3.14 RECREATION

A. Setting

REGIONAL SETTING

Northern Sonoma County provides for an array of recreation activities, including boating, fishing, camping, wine tasting, biking, hiking, horseback riding, and wildlife viewing. The Russian River is a major recreation resource within the region. The Russian River, including the study area, is popular for boating, particularly nonmotorized boating, downstream of the study area. The 18,000-acre Lake Sonoma area is located less than 10 miles northwest of the study area (Geyserville Chamber of Commerce 2007). Scenic driving and visitation to wineries are popular recreation activities in the Alexander Valley.

LOCAL SETTING

The study area is located near Geyserville along the Russian River, which is the focus of recreation in the area. Activities within the study area include boating, wildlife viewing, swimming, sunbathing, fishing, wine tasting, and camping. Public access to the study area is limited to public road crossings, primarily the area near Geyserville Bridge, where State Route (SR) 128 crosses the Russian River. Therefore, it is likely that most recreation use in the study area is either by adjacent private landowners, public users at the SR 128 bridge, and on-water public use via upstream public access locations (most likely in Asti or Cloverdale).

The Russian River is navigable from Cloverdale to the coast and is included within the Russian River Waterway Trail (Sonoma County 1989, Sonoma County Board of Supervisors 2003). Boats on the river are those used for flat-water paddling, such as canoes and rafts; there are no whitewater rafting opportunities within the study area. Although April to October is the best boating season on the river at large, because of lower, slow-moving water, the stretch within the study area is best during the early part of the season, from April to August, when water flow is at neither its annual peak nor summertime low (RussianRiverTravel.com 2007a and Mercer, pers. comm. 2007); however, one source states that the boating season typically occurs from January through June within the run that encompasses the study area (California Creeks 1997). As for commercial use of the river, according to the River's Edge Kayak & Canoe Trips, commercial rafting generally occurs from April to August in a normal water year (to avoid heavy flows during the early months and minimize portaging [walking in low-flow areas] during the later months).

The 6.5-mile segment of the Russian River within the study area is Class I[1] and is part of a larger, 11-mile run between Asti (the put-in) and the Alexander Valley RV Park and Campground (the take-out) that crosses through an open valley with surrounding vineyards and over wide gravel bars with little shade. This stretch is also boated commercially by a company out of Healdsburg, which runs group and weekend trips, and describes this run as remote, a favorite in the early season, and the company's most challenging run with a little more current than other runs south of the study area (River's Edge Kayak & Canoe Trips 2007). The meandering run, which is not available during the latter part of the season because of low flows, includes several swimming holes and picnic spots and requires 4–5 hours to complete. People gain unauthorized access to the river at the Geyserville Bridge (SR 128), where sunbathers and

[1] Class I rivers are considered easy, consisting of fast-moving water with riffles and small waves and few obstructions. Difficulty classes range from Class I (Easy) to Class V, which is Expert level with extremely long, obstructed, or very violent rapids.

anglers can be seen. River use is most likely to be by canoe, kayak, or inner tube. Wildlife viewing by boat or from shore may also be a common activity.

The Russian River also provides for fishing use, both from the banks of the river and by boat. Recreational fish species within the river include large and smallmouth bass, catfish, and steelhead and Chinook salmon in the winter (Hight 2007, RussianRiverTravel.com 2007b). Public bank-fishing use likely only occurs in the SR 128 bridge area because the river is not publicly accessible by road and bank access is thus limited. There may also be bank fishing use by adjacent private landowners along the rest of the river.

Wine tasting is another primary activity that occurs around the study area. According to the Alexander Valley Winegrowers' Map of Alexander Valley (Alexander Valley Winegrowers 2007), seven vineyards surround the study area between the Geyserville Bridge and the Jimtown Bridge to the south. Many more vineyards and tasting rooms are located both north and south of the study area. Camping is available in the study area at the Alexander Valley RV Park and Campground (Geyserville.com 2007). Additionally, Geyserville Avenue is a proposed Class II bicycle route[2] according to the Sonoma County Bikeways Plan (Sonoma County Bicycle & Pedestrian Advisory Committee 1997).

B. Regulatory Framework

LOCAL REGULATORY ISSUES

The *Sonoma County General Plan* (Sonoma County 1989) contains an Open Space Element that describes policies for parks and equestrian and hiking trails, as well as bikeways. The goals, objectives, and policies described in the County General Plan support establishing a countywide park and trail system and a bikeways network. Parkland needs and implementation measures are discussed in the Public Facilities and Services Element. The *Draft Sonoma County Outdoor Recreation Plan* (Sonoma County 2003) was developed to facilitate cooperation among agencies in the planning, acquisition, management, and funding of recreation facilities in unincorporated areas of Sonoma County. The plan recommends policies that could form a County General Plan amendment, classifies and inventories parks within the county, and identifies parkland needs throughout the county using quantitative guidelines and public input. Based on trends, survey information, public input, and identified needs, recommendations for additional parks and trails are included within the plan. Three recommendations are pertinent to the study area: developing a community park in Geyserville, providing river access in Geyserville, and acquiring land on the Russian River in the Alexander Valley area for public access. The latter recommendation for river access was also suggested in the California Coastal Conservancy's *Russian River Trespass Management and Access Plan.*

C. Potential Impacts and Mitigation Measures

CRITERIA USED FOR DETERMINING IMPACT SIGNIFICANCE

According to Appendix G of the State CEQA Guidelines, a project would typically have a significant impact if it would:

[2] A Class II bicycle route is a bicycle lane that is designated on roadway shoulders, outside of vehicle travel lanes, for preferential use by bicycles.

- increase the use of existing neighborhood and regional parks or other recreational facilities such that substantial physical deterioration of the facility would occur or be accelerated, or
- include recreational facilities or require the construction or expansion of recreational facilities that might have an adverse physical effect on the environment.

In addition, it was determined that the project would result in a significant effect on recreational resources if it would:

- substantially reduce recreational opportunities or substantially degrade recreational experiences.

The project would not increase use of recreational facilities, include recreational facilities, or require the construction or expansion of recreational facilities. Therefore, the project would not result in a significant impact under the first and second significance thresholds listed above.

PROJECT IMPACTS

Findings in the ARM Plan

Section 8.7, "Land Use," of the aggregate resource management plan (ARM Plan) PEIR evaluated potential recreation impacts. The ARM Plan PEIR noted that instream mining operations could result in adverse recreation impacts by reducing stream access; creating unaesthetic conditions, noise, and dust; disrupting wildlife habitat; and posing a potential conflict with recreationists on public roads used as gravel haul routes. Instream mining operations also would be visible to river recreationists on weekdays during the summer when river use is substantial. Further, recreational fishing could be affected by losses in streamside vegetation and fisheries resulting from bank erosion. The PEIR determined that these impacts would not be significant on a project level. The PEIR further determined that cumulative mining projects could result in a significant impact, but identified required measures to mitigate that impact to a less-than-significant level.

Project Impacts

Impact 3.14-1 The project would not substantially reduce recreational opportunities or substantially degrade recreational experiences.

Up to four gravel bars on either side of the 6.5-mile stretch of the Russian River within the study area would be mined for gravel each year from June 1 to November 1. Mining operations would alter the recreation setting and thus the recreation experience for boaters, as well as anglers and sunbathers. Because wine tasting does not occur immediately adjacent to the river in this reach, mining operations would not disturb participants in this activity, although hauling operations could affect traffic in the local area. See Section 3.7 for impacts on traffic and circulation.

Mining operations could occur at four gravel bars (one bar at a time) through the 5-month duration, or occur simultaneously at two bars for 50 days or less toward the end of the operating season (when flows are at the lowest) if mining commences late in the season; the latter scenario is expected to occur rarely. Mining and hauling operations would primarily distract from the recreational experiences of weekday boaters because of operational dust, noise and views of the equipment, stockpiles, vegetation clearing and mining areas. The noise and views of

mining and river enhancement program (REP) activities could also negatively alter the primarily undeveloped, natural/agricultural recreation setting for boaters and may reduce their opportunities for wildlife viewing, and negatively affect their recreation experience. Steelhead and Chinook salmon runs in the Alexander Valley reach of the Russian River typically take place during the late fall, winter, and early spring months (October–April), when there would be little or no mining activity under the project. But there would be some crossover between the boating season (January–August) and mining activities (June 1–November 1) although mining would not begin until June at the earliest. The timing of mining activities would also overlap with the commercial boating season, but most commercial boating use, and likely public use as well, typically occurs on the weekend when gravel would not be actively mined, and noise and dust would not occur. In addition, because mining activities would occur in such a small area relative to the length and duration of the overall boating run (11 miles and 4–5 hours duration), adverse effects on the recreational experience would be temporary, even if boating occurs during the weekday period.

The areas subject to mining and construction of enhancement features are private lands with no public access. The only legal access through the mining and enhancement areas is by boat along the river. As a result, because bank access is limited, most fishing, swimming and wildlife viewing within the study area is likely to be done by boat. Negative effects on the recreational experience would therefore be similar to those previously described for boating. The exception would be at the Geyserville and Jimtown Bridge areas, where public access likely occurs. The noise associated with mining on weekdays could negatively affect bank fishing in these area. Project noise may also affect weekday sunbathers.

As required by the operating standards of the ARM Plan, temporary bridges erected for mining purposes would have a minimum height of 4 feet above the water. Though this is low, boaters would be able to pass under the bridges. The ARM Plan and SMARO require the posting of signage upstream of temporary bridges to alert boaters of the bridges, and the project will be conditioned to meet this requirement. The impact is therefore less than significant with the measures already established in the ARM Plan.

In conclusion, most recreation conflicts would be reduced because of the short crossover between the boating season and mining activities, and the fact that the bulk of recreation use in the study area typically occurs on weekends and holidays when mining or construction activities would not occur pursuant to existing County mining ordinance standards (26A-09-010(j)). In addition, the impact on river recreation would be less than significant because the project would operate in only a limited portion of the overall length and duration of a user's experience.

Mitigation Measures

None. The impact on recreational users is less than significant with measures already established in the ARM Plan and mining ordinance.

Impact 3.14-2 Implementation of the REP will expand riparian and wetland areas, improve aquatic and terrestrial habitats that would benefit recreational users.

Once completed and well established, the REP would provide additional wetland areas and fish habitat that could benefit recreational users by creating enhanced views of riparian forest, wetland and other complex channel features and potentially creating more opportunities for wildlife viewing and fishing. The long term impact of the REP is therefore beneficial.

Mitigation Measures

None. The long term impact of the REP is beneficial.

Impact 3.14-3 Mining and REP streambank enhancements, including bioengineered bank stabilization measures and placement of large woody debris, could have a negative effect on recreation if they create an attractive nuisance, boating hazards or temporarily block the navigable channel.

Although wet crossings of equipment would be limited to the construction of temporary bridges, wet crossings could delay boaters and anglers from moving downstream or disrupt the natural recreation setting and negatively affect the recreation experience. The operations may also create an attractive nuisance for users of the waterway and visitors to the area. Installation of materials along the channel banks is also subject to extreme hydraulic force of the river and may dislodge and create a boating hazard. This impact is potentially significant.

Mitigation Measure

3.14-1 Prior to issuance of grading permits, Syar shall submit an engineering analysis demonstrating that any proposed bank stabilization or enhancement features are anchored, meet applicable construction standards, and are designed to withstand the hydrologic force of the river.

3.14-2 Syar shall install fencing, post warning signs, provide site patrol, and take other actions necessary to ensure the security of the active mining site and associated work equipment storage areas and control private access to those areas.

Impact Significance After Mitigation

Mitigation Measures 3.14-1 and -2 would substantially reduce impacts related to site safety and boating hazards to a less than significant level.

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