



United States Department of the Interior



BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

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March 2008 Final Cosumnes River Preserve Management Plan (CA-180-08-40) Finding of No Significant Impact November 2013

It is my determination that this decision will not result in significant impacts to the quality of the human environment. Anticipated impacts are within the range of impacts addressed by the February 2008 Sierra Resource Management Plan and Final Environmental Impact Statement Record of Decision (Sierra RMP). The BLM's proposed action to formally adopt the March 2008 Cosumnes River Preserve Final Management Plan (Management Plan) and establish new supplementary rules that further protect the Preserve and its visitors, as well as the support the Preserve's mission and goals, do not constitute a major federal action having a significant effect on the human environment; therefore, an environmental impact statement (EIS) is not necessary and will not be prepared. This conclusion is based on my consideration of CEQ's following criteria for significance (40 CFR §1508.27), regarding the context and intensity of the impacts described in the EA and based on my understanding of the project:

1) Impacts can be both beneficial and adverse and a significant effect may exist regardless of the perceived balance of effects. Formal adoption of the Management Plan and establishment of final interim supplementary rules will have an overall beneficial effect on BLM-administered lands within the Preserve. Additionally, the proposed action would positively benefit surrounding lands, both upstream and downstream of the Preserve. Potential impacts of adopting the management plan include individual, site-specific actions such as control of non-native, invasive vegetation, and soil disturbance and temporary noise and dust issues due to management and restoration activities. None of these impacts would be significant at the local scale or cumulatively because of the Management Plan actions and site-specific project design features. Visual, cultural, and recreation resources at the Preserve would be positively affected by long-term management activities outlined in the Management Plan as well as by establishing the new supplementary rules that further help to protect the Preserve's resources. There are no potential negative impacts of establishing the supplementary rules, aside for the loss of some recreational opportunities such as horseback riding at the Preserve. In fact, the supplementary rules will result in beneficial effects to the Preserve's staff, volunteers, and visitors, as well as the Preserve's mission and goals by further protecting the Preserve's resources.

2) The degree of the impact on public health or safety. No aspects of the proposed action have been identified as having the potential to significantly and adversely impact public health or safety. In fact, the Management Plan and new supplementary rules contributes to the wealth and health of the public in general by protecting natural resources and providing opportunities for recreation and education. In addition citizens from local communities benefit as a result of the Preserve's open space, cleaner environment, and development restrictions that help reduce overcrowding and traffic concerns.

3) *Unique characteristics of the geographic area.* The project area is within the boundaries of the Cosumnes River Preserve and has been designated by the BLM as an Area of Critical Environmental Concern due to its ecological values. The California Natural Diversity Data Base (CNDDB) has identified two special status plant communities along the Cosumnes River riparian zone. Great Valley Oak Riparian Forest and Great Valley Mixed Riparian Forest. In addition the USDA has identified some of the Preserve soils as prime or unique farmland. The proposed action will not significantly and adversely affect these special plant communities or prime or unique soils. In fact, the proposed will serve to protect and enhance these resources.

4) *The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial effects.* No anticipated effects have been identified that are scientifically controversial. As a factor for determining within the meaning of 40 C.F.R. § 1508.27(b)(4) whether or not to prepare a detailed environmental impact statement, “controversy” is not equated with “the existence of opposition to a use.” *Northwest Environmental Defense Center v. Bonneville Power Administration*, 117 F.3d 1520, 1536 (9th Cir. 1997). “The term ‘highly controversial’ refers to instances in which ‘a substantial dispute exists as to the size, nature, or effect of the major federal action rather than the mere existence of opposition to a use.’” *Hells Canyon Preservation Council v. Jacoby*, 9 F.Supp.2d 1216, 1242 (D. Or. 1998).

5) *The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are likely to be highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.* The analysis does not show that this action would involve any unique or unknown risks.

6) *The degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration.* Continued management, restoration efforts, education, research, recreation, outreach, and facilities maintenance or improvement is not precedent setting. New supplementary rules are established by the BLM and other land managing agencies on a regular basis to ensure the safety and well-being of the American public and the lands that are managed by the BLM on behalf of that public.

7) *Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts.* No significant site specific or cumulative impacts have been identified. The proposed action is consistent with the actions and impacts anticipated in the Sierra RMP.

8) *The degree to which the action may adversely affect National Historic Register listed or eligible to be listed sites or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural or historical resources.* No adverse effects are expected to eligible or listed cultural resources. All activities on BLM-administered lands will be subject to location/project-specific Section 106 National Historic Preservation Act compliance, with the primary goal of avoiding adverse effects to listed or eligible cultural resources. In fact, beneficial effects are anticipated as long-term management actions are implemented under the guidance of the BLM and the Management Plan.

9) *The degree to which the action may adversely affect ESA listed species or critical habitat.* Although listed species do occur or have the potential to occur on the Preserve, due to project design features and compliance with supplemental NEPA requirements at the site specific level, no adverse effects to listed species or their habitats are expected.

10) *Whether the action threatens a violation of environmental protection law or requirements.* There is no indication that this decision will result in actions that will threaten such a violation.

William S. Haigh
Manager, Mother Lode Field Office

Date



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EA Number: CA-180-08-40

Proposed Action: BLM adoption of the March 2008 Final Cosumnes River Preserve Management Plan.

Location: Approximately 1,893 acres in southern Sacramento County, CA. The project area maps are attached.

1.0 Purpose and Need for Action

1.1 Need for Action

The Bureau of Land Management's Mother Lode Field Office (BLM) is one of seven land-managing partners at the 50,000-acre Cosumnes River Preserve (Preserve), near Galt in southern Sacramento County, CA. The BLM provides overall management of the Preserve through a Preserve Manager's position that has oversight over all partners' activities related to physical, biological, and cultural resources.

The Preserve partnership's mission is to protect, restore, and manage riparian forest, freshwater wetland, vernal pool grassland, oak woodland, and wildlife-friendly agricultural lands within the Cosumnes River watershed. The main overarching goal is to preserve native biodiversity and benefit declining, threatened and endangered species of fish, wildlife and plants. In March 2008 the Preserve partners completed the Final Cosumnes River Preserve Management Plan (Management Plan) (Kleinschmidt 2008), the purpose of which is to help the Preserve partners implement the Preserve's missions across jurisdictions, over the life of the Management Plan. The Management Plan is needed to coordinate and guide the management activities of all of the Preserve partners, which include federal, state and county agencies; private, non-profit conservation organizations, and local cooperating private land owners. The Management Plan serves as the foundation of the Preserve's Annual Work Plans and the basis for future consultation with federal, state, and county agencies to evaluate the impacts of restoration and management activities on threatened and endangered species.

The Draft Management Plan was released to the public in December 2007 and January 2008 for a 30-day comment period. A total of 81 comments were received from a variety of sources, including State agencies, private nonprofit conservation organizations, and private landowners and other citizens. Tribes were not specifically contacted. During the 30-day comment period the Preserve hosted five public meetings to present the Draft Plan to the public and receive comments. The meetings were held in Elk Grove, Galt, and at the Preserve Visitor Center. The primary method of sharing the Draft Management Plan with the public was by posting it on the Preserve's website, the BLM's website, and by sending public notices to neighboring landowners and other interested parties. News releases were also published in local newspapers in Galt and Elk Grove. The comments received on the Draft Management Plan are summarized in Chapter 9 of the Final Management Plan.

During this same time, in late 2007 and early 2008, the BLM prepared an Environmental Assessment (EA) that considered potential impacts and alternatives to the Management Plan, pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). However, the BLM never completed a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI), or made a formal decision to adopt the Management Plan. Also of importance, the Management Plan was not subjected to other environmental laws and requirements such as those under Section 106 National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), and we did not specifically invite the Tribes to participate in the plan development process or the NEPA process. The BLM now proposes to remedy this situation by formally adopting the Management Plan and using it to manage BLM lands within the Preserve.

In 2008 the BLM approved the Sierra Resource Management Plan (RMP) which states on page 47: “Complete the Cosumnes River Preserve (CRP) Management Plan to reflect management and ecosystem needs of the Cosumnes River Preserve (CRP) fishes, or append this strategy to the plan.” Under the RMP, BLM lands within the Preserve were also designated the Cosumnes River Preserve Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC). The Sierra RMP proposed new rules to help the BLM manage public lands, especially those with special designations and values, like the Cosumnes River Preserve ACEC. In 2010 the BLM established Interim Final Supplementary Rules for BLM lands, including lands within the Preserve (75 FR 26981). The rules were established under the rulemaking process at 43 CFR 8365.1-6.

These rules are now thought to be insufficient. Preserve staff have noticed that certain visitor uses and behaviors not covered under the current supplementary rules are incompatible with the Preserve’s missions. These uses and behaviors are diminishing the experiences of other users and/or are negatively impacting migratory waterfowl and other wildlife. For instance, visitors to BLM lands within the Preserve are bringing their pet dogs. Currently, visitors are required to keep their dogs on a leash at all times, as is required under BLM regulations at 43 CFR 8362-1(c). Most visitors comply with this requirement but the presence of dogs, even on a leash, is negatively impacting wildlife in the seasonal wetlands. In particular, the conservation of migratory waterfowl and their habitat (seasonal wetlands) is a primary mission of the Preserve. Seasonal wetlands are considered an ACEC value. Therefore, the BLM proposes the following supplementary rules for all BLM lands within the Preserve.

1.2 Conformance with Applicable Land Use Plans

The proposed action is in conformance with the BLM’s February 2008 *Sierra Resource Management Plan* (RMP). On page 47 of the RMP it states: “Complete the Cosumnes River Preserve (CRP) Management Plan to reflect management and ecosystem needs of the Cosumnes River Preserve (CRP) fishes, or append this strategy to the plan.” The proposed action also provides for, per section 7(a)(1) of the Federal Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended, the implementation of recovery actions for Federal and State-listed species described in the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s (USFWS) *Recovery Plan for Vernal Pool Ecosystems of California and Southern Oregon* (USFWS 2006), *Draft Recovery Plan For The Giant Garter Snake* (USFWS 1999), and *Valley Elderberry Longhorn Beetle Recovery Plan* (USFWS 1984).

2.0 Proposed Action and Alternatives

2.1 Proposed Action

The BLM proposes to adopt the Management Plan to manage the approximately 1,893 acres of BLM lands within the Preserve. Formally adopting the Management Plan would help the BLM, with the assistance of the other Preserve partners, to protect, restore, and manage key habitats and species within the Cosumnes River watershed. It would also provide for long-term protection, enhancement, and management of ecological values, ecosystem function, and wildlife habitat in the existing protected land, as well as any new lands that are acquired through fee title or protected under conservation easement by the Preserve partners. Public use, environmental education, and outreach would be secondary and supplementary objectives to the primary ecological/ecosystem goals.

The Management Plan is available at

http://www.blm.gov/style/medialib/blm/ca/pdf/folsom/plans.Par.67798.File.dat/CRP_Final_Mgmt_Plan.pdf. Table 8.3 (Implementation timeline for management plan) on pages 8-11 to 8-23 in the Management Plan provides a list of actions and activities to be accomplished.

Management actions include future land protection through fee title acquisition and conservation easements, habitat management, habitat restoration, facilities and equipment maintenance and upgrades, scientific research and monitoring, environmental education and outreach, public uses, law enforcement, resource planning, policy monitoring and reform, wildlife-friendly farming and ranching operations, and visual and cultural resources. Under the Management Plan, the BLM proposes to actively manage BLM lands within the Preserve, in cooperation with the other Preserve partners, in a way that supports the Preserve's primary missions. Proposals in the Management Plan include protecting the free-flowing Cosumnes River; protecting, maintaining and restoring riparian and floodplain communities; protecting, maintaining and restoring vernal pool and grassland communities; maintaining and restoring a mosaic of freshwater wetland habitats; maintaining and enhancing the population of the giant garter snake in the Badger Creek watershed; and restoring and maintaining a population of fall-run Chinook salmon in the Cosumnes River. The agricultural stewardship sub-goal of the Management Plan proposes that agricultural stewardship will continue to serve as an important land-management tool and will be compatible with the Preserve's overall missions and goals. Public use, including existing and future recreational activities and facilities, as required, will support activities such as hiking, geocaching, bird watching, wildlife photography, limited-entry hunting, etc. The Preserve's multiple volunteer programs, scientific research and monitoring, and environmental education program all will be compatible with the Management Plan's Natural Resources Stewardship goals.

The BLM also proposes new supplementary rules for BLM-owned land within the Preserve. These rules would include

- Dogs or other domestic pets are not allowed.
- Riding horses, mountain bikes, and other non-motorized conveyances is not allowed.
- Campfires are not allowed.
- Smoking is not allowed.
- Fishing from land is not allowed without first obtaining written permission from BLM.

These rules are designed to protect ACEC values and other sensitive resources at the Preserve. The rules would be established using the supplementary rulemaking process under 43 CFR 8365.1-6.

These rules will augment or replace the following rules already formally established:

- Motorized boats may not be launched from the Preserve's dock.
- Target shooting is not allowed.
- Hunting is not allowed without a special recreation use permit issued by the BLM.
- Camping is not allowed.
- Riding horses, mountain bikes, and other non-motorized conveyances is allowed only on designated trails.

2.2 Project Design Features

No avoidance or minimization or mitigation actions would be necessary in the adoption and implementation of the Management Plan. Specific management actions that are proposed in the Management Plan would be analyzed at the project or site-specific level, as necessary, to identify potential resource impacts before implementation in accordance with NEPA. At that time, any necessary mitigation would be designed into the site-specific project to reduce any adverse effects on the environment.

2.3 No Action

Under the no action alternative, BLM lands within the Preserve would continue to be managed under the Sierra RMP, rather than in accordance with the Management Plan. The Sierra RMP process was sufficient for designating the Preserve as a standalone ACEC and creating appropriate use restrictions for this ACEC that were later published in the *Federal Register* under the BLM's supplementary rulemaking process; however the Sierra RMP does not contain the detailed and specific management actions and activities needed for managing the ACEC values (such seasonal wetlands, valley oak riparian forest, etc.) and other sensitive resources on BLM lands within the Preserve. Another problem is that the sole use of the Sierra RMP to manage BLM lands within the Preserve approach provides little or no management consistency or continuity with other Preserve lands, and it hinders progress toward achieving long-term goals for the Preserve. Present levels of land management activities would likely continue; however, no specific objectives or actions would be achieved, no concerted efforts to restore habitats or protect rare species could be assured, and no long-term outcomes could be guaranteed without BLM's leadership and the implementation of the Management Plan. BLM lands within the Preserve would continue to be managed under the current supplementary rules, which are now considered insufficient for protecting ACEC values and other sensitive resources. The risk of wildfire ignition would be increased. Wildlife could be harassed by pet dogs or could be harmed by ingesting cigarette butts.

2.4 Alternatives Considered but Eliminated from Detailed Analysis

A) Public Use Focus: The Preserve partners would adopt and implement a Management Plan that would provide primarily for public use opportunities at the Preserve, with ecological goals and objectives being secondary rather than the primary purpose of the Preserve. Public use facilities including trails, roads, parking lots, restrooms, and additional visitor services would be maintained and expanded as necessary. Under this alternative it is highly unlikely that the ecological goals of the Preserve would be met because of inherent conflict between many ecological goals and extensive, varied public use. As such, at-risk habitats and species would continue to decline in the California Central Valley. Due to limited acreage suitable for public use facilities (due to the high potential for large-scale natural flood events and other factors), continued expansion or the creation of additional public use facilities would likely be cost prohibitive to build and maintain. Also additional damage to

natural resources would likely occur. BLM lands within the Preserve are almost entirely dedicated to managed seasonal wetland including leased rice fields. Under this alternative, resource protection could not be assured and no orchestrated, coordinated effort to protect, restore, and manage habitat would be achieved. The Preserve could not make progress toward fulfilling its missions.

3.0 Affected Environment

Soil, water, and air quality

The Preserve lands host a variety of soil types ranging from clay hardpan to sandy loam. The following soil units are included within the project area, the San Joaquin, Columbia-Cosumnes, Egbert-Valpac, Dierssen, and the Sailboat-Scribner-Cosumnes soil series. The majority of the soils within the project area are Columbia-Cosumnes and San Joaquin soils (U.S. Department of Agriculture 1985).

The Cosumnes River watershed covers approximately 940 square miles (approximately 600,000 acres), from its headwaters in the Sierra Nevada to its confluence with the Mokelumne River in the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta. The river remains as the only river flowing to the Central Valley in California without a major hydro-electric dam.

The river segment from Highway 16 down to the tidal floodplains consists of a continuum of highly incised meandering channel lined with agricultural levees and limited riparian vegetation in the upper reaches, to less incision in the lower reaches where discontinuous low-levees and riparian forests flank the channel. The tidal floodplain area includes the portion of the Cosumnes River from the confluence with the Mokelumne River, upstream to the limits of tidal influence south of the bridges on Twin Cities Road. Much of the tidally influenced floodplain area is now agricultural fields protected by low levees that do not prevent seasonal flooding, or the floodplain area is contained within the existing boundaries of the Preserve. In addition to the main stem of the Cosumnes River, several tributaries drain into the lower watershed: Deer Creek, Badger Creek, and Laguna Creek.

Winter storms account for about 80% of the annual precipitation in the Cosumnes River watershed. The Cosumnes River watershed typically does not receive significant amounts of snowfall because of its low peak elevation and, therefore, most floods are caused by intense rainfall events (Sacramento County Water Agency 2005).

Groundwater is typically found in distinct shallow and deep aquifer zones ranging in depth between 200 and 2,000 feet below the ground surface level. Historically, the input of groundwater to the river channel kept the channel and associated wetland areas wet throughout the summer for the entire length of the river. Over the past 60 years, however, groundwater pumping has reduced groundwater levels in the valley segment, leading to a decline of groundwater input to the river.

Air quality on the Preserve is generally good; however because of its proximity to agricultural operations, which entail burning and plowing, as well as major urban areas (Lodi, Stockton and Elk Grove), higher concentrations of air pollutants may occur in summer and fall, as well as on stagnant, foggy winter days.

Botany/invasive and noxious weeds

The Cosumnes River Preserve hosts a rich diversity of plant species; 442 species have been identified, of which 279 (63%) are California natives. Specific habitat types found at the Cosumnes River

Preserve are described below. These descriptions follow the California Department of Fish and Wildlife's Wildlife Habitat Relationship (CWHR) vegetation types.

The California Natural Diversity Data Base (CNDDDB) identifies two special status plant communities along the Cosumnes River riparian zone. Great Valley Oak Riparian Forest and Great Valley Mixed Riparian Forest. There are four known special-status plant species in the Preserve that are associated with vernal pools, marshes, or slough habitats including Dwarf dowingia (*Downingia pusilla*), Rose-mallow (*Hibiscus lasiocarpus*), Legenere (*Legenere limosa*), and Sandford's arrowhead (*Sagittaria sanfordii*). Ten other special-status plant species potentially occur on the preserve within the vernal pool, marsh and slough habitats.

Many of the areas bordering the river and sloughs on the Preserve are valley foothill riparian areas. Most trees consist of valley oak (*Quercus lobata*) and cottonwood (*Populus deltoids*), Oregon ash (*Fraxinus latifolia*), box elder (*Acer negundo*), and white alder (*Alnus rhombifolia*). wild grape (*Vitis Californica*), wild rose (*Rosa acicularis*), California blackberry (*Rubus urinus*), blue elderberry (*Sambucus cerulea*), poison oak (*Toxicodendron diversilobum*), button bush (*Cephalanthus occidentalis*), and willows (*Salix spp.*) usually comprise the shrub understory layer. Herbaceous vegetation constitutes about one percent of the cover and it consists of sedges (*Carex spp.*), rushes (*Eleocharis spp.*), grasses, miner's lettuce (*Claytonia perfoliata*), Douglas sagewort (*Artemisia douglasiana*), poison hemlock (*Conium maculatum*), and hoary nettle (*Urtica dioica*).

Vast annual grassland habitat is found on the Preserve. These habitats are open grasslands composed primarily of annual plant species including wild oats (*Avena sativa*), soft chess (*Bromus hordeaceus*), ripgut brome (*Bromus diandrus*), wild barley (*Hordeum vulgare*), and annual ryegrass (*Lolium spp.*). The native California poppy (*Eschscholzia californica*) is also found in this habitat. Vernal pools, which support downingia (*Downingia spp.*), meadowfoam (*Limnanthes spp.*), and other native plant species, are found in small depressions within the annual grassland underlain by a hardpan or bedrock layer.

Fresh emergent wetlands are perennial wetlands that depend on year-round water availability. The marshes are typically characterized by species such as common cattail (*Typha latifolia*), bulrush (*Scirpus spp.*), arrowhead (*Sagittaria spp.*), and the highly invasive, non-native water primrose (*Ludwigia peploides*).

Currently, several invasive, non-native plant species (collectively referred to as "weeds" or "weed species" throughout this document) including perennial pepperweed (*Lepidium latifolium*), yellow star thistle (*Centaurea solstitialis*), poison hemlock (*Conium maculatum*), bristly ox-tongue (*Picris echioides*), water primrose (*Ludwigia hexapetala*), Himalayan blackberry (*Rubus armeniacus*) and others are becoming increasingly common at the Preserve. These weed species are extremely problematic because they spread quickly and displace native plants. This in turn negatively affects fish, wildlife, and other local fauna that rely upon native plants for their existence. The result is an overall loss of native biodiversity.

Wildlife/fisheries

The Preserve hosts a rich and wide variety of wildlife species that inhabit wetland, upland, vernal pool, grassland and riparian areas of the Preserve. There are 295 species known to occur at Preserve, including 247 species of birds, 30 species of mammals, and 18 species of amphibians and reptiles.

Many of the species that commonly occur at the Preserve are not specifically managed for as part of the Preserve's overall management strategy. However, these species benefit from habitat that is created, restored or preserved as part of the Preserve's projects and continued management. These species include black tailed deer (*Odocoileus hemionus*), river otter (*Lutra canadensis*), California vole (*Microtus californicus*), beaver (*Castor canadensis*), American bittern (*Botaurus lentiginosus*), northern pintail (*Anas acuta*), redwing blackbird (*Agelaius phoeniceus*), western fence lizard (*Sceloporus occidentalis*), common kingsnake (*Lampropeltis getulus*), and desert cottontail (*Sylvilagus auduboni*).

The lower Cosumnes River watershed hosts a variety of special-status wildlife species including those wildlife species that have been designated as endangered, threatened, or species of special concern, or is proposed for listing (*i.e.*, candidate species) under the Federal Endangered Species Act (FESA) or California Endangered Species Act (CESA). Special-status species known to occur on the Cosumnes River Preserve include vernal pool fairy shrimp (*Branchinecta lynchi*), vernal pool tadpole shrimp (*Lepidurus packardii*), valley elderberry longhorn beetle (*Desmocerus californicus dimorphus*), California tiger salamander (*Ambystoma californiense*), western pond turtle (*Clemmys marmorata*), giant garter snake (*Thamnophis gigas*), greater sandhill crane (*Grus canadensis tabida*), and Swainson's hawk (*Buteo swainsoni*).

Thirty-eight fish species are found in the Cosumnes River Preserve including a diverse variety of native and non-native species. Several species have been designated as special-status species by NOAA Fisheries, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and/or California Department of Fish and Game due to concern over their declining numbers. These species include fall-run chinook salmon (*Oncorhynchus tshawytscha*), steelhead (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*), delta smelt (*Hypomesus transpacificus*), Sacramento splittail (*Pogonichthys macrolepidotus*), and Sacramento perch (*Archoplites interruptus*). Two special-status species, hardhead and speckled dace, have likely been extirpated from the Cosumnes River. The remaining 26 (65%) fish species have been introduced to California water bodies, either intentionally or unintentionally.

Recreation

In general, passive recreational activities, such as bird watching, photography, nature study, hiking and paddling, are encouraged at the Preserve. Designated areas have been set aside for limited-entry hunting. Fishing and hunting are allowed from watercraft in State of California waterways. The Visitor Center is the focal point for the majority of public access and education at the Preserve. Universally accessible trails offer visitors an up-close experience into lush marshes, wetland plants, water birds, insects, and amphibians. The Cosumnes River Preserve also offers canoeing and kayaking opportunities as well as a self-guided driving tour throughout the public road system.

Visual resources management

The Cosumnes River Preserve is a major visual resource for the southern Sacramento County area from a variety of perspectives. From a distance the distinct forested landscape appears as a natural wooded area in marked contrast to the surrounding agricultural and urban landscapes. Preserve visitors experience a sense of visual enclosure from trails that traverse natural areas and especially from within the forests along the River Walk trail. Under the 2008 Sierra RMP, BLM lands within the Preserve are managed in accordance with the BLM visual resources management (VRM) Class II standard. The objective of this class is to retain the existing character of the landscape. The level of change to the characteristic landscape should be low. Management activities may be seen, but should not attract the attention of the casual observer. Any changes must repeat the basic elements of form, line, color, and texture found in the predominant natural features of the characteristic landscape.

Cultural resources and Native American issues

There are numerous cultural resources recorded on lands within the Preserve. These sites are recorded in the California Historical Resources Information System. Of these, many of them are prehistoric archaeological sites of Native American origin. Cultural resources related to prehistoric use, as well as historic-era agriculture and flood control, have also been recorded on BLM lands within the Preserve. Currently two Native American tribes come to the Preserve to collect native plant materials for ceremonial headdress, basketry and traditional building materials for structures.

Fire/fuels management

There is a wide variety of fuel types and structure at the Preserve which include grass, shrub and tree species. The Cosumnes River Preserve has routinely used prescribed fire for weed control and to reduce built up vegetation. In addition, wildfires occur annually on Preserve lands caused by a variety of sources ranging from vehicle-caused fires to bird strikes on power lines. Fuels on BLM lands within the Preserve include native and non-native grasses, shrubs including Himalayan blackberry, coyote bush, wild grape, Elderberry and poison oak. Native trees also included are Oregon ash, valley oak, live oak, box elder, cottonwood, California buckeye, and willows. A variety of exotic trees such as fig, tree of heaven, Osage orange, honey locust, black locust, and cherry plum which have been killed by previous eradication efforts also serve as standing dry or ladder fuels.

Social/agricultural values

The current landscape of Central Valley, including the lower Cosumnes watershed, consists largely of croplands, especially intensively managed irrigated crops. However, the Central Valley is one of California's more rapidly growing regions, gaining nearly two million more residents in the last 30 years. In the last several years the Sacramento region has experienced explosive growth, with urban expansion driving further south and east. The City of Elk Grove is planning to expand beyond the existing Urban Service Boundary to as far south as Eschinger Road. The City of Galt is located to the east of the Preserve. The city has been working on a General Plan update with ideas of expanding northward; however, they have made few inroads with the agricultural community on this issue. Thornton is an unincorporated town located south of the Preserve in San Joaquin County. Like other towns in the area, there is mounting pressure for new growth and development and land speculation in the area has increased.

The Preserve has an active education program and is currently a field trip destination for over 10,000 K-12 students annually. In addition 3,000 K-12 students are involved in service learning projects, and more than 10 higher education field trips are attended by local and visiting colleges annually. In addition the Cosumnes River Preserve is used by graduate and undergraduate college students for research projects. The Preserve also has an active Volunteer program with several groups and more than 100 volunteers.

Farming occurs on over 13,000 acres on the Cosumnes River Preserve, and approximately 2,000 acres of additional farmland have been protected through conservation easements. Of the 13,000 acres in agricultural production, approximately 10,000 acres are managed to be compatible with wildlife. Grazing currently occurs on nearly 3,000 acres of annual grasslands in the Preserve. In addition, well over 15,000 acres of vernal pool grassland are grazed on lands held under a conservation easement.

Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) values

Under the 2008 Sierra RMP, BLM lands within the Preserve were designated the Cosumnes River Preserve ACEC. The management goals and objectives include develop the Cosumnes River Preserve Management Plan. Relevant and important values include the existence or potential for restoration of:(1) valley oak (*Quercus lobata*) riparian forest; (2) seasonal wetlands; (3) vernal pools; (4) oak (*Quercus* spp.) savannah; and (5) agricultural lands such as irrigated pasture and crops that provide habitat for sandhill cranes (*Grus Canadensis*) and a buffer for the Preserve.

4.0 Environmental Effects

The resources or program areas considered for this environmental assessment are soil, water, and air quality, botany/invasive and nonnative weeds, wildlife/fisheries, recreation, visual resources management, cultural resources and Native American issues, fuels/fire management, social/agriculture values, and Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) values. The resources or program areas considered to be not affected because they do not occur within or near the Preserve include wild and scenic rivers, wilderness areas, and hazardous/solid waste. There are no designated wild and scenic rivers or wilderness areas within or in the vicinity of the Preserve. There are no management actions on-going or anticipated at the Preserve that would result in the production of hazardous waste/solid materials. The Preserve is the occasional recipient of hazardous waste through illegal dumping on public rights-of-way, from illegal narcotics operations on Preserve lands, and from catastrophic flooding events that deposit hazardous waste on Preserve lands. This hazardous waste generally consists of abandoned automobiles, appliances, car batteries, tires, pressure-treated lumber and other materials that are routinely collected by the Waste Management Authority or can be disposed of at the County landfills. Therefore, this program area is not considered to be affected by the proposed action.

4.1 Impacts of the Proposed Action

Soil, water, and air quality

The proposed action promotes the protection, restoration, and management of soil, water, and air resources. As such, the proposed action (adoption of the Management Plan) is invaluable in terms of its contribution towards managing BLM lands within the Preserve for proper ecosystem function through natural processes, such as seasonal flooding which regenerates riparian forests and freshwater wetlands. The Management Plan promotes the protection of a more natural hydrologic cycle within the Cosumnes River watershed by ensuring areas of the floodplain receive adequate deposition of sediment and debris while reducing the likelihood of catastrophic flooding elsewhere. Additionally, protection and restoration of native habitats and ecosystem function within the Cosumnes River watershed has a positive effect on the health of the watershed and water quality by filtering debris and contaminants. For example, water passing through a wetland ecosystem within the Preserve carries organisms, sediment, nutrients, and pollutants. The vegetation and soil in the wetland form a kind sieve, trapping those materials and filtering the water so that the downstream Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta ecosystem is cleaner and healthier. The proposed supplementary rules would help protect seasonal wetlands from inadvertent wildfire ignition, the spread of invasive, nonnative weeds through horse manure, and harm to wildlife caused by the ingestion of cigarette butts.

The proposed action to adopt and implement the Management Plan would, over the long-term, assist in the improvement of air quality within the Central Valley of California. As more native habitat is created or restored at the Preserve, such as native valley oak riparian forests, the Preserve's habitat would sequester larger quantities of carbon and nitrogen, thereby contributing substantially to the amount of clean air production. However, when the Preserve implements Native American-style prescribed fire as one of its tools to reduce fuel loads and improve native habitats and species, there may be short-term, temporary impacts to local air quality. However, the resulting positive, long-term benefit received from the use of these historic, native Miwok Indian practices, prescribed fires greatly outweighs the short-term, temporary impacts to air quality. Prescribed burning in this way reduces fire hazard and associated fire-related air quality impacts in the long term. The proposed supplementary rules would not affect air quality, though arguably they would prevent wildfires which could temporarily degrade air quality.

Botany/invasive and nonnative weeds

The proposed action would help to control the proliferation of invasive, nonnative weeds, thereby protecting native habitats and increasing the overall native biodiversity in the Cosumnes River watershed. The use of herbicides and other methods to control or eradicate weeds on the Preserve would benefit plant communities by decreasing the growth, seed production and competitiveness of targeted weed species, thereby aiding in the reestablishment of native species. The proposed supplementary rules would help prevent the spread of invasive nonnative weeds spread, for instance, through horse manure.

Wildlife/fisheries

The proposed action would help to fulfill part of the Preserve's mission to conserve, in perpetuity, rare and/or sensitive wildlife species and communities of the Central Valley of California, including federal and state listed species such as the giant garter snake, sandhill crane, Swainson's hawk, and vernal pool branchiopods. There may be occasions when temporary effects to these species may result as a matter of implementing management practices or habitat restoration actions on their behalf. If and/or when this case arises, the BLM would consult with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on project-specific basis that may result in effects to the listed species and communities that cannot be avoided or minimized. However, the long-term benefits of the management practices would likely outweigh these short-term impacts and no overall adverse impact is expected to the ability of species to persist and thrive in the Preserve. The proposed supplementary rules would benefit wildlife. If the rules are put into effect, listed species would be less likely to be harassed by dogs, or scared by people riding bicycles, or harmed by ingesting cigarette butts. The habitat that the listed species depend upon would be less likely to be damaged by wildfire inadvertently caused by a smoldering cigarette butt or by the introduction and spread of nonnative invasive weeds spread through horse manure.

Recreation

The proposed action would enhance regional recreation activities and access in a way that maintains the Preserve's primary mission to protect and restore native biodiversity and declining threatened and endangered species of wildlife and plants. The Management Plan anticipates that some new recreational facilities (built where limited space allows and not in conflict with ACEC values) would be needed in the future to meet an ever-increasing demand by the public. All new construction or upgrades to existing facilities such as trails would involve project-specific NEPA

compliance/environmental review. All proposed projects would be planned in a way that is in compliance with applicable environmental laws, regulations, and policies while allowing for controlled public use, which is expected to increase based on current and future urban growth projections in and near the proposed project area. The Management Plan is needed to ensure that future recreation and access proposals have a beneficial effect on public use of the Preserve, with little or no negative impacts on ACEC values or other sensitive resources.

The proposed supplementary rules would benefit recreation by creating a better experience for most visitors. The rules address visitor uses and behaviors that appear to be incompatible with the Preserve's missions. Most visitors come to view the wildlife and enjoy the scenery of the seasonal wetlands. These attractions are likely to be undermined by pet dogs harassing wildlife, people smoking, as well as people riding bicycles and horses around others who are watching wildlife. Some visitors who like to ride bicycles and horses, or who would like to fish from land would be negatively affected.

Visual resources management

The proposed action would help Preserve managers to better manage BLM lands within the Preserve for ecosystem health; thus the proposed action would help keep these lands looking like VRM Class II lands should look. The Class II management standard prescribes a low level of change to the characteristic landscape. The proposed supplementary rules such as no smoking (inadvertently started fires) or horse use (weed spread through horse manure) should help prevent change to the landscape that is consistent with the Class II standard. The rules would help prevent wildfire ignition and the damage it does to the scenery as well as the potential new trails and horse manure that often comes with equestrian use.

Cultural resources and Native American issues

The Management Plan also includes proactive actions to work more closely with persons and organizations interested in preserving cultural resources and Native American traditional use at the Preserve. For example, the Preserve plans to re-establish Native American-style prescribed fires as a means of restoring and managing native valley oak riparian forests and wetland areas in the same manner that Plains Miwok Indians managed these same lands over the course of their history in the area. The Preserve's goals, objectives, and actions (such as prescribed fire) include ways to help provide Native American people and organizations with sources of native plant materials that are known to be important for religious or medicinal purposes. The proposed supplementary rules would have a beneficial effect on cultural resources. The rules are designed to help prevent wildfire ignitions which could cause damage to or even destroy cultural resources with wooden or other sensitive elements.

Fire/fuels management

Under the proposed action, BLM lands within the Preserve would be managed under the Management Plan, which directs Preserve managers to use additional tools (such as herbicides) to manage fuels and prevent wildfire. The proposed supplementary rules would have a beneficial effect on fire/fuels management. The rules such as no smoking and no campfires are designed to help prevent wildfire ignitions.

Social /agricultural values

The proposed action would have no impact on social/agricultural values.

ACEC values

The 2008 Sierra RMP designated BLM lands within Preserve as a standalone ACEC called the Cosumnes River Preserve ACEC. The BLM is required to protect the relevant and important ACEC values. Certain public use restrictions have been established to help in this effort. Activities that have potential to cause significant disturbance (i.e., large-scale mining, construction of roads, high-voltage transmission lines, telecommunication towers, etc.) may not be allowed or would require careful planning to avoid or to minimize negative impacts to ACEC values. If there are conflicts between ACEC values and public access, ACEC values will given special consideration. The proposed action would have no effect on this management prescription. The proposed supplementary rules would help the BLM to protect ACEC relevant and important values such as seasonal wetlands and the plant and wildlife species that depend on them. The rules would help prevent inadvertent wildfire ignition, the harassment of wildlife by pet dogs, and other resource damage caused by visitor uses and behaviors not currently prohibited under existing rules and regulations.

4.2 Impacts of the No Action Alternative

Soil, air, and water quality

Under the no action alternative, soils would be managed in accordance with the Sierra RMP, which provides general guidance. Impacts to soils on the Preserve would be evaluated in separate project-specific environmental/NEPA reviews. Less concerted effort would be made to manage soils on BLM lands within the Preserve collectively with soils on other Preserve lands. Soil management would be less effective under this scenario. The proposed supplementary rules would not be established; this is unlikely to affect soils.

Impacts to water quality and hydrology under the no action alternative are not well known. However, the interconnected hydrologic system that traverses through the Preserve and crosses ownerships would most likely be negatively impacted by less well -orchestrated management and restoration efforts. Under the no action alternative BLM lands within the Preserve would be managed in accordance with the Sierra RMP which does not have a comprehensive strategy to restore the floodplain for the entire Preserve. As such, the BLM may not conduct projects in concert with other Preserve partners and ownerships that promote natural hydrologic processes of sediment and debris deposition as well as sub-surface hydrological connectivity would be absent in the floodplain and in other areas of the Preserve such as the vernal pool grassland areas. Deposition of sediment and debris within the floodplain areas would continue within the confines of the levees of the river channel, thereby decreasing flow capacities and increasing the likelihood of catastrophic flooding elsewhere. The lack of proposed supplementary rules would not affect hydrology. Without the proposed supplementary rules, inadvertent wildfire ignition is more likely through discarded cigarette butts and campfires, both of which would be prohibited under the proposed action and the publication of new rules in the *Federal Register*.

Botany/noxious and invasive weeds

Under the no action alternative efforts to control non-native, invasive weeds and restoration native vegetation would continue in accordance with the Sierra RMP rather than the more detailed

Management Plan. Efforts by individual Preserve partners would be minimal and would not be conducted in a systematic fashion that results in maximum control and results. For example weed control efforts on lands owned by the BLM would not be in conjunction with efforts on contiguous Preserve lands owned by other partners. Noxious weeds and other invasive vegetation that can impact soil function and reduce soil biodiversity would continue to spread and displace native plant and animal species. Without a systematic, organized weed control effort under the leadership of the BLM it is likely that the continued spread of invasive plants would dramatically, and potentially irreversibly, adversely affect soil organic matter content, diversity and abundance of soil organisms, and nutrient and water availability. This, in turn, adversely impacts the botanical resources at the Preserve. Under no action, the proposed supplementary rules would not be established. It is more likely that weeds would be introduced through horse manure left during horseback riding.

Wildlife/fisheries

Although efforts to provide habitat for wildlife would continue under the no action alternative, efforts to provide contiguous high quality native habitats are likely to be less effective because of the more general approach to habitat protection, restoration, and management prescribed in the Sierra RMP. Proposed projects to enhance or improve native habitats would be considered on a case-by-case basis which, in turn, would likely be less efficient and more time consuming and costly compared to the proposed action, which would direct the BLM to adopt and use the Management Plan which lays out proposed habitat projects on the scale of entire Preserve, without regard for ownership. In addition, connectivity of native habitats that provide wildlife with high quality resources required for general health and corridors for seasonal movement within their home range may be negatively impacted because of the bureaucratically created fragmentation created by the use of Sierra RMP independent of the Management Plan. Without the proposed supplementary rules, wildlife may be negatively affected. Species may be more likely to ingest cigarette butts, with dire health consequences. Dog owners with unleashed dogs would be more likely to visit the Preserve and frighten migratory waterfowl and other wildlife in the seasonal wetlands. Wildfires may be inadvertently started by discarded cigarette butts, causing damage to the habitat that wildlife depend upon.

Under the no action alternative efforts to restore riparian and floodplain habitat crucial to the continued survival of native fish species found in the Cosumnes River watershed would continue in accordance with the Sierra RMP, which has very general prescriptions for riparian habitat and management of native fishes. Without adoption of the Management Plan, the Preserve's goal to restore and maintain a population of fall-run Chinook salmon in the Cosumnes River, with an average annual spawning run of 2,000 adults (10-year average, range of 1,000 – 5,000 adults) would probably not be attained, thereby adding to the risk that the fall-run chinook would be listed under the Endangered Species Act. Not establishing the proposed supplementary rules would not affect fisheries. Fishing from land could occur but the effects to fisheries would be negligible.

Recreation

Recreation within the Preserve is likely to be adversely impacted by the no action alternative because orchestrated efforts between Preserve partners to provide additional recreational opportunities (i.e., new and/or improved trails or additional recreational facilities) may not be practical. Without a concerted plan to manage vegetation the Preserve, the trail system and boat launch sites would be negatively impacted by weeds, similar to what would be found in and around an abandoned homestead. This would create a serious access issue for the public, particularly for mobility impaired persons. Some recreating visitors enjoy bringing their pet dogs to the Preserve. Others may see an opportunity to ride a bicycle or a horse at the Preserve. If established, the proposed supplementary rules would deny these recreational opportunities. Still others may want to fish without BLM

restrictions. Some may see this as detrimental to recreation. However, most visitors come to the Preserve to enjoy wildlife viewing and scenery. These opportunities would be diminished without the proposed supplementary rules.

Visual resources management

Not adopting the Management Plan and establishing the proposed supplementary rules would not affect visual resources management (VRM Class II standards could be maintained), though cigarette butts, horse manure, dog droppings are undesirable to look at and could mar the scenery for some visitors.

Cultural resources and Native American issues

Under the no action alternative the cultural resources on BLM lands within Preserve would remain in an “as is” condition. Compliance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, the Archaeological Resources Protection Act, the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act, and other authorities would continue. Native American collection of plant materials for ceremonial headdress, basketry, and traditional building materials for structures such as sweat lodges would continue, as required by BLM California policy, but there would be no designated lead contact person or agency to properly document and/or coordinate collections or activities. The lack of proposed supplementary rules would not affect cultural resources, though a continued increased chance of inadvertent wildfire ignition, leading to damages to sensitive cultural resources, would be possible.

Fire/fuels management

Without adoption of the Management Plan, which gives Preserve managers more detailed direction and tools to restore and maintain native vegetative communities on the Preserve, fuel loads and the risk of severe wildfire could increase more rapidly than management under the Sierra RMP. An increase in fuel loads would be expected because of the increases noxious invasive species, such as poisonous hemlock which creates ladder fuels into the valley oak tree canopies. A resulting, uncontrollable wildfire could damage ACEC or other sensitive resource values. For example, a wildfire in the riparian forest next to the Visitor Center could destroy the building and trail facilities as well as the habitat. Without the proposed supplementary rules, the risk of wildfire starts would increase. Cigarette smoking is known to lead to inadvertent wildfire ignition as smokers sometimes drop their still-smoldering butts on the ground.

Social/agricultural values

Not adopting the proposed action would not affect social/agricultural values.

4.3 Cumulative Impacts

There are no long-term site specific adverse impacts expected from the proposed action for soil, water, and air quality, botany/invasive and nonnative weeds, wildlife/fisheries, cultural resources and Native American concerns, visual resources management, social/agricultural values, and Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC), so no adverse cumulative impacts are expected at a larger scale. Rather, the adoption and implementation of the Management Plan is expected to provide positive, beneficial effects for most of these resources or program areas because long-term management and restoration efforts prescribed in the Management Plan increase habitat connectivity, decrease habitat

fragmentation, and increase the amount of natural habitat in the Central Valley. The proposed supplementary rules would prohibit the pet dogs, horse and bicycle riding, hunting and fishing, and other recreational uses that some visitors to the Preserve enjoy. However, there is no shortage of areas in the region suitable for these activities and no cumulative impacts are expected. Most visitors to the Preserve come to view the wildlife, especially the migratory waterfowl, which would benefit from the proposed supplementary rules, thus enhancing visitor experience.

5.0 Agencies and Persons Consulted

5.1 BLM Interdisciplinary Team (Plan development and environmental compliance)

- Harry McQuillen – Preserve Manager
- Holden Brink – Wetlands Manager
- Mark Ackerman – Wildlife Biologist
- Sandra McGinnis – NEPA Coordinator
- James Barnes – NEPA Coordinator/Archaeologist

5.2 Other Personnel, Agencies and Organizations (Plan development)

- Keith Whitener, The Nature Conservancy
- Mike Eaton, The Nature Conservancy
- Jaymee Marty, The Nature Conservancy
- Ramona Swenson, The Nature Conservancy
- Jennifer Buck, The Nature Conservancy
- Becky Wagell, The Nature Conservancy
- Dianna McDonell, The Nature Conservancy
- Alex Cabrera, The Nature Conservancy
- Amber Veselka, Sacramento County Parks and Recreation
- Jill Ritzman, Sacramento County Parks and Recreation
- Mark Biddlecomb, Ducks Unlimited
- Greg Greene, Ducks Unlimited
- Kevin Petrick, Ducks Unlimited
- Dan Fehringer, Ducks Unlimited
- John Durand, Galt Joint Union Elementary School District
- Paul Raquel, California Department of Fish and Game
- Armand Gonzalez, California Department of Fish and Game
- Matt Reeves, Department of Water Resources
- Catherine Graham, State Water Resources Control Board
- Chris Davis, NRCS
- Kateri Harrison, Kleinschmidt Associates, Inc.

5.2 Availability of Document and Comment Procedures

This EA will be posted on the Mother Lode Field Office's website under Information, NEPA (or available upon request). The EA will be available for a 30-day public review period. Comments should be sent to the BLM, Attn: James Barnes, NEPA coordinator, 5152 Hillside Circle, El Dorado Hills, CA 95762 or emailed to jjbarnes@blm.gov.

5.3 Reviewers:

<i>/s/ James Barnes</i>	<i>10/30/13</i>
NEPA Coordinator/Archaeologist	Date
<i>/s/ H. McQuillen</i>	<i>10/23/13</i>
Preserve Manager/EA Preparer	Date
<i>/s/ Mark Ackerman</i>	<i>10/24/13</i>
Wildlife/Fisheries Biologist	Date
<i>/s/ Sara Sweet</i>	<i>10/24/13</i>
Botanist	Date
<i>/s/ Amber Veselka</i>	<i>10/24/13</i>
Outdoor Recreation Planner/VRM Specialist	Date
<i>/s/ Gerald Martinez</i>	<i>10/30/13</i>
Fire and fuels specialist	Date

6.0 References

Kleinschmidt Associates. 2008. Cosumnes River Preserve Management Plan. Available at: <http://www.cosumnes.org>

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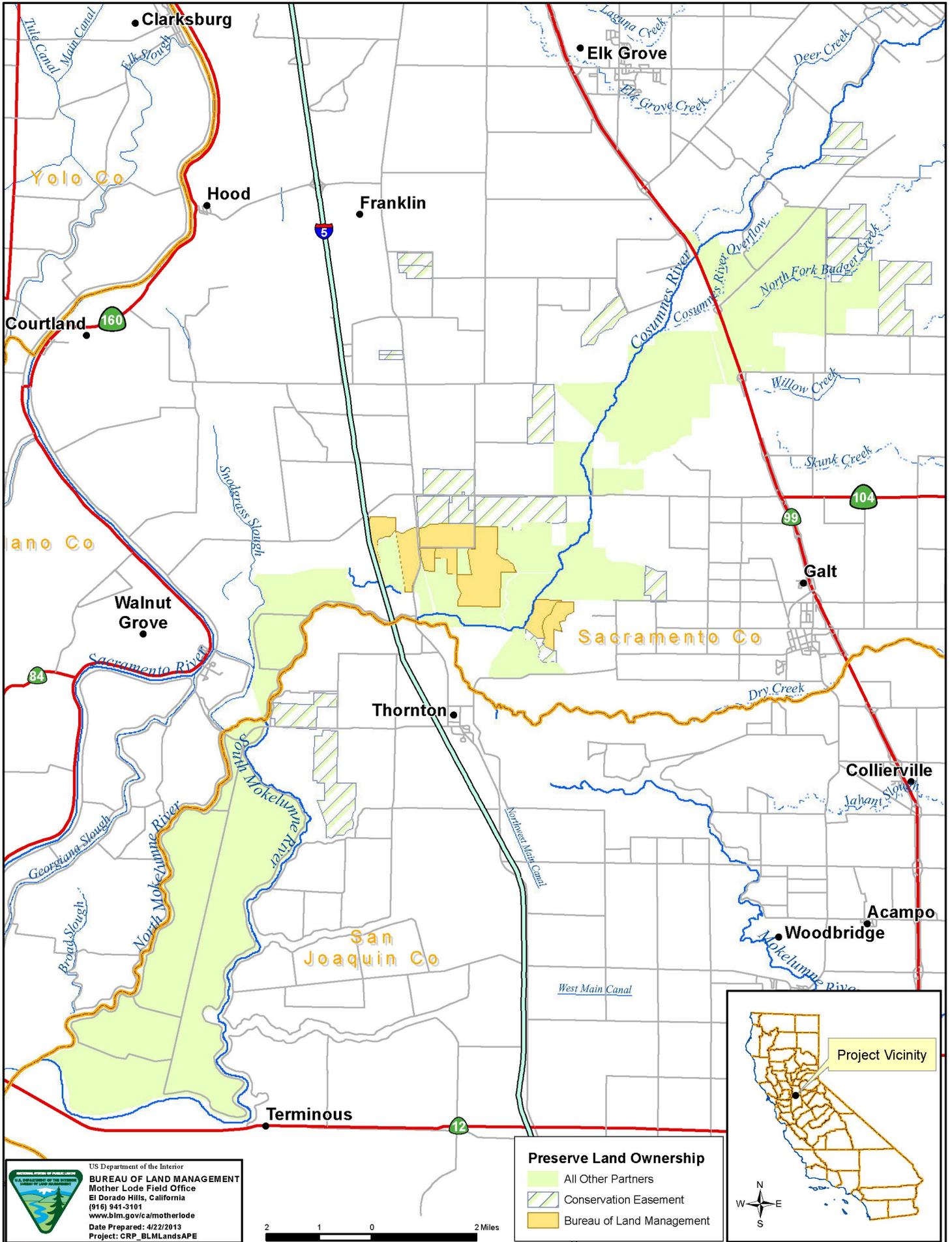
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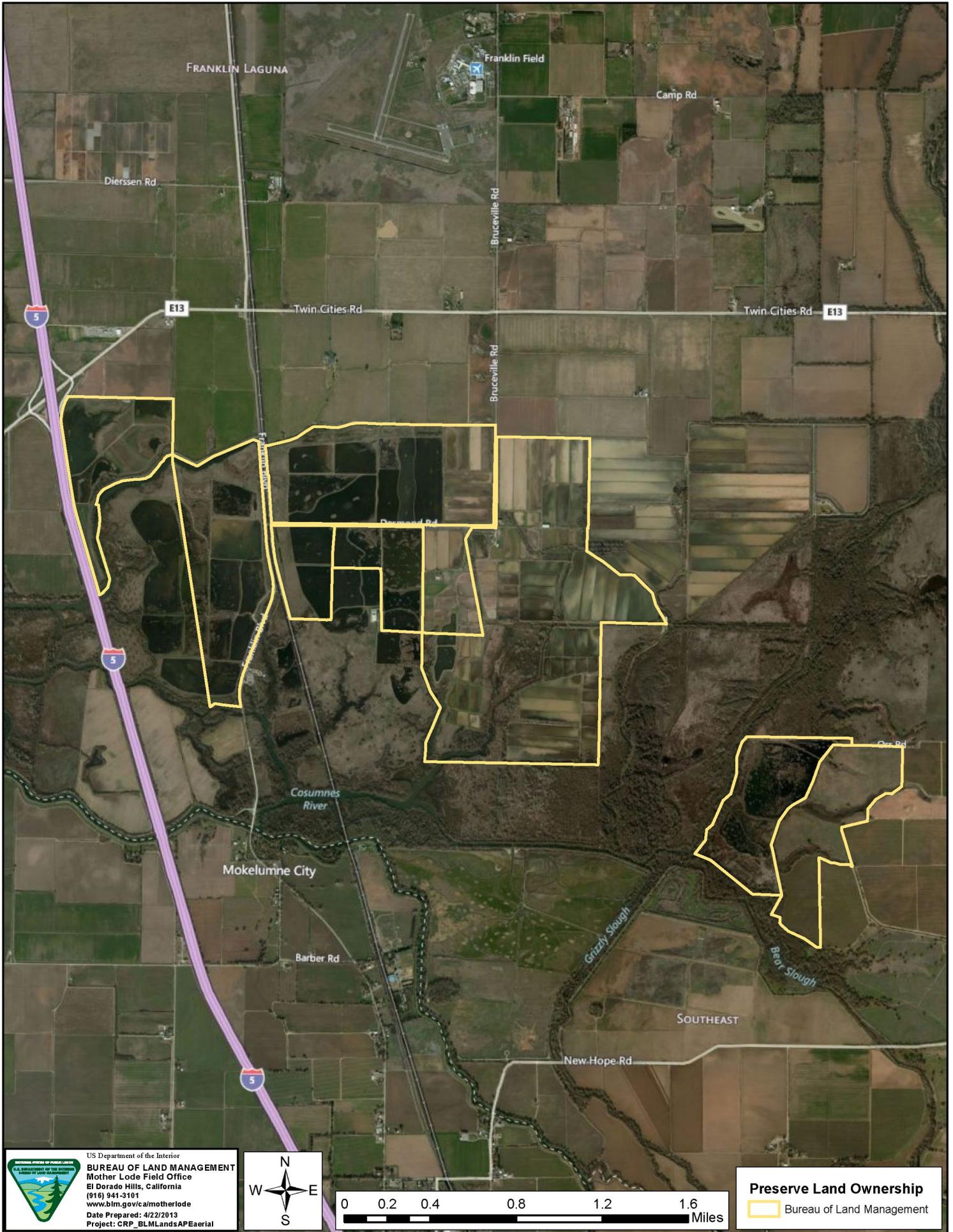
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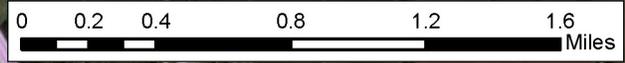
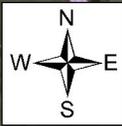
Cosumnes River Preserve BLM Owned Land / APE



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Preserve Land Ownership
Bureau of Land Management