

FEE TITLE RECOMMENDATION BASS LAKE PLANNING UNIT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Stewardship Council was created to oversee Pacific Gas and Electric's (PG&E) Land Conservation Commitment, as set forth in the Settlement and Stipulation,¹ to protect over 140,000 acres of land and to preserve and enhance, on an overall basis, the following six beneficial public values (BPVs): protection of the natural habitat of fish, wildlife, and plants; preservation of open space; outdoor recreation by the general public; sustainable forestry; agricultural uses; and, historic values. The Stewardship Council is responsible for developing a land conservation plan and recommending qualified organizations to become involved in the future stewardship of these lands.

The Bass Lake planning unit, located in Madera County, encompasses approximately 1,088 acres. Approximately 151 acres have been identified by PG&E as lands outside of Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) project boundaries and not necessary for current and future utility operations. Therefore, these 151 acres of land were made available for fee title donation.

At the request of the Stewardship Council Board of Directors (Board), staff evaluated the watershed lands to identify acreage available for donation located adjacent to or surrounded by land owned by a qualified organization seeking a fee title donation. Staff then evaluated whether a donation of such acreage to the subject organization would promote consistent and consolidated land management, as well as achieve more efficient implementation of the land conservation program. Based on this evaluation, the Board recommended the US Forest Service (USFS) for a donation of fee title to approximately 73 acres within the Bass Lake planning unit on September 16, 2010.

However, on March 8, 2012, following further evaluation of the proposed fee title donation, the USFS notified the Stewardship Council of its decision to no longer pursue this donation. Given the withdrawal of the USFS from the previously recommended fee title donation transaction, the Stewardship Council staff has developed the following recommendation which was endorsed by the Watershed Planning Committee (Planning Committee):

PG&E to retain fee title to approximately 151 acres preliminarily designated as available for donation within 12 parcels (parcels 1033-1044) at the Bass Lake planning unit, which includes the 73 acres previously recommended to the USFS in parcel 1033. This acreage is in addition to the 937 acres originally designated by PG&E for retention in this planning unit.

¹ California Public Utilities Commission Decision 03-12-035, December 18, 2003 (the "Settlement") and the Stipulation Resolving Issues Regarding the Land Conservation Commitment dated September 25, 2003 (the "Stipulation").

If this recommendation is accepted by the Stewardship Council Board (Board), PG&E and the recommended conservation easement holder will negotiate a conservation easement for the lands that will be retained by PG&E in this planning unit. After review by the Stewardship Council, the proposed conservation easement will be incorporated into a Land Conservation and Conveyance Plan (LCCP) developed for the planning unit. The draft LCCP will be made available for public review and comment before it is reviewed and approved by the Planning Committee and the Board. Adoption of the LCCP by the Board would be the final step in the Stewardship Council's process.

I. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

a. Planning Unit Description

Bass Lake planning unit is comprised of 1,088 acres located in Madera County, approximately eight miles east of Oakhurst, and five miles north of North Fork. Approximately 937 acres (including the reservoir) are inside the FERC project boundary and therefore were designated for retention by PG&E for current and future utility operations.

The central feature of this planning unit is Bass Lake, a four mile long and half-mile wide reservoir with 15 miles of shoreline at the full pool elevation. The reservoir, easily accessed by the public, is a popular summer recreation destination with substantial residential and recreational development. The planning unit is surrounded by the Sierra National Forest which services a variety of recreational opportunities. Recreational facilities within the planning unit include two resorts on the west shore of the reservoir, several campgrounds and picnic areas managed by USFS, as well as a camp leased by PG&E to the Pacific Services Employment Association. Recreation is highest in the summer, when the reservoir hosts many boaters, campers, anglers and resort guests.

In addition to recreational opportunities, the reservoir and planning unit support a variety of fish, plant, and wildlife habitat. The lands within and surrounding the planning unit are primarily covered with mature mixed conifer forests, with small areas of oaks and riparian vegetation. The reservoir supports nesting bald eagles and osprey as well as several special status plant species, and potentially California red-legged frog and valley elderberry longhorn beetle.

The Bass Lake area is within the ancestral territory of the Southern Miwok, Chukchansi, Yokuts, and North Fork Mono tribes. Several prehistoric and historic sites have been identified around Bass Lake, and the USFS has nominated the area as the Crane Valley National Historic District. The protection and enhancement of ethnobotanical resources is an important issue in the area as well.

II. EVALUATION

a. PG&E Retention

According to PG&E, its management of the watershed lands is guided by a number of considerations, including optimizing benefits to PG&E customers, shareholders, and the environment. The retention of the lands within the Bass Lake planning unit by PG&E would likely result in continuing the current management regime, subject to a conservation easement.

b. Requirements of the Settlement and Stipulation

The Stewardship Council's recommendation that PG&E retain fee title to lands within this planning unit is subject to compliance with all the requirements of the Land Conservation Commitment. Several of these requirements are highlighted below.

- A conservation easement will be established on all lands retained by PG&E within the Bass Lake planning unit.
- The conservation easement will permit the existing economic uses on the lands to continue.
- The conservation easement will include an express reservation of right for continued operation and maintenance of hydroelectric facilities and associated water delivery facilities, including project replacements and improvements required to meet existing and future water delivery requirements for power generation and consumptive water use by existing users, compliance with any Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) license, FERC license renewal or other regulatory requirements.

III. PUBLIC COMMENTS

The Stewardship Council has implemented a public outreach program to engage stakeholders and solicit public input on the development and implementation of the land conservation plan. A summary of key public outreach activities and public comments associated with the Bass Lake planning unit is attached.

IV. RECOMMENDATION

Stewardship Council staff is recommending that PG&E retain fee title to the approximately 151 acres that was preliminarily designated as available for donation within 12 parcels (parcels 1033-1044) at the Bass Lake planning unit, which includes 73 acres previously recommended to the USFS. This acreage is in addition to the 937 acres originally designated by PG&E for retention in this planning unit.

V. NEXT STEPS

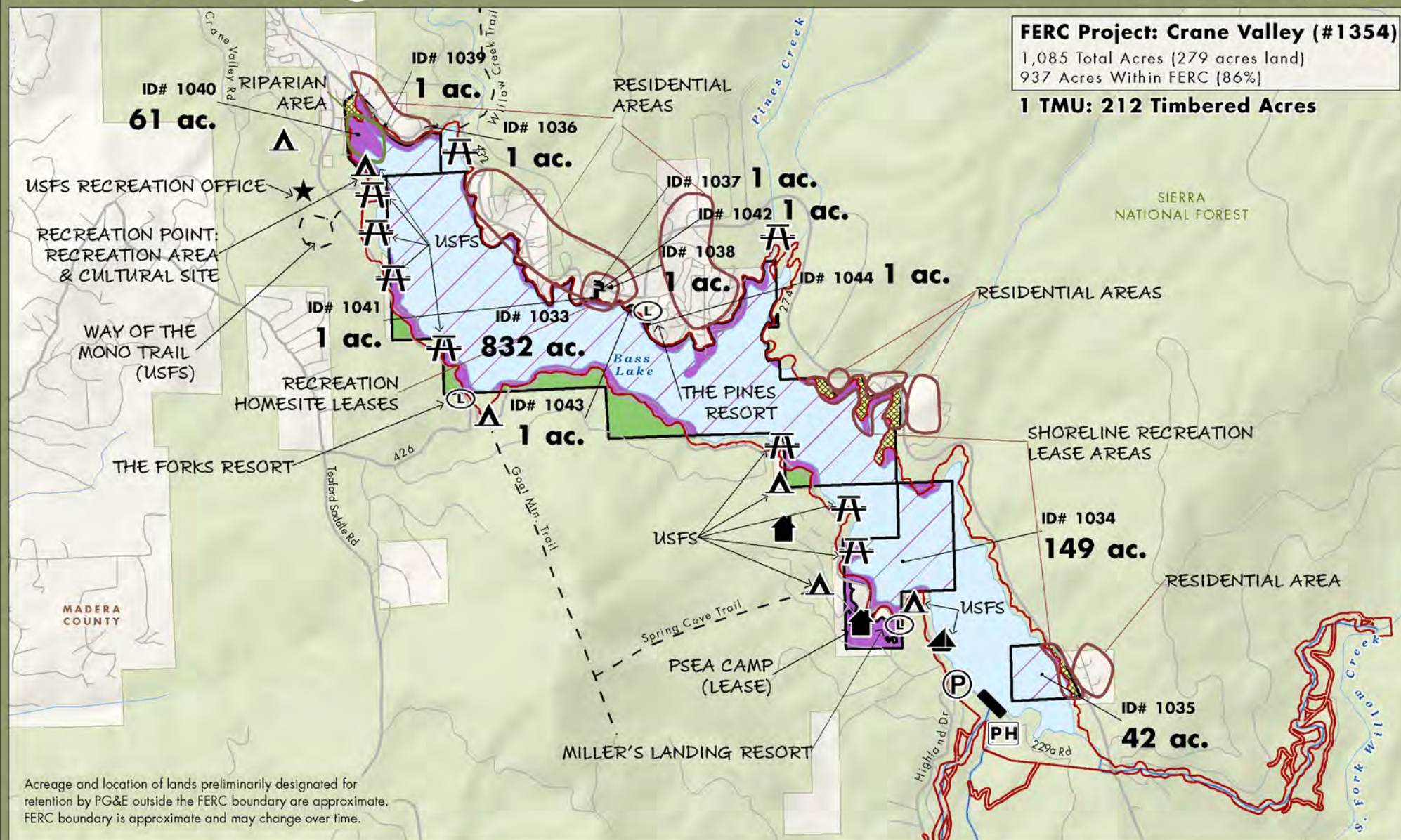
If the Board approves this recommendation on May 2, 2012, PG&E and the recommended conservation easement holder will negotiate a conservation easement for the lands that will be retained by PG&E in this planning unit. After review by the Stewardship Council, the proposed

conservation easement will be incorporated into a Land Conservation and Conveyance Plan (LCCP) developed for the planning unit. The draft LCCP will be made available for public review and comment before it is reviewed and approved by the Planning Committee and the Board. Adoption of the LCCP by the Board would be the final step in the Stewardship Council's process for selecting donees.

ATTACHMENTS AND REFERENCE MATERIAL

- Bass Lake Planning Unit Map
- LCP Volume II Planning Unit Report for the Bass Lake Planning Unit
- Summary of Key Public Outreach Activities and Public Comments Associated with the Bass Lake Planning Unit

Willow Creek Watershed Bass Lake Planning Unit



- Constrained Land - Previously Identified as Available for Donation.
Recommended for Retention by PG&E.
- Land Previously Identified as Available for Donation.
Recommended for Donation to the USFS.
- Legal Parcel Boundary and Id Number

- PG&E Lands Preliminarily Designated for Retention
- PG&E Lands Under Water
- Private
- USFS

- Boat Launch
- Campground
- Dam
- Day Use

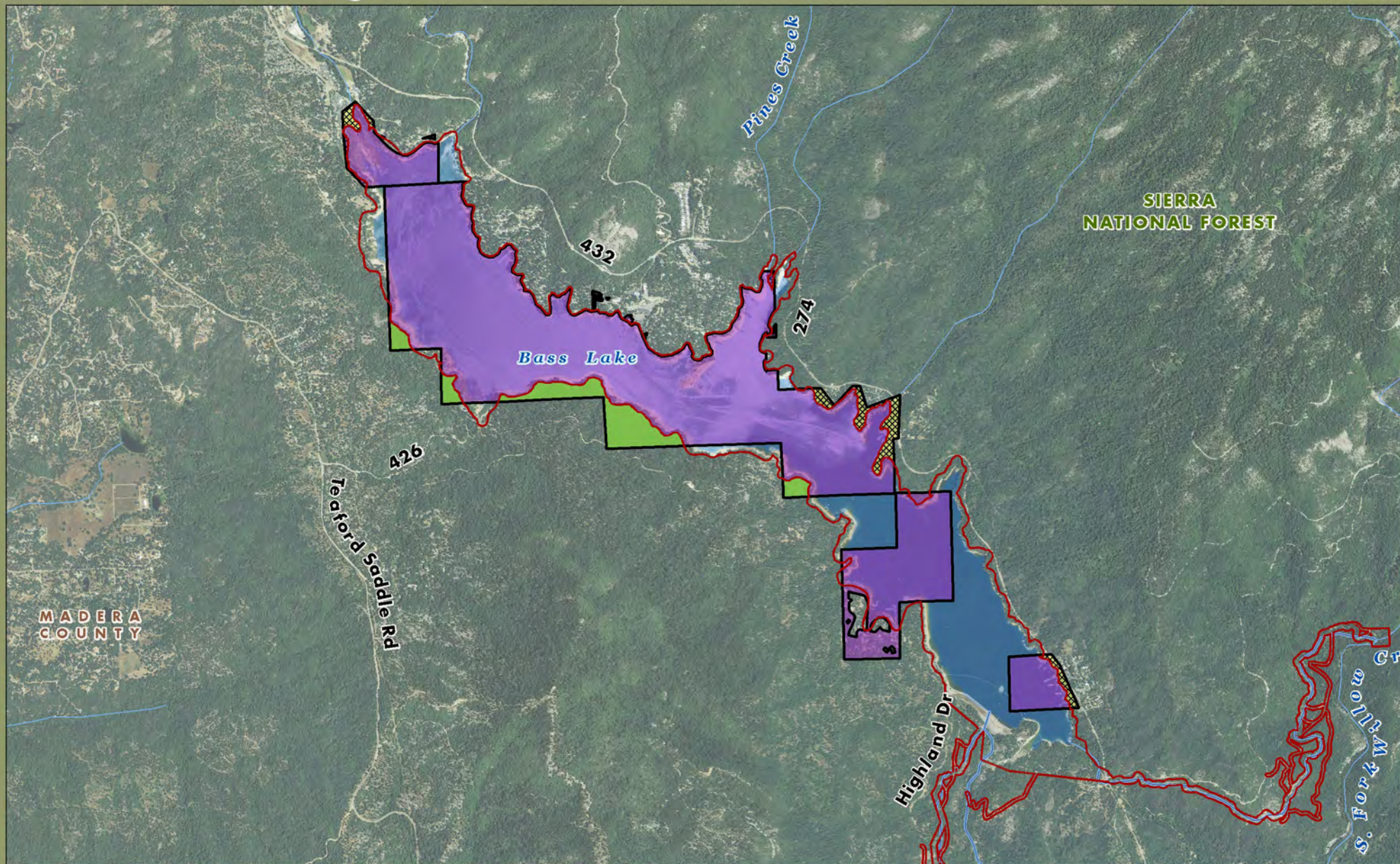
- Feature of Importance
- Lodge
- Parking

- Powerhouse
- Private Camp

- FERC Boundary
- Trail


0 0.5 1 Mile






 Constrained Land - Previously Identified as Available for Donation. **Recommended for Retention by PG&E.**

 Land Previously Identified as Available for Donation. **Recommended for Donation to the USFS.**

 PG&E Lands Preliminarily Designated for Retention

 FERC Boundary

0 0.5 1 Mile

Acreage and location of lands preliminarily designated for retention by PG&E outside the FERC boundary are approximate. FERC boundary is approximate and may change over time.

April 2011

Imagery: NAIP 2009

AECOM

BASS LAKE PLANNING UNIT

Willow Creek Watershed

Existing Conditions & Uses

Overview

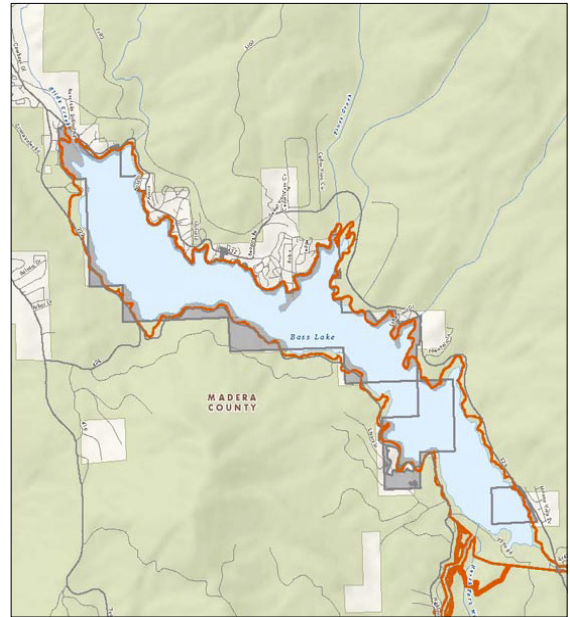
- Reservoir that is a popular summer recreation destination, with substantial residential and recreation development
- 1,085 acres in Madera County; 149 acres outside and 936 acres (including most of the reservoir) inside the FERC boundary
- Part of the Crane Valley Project (FERC #1354), New License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

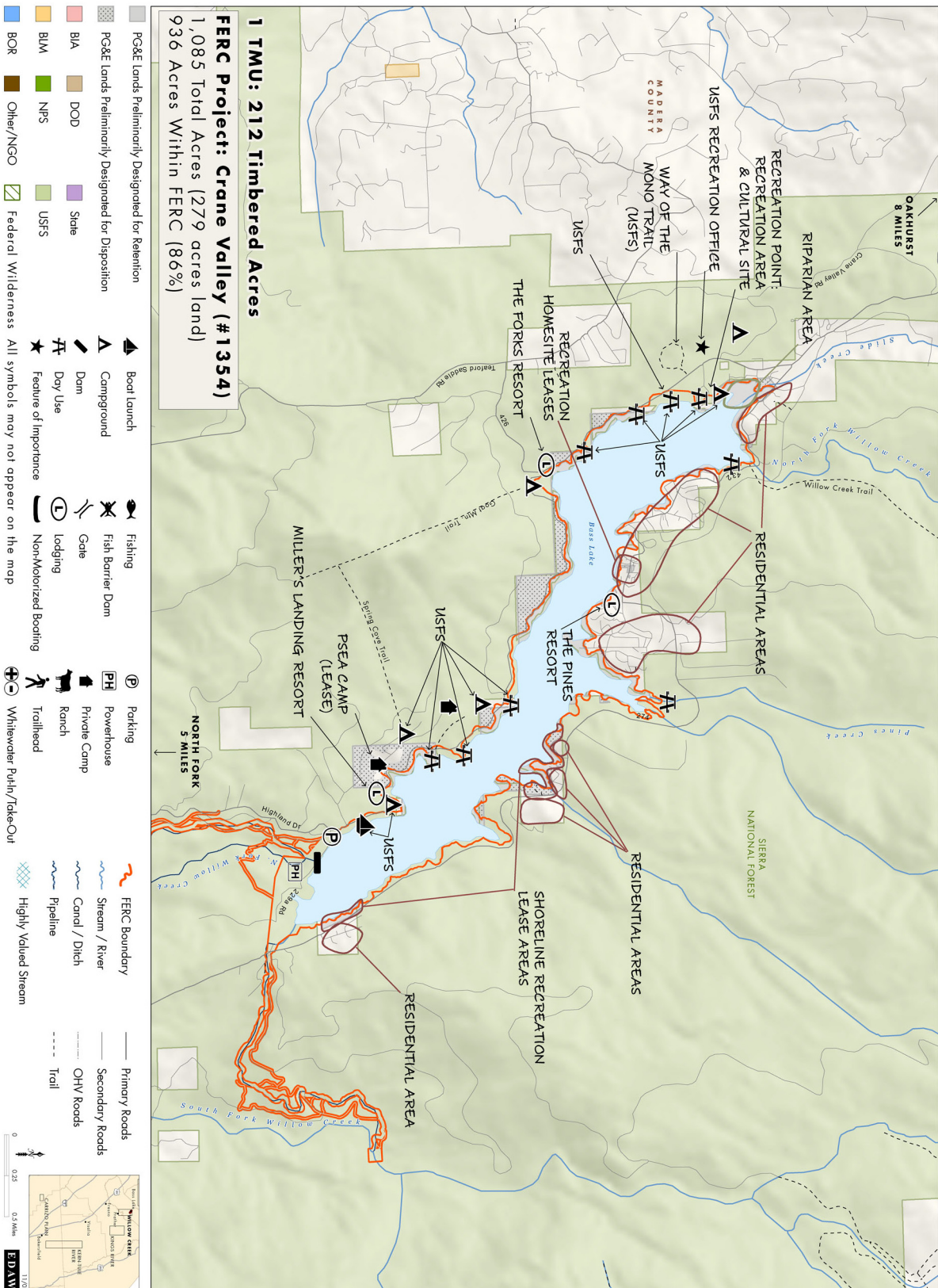
the south. The rapidly growing Fresno area, with a population of around 500,000 people, is about 45 miles to the south. The southern entrance to Yosemite National Park is 14 miles to the north.

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.¹ 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



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.² 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.³ 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.⁴ 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

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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.⁵

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.

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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

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

² 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.

³ 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.

⁴ The draft plan is currently under review by SNF.

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

SUMMARY OF KEY PUBLIC OUTREACH ACTIVITIES AND PUBLIC COMMENTS ASSOCIATED WITH THE BASS LAKE PLANNING UNIT

PUBLIC REVIEW OF VOLUMES I AND II OF THE LCP

The Draft Land Conservation Plan (LCP) Volumes I and II were released in June 2007 for a 60-day public comment period. During this time, the Stewardship Council held ten public meetings to publicize the availability of the Draft LCP and to encourage public comment. During public review of Volumes I and II of the LCP, the following comment was received regarding the Bass Lake planning unit:

- Support for ensuring that existing agreements for access and uses at Bass Lake are honored as identified in the Settlement Agreement and Stipulation.

PUBLIC INFORMATION MEETING FOR THE BASS LAKE PLANNING UNIT

A public information meeting was hosted by the Stewardship Council on April 21, 2011 at the Clovis Veterans Memorial Hall in Clovis, California. The meeting concerned the following six planning units: Bass Lake, Manzanita Lake, Willow Creek, Kerckhoff Reservoir, Auberry Service Center, Kern River, Kings River, and Wishon Reservoir. A total of 18 people attended and participated in the meeting, representing a wide variety of interests, including local and federal governments, community organizations, and community members. The meeting was advertised via an e-mail sent to contacts in our database, an announcement posted on the Stewardship Council's web site, a press release in the local newspaper, and a postcard sent to all landowners on record that reside within one mile of any PG&E parcel associated with the six planning units that were the focus of the meeting.

The purpose of this meeting was to: (1) provide a review and update on the Stewardship Council's Land Conservation Program; and, (2) solicit additional public input on future stewardship of the eight planning units. During the meeting, participants were invited to ask questions and provide comments on the eight planning units. Stations were set up with maps, other pertinent information, and easels with blank paper. Below is a summary of comments related to the Bass Lake planning unit that were recorded on the easels and provided on comment cards.

Bass Lake Planning Unit

- Support for PG&E to retain ownership of the property located on the north shore of Bass Lake

ADDITIONAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR PUBLIC COMMENT

The Stewardship Council Board of Directors (Board) took action to recommend the US Forest Service (USFS) for a donation of fee title to 73 acres within the Bass Lake planning unit on September 16, 2010. The proposed recommendation was issued on August 2, 2010 for public review and comment. No comments specific to the Bass Lake planning unit were received.

The Stewardship Council has not received any additional public comments or letters from individuals and organizations regarding the future management of the Bass Lake planning unit.