

# AUBERRY SERVICE CENTER PLANNING UNIT

## Willow Creek Watershed

### Existing Conditions & Uses

#### Overview

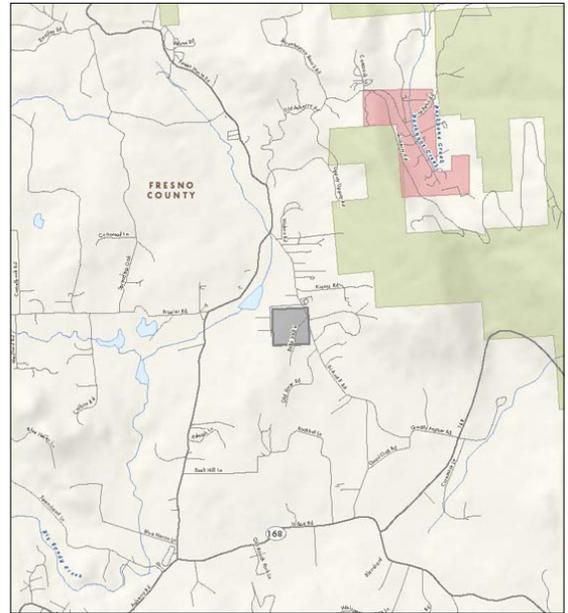
- Oak woodland area with a PG&E Hydropower Operations Center
- 40 acres in Fresno County
- Planning unit is outside any FERC Project boundary

The Auberry Service Center Planning Unit is a single 40-acre parcel at about 2,000 feet elevation on the outskirts of the small unincorporated town of Auberry in the Sierra foothills. The planning unit is located in Fresno County, about 30 miles northeast of the City of Fresno. PG&E's Hydropower Operations' Auberry Service Center, built in 1980, is in the northwest corner of the parcel and covers about one-third of the land area (see Figure WC-9). The facility contains the headquarters office, several equipment and worksheds, a heliport, laydown areas, and storage for heavy machinery. The remainder of the land is undeveloped. The parcel is surrounded by private land.

There are no hydroelectric facilities on the parcel itself, and no FERC Project is directly associated with this planning unit. The primary purpose of the Service Center is to support hydropower



Mixed oak woodland on east side of planning unit



Auberry Service Center Planning Unit  
Fresno County

operations in the Crane Valley and Kings River areas, which include several FERC-Licensed hydropower projects.

#### Fish, Plant, and Wildlife Habitat

The dominant plant community in the undeveloped area is mixed oak woodland comprised of interior live oak, blue oak, black oak, canyon oak, grey pine, and California buckeye, with an understory of annual grasses. Although no site-specific data is available, this habitat would likely support species such as acorn woodpecker, bushtit, and blue-gray gnatcatcher. Foothill oak woodlands are among the most diverse habitats in the state. No special status species are known to occur within this site, however, the planning unit has not been surveyed. Special status species do occur within the area, including orange lupine, tree anemone, and the molestan blister beetle.

#### Open Space

Apart from preserving potential habitat for special status species, the undeveloped part of the planning unit also provides open space in an

# Auberry Service Center Planning Unit Existing Conditions

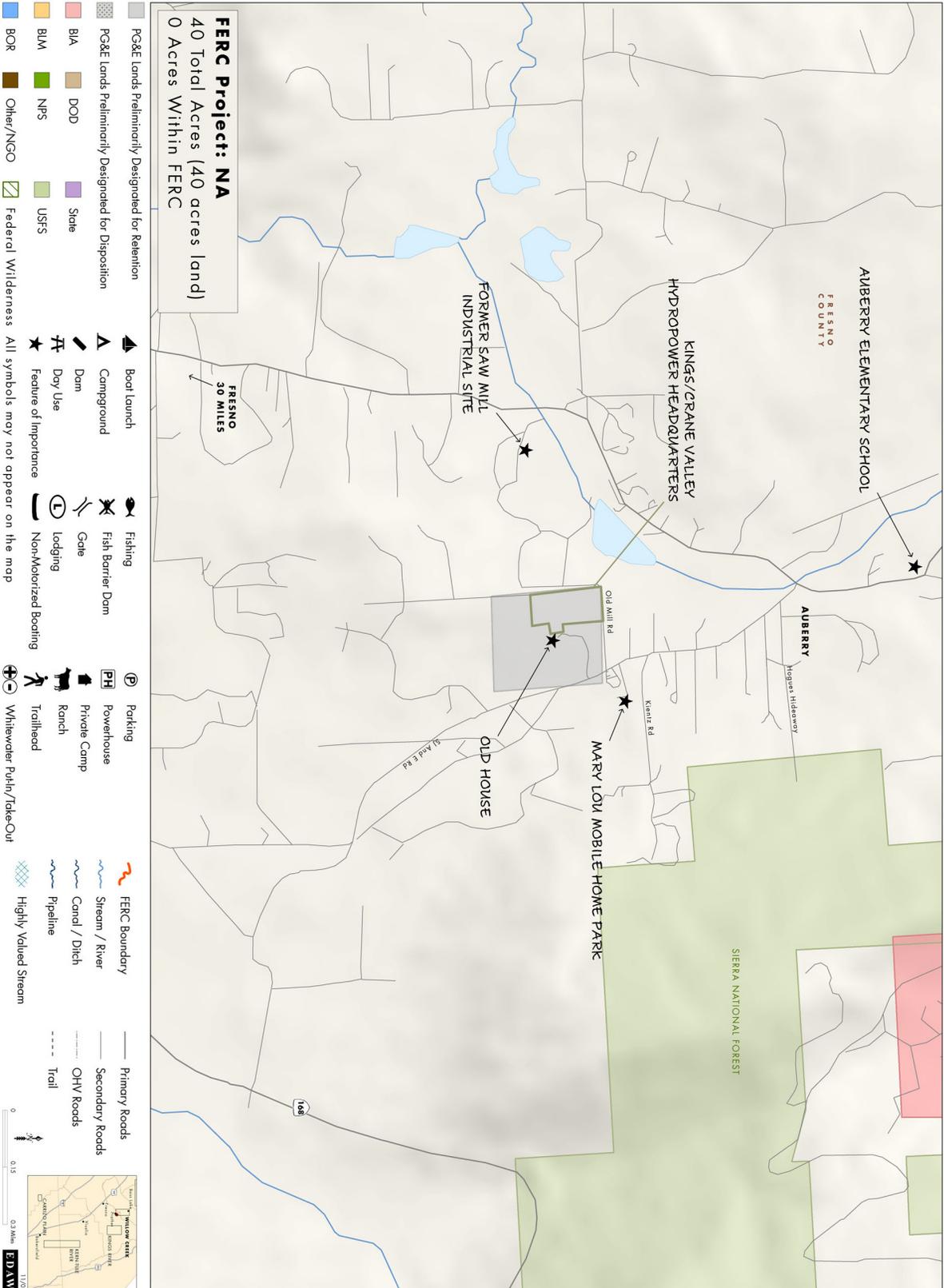


Figure WC-9

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increasingly residential area. The undeveloped land serves as an open space buffer area for the Service Center, obscuring it from view from the private lands to the north, east, and south, where there is a mobile home park and other residences. Since the Sequoia Forest Industries Auberry Saw Mill was closed in 1994, Auberry has been developing into a bedroom community for the Fresno-Clovis area, and development pressure on the surrounding lands will likely increase in the future.

### Outdoor Recreation

The planning unit currently does not provide any public access or recreation uses. No water or other facilities exist on the undeveloped 30-acre portion of the planning unit.

### Forest Resources

There are no Timber Management Units (TMUs) in the Auberry Service Center Planning Unit.

### Agricultural Uses

The undeveloped 30 acres of this planning unit were formerly grazed under a PG&E lease. The grazing lease was discontinued several years ago.

### Historic Resources

Currently, no cultural resources are known to exist in the planning unit. An old residence, unoccupied for approximately 15 years and not habitable, is located onsite and may be old enough to be eligible for placement in the NRHP.

## Stewardship Council Recommendations

The Stewardship Council recommends that the land and land uses at the Auberry Service Center Planning Unit be preserved and enhanced by

focusing on habitat values and opportunities to introduce recreation and agricultural uses to the property. In presenting the Recommended Concept provided here (see Figure WC-10), our objective is to preserve oak woodland habitat while also providing additional recreation and grazing opportunities to the local community. We recommend this effort be conducted in close coordination with PG&E.

**Objective: Preserve and enhance biological resources, protect cultural resources, and evaluate providing recreation and agricultural opportunities.**

As shown on Table WC-5, the Stewardship Council has identified a number of preservation and/or enhancement measures that may contribute to the conservation management program for the Auberry Service Center Planning Unit. Additional detail and background regarding these potential measures can be found in the Supporting Analysis for Recommendations, provided under separate cover. These measures are intended to be illustrative in nature, not prescriptive, and will be amended, deleted, or augmented over time in coordination with future land owners and managers to best meet the objective for this planning unit.



Fence & gate of former grazing allotment

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Oaks & grassland within former grazing allotment

### Fish, Plant, and Wildlife Habitat

**Objective: Preserve and enhance habitat in order to protect special biological resources.**

The Auberry Service Center Planning Unit contains foothill oak woodland, which provides habitat for many plant and wildlife species, including special status species. In order to preserve and enhance the habitat and resources found here, the Stewardship Council recommends that baseline studies and plans be developed to gain a clear understanding of the resources within the undeveloped portion of the planning unit. These studies will likely be followed by management plans for habitat, wildlife, and noxious weeds to ensure implementation of preservation and enhancement measures for specific resources.

### Open Space

**Objective: Preserve open space in order to protect natural and cultural resources and viewsheds.**

This concept would preserve open space through permanent conservation easements. Conservation easements would describe all prohibited uses to maintain open space values, including the level of uses allowed, and the requirement to maintain scenic qualities.

### Outdoor Recreation

**Objective: Introduce recreational facilities in order to provide outdoor public access and recreation opportunities.**

The Auberry Service Center Planning Unit contains foothill oak woodland that could offer a unique natural setting and recreational opportunity for the town of Auberry. The Stewardship Council looks to potentially provide a community recreation area by investigating the potential to develop a small day use area with basic facilities. If developed, the day use area could serve the nearby community of Auberry and host interpretive signage on a variety of topics including cultural, natural, and agricultural resources. The Stewardship Council also recommends assessing the potential for increased opportunities for youth education and recreation.

### Agricultural Uses

**Objective: Identify potential grazing opportunities in order to enhance agricultural resources and related economic benefits.**

The Auberry Service Center Planning Unit once supported grazing on the undeveloped portion of the property. The Stewardship Council looks to enhance agricultural opportunities and associated important economic uses as part of the long-term management of the planning unit. This objective



Kings/Crane Valley Hydropower Headquarters

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would be achieved by evaluating the potential to reintroduce grazing to the parcel in coordination with PG&E and interested stakeholders. To support this effort, we anticipate a baseline conditions report will be required to describe current agricultural, physical, and overall biological conditions of the area. From this, specific determinations can be made to identify and manage grazing practices in balance with other uses and values of the property.

### Preservation of Historic Values

**Objective: Document and manage cultural resources in order to ensure their protection if discovered in the future.**

No cultural resources are known to occur on the Auberry Service Center Planning Unit. To ensure any cultural resources found within the planning unit in the future are protected and appropriately managed, we recommend that cultural resource protection measures be incorporated into conservation easements. These measures would describe the process for addressing any cultural materials found during ground-disturbing activities. Throughout this effort, the Stewardship Council recommends close coordination with Native American entities.



California buckeye & grassland

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**Table WC-5 Objectives to Preserve and/or Enhance – Recommended Concept**

Planning Unit Objective: Preserve and enhance biological resources, protect cultural resources, and evaluate providing recreation and agricultural opportunities.		
Beneficial Public Value	Objective	Potential Measures to Preserve and/or Enhance BPVs – Not Requirements*
Protection of the Natural Habitat of Fish, Wildlife, and Plants	<b>Preserve and enhance habitat in order to protect special biological resources.</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conduct surveys of undeveloped planning unit lands to identify biological resources and enable their protection.</li> <li>• Develop a wildlife and habitat management plan for the planning unit that includes noxious weed management.</li> </ul>
Preservation of Open Space	<b>Preserve open space in order to protect natural and cultural resources and viewsheds.</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Apply permanent conservation easements to ensure a higher level of open space protection.</li> </ul>
Outdoor Recreation by the General Public	<b>Introduce recreational facilities in order to provide outdoor public access and recreation opportunities.</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evaluate the potential to add a small day use area with basic facilities in a shaded area close to the road.**</li> <li>• 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.**</li> <li>• Assess the potential for youth program opportunities.</li> </ul>
Sustainable Forestry		None proposed.
Agricultural Uses	<b>Identify potential grazing opportunities in order to enhance agricultural resources and related economic benefits.</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evaluate the potential for grazing opportunities on the undeveloped portion of the planning unit.**</li> </ul>
Preservation of Historic Values	<b>Document and manage cultural resources in order to ensure their protection if discovered in the future.</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Incorporate cultural resource protection measures in the conservation easements to protect any cultural resources found in the future in coordination with Native American entities.</li> </ul>

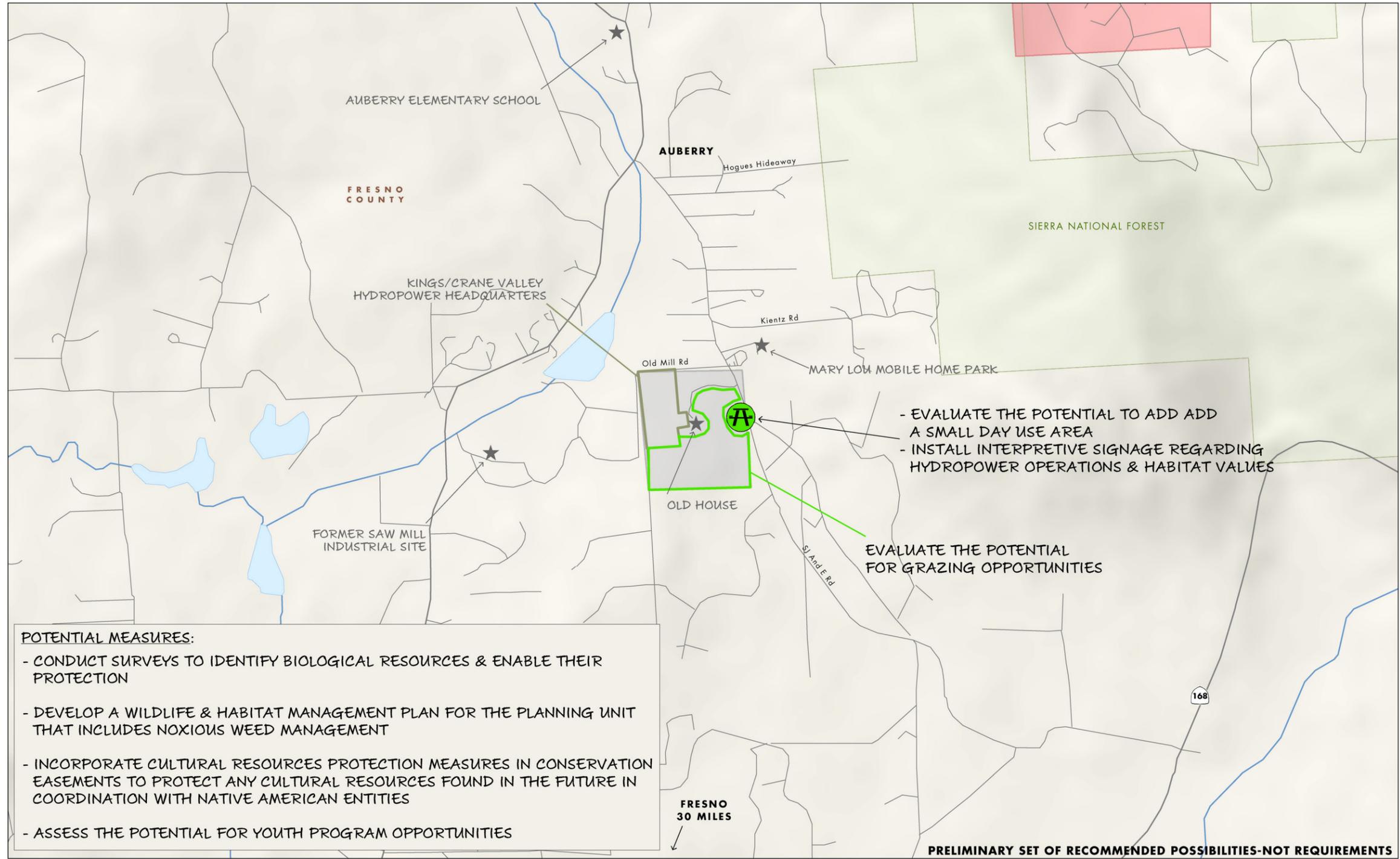
\* This is a set of recommended possibilities for the preservation and enhancement of BPV's, and is not intended to be a set of requirements for future land management.

\*\* Denotes site specific measure.

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### Auberry Service Center Planning Unit Recommended Concept



<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>PG&amp;E Lands Preliminarily Designated for Retention</li> <li>PG&amp;E Lands Preliminarily Designated for Disposition</li> <li>BIA</li> <li>BLM</li> <li>BOR</li> <li>DOD</li> <li>NPS</li> <li>Other/NGO</li> <li>State</li> <li>USFS</li> <li>Federal Wilderness</li> </ul>	<p><b>Concept Features</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Modify Existing Feature</li> <li>New Feature</li> <li>Trail</li> </ul>	<p><b>Existing Features</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Boat Launch</li> <li>Campground</li> <li>Dam</li> <li>Day Use</li> <li>Feature of Importance</li> <li>Fishing</li> <li>Fish Barrier Dam</li> <li>Gate</li> <li>Lodging</li> <li>Non-Motorized Boating</li> <li>Parking</li> <li>Powerhouse</li> <li>Private Camp</li> <li>Ranch</li> <li>Trailhead</li> <li>Whitewater Put-In/Take-Out</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>FERC Boundary</li> <li>Stream / River</li> <li>Canal / Ditch</li> <li>Pipeline</li> <li>Highly Valued Stream</li> <li>Primary Roads</li> <li>Secondary Roads</li> <li>OHV Roads</li> <li>Trail</li> </ul>
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All symbols may not appear on the map



Figure WC-10

EDAW

## 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.