



## United States Department of the Interior

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**EA Number:** CA-180-16-25

**Proposed Action:** Cosumnes River Preserve Special Recreation Permit Program

### **Location:**

The proposed action area is located within the 50,000-acre Cosumnes River Preserve (Preserve), which lies between the cities of Elk Grove and Galt, in southeastern Sacramento County, California (Figure 1). The Preserve stretches along the Cosumnes River from its confluence with the Mokelumne River near Interstate-5 and the San Joaquin County line, extending up river past California State Highway 99 and Dillard Road towards the town of Wilton, California. The Preserve also includes Staten Island (in San Joaquin County), the McCormack-Williamson Tract, and several private farms and ranches that are protected under conservation easements.

The proposed action area includes approximately 3,150 acres of BLM-owned and BLM-managed lands within MDBM, T 5 N, R 5 E, sections 21, 3, 24, 25, 26, 27, and 28 (Figure 1).

## **1.0 Purpose of and Need for Action**

### **1.1 Need for Action**

The U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is one of seven land-owning partners at the 50,000-acre Cosumnes River Preserve (Preserve). The Preserve is a 30-year collaborative partnership between federal, state and local agencies, as well as non-profit conservation organizations and private farming and ranching cooperators. The BLM provides overall management of the Preserve through a Cooperative Management Agreement (CMA) that specifies that the BLM has primary oversight of all partner's activities related to fish, wildlife, plants, and other natural resources.

The primary purpose of the Proposed Action is to regulate, via the BLM's recreational permit system (CFR 43 Part 2930), the commercial use, competitive events, and organized group activities that occur on BLM-owned and BLM-managed lands at the Preserve, and the related waterways that are accessed via those lands. Currently, there are approximately 4,000 acres of BLM-owned or BLM-managed lands at the Preserve (Figure 1). BLM-managed lands are defined as those lands where the BLM has a contractual and/or financial agreement in place with other Preserve partners to manage those lands on behalf of those individual partners. Currently, the BLM has formal written agreements and/or contracts to manage lands at the Preserve for the following partners: 1) California Department of Water Resources, 2) California State Lands Commission, 3) Ducks Unlimited, 4) Sacramento County Department of Regional Parks, and 5) The Nature Conservancy.

Some, if not most, of the commercial use, competitive events, and organized group activities that would be covered under the Proposed Action are already occurring on the Preserve, or on the related waterways that traverse the Preserve (*e.g.*, Cosumnes and Mokelumne Rivers). The BLM and its implementing Preserve partners have administered recreational facilities and sites on Preserve-owned lands for more than two decades, the majority of which includes four miles of hiking trails, a floating dock, and other associated amenities such as toilets, kiosks, parking lots, viewing platforms, benches, and similar recreation facilities. Due to the complex mixture of BLM and non-BLM-owned and managed lands (*i.e.*, other partner-owned and managed lands) at the Preserve, the majority of commercial users, competitive events, and organized groups use both BLM and other Preserve partner lands for their activities. In most cases, these users and other visitors are not aware that there are different agencies and entities that own and/or manage the Preserve under the BLM's oversight.

Under the Proposed Action the BLM would now require recreational permits for activities that originate on, or are wholly or partially conducted on, BLM-owned and BLM-managed lands, and related waterways, at the Preserve. This Programmatic Environmental Assessment (EA) is needed in order to eliminate the need to conduct individual environmental analyses each time that the BLM receives an individual request to conduct commonly occurring (*e.g.*, paddling) commercial use, a competitive event, or organized activity on BLM-owned and BLM-managed lands at the Preserve, provided that the newly proposed activities are consistent with the activities and stipulations already analyzed in this Programmatic EA and are not ground disturbing activities. Activities that fall outside the scope of this EA, would be considered and analyzed on a case-by-case basis under separate EAs, as needed.

## **1.2 Conformance with Applicable Land Use Plans**

In accordance with 43 CFR §1610.5-3, the Proposed Action is subject to, and conforms to, the BLM Sierra Resource Management Plan (Sierra RMP) and Record of Decision (ROD), dated February 2008. The Sierra RMP states the goal of the recreation program is to “ensure the continued availability of outdoor recreational opportunities while protecting other resources and uses,” (p.26).

The Proposed Action is also consistent with the Cosumnes River Preserve's March 2008 Final Management Plan, and with the following federal statutes, regulations, policies, and plans:

### **Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act (REA)**

Sections 3(h), 6(a) and (b) of REA provide authority for Federal agencies to issue and collect fees for permitted uses of Federal recreational lands and waters and to enter into fee management agreements/ contracts to collect, process, and share revenue with other governmental entities.

### **Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA)**

Section 302(b) of FLPMA directs the Secretary of the Interior to regulate through permits or other instruments the use of the public lands which includes commercial recreation use.

## **The Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) Act**

LWCF as amended authorizes the BLM to collect fees for recreational use and to issue special recreation permits for group activities and recreation events.

### **Code of Federal Regulations 43 Part 2930**

43 CFR 2930 and the associated handbook provide direction for authorizing commercial operations, competitive events and activities, and organized group activities and events. It outlines the direction for determining fees to ensure a fair return to the public for special uses of public lands.

## **2.0 Proposed Action and Alternatives**

### **2.1 Proposed Action: Programmatic Recreation Permit Program**

Under the Proposed Action the BLM would implement a programmatic Special Recreation Permit program for administering commercial, competitive, and organized group activities on BLM-owned and BLM-managed lands, and related waterways, at the Preserve. Under this alternative, the BLM would conduct an analysis in this EA of all known, and anticipated, common non-ground disturbing recreational activities (*e.g.*, paddling, tour groups, *etc.*) that may occur on Preserve lands over the next ten years. Criteria analyzed in this EA would be used to evaluate an application for commercial, competitive, or organized group activities, and determine whether to issue a Special Recreation Permit without further environmental analysis. Activities that fall outside the scope of the analysis conducted in this EA still would be considered, but would be analyzed on a case-by-case basis. The Proposed Action would not limit access and use to BLM-owned or BLM-managed land, or associated waterways, at the Preserve beyond the current access and activity limitations, unless it is deemed necessary by the BLM to protect the resources per the Preserve's March 2008 Final Management Plan. In such cases, the BLM would initiate an independent planning process to evaluate the possibility of a more restrictive permit issuance program to balance the needs of the public with appropriate resource management. All requests, whether analyzed and covered in this EA or on a case-by-case basis, would be subject to current BLM permit issuance guidance, policies, fee structures and cost recovery guidelines available at the time of the permit request.

The objectives of the Proposed Action include:

1. Develop a streamlined process for the issuance of Special Recreation Permits that accounts for multiple users using multiple lands and waterways owned and managed by the BLM as well as by multiple agencies and other non-governmental entities at the Preserve.
2. Develop a streamlined process that provides users and potential users with a single point of contact for recreational activities at the Preserve.
3. Ensure balanced, equitable, and efficient issuance and management of Special Recreation Permits.
4. Improve public service and reduce administrative costs for the BLM and permittees.

5. Ensure resource protection remains a high priority in managing authorized activities regardless of land ownership.
6. Ensure that the public receives fair return for commercial use of public lands and related waters.

Below is a list of some commercial, competitive, or organized group activities that have occurred, or do already occur, at the Preserve. These activities would, under the Proposed Action, now require a Special Recreation Permit for the use of BLM-owned or BLM-managed lands, and associated waterways, at the Preserve:

- Competitive group events (*e.g.*, water and rest stops for cycle races),
- Instructional/educational classes: either water-based (*i.e.*, canoeing) or shore-based (*i.e.*, art or photography classes),
- Water-based and/or waterway-dependent group activities (*e.g.*, commercial paddling tours),
- Land-based organized, group activities including, but not limited to, geo-caching, guided hikes or wildlife viewing, guided photography walks, guided birding tours, organized fishing or hunting events, and other similar activities or events that are not sponsored by, or conducted by, Preserve Staff and Volunteers,
- Fund-raising activities (*e.g.*, non-profit conservation organization donor tours).

## **2.2 Program Design Features**

### **2.2.1 Criteria for Activities and Fee Structure**

#### ***Commercial Use Permit Criteria***

Commercial use is defined as recreational use of public lands and related waters for business or financial gain. Financial gain includes gratuities, donations, gifts, bartering, etc. When any person, group, or organization makes or attempts to make a profit, vend a service or product, receive money, amortize equipment, or obtain goods or services as compensation for recreational activities occurring on public lands, the use is considered commercial. Compensation for recreation services may come from participants and/or other sources.

Other indicators of commercial use are when:

- a. Anyone collects a fee or receives other compensation that is not strictly a sharing of, or is in excess of, actual expenses incurred for the purposes of the activity, service or use; or,
- b. There is paid public advertising to seek participants; or,
- c. Participants pay for a duty of care or an expectation of safety.

Additionally:

- d. Profit-making organizations and organizations seeking to make a profit are automatically classified as commercial, even if that part of their activity covered by the permit is non profit-making or the business as a whole is non profitable; and,

- e. The use of the BLM-owned and BLM-managed lands, and associated waterways, at the Preserve by scientific, educational, and therapeutic institutions or non-profit organizations is commercial and subject to a permit requirement if it meets any of the criteria described above. The non-profit status of any group or organization does not alone determine that an event or activity arranged by such a group or organization is noncommercial.

### ***Vending Permit Criteria***

Vendor permits are authorizations to sell goods or services on public lands in conjunction with a recreation activity that directly supports or enhances the recreation experience. Examples might be t-shirt or postcard sales, food or water, *etc.*

**1. Vending in association with permitted event.** Vending under the Proposed Action would be associated with a commercial, permitted event. Examples of vendor permits include T-shirt sales in conjunction with a paddling event, a food or souvenir stand at a specific, permitted event, *etc.* Under the Proposed Action the vending may be included in the permit for the event. If not, the vendors would be required to obtain their own permit.

**2. Vending not associated with permitted events.** Vendors not in conjunction with an event would need to directly support or enhance the recreation experience and be appropriate for the Preserve, except in the case of BLM's implementing Preserve partners that currently sell small goods at the Preserve's Visitor's Center. Examples might be sales of food, souvenirs, clothing, and convenience items during one of the Preserve's major outreach and recreational events, such as the Galt Winter Bird Festival, which is an event that is hosted by the City of Galt, not the Preserve.

### ***Competitive Events Permit Criteria***

Competitive Use means any organized, sanctioned, or structured use, event, or activity on public land in which two or more contestants compete and either of the following elements applies:

- a. Participants register, enter, or complete an application for the event; or,
- b. A pre-determined course or area is designated; or,
- c. One or more individuals are contesting an established record such as speed or endurance; or,
- d. The event is publicly advertised; or,
- e. The event awards cash prizes; or,
- f. The activity poses an appreciable risk for damage to public lands or water resource values; or,
- g. The activity requires specific management or monitoring.

Examples of competitive events that may require a permit under the Proposed Action include cycling or foot races, geo-caching or orienteering course, *etc.* Competitive events also may be considered commercial events.

### ***Organized Group Permit Criteria***

An organized group is any group that is a structured, ordered, consolidated, or scheduled event on, or occupation of, public lands and related waters and associated sites for the purpose of recreational use that is not commercial or competitive.

A permit may be required if the organized group activity contains 15 or more people and/or meets one of the following criteria:

- a. The activity is publicly advertised; or,
- b. The activity poses an appreciable risk for damage to public lands or water resource values; or,
- c. The activity requires specific management or monitoring; or
- d. A reservation is required at a specific site or campground.

Examples of groups or events that may require a permit under the Proposed Action include a large scout campout, a fraternity activity, a large family reunion, wedding, reenactments, or other similar event held at the Preserve.

### ***Fee Structure***

Under the Proposed Action, all permit fees would be based on current permit fee structures and cost recovery guidelines established by the BLM. The fees would support the purposes of administrating the proposed program, and management and maintenance activities related to recreation and resource protection on BLM-owned and BLM-managed lands at the Preserve.

## **2.3 No Action Alternative**

Under the No Action Alternative, the BLM would continue to allow commercial, competitive, and organized group activities to occur at the Preserve without implementing a recreational permit system per 43 CFR 2930. Under this alternative, users and other visitors would continue to have access to existing Preserve lands and recreational facilities in the same manner that they have had access over the past two decades. However, as recreational users, and other visitor's use, increases over time, the level of use will reach a point where the Preserve's recreational facilities are over-used, thereby resulting in the degradation of the overall experience for the recreational users and visitors. This approach would also result in increased operations and maintenance costs over time.

## **2.4 Alternatives Considered but Eliminated from Detailed Analysis**

### **Recreation Permit Issuance on a Case-by-Case Basis**

Under this alternative, the BLM would continue to allow commercial, competitive, and organized group activities to occur at the Preserve. However, Special Recreation Permits would be issued on a case-by-case basis, as requested, per 43 CFR 2930. Under this alternative, the Preserve's recreational facilities and natural resources would be more fully protected by regulating the amount of use that each facility or area receives annually. However, issuing permits on a case-by-case basis, as requested by the user, would increase the BLM's workload and associated costs due to the need to complete individual EAs for each requested action. Therefore, this alternative was eliminated from further analysis because based on current use the rate of permit requests would immediately exceed the BLM's limited staff resources at the Preserve. At this time, the Preserve has only two BLM employees, and is not authorized BLM recreation staff positions on the Table of Organization.

## **3.0 Affected Environment**

This section describes the physical, biological, social, and economic resources in the action area and the potential environmental effects of the no action and the proposed action alternatives. When necessary, mitigation measures are also proposed to avoid or reduce any effects to less than significant.

The following critical elements have been considered in this environmental assessment, and unless specifically mentioned later in this EA, have been determined to be unaffected by the proposed action: soils, prime/unique farmlands, wild and scenic rivers, wilderness, traffic, climate change, and environmental justice.

### **Areas of Critical Environmental Concern**

Area of Critical of Environmental Concern (ACEC) are special management areas designated by the BLM to protect significant historic, cultural, or scenic values; fish and wildlife resources; natural process or systems; and/or natural hazards that:

- have more than locally significant qualities which give it special worth, consequence, meaning, distinctiveness, or cause for concern, especially compared to any similar resource;
- have qualities or circumstances that make it fragile, sensitive, rare, irreplaceable, exemplary, unique, endangered, threatened, or vulnerable to adverse change;
- has been recognized as warranting protection in order to satisfy national priority concerns or to carry out the mandates of Federal Land Management and Practices Act (FLMPA);
- has qualities which warrant highlighting in order to satisfy public or management concerns about safety and public welfare; and/or
- poses a significant threat to human life and safety or to property.

The proposed action area falls within the 2,035-acre Cosumnes River Preserve ACEC. Relevant and important values include the existence or potential for restoration of (1) valley oak (*Quercus lobata*) riparian forest; (2) seasonal wetlands; (3) oak (*Quercus spp.*) savannah; (4) agricultural lands that provide habitat for sandhill cranes (*Grus canadensis*) and a buffer for the Preserve.

## Noise

The Preserve has a continuous stream of visitors, staff, and volunteers moving and working throughout its boundaries every day, including weekends and holidays. Noise associated with vehicles, heavy equipment, handheld power equipment (hedge trimmers, weed trimmers, chainsaws *etc.*), visitors, recreational users, and other sources are common during daylight hours, and, to a certain extent, at night (*e.g.*, Interstate 5 traffic).

## Vegetation

The Preserve protects a rich diversity of plant species, 442 species have been identified, of which 279 (63%) are California natives, the remaining species are introduced to California. 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 downingia (*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*).

## **Wildlife**

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 packardi*), 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*).

## **Hydrology**

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.

## **Fisheries**

Thirty-eight fish species are found in the 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 Wildlife 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**

Recreational activities, such as bird watching, photography, nature study, hiking and paddling, are encouraged at the Preserve throughout the year. The four miles of trail system in the lower Preserve provides educational and recreational opportunities for visitors, local schools, universities, and others to explore the natural settings of the Preserve in a safe and effective manner. Recent data for 2015 shows a steady trend of increased use for the Preserve's boardwalk facility, for example, from approximately 7,500 unique visitors in 2011 to more than 10,000 visitors in 2015. The Preserve's trail system also includes another seven miles of trail located at Rancho Seco. This trail system allows visitors to explore vernal pool grassland areas that are permanently protected by the Preserve partnership.

Designated areas also have been set aside for limited-entry hunting on the Preserve. Fishing and hunting in general are allowed in all of the state waterways. The Visitor Center is the focal point for the majority of public access and education at the Preserve. The Preserve also offers

canoeing and kayaking opportunities as well as a self-guided driving tour throughout the public road system.

## **Visual Resources**

The Preserve is a major visual resource for the south 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. From within the 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.

## **Cultural Resources and Native Americans**

There are nearly 180 archaeological sites within the Cosumnes River floodplain that are recorded in the California Historical Resources Information System. There is one registered national historic landmark, the McFarland Ranch, as well as parts of the forested areas that are registered as national natural landmarks.

## **Fire & Fuels**

There is a wide variety of fuel types and structure at the Preserve which include grass, shrub and tree species. The Preserve has used prescribed fire for weed control and to reduce fuel loads. In addition, wildfires occur annually on Preserve lands caused by a variety of sources ranging from vehicle-caused fires to bird strikes at power lines. The affected fuels for the project include dried vegetation including 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**

The current landscape of Central Valley, including the lower Cosumnes watershed, consists largely of agriculture, 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 1980's and 90's. 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 nearly 10,000 K-12 students annually, of which 3,000 of these 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 Consumes River Preserve is used by graduate and undergraduate college students for research projects. The Preserve also has an active Volunteer program with several sub-groups and a total of over 100 volunteers.

Farming occurs on over 13,000 acres on the Preserve, and approximately 2,000 acres of additional farmland have been protected through conservation easements. Of the total 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.

#### **4.0 Environmental Effects**

As stated in Section 3.0, Affected Environment, the following critical elements have been considered in this environmental assessment and have been determined to be unaffected by the Proposed Action: soils, prime/unique farmlands, wild and scenic rivers, wilderness, traffic, climate and change, and environmental justice.

#### **4.1 Impacts of the Proposed Action and Alternatives**

##### **Areas of Critical Environmental Concern**

The proposed action would not significantly impact floodplains, wetlands and riparian zones, and the relevant and important values for which the area was designated an ACEC. The activities that would be covered under the Proposed Action are already occurring at the Preserve.

##### **Noise**

Sounds relating to recreational activities can be expected as a result of the Proposed Action. However, the proposed action would not significantly affect the Preserve native and non-native species because the activities that would be covered under the Proposed Action are already occurring to some extent at the Preserve.

##### **Vegetation & Wildlife**

The Preserve's recreational areas and facilities experience moderate to high levels human presence throughout the year as a result of existing user activity, visitor activity, and staff/volunteer duties. The Proposed Action would not increase any adverse effects. In fact, the Proposed Action would serve to track and regulate, if needed, the amount of adverse impacts that may occur on BLM-owned or BLM-managed lands, and associated waterways, at the Preserve. As such, no adverse effect on vegetation and wildlife would be expected as a result of this Proposed Action.

## **Hydrology & Fisheries**

The proposed action would have no adverse effect on hydrology. The Preserve is a riverine preserve with a relatively natural hydrological system. The activities that would be covered under the Proposed Action have been occurring at the Preserve for nearly 30 years with no evidence of any adverse effect on hydrology.

The proposed action would have no adverse effect on fisheries. The Preserve allows visitors to launch non-motorized watercraft from the dock, but fishing from the banks is strictly prohibited to protect the streamside vegetation. The activities that would be covered under the Proposed Action have been occurring at the Preserve for nearly 30 years with no evidence of any adverse effect on fisheries, which are protected and regulated primarily via state laws.

## **Recreation**

The Proposed Action would not adversely affect the Preserve. In fact, the Proposed Action would serve to track and regulate, if needed, the amount of adverse impacts that may occur at the Preserve. As such, the Proposed Action is expected to have a beneficial effect on recreation at the Preserve.

## **Visual Resources**

The proposed action would not adversely affect visual resources. Moderate to high levels of human activity are already common at the Preserve. As indicated on page 3-39, Table 3-11 of the Sierra Proposed RMP/Final EIS the BLM currently manages the Preserve lands in accordance with VRM class II standards, which is to retain the existing character of the landscape (no disruption of basic elements, changes should not be evident) and VRM class III standards, which is to retain partial character (changes may be evident but subordinate). Since recreational uses are already occurring at the Preserve in an unmanaged manner without a permitting system, the Proposed Action would serve to further protect the visual resources at the Preserve by providing regulatory protection/monitoring measures for the recreational uses.

## **Cultural Resources**

The Proposed Action has been reviewed to determine whether significant cultural resources would be affected, in accordance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act. Since recreational uses are already occurring at the Preserve in an unmanaged manner without a permitting system, the Proposed Action would serve to further protect the cultural resources at the Preserve by potentially limiting the amount of activity that would occur in, on or near a known cultural site.

## **4.2 Impacts of the No Action Alternative**

Under the No Action alternative, users and other visitors would continue to have access to existing Preserve lands and recreational facilities in the same manner that they have had access

over the past two decades. However, as recreational users, and other visitor's use, increases over time, the level of use will reach a point where the Preserve's recreational facilities are over-used, thereby resulting in the degradation of the facilities, the land, and the overall experience for the recreational users and visitors. This approach would result in increased operations and maintenance costs over time, and could eventually cause the BLM to close the Preserve's recreational facilities as a means of protecting visitors, as well as natural resources.

### **Areas of Critical Environmental Concern**

Under the No Action alternative, the recreational opportunities at the Preserve could potentially impact floodplains, wetlands and riparian zones, and the relevant and important values for which the area was designated an ACEC as more and more people flock to the Preserve to exploit the recreational activities.

### **Noise**

Sounds relating to recreational activities could be expected to increase under the No Action alternative as more and more people pursue recreational opportunities at the Preserve.

### **Vegetation & Wildlife**

Vegetation and wildlife would be expected to be adversely affected under the No Action alternative. Streamside and trailside vegetation would be trampled as more people use the facilities. Wildlife, especially migratory waterfowl and waterbirds, would be expected to be flushed off of wintering habitat as more people try to get better views of the birds.

### **Hydrology & Fisheries**

The No Action alternative would not be expected to have a significant adverse effect on hydrology or fisheries since water-based recreation (*e.g.*, canoeing) has been occurring at the Preserve for nearly 30 years with no evidence of any adverse effect on hydrology or fisheries.

### **Recreation**

Under the No Action alternative, the recreational opportunities at the Preserve could potentially diminish as more and more users and visitors utilize the Preserve's limited recreational resources and facilities. If this happened, users and visitors would be deprived of a unique recreational experience, and students, schools could lose a valuable educational opportunity through the use of the recreational facilities offered by the Preserve.

### **Visual Resources**

The No Action alternative would not affect the current visual resources of the Preserve. The natural landscape and views would essentially remain the same, although localized degradation would occur as people trample low growing vegetation along the river and trails due to the lack of control and regulatory measures that permits would otherwise provide.

## **Cultural Resources**

The No Action alternative would not be expected to adversely affect cultural resources because most known sites are located in closed areas of the Preserve where they are protected from visitors.

### **4.3 Cumulative Impacts**

NEPA regulations require that an Environmental Assessment discuss proposed action impacts that, when combined with the impacts from other actions, could result in cumulative effects (40 CFR 1508.25). Cumulative impacts may result from individually minor, but collectively significant, effects of several projects over a period of time.

There are many other urban and agricultural projects occurring in the lower Cosumnes River watershed on a regular basis. These projects generally include anything from the construction of large-scale urban development projects within the city limits of Galt or Elk Grove, California to smaller projects like the Proposed Action that may be implemented by other agencies or entities such as the neighboring Stone Lakes National Wildlife Refuge. Most recently, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, for example, released a draft Environmental Impact Statement for the potential development of an Indian gaming casino located on 282 acres north of the Galt city limit and west of Highway 99. In the end, there are no short-term, long-term, site-specific, or regional-scale cumulative impacts expected from the Proposed Action because it would be implemented on existing Preserve lands as a means of more fully protecting the Preserve's natural resources, recreational facilities, and visitor's outdoor experience.

## **5.0 Agencies and Persons Consulted**

Cosumnes River Preserve partners were consulted numerous times as part of the Proposed Action.

### **5.1 Author**

Harry McQuillen, BLM Preserve Manager, Cosumnes River Preserve

## 5.2 BLM Interdisciplinary Team/Reviewers:

*/s/ Alden Neel* 2/24/2016

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Alden Neel  
Archaeologist Date

*/s/ Jeff Horn* 2/18/16

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Jeff Horn  
Recreation Manager/VRM Specialist Date

*/s/ Beth Brenneman* 2/19/16

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Beth Brenneman  
Botanist Date

*/s/ mark Ackerman* 2/22/16

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Mark Ackerman  
Wildlife biologist Date

## 5.3 Availability of Document and Comment Procedures

This EA will be posted on Mother Lode Field Office's website ([www.blm.gov/ca/motherlode](http://www.blm.gov/ca/motherlode)) under NEPA and will be available for a 15-day public review period. The EA is also available by mail upon request during this 15-day public review period. Comments should be sent to Heather Daniels at Bureau of Land Management, Mother Lode Field Office, 5152 Hillsdale Circle, El Dorado, CA, 95762, or emailed to [hdaniels@blm.gov](mailto:hdaniels@blm.gov).

## 6.0. References

Bureau of Land Management (BLM), 2008. Sierra Resource Management Plan and Record of Decision. February 2008. Available from:  
[http://www.blm.gov/ca/st/en/fo/folsom/rmp\\_index\\_page.html](http://www.blm.gov/ca/st/en/fo/folsom/rmp_index_page.html)

Kleinschmidt. 2008. Cosumnes River Preserve Management Plan, Final. March 2008. Prepared for Cosumnes River Preserve. Available from:  
<http://www.cosumnes.org/about-the-preserve/>.

# Cosumnes River Preserve Property Map

