

Carrizo Plain Planning Unit

Agricultural Uses

Potential Measure:

- *Remove chain-link and barbed wire security fencing surrounding the former solar facility; replace with barbed wire fencing at the site margin as needed for agricultural uses.*

The Stewardship Council recommends removal of the unneeded chain-link and barbed wire security fence surrounding the former solar power facility lands, which would eliminate a barrier to use of the land for dryland farming and grazing. Although the lessee apparently has access to the fenced area and grazes cattle there, along with the lease area, the fence is a hindrance to planting, harvesting, and grazing activities. Observations during a site visit in July 2006 suggest the fence is a limiting factor in agricultural use; unlike the lease area, the former solar facility lands were not planted in a grain crop, but had only a sparse grass cover. The DFG has indicated that removal of the fence could also benefit wildlife, particularly the native tule elk and pronghorn antelope that have been reintroduced on the CPNM and may use planning unit lands.

Potential Measure:

- *Investigate the potential for agricultural lessee use of the warehouse/shop building.*

The former warehouse and shop building represents the major infrastructure remaining onsite and may have the potential for re-use associated with restoration of agricultural use of the adjacent land, or other uses. Therefore, the Stewardship Council recommends investigating opportunities for re-use of the warehouse/shop building, which was in use for relatively few years and, superficially, appeared to be in reasonably good condition. Damage to the interior roof insulation was observed, and there appeared to be a gap in the roof at the south end of the building, but the overall structural integrity appeared sound and no vandalism was noted.

Hand-in-hand with an evaluation of the building would be a determination of what interest in future use of the building exists on the part of governmental agencies, Native American Tribes, conservation organizations, educational institutions, youth groups, or other groups, and what types of uses would be appropriate to enhance agricultural, habitat, or recreation values on the planning unit or on the larger Carrizo Plain. This determination would involve discussions with the agricultural lessee, the managing agencies of the Carrizo Plain National Monument (CPNM), conservation groups such as Friends of Carrizo Plain, the local school district, and universities in the area, such as the California Polytechnic State University in San Luis Obispo. Such use may have the potential to enhance agricultural use of the land, for example, by providing space for storing farm machinery.

Outdoor Recreation

Potential Measure:

- *Investigate the potential for restoration of the warehouse/shop building in support of recreation uses of the Carrizo Plain, and interest on the part of local agencies and groups in these uses.*

The warehouse/shop building may also have potential for non-agricultural uses that would not be in conflict with the recommended agricultural use of the surrounding lands. Possible uses that would enhance BPVs might include storage, work, or meeting space in support of habitat restoration, recreation, and/or education on the Carrizo Plain. Given the remoteness of the area and lack of lodging, groups wishing to stay in the area overnight might be provided “bunkhouse” type sleeping quarters in the building. However, evaluation of the potential hazards and restoration potential of the building is necessary before any resumption of human use, beyond the agricultural storage use mentioned above, can occur. The assessment would include evaluation of the steps necessary to restore potable water, sanitary facilities, and electric service.

Fish, Plant, and Wildlife Habitat

Potential Measure:

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

No data are available regarding wildlife or plant species that may occur on the planning unit. Although the agricultural lease area is primarily devoted to dryland grain crop production, fencerows and other undisturbed areas may host wildlife and non-crop plant species of value to wildlife, and wildlife may use the agricultural habitat of the cropland itself. Also, in the several years that have passed since the solar facility was dismantled, that portion of the planning unit has revegetated to some extent, and native wildlife may be using the area, including special status species known to occur elsewhere on the Carrizo Plain such as the San Joaquin kit fox, giant kangaroo rat, blunt nosed leopard lizard, or burrowing owl. Like the area surrounding the agricultural lease land, fencerows and relatively undisturbed roadsides around the former solar facility lands may provide plant and wildlife habitat. Recognizing the lack of available biological data and the potential habitat values, the Stewardship Council recommends conducting surveys of the planning unit to identify biological resources and provide needed information for future management decisions.

Potential Measure:

- *Develop a wildlife and habitat management plan for the planning unit.*

The Stewardship Council recommends using the biological resource survey data to create a wildlife and habitat management plan. Once surveys are completed, potential habitat enhancements and restoration opportunities can be identified and developed into a plan describing goals and objectives for habitat and species, as well as measures to enhance and protect habitat for both plant and wildlife species. If surveys determine that sensitive species known to occur on the Carrizo Plain or other native plants and animals are present, the plan would specify agricultural use and practices on the planning unit that would best protect those species. For example, it is possible that the recommended expansion of agricultural use of the former solar facility lands may need to be restricted to meet habitat goals, by leaving some areas unplanted and by not conducting agricultural activities during certain periods of the year. Conversely, enhancement of raptor habitat in the planning unit may yield benefits for agricultural use by increasing control of rodents, which can cause crop damage.

Potential Measure:

- *Investigate the potential for restoration of the warehouse/shop building in support of habitat restoration activities on the Carrizo Plain and interest on the part of local agencies and groups in these uses.*

There is a potential to provide roosting and/or nesting structures for barn owls to replace the roosting site that would be lost with any restored human use of the warehouse and shop building. Several raptor organizations such as the Raptor Trust and the Birds of Prey Foundation highlight the potential for enhancing habitat for barn owls in proximity to human activity, and provide designs for barn owl roosting and nesting boxes. These boxes may be attached to the outside of an existing structure such as the warehouse/shop building, or erected on a pole. However, managing for other sensitive species, such as the giant kangaroo rat or burrowing owl, if supported based on survey results and the wildlife plan, could require that conditions for barn owls not be enhanced to avoid conflicting purposes.

Preservation of Historic Values

Potential Measures:

- *Conduct an ethnographic study to identify traditional use areas.*
- *Incorporate cultural resource protection measures in conservation easements to protect any cultural resources found in the future.*
- *Coordinate with Native Americans and interested stakeholders when conducting cultural resource measures.*

No ethnographic uses of planning unit lands are known, and these may be unlikely given the current agricultural and former solar facility use of essentially the entire area, and the absence of any features that distinguish other ethnographic sites on the Carrizo Plain, such as rock outcroppings. However, given that no actual data are known to exist on these potential uses and the site's proximity to other very important Native American cultural sites within the CPNM, the Stewardship Council recommends conducting an ethnographic study of the planning unit to identify any traditional use areas that may exist. The Stewardship Council also recommends preserving cultural resources through permanent conservation easements that include cultural resource protection measures. These measures would describe the process for addressing any cultural materials found during ground-disturbing activities. The ethnographic study and development of 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.*

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.

Removal of the security fence would also help restore the appearance of the lands to that which exists in the surrounding agricultural area and would enhance the value of the lands as open space. The enclosure of a large portion of the land by over one mile of this visually intrusive fencing detracts from the agricultural open space setting that characterizes the surrounding lands of the Carrizo Plain. The security fence on the north and west sides of the planning unit may need to be replaced with barbed wire fencing that is more typical of the agricultural lands in the area to permit continued grazing of the lands.

Sustainable Forestry

None recommended.