

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT COVER SHEET

EA Roster Number: CA-180-08-03

TYPE OF EA

 Application(s) (Non-BLM)

Standard MAD

 X BLM Proposal(s)

 X Programmatic

Type of Application(s) or Proposals(s):

Environmental Assessment for the Pine Hill Preserve Management Plan

Assessment Title:

Environmental Assessment for the Pine Hill Preserve Management Plan

Legal Description:

See EA and Plan for legal descriptions and Map in Appendix A

County:

El Dorado County

Planning Unit and Management Area:

Sierra Proposed Resource Management Plan

Sierra Planning Area Management Framework Plan

Prepared By:

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United States Department of the Interior



BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

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Proposed Action: Protect and manage habitat for rare plants growing on gabbro soils in western El Dorado County, CA, through implementation of the Pine Hill Preserve (Preserve) Management Plan (Plan).

The proposed action includes adoption of management tasks listed in the draft Plan (attached), and seeks for the general public input to refine and/or modify these tasks and developed them into a final Plan for management of publicly-owned lands within the Preserve.

Location: The 4, 402-acre Preserve, is located in central Sierra foothills in western El Dorado County (EDC), north of Highway 50 and southeast of Folsom Lake (Figure 1), approximately 30 miles east of Sacramento, and in portions of Sections 2 and 3 of T9N, R9E, portions of Sections 4-7, 9, 10, 14, 16, 18 and 34 of T10N R9E, a portion of Section 36 of T11N R8E and portions of Sections 29-32 of T11N R9E of the Mount Diablo Base and Meridian. Of the 4.402 acres that are part of the Preserve system, 3,284 are under Bureau of Land Management (BLM) ownership and the rest are under other federal, State and local government ownership (Table I).

1.0 Purpose of and Need for Action

Because the Preserve was established to protect rare plants threatened by habitat destruction and/or degradation and the mission of the Preserve is to conserve in perpetuity the rare plant species and plant communities of the western EDC gabbro soil formation, the preparation and implementation of a Plan is needed to guide management activities that will help to fulfill the Preserve's mission.

The purpose of the Plan is to coordinate management activities at the Preserve with actions undertaken by federal, State and local agencies, conservation organizations and private land owners to fulfill the mission of the Preserve. The Plan will also serve as basis for future consultation with State and federal wildlife agencies to evaluate impacts of management activities on the rare plants.

1.1 Conformance with Applicable Land Use Plans

The proposed action is subject to the BLM's 2007 Sierra Proposed Resource Management Plan and the 1983 Sierra Planning Area Management Framework Plan. The proposed action also provides for

implementation of recovery actions for five federally listed species described in the US Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) 2002 Recovery Plan for Gabbro Soil Plants of the Central Sierra Nevada Foothills.

1.2 Background Information

The Preserve was established in 2001 to ensure that habitat for eight rare plant species, growing on gabbro soils at western EDC, would be protected from factors threatening survival and recovery of the rare plants. The gabbro is a unique soil formation in western EDC that supports chaparral, woodland and grassland vegetation types and sustains about 10% of the total California plant diversity. In addition to plant species richness, several special status plant species exist in the habitat types of the gabbro soil formation, including the State and/or federally listed *Calystegia stebbinsii* (Stebbins' morning-glory), *Ceanothus roderickii* (Pine Hill ceanothus), *Galium californicum* ssp. *sierrae* (El Dorado bedstraw), *Fremontodendron californicum* ssp. *decumbens* (Pine Hill flannelbush) and *Packera layneae* (Layne's butterweed), and the rare *Chlorogalum grandiflorum* (Red Hills soaproot), *Helianthemum suffrutescens* (Bisbee Peak rush-rose) and *Wyethia reticulata* (El Dorado mule-ears).

Cooperation among agencies and organizations concerned with protection of the rare plants was formalized on March 1, 2001 with the signing of a Cooperative Management Agreement (Agreement). On July 18, 2006, after reaching its 5-year term, the Agreement was ratified by the different Cooperative Management parties. A copy of the 2006 Agreement can be viewed as Appendix 1 of the attached Plan. This new Agreement will be in effect until July 2011. Participants of the Agreement include nine local, State and federal agencies, including BLM, Bureau of Reclamation (BOR), Cal Fire, FWS, California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG), EDC, El Dorado Irrigation District, El Dorado County Water Agency and the private non-profit American River Conservancy (ARC).

Currently, the Preserve provides protection and management for 4,042 acres of rare plant habitat within five non-contiguous sites or units: Cameron Park, Pine Hill, Martel Creek, Penny Lane and Salmon Falls. Of the 4,042 preserved acres 3,154 lie within a FWS 5,000-acre area designated for the recovery of the federally listed rare plants.

Main management issues at the Preserve include protection of habitat, reducing fuels loads to enhance habitat for the rare plants and minimize the risk of fire for human lives/property, lack of direct access to most of the Preserve sites, uses that may not be compatible with protection of the rare plants, filling in research and monitoring gaps that will allow for science-based management decision, and providing the general public with educational and recreational activities compatible with the protection of the rare plants. A more detailed description of management issues and the strategies to approach these issues is found in the attached Plan document.

2.0 Proposed Action and Alternatives

2.1 Proposed Action

The proposed action, implementation of the Plan, includes tasks that are needed to manage BLM administered lands within the Preserve and also address main issues that are common to all lands within the Preserve, including State and local government lands. Most BLM parcels at the Preserve contain special resource values which need increased levels of protection not presently authorized or supported by BLM's existing plan uses. The presence of rare plants and/or gabbro soils vegetation type habitats at all BLM owned Preserve parcels also requires for special type of management to enhance habitat for these species. The Plan may also serve as a guide for management of adjacent public and privately owned lands within the gabbro soil formation that can be set aside and/or managed for rare plant conservation purposes.

This alternative reflects an evaluation of present threats to the rare plants and/or their habitats, compilation and analysis of scientific data available, feasibility of implementing management decisions, resource allocations, and an economical analysis developed by the BLM and in cooperation with the different Preserve CMA parties. Tasks associated to this Proposed Action address land protection, fuels load reduction, Preserve access, research and monitoring, habitat restoration, education and outreach, public uses, public roads and highway extension projects and visual and cultural resources issues. These tasks are described in the draft Plan document.

2.2 No Action

Under this alternative, the BLM administered lands in the Preserve would continue to be managed under the Sierra Planning Area Management Framework Plan, which provides little or no specific activity level guidance, and does not take into consideration newly acquired lands, as is the case for some of the BLM administered lands at the Pine Hill Preserve. Present levels of management would continue, no specific protection for the rare plants or their habitat would be provided and main management concerns would remain at current levels and condition.

3.0 Affected Environment

Physical description. The 4,042-acre Preserve is located in the central Sierra foothills in western EDC, north of Highway 50 and southeast of Folsom Lake, approximately 30 miles east of Sacramento. Elevations at the Preserve range from 480 to 2,059 feet above sea level. The Preserve is formed by five non-contiguous units that stretch over a 30,000-acre area of the gabbro soil formation (Figure 1). These units are: Cameron Park (454 acres), Martel Creek (320 acres), Penny Lane (166 acres), Pine Hill (403 acres) and Salmon Falls (2,699 acres). The different Preserve parcels are owned by the BLM, BOR, CalFire, CDFG and EDC. The total acreage by ownership at the Preserve is shown in Table I.

Climate and Hydrology. The climate is characterized as Mediterranean with cool wet winters and hot dry summers. Average precipitation and temperature during the last five years are 31 inches per year and 63° F, respectively; the average minimum and maximum temperatures during the past five are 29° F and 113° F. A portion of the South Fork American River runs through the Preserve and several intermittent and perennial creeks in the Preserve (Sweetwater, Martel and Weber Creeks) flow into the South Fork American River.

Vegetation. Vegetation at the Pine Hill area is represented by three distinct types: grassland, woodland and chaparral. The majority of the Preserve is covered with chaparral species. More than 700 species (approximately 10 percent of the native species in California) are represented in the gabbro soils formation and adjacent areas and the Pine Hill area has the highest concentration of rare and endangered plants in EDC. This high concentration is represented in areas set aside for conservation purposes within the Preserve and the surrounding remaining pockets of natural habitat.

Table I. Pine Hill Preserve total acreage by ownership and unit.

Owner	Unit	Acreage
BLM	Cameron Park	392
	Martel Creek	320
	Penny Lane	166
	Pine Hill	60
	Salmon Falls	2,346
BOR	Salmon Falls	29
State of California	Pine Hills	320
	Salmon Falls	305
EDC	Cameron Park	63
	Pine Hill	22
	Salmon Falls	19
Total		4,042

Northern Mixed Chaparral is the main vegetation type at the Preserve, also described as gabbroic northern mixed chaparral. Primary species are chamise, white leaf Manzanita, toyon, California redbud, poison oak, different species of ceanothus, and California buckthorn. The woodland vegetation type is represented by grey pine, ponderosa pine, interior live oak, blue oak and California black oak in combination with the chaparral species. The rare Pine Hill flannelbush, Layne's butterweed, El Dorado mule-ears, Red Hills soaproot and Bisbee Peak rush-rose are also found in

woodland areas. Grassland in the Preserve are mostly represented by non-native grasses such as brome and little quaking grass, although some native species such as needlegrass, bluegrass and Western ryegrass are also present. Grassland patches occur in openings within the chaparral and woodland vegetation types, and in combination with the chaparral species. Distribution of rare plants at the Preserve by habitat type is shown in Table II.

The Preserve's vegetation is not only rich in plant diversity (see Appendix 2 of the attached Plan for a list of plant species of the Pine Hill unit and surrounding areas), but it also helps to support a diversity of wildlife in the area. Over 240 species of wildlife are known to occur within and near the Preserve (Appendix 3 of the attached Plan).

Other Wildlife Species. In addition, there are numerous insects including the different pollinators required for rare plant reproduction. An undetermined number of fungi, soil bacteria, and algae also exist in protected areas within the Preserve. Because the mechanisms for the conservation of the rare plants depends upon the existence and functionality of the entire ecosystem, conservation and management efforts should also focus on preserving the soil, hydrology and adequate fire regimes to sustain all wildlife species and their interactions.

Table II. Distribution of rare plants at the Pine Hill Preserve by habitat type.

Species	Habitat types	Preserve Unit
Stebbins' morning-glory	Chaparral	Cameron Park and Salmon Falls
Pine Hill ceanothus	Chaparral, chaparral/grassland transition	Cameron Park, Pine Hill and Salmon Falls
Pine Hill flannelbush	Chaparral, chaparral/woodland transition	Pine Hill
El Dorado bedstraw	Woodland, chaparral	Cameron Park, Pine Hill and Penny Lane
Layne's butterweed	Chaparral, woodland and grassland patches	Cameron Park, Martel Creek, Penny Lane, Pine Hill and Salmon Falls
El Dorado mule-ears	Chaparral, woodland and grassland patches	Cameron Park, Martel Creek, Penny Lane, Pine Hill and Salmon Falls
Red Hills soaproot	Chaparral, woodland and grassland patches	Cameron Park, Martel Creek, Penny Lane, Pine Hill and Salmon Falls
Bisbee Peak rush-rose	Chaparral, woodland and grassland patches	Cameron Park, Martel Creek, Pine Hill and Salmon Falls

Cultural resources. There is no clear pattern of historic land use in the gabbro soils area, although in general more settlement and ranching/farming activities were established in the relatively flat, oak woodlands compared to the chaparral-covered hills although existing records suggest decades of intensive mining in the area beginning during the Gold Rush. For decades, towns like Salmon Falls, Shingle Springs, and Rescue were significant service centers for local miners and, as a consequence, placer and hardrock mining sites occur in the Preserve and adjacent areas.

4.0 Environmental Effects

The critical elements considered for this environmental assessment are air quality, areas of critical environmental concern (ACEC), environmental justice, prime/unique farmlands, floodplains, invasive and nonnative weeds, water quality, cultural resources and native American concerns, threatened or endangered species, hazardous waste/solid, water quality, wetlands and riparian zones, wild and scenic rivers, and wilderness.

4.1 Impacts of the Proposed Action and Alternatives

4.1.1 Critical elements that have been determined to be unaffected by the proposal are: prime/unique farmlands, hazardous waste/solid and wilderness. The Preserve manages only lands with natural habitat and the gabbro soils and rather steep terrain at and around Preserve lands have no farmlands. There are no designated wilderness areas at or in the vicinity of the Preserve lands, and there are not current operations that would result in hazardous waste/solid materials at Preserve lands.

4.1.2 Critical elements that have been determined to have a positive impact as a result of the proposed action include a proposed ACEC, environmental justice, floodplains, invasive and nonnative weeds, water quality, cultural resources and native American concerns, water quality, wetlands and riparian zones and wild and scenic rivers.

ACEC. The BLM 2007 Sierra Proposed Resource Management Plan proposes that the Preserve be designated as an ACEC. If the Preserve is designated as an ACEC, the BLM will be required to protect its important natural resources and certain public restrictions will apply. Only BLM Preserve lands are included under this proposed ACEC designation. 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 resources impact. If there are conflicts between plant protection and public access, plant protection will be prioritized.

Environmental Justice. The Preserve contributes to the wealth and health of the public in general by protecting natural resources and providing opportunities for recreation and education. Most of the adjacent landowners are pleased to have preserved lands next to their property, enjoying the natural views and recognizing that their property value and life quality increase as a result of the Preserve's open space, cleaner environment, and development restrictions on preserved lands that help reduce overcrowding and ease traffic concerns.

Floodplains, water quality, wetlands and riparian zones. Because the proposed action promotes the protection of natural habitat, it would also promote the protection of hydrological features by preventing soil erosion and deposition of debris in the South Fork American River and several intermittent and perennial creeks in the Preserve. Protection of natural habitat will also have a positive effect on the watershed and water quality. Outlined tasks in the Plan, such as land (habitat) protection and the non use of herbicides or other chemicals on Preserve lands will also help maintain and enhance the water quality.

Invasive and nonnative weeds. The proposed action will help to control the invasion and proliferation of invasive non native weeds, in order to protect natural habitat for the rare plants, without the use of chemicals.

Cultural resources and native American concerns. Although the potential for significant cultural resources, both historic and prehistoric, to occur in the Preserve appears to be low, the proposed action includes compliance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act and other cultural resource laws and executive orders in advance of any projects with potential adverse effects to cultural resources. Projects at the Preserve that may affect cultural resources include building trails, parking lots, and other facilities for public access. At the Preserve, there are no major sources of natural or historic resources that are of interest to native Americans, although protection of lands and natural habitat at the Preserve will help to provide with natural sources for plants that may be important for religious or medicinal purposes.

Wild and scenic rivers. The different tasks listed in the proposed action will help to maintain the scenic features and values of the South Fork American River. Mining and dredging operation may alter these values and, if BLM land in the Preserve is designated an ACEC, mining and dredging claimants will have to file a Plan of Operations for activities that will not conflict with the protection of rare plants.

Because the proposed action will provide the Preserve with a framework for management activities that will benefit the rare plants and their habitats, the above mentioned critical elements will be protected and/or enhanced as a result of management activities on Preserve lands.

4.1.3. Critical elements that may be affected as a result of the proposed action are air quality and threatened or endangered species. The potential effects on these elements will be temporal and below a level of significance that would result in permanent detrimental effects on the environment.

Air Quality. This critical element will be affected if prescribed burning to reduce fuels loads at the Preserve is implemented. However, because the proximity of the Preserve with densely human populated areas and the associated risks for human lives and property, the use of fire to reduce fuels loads is not likely to happen. The proposed action lists other alternatives, such as removal of shrub by mechanical methods, to manage fuels load at the Preserve. Fuels reduction practices at the Preserve, including mechanical methods and the potential use of fire, would be in compliance with the FWS

Biological Opinions 1-1-01-F-0219, 1-1-04-F-0048, 1-1-04-F-0178 and 1-1-07-F-0189, and the BLM Environmental Assessments CA-180-02-56, CA-180-03-18, and CA-180-07-70 (attached). In all these documents the effects of fuels reduction practices at the Preserve and surrounding environment have been analyzed and avoidance, minimization of impacts, and mitigation have been outlined. If prescribed burning were to be implemented there is a potential for temporary impact on air quality. Potential prescribed burning at the Preserve will not affect air quality permanently and, by reducing the amount of fuels, it would help prevent catastrophic non-controlled fire events and it would contribute to the protection of natural habitat and human lives and property.

Threatened and endangered species (T&E). The proposed action will help to fulfill the Preserve's mission to conserve in perpetuity the rare plant species and plant communities of the western EDC gabbro soil formation, including the five species that are federally listed. However, there may be occasions when temporary damage to these species may be result of implemented management practices such as fuels reduction. In order to avoid, minimize and/or mitigate for potential impacts on T&E species, the BLM will consult with the FWS for particular projects that may result in temporary impacts to the rare plants. These potential impacts will be to a level of significance acceptable to result in the long term benefit of these species and their habitats.

4.2 Impacts of the No Action Alternative

If the project were not conducted, there would be no impacts to air quality, prime/unique farmlands, hazardous waste/solid, wild and scenic rivers, and wilderness.

If the project were not conducted, there could be a negative impact regarding areas of critical environmental concern (ACEC), environmental justice, floodplains, invasive and nonnative weeds, water quality, cultural resources and native American concerns, threatened or endangered species, water quality, wetlands and riparian zones, wild and scenic rivers, and wilderness. The implementation of the Plan would provide the Preserve with a framework to conduct activities that will benefit the rare plants and their habitats. However, if the Plan is not implemented habitat for the rare plants will degrade in the absence of adequate management and, therefore, would have a detrimental impact over some of the environmental critical elements.

4.3 Cumulative Impacts

Because there are no long term site specific adverse impacts expected for air quality, areas of critical environmental concern (ACEC), environmental justice, prime/unique farmlands, floodplains, invasive and nonnative weeds, water quality, cultural resources and native American concerns, threatened or endangered species, hazardous waste/solid, water quality, wetlands and riparian zones, wild and scenic rivers, and wilderness, no cumulative impacts are expected at a larger scale.

5.0 Agencies and Persons Consulted

The following persons and agencies participated in the development of the Plan and/or EA documents.

5.1 BLM Interdisciplinary Team (Plan development, review and EA document)

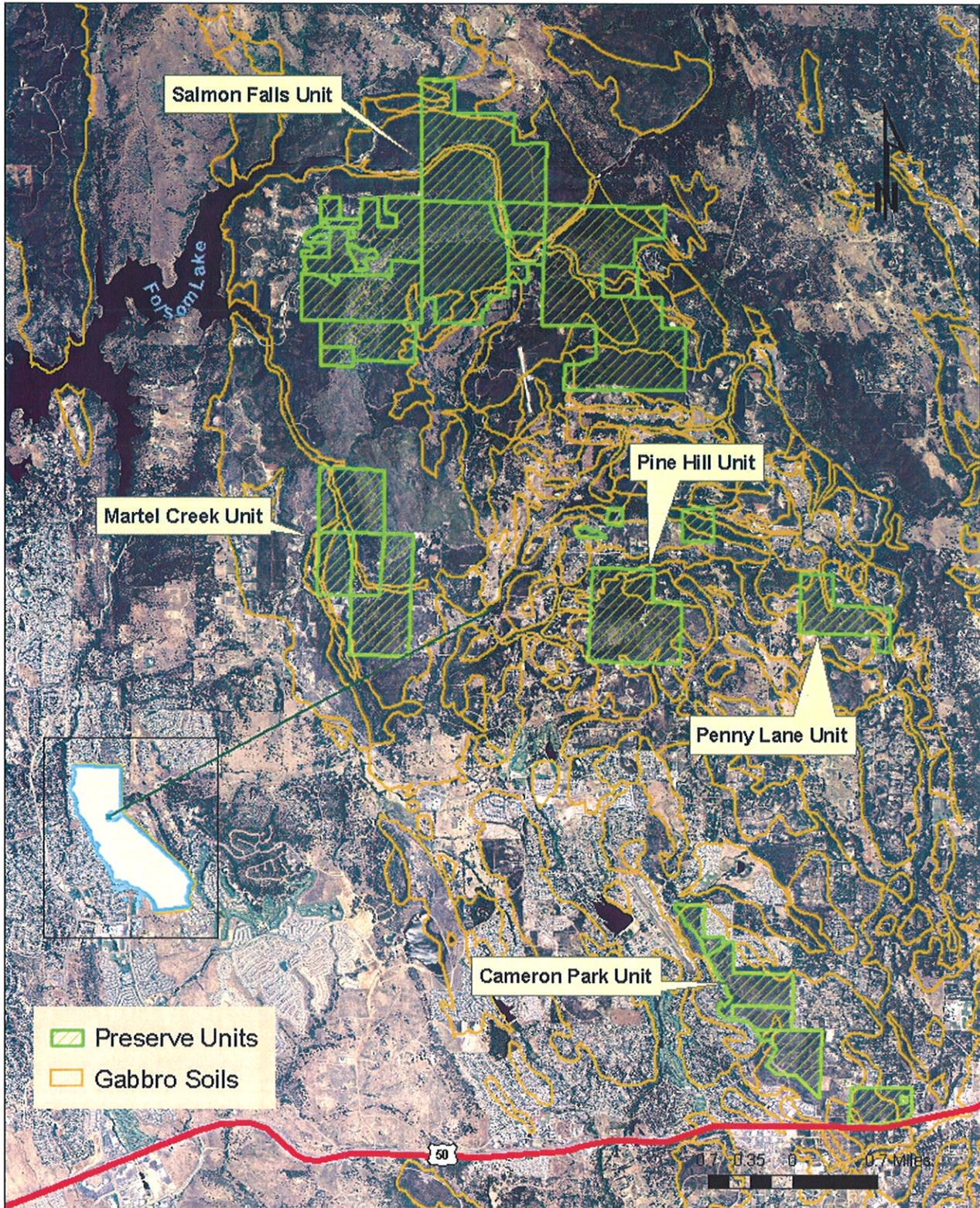
- James Barnes- Cultural Resources
- James Eicher- Associated Field Manager
- Al Franklin -Botany
- William Haigh- Field Manager
- Graciela Hinshaw-Preserve manager
- Sandra McGinnis-NEPA Coordinator
- Melanie Panganiban-Volunteer/manager assistant

5.2 Other Personnel, Agencies and Organizations (Plan development)

- Alan Erghott, American River Conservancy-Review and comments
- Brian Deason, Bureau of Reclamation-Review
- Roberta Gerson, Fish and Wildlife Service-Review and comments
- Todd Gardner, California Department of Fish and Game-Review and comments
- Jason Holley, California Department of Fish and Game-Review
- Steve Hust, El Dorado County Planning Services-Review and comments
- Tamy Scowcroft, El Dorado County Water Agency-Review
- Peter Trenham, Fish and Wildlife Service-Review and comments
- Chris Waters, CalFire-Review
- David Witter, El Dorado Irrigation District-Review

5.3 Availability of Document and Comment Procedures

The EA, posted on Folsom Field Office's website (www.blm.gov/ca/folsom) under Information, NEPA (or available upon request), will be available for a 30-day public review period. Before including your address, phone number, email address, or other personal identifying information in your comment, you should be aware that your entire comment – including your personal identifying information – may be made publicly available at any time. Comments should be sent to the BLM-Pine Hill Preserve at 63 Natoma Street, Folsom, CA 95630 or emailed to us at Graciela_Hinshaw@ca.blm.gov.



PINE HILL PRESERVE MAP