

# BASS LAKE PLANNING UNIT

## Willow Creek Watershed

### Existing Conditions & Uses

#### Overview

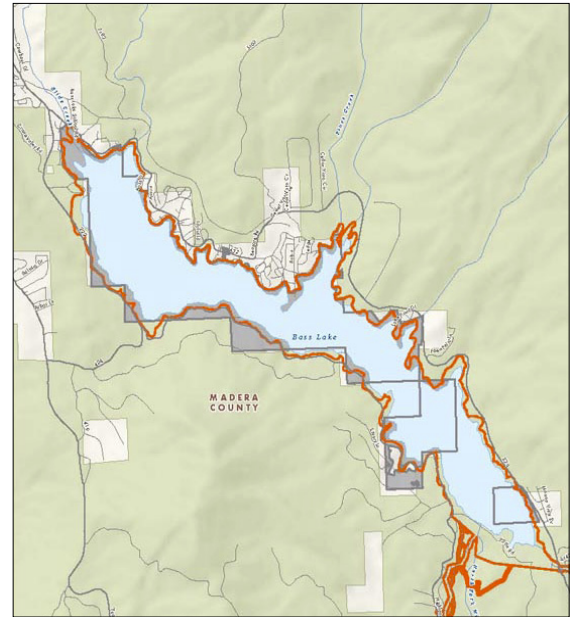
- Reservoir that is a popular summer recreation destination, with substantial residential and recreation development
- 1,085 acres in Madera County; 149 acres outside and 936 acres (including most of the reservoir) inside the FERC boundary
- Part of the Crane Valley Project (FERC #1354), New License issued in October 2003

The central feature of this planning unit is Bass Lake, a four mile-long and half-mile wide reservoir with 1,165 surface acres and 15 miles of shoreline at the full pool elevation of about 3,377 feet. The 279 acres of land that are not inundated by the lake at full pool form a narrow strip around the shoreline (see Figure WC-1). The planning unit is surrounded by USFS lands administered by the Sierra National Forest (SNF) as the Bass Lake Recreation Area.

The planning unit is very accessible to the public with county roads paralleling both the east and west shorelines of the lake. The small town of Oakhurst is about eight miles to the west, and the small town of North Fork is about five miles to



Very full Bass Lake from southeast shoreline



Bass Lake Planning Unit  
Madera County

the south. The rapidly growing Fresno area, with a population of around 500,000 people, is about 45 miles to the south. The southern entrance to Yosemite National Park is 14 miles to the north.

Bass Lake comprises the upstream portion of the Crane Valley Project (FERC #1354), which received a New License in 2003. About 86% of the planning unit is within the FERC boundary, including over 800 acres covered by the lake. Numerous biological, cultural, and recreation surveys and studies were conducted within the project area during the relicensing process. Lands outside the FERC boundary are primarily on the hill slopes above the west side of the lake.<sup>1</sup> The New License requires several management and monitoring plans to be developed by PG&E in consultation with others, some of which have been completed, and others of which are in draft form or have been postponed with FERC approval.

#### Fish, Plant, and Wildlife Habitat

The reservoir area supports nesting bald eagles and osprey. A pair of bald eagles has been successful at establishing a nesting territory on the slope above the west shore on National Forest

# Bass Lake Planning Unit Existing Conditions

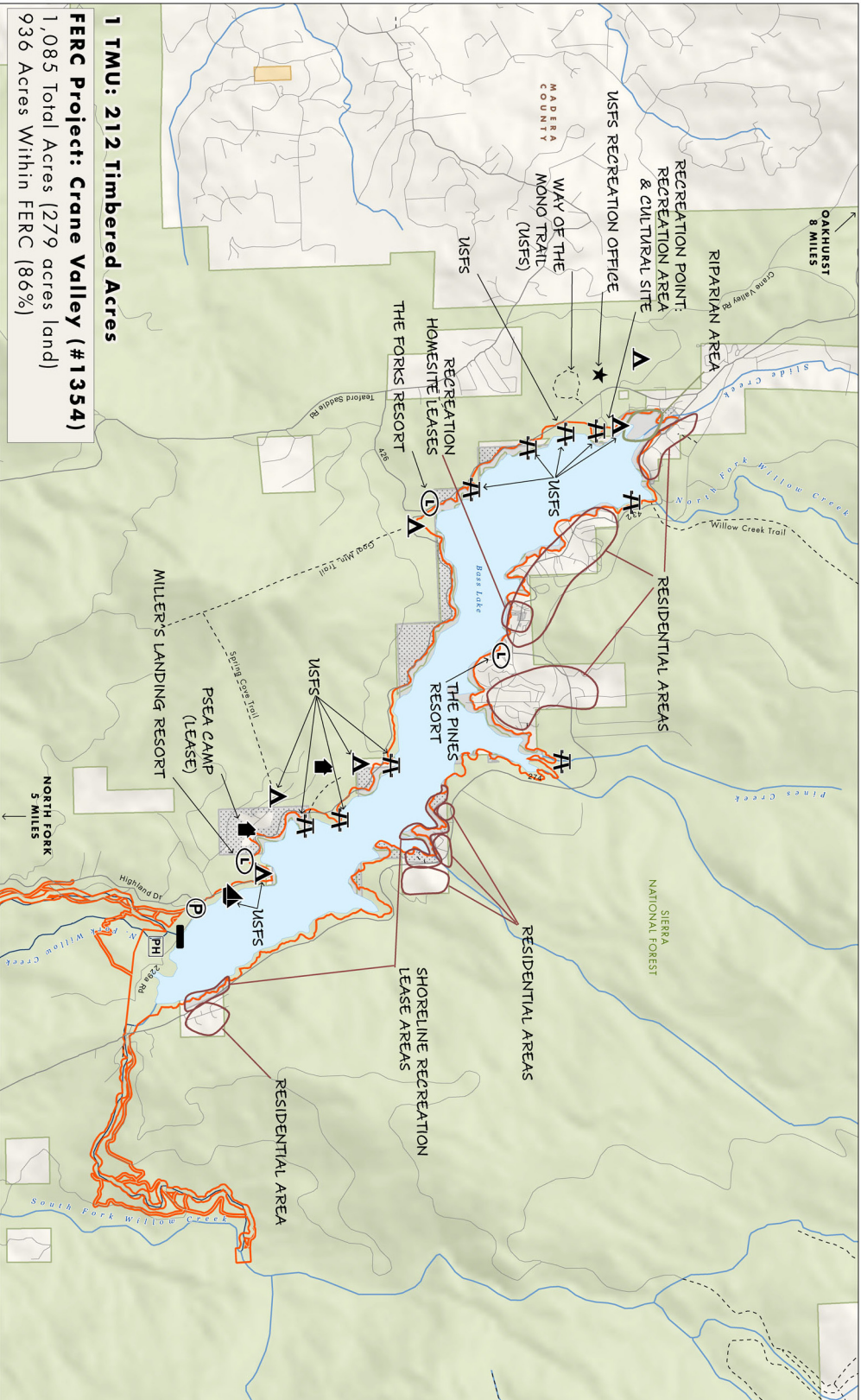
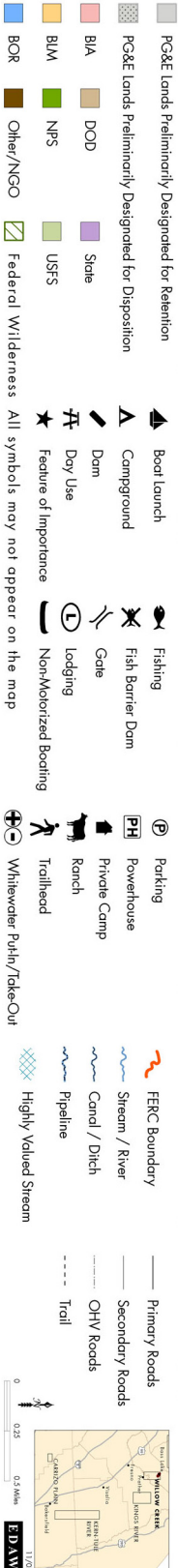


Figure WC-1

# BASS LAKE PLANNING UNIT

## Willow Creek Watershed

land for the past several years. A PG&E Bald Eagle and Raptor Management Plan requires that disturbance to the nesting pair be minimized, that forest management include recruitment of nesting and perch trees, and that fuel loads be managed.

Other special status wildlife species that may occur in the Crane Valley Project area include California red-legged frog and valley elderberry longhorn beetle; however, these species were not identified within the Bass Lake area during relicensing studies conducted between 2000 and 2002. In addition to the bald eagle and osprey habitat, the SNF has designated three California spotted owl Protected Activity Centers (PACs) within one-half mile of the reservoir. Relicensing studies also identified several special status plant species that have been found or that may occur within the Bass Lake area, one being a Federally listed and extremely rare species with only six known occurrences.

A vegetation management plan is being drafted by PG&E in consultation with SNF, other Federal and State agencies, and tribes as required by the New License.<sup>2</sup> It is expected that the plan will ensure protection of habitat and viewshed resources and protection of recreation facilities and private properties in the Bass Lake area. Vegetation management is also addressed in the Bald Eagle and Raptor Management Plan, which includes areas on the west shore of the lake outside the FERC boundary but near the existing bald eagle nesting territory.

### Open Space

The undeveloped forest lands within the planning unit provide open space values, comprising a portion of the natural viewshed enjoyed by recreationists on the lake and travelers on the roads encircling the lake.

### Outdoor Recreation

The SNF manages four family campgrounds (more than 250 campsites total) and two group camps, six picnic areas and a boat ramp on or

near the west shore, and two picnic areas on the east shore. Most of these facilities are on SNF lands, but several are on planning unit or both planning unit and SNF lands. Four SNF trails are close to the lake and provide scenic views of the area. Plans are underway for a trail to link the shoreline recreation facilities on the west side of the lake, which would cross both SNF and planning unit lands.

Two resorts on the west shore, The Forks and Miller's Landing, operate under SNF permits and provide boat docks to visitors (at The Forks, under a PG&E marina lease). Also on the west shore, the Pacific Service Employees Association (PSEA) operates the 20-acre Camp Wishon Cove for its members under a PG&E lease. The camp has 21 cabins, eight RV and ten tent campsites, a recreation room and playground, laundry facilities, access to the lakeshore, and a dock. PSEA has recently invested in improvements to the camp facilities.

Much of the east side of the lake is bordered by private lands occupied by one large resort, The Pines, and several residential developments. The shoreline in the area of the residential developments is largely occupied by boat docks authorized under a PG&E permit program. Three homeowner associations have PG&E leases for recreational activities on areas of shoreline next to their communities. These lease areas generally include boat docks, a boat ramp, parking and small beaches, picnic areas, or similar day use amenities.



Classic boats moored at The Pines Resort

# BASS LAKE PLANNING UNIT

## Willow Creek Watershed



Wallflower at Willow Cove

Recreation use is high during the summer, when the reservoir hosts many boaters, campers, anglers, and resort guests. Boating use is heavy, with PG&E estimates of about 300 boats using the lake at peak use times.<sup>3</sup> Bass Lake provides both a coldwater and warmwater fishery for anglers. DFG stocks catchable-size trout and kokanee salmon fingerlings annually, and the lake has reproducing populations of rainbow and brown trout, kokanee salmon, bass, and crappie.

The New License issued by FERC contains several articles and conditions that reflect PG&E's Recreation Settlement Agreement with the SNF. The New License set a schedule for the rehabilitation of all existing recreation facilities at Bass Lake; rehabilitation of several family campgrounds and day use areas have been completed, and others are underway or in the planning stages. Other planned enhancements include development of a bike path around the lake and installation of barrier-free fishing piers. A recreation management plan will also be developed.

### Forest Resources

The lands within and surrounding the planning unit are primarily covered with mature mixed conifer forests, with small areas of oaks and riparian vegetation. Forested lands within the planning unit are included within PG&E's Bass Lake Timber Management Unit (TMU), which contains 212 acres of timberlands. The TMU is

managed under a Salvage prescription, meaning that timber management activities are restricted to mitigating for emergency forest and watershed health issues, such as salvage harvesting following an insect attack or fire. Fuel load management is of paramount importance in the area due to the presence of significant public and private development and recreation uses. The new FERC Project License requires that PG&E develop a fire prevention and response plan, in consultation with SNF.<sup>4</sup> Fuel load management to prevent catastrophic fires will also be addressed in the vegetation management plan.

### Agricultural Uses

There are no agricultural uses within the planning unit or on adjacent public lands.

### Historic Resources

The Bass Lake area is within the ancestral territory of the Southern Miwok, Chukchansi Yokuts, and North Fork Mono tribes. The latter were the principal occupants of the area prior to European settlement in the mid-1800s. Several prehistoric and historic sites have been identified around Bass Lake, and the SNF has nominated the area as the Crane Valley National Historic District.

The North Fork Mono Tribe and North Fork Mono Rancheria, located nearby, as well as other tribes from the region, participate regularly



Picnicking at the Falls Day Use Area

# BASS LAKE PLANNING UNIT

## Willow Creek Watershed



Pines Creek with healthy riparian habitat

with PG&E, SNF, and others in discussions of cultural resources and other issues related to PG&E operations in the Crane Valley Project area. These consultations are part of the implementation of the Historic Properties Management Plan (HPMP) for the project. Many Native Americans reside in the area and maintain an active interest in cultural resources and traditional practices in the Bass Lake vicinity. The protection and enhancement of ethnobotanical resources is an important issue in the area and a key topic in consultations.<sup>5</sup>

### Stewardship Council Recommendations

The Stewardship Council recommends that the land and land uses at Bass Lake be preserved and enhanced by focusing on habitat values, public access, and cultural resources. Recommendations are intended to complement the actions and plans implemented as a result of relicensing, as well as to address the protection and enhancement of BPVs on lands outside the FERC boundary, which may not be addressed in FERC license required management and monitoring plans. In presenting the Recommended Concept provided here (see Figure WC-2), our objective is to enhance habitat and cultural resource protection, preserve open space, and enhance public access.

**Objective: Preserve and enhance biological and cultural resources, preserve open space and viewsheds, as well as enhance public access.**

As shown on Table WC-1, the Stewardship Council has identified a number of preservation and/or enhancement measures that may contribute to the conservation management program for Bass Lake. 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.

### Fish, Plant, and Wildlife Habitat

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

The Bass Lake Planning Unit provides riparian and forest habitat for several special status wildlife and plant species. Almost 90% of the planning unit will be subject to several new management and monitoring plans that will protect habitat values. In order to preserve and enhance the habitat and resources found on the rest of the planning unit, the Stewardship Council recommends extending prescriptions developed in the relevant FERC license required management and monitoring plans to lands outside the FERC boundary. This would provide consistent management and enhance habitat connectivity between the approximately 135 acres of land inside the FERC boundary and approximately 150 acres outside of the boundary. We recommend close coordination with the USFS, Native American entities, and other resource-focused organizations and agencies working in the area.

# BASS LAKE PLANNING UNIT

## Willow Creek Watershed

### Open Space

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

This concept would preserve open space on lands surrounding the Bass Lake shoreline 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: Enhance recreational access in order to provide additional public recreation opportunities.**

The Bass Lake Planning Unit is a popular recreation destination with substantial recreation use and many developed public and private recreational facilities. All recreation facilities will be enhanced under the New License and plans will be developed to guide recreation management. As a result, few opportunities for additional enhancements to facilities exist. However, the Stewardship Council recommends enhancement of public access at the PSEA camp. This enhancement would be addressed in consultation with the PSEA and PG&E.



Camp Wishon PSEA camp

### Preservation of Historic Values

**Objective: Manage cultural resources in order to ensure their protection as well as support opportunities for public education.**

Several historic and prehistoric cultural sites have been identified within the planning unit, as well as ethnobotanical resources. Almost 90% of the planning unit is subject to cultural resource protection, monitoring, and management measures under the new HPMP. In order to preserve and enhance resources found on the rest of the planning unit, the Stewardship Council recommends managing lands outside the FERC boundary consistent with the HPMP and any other relicensing-related cultural resource protection and enhancement measures. The Stewardship Council also recommends developing an interpretation and education program to support public education regarding Native American cultural and history, as well as historical development in the Bass Lake area. Throughout this effort, the Stewardship Council recommends close coordination with Native American entities.

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> The FERC boundary will be expanded to include all recreation facilities after improvements to facilities agreed to during relicensing are completed.

<sup>2</sup> The vegetation management plan will address vegetation management goals, objectives, and constraints; integrated pest management; riparian area monitoring; valley elderberry longhorn beetle protection; and measures to ensure tribal access to botanical gathering areas. Completion of the vegetation management plan, and the associated noxious weed management and riparian area monitoring plans, has been postponed, with FERC approval.

<sup>3</sup> Boating use is regulated by Madera County. The Madera County Sheriff's Department maintains a patrol presence on the lake during the summer and conducts required boat safety inspections. The department also collects a once-a-season lake use fee from boaters, ranging from \$32 to \$63.

<sup>4</sup> The draft plan is currently under review by SNF.

<sup>5</sup> Plants such as soaproot (used for processing acorns) and deer grass (used in basketry) have been documented at Bass Lake.

**Table WC-1 Objectives to Preserve and/or Enhance – Recommended Concept**

Planning Unit Objective: Preserve and enhance biological and cultural resources, preserve open space and viewsheds, as well as enhance public access.		
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>Extend prescriptions developed in the vegetation management plan and related plans to lands outside the FERC boundary.</li> </ul>
Preservation of Open Space	<b>Preserve open space in order to protect natural and cultural resources, viewsheds, and the recreation setting.</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Apply permanent conservation easements to ensure a higher level of open space protection for lands surrounding the Bass Lake shoreline.</li> </ul>
Outdoor Recreation by the General Public	<b>Enhance recreational access in order to provide additional public recreation opportunities.</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Enhance public recreation access at the PSEA camp.**</li> </ul>
Sustainable Forestry		None proposed.
Agricultural Uses		None proposed.
Preservation of Historic Values	<b>Manage cultural resources in order to ensure their protection as well as support opportunities for public education.</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop an interpretation and education program to increase information available to visitors on Native American culture and history, as well as historical development in the Bass Lake area.</li> <li>Manage lands outside the FERC boundary consistent with the HPMP and other cultural resource protection and enhancement actions developed in FERC relicensing.</li> <li>Coordinate with Native American entities when conducting cultural resource measures.</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.

BASS LAKE PLANNING UNIT  
Willow Creek Watershed

Bass Lake Planning Unit  
Recommended Concept

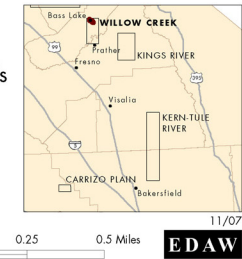
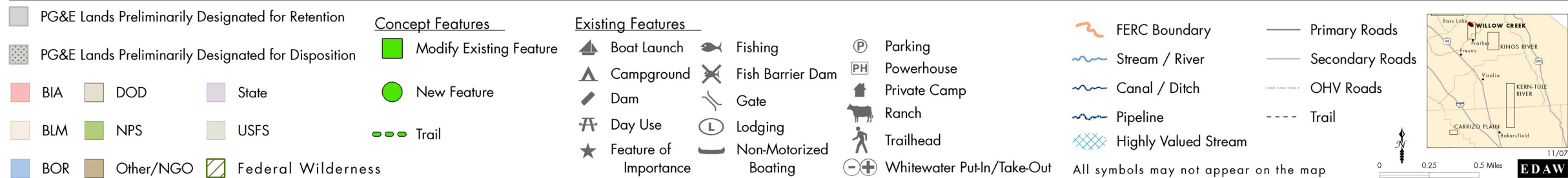
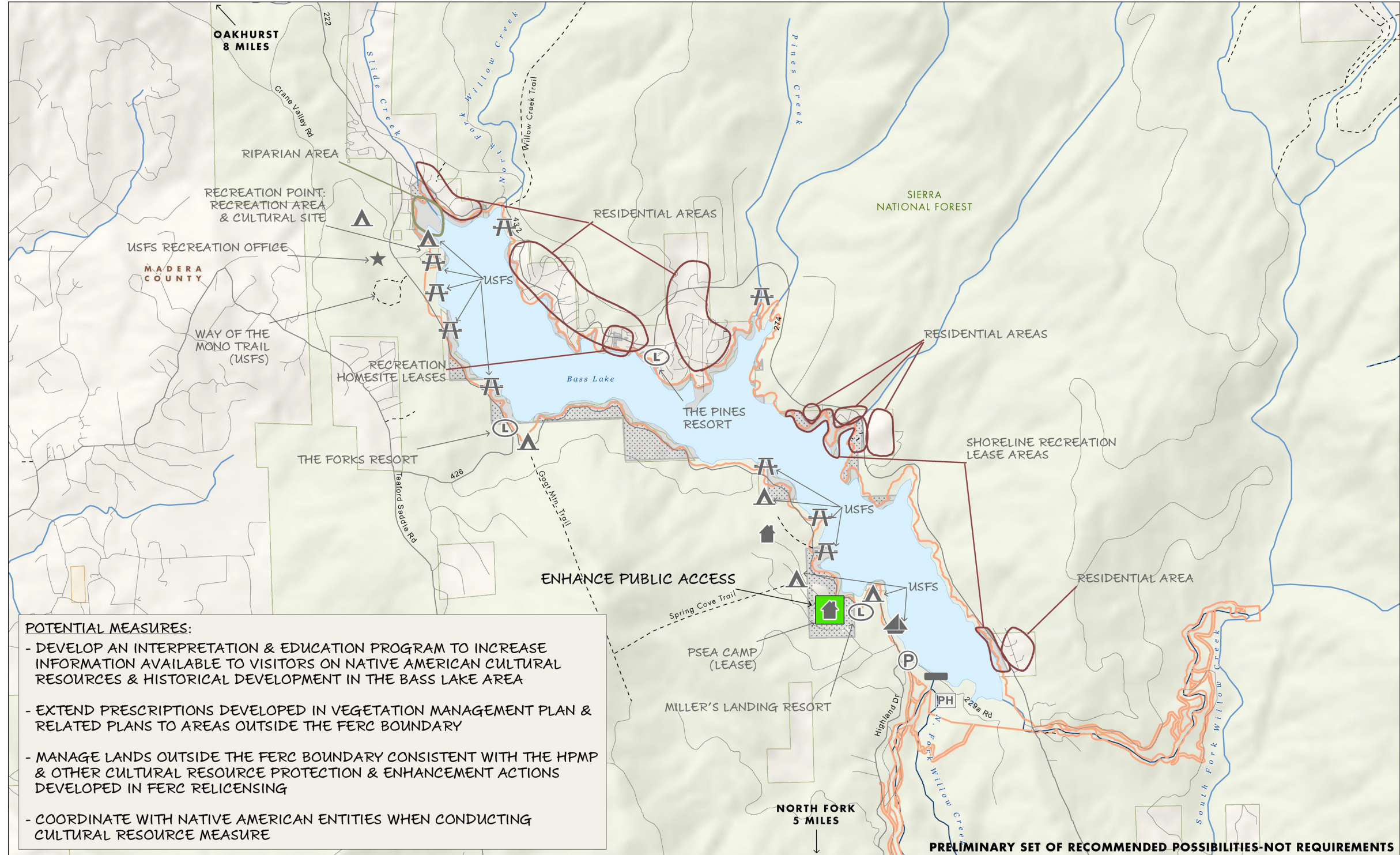


Figure WC-2  
WC-8 LCP Volume II



## Bass Lake Planning Unit

The number of measures recommended are few because numerous actions to enhance cultural resource protection, recreation, and plant and wildlife habitat (and plans that may result in more specific actions) are stipulated in the new FERC License, limiting the potential for additional enhancements. Recommendations are intended to complement the actions and plans implemented as a result of relicensing, as well as to address the protection and enhancement of BPVs on the approximately 150 acres of PG&E lands that are outside the FERC boundary, which may not be addressed in the relicensing process. The limited land base and the prevalence of recreation development and uses provide little potential for sustainable forestry or agricultural uses or enhancements.

## Preservation of Historic Values

Cultural resource protection and management at Bass Lake are closely interrelated with recreation and vegetation management; as such, cultural resource protection has or will be addressed in several aspects of the New License or in required plans. However, there is potential for enhancements that increase the interpretive information available to visitors related to Native American culture and history, as well as the history of the area related to logging and hydropower development. Specifically, the Stewardship Council recommends two measures that enhance preservation of historic values through an interpretation and education program and extension of the existing Historic Properties Management Plan (HPMP) to cover lands outside the FERC boundary. Development of an interpretation and education program would increase the cultural information available to the public, increasing awareness and fostering protection; the protection provided by the HPMP would be extended to all lands in the planning unit.

### Potential Measure:

- *Develop an interpretation and education program to increase information available to visitors on Native American culture and history, as well as historical development in the Bass Lake area.*

Development of an interpretation and education program would increase information available to visitors on Native American culture and history, as well as historical development in the Bass Lake area. Although some interpretive information is available at Bass Lake—at the Way-of-the-Mono Trail, for example—it is not available at sites such as the several shoreline day use areas, some of which contain cultural and ethnobotanical resources. An interpretation plan is not required by the new FERC License, and none has been prepared. Native American cultural themes and historical themes could be developed with direct references to the sites and resources present around the lake. The Rainbow Point recreation area is an example of a site used by the general recreating public that has particular relevance to Native American cultural history and activities, but interpretive information is not provided at the site. A monument near the public boat ramp references the railroad that once crossed the dam and passed along the lake shore en route to a nearby logging camp. The camp was among the largest in existence at the time it operated, in the 1920s, but little other information is available about this facet of local history. Other possible interpretive themes include the history of the lake's creation and hydropower development, dating back to the late 1800s, and the history of resort development and recreation that began in the mid-1900s. The interpretation program could also provide messages related to the threats to Native American cultural resources posed by vandalism or theft and respect for these resources to engender cooperation in their protection.

**Potential Measure:**

- *Manage lands outside the FERC boundary consistent with the HPMP and other cultural resource protection and enhancement actions developed in FERC relicensing.*

Related to these actions is the protection and enhancement of ethnobotanical resources where the opportunity exists. The relicensing process identified the protection of Native American archeological sites and protection and enhancement of ethnobotanical resources as important issues in the Bass Lake area. Botanists have completed plant surveys with a focus on sensitive plants and those used by Native Americans, as well as developed a list of culturally significant plant species in the Bass Lake area. A HPMP that addresses protection of these resources was approved by FERC in 2005. Plans are underway to create a Native American liaison position that would facilitate oversight and communications with PG&E regarding cultural resource issues. The Cultural Resources Committee consisting of representatives of PG&E, Sierra National Forest (SNF), Native American tribes and organizations, and others meets quarterly to confer on HPMP implementation and all cultural resource matters. The HPMP includes additional ethnographic studies and protection of ethnobotanical resources and other traditional cultural properties.

The Stewardship Council recommends managing lands outside the FERC boundary (which are not covered by the HPMP) consistent with the HPMP and other cultural resource protection and enhancement measures developed in FERC relicensing, including provisions for tribal access to cultural and ethnobotanical resources. Coordination with Native American entities would occur during development of the interpretation and education program and protection and access to ethnobotanical resources outside the FERC boundary.

**Fish, Plant, and Wildlife Habitat****Potential Measure:**

- *Extend prescriptions developed in the vegetation management plan and related plans to lands outside the FERC boundary.*

Habitat protection would be enhanced by ensuring that the several existing or in-development plans and actions directed at habitat areas within the FERC boundary also include adjacent areas outside the FERC boundary. Undeveloped forest lands on the west shore (mostly outside the FERC boundary) and a riparian area at the north end of the reservoir (mostly within the FERC boundary) provide the highest habitat values in the planning unit. Much of these lands surround recreation facilities. The largest area of undeveloped forest is in the area surrounding the bald eagle nest site; the existing Bald Eagle and Raptor Management Plan addresses habitat protection for eagles and osprey, both special status species, in that area and elsewhere in the project area. The New FERC License requires a Biological Evaluation that evaluates potential effects on special status species and their habitat before new recreation developments or other new features are constructed, and the SNF may require mitigation. The opportunity exists to extend the habitat protection embodied by these requirements to the portions of the planning unit that are outside the FERC boundary.

To meet this objective, the Stewardship Council recommends extending prescriptions and protections contained in the vegetation management plan (associated with relicensing, and currently in draft form in combination with the related noxious weed management plan and riparian area monitoring plan) to areas outside the FERC boundary. It is expected that the plan, being developed in consultation with SNF, Federal and State wildlife agencies, tribes, and others,

will ensure protection of habitat and viewshed resources and protection of recreation facilities and private properties in the Bass Lake area, particularly from the threat of catastrophic fire. The plan will provide prescriptions for habitat management and will address vegetation treatment (cutting, limbing, or topping trees), gathering of plant materials by Native American for traditional purposes, protection of visually sensitive areas, and USFS notification procedures.

## **Sustainable Forestry**

None recommended.

## **Outdoor Recreation**

### **Potential Measure:**

- *Enhance public recreation access at the PSEA camp.*

In addition to habitat and cultural resource measures, the Stewardship Council recommends a measure to increase recreation opportunities by enhancing public access at an existing Pacific Service Employees Association (PSEA) camp operated under a lease (as well as by the increase in interpretive facilities recommended above). The PSEA camp at Wishon Cove is the largest in the system of six camps dispersed across the length of the southern Cascade and Sierra Nevada mountains, and is reported to be among the most popular. It provides a unique recreation opportunity in that it provides an option for an overnight stay that is more rustic than the resorts on the lake, yet more developed than the USFS campgrounds. At present, this opportunity is only available to members of the PSEA, which is open only to PG&E employees, retirees, and their families. The Stewardship Council recommends providing access to these facilities for the general public, in conjunction with continued PSEA member's use, to enhance outdoor recreation opportunities for the public.

## **Open Space**

### **Potential Measure:**

- *Apply permanent conservation easements to ensure a higher level of open space protection for lands surrounding the Bass Lake shoreline.*

Lastly, to protect open space and aesthetic values of the lands for residents and visitors to this popular and scenic recreation area, the Stewardship Council recommends conservation easements for all parcels, although there is little threat of development at present. The easements would preclude future development and preserve open space on the currently undeveloped lands in the planning unit. These are primarily lands above the west shore of the lake currently managed for wildlife habitat, particularly for bald eagles, and viewshed protection. The surrounding SNF lands are managed similarly, and there are no plans to extend SNF recreation development onto the PG&E lands. Nevertheless, open space is an important value of the lands adjacent to the Bass Lake shoreline in terms of the forested viewshed enjoyed by residents and visitors to the reservoir and travelers on the roads surrounding the lake.

## **Agricultural Uses**

None recommended.