

# **UPPER KERN RIVER ACTION PLAN**

## **National Wild and Scenic River**



**Kern River Ranger District**  
**Sequoia National Forest**

**March 2010**

## Message from Tina Terrell, Forest Supervisor

Hello Sequoia National Forest/Giant Sequoia National Monument Stakeholders!

Summers on the Kern River provide an incredible experience which touch many people and create lasting family memories! Our national forests provide opportunities to get away from the distractions we face each day and get back to basics like just enjoying the beautiful sounds of nature along the “Wild and Scenic” Kern River. Each year visitors travel to this area seeking a renewal of spirit and mind.

One of the most popular segments of the Kern River is the 20-mile stretch north of Kernville located within an hour’s drive of Bakersfield. This segment provides easy and convenient year round river access from State Mountain 99 and flows from the Johnsondale Bridge south to Isabella Reservoir.

Within the canyon corridor, there are six developed campgrounds, 10 dispersed (largely undeveloped) camping areas and three picnic areas. Currently, the Kern River Ranger District manages dispersed camping and picnic sites, while developed campgrounds are managed by a concessionaire. Historically, the Forest Service has followed a policy of allowing “open or dispersed camping” outside of developed campgrounds. These areas provide limited or no services. In 1987, this policy continued with the designation of the Kern River into the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System, so long as the river’s water quality and ecosystem remained protected.

Over time impacts from this open camping policy have resulted in resource degradation, sanitation issues, and loss of habitat. Overcrowding, congested parking, and visitor conflicts further demonstrate the need for improved management of these areas. More specific actions are necessary in order to be consistent with currently accepted riparian conservation practices being used throughout the Sierra Nevada range. Basically, more specific actions need to be implemented to ensure public health and safety and to meet the intent of the “Wild and Scenic Rivers Act,” by protecting the Outstandingly Remarkable Values for which the river was designated.

We have prepared the Upper Kern River Action Plan to address the above issues and public concerns gathered from meetings, field trips, comments and other feedback. This plan will be part of a three-fold strategy over the next five years to preserve and enhance the Upper Kern River corridor.









This year we will review the 25- foot setback for camping and fire use from the river’s edge. We will review the open camping, use of fire, and wood collection policies along the river corridor. Long term plans may include developing “dispersed” sites into campgrounds, changing periods of use, changing distribution of use, and/or limiting use. Other measures will include monitoring, resource planning, and updating the Kern River Comprehensive Management Plan through an environmental analysis. With these actions we hope to improve the quality of the recreation experience and the long-term protection for this Wild and Scenic river corridor.

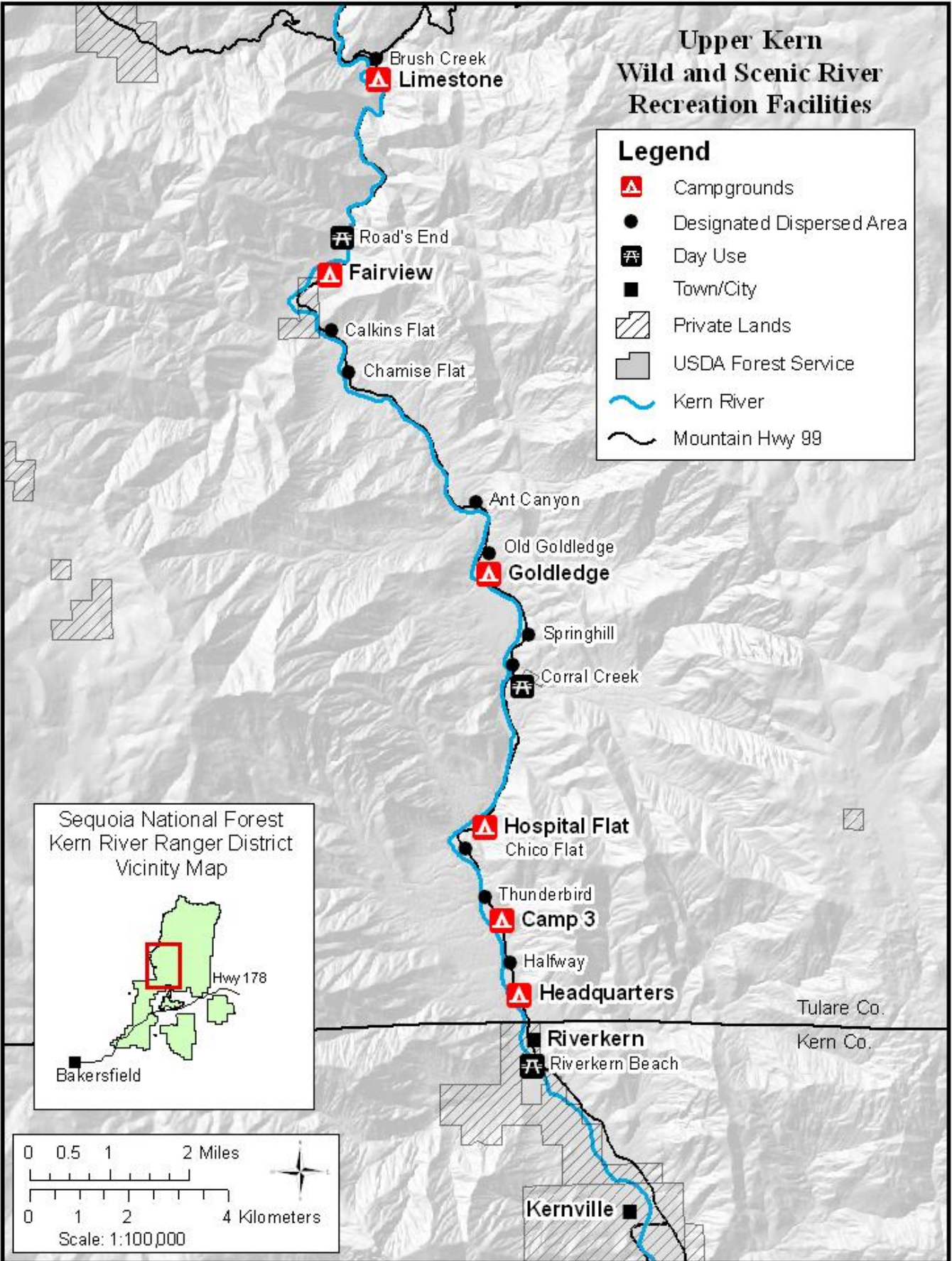
I invite you to join me in this challenging endeavor. Let’s continue the dialogue for preserving and enhancing the values of this outstandingly remarkable and beautiful river!

*TINA*

# Upper Kern Wild and Scenic River Recreation Facilities

**Legend**

-  Campgrounds
-  Designated Dispersed Area
-  Day Use
-  Town/City
-  Private Lands
-  USDA Forest Service
-  Kern River
-  Mountain Hwy 99



Sequoia National Forest  
Kern River Ranger District  
Vicinity Map

0 0.5 1 2 Miles

0 1 2 4 Kilometers

Scale: 1:100,000

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## I. Introduction

The Upper Kern River is special to many people, and is of such importance that Congress designated this section of river as part of the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System in 1987. Here, the river is managed to preserve its free-flowing character and unique environment, while providing for continued public use. This stretch of river is designated as a “Recreation” opportunity class and therefore is managed for more intensive recreation purposes. All designated Wild and Scenic Rivers are managed to protect the outstandingly remarkable values for which the river was designated.

The Forest Service has historically followed an “open camping” policy in the Upper Kern River corridor by allowing visitors to camp outside the six developed campgrounds and ten named dispersed camping areas. This policy continued after the Wild and Scenic designation, so long as the river’s water quality, adjacent ecosystem, and other “Outstandingly Remarkable Values,” remained protected.

Over the last twenty years, resource damage from this recreational activity has escalated as there are no limits on the number of guests and no limits on where they are allowed to camp, except for a 25- foot setback from the river’s edge. This has resulted in unacceptable resource impacts, poor sanitation practices, and loss of habitat. General trash, toilet paper, diapers, and human waste can frequently be found between the river and highway. Other impacts include campers illegally cutting trees, shrubs, and clearing of ground cover. Overcrowding, congested parking, and visitors creating and expanding camping and parking areas demonstrate the need for more intensive management of this area.

In response, the Kern River Ranger District has developed this Action Plan to address Forest Service and public concerns over the resource degradation and recreation impacts. Current policies will be reviewed and new policies will be implemented to strategically regain management control over the river corridor. With this effort, we hope to gain public acceptance and support to ensure the long-term sustainability and protection for this Wild and Scenic river corridor through sharing information and asking for public input as new policies are being considered. This will involve engaging the public, elected officials, and community members, and close coordination with other federal, state, county, and tribal governments with an interest in the Upper Kern River.

## **II. Mission Statement**

The mission of the USDA-Forest Service is to sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of the Nation's forests and grasslands to meet the needs of present and future generations. Our commitment to land stewardship and public service is the framework within which natural resources are managed. Implicit in this is the agency's collaboration with partners and the public, especially as increasingly diverse urban populations are losing their awareness and knowledge of the natural systems on which they depend. The agency must connect with and educate the citizens to expand their understanding of the links between people, the way they live, and the natural environments within which they live.

If public lands are to provide additional recreational benefits without unacceptable resource impacts, we must emphasize effective management solutions that have a solid scientific foundation. The condition of the land, recreation facilities, and transportation infrastructure, must be considered if we expect to preserve high-quality recreation experiences. We must maintain specially designated protected areas. We must continue to work with our partner volunteers, nongovernmental organizations, other agencies, and the private sector if we are to achieve acceptable results. (USDA Forest Service Strategic Plan FY 2007-2012)

### **Assumptions**

*Assumption #1: A well balanced program of recreation management on the Kern River Ranger District reflects good land stewardship and is consistent and compatible with achieving the greatest value for the public good.*

*Assumption #2: Public use of the Upper Kern River corridor for recreational pursuits will continue to increase.*

*Assumption #3: Increased public use will raise the potential for increased adverse impacts on other resources and conflicts between users.*

*Assumption #4: A well managed recreation program provides an opportunity to reduce or mitigate potential conflicts and impacts through informing, educating, and directing users so that coordination and cooperation between user groups can be facilitated.*

*Assumption #5: A well planned interpretation and education program will result in a better informed public and raise awareness.*

*Assumption #6: Establishing a well managed program will require a commitment of agency direction, support, and funding.*

### **III. Goals**

*Goal #1: Identify and develop an Upper Kern River Action Plan to address problems involving ongoing resource damage.*

*Goal #2: Establish a program that provides consistent, coordinated, comprehensive recreation management.*

*Goal #3: Maximize opportunities to educate the public through a variety of means including publications, website, and one-on-one communications.*

*Goal #4: Provide recreation users with a safe, enjoyable, high quality recreation experience by providing good people management along with well designed, durable facilities.*

*Goal #5: Manage recreational use to minimize adverse impacts on other resources, such as water quality, cultural resources and/or recovery of threatened, endangered, or sensitive species.*

*Goal #6: Comply with the National Wild and Scenic Rivers Act by implementing the management plan and amending it, as needed, to protect the river's outstandingly remarkable values.*

*Goal #7: Manage recreation use to accommodate a wide variety of users. Dispersed camping opportunities were a primary component for recognizing this stretch of river as possessing outstanding remarkable recreational values.*

*Goal #8: Seek to maximize efficiency and diversify funding of recreation management through the development of partnerships with user groups, grants, and other entities.*

*Goal #9: Monitor the effectiveness of programs, facility development projects, and levels of use to measure performance of plan implementation.*

### **Strategies**

*Strategy 1: Develop a set of standards and guidelines to govern recreation management activities and facility development and maintenance.*

*Strategy 2: Complete site plans for named camping areas in the Upper Kern River corridor.*

*Strategy 3: Pursue grant funding and other funding sources for recreation management projects and programs.*

*Strategy 4: Apply rules and regulations affecting recreation use combined with an effective law enforcement program.*

*Strategy 5: Implement long term programs and safeguards through monitoring, resource planning, and implementing a revised Comprehensive Management Plan for the Upper Kern River.*

## IV. Purpose of the Action Plan

The Action Plan implements a three-fold strategy for short term, intermediate, and long range actions to guide Forest Service recreation management in the Upper Kern River corridor over the next five years. Specific actions need to be implemented in order to ensure public health and safety, safeguard the water quality, and meet the intent of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act.

The plan has an **Initial Response** consisting of actions which will be taken this year as they are part of the 1994 Kern River Comprehensive Management Plan and the accompanying Monitoring Plan. They include education programs to improve visitor awareness, improved signage, and limiting use in certain areas.

**Intermediate Actions** will review and consider effectiveness of current policies that require campers to be at least 25 feet from the river's edge and restrict camping to developed campgrounds and dispersed camping areas only to accommodate visitors without compromising other recreational opportunities or ecosystem integrity.

**Long Term Actions** will address compliance with the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act by updating the Kern River Comprehensive Management Plan and implementing long term programs and safeguards through monitoring and resource planning. This will include completing an environmental analysis and other documentation to define user capacities that will improve recreation and sanitation facilities, enhance visitor experiences and protect the river's Outstandingly Remarkable Values.

Additionally, the Plan will seek to augment the spectrum of funding sources that the agency currently uses to manage its recreation program.

The Action Plan was developed with direction provided in the North and South Forks of the Kern Wild and Scenic River Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and accompanying Comprehensive Management Plan (CMP), USDA Forest Service Strategic Plan FY 2007–2012 Goals and Objectives, Sequoia National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (LRMP), Sierra Nevada Forest Plan Amendment (SNFPA) Record of Decision, and Forest Service Manuals and Handbooks. As the river-administering agency, the Forest Service is responsible for ensuring that the requirements of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act (WSRA) are met. In short they are to protect its free-flowing nature, protect and enhance its water quality and Outstandingly Remarkable Values. The Forest Service has no direct authority over other agencies, but is directed to work with county, state and other federal agencies to provide protections for the river corridor. In recent years, shifts in public perceptions and expectations concerning resource management on federal lands have led to a gradual increase in protection of ecosystems and species, and to an increased concern for riparian areas. Statutory requirements to protect water quality, wildlife habitat, and endangered species provide legislative restrictions on use.

## **V. Background and Description**

### **Wild and Scenic Designation**

The Upper Kern River is a popular recreation tourist destination with its close proximity to several major metropolitan areas and population centers in Bakersfield, Ridgecrest, southern California, the Bay Area, and San Joaquin Basin.

This section of river was formally designated by Congress for inclusion into the National Wild and Scenic River Systems in 1987. With this designation comes recognition of this river to possess “Outstandingly Remarkable Values” (ORVs) and thus should receive special protections and directives under the National Wild and Scenic Rivers Act (WSRA). This stretch of river was designated as a “Recreation” opportunity class and therefore has been managed for more intensive recreation purposes.

The “Wild and Scenic” portion starts north of Kernville at the Tulare/Kern County lines and follows State Mountain 99 to one mile north of the Johnsondale Bridge. Mountain 99 serves as the primary southern gateway for several thousand visitors traveling north to the Giant Sequoia National Monument, and other parts of the Sequoia National Forest. The highway parallels the river which provides a convenient access point and attracts a large number of recreation users who enjoy a broad spectrum of recreational activities for all seasons of the year including world class whitewater rafting and kayaking, fishing, camping, mountain biking, and sightseeing. With the highway providing easy access, the river corridor receives heavy, concentrated use especially during the busy summer season from May through September.

### **Historical Background**

Many of the Forest Service developed campgrounds along the river corridor were the result of former camps first established by Southern California Edison during the construction of Kern River No. 3 (KR3) hydroelectric power plant in the 1920s. The campground names reflect their historical use. Headquarters, located one-half mile above Riverkern, served as the main base camp during construction operations. Camp 3 was the third camp up river and Hospital Flat served as the local hospital for employees working on the project and their families. In 1936, a 100-man Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) camp was brought in by the Forest Service to extend Mountain Road 99 north of Road’s End to the historic logging town of Johnsondale. With the road completed, tourists soon discovered the Upper Kern River Canyon and it has become a popular destination ever since.

Currently, there are six developed campgrounds, ten “named” dispersed camping areas, and three day use areas under Forest Service management. In addition, there are many non-named day use and open camping areas throughout the river corridor that can accommodate several thousand additional people each year. Developed campgrounds are operated under a special use permit by a concessionaire. The Forest Service operates and maintains the 10 dispersed and day use areas, and 11 river access points. Private lands include McNally’s/Soda Springs area, Golden Trout Resort Lodge, and the community of Riverkern.

## **Recreation Facilities – Upper Kern River**

### ***DEVELOPED CAMPGROUNDS***

Headquarters – located four miles north of Kernville along the Kern River via State Mtn. 99. Paved road; 44 family units, including one accessible family site; trailers up to 27 feet; vault toilets; potable water; elevation: 2800 feet; open year round.

Camp 3 – located five miles north of Kernville along the Kern River via State Mtn. 99. Paved road; 52 family units; two accessible group sites can accommodate up to 30 people; trailers up to 30 feet; length; vault toilets; potable water; elevation: 2800 feet; open May through September.

Hospital Flat – located 6.5 miles north of Kernville along the Kern River via State Mtn. 99. Paved road; 40 family units, including one accessible family site; trailers up to 30 feet in length; vault toilets; potable water; elevation: 3000 feet; open May through September.

Goldledge – located 10 miles north of Kernville along the Kern River via State Mtn. 99. Paved road; 37 family units; trailers up to 30 feet; vault toilets; potable water; elevation: 3200 feet; open May through September.

Fairview – located 16 miles north of Kernville along the Kern River via State Mtn. 99. Paved road; 55 family units, including one accessible site; trailers up to 45 feet; vault toilets; potable water; elevation 3500 feet; open April through November.

Limestone – located 19 miles north of Kernville along the Kern River via State Mtn. 99. Paved road; 20 family units; trailers up to 30 feet; vault toilets; no water; elevation: 3800 feet; open April through October.

### ***DAY USE AREAS - Open Year Round***

Riverkern Beach – located three miles north of Kernville along the Kern River via State Mtn. 99. Beach area for river access; river access point for boating and a day use area; picnic tables; portable toilets and dumpsters on east side of Mtn. 99.

Corral Creek - located eight miles north of Kernville via State Mtn. 99. Beach area for river access; river access point for boating and day use picnic area; portable toilets; picnic tables; and dumpsters.

Road's End – located 16.5 miles north of Kernville along the Kern River via State Mtn. 99. Beach area for river access; unpaved parking area; no water; picnic tables; portable toilets; dumpster; historical marker.

### ***NAMED DISPERSED AREAS***

Portable toilets and dumpsters are provided from May to September, except for Brush Creek which offers two permanent vault toilets. Potable water is not available. These areas are accessed from State Mtn. 99.

Half-Way is located 4.5 miles north of Kernville; portable toilets and dumpsters; approximate capacity: 50 sites.

Thunderbird is located 5.5 miles north of Kernville; river access point at the northern most end of site; portable toilets and dumpsters, approximate capacity: 10 sites.

Chico Flat is located 6.5 miles north of Kernville; portable toilets and dumpsters; approximate capacity: 30 sites.

Corral Creek is located 8.5 miles north of Kernville; day use/river access point and a separate dispersed camping area. Site includes picnic tables, dumpsters, and portable toilets; approximate capacity: 30 sites.

Springhill is located 9 miles north of Kernville; two camping areas; Springhill South has one portable toilet and no dumpster; Springhill North has portable toilets and dumpsters; approximate capacity: 40 sites.

Old Goldledge is located 11 miles north of Kernville; one portable toilet, one dumpster and approximate capacity: 6 sites.

Ant Canyon is located 11.5 miles north of Kernville; river access point for boating; portable toilets, dumpsters and approximate capacity: 20 sites.

Chamise Flat is located 14.5 miles north of Kernville; portable toilets and dumpsters; area contains 7 foot vegetation (creosote); secluded dispersed campsites and approximate capacity: 25 sites.

Calkins Flat is located 15.5 miles north of Kernville; river access point for boating; portable toilets, dumpsters and approximate capacity: 30 sites.

Brush Creek is located 20 miles north of Kernville; river access point for boating; vault toilets, two dumpsters and approximate capacity: 20 sites.

### ***RIVER ACCESS POINTS***

River access points for commercial outfitters and private boaters include Riverkern Beach, Camp 3, Thunderbird, Corral Creek, Ant Canyon, Salmon Creek, Calkins Flat, Fairview, Willow Point, Brush Creek and Johnsondale Bridge.

## VI. Current Conditions – Upper Kern River

The results of “unmanaged” recreation have led to the loss of riparian habitat, resource damage, littering and human waste with a potential for contamination to the adjacent river and streams, an increase in human-caused fires, and conflicts between user groups.

### Loss of Riparian Habitat and Decrease in Ecosystem Health

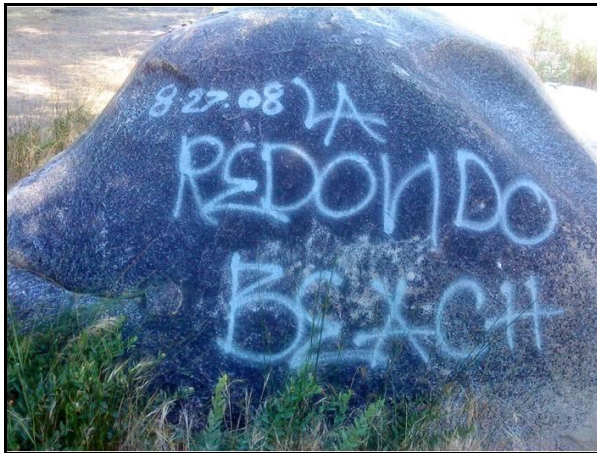
- Some popular areas are experiencing habitat loss and fragmentation (less than 100’ from the high water mark) by as much as 20% a year.
- The majority of habitat losses are trees, branches, and shrubs being cut in areas where open and dispersed camping is occurring.
- There is a lack of dead woody material on and near stream banks, most likely depleted for firewood.
- New trails and camping areas are being established. Once the area is cleared, the effects are soil compaction, loss of ground cover, and continued expansion of the camping area.
- The designated dispersed camping areas are under pressure from overuse and abuse. Habitat loss next to these areas is growing every season, and currently these areas have expanded outside the original boundaries by as much as 50%.



**Standing “snags” are an important part of the riparian ecosystem within the river corridor. These trees were cut less than 100 feet from the river’s edge.**

## Health and Safety

- Emergency responders are unable to access many areas due to parking congestion.
- Inadequate sanitation facilities, lack of public awareness or health practices, have led to increased littering and human waste scattered throughout the river corridor, increasing the potential for contamination of adjacent river and streams.
- Vehicles drive and/or park on both sides of Mountain 99, in pullouts, or in the named dispersed areas causing vegetation damage, congestion. Unsafe parking practices occur adjacent to the highway.
- Areas are frequently vandalized with graffiti as they are not under the supervision of a campground host or observed by Forest Service patrols.
- Heavy, concentrated visitor use has led to overcrowding and increased social conflicts.



**Graffiti is increasing in the river corridor diminishing Wild and Scenic river values.**



**Overflowing dumpsters typically result after a busy holiday weekend.**

## Recreation Experience

- Public concern over resource damage, increased littering and human waste.
- Overcrowding in camping areas and congested parking.
- Decline in visitor recreation enjoyment and experience.
- Concerns over conflicts between user groups and river access points.
- Concerns for personal safety.



**Overcrowding in camping areas**



**Vehicles block emergency responders**

## Wild and Scenic River Corridor

- Outstandingly Remarkable Values (recreation, scenic and wildlife) diminished.
- Free flowing character and unique environment threatened.
- Negative effects to natural and cultural resources from the “open camping” policy.



## **VII. Action Plan**

### **Short Term (2009-2010)**

- Develop “Communication Plan” for the 2010 season to educate visitors on deteriorating conditions under current recreation policy and to implement changes to restore and protect river values this year.
- Issue press release to announce completion of Action Plan; distribute to greater Los Angeles area and Sequoia National Forest media. Host public meetings and field trips; brief elected officials, community groups and recreation users. (Complete April-May 2010).
- Develop public comment form for distribution to visitors in the Upper Kern River and at Forest Service offices in the Kern Valley.
- Develop bilingual information materials on any revised Wild and Scenic River camping policies; and issue press release for public distribution; include southern California and Bay Area media markets.
- Order and install new entrance signs for Kern Wild and Scenic River corridor boundary.
- Complete site design plan for the ten named dispersed areas with engineering staff, District recreation staff, District Hydrologist, District Archeologist, and Forest Landscape Architect to: 1) define boundaries for camping and parking, 2) identify locations for placement of new bulletin boards and Forest Service recreation site signs, and 3) identify locations for placement of boulders and other natural material to delineate boundaries to adequately protect riparian habitat.
- Complete on site review of other “open camping” areas with engineering staff, recreation personnel, and resource specialists, to identify areas where additional closures are needed, roads and trails need to be restored, and to address travel corridor safety issues.
- Prepare appropriate environmental document for planned routine road maintenance, parking areas, and placement of boulders for designated dispersed camping area boundaries. (March-April 2010).
- Re-establish site boundaries for camping and parking by moving boulders and other natural materials and improve access points along roadways with engineering support. (Complete April-May 2010).



**Example of recreation site sign**



**Example of information bulletin board**

- Purchase and install three (3) recreation site signs for placement at Halfway, Thunderbird, and Chico Flat dispersed areas. (Complete by June 2010).
- Purchase and install six (6) information bulletin boards for placement at Halfway, Chico Flat, Corral Creek, Chamise Flat, Calkins Flat and Brush Creek dispersed areas. Boards will be installed with volunteer help during the June Upper Kern River Clean-up Day. (Complete by June 2010).
- Purchase and install one (1) accessible CXT double vault toilet for placement at Chico Flat.
- Purchase and place three new accessible portable vault toilets at Chico Flat, Calkins Flat, and Springhill and new dumpsters to improve sanitation facilities and on-site capacity at Halfway, Chico Flat, Corral Creek, Springhill, and Calkins Flat dispersed sites. (Complete by June 2010).
- Pursue volunteer Campground Host or “roving” recreation patrol to be stationed at Halfway, Chico Flat, Corral Creek, Springhill, and Calkins Flat.
- Establish visitor information station at the Riverkern pull-out for Memorial Day, July 4<sup>th</sup> and Labor Day holiday weekends, to provide information briefing paper and new education materials for visitors traveling north. (Utilize Student Conservation Association interns).
- Utilize Porterville organized crews to complete hazard reduction work in named dispersed camping areas. Rotate crews throughout the summer during high fire danger.
- Request Fire Prevention Task Force (5-10 people), additional law enforcement and Forest Protection Officers with citation authority to patrol the Upper Kern River during high periods of use to disseminate information on any new policies regarding fire use, wood gathering, and camping. Coordinate ride-along with trained organized crew members.

## **Intermediate Actions (2010-2012)**

- Establish Upper Kern River Task Force with community members and forest visitors to ensure support for compliance, public safety and user education. (Complete by September 2010).
- If unacceptable resource damage continues, consider implementing policy to allow camping in designated areas only. Communicate decision to visitors and community. (October 2010)
- Conduct carrying capacity study (as per Wild and Scenic Rivers Act) associated with expanding developed campgrounds and converting Springhill and Calkins Flat to developed campgrounds (reference Comprehensive Management Plan). Define how many developed campgrounds the river corridor can support and still maintain a high quality user experience for all recreational opportunities. Direction from the Comprehensive Management Plan recommends campsites for group size of eight and 25 in developed campgrounds. (Complete by 2012)
- Conduct environmental analysis and prepare appropriate environmental document to update the Comprehensive Management Plan and accompanying Monitoring Plan. (Complete by 2012)
- Prepare Civil Rights Impact Analysis for new policies: 1) Camping in designated areas only; 2) Firewood collection prohibited in river corridor, and 3) Campfires restricted to designated sites only (developed campgrounds and designated dispersed camping areas). Propane stoves permitted outside designated areas.
- Sequoia National Forest Supervisor issues Forest Order to implement new policy actions for Upper Kern “Wild and Scenic” River.
- Review existing turnouts with Tulare Co. Roads Dept. to identify and develop designated turnouts and decommission turnouts in unsafe locations. Also review direction in Comprehensive Management Plan under “Transportation System” section.
- Purchase and install seven (7) accessible CXT double vault toilets for placement at Halfway (1); Corral Creek (1); Springhill North & South (2); Chamise Flat (2); and Calkins Flat (1).
- Research and identify new funding sources (i.e., grants, partnerships, Recreation Enhancement Program [pass permit system]).
- Work with the community to examine and evaluate funding mechanisms that may include development and implementation of a “Wild and Scenic” river corridor permit system to protect the watershed and riparian habitat. Highest recreation visitor use occurs from May 1 through September 30. Areas of consideration include the following named dispersed areas: Halfway, Thunderbird, Chico Flat, Corral Creek, Springhill, Old Goldledge, Ant Canyon, Chamise Flat, Calkins Flat, and Brush Creek.

## **Long Term Actions (2012-2014)**

- Announce availability of environmental document and revised Comprehensive Management Plan for Upper Kern River corridor (Complete by September 2012).
- Initiate new Monitoring Plan program as per Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. (Complete early season and late season annually).
- Restore, sustain, and enhance the Wild and Scenic River corridor.
- Restore and maintain healthy watersheds and diverse habitats.
- Maintain resilient land and water conditions at the watershed level and restore deteriorated lands and waters.
- Develop and implement conservation strategies to conserve endangered, threatened, and other at-risk species.
- Monitor the status of congressionally designated areas, and manage them to protect and enhance the values for which they were designated.
- Plan new campgrounds or redesign existing campgrounds for group size of eight to 25. (Complete by September 2014).
- Monitor and review effectiveness of new policies and identify areas of improvement (how is this new policy working out?).
- Establish long term sustainable funding for the Upper Kern River canyon for facility maintenance and new facility development.
- Continue public dialogue regarding recreation management in the Upper Kern River corridor.

## **VIII. Work Force and Partnerships**

Seasonal river rangers provide a Forest Service presence on the upper and lower sections of the Kern River and adjacent river corridor. They receive law enforcement training and have citation authority to issue violation notices. They provide river safety information, clear debris and logs from the river channel, respond to emergency situations, and monitor river use.

Fire prevention technicians are assigned to patrol the Upper Kern canyon during fire season. They respond to wildland fires, medical aids, traffic accidents and other emergency response calls. They provide fire prevention information, issue campfire permits and are qualified as Forest Protection Officers with citation authority.

Seasonal recreation technician's clean and service portable and vault toilets at the 10 named dispersed camping areas along the Upper Kern canyon. They also service and maintain dispersed and developed facilities on the Kern Plateau, Greenhorn Mountains, Piute Mountains, Breckenridge Mountain, and Lake Isabella. They pick up trash, remove graffiti, collect fees, maintain facilities, provide a Forest Service presence, and assist forest visitors.

To manage the thousands of guests on any given summer weekend in the river corridor, these employees work in cooperation with Tulare County Sheriff deputies. With each of these enforcement units having additional territory to patrol outside of the river corridor, law enforcement and visitor contacts are limited, and officers often travel long distances to respond to calls. The current ratio of guests to officers results in the majority of visitors not coming into contact with Forest Service law enforcement personnel.

### **Volunteer Partnerships**

California Land Management, Forest Service and the Kern River outfitters sponsor two volunteer river cleanups each year; typically the Upper Kern in June and the Lower Kern in July. Volunteers and sponsors include the Kern Valley River Council, Whitewater Voyages, Kern River Outfitters, Kern River Tours, Mountain and River Adventures, Sierra South, Eagle Rafting, and local Kern Valley merchants. Kern River Fly-fishing, a permitted outfitter, sponsored a volunteer upper river clean-up in November, 2009 with approximately 50 volunteers.

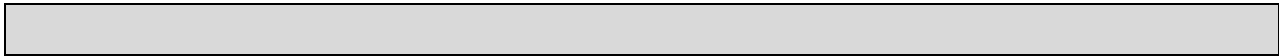
The Forest Service and Kern River Outfitters sponsor and coordinate the annual South Fork Middle School environmental education program along the Upper Kern River. Students participate in hands-on learning activities centered on conservation education. At the annual five-day camping event, the students learn how to identify local trees, the roles that both trees and fire play in the ecosystem, how to use a compass and negotiate an orienteering course, how to pan for gold, how to safely use hand tools to maintain trails, proper river and lake etiquette while rafting or kayaking, and through the use of a climbing wall hone their mountaineering and rock climbing skills. Additionally, Stewards of the Sequoia organize volunteer groups and individuals to plant trees at Rincon Camp and perform trail maintenance on the Rincon Trail.

### Potential Funding

- Sierra Nevada Conservation grant program
- Friends of the River
- Region 5 Recreation Enhancement Act (REA) Pass Program
- Region 5 (REA) Grant Program

### Key External Factors

- Natural events (river level, snow pack, wildfires, etc.)
- Outcome of California Department of Fish and Game's "fish stocking program" for the Upper Kern River.
- Outcome of Kern River Whitewater Boating Access Improvement Environmental Assessment.
- Outcome of Sequoia National Forest Motorized Travel Management Plan
- Forest-wide campground prospectus.
- Other federal, state and local agencies, organizations, and individuals with an interest in the Upper Kern River related to recreation and natural resources management.



## IX. Current Management Direction and Actions

The following documents and legislation outline management direction and actions to be used for adjusting policies.

### *USDA Forest Service Strategic Plan FY 2007–2012 Goals and Objectives*

- We will continue our commitment to reducing *threats* to the Nation’s forests and grasslands. These threats include (1) the risk of loss from catastrophic wildland fire caused by hazardous fuel buildup; (2) the introduction and spread of invasive species; (3) the loss of open space and resulting fragmentation of forests and grasslands that impairs ecosystem function; and (4) unmanaged recreation, particularly the unmanaged use of off-highway vehicles. Goal 1. Restore, sustain, and enhance the Nation’s Forests and Grasslands. Objective 1.5. Restore and maintain healthy watersheds and diverse habitats.

### *National Wild and Scenic Rivers Act*

- Section 10 of the Act requires that each component of the National Wild and Scenic River System shall be administered in such a manner as to protect and enhance the values which caused it to be included in the system. Other uses are permitted which do not substantially interfere with public use and enjoyment of these values.

### *North and South Forks of the Kern Wild and Scenic River Environmental Impact Statement*

- The Upper Kern River segment (Segment 4) is classified as Recreational, defined as having road access that parallels the river. Based on this opportunity class and management direction established in that plan, the direction states, and **“If unacceptable resource conditions begin to occur, managers may have several possible solutions. Actions may include encouraging users to adjust habits, changing time periods of use, changing distribution of use, and/or limiting use.”**

### *Comprehensive Management Plan (CMP)*

- The Plan provides guidance for managing the uses and resources with Kern W&SR segment corridors. The Plan is intended to serve as a guiding document for W&SR management and project planning. When necessary, an environmental analysis and appropriate environmental documentation are required to implementing site-specific programs and projects.

### *Sequoia National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan*

- Manage rivers in accordance with the final legislation on Wild and Scenic River designation.
- Prepare a river management plan for each designated river or Special Management Area, including final boundary descriptions.
- Classify the National forest segments of designated rivers at their highest eligible level (this is actually done before a river is designated).

### *Forest Service Manuals and Handbooks*

“It is the objective of the Forest Service to: provide river and similar water recreation opportunities to meet the public needs in ways that are appropriate to the National Forest recreation role and are within the capabilities of the resource base. Protect the free-flowing condition of designated Wild and Scenic Rivers and preserve and enhance the values for which they were established. Establish use limits and other management procedures that best aid in achieving the prescribed objectives for a river and in providing sustained benefit to the public. (FSM 2354.02)”

## **X. Comprehensive Management Plan for North and South Forks of the Kern Wild and Scenic River**

The Comprehensive Management Plan was written in 1994, as a requirement of the W&SR legislation and was a component of the Final North and South Forks of the Kern Wild and Scenic River Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). The Plan provides the range of resource, social and managerial conditions that the Forest Service intends to maintain, restore, or enhance within the segment corridors; it identifies management actions which provide guidance common to all Opportunity Classes or guidance unique to individual classes; and a monitoring plan to ensure compliance of management actions.

### **UPPER KERN RIVER: *Resource, social and managerial conditions***

#### Soils

- Perform an on-going inventory of campsites and trails within the river corridor for evidence of overuse, including but not limited to, soil compaction and vegetation loss. Repeat at 5 year intervals.
- Geologic conditions: Ensure that structures can resist debris flow effects.

#### Water Quality and Use

- Cumulative Watershed Effects (CWE) analysis and Best Management Practices (BMPs) will continue to be used for the planning and implementation of projects appropriate within the W&SR corridor to protect and enhance the water resources.
- Identify streamside management zones and riparian management areas within the W&SR corridor.
- Ensure that recreationists locate campsites and campfires away from the river's edge and tributaries within the corridor.
- Vehicular access in streamside management and riparian zones will be restricted in accordance with current Riparian Standards and Guidelines and BMPs.
- On North Fork, Segment 4, develop a partnership with commercial boating outfitter/guides to provide temporary sanitation facilities (dumpsters and portable toilets) at selected boating put-ins, take-outs, and launch spots.
- Initiate a water quality monitoring plan.

#### Vegetation:

- Manage vegetation to maintain and enhance the vegetative cover, preferably by natural processes.
- Reestablish vegetation by taking steps to protect tree and ground cover, preferably by natural vegetation.

#### Heritage

- Enforce laws and regulations to discourage vandalism and theft of cultural resources
- Develop and implement strategies, including limiting and distributing use, for the protection of significant heritage resource sites. Provide interpretation of suitable sites to the public, when and where appropriate.

### Wildlife and Fisheries

- Construct fenced enclosures along banks to promote streambank stabilization and fisheries habitat.
- On the North Fork, Segment 4, protect the identified habitat of the Kern River Slender Salamander which is an ORV in this segment.
- Manipulate vegetation to sustain early successional stands of forage
- Provide for the development of springs
- Provide for the installation of guzzlers
- Provide fishery habitat improvement projects such as erosion control structures, gully plugs, vegetation plantings, and spawning beds.

### Recreation

- Prohibit dispersed camping adjacent to the following campgrounds to reduce user conflicts: Limestone Campground and other developed campgrounds, as indicated through monitoring.
- Analyze, design, and construct group camps (up to 25 people each) on North Fork, Segment 4. Potential sites include: modify south and north ends of Hospital Flat Campground, modify south end of Goldledge Campground, modify central area of Fairview Campground, and undeveloped area adjacent to north end of Camp 3 Campground.
- North Fork, Segment 4: identify islands of vegetation within dispersed camping areas for the purpose of protecting vegetation from vehicular traffic. Then protect by placing large boulders around islands, or other acceptable protection measures.
- Eliminate dispersed camping and campfires within 25 feet from the river's edge, tributaries, system trails and meadows within the river corridor.
- Maintain vegetation in public use areas in a healthy and vigorous condition.
- Investigate the need and location(s) for designated target shooting areas, within the corridor of North Fork, Segment 4.
- Establish Partnership agreements to provide additional garbage bins and portable toilets on a cost-share basis.

### Protection (Fire Suppression)

- Continue to adhere to Best Management Practices (BMPs) for Fire Suppression and Fuels Management
- Enforce applicable sections of 36 CFR 261.5 (Fire)
- Control all wildfires. Use suppression techniques that minimize landscape alteration and ground disturbances. Limit and tightly control use of mechanized equipment.

### Visual Resources

- Meet the following Visual Quality Objectives (VQOs) as indicated. Strive for a higher visual quality whenever practical and when compatible with other resource objectives:
- North Fork, Segment 4 – Retention and Partial Retention
- Within North Fork Segment 4, manage Tulare County Highway SM99 as Sensitivity Level 1.
- Rehabilitate Brush Creek launch site and undeveloped camping area to VQOs.
- Revegetate the length of the Recreation segment with trees where needed to meet VQOs; preferably with native species.

### Transportation System

- For Opportunity Class “Recreation” (Upper Kern River): plan, develop, and manage transportation facilities and transportation modes that provide user safety, convenience, and efficiency of operations.
- Continue to adhere to Best Management Practices for Roads.
- On North Fork, Segment 4, locate areas where additional turnouts can be constructed and existing turnouts can be widened to accommodate safe vehicle parking. Once identified, coordinate with Tulare County Public Works Department to plan and construct/reconstruct turnouts.

### Public Information and Education

- Prepare information handouts to explain the attributes of the North and South Forks of the Kern W&SR.
- Prepare an Interpretive Plan promoting W&SR values. Include ways to communicate the information effectively for people with different kinds of disabilities.
- Bulletin boards and other appropriate on-site facilities and techniques would be allowed within the corridor in areas of concentrated public use or where needed.
- Strive to develop a Partnership with outfitter/guides to train people with the knowledge and skills to provide interpretive and visitor information services.