



Council to divvy up PG&E land in Mokelumne River watershed

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The Pacific Forest and Watershed Lands Stewardship Council is soliciting organizations to care for thousands of acres within the Mokelumne River watershed.

The council was formed to divvy up 140,000 acres of land across 22 California counties, including 240 acres surrounding Kennedy Meadows Pack Station, as part of a Pacific Gas and Electric Co. bankruptcy agreement.

Council staff was expected to make a recommendation on the Kennedy Meadows plot to the council board of directors by the end of April, but the deadline is most likely not going to be met, said Mary Adelzadeh, council regional land conservation manager.

If the council board of directors approves staff's recommendation, PG&E would still have to accept the board's decision. Then PG&E and the accepted organization would enter into negotiations on a land conservation plan.

The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission and the California Public Utilities Commission have to approve the plan.

Council staff is currently reviewing proposals from the U.S. Forest Service and joint proposals from Tuolumne County and the Tuolumne County Resource Conservation District for the Kennedy Meadows plot.

The council hopes to make it through the process for Kennedy Meadows by May 2010, Adelzadeh said.

In the meantime, the council is moving forward with its next round of land allotments.

The following three land units in the Mokelumne River watershed are part of the second round of land to be divvied up:

- The Blue Lake unit is more than 2,000 acres of forest and waterways in Alpine County. This plot contains four high elevation (over 8,000 feet), glacial step lakes, which include Upper Blue, Lower Blue, Twin and Meadow lakes. Also, sections of the Middle, Blue, Meadow and Deer creeks flow through the area.

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Trout are plentiful in the lakes and creeks. Also, pine marten, snowshoe hare, Pacific fisher and the mountain yellow-legged frog are native to the land.

The plot has a variety of recreational activities, including hunting, fishing, off-highway vehicle use and boating. There are several developed campground and day-use areas within the chunk of wilderness.

The area is surrounded by Forest Service land and the Mokelumne Wilderness on the western border.

- The North Fork Mokelumne River unit is made up of separate parcels scattered along a 30-mile section of the North Fork and main stem of the Mokelumne River in Calaveras and Amador counties. The plots total about 3,400 acres and rise from about 700- to 4,200-foot elevation.

The unit also includes portions of East and West Panther creeks, Tiger Creek, Tiger Creek Reservoir, Tiger Creek Regulatory Reservoir and Lake Tabeaud.

Many of these waterways have self-sustaining populations of brown, rainbow and brook trout.

Land along Tiger and Panther creeks have ongoing PG&E timber harvests and plans for future harvests. Also, the land is within traditional territory of the Northern Sierra Miwok.

The Bureau of Land Management, Forest Service and Sierra Pacific Industries are the main adjacent landowners.

- The Lower Bear unit includes about 1,800 acres in Amador County, including portions of Lower Bear River and Upper Bear River reservoirs. This planning unit is almost completely surrounded by the El Dorado National Forest.

There is interest from the Amador Water Agency in expanding Lower Bear River Reservoir for future water demands.

The unit includes popular outdoor recreational opportunities, including swimming, boating, hiking, camping and OHV use. There are several El Dorado Forest-managed campgrounds on Lower Bear Reservoir. Lower Bear River Reservoir is known for being an exceptional trout fishery.

There are also about 55 miles of popular snowmobile trails in the unit.

The council is looking for qualified organizations that are interested in holding conservation easements or owning these lands, said Toby Perry, council land conservation manager.

Public entities, nonprofit organizations and California recognized tribes are encouraged to register for consideration. Groups can register on the council's Web site at www.stewardshipcouncil.org.

There will be several public workshops over the summer to garner public input about the future of these lands, Perry said.

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