

DEER CREEK PLANNING UNIT

Feather River Watershed

Existing Conditions & Uses

Overview

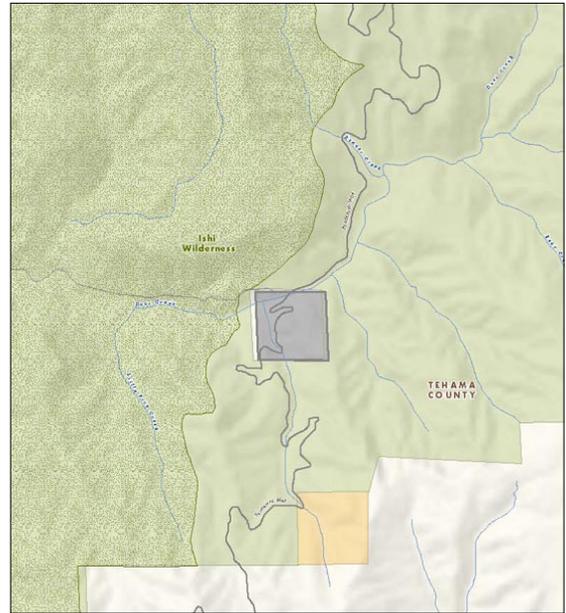
- Remote and scenic landscape with informal camping, angling, and whitewater boating opportunities, as well as access to the adjacent Ishi Wilderness Area
- 151 acres in Tehama County
- Lands are not associated with a FERC Project and do not contain hydroelectric facilities

The Deer Creek Planning Unit consists a single parcel of slightly more than 150 acres located in an area of deep canyons eroded between lava cliffs and pinnacles. Deer Creek crosses the northwest corner of the parcel. Steep north and west-facing slopes rise from the creek to an elevation of over 2,500 feet on a ridge near the southeast corner of the parcel. There are no hydroelectric facilities or infrastructure and no FERC Project associated with this planning unit.

As shown in Figure FR-11, USFS Road 28N29 (Ponderosa Way) crosses the parcel from north to south, providing access from both directions, but is suitable only for high-clearance vehicles. Other USFS roads link Ponderosa Way to



Deer Creek Canyon & basalt outcrops



Deer Creek Planning Unit
Tehama County

Highway 32 at a junction about 30 miles to the north and east of the parcel. To the south, Ponderosa Way links to Cohasset Road, which follows the Cohasset Ridge to Highway 99 at Chico, about a 25-mile drive from the parcel. The planning unit is surrounded by USFS lands administered by the Lassen National Forest. The 41,000-acre Ishi Wilderness Area is immediately to the west.¹ A few miles south of the planning unit, ownership becomes primarily private.

Fish, Plant, and Wildlife Habitat

The vegetation of the Deer Creek drainage in the vicinity of the planning unit is varied and intermixed with geologic formations characterized by basalt outcroppings, caves, and pillar formations. Oak woodlands are found on the rocky canyon slopes with northern exposures, and chaparral or scrub oak can be found on south-facing slopes. Riparian vegetation lines Deer Creek, typified by white alder, big-leaf maple and willows. Pineries, ancient plateaus of ponderosa pine left isolated after the river carved the canyon, are nearby and unique to the area. Each of these vegetation types provides a high diversity of wildlife habitat. In addition, rocky outcrops provide ledges, crevices, and cliffs that may serve as nesting sites and foraging perches

Deer Creek Planning Unit Existing Conditions

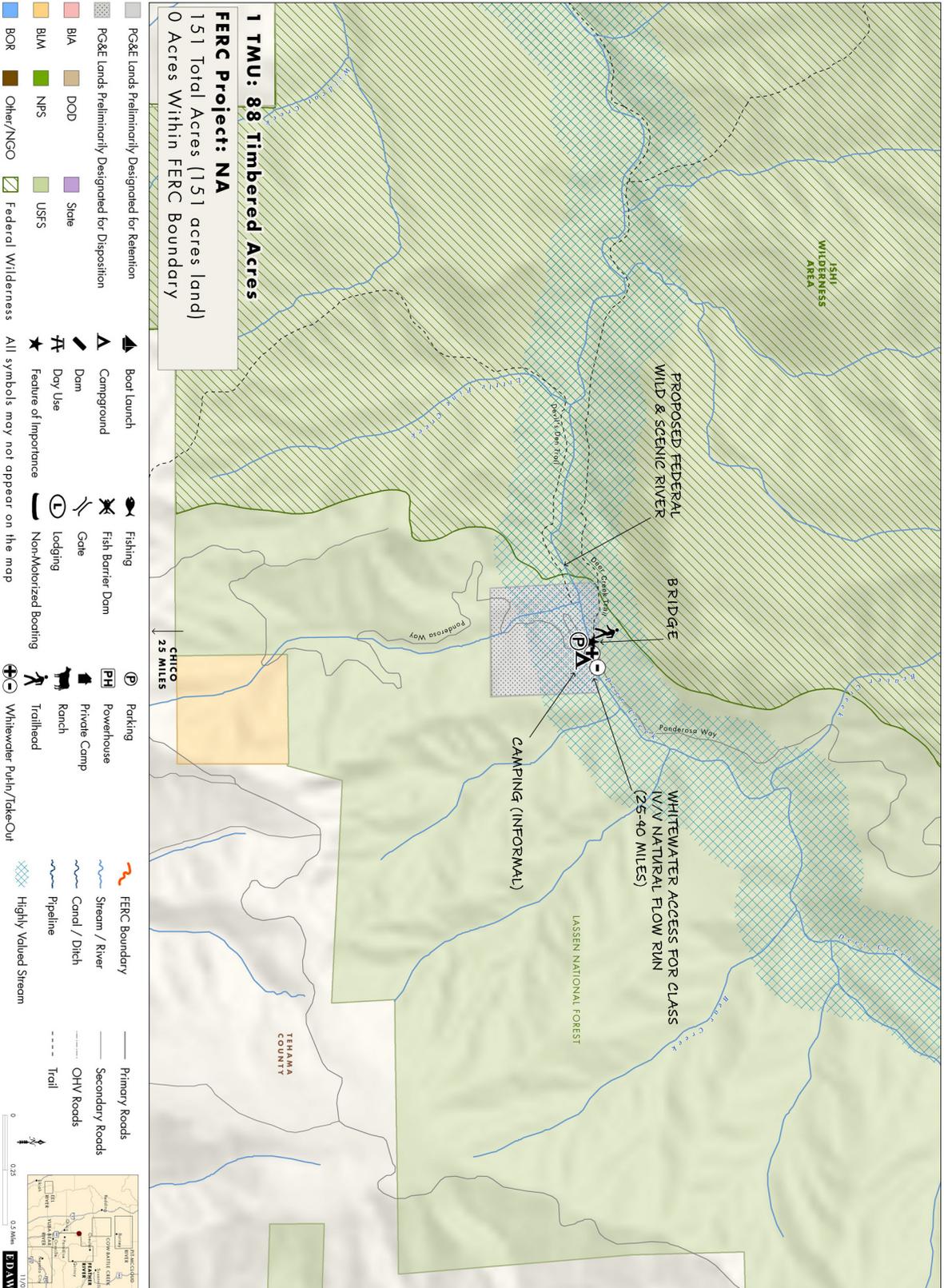


Figure FR-11

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for special status species such as peregrine falcon, golden eagle, and prairie falcon, as well as for many bat species.

Deer Creek is protected from development of new dams and diversions under the California Wild and Scenic River Act, although it is not formally designated as a Wild and Scenic River. The USFS has recommended federal Wild and Scenic designation for Deer Creek, including the segment that runs through the planning unit. The upper and lower canyon reaches of Deer Creek (the Ponderosa Way bridge marks the boundary between these two reaches) hosts one of the last wild runs of spring-run chinook salmon and provides prime habitat for both salmon and steelhead. These special status fish species are the focus of a USFS anadromous fisheries protection and restoration program.² Other special status species include the foothill yellow-legged frog, which is found in the side channels of Deer Creek, and two special status plant species, Hall's rupertia and the Butte County fritillary, found on adjacent lands, and whose distribution indicates that they may occur in the planning unit. The Tehama deer herd, the largest herd in the State, winters in the Ishi Wilderness area and likely uses the Deer Creek Planning Unit.

Open Space

The relatively remote character of the planning unit has helped maintain its open space value. The planning unit provides outstanding views dominated by rugged cliffs, eroded lava outcrops and spires high above the south side of the Deer Creek Canyon.

Outdoor Recreation

The Deer Creek Planning Unit primarily serves as a gateway to a variety of recreation activities on the surrounding National Forest lands and on Deer Creek, including backpacking, hiking, horseback riding, mountain biking, fishing, and whitewater boating. The Ponderosa Way bridge over Deer Creek serves as the take-out and put-

in for Class IV/V natural flow whitewater runs. Due to its remoteness and difficulty, the runs are used by relatively few boaters but are particularly valued for consistent flows, and the potential for multiple-day trips in a wilderness setting.

Two USFS trails cross portions of the planning unit. Just outside the planning unit is a trailhead for the USFS 7-mile Deer Creek Trail which leads west into the Ishi Wilderness on the north side of Deer Creek. On the south side of Deer Creek, the 4.5-mile Devil's Den Trail also leads west into the wilderness area and a roadside parking area and signage have been provided by the USFS (one of three interpretive panels is missing, and most postings are missing from the trailhead bulletin board).

Anglers fish for rainbow and brown trout, salmon, and steelhead in Deer Creek. Parking and informal camping areas on the south side of the river near the bridge accommodate the low-intensity recreational uses of the planning unit and surrounding lands. The USFS has attempted to block unauthorized OHV spur roads created in the vicinity of the bridge in order to prevent resource damage. Drivers utilizing the "Lassen Backcountry Discovery Trail," a network of high-clearance and OHV roads and trails throughout the Lassen National Forest, may also access the lands in the planning unit. Although the principal trail passes several miles to the north, a branch of the trail directs travelers down Ponderosa Way to a "Discovery Point" at the bridge over Deer Creek. Recreation use is limited by the



Ponderosa Way Bridge over Deer Creek

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Deer Creek Canyon from Ponderosa Way

difficult road access, high temperatures during the summer, and the short recreation season, as well as the high skill level needed to boat on the whitewater runs.

Forest Resources

The Deer Creek Planning Unit contains one PG&E Timber Management Unit (TMU) consisting of 88 timbered acres. Current PG&E timber management on these lands is limited to salvage activities only, when necessary; management activities are restricted to mitigating for watershed and forest health issues, including emergency salvage harvesting following insect attack or a catastrophic event.

Agricultural Uses

No agricultural uses occur in the planning unit and the primarily steep terrain and rock outcrops that characterize the landscape provide little opportunity to support such uses. There is a USFS grazing allotment on the north side of Deer Creek, but no allotment south of Deer Creek, where most of the planning unit lies.

Historic Resources

The Deer Creek area is rich in historic resources. For over 3,000 years, the Yahi Yana Native

Americans lived on these lands, their presence ending only when Euro-American settlers came to the area in the 1850s. Anthropologists believe the cultural resources (prehistoric, historic, and ethnographic) present throughout the Deer Creek watershed to be among the most significant in California. Although only a limited portion of the Deer Creek watershed has been inventoried, house pits, burial sites, rock art, and rock shelters have been discovered, and the results of existing surveys suggest that many archeological sites remain undiscovered. Historic sites linked to Euro-American pioneers are found in this area as well. The USFS has considered nominating portions of the Deer Creek drainage as a National Register Historic District.

Stewardship Council Recommendations

The Stewardship Council recommends that the land and land uses at Deer Creek Planning Unit be preserved and enhanced by focusing on sensitive fish and wildlife habitat, forest and cultural resources, and recreation opportunities. In presenting the Recommended Concept provided here, our objective is to preserve and enhance unique habitat and valuable cultural resources, while enhancing sustainable forestry and recreation experiences.



Devils Den trailhead signage

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Objective: Preserve and enhance biological and cultural resources, as well as enhance sustainable forestry management and recreation experiences.

As shown on Table FR-6, the Stewardship Council has identified a number of preservation and/or enhancement measures that may contribute to the conservation management program for Deer Creek. 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 and restore special biological resources.

The Deer Creek Planning Unit provides valuable terrestrial and aquatic habitats that support a variety of species, most notably anadromous fish. 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, particularly riparian areas associated with aquatic habitat. These studies will likely be followed by management plans to ensure implementation of preservation and enhancement measures for specific resources, including protection and restoration of lands associated with anadromous fish habitat. Management of the property to preserve and enhance habitat will also include assessing the need for management of noxious weeds. We recommend close coordination with the USFS and other resource-focused organizations working in the region and that all



Vehicle barriers at primitive camping area planning be considered in conjunction with the fuels management plan.

Open Space

Objective: Preserve open space in order to protect natural and cultural resources, as well as the unique character of the site.

This concept would preserve open space by limiting new development to minimal recreation enhancements, as well as through permanent conservation easements. Preservation and enhancement measures are not expected to alter the natural and remote character of the planning unit. 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 facilities in order to provide educational opportunities and enhance the recreation experience.

The Deer Creek Planning Unit provides access to whitewater runs and trails that lead into the adjacent Ishi Wilderness, as well as opportunities for fishing and informal camping. As shown in Figure FR-12, the Stewardship Council looks to

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enhance these opportunities by recommending minimal improvements that would enhance the recreation experience without detracting from the remote natural setting and would protect natural and cultural resources. We recommend enhancements focused on providing a formal camping area, enhancing interpretive signage, and providing restroom facilities, if warranted, based on future use and conditions.

Sustainable Forestry

Objective: Develop and implement forestry practices in order to contribute to a sustainable forest, preserve and enhance habitat, as well as to ensure appropriate fuel load management.

Though limited in size, forest stands provide important habitat resources within the Deer Creek Planning Unit. The Stewardship Council recommends that future care and management of the land include developing a long-term vision for forest management in the area, addressing silvicultural practices, holistic watershed management, and fuels management. Forest and fuels management plans should be developed in conjunction with the wildlife and habitat management plan. We expect that all of these plans would be developed in coordination with USFS management and practices as appropriate.



USFS Deer Creek Trailhead

Preservation of Historic Values

Objective: Identify and manage cultural resources in order to ensure their protection, as well as to support opportunities for public education.

The Deer Creek watershed is known to contain many significant cultural resources (prehistoric, historic, and ethnographic) and therefore the planning unit may also contain important cultural resources. The Stewardship Council aims to support an increased understanding of these resources and ensure they are appropriately protected. To meet this objective, we recommend that cultural resource studies be conducted to understand the resources found at Deer Creek, that appropriate management plans be developed and implemented, and that opportunities to support public education regarding cultural resources be considered. Throughout this effort, the Stewardship Council recommends close coordination with Native American entities and the USFS.

Endnotes

¹ There are bills pending in the United States Senate and the House of Representatives that propose the extension of the Ishi Wilderness by an additional 48,000 acres, including the Polk Springs Unit to the east of the planning unit.

² This management program includes a long-term aquatic conservation strategy to maintain and improve fish habitat, with complementary measures such as watershed analyses and a watershed restoration project in cooperation with private landowners, State and Federal agencies, and watershed conservancies. The USFS has been an active partner with the Deer Creek Conservancy in riparian restoration projects for protection of anadromous fisheries in Deer Creek.

Table FR-6 Objectives to Preserve and/or Enhance – Recommended Concept

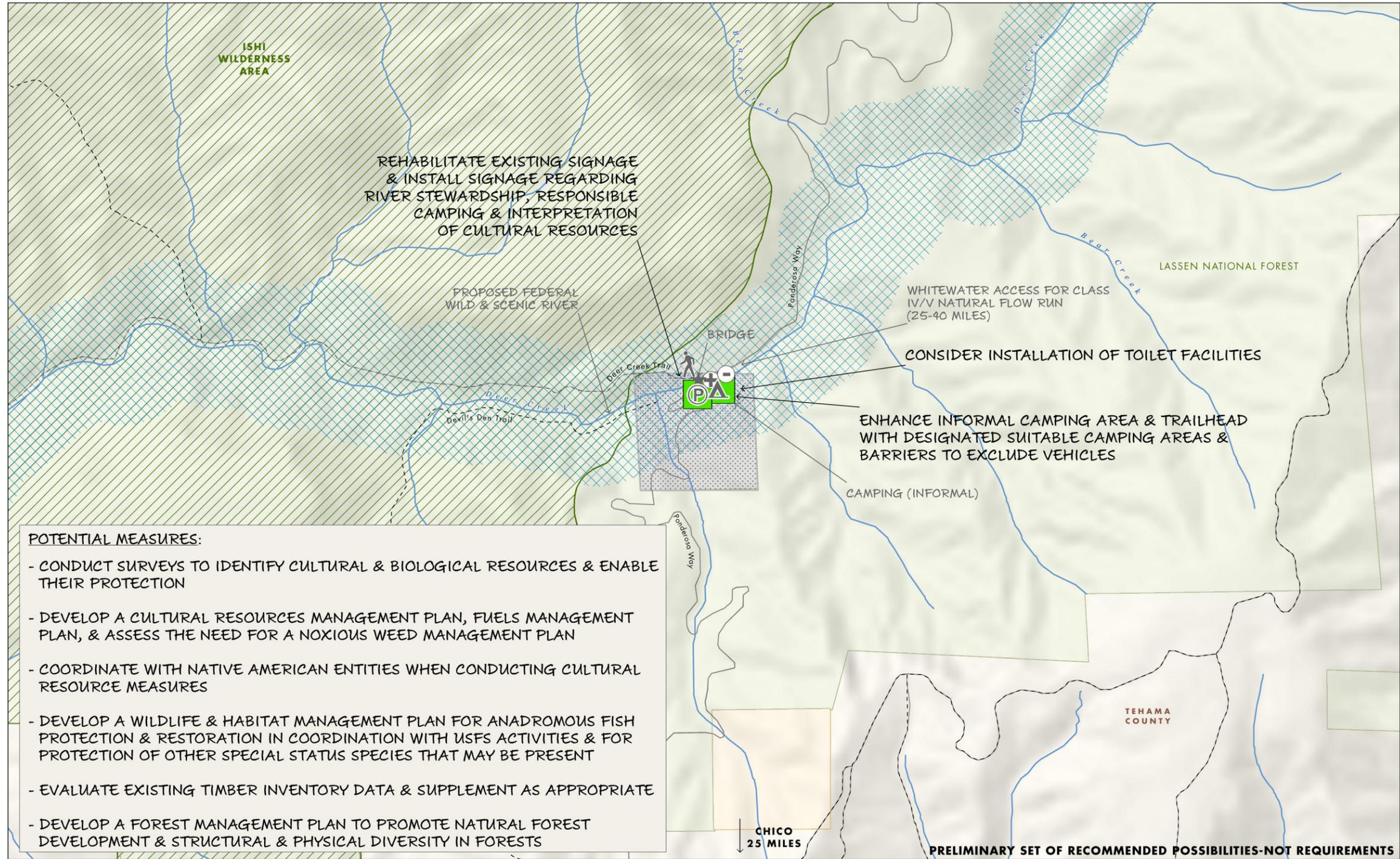
Planning Unit Objective: Preserve and enhance biological and cultural resources, as well as enhance sustainable forestry management and recreation experiences.		
Beneficial Public Value	Objective	Potential Measures to Preserve and/or Enhance BPVs – Not Requirements*
Protection of the Natural Habitat of Fish, Wildlife, and Plants	Preserve and enhance habitat in order to protect and restore special biological resources.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct an assessment of aquatic habitat and survey for biological resources. • Develop a wildlife and habitat management plan for anadromous fish protection and restoration in coordination with USFS activities, and for protection of other special status species that may be present. • Assess the need for a noxious weed management plan, and develop a plan as needed.
Preservation of Open Space	Preserve open space in order to protect natural and cultural resources, as well as the unique character of the site.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apply permanent conservation easements to ensure a higher level of open space protection.
Outdoor Recreation by the General Public	Enhance recreational facilities in order to provide educational opportunities and enhance the recreation experience.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhance informal camping area and trailhead with designated suitable camping areas and barriers to exclude vehicles.** • Rehabilitate existing signage at Devil’s Den trailhead and install signage regarding river stewardship, responsible camping, and interpretation of cultural resources.** • Consider installation of toilet facilities if use levels and potential impacts indicate a need.**
Sustainable Forestry	Develop and implement forestry practices in order to contribute to a sustainable forest, preserve and enhance habitat, as well as to ensure appropriate fuel load management.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluate existing timber inventory data and supplement as appropriate. • Develop a forest management plan to promote natural forest development and structural and physical diversity in forests for long-term ecological, economic, social, and cultural benefits. • Develop a fuels management plan to ensure long-term forest health and reduce fuel loading and fire hazard.
Agricultural Uses		None proposed.
Preservation of Historic Values	Identify and manage cultural resources in order to ensure their protection, as well as to support opportunities for public education.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct surveys of the planning unit to identify cultural resources and enable their protection. • Develop a cultural resources management plan for the planning unit in coordination with adjacent USFS lands. • Coordinate with Native American entities when conducting cultural resource measures.

* 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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Deer Creek Planning Unit
Recommended Concept



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



Figure FR-12



Deer Creek Planning Unit

Preservation of Historic Values

Potential Measures:

- *Conduct surveys of the planning unit to identify cultural resources and enable their protection.*
- *Develop a cultural resources management plan for the planning unit in coordination with adjacent USFS lands.*
- *Coordinate with Native American entities when conducting cultural resource measures.*

Under the concept, a primary focus is the preservation of cultural resources. Because this area is historically significant as the homeland of the Yahi Yana people and an area of early European-American settlement, the discovery and preservation of these cultural legacies is essential to preserving California history. Surveys would be conducted to discover any prehistoric, historic, and ethnographic resources that may exist in the planning unit. All subsequent measures would take into account the results of these surveys to ensure that historic sites and artifacts are protected from disruption or damage. The results of these surveys would be the foundation for the development of a cultural resources management plan that would ensure the protection and preservation of these resources. Archaeologists have reported inadvertent damage to cultural resources from recreationists and well as vandalism in the Deer Creek area, indicating a need for the protection of historic and archeological values in the planning unit. Potential measures include the installation of signage explaining the value of historic resources, and installation of barriers such as boulders and rail fences around any sensitive areas that are identified. Documentation of cultural sites and development of the cultural resources management plan should be coordinated with Native American entities.

Fish, Plant, and Wildlife Habitat

Potential Measures:

- *Conduct an assessment of aquatic habitat and survey for biological resources.*
- *Develop a wildlife and habitat management plan for anadromous fish protection and restoration in coordination with USFS activities, and for protection of other special status species that may be present.*

The habitat component of these recommendations would protect and enhance habitat for special status anadromous fish species in Deer Creek, as well as special status raptors, amphibians, and other wildlife that may be present on the planning unit. An initial assessment of aquatic habitat and a biological survey are recommended to obtain baseline information. A wildlife and habitat management plan would then be developed to ensure consistent management of Deer Creek. Of particular interest for habitat are the protection of spawning beds as well as watershed restoration for the protection and enhancement of water quality. Considering economies of scale and the continuity of long-term ecological management, the Stewardship Council recommends coordination of habitat-related measures with the USFS, who is conducting an anadromous fisheries program on Deer Creek. The habitat measures are intended to be consistent with this program's goals of protection and restoration, and well-designed coordination would be

synergistic. At the watershed level, the USFS has been cooperating with partners such as private landowners, watershed conservancies, and State and Federal agencies; a closer collaboration regarding the lands and creek segment within the planning unit would be a natural extension of the current program.

Potential Measure:

- *Assess the need for a noxious weed management plan, and develop a plan as needed.*

Additionally, the Stewardship Council recommends assessing the need for a noxious weed management plan in the planning unit. A survey would be conducted of the planning unit to determine the potential threat or existence of noxious weeds. If determined necessary, a management plan would be developed to eradicate existing infestations of noxious weeds where possible and implement preventative measures to minimize the spread of weeds in the future.

Sustainable Forestry

Potential Measures:

- *Evaluate existing timber inventory data and supplement as appropriate.*
- *Develop a forest management plan to promote natural forest development and structural and physical diversity in forests for long-term ecological, economic, social, and cultural benefits.*
- *Develop a fuels management plan to ensure long-term forest health and reduce fuel loading and fire hazard.*

A forest management plan would be developed to promote natural forest development and structural and physical diversity in forests for long-term ecological, economic, social, and cultural benefits. In support of this plan, existing timber inventory data would be evaluated and supplemented as appropriate. Management would be coordinated with the USFS surrounding management prescriptions to the extent possible in order to support forest connectivity and management consistency. In the areas under Salvage management, snags and downed woody debris would be maintained in the planning unit for wildlife habitat and forest regeneration when not deemed a safety, fire, or disease hazard. A fuels management plan would also be developed for this area to promote forest regeneration and prevent fuels build-up. Fire is an historic component of the ecosystem in the area, aiding regeneration of oaks and many chaparral species. Together, both management plans would contribute to healthy ecosystem functioning and the maintenance of wildlife habitat.

Outdoor Recreation

Potential Measures:

- *Enhance informal camping area and trailhead with designated suitable camping areas and barriers to exclude vehicles.*
- *Rehabilitate existing signage at Devil's Den trailhead and install signage regarding river stewardship, responsible camping, and interpretation of cultural resources.*
- *Consider installation of toilet facilities if use levels and potential impacts indicate a need.*

Recreation infrastructure and amenities would be minimally enhanced to accommodate the limited amount of recreation currently occurring and likely to occur in the planning unit. Informal camping would be improved through designating suitable camping areas, better exclusion of vehicles from camping areas with barriers, and installation of “leave no trace” signage. Interpretive signage would be added at the trailhead to emphasize responsible river conservation, as well as to convey the cultural significance of these lands. Development of such signage should be coordinated with Native American entities. The existing USFS signage at the Devil’s Den trailhead could also be rehabilitated to meet these same information objectives. Provision of toilet facilities at the trailhead and camping area should be considered if the level of use increases. All of the recommended measures would occur only after surveys of natural and cultural resources are undertaken to ensure compatible land use. Impacts to riparian vegetation, water quality, sensitive plant species, and fisheries from roads and recreation activities are key considerations to the application of any recreation enhancement. As the majority of cultural sites occur near waterways and on flatlands, it is imperative that any recreation enhancement take into account potential impacts on cultural resources.

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 include only minor additions of recreation facilities and are not expected to decrease the scenic quality of the viewsheds.

Agricultural Uses

None recommended.