

Final Report
Sierra Nevada Conservancy Grant Agreement No. G764005
Tule River Environmental Review

Introduction

The Tule River Environmental Review Project assisted in the completion of environmental and heritage resource reviews to meet California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). The reviews met requirements needed to conduct trail restoration, maintenance, graffiti abatement, and interpretive projects along a fifteen mile of stretch of the Tule River near the community of Springville, California. Bilingual (English and Spanish) surveys were conducted to evaluate public response for trail restoration, identify issues and concerns regarding the Tule River environment and user values, and receive feedback to a permit/fee system. This project also complemented the US Forest Service efforts to address growing management challenges of this heavily used area.

1. Resources Leveraged

Approximately \$20,760 was leveraged as in-kind contributions, particularly during the period when the State funding was frozen. The following items contributed to the Project completion.

GPS trail inventory and mapping by Forest crews	\$2,500
Pubic use surveys (Chavez and Olson, 2011) at Lower Coffee Camp and the Stairs	\$13,300
Wildlife, vegetation and other resource surveys and analyses	\$4,000
Forest Service match for bilingual employee	\$1,460
California Conservation Corps match for bilingual employee	\$1,460
TOTAL	\$20,760

Resources leveraged as a result of this project also included participation from the non-profit WildpPlaces assisting with trail maintenance as well as Forest Service fire crews clearing brush off the Fisherman’s trail (valued at \$17,611).

2. Impact on Collaboration/Cooperation among Stakeholders

Number of people/entities involved in Project. During this project, over 800 visitors were contacted. Of those 800 visitors 366 comments were gathered from 286 visitors willing to participate in the survey discussion. In-kind surveys conducted by Chavez (2011) interviewed 157 people at Lower Coffee Camp Day Use Area and 154 people at

the Stairs (a dispersed site). Results of the SNC surveys can be found in Ilse (2010), and Chavez and Olson (2011).

Contacts and relationships were developed with non-profit organizations and other agencies that invest in the management of the Tule River area. These included contacts with California Department of Transportation (CalTrans), the Angeles National Forest, the Inyo National Forest, Tulare County Sheriffs, California Highway Patrol (CHP), High Sierra Volunteer Trail Corp, Tulare County Board of Supervisors, Springville Public Utility District, and the Sequoia/Kings Canyon National Parks. Other entities involved in the project included the California Conservation Corps and nonprofit WildPlaces.

A Forest Service employee was detailed from the El Dorado National Forest to oversee the surveys, conduct collaborations with other entities, and prepare the final report *Management of the Tule River – A comprehensive look at recreation on the Tule River* (Ilse, 2010).

Increased cooperation/decreased conflict among stakeholders. This project improved collaboration and cooperation among stakeholders by increasing understanding between the user groups and neighboring communities both upstream and downstream. In addition, relationships with affected and involved agencies benefited as opportunities for continued on-site improvements developed.

Efforts by Ilse resulted in improved relationships with organizations such as: CalTrans, non-profit organizations (WildPlaces, Upper Tule Association), Community Service Education Training (CSET), Tulare County Sheriffs, CHP, Tulare County Board of Supervisors, and Southern California Edison.

CalTrans contributed greatly with suggestions and actions regarding adding, removing or relocating signs along Highway 190, enhancing pullouts, and brushing roadways. We have continued to enhance our partnership with WildPlaces through involvement in Rio Limpio, a monthly event during the summer removing litter and graffiti, and educating users regarding their impacts along the river. CSET has continued their recycling program maintaining a large container located at the bottom of the canyon. This project reduced long-standing conflicts between these user groups based on misconceptions of fires and litter in the Tule River Canyon. Presence in the Tule River Canyon by Ilse, Forest Service Patrols, the CCC bilingual employee, and law enforcement agencies resulted in better cooperation with users, fewer gang-related events, and a better understanding of the needs and values of the visiting public.

3. Capacity Building within Region

How completion of this Project improved capabilities of grant recipients, partners, or larger community. This project developed opportunities for future projects including interest from the High Sierra Volunteer Trail Crew to seek grants for improving the Fisherman's Trail (30E29), interest in an existing outfitter guide operation to expand their operation providing shuttle rides for mountain bike rides down the trail, and local support for improving the Upper Coffee Camp Day Use Area. The trail also generated interest from anglers for better access to out-of-the-way fishing holes.

In 2012, the Forest Service will once again manage the Upper and Lower Coffee Camp Day Use Areas that have been under management by concessionaire for the past 15 years. This project has enabled the Forest Service to provide recreation sites that could be potential user fee areas or part of a permit system along the canyon in addition to the day use areas. User fees will help fund needed amenities along the river such as garbage bins and pick up and sanitary facilities.

Because CEQA and NEPA are completed the Sequoia National Forest, Giant Sequoia National Monument is now poised for applying for additional grants to implement the projects that were identified during the visitor survey and through communication with cooperators and other stakeholders, and has already begun implementation of the trail clearing with Forest Service firefighting employees during the winter months. This will help leverage additional funding with grants from the Title II Secure and Rural Schools Self-Determination Act, the National Forest Foundation, and/or future Sierra Nevada Conservancy grants.

4. Project Accomplishments

Description of how the Project succeeded in accomplishing its intent and the direct benefits that resulted from the project. The project successfully completed due diligence required by CEQA and NEPA. Documents prepared included the Notice of Exemption and Decision Memo for trail maintenance, trail obliteration and/or restoration, and addition of recreation facilities. Essential to completing these reviews was compliance with other laws such as the Clean Water Act, Endangered Species Act and the National Historic Preservation Act.

The project was posted on archaeologist's schedule. This was important because of the archeologist's heavy workload, competing priorities, and the complexity of the project itself.

Forest Service employees conducted the environmental and heritage resource reviews. This included field work to identify the location of the Fisherman's trail, which was difficult due to 20 years of brush that had grown over the trail. It included GPS location of as much of the Fisherman's trail that could be located as well as the user-created trails leading from the road to the river.

Field work and a Biological Assessment and a Biological Evaluation were completed in compliance with the Endangered Species Act, addressing threatened and endangered species, most notably the valley elderberry long-horned beetle for which sizable elderberry bushes must be protected.

The heritage resource review was conducted the entire length of the project area with a more in-depth survey and review of a large archaeology site, the boundaries and significance of which were previously unknown. Archaeological sites will be flagged in order to avoid adverse impacts of implementation.

Public notification and surveys were conducted with numbers of contacts shown above and in more detail in attached documents Ilse (2010) and Chavez and Olson (2011).

By completing this project, we have a better knowledge of the natural resources in the area so that we can better manage the area for protection and recreation enjoyment. In addition, the public surveys gave us a more in-depth knowledge of how people use the area and what their values and beliefs are for the area. This will enable us to better develop facilities and recreational opportunities for those that recreate along the river.

Description of the follow-on or indirect benefits of the Project. Completion of this project created the foundation for future projects that will benefit the resource by reducing soil erosion and protect natural resources identified (for example the archeological sites and valley elderberry long-horn beetle habitat), and will provide more appropriate and improved facilities and recreation experiences for the public. With these items in place, the Forest Service is in a better position to be competitive for grants and other funding to implement these improvements.

Description of any significant positive experiences and unanticipated occurrences, or other noteworthy events that happened during the Project and anything about the project that gives you "goose bumps". Over half of the comments received during the interviews focused on four main improvements. The three improvements consistently noted were better access trails, restrooms, and garbage receptacles. The fourth common request was the desire to have more presence from Forest Service patrols. We did not realize how much the public appreciated our presence and valued that direct contact along the river.

Description of lessons learned during the course of completing the Project. We learned the importance of knowing how many people used the project area before we

considered limiting use. We learned that if we limited use in the area, we could displace users to other areas. As we evaluate future actions along the river, we need to consider areas outside the project area to determine if that is our desired outcome.

5. Environmental and heritage reviews completed and resources identified.

The initial heritage review identified an archaeological site that was more extensive than originally known. This led to the testing which provided data to determine the eligibility for the National Register of Historic Places (see #2).

A private company with needed expertise was hired to conduct archaeological testing and evaluate the site for eligibility on the National Register of Historic Places. Findings of this testing and evaluation are in Archaeological Testing and National Register of Historic Places Eligibility Evaluation of CA-TUL-1400/2025/2066 (FS 05-13-52-0013/33/184), Upper Coffee Camp Recreation Site, Western Divide Ranger District, Sequoia National Forest, Tulare County, California (Loyd et al., 2011).

As required by the National Historic Preservation Act these findings were submitted to the State Historic Preservation Officer for concurrence (which was obtained) as well as a “no effect” determination to complete installation of a CXT-style toilet.

The environmental reviews identified the need to protect such species as the valley elderberry long-horned beetle, and the importance of curtailing erosion along the user-created trails to the river.

Notice of Exemption and Decision Memo, signed September 10, 2010.

Ilse, David. 2010. Management of the Tule River – A comprehensive look at recreation on the Tule River. This document compiles the findings of this project and presents opportunities for future development addressing the needs of the recreation public.

Chavez, Deborah J., Ph.D., 2010. Visitor Survey Results – Giant Sequoia National Monument Day Use Study 2009-2010. This survey documents the values of people regarding safety and natural resources in two locations along the river, Lower Coffee Camp and the Stairs.

Bilingual contacts with forest users were completed. A student, whose first language is Spanish, was hired from the Central California Consortium to assist in the surveys and interviews conducted. Formal surveys, through the Pacific Southwest Research Branch of the USFS, and informal interviews were conducted to learn more about the recreation users along the Tule. Informal interviews were conducted with open-end conversations encouraging the user to recommend desires; indicating and including management techniques, amenities, and resources.

6. List of Potential projects resulting from these environmental reviews.

- a. Tule River Access Improvement Project. This project conducts much needed maintenance along the Fisherman's Trail, restores proper drainage and improves access to the Tule River, and rehabilitates user-created trails that are causing erosion. This project has been implemented in part by US Forest Service fire crews clearing the brush along the trail during the winter months (the value equaling \$17,611). The High Sierra Volunteer Trail Crew has made preliminary plans for submitting trail tread and/or bridge construction for this trail. After uncovering the trail from years of brush growth we discovered trail tread maintenance needs and several drainages that will need either a bridge or major work to bring the trail up to standard.
- b. Extend Fisherman's trail to Lower Coffee Camp and Pierpoint Springs and provide better access to and across Highway 190.
- c. Enhance the Fisherman's trail to view the waterfall.
- d. Upper Coffee Camp Reconstruction. This project would include redesigning the site to accommodate picnickers, larger group size, ADA accessible sites, and reconstruct the water system.
- e. Tule River Vista. This large pullout provides access to the Fisherman's trail and could be enhanced with interpretive signs and better parking.
- f. Lumreau Day Use and/or information center. Additional day use areas could be possible at this site with one or possibly two groups, managed as reserved groups only.
- g. Permit system for the entire canyon to reduce traffic jams and over use in the river.