehabilitating the trail, which would require kayakers to utilize the opposite bank take-out below the powerhouse or to continue downstream to the Rancheria Road bridge. Boaters continuing downstream would need to portage around the Rio Bravo Diversion Dam and portage around a brush-choked area about one mile downstream. The river between the Rio Bravo Diversion Dam and the Rio Bravo Powerhouse, two miles downstream, may not be boatable during low flow periods, requiring boaters to take-out at the Kern Canyon Powerhouse.

Preservation of Historic Values

Potential Measures:

- *Conduct surveys outside the FERC Project APE to identify cultural resources and enable their protection.*
- *Incorporate cultural resource protection measures in conservation easements to protect any cultural resources found in the future.*
- *Coordinate with Native American entities when conducting cultural resource measures.*

It is likely that cultural sites exist outside the FERC Project Area of Potential Effects (APE); therefore, the Stewardship Council recommends conducting surveys outside the APE to identify cultural resources and enable their protection. The Stewardship Council also recommends protecting cultural resources through permanent conservation easements that include cultural resource protection measures. Documentation of cultural sites and development of appropriate cultural resource protection measures would be coordinated with Native American entities.

Open Space

Potential Measure:

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

Finally, 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. No new developments are recommended; therefore, the scenic quality of the river valley and canyon would be protected.

Sustainable Forestry

None recommended.

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