

EEL RIVER PLANNING UNIT

Eel River Watershed

Existing Conditions & Uses

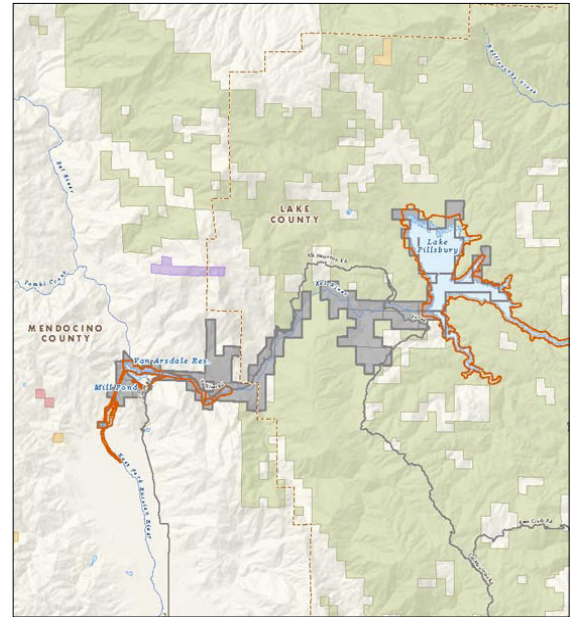
Overview

- Popular lake for recreation and steep river corridor
- 7,452 acres in Mendocino and Lake Counties; 5,218 acres outside the FERC boundary and 2,234 acres inside the FERC boundary
- Comprises the Potter Valley Project (FERC #77); License Amendment in 2004 related to fisheries and flows, License expires in 2033

The Eel River Planning Unit is located in both Mendocino and Lake Counties, north and east of the town of Potter Valley and approximately 16 miles from the City of Ukiah. The site contains Lake Pillsbury (2,280 surface acres), Van Arsdale Reservoir (106 surface acres), and a 12-mile section of the mainstem Eel River (see Figure ER-1). The planning unit contains lands that are part of the Potter Valley FERC Project (#77)¹ as well as hydropower infrastructure consisting of two dams – Scott Dam at Lake Pillsbury and Cape Horn Dam at Van Arsdale Reservoir, and the Potter Valley Powerhouse. The planning unit provides a significant water supply for the



Boats at Fuller Grove Campground



Eel River Planning Unit
Mendocino & Lake Counties

Sonoma County Water District. The Eel River Planning Unit is surrounded primarily by the Mendocino National Forest and private land.

There are five leases within the planning unit for a variety of land uses, including an access road, log boom, weather reporting site, grazing and row cropping, and a large camping area (Westshore). There are two home areas near Lake Pillsbury on adjacent lands: a USFS summer home tract at Lake Pillsbury and a private development on the Rice Fork arm of Lake Pillsbury. Some residents of the private development have boat dock agreements with PG&E.

Fish, Plant, and Wildlife Habitat

The 12-mile section of the mainstem Eel River supports Federally threatened fall-run chinook salmon and steelhead.² Sacramento pikeminnow were introduced (likely as bait) into the Eel River in 1979 and have prospered, negatively affecting salmonids through predation and habitat displacement. First built in 1910, significant fish passage facilities at Cape Horn Dam allow anadromous fish access to spawning and rearing habitat in the Eel River as well as in Soda, Benmore, and Bucknell Creeks. There are no

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fish passage facilities at Scott Dam. Information on other aquatic species in the Eel River is not available. In addition, Lake Pillsbury contains both coldwater and warmwater fisheries.

There is limited information regarding the wildlife and botanical resources in the planning unit. There are three bald eagle nesting territories at Lake Pillsbury, as well as nesting osprey and habitat for many waterfowl species. A herd of reintroduced tule elk live around the northern end of the lake. Many other special status species likely inhabit planning unit lands, potentially including northern spotted owl, Humboldt marten, American peregrine falcon, northern goshawk, and northwestern pond turtle. USFS land south of the Eel River downstream of Scott Dam is designated a Late Successional Reserve (LSR) to support species that inhabit old-growth forests. Several special status plants are known to occur in and around planning unit lands; however, noxious weeds, such as yellow starthistle are also present.

Open Space

The planning unit contains open space around Van Arsdale Reservoir, the Eel River, and Lake Pillsbury (outside of recreation developments). Due to the concentration of recreation facilities and the steepness of the Eel River Canyon, open space values are found throughout the planning unit. Lands surrounding the two home areas provide open space and viewshed values for these developments. Lands surrounding the Eel River provide views for the main access roads along the Eel River.

Outdoor Recreation

Lake Pillsbury is a regionally important recreation destination. Popular recreation activities at the Lake Pillsbury area include camping, boating, fishing, hang gliding, and OHV use. Developed recreation facilities at Lake Pillsbury are focused on the northern and western sides of the lake, located on or partially on planning unit and/or USFS land. There are

three campgrounds, one group camp, and two overflow campgrounds, one of which is open on 3-day weekends (Navy Camp); the other is currently free and open year-round (Oak Flat).³ All campgrounds except Oak Flat are open from May to September and three of the campgrounds have hosts. Boat-in camping is popular in the Horse Pasture Cove, Salt Spring Creek, Rocky Point, and Graveyard Point areas.

Two public boat launches are available on the north and west sides of the lake. Boat docks and day use facilities are located at Pine Point for USFS summer home tract users, and a private boat launch is located at the Lake Pillsbury Resort and Marina, which also provides boat rentals, gas, boat storage, and overnight cabin facilities. Motorboating, windsurfing, kayaking, waterskiing, and sailing are popular boating activities on the lake. Fishing is also a popular activity, primarily for rainbow trout and bass. Due to naturally occurring mercury in the area, there is a mercury health advisory on consumption of fish from Lake Pillsbury.

Two whitewater runs terminate at the lake, the Upper Eel River run and the Rice Fork run. The Upper Eel River run is an 18-mile Class IV/V run extending to Sunset Campground in the northeast corner of the lake, and the Rice Fork run is an 8-mile Class II run that ends at a dirt boat launch on the Rice Fork arm of the lake. It is unknown the extent to which these runs are used throughout the year. Hang gliding is another popular activity



Wet meadow & live oaks

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Kayak at Fuller Grove Group Campground

in the northern lake area, with a launch located on Mendocino National Forest's Hull Mountain north of the lake and a corresponding landing zone located near the Gravelly Valley Air Strip in a flat, grassy area.

OHV trails within and outside the Lake Pillsbury basin are popular, with over 30 miles of trails available. The basin is closed to OHV use from May 18 to September 8, and riding off of designated roads and trails is prohibited. There are three OHV trails in near proximity to Sunset Campground and one west of Fuller Grove Campground and road M1, on the west side of the lake. Unauthorized OHV use occurs adjacent to developed campgrounds at the north end of Lake Pillsbury as well as downstream of Scott Dam.

Significant deer and waterfowl hunting also occur at the lake. Picnicking facilities are available at the Pogie Point Day Use Area, Pillsbury Pines, Pine Point, and Fuller Grove Boat Ramp. Informal beach and swimming use occur in many coves and other areas of the lake. The planning unit also serves as a gateway for the nearby Snow Mountain Wilderness.

Recreation use within the Eel River Canyon consists primarily of dispersed uses, camping, and whitewater boating. Due to sensitive fisheries and ongoing restoration activities, fishing in the Eel River between Scott Dam and Cape Horn Dam is not allowed. There is some unauthorized OHV use and camping, primarily

near the two County Road bridges as both offer flat, easy access to the river.

There is also some dispersed camping and swimming use off of River Road on the south side of the Eel River; however, River Road has been closed due to a landslide and is unlikely to be reopened in the foreseeable future due to the lack of Federally appropriated funds to repair existing problems as well as continued geological instability. The County Road on the north side of the river is now the main access through the Eel River Canyon to Lake Pillsbury. There are also two trails in the canyon, one formal trail along Benmore Creek and one informal trail along Trout Creek. A developed campground is also located at Trout Creek and provides 12 drive-in and 3 walk-in campsites.

The Pillsbury whitewater run, a 6- to 8-mile Class III run, is located on the Eel River below Scott Dam. The run begins at the upper Eel River Bridge and currently has two accessible take-outs, Trout Creek Campground or farther downstream at the lower Eel River Bridge. Put-in and take-out sites that were accessible only via the River Road are no longer available due to the road closure. There is currently no information on recreation use at Van Arsdale Reservoir. Below Van Arsdale Reservoir and the Cape Horn Dam, the Eel River is both a State and Federally designated Wild and Scenic River.



Campsite at Navy Camp

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Forest Resources

The planning unit contains six PG&E Timber Management Units (TMUs), which cover the entire unit, for a total of 4,249 acres of forestlands. The planning unit primarily consists of mixed conifer stands with some late seral stage stands and old-growth trees. There are no plantations within the planning unit. The majority of the TMUs are managed for Multiple-Uses, meaning that although sustained timber production is an important management component, protection and uses of other resources and facilities may preclude sustained timber management as the highest and best use of portions of the TMU. The TMU around Lake Pillsbury is managed for mitigation for watershed and forest health issues, including emergency salvage harvesting, but may require entry for activities such as reducing fuel loading, hazard tree removal, and improving forest aesthetics.

Fire occurrence is frequent in the Lake Pillsbury area and is primarily caused by humans. The USFS is performing or will perform fuel reduction projects near the Westshore lease area on the west shore of Lake Pillsbury, at the USFS summer home tract on the east lakeshore, and in the Pine Mountain LSR south of planning unit lands along the Eel River.

Agricultural Uses

Agricultural uses are present on planning unit lands surrounding the Potter Valley Powerhouse and consist of grazing on six acres and row cropping on two acres of land. The Mendocino National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan presently does not allow grazing in the Lake Pillsbury or Ericson Ridge (north of the Eel River, west of the lake) Management Areas. There is a grazing allotment for National Forest System (NFS) lands south of the Eel River in the Pine Mountain Management Area. Due to steepness in the Eel River Canyon, erosion potential, sensitive fisheries habitat, and limited acreage adjacent to other potential grazing



Wet meadow at Navy Camp

areas, planning unit lands have low potential for additional agricultural activities.

Historic Resources

Both historic and prehistoric resources are present within the Eel River Planning Unit. The territory within and around the Eel River Planning Unit was evidently shared by Pomo, Huchnom, and Yuki Tribes. The lower region of the planning unit, named John Day Flat by European settlers, and now the site of the Van Arsdale Reservoir, was used by the nearby Potter Valley Tribe. There are at least 2 recorded village sites believed to be Pomo located on the flat. Other Northern Pomo Tribes that visited or resided in the area include the Redwood Valley, Habematolel Pomo of Upper Lake, and Robinson Rancherias.



Sheriff's Posse area

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Today, there are several Federally recognized Tribes located near the planning unit including the Redwood Valley Rancheria of Pomo Indians of California, Potter Valley Rancheria of Pomo Indians of California, Upper Lake Band of Pomo Indians of Upper Lake Rancheria of California, Robinson Rancheria, and Round Valley Indian Tribes of the Round Valley Reservation.⁴

The Cape Horn Dam and Potter Valley Powerhouse were built in 1908, and Scott Dam was built in 1920-22 when the project was first licensed. Seven prehistoric sites, one historic site, and one prehistoric/historic site have been discovered around Lake Pillsbury. Nine prehistoric sites, one prehistoric/historic site, and one historic site have been discovered around Van Arsdale Reservoir. None of these sites have been evaluated for NRHP listing. Only 15% of the area within the FERC boundary has been inventoried for cultural resources, and the lands outside the FERC boundary have not been surveyed. As the shared ethnographic territory of the northern Pomo people, the ancestors of the current members of the Potter Valley Tribe have an important past and present connection with the area of the planning unit.



Riparian forest along Eel River south of Scott Dam

Stewardship Council Recommendations

The Stewardship Council recommends that the land and land uses in the Eel River Planning Unit be preserved and enhanced by focusing on the excellent habitat values, forest and cultural resources, and the importance of recreation in the planning unit. In presenting the Recommended Concept provided here, our objective is to preserve and enhance habitat and cultural resources, in addition to enhancing recreation opportunities and forest management.

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

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

Fish, Plant, and Wildlife Habitat

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

The planning unit provides important anadromous fish and late successional forest habitats, though little study of biological resources has been conducted within the planning unit. In order to preserve and enhance the habitat and resources found here, the Stewardship Council recommends that baseline

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studies and plans be developed to gain a clear understanding of the resources. These studies will likely be followed by management plans to ensure implementation of preservation and enhancement measures for specific resources. Management of the property to preserve and enhance habitat will also include addressing noxious weeds.

The Stewardship Council also recommends developing measures to further protect and enhance habitat in the lower Eel River bridge area, which has sustained damage from unauthorized uses. Tule elk habitat north of Lake Pillsbury also offers opportunities for enhancement in conjunction with adjacent USFS efforts. We encourage close coordination with the USFS, Lake and Mendocino Counties, and all planning should be considered in conjunction with the fuels and forest management plans.

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 by limiting new construction to minor additional recreation facilities, as well as 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 facilities in order to provide additional public access, education and recreation opportunities, and recreation management.

Lake Pillsbury is a popular recreation destination offering boating, fishing, hunting, camping, hang gliding, and OHV opportunities and many developed recreation facilities. The Eel River



Sailboat at Lake Pillsbury

corridor is more remote and undeveloped, providing limited recreation, mostly whitewater boating, camping, and trail use opportunities. The Stewardship Council looks to enhance these opportunities by recommending additional recreation study and management, as well as a few additional facilities and improved access (see Figure ER-2). We recommend enhancements focused on a whitewater boating study, providing wildlife viewing facilities and campground shoreline access, and coordinating OHV use with adjacent OHV route designation efforts. The Stewardship Council also recommends developing an interpretation and education plan, developing a recreation management plan for lands outside the FERC boundary, and determining future use and management of the River Road from the Bucknell Creek Bridge to the lower Eel River Bridge. Assessing using the Sheriff's Posse area for educational use is also recommended.

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 and fire management.

Extensive forest resources, including late successional resources, are located throughout

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the planning unit, including adjacent to popular recreation facilities. The Stewardship Council recommends that future care and management of the property include developing a long-term vision for forest management in the area, which addresses silvicultural practices, holistic watershed management, fuels management, and fire management and response. The fire management and response, fuels, and forest management plans should be developed in conjunction with noxious weed and wildlife and habitat management plans. We expect that all of these plans would be developed in coordination with adjacent landowner, USFS, CDF, and lessee management and practices as appropriate. The Stewardship Council also recommends investigating the potential for a traditional management demonstration area in coordination with Native American entities to educate the public about traditional ecological practices used in the area.

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.

Several cultural sites have been identified within the small portion of the planning unit that has been studied, and there is a high likelihood the planning unit contains additional 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 in the Eel River Planning Unit, 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.

Endnotes

¹ The current License Order was issued in 1983 based on a Settlement Agreement. The License Order contained two articles that required a complex regime of minimum flow requirements and a 10-year study of the effects of the minimum flow requirements on the salmonid fishery in the upper Eel River and the East Branch of the Russian River. Results of this study, along with numerous other data, were then incorporated into a License Amendment in 2004. The License Amendment, which required various operational and physical modifications for the benefit of salmonids, developed a new flow regime for the Eel River below Scott and Cape Horn Dams, and required additional performance reports, additional temperature and flow monitoring, pikeminnow suppression efforts, summer rearing monitoring, salmon carcass surveys, funding of the DFG stock rescue program, bald eagle monitoring, bathymetric surveys, and monitoring of the inability of boaters to use boat ramps due to low water.

² Populations throughout the watershed have declined at least 80% since the early 1960s, and roughly 97% over the last century.

³ However, the USFS is considering charging a fee at this campground in the future.

⁴ The following Federally recognized Tribes are near the planning unit (distances by air): Redwood Valley Rancheria of Pomo Indians of California (7.5 miles southwest), Potter Valley Rancheria of Pomo Indians of California (5.5 miles south), Upper Lake Band of Pomo Indians of Upper Lake Rancheria of California (Habematolel Pomo of Upper Lake) (9.5 mi southeast), Robinson Rancheria (16.9 miles southeast), Round Valley Indian Tribes of the Round Valley Reservation (30.0 miles northwest).



Tule elk interpretive sign