

CHILI BAR PLANNING UNIT

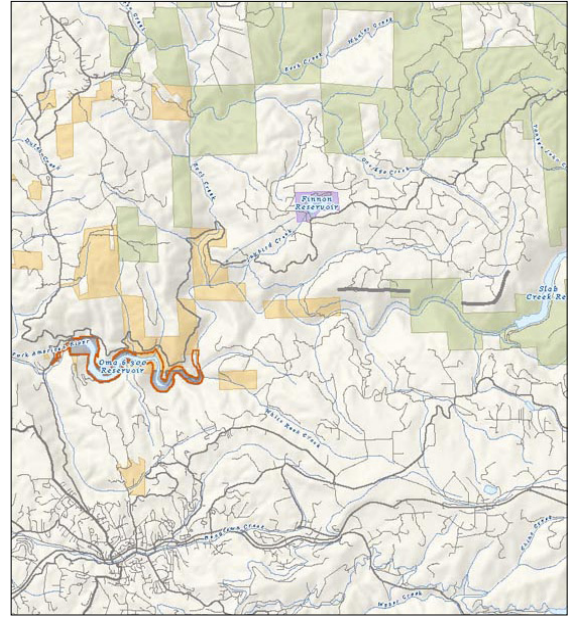
Yuba-Bear River Watershed

Existing Conditions & Uses

Overview

- Forested, steep river canyon surrounding Chili Bar Reservoir, upstream from the popular Chili Bar whitewater run
- 226 acres in El Dorado County; 30 acres outside the FERC boundary and 196 acres inside the FERC boundary
- Part of the Chili Bar Project (FERC #2155); License Application filed July 2005

The Chili Bar Planning Unit is located in the Sierra foothills on the South Fork American River (SFAR). Most of the planning unit is occupied by the 110-acre Chili Bar Reservoir and adjacent lands at an elevation range of 100 to 1,300 feet. The reservoir is situated in a steep-sided canyon with primarily scrub oak and oak woodland vegetation on the north side and Douglas-fir and pine on the south side. As shown in Figure YB-11, the Chili Bar Planning Unit is located one mile north of Placerville and is accessed by Highway 193, which connects to Highway 50, a popular route between Sacramento and South Lake Tahoe.



Chili Bar Planning Unit
El Dorado County

A few miles farther up the canyon are additional planning unit parcels that are not associated with the Chili Bar Project, primarily in two narrow mile-long strips. These lands, comprising about 25 acres in total, were occupied by features of the former American River Project.¹ The elevation range for these parcels is from 2,000 to 2,800 feet and they are accessed by using County, private, and USFS roads. Adjacent land ownership around Chili Bar Reservoir is both public (primarily BLM) and private and supports land uses such as ranching, grape cultivation, and outdoor recreation. The eastern, linear parcels are primarily surrounded by private and USFS lands.



Chili Bar Dam (looking south)

The Chili Bar Project is located downstream from the larger Upper American River Project (UARP, FERC #2101) that is operated by the Sacramento Municipal Utility District (SMUD).² The UARP controls flow into Chili Bar Reservoir and influences potential recreation activities on the reservoir through upstream releases into the SFAR. Frequently, only part of the inflow into the reservoir can be passed through the Chili Bar Powerhouse below the dam, and the remaining water spills over the dam.

Chili Bar Planning Unit

Existing Conditions

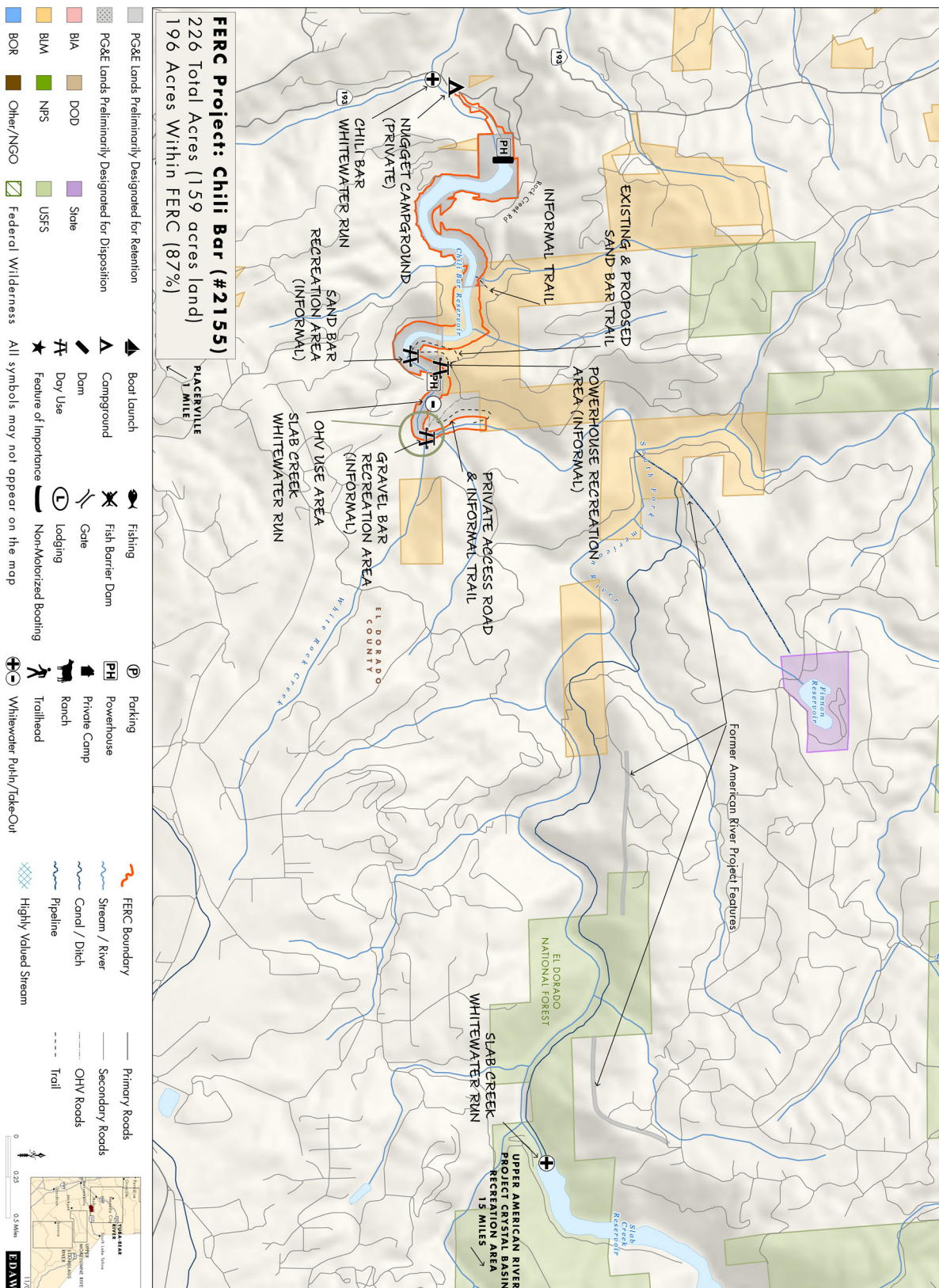


Figure YB-11

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Yuba-Bear River Watershed

Fish, Plant, and Wildlife Habitat

Several types of habitat have been identified in the Chili Bar Project area, with many associated wildlife species. A variety of birds, including bald eagle,³ Swainson's hawk, and American peregrine falcon, are likely to pass through, but not nest within the planning unit.

Overall, about 7% of the Chili Bar Reservoir shoreline supports riparian vegetation, mostly comprised of willow and alder. One special status plant species, the Red Hills soaproot, was identified within the project area. A survey of invasive/noxious species was conducted during relicensing, and Scotch broom was found to dominate significant portions of the project area. The foothill yellow-legged frog, western pond turtle, and the Yuma myotis bat are special status wildlife documented within one mile of the project.

Fish species collected in Chili Bar Reservoir in 2004 included hardhead, Sacramento sucker, brown trout, Sacramento pikeminnow, riffle sculpin, and smallmouth bass. Of these species, hardhead is the only special status species.

Open Space

The lands around Chili Bar Reservoir, apart from those with hydroelectric facilities, as well as the upstream parcels, function as open space due to lack of development. Chili Bar Reservoir and the surrounding wooded canyon sides provide attractive views from nearby roads and adjacent private developments.

Outdoor Recreation

Within the planning unit, recreational activities are taking place at three informal use areas: Sand Bar, Gravel Bar, and the White Rock Powerhouse (see Figure YB-11). These activities include informal camping, swimming, hiking, picnicking, OHV use, and shoreline fishing with access from private or BLM lands. A small amount of recreation use by adjacent residents also occurs

where two private dirt roads provide access to the shoreline. Current relicensing will likely address the providing additional shoreline recreation including parking, trail access, trash receptacles, signage, and maintenance.

At present, PG&E is constructing a formal trail from Rock Creek Road to a sandbar on the north shoreline of the reservoir. This trail will replace an informal user-created trail. Related proposed enhancements include signage related to public safety and recreation use and a picnic table near the shoreline.

Limited recreational facilities are available at Chili Bar Reservoir. A recreation suitability assessment found that 88% of the shoreline was not suitable or had low suitability for recreation use or development, and the remaining 12% (generally the areas already in use) were only moderately suitable. Combined with the fact that many recreation alternatives of superior quality exist within an hour's drive of the Chili Bar Project⁴ and current visitorship is modest, no facilities have been proposed during relicensing.

Fishing is poor in the reservoir due to a lack of game species. Swimming and boating are prohibited in the reservoir due to strong currents, frequent spills over the dam spillway, and fluctuating water levels associated with hydropower operations. These safety concerns, limited existing access, and limited potential for new access have been identified as making the reservoir unsuitable for boating use. Despite



Oak woodland looking west toward Chili Bar Dam

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Oak woodland slopes above Chili Bar Reservoir being prohibited, swimming and boating are both noted to occur in Chili Bar Reservoir.

Public access to Chili Bar Reservoir is difficult; nearly half of the area is characterized by very steep slopes of greater than 40% slope. Private, gated roads lead to the reservoir and are generally not available to public access; however, public non-motorized access is permitted by crossing BLM lands, but access is difficult, with no formal trail. Vehicular and non-vehicular access is available to a large gravel bar on the river just upstream of the reservoir by use of an informal trail and a private road, whose gate is often left open. Visitors can reach the south shoreline of the reservoir immediately downstream of the White Rock Powerhouse by using the powerhouse access road when the gate is open.

Beyond Chili Bar Reservoir, there are two whitewater boating opportunities in the immediate vicinity. The first is the Class IV/V Slab Creek Run that occurs during wet years when UARP is required to spill from its reservoir. The put-in for this 10-mile expert-level run is Slab Creek Reservoir, and the take-out is upstream of the Chili Bar Reservoir at one of the three informal recreation use areas. The second run, the Chili Bar Run, has a put-in less than one mile downstream of the planning unit.⁵

Forest Resources

The Chili Bar Planning Unit contains forest resources, including scrub oak and oak woodland

vegetation on the north side of the SFAR and Douglas-fir and pine on the south side. One PG&E Timber Management Unit (TMU) is found in the planning unit; however, it does not include timbered acres and there is no associated management prescription. This lack of management prescription is likely due to the steep terrain and difficult access to forest resources.

Agricultural Uses

Grazing does not currently take place on these lands, nor are there grazing allotments on adjacent public lands.

Historic Resources

The planning unit was in the cultural range of the Southern Maidu or Nisenan people prior to European settlement during the gold rush. The Nisenan occupied the area in settlements that varied from seasonal to permanent, and their hunting-and-gathering-based economy utilized a variety of regional resources.

No Native American cultural resources were identified during relicensing studies. While several local Native American tribes were consulted, and representatives of one tribe visited the project lands, surveys have not been conducted throughout the parcels in the reservoir area. Outside of this area, the status of cultural resources in the eastern parcels is unknown.



S. Fork American R. downstream of Chili Bar Dam

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The presence of significant cultural resources is unlikely, however, given the steep canyon-side location of most of the lands and the past use of the parcels for hydropower development.

Additionally, the SFAR was considered part of the “Mother Lode” area during the 1850s gold rush. Though hydraulic mining was used in the area, the planning unit parcels did not receive as much mining activity as other lands due to the steepness of the terrain. After gold mining declined in the 1870s, quartz and slate were also mined in this area. Two historic mining features were found to be inundated by the reservoir during the relicensing. Both of these sites were recorded and evaluated for the NRHP, but were determined to be ineligible. The research conducted for this evaluation revealed mining claims were located primarily on the slopes above the reservoir. Due to the steep terrain and dense brush, these areas were not surveyed during the relicensing.

Stewardship Council Recommendations

The Stewardship Council recommends that the land and land uses in the Chili Bar Planning Unit be preserved and enhanced by focusing on the important terrestrial and aquatic habitat values and viewsheds available within the planning unit. In presenting the Recommended Concept provided here (see Figure YB-12), our objective is to preserve and enhance biological resources, preserve cultural resources and open space, and enhance fuels and fire management. We recommend this effort be conducted in close coordination with PG&E and FERC relicensing efforts for the area.

Objective: Preserve and enhance biological resources while preserving cultural resources and enhancing fuels and fire management.



Spring growth within oak woodlands

As shown on Table YB-6, the Stewardship Council has identified a number of preservation and/or enhancement measures that may contribute to the conservation management program for the Chili Bar Planning Unit. Additional detail and background regarding these potential measures can be found in the Supporting Analysis for Recommendations, provided under separate cover. These measures are intended to be illustrative in nature, not prescriptive, and will be amended, deleted, or augmented over time in coordination with future land owners and managers to best meet the objective for this planning unit.

Fish, Plant, and Wildlife Habitat

Objective: Preserve and enhance habitat in order to protect special biological resources.

The Chili Bar Planning Unit contains several types of habitat with many associated species, including special status bird, fish, and plant species. In order to preserve and enhance the habitat and resources found here, the Stewardship Council recommends that baseline studies and plans be developed to gain a clear understanding of the resources (particularly outside the relicensing study area where little information is currently available). These studies will likely be followed by management plans to ensure implementation of preservation and enhancement measures for specific resources.

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Open Space

Objective: Preserve open space in order to protect natural and cultural resources, viewsheds, and the low-intensity river recreation setting.

This concept would preserve open space through permanent conservation easements. Conservation easements would describe all prohibited uses to maintain open space values, including the level of uses allowed and the requirement to maintain scenic qualities.

Sustainable Forestry

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

The planning unit is situated in a steep-sided forested canyon, located in close proximity to private development. The Stewardship Council recommends that future care and management of the land include developing a long-term vision for fuels management and management and response to fires. We expect that the fire management and response and fuels management plans would be developed in coordination with adjacent landowners and the Mosquito Fire and Vegetation Management Plan.



Chili Bar Dam looking east

Preservation of Historic Values

Objective: Document and manage cultural resources in order to ensure their protection if discovered in the future.

Areas with a high likelihood of containing cultural resources were already studied in relicensing; remaining areas are steep and have a low likelihood of containing cultural resources. To ensure any cultural resources found within the planning unit in the future are protected and appropriately managed, we recommend that cultural resource protection measures be incorporated into conservation easements. These measures would describe the process for addressing any cultural materials found during ground-disturbing activities. Throughout this effort, the Stewardship Council recommends close coordination with Native American entities.

Endnotes

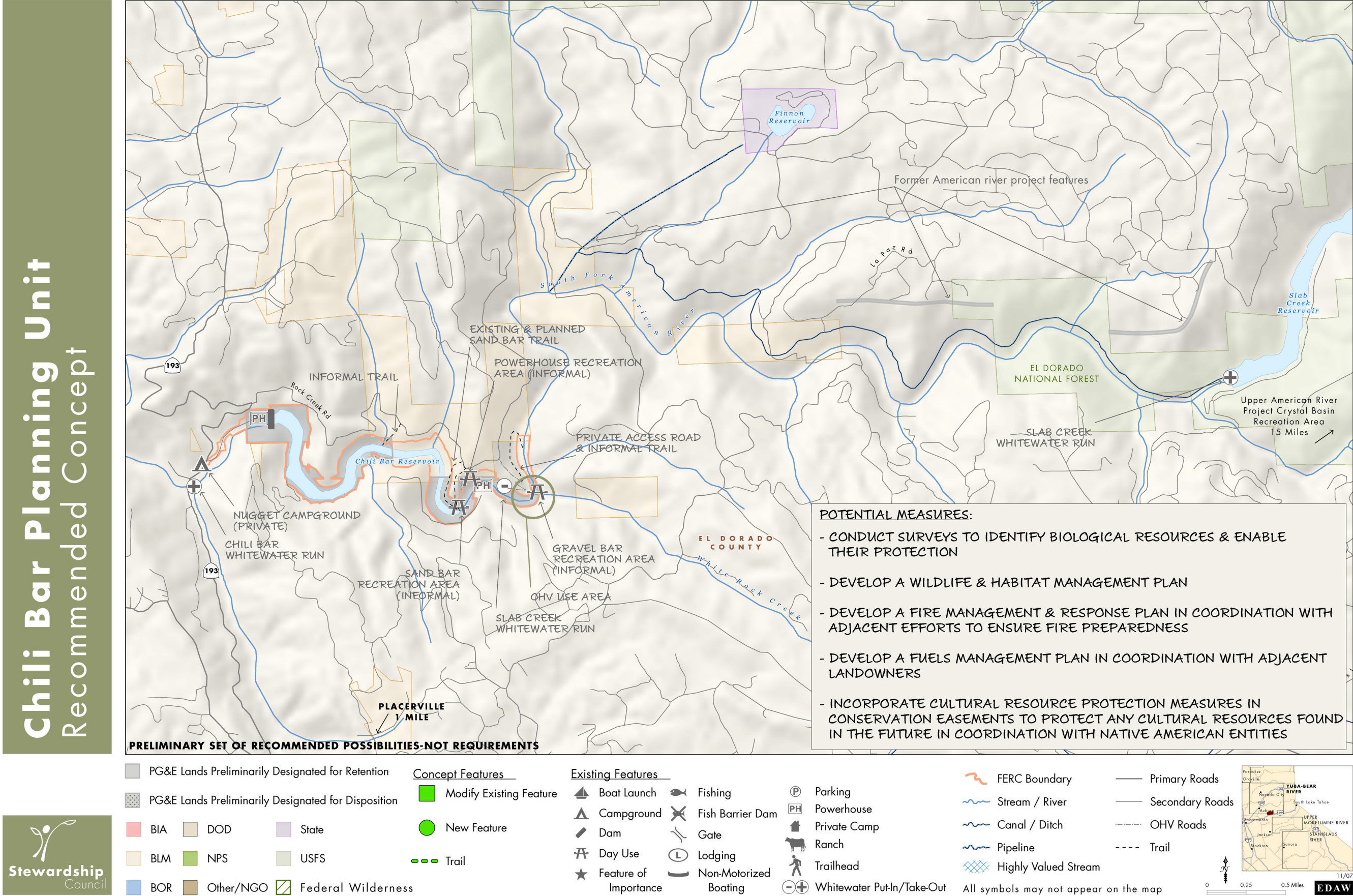
- ¹ The American River Project is a PG&E hydropower development that ceased operation in the 1960s when the UARP was built.
- ² Both the Chili Bar Project and UARP are undergoing FERC relicensing, and some aspects of the separate relicensing processes are being combined due to the interconnected operation of the two projects. License Applications for the projects were submitted to FERC in July 2005, and both licenses expire on July 31, 2007.
- ³ A relicensing study found that the project provides little suitable bald eagle foraging habitat and provides poor habitat for nesting, wintering, or roosting bald eagles.
- ⁴ Many camping opportunities are available in the vicinity of the planning unit, including approximately 700 designated campsites within the UARP Project boundary.
- ⁵ The 20.5-mile Chili Bar Run is Class III+ with a season from April to October. One of the most popular runs in the Western United States, the Chili Bar Run attracts up to 150,000 river-runners, and 44 commercial rafting guide permits are issued by El Dorado County annually.

Table YB-6 Objectives to Preserve and/or Enhance – Recommended Concept

Planning Unit Objective: Preserve and enhance biological resources while preserving cultural resources and enhancing fuels and fire management.		
Beneficial Public Value	Objective	Potential Measures to Preserve and/or Enhance BPVs – Not Requirements*
Protection of the Natural Habitat of Fish, Wildlife, and Plants	Preserve and enhance habitat in order to protect special biological resources.	• Conduct surveys outside the relicensing study area to identify biological resources and enable their protection. • Develop a wildlife and habitat management plan for the planning unit.
Preservation of Open Space	Preserve open space in order to protect natural and cultural resources, viewsheds, and the low-intensity river recreation setting.	• Apply permanent conservation easements to ensure a higher level of open space protection.
Outdoor Recreation by the General Public		None proposed.
Sustainable Forestry	Develop and implement forestry practices in order to ensure appropriate fuel load and fire management.	• Develop a fire management and response plan in coordination with adjacent efforts to ensure fire preparedness. • Develop a fuels management plan in coordination with adjacent landowners to ensure long-term forest health and reduce fuel loading and fire hazard.
Agricultural Uses		None proposed.
Preservation of Historic Values	Document and manage cultural resources in order to ensure their protection if discovered in the future.	• Incorporate cultural resource protection measures in conservation easements to protect any cultural resources found in the future in coordination with Native American entities.

* This is a set of recommended possibilities for the preservation and enhancement of BPV’s, and is not intended to be a set of requirements for future land management.

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Chili Bar Planning Unit

Open Space

Potential Measure:

- *Apply permanent conservation easements to ensure a higher level of open space protection.*

The Stewardship Council recommends preserving open space through permanent conservation easements. The planning unit would be managed to protect lands in a manner consistent with surrounding public land use. With the exception of the Chili Bar Dam and Powerhouse and related facilities, the planning unit is predominantly open space, and this value would be preserved through conservation easements. Conservation easements would secondarily protect the variety of habitat types found in the narrow band of land surrounding the reservoir and the small eastern parcels. Additionally, conservation easements would preserve viewsheds and the setting for the low level of recreation use that occurs throughout the planning unit.

Fish, Plant, and Wildlife Habitat

Potential Measure:

- *Conduct surveys outside the relicensing study area to identify biological resources and enable their protection.*

Relicensing studies regarding biological resources did not include the entire planning unit. Therefore, the Stewardship Council recommends conducting surveys outside the relicensing study area to identify biological resources and enable their protection.

Potential Measure:

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

The Chili Bar Planning Unit provides habitat for a variety of species, including many special status species. To provide a comprehensive vision for habitat protection and enhancement within the planning unit, the Stewardship Council recommends creating a wildlife and habitat management plan. Results from recommended surveys as well as data from relicensing would be used to identify and develop a comprehensive plan describing goals and objectives for habitat and species, as well as measures needed to enhance and protect habitat for plant and wildlife species. Monitoring of species and/or habitats would also be developed as a component of the plan. Specific actions to promote aquatic habitat would include the maintenance of large woody debris near watercourses and the minimization of sedimentation in streams. The wildlife and habitat management plan should be developed in conjunction with fuels management plans as well as relevant FERC license required plans.

Sustainable Forestry

Potential Measures:

- *Develop a fire management and response plan in coordination with adjacent efforts to ensure fire preparedness.*

- *Develop a fuels management plan in coordination with adjacent landowners to ensure long-term forest health and reduce fuel loading and fire hazard.*

The Stewardship Council recommends developing a fire management and response plan to ensure fire preparedness throughout the planning unit. Fire risk is a concern in the area surrounding Chili Bar Reservoir because there are forested stands in proximity to private development. The development of a fire management and response plan would be coordinated with the Mosquito Fire and Vegetation Management Plan developed by the Fire Safe Council of El Dorado County. This plan was developed for the lands surrounding the eastern linear parcels. Additionally, a fuels management plan would be developed to reduce fire risk and fuels accumulation. The plan would be developed in coordination with adjacent private landowners, USFS, and BLM to ensure consistency in management.

Preservation of Historic Values

Potential Measure:

- *Incorporate cultural resource protection measures in conservation easements to protect any cultural resources found in the future in coordination with Native American entities.*

The Stewardship Council recommends protecting any cultural resources found in the future through permanent conservation easements that include cultural resource protection measures. These measures would describe the process for addressing any cultural materials found during ground-disturbing activities. Development of appropriate cultural resource protection measures would be coordinated with Native American entities.

Outdoor Recreation

None recommended.

Agricultural Uses

None recommended.