

KINGS RIVER PLANNING UNIT

Kings River Watershed

Existing Conditions & Uses

Overview

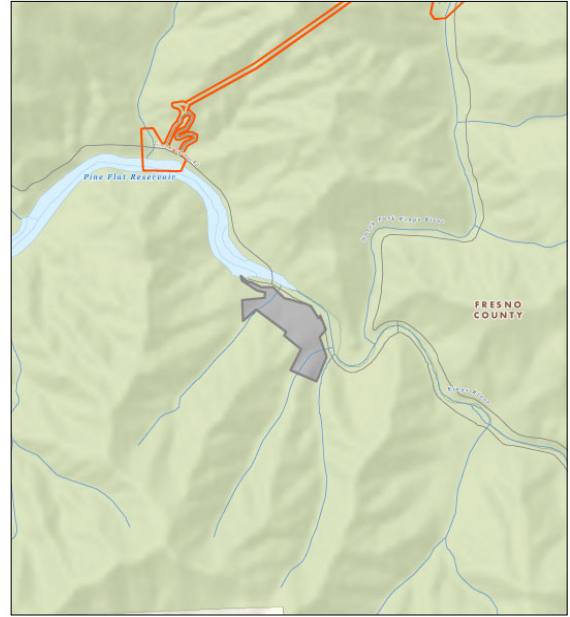
- Remote parcel in rugged canyon with adjoining whitewater rafting base camps
- 100 acres in Fresno County
- The Kings River Planning Unit is outside any FERC Project boundary

The Kings River Planning Unit, also known as Keller Ranch, consists of one parcel along the Kings River, just upstream of Pine Flat Reservoir, between the City of Fresno and Kings Canyon National Park in Fresno County. It is accessible via a winding, paved road and is about 40 miles from the Fresno area. The planning unit is southwest of the Kings River, just uphill and along side Trimmer Springs Road and is surrounded by Sierra National Forest to the north and Sequoia National Forest to the south (see Figure KR-3).¹

Much of the Kings River and its upstream tributaries were added as the Kings River Special Management Area to the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System by Congress in 1987. The lower 12 miles of the river directly upstream of the existing Pine Flat Reservoir, including the Kings River Planning Unit, were not designated; however, this river segment is considered eligible



Kings River with planning unit on the right



Kings River Planning Unit
Fresno County

for Wild and Scenic River protection by the USFS and it received specific protection by Congress.

The planning unit is primarily used as a parking area for a commercial whitewater rafting operation, whose base camp is located on adjacent USFS land. The USFS has a PG&E parking permit to support the recreation use. In turn, the USFS provides some vegetation management in the area and along the roads of the planning unit. Although the planning unit is outside any FERC Project boundary, PG&E discusses coordination of use of this land with the USFS during North Fork Kings River Consultation Meetings, which are conducted twice a year as required by the Haas-Kings River Project (FERC #1988) License.

Fish, Plant, and Wildlife Habitat

The Kings River Canyon area supports a variety of plant communities, primarily consisting of oak woodlands, grasslands, and chaparral; however, the planning unit has not been surveyed for biological resources. The diverse landscape of the larger area provides habitat for many animal species, including mule deer, bald and golden eagles, and California spotted owl. Based on

Kings River Planning Unit Existing Conditions

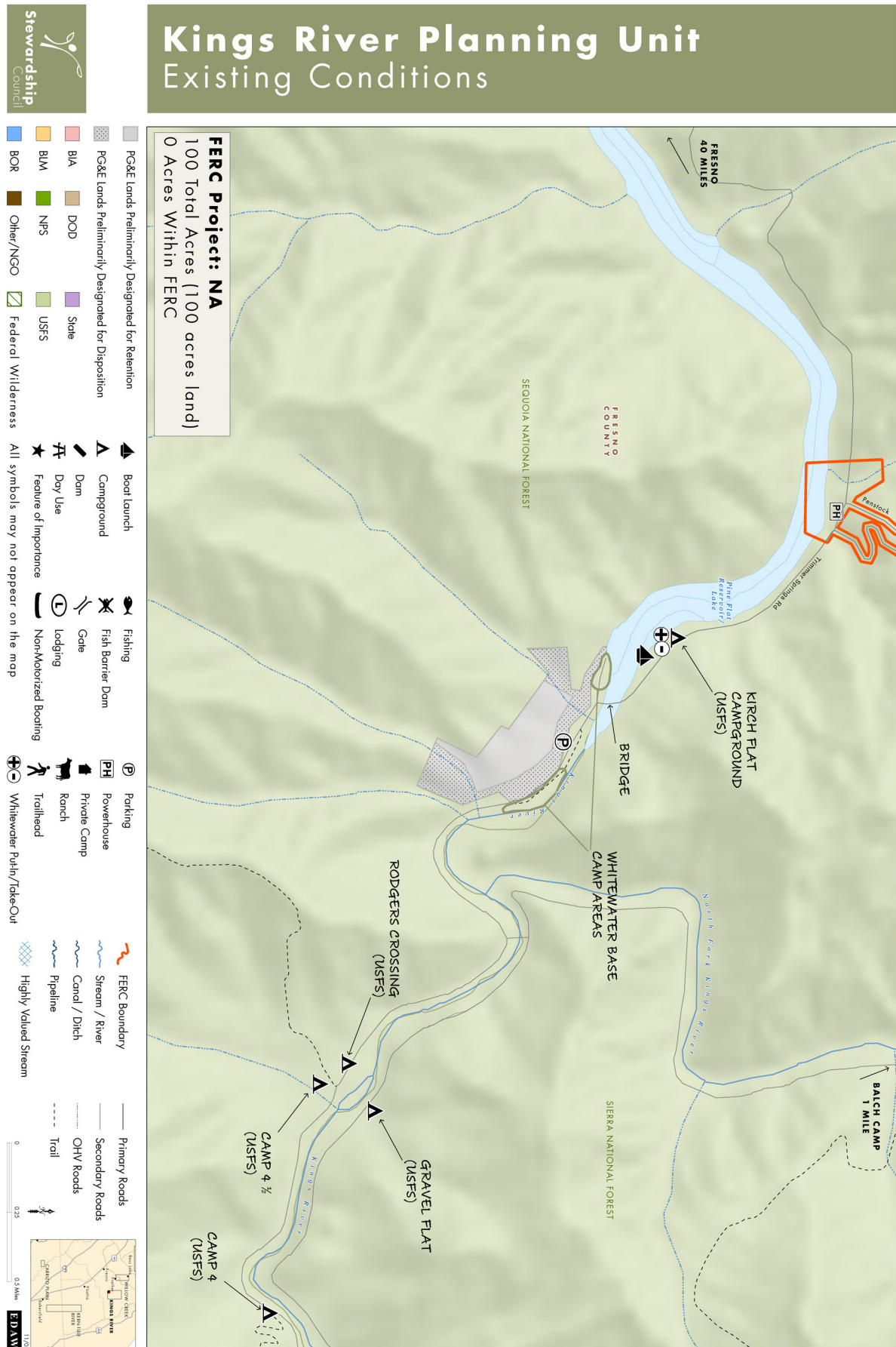


Figure KR-3

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USFS assessments of the surrounding area, however, there are no known occurrences of eagles in the planning unit, but a spotted owl Protected Activity Center (PAC) was mapped by the USFS within one mile of the planning unit. Spotted owls that were historically banded as part of a USFS research project have been repeatedly observed to use the site during the winter months as they migrate down from higher elevations. Many common migratory and resident birds would also find suitable habitat within the chaparral and oak woodlands. Some special status plants are also known to occur in the planning unit area.

Open Space

Open space and associated viewshed values are high throughout and around the planning unit due to the steepness of the Kings River Canyon, management of surrounding USFS lands for viewshed, and the low concentration of recreation facilities on the adjacent riverbank.

Outdoor Recreation

The natural setting of the rugged river canyon enhances one of California's most popular whitewater boating experiences. The Kings' largely Class III whitewater attracts private and commercial boaters alike. The flows are unmodified by upstream dams, and craft types include rafts, kayaks, canoes, and tubes. Trips begin upriver from a put-in at Garnet Dike and run nine miles to the base camps and take-out spots at Keller Ranch (on the river bank below the planning unit) and just below at Kirch Flat.

There are three whitewater rafting companies – Kings River Expeditions, Whitewater Voyages, and Zephyr River Expeditions – that operate on the river under permits administered by the USFS. New five-year whitewater rafting permits were issued by the USFS in 2004. The outfitters use the area between the river and the road for their temporary base camps during the summer, which are fully equipped with campsites, kitchen areas, dining areas, volleyball courts, flush

toilets, and changing rooms. All equipment is portable and can be removed from the riverbank in the winter months. The planning unit is the only large level area in this river segment, and as such the whitewater rafting outfitters use it to accommodate up to 90 vehicles through a land use agreement between PG&E and the USFS.

Other recreation facilities in the area include USFS campgrounds (there are more than 30 sites within a two-mile radius), dispersed camping, and boating put-in sites farther upstream. Aside from boating, fishing is the other principal recreation activity in the area; the Kings River is a designated wild trout fishery. The segment between Garnet Dike Campground and Pine Flat Reservoir is open all year and has a two fish per day limit.

Forest Resources

The planning unit is heavily vegetated with oak trees, brush, and shrubs, especially in the upper areas. There are no PG&E Timber Management Units (TMUs) in this planning unit. The USFS addresses some of the vegetation management for this parcel, creating fuel breaks alongside the road.

Agricultural Uses

The planning unit is within the area of the White Deer USFS grazing allotment; however, no grazing lease exists for the planning unit itself,



Oak woodland vegetation

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and access is difficult since the planning unit is located in a canyon and surrounded by steep hillsides. The planning unit was used as a ranch/homestead with small-scale agricultural use in the early 1900s (see Historic Resources).

Historic Resources

Information about specific cultural sites in the planning unit was not available in preparation of this report. However, river corridors like this one were commonly used by Native Americans, and more than 3,000 sites have been identified in the Sierra National Forest to the north, even though only about 10% of the Forest has been reliably inventoried, according to the Forests' 1991 Land and Resource Management Plan. The area is part of the traditional territory of the Western Mono, and tribal representatives have voiced their interest and concern about potential cultural sites in the planning unit. Surveys completed for the Haas-Kings River Project identified 17 prehistoric sites and two historic structures within the nearby FERC boundary (outside this planning unit). Old survey documents from 1914 show agricultural use on the parcel, which was then the Keller Ranch homestead, and PG&E reports remnants of an old orchard on the site. Some old foundations and piping exist on the site and on the riverbank below, where they are being used by the whitewater rafting outfitters for their base camps.

Stewardship Council Recommendations

The Stewardship Council recommends that the land and land uses at the Kings River Planning Unit be preserved and enhanced by assessing and enhancing habitat values and surveying for and protecting potential cultural resources. In presenting the Recommended Concept provided here (see Figure KR-4), our objective is to preserve biological and cultural resources, preserve (and enhance, if needed) recreation uses, and protect habitat and recreation resources from wild fire. In addition, we recommend

evaluating the potential for reviving some of the agricultural uses on the former Keller Ranch homestead, potentially as a recreation and education enhancement. We encourage close coordination with PG&E, the USFS, and commercial whitewater operators.

Objective: Preserve and enhance biological and cultural resources, preserve and potentially enhance recreation opportunities, enhance fuels management, and evaluate the potential for agricultural uses.

As shown on Table KR-2, the Stewardship Council has identified a number of preservation and/or enhancement measures that may contribute to the conservation management program for the Kings 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.

Although little specific information is available about biological resources in this planning unit, the riverbank location and the principally oak woodland vegetative cover suggest important habitat is present that may offer opportunities for enhancement. 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. These studies will likely be followed by management plans to ensure implementation of preservation and enhancement measures for specific resources.

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Management of the property to preserve and enhance habitat will also include addressing noxious weeds. It is envisioned that these measures would be coordinated with the USFS vegetation management that has historically occurred on these lands, as well as the fuels management plan.

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 values through permanent conservation easements. Conservation easements would describe all prohibited uses to maintain open space values, including the level of uses allowed. The concept does not recommend any development of new permanent recreation facilities that would decrease the scenic quality of the viewsheds. Any agricultural uses or potential future recreation uses are expected to be developed within the character of the area and not conflict with the scenic quality of the viewshed.

Outdoor Recreation

Objective: Manage recreation uses in conjunction with USFS in order to preserve and possibly enhance river-based recreation uses.

Existing recreation use currently taking place adjacent and partially on the planning unit (parking) is important and has high beneficial public value. The potential for enhancement is limited, however, as the three outfitters accommodate the need for whitewater rafting opportunities and occupy the water access areas available and necessary for this type of operation. Also, nearby USFS campgrounds provide adequate public access and recreation opportunities for the general public. However, the Stewardship Council recommends making a portion of the lands available for recreational uses and facilities, should a need arise for them in the



Beach along Kings River downriver of planning unit

future. We recommend close coordination with the USFS for this measure as future recreation needs will be identified based on recreation monitoring of existing USFS recreation facilities.

In addition, we recommend a land survey and review of the planning unit boundary, which may yield information that some of the planning unit indeed has more water access than currently believed and that the whitewater rafting base camps are actually located on the planning unit. Based on these surveys, the current use agreements with the USFS would likely need to be updated to reflect current use and users. If surveys determine that whitewater facilities are located on planning unit land or that the planning unit has more water access than currently believed, this may create opportunities to further enhance recreational uses within the planning unit.

Sustainable Forestry

Objective: Develop and implement forestry practices in order to ensure appropriate fuel load management.

The planning unit is dominated by oak woodlands, and has areas of brush and grasslands adjacent to significant whitewater boating facilities. The Stewardship Council recommends that future care and management of the land include developing a long-term vision

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for fuels management to reducing fuel loading and fire hazard within the planning unit. The fuels management plan should be developed in conjunction with the noxious weed and wildlife and habitat management plans. We expect that all of these plans would be developed in coordination with USFS management and practices as appropriate.

Agricultural Uses

Objective: Identify potential agricultural opportunities in order to enhance agricultural resources, and possibly benefit habitat resources and recreation opportunities.

Although no agricultural uses are occurring now, potential for enhancement of agricultural uses may exist within the planning unit, as it lies within the range of a USFS grazing allotment, and crops were grown on the flat portion of the Keller Ranch homestead. The Stewardship Council recommends evaluating the potential for agricultural uses in the planning unit, such as grazing or an orchard, including investigation into the feasibility, benefits, and costs of such uses. The remote location and small size of the planning unit, among other factors, are recognized as constraints that may make any resumption of historical agricultural uses uneconomical and impractical. However, the substantial recreation use that occurs in the area during the summer could warrant showcasing



Fire break through annual grassland

and educating the public about the historic Keller Ranch homestead and the values of agricultural uses. Also, there could be potential for grazing on a limited basis as a vegetation management tool. Investigation of potential agricultural uses should occur in coordination with the noxious weed, fuels, and wildlife and habitat management plans.

Preservation of Historic Values

Objective: Identify and manage cultural resources in order to ensure their protection.

The planning unit was the site of a homestead in the early 1900s, of which traces remain, and may contain Native American cultural sites as well, although no specific information is available. 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 the Kings River Planning Unit and that appropriate management plans be developed and implemented. Throughout this effort, the Stewardship Council recommends close coordination with Native American entities. Development of the cultural resources management plan should be consistent with the Haas-Kings River Project Cultural Resources Management Plan (CRMP).

Endnote

¹ Available USFS, County, and PG&E GIS data layers provide conflicting information about the exact location of the planning unit boundaries. Based on discussions with the PG&E land manager and review of old PG&E fee title data and maps, it appears that the GIS information available through Fresno County provides the most accurate representation of the PG&E property boundary. This version places the planning unit largely south of the road and does not include much of the river banks, except for a small portion of river access (approximately 50-100 feet, depending on water level and map accuracy) on the western end. The County's GIS layer was used to create the boundaries for the Existing Conditions and Recommended Concept maps.

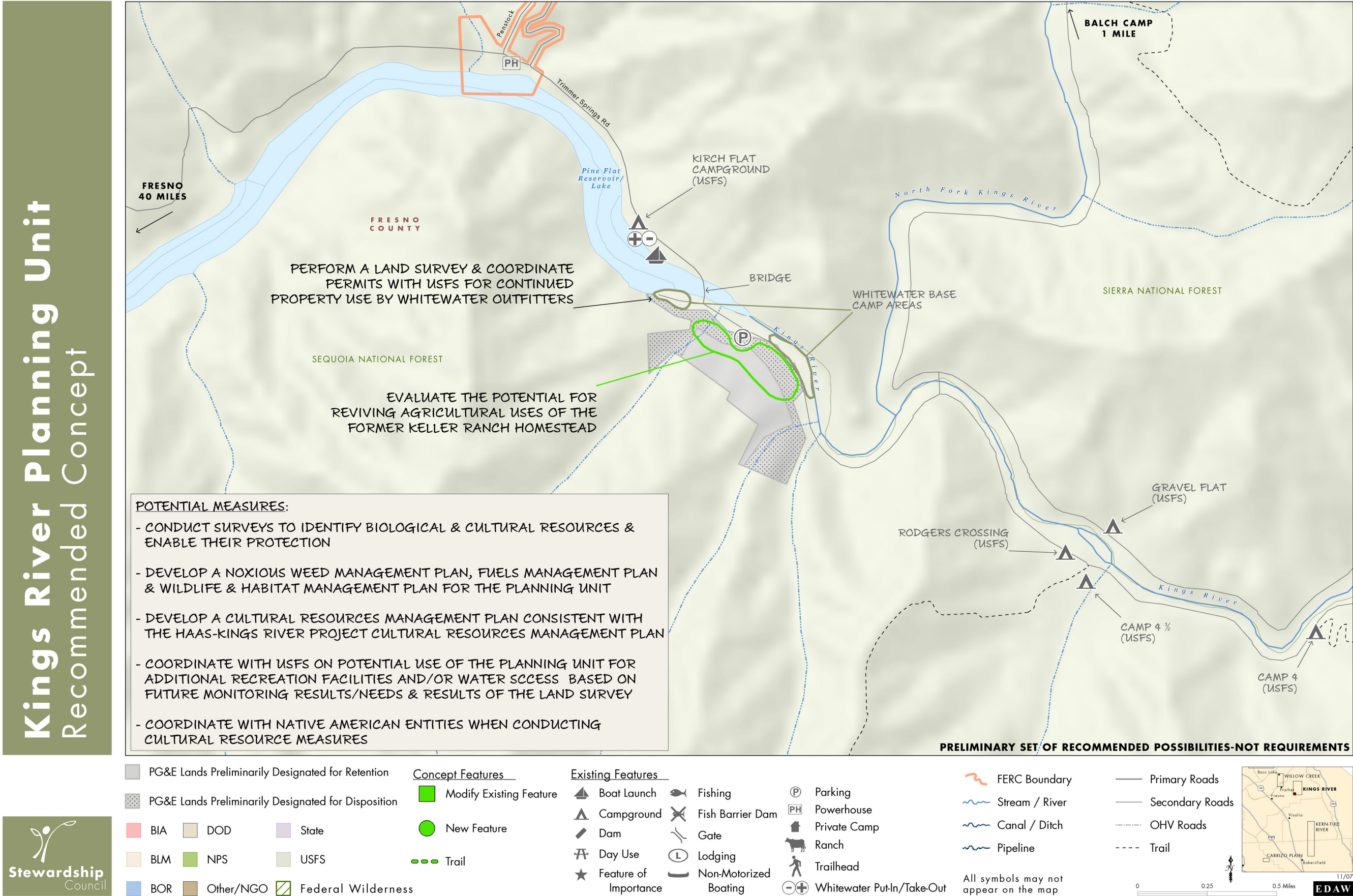
Table KR-2 Objectives to Preserve and/or Enhance – Recommended Concept

Planning Unit Objective: Preserve and enhance biological and cultural resources, preserve and potentially enhance recreation opportunities, enhance fuels management, and evaluate the potential for agricultural uses.		
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 special biological resources.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Conduct surveys of the planning unit to identify biological resources and enable their protection.Develop a wildlife and habitat management plan for the planning unit.Develop a noxious weed management plan for the planning unit.
Preservation of Open Space	Preserve open space in order to protect natural and cultural resources, viewsheds, and the recreation setting.	<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	Manage recreation uses in conjunction with USFS in order to preserve and possibly enhance river-based recreation uses.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Perform a land survey and coordinate permits with the USFS for continued property use by whitewater outfitters.**Coordinate with the USFS on potential use of the planning unit for additional recreation facilities and/or water access based on future monitoring results/need and the results of the land survey.
Sustainable Forestry	Develop and implement forestry practices in order to ensure appropriate fuel load management.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Develop a fuels management plan in coordination with existing USFS vegetation management to ensure long-term forest health and reduce fuel loading and fire hazard throughout the planning unit.
Agricultural Uses	Identify potential agricultural opportunities in order to enhance agricultural resources, and possibly benefit habitat resources and recreation opportunities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Evaluate the potential for reviving agricultural uses of the former Keller Ranch homestead.**
Preservation of Historic Values	Identify and manage cultural resources in order to ensure their protection.	<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 consistent with the Haas-Kings River Project CRMP.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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Fish, Plant, and Wildlife Habitat

Potential Measure:

- *Conduct surveys of the planning unit to identify biological resources and enable their protection.*

The planning unit does not contain any FERC Project lands and as a result surveys for habitat or species have likely not been conducted. Thus, little specific biological information is available. Taking into account nearby FERC Project assessments, regional plans of the area, and the planning unit's prominent location on a wide bank of the Kings River corridor (this parcel is the only relatively large, level area in this stretch of the canyon), the area likely contains habitat resource values with potential for enhancement. Therefore, the Stewardship Council recommends conducting surveys of the planning unit to identify biological resources and enable their protection.

Potential Measure:

- *Develop a wildlife and habitat management plan for the planning unit.*

The Stewardship Council recommends using biological resource survey data to develop a wildlife and habitat management plan. The planning unit contains potential habitat for several special status species, and recommended surveys may reveal additional special status plants and wildlife. Once recommended surveys are completed, potential habitat enhancements and restoration opportunities can be identified and developed into a comprehensive plan describing goals and objectives for habitat and species, as well as measures to enhance and protect habitat for both wildlife and plant species. Monitoring of species and/or habitats would also be a component of the plan. The wildlife and habitat management plan should be developed in conjunction with the noxious weed and fuels management plans. The wildlife and habitat management plan would include measures to protect late successional or other suitable habitat for the spotted owl. This measure would provide consistency with nearby USFS-designated spotted owl Protected Activity Centers (PACs).

Oak woodland is the main vegetation community within the planning unit. California's oak woodland habitats are considered threatened due to development, firewood harvesting, and agricultural conversions. This habitat type supports a range of dependent wildlife species, as oak woodlands are home to more than 300 species of terrestrial vertebrates, as well as thousands of species of invertebrates. In addition, woodland habitats moderate temperatures, reduce soil erosion, facilitate nutrient cycling, and sustain water quality and thus prove beneficial for habitat enhancement. In 2001, the California Legislature passed the California Oak Woodland Conservation Act, which supports the preservation of this habitat type. The wildlife and habitat management plan would include a description of all native oak species, estimates of the current and historical distribution of oak woodlands, existing threats, and status of natural regeneration and growth trends. Based on this information, measures to protect and preserve this habitat would be developed.

Potential Measure:

- *Develop a noxious weed management plan for the planning unit.*

The Stewardship Council also recommends developing a noxious weed management plan for the planning unit to eradicate existing populations of noxious weeds if identified within the planning unit and implement preventative actions to minimize the spread of weeds in the future. This plan would also provide for consistency in management of noxious weeds with adjacent management and should be coordinated with the USFS. This plan should be developed in conjunction with the fuels and wildlife and habitat management plans.

Preservation of Historic Values

Potential Measures:

- *Conduct surveys of the planning unit to identify cultural resources and enable their protection.*
- *Coordinate with Native American entities when conducting cultural resource measures.*

Since the planning unit is located outside of a FERC boundary, no assessment of cultural resources has been conducted. To develop a better baseline understanding of existing cultural resources, including ethnobotanical sites, the Stewardship Council recommends surveying the planning unit to identify cultural resources and enable their protection. The site was used as a homestead in the beginning of the century, which may provide for some historic resources. In addition, representatives of the Mono Tribe mentioned at a community meeting in July 2006 that an important cultural site is located on a nearby stream up the river. This may indicate further cultural sites in the area, especially since the planning unit is located on the only relatively large and level piece of land in the river corridor. Documentation of cultural sites should be coordinated with Native American entities.

Potential Measures:

- *Develop a cultural resources management plan consistent with the Haas-Kings River Project CRMP.*
- *Coordinate with Native American entities when conducting cultural resource measures.*

The Stewardship Council also recommends developing a cultural resources management plan for the planning unit to ensure that cultural resources are provided adequate protection in the future. The plan would include appropriate measures for the identification, evaluation, and treatment of cultural resources (archaeological and historical), as well as traditional use areas. Treatment measures could include avoidance, specific protective measures (e.g., fencing), site monitoring, and methods to preserve, restore, or enhance cultural resource values through conservation easements, management agreements, or through public interpretation and education programs. The cultural resources management plan should be consistent with the Haas-Kings River Project Cultural Resources Management Plan (CRMP), which dictates protocol guidelines for proper inclusion of the Native American community.

Measures listed in the Haas-Kings River Project CRMP include: informing the Mono people of any archeological research planned in the area; monitoring by a member(s) of the Mono community for any archeological excavation or testing or construction that requires an archeologist in the project area; retrieving artifacts and treating burials in accordance with the

USFS and current laws (Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act of 1990); providing Mono people with the opportunity to select a representative to serve as an advisory member for habitat management related issues; making every effort to avoid disturbing known plant resources currently used by Mono people in traditional lifeways; and acknowledging the desire of the Mono people to use Native American plant resources in the vicinity of project features in the project area, subject to USFS regulations.

Sustainable Forestry

Potential Measure:

- *Develop a fuels management plan in coordination with existing USFS vegetation management to ensure long-term forest health and reduce fuel loading and fire hazard throughout the planning unit.*

The Stewardship Council recommends developing a fuels management plan for the planning unit. The fuels management plan would ensure long-term forest health and reduce fuel loading and fire hazard throughout the planning unit. Coordination with adjacent USFS management would provide a consistent approach to the management of forest, habitat, and recreation resources in this area.

Agricultural Uses

Potential Measure:

- *Evaluate the potential for reviving agricultural uses of the former Keller Ranch homestead.*

Some potential for enhancement of agricultural uses may exist within the planning unit, as it lies within the range of a USFS grazing allotment, and crops were grown on the flat portion of the property until the Keller Ranch homestead was sold to the San Joaquin Light and Power Corporation in 1925. However, the potential for these uses appears limited; part of the planning unit and the surrounding lands are steep, and the parcel is located far away from the nearest cattle staging area. In addition, the size of the parcel reduces the likelihood that the planning unit could provide for economically viable grazing operations. Other agricultural uses such as maintaining a small orchard on the flat area of the property may not be commercially viable either; however, restoration of such use could be assessed. Therefore, the Stewardship Council recommends evaluating the potential for agricultural uses in the planning unit.

Since the parcel was formerly used as a homestead and a land surveyor description estimated the soils as suitable for a variety of agricultural crops, the Stewardship Council recommends investigating the idea of restoring some of the uses, such as maintaining an orchard. The useable, flat portion of the parcel is rather small (30-40 acres), so use of the area for agriculture may be more beneficial for educating visitors on historic use of the site rather than for providing significant agricultural or economic value. The remote location and small size of the parcel may turn out to be cost prohibitive for reviving agricultural uses; however, this area receives a fair amount of use and public attention, particularly in the summer that could warrant showcasing parts of the historic Keller Ranch homestead.

Although grazing the approximately 80-90 grazable acres of the planning unit may not be a commercially viable agricultural use either, there could be potential for it on a limited basis as a

vegetation management tool in coordination with the wildlife and habitat and noxious weed management plans. Further investigation into the feasibility, benefits, and costs of such measures would need to be completed. If grazing is determined to be feasible within the planning unit, a rangeland management plan should be developed that includes goals and objectives and a monitoring and adaptive management strategy, and specifies grazing practices that may address topics including soil and water conservation, erosion control, pest management, nutrient management, vegetation management, and habitat protection.

Outdoor Recreation

Potential Measure:

- *Coordinate with the USFS on potential use of the planning unit for additional recreation facilities and/or water access based on future monitoring results/need and the results of the land survey.*

Existing recreation use currently taking place adjacent and partially on the planning unit (parking) is important and has high beneficial public value. The potential for enhancement is limited, however, as the three outfitters accommodate the need for whitewater rafting opportunities and occupy the water access areas available and necessary for this type of operation. Public put-ins and fishing opportunities are also located in the surrounding area. Nearby USFS campgrounds provide adequate public access and recreation opportunities for the general public, limiting the potential for additional recreation facilities on the planning unit. However, the Stewardship Council recommends making a portion of the lands available for recreational uses and facilities, should a need arise for them in the future. The Stewardship Council recommends close coordination with the USFS for this measure as future recreation needs will be identified based on recreation monitoring of existing USFS recreation facilities.

Potential Measure:

- *Perform a land survey and coordinate permits with the USFS for continued property use by whitewater outfitters.*

In addition, the Stewardship Council recommends a land survey and review of the planning unit boundary, which may yield information that some of the planning unit indeed has more water access than currently believed and that the whitewater rafting base camps are actually located on the planning unit. Based on these surveys, the current use agreements with the USFS will likely need to be updated to reflect current use and users. If surveys determine that whitewater facilities are located on planning unit land or that the planning unit has more water access than currently believed, this may create opportunities to further enhance recreational uses within the planning unit.

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 do not include any

development of new permanent recreation facilities that would decrease the scenic quality of the viewsheds. Any agricultural uses or potential future recreation uses are expected to be developed within the character of the area and not conflict with the scenic quality of the viewshed.