

Pacific Forest and Watershed Lands Stewardship Council

Land Stewardship Proposal (LSP)

For the

**Lyons Reservoir Planning Unit
Stanislaus River Watershed Area**

**Submitted by: USDA Forest Service
Stanislaus National Forest**

May 13, 2011

Table of Contents

Contact Information.....	3
Executive Summary.....	3
Organizational Information.....	5
Rationale for Applying.....	5
Organization’s Mission.....	6
Geographic Focus.....	7
Organizational Experience and Capacity.....	8
Organizational Finances.....	9
Key Personnel/Staff.....	11
Community Engagement and Collaboration.....	11
Legal Compliance and Best Practices.....	14
Conflict of Interest Disclosure.....	14
Land Interests Sought.....	15
Baseline and Enhanced Land Management.....	17
Physical Enhancements/Capital Improvements.....	23
Land Conservation Partners and Youth Opportunities.....	25
Public Input.....	26
Budget and Funding Plan.....	27
Supporting Documentation.....	30
Exhibit 1: Attachment A - Letter from the Forest Supervisor	
Attachment B - STF – Summary of Forest Plan Direction	
Attachment C – Letters from Land Conservation Partners	
Attachment D – Budget and Funding Plan	
Exhibit 2: Attachment E - Operating Budget (current year – 1 spreadsheet)	
Attachment F – STF expenses for the past three years	
(3 spreadsheets - 2008, 2009, 2010)	

PART 1 – ORGANIZATIONAL INFORMATION

Contact Information

Primary Proposal Contact: **Ann Denton, District Ranger**
Mi-Wok Ranger District
24695 Highway 108
Mi-Wuk Village, CA 95346
Telephone: (209) 586-3234 x 607
E-mail address: adenton@fs.fed.us

Secondary Proposal Contact: **Christina Welch, Deputy Forest Supervisor**
Stanislaus National Forest Supervisor's Office
19777 Greenley Road
Sonora, CA 95370
Telephone: (209) 532-3671 x 232
E-mail address: cwelch@fs.fed.us

Executive Director: **Susan Skalski, Forest Supervisor**
Stanislaus National Forest Supervisor's Office
19777 Greenley Road
Sonora, CA 95370
Telephone: (209) 532-3671 x 232
E-mail address: sskalski@fs.fed.us

Executive Summary

It is the desire of the Forest Service to engage in the oversight of the Lyons Reservoir Planning Unit, Map 1 (Parcel id numbers 1024, 1025, 2026 and 1027). The Stanislaus National Forest (STF) is interested in acquiring fee title to these parcels – commonly referred to as Rushing Meadow - so that the Beneficial Public Values (BPV's) and associated Objectives developed by the Stewardship Council are preserved and enhanced in perpetuity.

The Forest Service proposes to manage Rushing Meadow holistically, incorporating the approximately 628 acres available for acquisition into similar management and emphasis as the NFS lands surrounding the majority of the Rushing Meadow parcels at this time. With the exception of a single shared property boundary line on the southwest edge of parcel #1024, the Rushing Meadow parcels are completely surrounded by NFS lands.

The Forest Land and Resource Management Plan, as amended, (Forest Plan, 2010) would guide the management of the area, providing specific management direction in the form of

Forest Goals and Objectives, Management Practices, Forest Standards and Guidelines, and specific Management Area direction. NFS lands adjacent to Rushing Meadow lie specifically within three management areas: Wildlife, Scenic Corridor, and General Forest. Forest Goals pertaining to fish and wildlife, sensitive plants, recreation, timber, range, cultural resources and water quality closely mirror the Stewardship Council BPV's of protection of the natural habitat of fish, wildlife and plants; preservation of open space; outdoor recreation; sustainable forestry; agricultural uses; and, the preservation of historic values.

Located in the heart of the Sierras, the STF has a demonstrated history of quality land and resource management covering a variety of natural resources and associated programs. The Forest receives an estimated 1,760,000 recreation visitors annually. Together, our management efforts and the services we provide are the epitome of our Agency mission: *'Caring For the Land and Serving People'*.

The STF employs over 350 permanent employees with an additional 75-100 temporary employees typically hired during the summer months. Our staffing includes a base of professional, technical, and administrative expertise in a multitude of specialties and management functions. Employee expertise includes wildlife biologists, aquatic biologists, botanists, fuels planners, foresters, archeologists, hydrologists, soil scientists, geologists, entomologists, ecologists, range conservationists, recreation specialists, landscape architects, public affairs specialists, interpretive/conservation education specialists, recreation planners, geographic information specialists, business management specialists, and engineers. Our Agency has the experience and capacity to provide management oversight and protection of the valued resources located in the Rushing Meadow area.

As a federal Agency, the STF receives appropriated program funding from Congress on an annual basis. Financially, federal budgets and politics often cause fluctuations in available finances and subsequent program emphasis areas from year-to-year. Despite the up and down cycles, local resource managers find creative ways to protect and manage the resources through partnerships, outside funding sources (grants), and by engaging the local community.

The STF has a long history of partnering with a variety of individuals and groups on project efforts where common goals and objectives exist. Past partnership efforts have included other Agencies, volunteers, local governments, youth groups, conservation groups, industry and commodity users, various user groups, fire safe councils, and tribes. A variety of projects have covered many types of land management activities including trail maintenance, habitat and meadow restoration, fuel reduction and community protection, watershed improvements, environmental education and interpretation, and cultural resource maintenance and enhancement.

Baseline land management of the acquired parcels would entail ongoing management and stewardship similar to the surrounding NFS lands. Agency personnel are not able to provide a presence on all NFS lands each year. Rather, our annual program emphasis, planned projects, and appropriated funding generally dictate where on the landscape baseline management continues as compared to locations where opportunities for enhanced land management activities through project planning and implementation might occur.

For over 100 years, one of the keys to our success with project planning and implementation has been public participation and working together to accomplish common goals. The STF looks forward to working with the Stewardship Council to jointly develop a Conservation Covenant that will assure that the BPV's and Objectives identified for the Rushing Meadow area are preserved and enhanced for the benefit of the American public.

Organizational Information

The legal name of our organization is the USDA Forest Service, Stanislaus National Forest. We are a federal government entity, founded in 1905. We are commonly referred to as the Stanislaus National Forest (STF). Additional information regarding our Forest can be found at www.fs.fed.us/r5/stanislaus

Rationale for Applying

As the primary owner of land surrounding the Lyons Reservoir parcels, acquisition of these parcels would allow the STF to provide consolidated management of the natural resources and values found across the landscape. Many opportunities exist to protect and enhance the Stewardship Council's identified beneficial public values (BPV's) within the South Fork Stanislaus River watershed for the American public. These values are the protection of the natural habitat of fish, wildlife and plants; preservation of open space; outdoor recreation; sustainable forestry; agricultural uses; and, the preservation of historic values.

Forest Service (FS) acquisition of this parcel would allow for greater biological and physical connectivity through consistent management with adjacent lands already managed by the Agency. A variety of species and habitats that could benefit from this connectivity would include the Bald eagle, spotted owl (six occupied territories in the area), goshawk (one territory), mule deer (winter range), and various aquatic species occupying riparian habitat along the South Fork of the Stanislaus River. FS management would emphasize riparian habitat restoration with resulting improvements to habitat and stream bank stability leading to a reduction in downstream sedimentation and improved water quality.

The STF is a recognized leader in providing access and recreation opportunities for the local community, California, the nation and visitors from around the world. FS acquisition of the Lyons Reservoir parcels would allow public access to continue. The only motorized access to Lyons Reservoir itself is via Forest Road 3N14 from Highway 108. Other roads in close proximity to the north and west sides of Lyons Reservoir have been closed to help protect the water quality of Lyons Reservoir, the primary municipal water source for Tuolumne County communities downstream. Forest roads also provide access to other non-federal lands in the Lyons Reservoir planning unit. Non-motorized access via hiking, bicycling and horseback riding provide dispersed recreation opportunities in the area. Primary non-motorized access is along segments of the historic Sugar Pine Railroad grades. Opportunities exist to expand non-motorized use connecting the Lyons area to destinations both upstream (Pinecrest Lake area) and downstream (Twain Harte area). Protecting the historic values while enhancing non-

motorized recreation offers the opportunity to also capitalize on the 40 years of experience the STF has in providing a strong interpretive program. Interpretive efforts connect the visiting public with their cultural and natural heritage, facilitating understanding of forest management and promoting land and resource stewardship.

Sustainable forestry practices on nearby federal lands can be planned and implemented across more of the landscape if the STF were to acquire the Lyons Reservoir parcels. An interdisciplinary approach is used to identify the purpose and need and project objectives for proposed activities. Design criteria are identified to ensure practical removal of forest products while protecting and enhancing other resources and values.

Ongoing agricultural use of the area is evident. NFS lands surrounding the Lyons Reservoir planning unit are part of the Rushing Grazing Allotment. The current Forest Service permittee also holds permits for adjacent Pacific Gas and Electric (PG&E) and Sierra Pacific Industry (SPI) lands. Rushing Meadow (PG&E owned) is an integral component of the grazing operations on federal lands as it is the only gathering facility on the high elevation end of the allotment. The Mi-Wok District has a successful, working relationship with the current permittee who has been an excellent land steward in managing the range resource while protecting other resource values.

Organization Mission

Established in 1905, the USDA Forest Service manages 193 million acres of public lands in National Forests and Grasslands. The mission of the Forest Service (FS) is to sustain the health, diversity and productivity of the nation's forests and grasslands to meet the needs of present and future generations. Congress directs the FS to manage National Forests for multiple uses and benefits and for the sustained yield of renewable resources such as water, forage, wildlife, wood and recreation.

The Stanislaus National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) provides management direction for National Forest system (NFS) land surrounding the Lyons Reservoir planning unit. Management direction is included in the Forest Goals and Objectives, Management Practices, Forestwide Standards and Guidelines, and specific Management Area direction. NFS lands adjacent to the Lyons Reservoir planning unit lie primarily within three management areas: Wildlife, Scenic Corridor, and General Forest. A summary of applicable Forest Plan direction is attached as supporting documentation (Attachment B).

Forest Goals (listed below) closely mirror the Stewardship Council BPV's previously identified above (protection of the natural habitat of fish, wildlife and plants; preservation of open space; outdoor recreation; sustainable forestry; agricultural uses; and, the preservation of historic values).

Fish and Wildlife: Provide habitat for viable populations of all native and desired non-native wildlife, fish and plants. Maintain and improve habitat for Threatened and Endangered species and give special attention to sensitive species to see that they do not become Federally listed as Threatened or Endangered.

Sensitive Plants: Manage sensitive plants to ensure continued population viability and prevent them from becoming federally listed as Threatened or Endangered.

Recreation: Provide a wide range of recreation opportunities directed at various experience levels to meet current and projected demand, including campgrounds, hiking trails, picnic areas, OHV trails, etc. Develop and implement programs to inform Forest users about recreation opportunities. Interpret forest management activities and the forest environment for visitors.

Timber: Manage the timber resource to provide commercial sawtimber, public fuelwood, and miscellaneous wood products, while considering environmental factors and other resource values.

Range: Manage livestock to utilize available forage while avoiding adverse impacts on soil, vegetation, water quality, wildlife, fisheries and riparian zones.

Cultural Resources: Inventory, evaluate, enhance and manage cultural resources to prevent loss of, or damage to cultural values; to integrate significant resources into multiple use management; to gain scientific knowledge and management data about them; and, to interpret for public benefit and appreciation.

Water Quality: Maintain and restore water quality to meet goals of the Clean Water Act and Safe Drinking Water Act, providing water that is fishable, swimmable, and suitable for drinking after normal treatment.

Geographic Focus

The Lyons Reservoir Planning Unit is surrounded by public lands administered by the STF, Mi-Wok Ranger District. The Mi-Wok Ranger District manages approximately 170,000 acres of the 900,000 acre forest. The STF has been managing these adjacent lands for over 100 years. The agency has a demonstrated history of quality land resource management for a broad range of ecological, economic and social benefits, including such services and activities as: developed and dispersed recreation opportunities; wilderness and wild and scenic rivers management; motorized and non-motorized recreation experiences; trail and road construction and maintenance; special use permitted activities (resorts, organization camps, recreation residences, communication/electronic sites, events, outfitting and guiding services, etc.); mining, grazing and vegetation management; wildlife and aquatic species habitat protection and enhancement; protection of sensitive botanical resources; archeological and historical resource protection and management; wildland fire protection, prevention and suppression; interpretive and conservation education services; and law enforcement.

The STF receives an estimated 1,760,000 recreation visits annually (Source: National Visitor Use Monitoring data). Approximately 20% of the total Forest recreation use occurs on the Mi-Wok Ranger District, with the majority of that recreation use being dispersed recreation activities: picnicking, camping, fishing, hiking, horseback riding, off highway vehicle riding, etc. Currently, PG&E manages the Lyons Reservoir area for day use and non-motorized recreation. Lying at mid range elevation, the lands surrounding Lyons Reservoir are generally available to the public year-round with winter access and opportunities somewhat weather dependent.

The STF is located within four counties: Alpine, Calaveras, Mariposa, and Tuolumne. Each District Ranger and the Forest Supervisor regularly communicate and interact with a variety of governmental and non-governmental organizations, including the Tribes, elected officials (County, State and Federal), user groups, environmental groups, permit holders and many other people interested in the management of their public lands. The Forest is not only a major employer, but also contributes to the local economies through the delivery of goods and services that support local and regional businesses, and through purchases, contracts and permits issued for a wide range of goods and services.

Organizational Experience and Capacity

As a Federal land management agency, the Forest Service has the capacity needed to manage the resources associated with the Rushing Meadow parcel. The Stanislaus NF employs over 250 permanent employees and 75-100 additional temporary employees that are typically hired during the summer months. The Forest maintains a base of professional, technical and administrative expertise in a multitude of specialties and management functions and is also able to draw on the experience and expertise of over 1000 Forest Service professionals within California. Employee expertise includes wildlife biologists, aquatic biologists, botanists, fuels planners, foresters, archeologists, hydrologists, soil scientists, geologists, entomologists, ecologists, range conservationists, recreation specialists, landscape architects, public affairs specialists, interpretive/conservation education specialists, recreation planners, geographic information specialists, business management specialists, and engineers.

One of the greatest strengths of the Forest Service is the resource managers and specialists who live in the local communities and know and love the land, such as the employees of the Mi-Wok Ranger District. Despite the ups and downs of budgets and politics that any government agency will experience, resource managers get in their trucks each day and go out and take care of the land and serve people. For the Forest Service this has been a consistent and non-wavering fact for over 100 years. When budgets drop local resource managers always find a way to protect the resources, create partnerships, find grants, create efficiencies and engage the community and youth to help.

Provided below are three specific projects that illustrate the Forest's capacity to own, manage and enhance resource values associated with the Lyons Reservoir Planning Unit:

Central Stanislaus Watershed Analysis (CSWA) Project: CSWA is a large scale ecosystem analysis document that provides recommendations to help guide future resource management in the center portion of the STF. CSWA addresses the biological, physical and social-cultural dimensions of the ecosystem across approximately 300,000 national forest acres consisting of five major watersheds (including the 40,174 acre Lyons watershed). The CSWA analysis consisted of identifying key ecosystem elements, determining desired and existing conditions, developing management opportunities (from the difference or similarity between desired and existing conditions) and providing recommendations for achieving desired conditions. CSWA is not a decision document. Rather, it provides recommendations that may be used to guide later decision making. It is a plan-to-project effort that complements the Forest Plan by providing additional information to help determine applicable resource

management activities. The resulting recommendations are divided into four principal categories: Potential Projects; Inventories and Monitoring; Plans, Analyses and Guides; and Forest Plan Amendments.

Lyons, Crandall, South 108 Projects - Fuel Reduction and Forest Health: Beginning in 2003 and continuing today, the Mi-Wok Ranger District has planned and implemented several fuels reduction and forest health projects which have treated approximately 650 acres of NFS lands adjacent to the Lyons Reservoir planning unit. The purpose of these treatments is to reduce fire spread and intensity on the landscape; establish areas where suppression activities would be highly successful; reintroduce fire into the landscape, bringing the system closer to its natural/historical fire regime; accelerate the development of forest stand structure and characteristics favored by old forest dependent species; and, reduce stand densities to levels consistent with the site's ability while increasing stand resistance to large scale drought- and insect-related mortality. Within this area, treatment units encompass a variety of Forest Plan management areas and land allocations that include wildland-urban intermix (WUI) defense zone, WUI threat zone, California spotted owl home range core areas (HRCAs), California spotted owl protected activity centers (PACs), old forest emphasis area, and general forest. Vegetation structure/composition includes multi-aged mature forest, even-aged plantations, chaparral, and lava cap associations. Activity types include the use of mechanical/hand thinning, biomassing, shredding, prescribed fire, pile burning, or any combination of these tools, as well as road maintenance and reconstruction in support of the treatments. Forest health treatments focus on decreasing stand densities to levels likely to resist mortality due to competition, insects and disease under drought conditions. These prescriptions are also designed to accelerate the development of old forest structure and function. The resulting efforts are consistent with many of the identified BVP's on the Lyons Reservoir planning unit.

Dispersed Recreation: The Mi-Wok Ranger District offers a variety of dispersed recreation opportunities for the visiting public. Ranging from 1,500 to 7,000 feet in elevation with land accessible year-round, available activities include fishing, hiking, mountain biking, hunting, camping, horseback riding, sightseeing, wildlife viewing, and off highway vehicle (OHV) riding. Offering the greatest number of trail miles on the Forest, the District has historically hosted 1-2 OHV events each year. A family enduro event hosted by a Modesto area club brings visitors from throughout California to Tuolumne County. A local 4WD club hosts a jeep ride for physically and mentally challenged visitors. The smiles on the faces of those who might otherwise not get to special places on the Forest culminate at the end of the day with a barbeque and visit from Smokey Bear. The District relies heavily on club members to assist with route maintenance throughout the year and to help with use area patrols, providing visitor contacts, information and education.

Organizational Finances

The Stanislaus National Forest receives and allocates funding in a variety of resource areas that are relevant to management of the Lyons Reservoir parcels. Efficient management of Forest resources requires that individual staff managers collaborate and share funds and other resources (personnel, equipment, supplies, etc.) to accomplish work. The following Forest financial information is provided as attachments:

- Operating Budget/Forest Allocations 2011 (Attachment E - 1 spreadsheet)
- Stanislaus National Forest expenses for the past three years (Attachment F – 3 spreadsheets, 2008-2010)

Work is also accomplished on the Forest through public/private partnerships, grants and other agreements. A specific, long-term funding program worth highlighting is the successful partnership with the CA State Parks and Recreation Off-Highway Motor Vehicle Recreation Division (OHMVRD) over the past 24 years. On the average, the Stanislaus National Forest has received \$250,000 annually to assist the Forest in providing off-highway vehicle (OHV) recreation opportunities while ensuring that a variety of resources are protected through conservation and restoration efforts. Since 2007, Mi-Wok District specific OHV grant funds have totaled \$481,000. Approximately \$100,000 is used annually for trail maintenance and other conservation/education efforts. The remaining funds are tied to specific restoration projects. Currently, nearly \$54,000 is available for two restoration projects on NFS lands in the Lyons Reservoir area.

The use of volunteers also supplements our Agency funding. On the Mi-Wok Ranger District, a number of volunteers (both individuals and sponsored groups) assist in the dispersed recreation/OHV program areas. Volunteers patrol use areas, making visitor contacts to provide information and education. They assist with operator compliance checks and with OHV trail and sign maintenance and installation. Volunteer group work days are integral to the accomplishment of OHV restoration projects. The value of volunteer contributed work within just the recreation/OHV program area on the Mi-Wok Ranger District has been averaging approximately \$48,000 annually over the past several years.

Generally speaking, any revenues or receipts generated on NFS lands through special use permits, grazing permits, timber sales, etc., are returned to the US Treasury. Except where special authorities exist, revenues generated on the Forest are not kept on the local unit for ongoing management, operations or future expenditures.

Stewardship Contracting is one example of the handful of special authorities that do exist. The objectives of stewardship contracting are to achieve land management goals for NFS lands while meeting local and rural community needs. It is a tool that can be used to maintain receipts from logging/biomassing at the local level for additional, follow up work needed (for example, shredding contracts, range improvements, road decommissioning, watershed improvements, wildfire habitat improvements, etc.) While most receipts are returned to the same landscape from which they were generated, projects can take place elsewhere on the Forest as needs arise.

In addition, partnership/cooperative funding agreements can be developed to ensure that funds provided or granted by a specific entity such as the Stewardship Council will in fact be used in the area designated and for the agreed upon purposes as set forth in the appropriate tool (collection agreement, participating agreement, challenge cost share agreement, etc.).

Key Personnel/Staff

The National Forest System, one arm of the USDA Forest Service, consists of a hierarchy of four levels of organization: the Washington Office, Regional Offices, Forest Supervisor Office and Ranger Districts. In general, Washington and Regional Offices set overall vision and policy, and the Forest and Ranger District accomplish specific projects to meet agency goals. The history and culture of the Forest Service, which sets it apart from many other agencies, emphasizes decision making at the Forest and Ranger District level so that management can be tailored to local conditions.

The top level of management for the Forest Service is located in the Washington Office and managed by the Chief of the Forest Service, Tom Tidwell. Next are Regions which are managed by a Regional Forester. The Pacific Southwest Region includes National Forests in California and the Pacific Islands and is under the supervision of Regional Forester Randy Moore. There are 18 National Forests in California, each of which is managed by a Forest Supervisor. Each National Forest is composed of Ranger Districts, managed by a District Ranger, who has the closest connection to the actions occurring on the National Forest land under their direction.

The Lyons Reservoir parcel is located within the Mi-Wok Ranger District of the Stanislaus National Forest. The Mi-Wok Ranger District encompasses approximately 170,000 acres of public land and is managed by District Ranger Ann Denton. Ms Denton has been employed by the Forest Service for over 32 years and has been the Mi-Wok District Ranger for the past 19 years. She would serve as the lead for the Lyons Reservoir Planning Unit.

Overall management of the Stanislaus National Forest is supervised by Forest Supervisor Susan Skalski and Deputy Forest Supervisor Christina Welch. Together, they share more than 55 years of federal land management employment experience. Both have previously served as District Rangers on other National Forest units. Ms Welch would serve as the secondary contact for this project while Ms Skalski would fulfill the role of Executive Director.

Community Engagement and Collaboration

The STF has a long history of partnering with a variety of individuals and groups on project efforts where common goals and objectives exist. Past partnership efforts have included other Agencies, volunteers, local governments, youth groups, conservation groups, industry and commodity users, various user groups, fire safe councils, tribes, and individuals. A variety of projects have covered many types of land management activities including trail maintenance, habitat and meadow restoration, fuel reduction and community protection, watershed improvements, environmental education and interpretation, and cultural resource maintenance and enhancement.

In addition, specific natural resource related legislation and policy require public involvement. The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requires that the Forest Service involve all interested parties when planning projects that may impact NFS lands. The National Forest

Management Act (NFMA) requires each National Forest to develop a Land and Resource Management plan prepared with public involvement.

The STF is open to meeting with any and all groups interested in partnering on projects located in the Lyons area. The following examples highlight ongoing collaborative efforts on the STF.

Tuolumne-Mariposa Counties Resource Advisory Committee

A Resource Advisory Committee (RAC) provides advice and recommendations to the FS on the development and implementation of forest improvement or maintenance projects on both federal and adjacent private lands as authorized under the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act. Shortly after the initial legislation (October 2000), the Tuolumne County RAC was established by the Secretary of Agriculture. Each RAC consists of 15 people representing varied interests and areas of expertise, who work collaboratively to improve working relationships among community members and national forest personnel. With the passage of new legislation in 2008, Mariposa County approached the Tuolumne County RAC with a desire to join the existing efforts and committee. The Tuolumne-Mariposa County RAC is responsible for distributing funds (ranging from \$100,000 - \$300,000 annually) to projects that benefit either the STF or the Sierra National Forest (SNF) to the south. Forest personnel also review and provide input regarding projects on the STF to the Alpine County RAC to the north.

Amador – Calaveras Consensus Group

The Amador Calaveras Consensus Group (ACCG) is a diverse, community-based collaborative effort working to create healthy forests and watersheds, fire-safe communities, and sustainable local economies. The Group operates within California's Amador and Calaveras Counties in and adjacent to the Upper Mokelumne River watershed. The STF is a charter member of this model of grass roots collaboration. The ACCG consists of federal, state, and local government representatives; environmental groups; local business people; and concerned citizens. The group formed in response to faltering local economies, heightened threat of catastrophic wildfires, and increased litigation on fuel reduction projects. Some of the guiding principles of the ACCG include: 1) make decisions primarily by consensus and include local forest and upper watershed stakeholders in project development, deliberations, and implementation; 2) design and implement activities that protect and restore forest ecosystem resiliency, structures, processes and functions within local watersheds; 3) reduce forest fuel loads to manageable levels using all site appropriate methods (including but not limited to mechanical and/or prescribed burning methods); 4) foster cooperative partnerships that maximize effectiveness and regional competitiveness of the local workforce and businesses.

Stanislaus Recreation Stakeholders

The Stanislaus Recreation Stakeholders (SRS) is an independent, community group seeking to enhance the quality of recreation opportunities in the STF. SRS was born out of a 2003 listening session attended by over 150 forest stakeholders sharing concerns and issues. The primary goal of SRS is to minimize conflict between different forms of recreation use on NFS

lands and to minimize the impact of all types of recreation on the environment. The STF is an ex-officio (non-voting) member of SRS.

Yosemite Stanislaus Solutions

The Yosemite Stanislaus Solutions (YSS) collaborative group was formed to assist the STF in developing landscape-level restoration plans for a 400,000 acre area including the 147,000 acres burned in the 1987 Stanislaus Complex Fire. The mission of YSS is to restore and maintain healthy forests and watersheds, fire-safe communities, and sustainable local economies. This “all hands” approach involves a diverse group of stakeholders including federal, state, county, tribal, municipal water and power entities, environmental organizations and private landowners. This is a recently formed group, still drafting their group Charter, working norms, guiding principles, etc.

Stakeholders have an opportunity to provide input to all projects on the STF. Projects involving land acquisition or disposal are no different. Generally, a letter and map describing the process (exchange, donation, purchase) is sent out to a variety of folks including the appropriate Congressional, State, and local government officials (i.e., U.S. Senators and Representative; State Senator and Assemblyperson; County planner and Board of Supervisors; conservation or environmental groups, interested parties, Tribes, neighboring land owners, permit holders, etc. Interested parties are requested to provide any comments or concerns they have regarding the proposal.

Land acquisition proposals must also be analyzed under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process. Depending on the scope of the acquisition, the proposal may be categorically excluded from documentation in an Environmental Assessment (EA) or an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). When categorically excluded, a decision memo and/or a project file may or may not be required.

Should the STF acquire fee title to the Rushing Meadow acreage, the land will be managed according to the Forest Plan. The Forest must seek public input regarding any proposed projects involving NFS lands. On a quarterly basis, the STF publishes a Schedule of Proposed Actions (SOPA) on the STF website (<http://www.fs.fed.us/r5/stanislaus/projects/>). The SOPA describes all projects being considered for planning and implementation on the Forest. It is designed to provide the public with basic information regarding both upcoming projects and ongoing environmental analyses. Projects are separated by Forest unit and include a description of the project, the location, pertinent dates, analysis status and a contact person. The STF also maintains a variety of mailing lists for different project types that commonly take place. The lists consist of other Federal agencies, state and local governments, tribes, interest groups, potentially affected parties, and citizens that have requested notification on specific projects or project types.

NEPA requires that Federal agencies consider the potential environmental effects of planned management activities, including the impacts on social, cultural, and economic resources, as well as on natural resources. The environmental review process generally results in better informed decisions with citizen involvement. The NEPA regulations ensure that the public

has a voice in projects on the STF. Initial steps include public scoping which may take place in a variety of ways (letters to interested parties, news releases, public meetings, field trips, etc.). As a result of scoping, issues, concerns and opportunities regarding the proposed activity are identified. Alternatives are developed and published, followed by another opportunity for public comment. The responsible official can then choose to modify a proposed action, implement the proposed action, or analyze additional alternatives prior to a decision being made.

Legal Compliance and Best Practices

An Agency of the Department of Agriculture, the Forest Service uses a variety of best practices, standards and guiding principles to ensure that our organizational operations are legally and ethically sound and in the public interest. As a federal entity, the Forest Service is responsible for ensuring that federal laws, mandates, and regulations are met both from a resource perspective as well in regard to how tasks get completed and how personnel (employees, contractors, volunteers, etc.) behave and perform while managing public land.

From resource application to personnel expectations, federal requirements are numerous and run the gamut to ensure protection of both the resources and the public. Resource activities must be consistent with federal laws such as the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), National Forest Management Act (NFMA), the Endangered Species Act, the Clean Water Act, etc. In work performance, personnel must adhere to expectations and requirements. This includes, for example, Titles 6 and 7 of the Civil Rights Act, assurances of non-discriminatory behaviors, and other regulations assuring honesty, integrity and/or no conflict of interest.

Due processes exist for alleged infractions of both resource violations (appeals and/or lawsuits) as well as regarding employee performance and conduct. At the current time, there is one lawsuit on the Forest and no outstanding appeals of project decisions. A lawsuit pertaining to the November 2009 Motorized Travel Management, Record of Decision was recently filed, but no judgment has been made.

Guiding direction is found in FS Manuals, Handbooks and Directives and in the Forest Plan. Routine monitoring of project implementation helps to ensure that organizational operations are legally and ethically sound and in the public interest.

Existing FS policy does preclude our Agency from accepting a conservation easement on the watershed lands that we are seeking fee title on. In lieu of a permanent conservation easement, a conservation covenant is being proposed by the Agency.

Conflict of Interest Disclosure

The STF is not aware of any personal or financial relationships existing between our Forest employees and members of the Stewardship Council's board, family members or board member's constituent organization.

The Forest Service, as an Agency, is a non-voting member of the Stewardship Council and is represented on the Council by Christine Nota. Ms Nota will not represent the Forest during any negotiations.

PART 2 – LAND STEWARDSHIP INFORMATION

Land Interests Sought

The STF is interested in acquiring fee title to the following four parcels within the Lyons Reservoir Planning Unit:

Parcel Number	Acreage
1024	160
1025	158
1026	155
1027	155

The total acreage is estimated to be 628 acres, commonly referred to as Rushing Meadow.

With the exception of one location, the Rushing Meadow area that the STF is interested in acquiring is completely surrounded by lands already in STF ownership. Parcel #1024 has one partial boundary (approximately 1300 feet) that is shared with a landowner other than the USFS. Because the parcels to be obtained through this PG&E divestiture process can be described using aliquot parts, no lot line adjustments, boundary surveys, or legal parcel splits would be necessary; therefore, there would be no anticipated costs related to boundary adjustments.

The FS has a variety of avenues through which it can acquire lands. The primary means of acquisition are through purchase, exchange, and via donation. Acquisition through purchase and land exchange is briefly discussed below. The donation process is discussed in more detail since the disposition of these PG&E-owned watershed lands in the Rushing Meadow area is proposed for disposal through donation to the selected donee.

Land Acquisition Thru Purchase

A federal land purchase is the Agency buying land at market value. A land purchase generally starts with a landowner offering to sell a piece of property to the Forest. To pursue a purchase, the initial response of the Forest would be a determination that the proposed acquisition is in the public interest and that the land would be consistent with the Forest Plan. The Forest must secure funding for the proposed purchase. Such funds generally come from Congressional appropriations through the Land and Water Conservation Fund. A land purchase process begins with an agreement between the landowner and the Forest on how the costs of the transaction will be shared. Once agreement is reached, the Forest will proceed with such basics as obtaining a preliminary title report and chain of title, conducting a Phase I Environmental Site Assessment (ESA), verifying the legal description, and investigating water/mineral rights and access. A request for an appraisal on the property will be made. A qualified appraiser will determine the

market value, which must be approved by a Forest Service appraiser. A Purchase Option is prepared which sets forth the appraised value, and other terms and conditions of the purchase. Following Office of General Counsel (OGC) review and approval of this and other transaction documents, the Purchase Option is executed by both parties and the deed to the United States is recorded.

Land Acquisition Thru Exchange

A federal land exchange is the Agency trading federal land (or interest in land) for private land. An exchange may start with either party recognizing an opportunity to resolve certain management issues via an exchange of lands. Unless legislated, exchanges are discretionary transactions. The typical land exchange process is time-consuming (often taking 2-3 years to complete), complex, and expensive. It takes a full commitment of both parties. Like all land acquisitions, the Forest must make a determination that the exchange is in the public interest and that it is consistent with the Forest Plan. A formal Feasibility Analysis is completed to determine whether the exchange should proceed. If the Feasibility Analysis results in a determination to move forward, the parties will enter into an Agreement To Initiate (ATI). The ATI will describe the lands involved, encumbrances on the lands and proposed reservations. It will also identify the anticipated costs of the exchange and which party is responsible for each cost. A Phase I ESA and an appraisal will be completed for all the parcels involved. The market value of the Federal and non-Federal lands must be equal, or equalized with cash not-to-exceed 25% of the Federal land value. The terms of the exchange are set forth in a contractually-binding Exchange Agreement. Following OGC review and approval, the exchange may proceed toward completion.

Land Acquisition Thru Donation

Land acquisition through donation generally starts with a landowner contacting the FS and offering to donate their land. If the Forest determines that the acquisition is in the public interest and that it is consistent with the Forest Plan, the landowner will be asked to provide a written offer of donation. The subsequent offer should include the donor's name and address, describe the location of the property and the approximate area of the tract, provide information on any known outstanding rights, detail any intended reservations by the landowner, and acknowledge the owner's responsibility to clear title defects and tax liens. The Forest will prepare a public benefit determination addressing the suitability of the land for NF purposes, the proposed use of the property, benefits/amenities, and any potential problems. The Forest will also obtain a preliminary title commitment, conduct a Phase I ESA, verify the legal description, and prepare the deed along with other necessary documents for the transaction. The Forest will request formal approval from the Regional Forester to proceed with the donation. All documents are submitted to our OGC office attorney review and preliminary title approval. Once received, the Forest will record the deed to the United States and complete the donation process. Most of the costs associated with land acquisition through donation are paid for by the Agency. Costs of the Phase I ESA and any survey work may be shared with or paid for by the landowner. Any necessary hazmat remediation must be paid for by the landowner. The Forest Service must formally accept the donation before spending any funds to manage and protect the property.

Baseline and Enhanced Land Management

The following baseline and potential enhanced land management discussion regarding the Rushing Meadow area assumes that the Forest Service is indeed the successful donee acquiring fee title to the 628 acres available.

Beneficial Public Value: Protection of the Natural Habitat of Fish, Wildlife, and Plants

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

Based on the Forest Plan land allocations (including Wildlife) for the surrounding NFS lands, the Rushing Meadow area would be enhanced to provide protection of the natural habitat of fish, wildlife and plants. As noted previously, FS acquisition of the Rushing Meadow area would allow for greater biological and physical connectivity through consistent management with adjacent lands already managed by the Agency. A variety of species and habitats would benefit from this connectivity. Species and their habitats include the Bald eagle, spotted owl (six occupied territories in the area), goshawk (one territory), mule deer (winter range), and various aquatic species occupying riparian habitat along the South Fork of the Stanislaus River. FS management would emphasize riparian habitat restoration, with resulting improvements to habitat and stream bank stability leading to a reduction in downstream sedimentation and improved water quality. The following specific management activities would take place:

1. As part of any project planned in the area, resource surveys would be conducted to inventory biological (terrestrial and aquatic) species and botanical species present. Appropriate habitat protection and improvement projects would be proposed based on the results of the resource surveys. Should any sensitive species be found within the parcels, appropriate protection measures will be developed.

The presence of the following terrestrial wildlife species or their habitat is known to occur in this area: Bald eagle, spotted owl, goshawk and mule deer. The presence of the following botanical species or suitable habitat is known to occur in or nearby this area: *Allium tribracteatum*, *Erythronium tuolumnense*, *Hydrothyria venosa*, *Lomatium stebbinsii* and *Mimulus pulchellus*.

2. Noxious weed population surveys will be conducted, a noxious weed risk assessment will be developed, and results, including any mitigation measures, will be incorporated into any project or management plans completed within the area.
3. Any unauthorized OHV trails in the area will be closed and rehabilitated to a natural condition.
4. With the Motorized Travel Management Decision (November 2009), the following OHV and dispersed recreation related decisions have been or will be implemented in the Lyons area:

- No unauthorized off-highway vehicle routes were added to the National Forest Transportation System (NFTS) in the area between 4N01/4N88/4N02 and the North Fork Tuolumne River. (Existing routes are now considered to be unauthorized [non-NFTS]).
- Existing NFTS routes (level 2 roads) in this area changed from being open for use by all vehicles to open for use by highway licensed vehicles only (e.g., prohibits OHV use on 4N90, 3N69, 3N30, 3N39 and 4N78).
- 4N90 - dispersed recreation site access routes were not added to the NFTS due to sensitive resource conflicts. Future management could potentially designate 4N90 as a Non-Motorized Recreation Area with motor vehicle closure at 4N01. The area would be designated open to non-motorized uses (e.g., hiking, mountain bikes, equestrian) with potential trailhead development at the 4N90/4N01 intersection with a connecting trail to Fraser Flat Campground and the Fraser Flat to Strawberry Rails-to-Trails.
- The Mi-Wok District would apply for California Off-Highway Motor Vehicle Recreation (OHMVR) grants for Restoration planning (NEPA/CEQA) and for project implementation (closure of unauthorized routes described in first bullet above). Grant funding could be available within 1 year of final land acquisition and project implementation could begin within 2 years.

Beneficial Public Value: Preservation of Open Space

Objective: Preserve open space in order to protect natural and cultural resources, agricultural land uses, recreation experiences, and viewsheds.

In addition to Wildlife, Forest Plan land allocations surrounding Rushing Meadow include General Forest and Scenic Corridor. The preservation of the existing open space will protect natural and cultural resources, historic recreation experiences and the surrounding viewsheds. A permanent conservation easement will ensure a high level of open space protection. Existing FS policy, however, precludes the Agency from accepting a conservation easement on any land it acquires. In lieu of a permanent conservation easement, a conservation covenant is being proposed by the Agency to provide satisfactory assurance that lands conveyed would be managed consistent with the purpose of the Land Conservation Commitment as required by Section 12(d)(2) of the Stipulation. Managing for multiple-use while protecting natural resources lies at the core of the Agency's conservation philosophy.

Beneficial Public Value: Outdoor Recreation by the General Public

Objective: Enhance recreation facilities in order to provide additional education and recreation opportunities, recreation management, and enhance the recreation experience.

PG&E currently manages the Lyons Reservoir area for day use. Amenities include a restroom, picnic and BBQ facilities, parking/staging areas and limited signing. General uses of the

surrounding area include hiking, mountain biking, and equestrian use. As the fee title owner of the Rushing Meadow area upstream from Lyons Reservoir, the overall recreation management objective for this area (General Forest/Scenic Corridor) would be to preserve and enhance traditional recreation experiences and values consistent with historic uses of the area.

Opportunities are plentiful to connect upstream uses with enhancement of ongoing uses in the Lyons Reservoir area. Desired improvements to enhance visitor experiences include: directional and informational signing; improved trail access and conditions for hiking, mountain biking and equestrian use; OHV trail obliteration and restoration; and interpretive and conservation education opportunities.

Specific, potential measures to preserve and enhance the area values include the following:

1. Install interpretive signage at Lyons Reservoir regarding drinking water quality protection, rare species, and cultural resources in the area.
2. Support any future steps to formalize the Sugar Pine Railroad Trail.
3. Assess the potential for youth program opportunities at Lyons Reservoir.

A more detailed description of the potential measures to be taken follows.

Interpretive Signage

The STF Interpretive Team has the knowledge, skills and abilities to create interpretive panels. In the last four years, the team has created numerous panels focusing on geologic processes, natural and cultural history, water and water quality and rare plant species. New interpretive panels have been designed, created and installed through Agency efforts at the Columns of the Giants, Donnell Vista, Beardsley Day Use Area and Ferretti Road.

Three Forest Interpretive Association (3FIA) is a nonprofit organization dedicated to helping the STF serve the public by promoting the educational, historical, scientific, and other values of the Forest. 3FIA provides funding and support for interpretive projects on the Stanislaus. Partnering with 3FIA, their expertise and support would be utilized to fund interpretive signs to enhance the recreation experience in the Lyons Reservoir/Rushing Meadow area.

Formalizing the Sugar Pine Railroad Trail

Consistent with the 2009 Motorized Travel Management Plan Decision, the STF will manage the land within the Rushing Meadow area as non-motorized. With the Sugar Pine Railroad grade transecting this property, opportunities for formalizing the Sugar Pine Railroad Trail abound. The rail road grade ties into the Frazer-to-Strawberry branch of the Sugar Pine Railroad Grade to the east and a proposed section of the Sugar Pine Railroad grade to the west near Twain Harte. The STF has numerous rails-to-trails that receive extensive recreational use enjoyed by the public. Several, including the West Side Rails from Hull Creek to the Clavey River, have a self guided informative/interpretive brochure that shares the logging history with the trail user as they travel back through history. A similar, self-guided interpretive tour for the Sugar Pine Railroad grade is

proposed. The Tuolumne City Memorial Museum and the Tuolumne County Parks and Recreation have offered their support for this action.

Youth Program Opportunities

The STF has a long tradition of providing high quality Environmental Interpretation and Conservation Education with a strong focus on youth. This program, which has received National recognition and awards, is focused on our vision “to foster land stewardship values and environmental literacy for elementary through college level students. Environmental literacy creates an enduring impact on young people’s values and attitudes towards nature and their understanding and appreciation for their role in conserving natural resources. This effort will sustain our public lands for future generations and develop the next generation of conservation leaders.” The Lyons Reservoir/Rushing Meadow environs and surrounding STF land provide a living laboratory and almost year round accessibility for connecting students to the land. The STF proposes to continue the following existing programs, adding the Lyons Reservoir/Rushing Meadow location to the list of possible venues:

Conservation Education

The STF Interpretive program provides school programming to hundreds of students each year. The location of Lyons Reservoir in proximity to Tuolumne County schools makes it an ideal, easy-to-get to destination for conservation education programs. These programs introduce youth to the Forest and are tied to California State Standards.

Youth Volunteers

Local high school students engage in volunteer stewardship projects on the Forest. Working with FS specialists they participate in restoration projects including meadow restoration, willow planting, trail obliteration, trail maintenance, fence building, noxious weed pulling and wildlife monitoring. Columbia College natural resource and forestry students would assist in inventory and monitoring projects. Lyons Reservoir/Rushing Meadow would serve as a living laboratory for students participating in these activities.

Summer Youth Employment

Since 2001, the STF has championed the youth employment project, Summer of Success. Over one hundred students have participated to date. The project has introduced students to educational and career opportunities in natural resources, while conducting valuable resource work. Lyons Reservoir/Rushing Meadow would be served by future work projects conducted by Summer of Success students.

Beneficial Public Value: Sustainable Forestry

Objective: Develop and implement forestry practices in order to contribute to and promote a sustainable forest, preserve and enhance habitat as well as to ensure appropriate fuel load management.

The current STF Forest Plan direction for the General Forest and Wildlife management areas includes standards and guidelines to ensure sustainable forestry practices and species habitat

protection and enhancement. Projects planned within the Rushing Meadow area would be designed and implemented to achieve the following:

1. Vegetation would be managed to reduce fuel loads while enhancing the vigor of residual trees to meet the goal of a sustainable healthy forest. Any vegetation treatment will be developed to be effective for twenty years.
2. An objective for forest management would be aimed at increasing standing biomass over time and fostering a component of mature trees and old forest structure across the area.
3. Any revenue generated from timber sales would be reinvested into these lands through the use of stewardship contracting or K-V (Knudson-Vandenberg Act) funding mechanisms. Projects that could be undertaken with these monies include, but are not limited to: restoring watershed areas, restoring wildlife habitat, closing and rehabilitating user created trails and roads.
4. The Rushing Meadow area would be incorporated into and covered by the annual Fire Management Plan for the STF. This area is identified "Protection, Wildland Urban Interface" – full aggressive suppression.
5. Rushing Meadow, with its surrounding timber stands, may lend itself to providing for and enhancing great grey owl habitat. Possible habitat improvements could include artificially creating nesting trees.

Beneficial Public Value: Agricultural Uses

Objective: Preserve and enhance grazing in order to support associated economic benefits, as well as to protect open space and habitat resources.

Currently, the Rushing Meadow area is grazed annually through a License Agreement for Grazing Purposes issued by PG&E. The holder of the Agreement also holds the 10 year term grazing permit for the Rushing Allotment on the Mi-Wok Ranger District. The Rushing Allotment encompasses over 30,000 acres of NFS lands (east of Rushing Meadow to HWY 108; north to the Middle Fork of the Stanislaus River; west to Rose Creek; and south to Twain Harte). Cattle are grazed from approximately June – September annually. Once moved off of NFS lands, cattle spend the winter months on both local foothill ranch land and valley pastures.

A quick review of the license agreement does not indicate what grazing utilization levels are authorized by PG&E on this ground at this time. On surrounding NFS lands, grazing standards and guidelines ensure protection of resources (browse, riparian habitat, streambank stability, etc.) Annual forage utilization standards are set, with primary feed being brush and annual grasslands on the Rushing Allotment. Key areas for monitoring have been established. Cattle are moved throughout the allotment throughout the grazing season based on utilization (and the accompanying idea that if cattle are moved before or as the standard is met, the other resources will be maintained in their desired condition, or, at a minimum, in a state moving toward that desired condition).

Rushing Meadow proper on PG&E lands and the neighboring Sierra Pacific Industries is a critical component of the FS Rushing Allotment in terms of providing an end-of-year gathering pasture. This area provides the only existing gathering structure on the upper, high elevation end of the Rushing Allotment and is essential to the permittee's operation.

Rushing Meadow itself would be incorporated into the Rushing Allotment should the FS gain fee title to the land. Grazing would be authorized subject to current standards and guidelines in the Forest Plan. The Rushing Allotment is scheduled to undergo a new environmental analysis (NEPA) in the coming years. This review of ongoing grazing would analyze continued grazing of the allotment. The planning effort would ensure that desired resource conditions are being met or are trending toward desired conditions throughout the allotment. If a change in the authorized grazing season or in authorized cattle numbers are warranted the resulting analysis and subsequent decision would provide for such. FS policy is to make forage resources available to qualified operators when livestock grazing is consistent with forest plans.

Beneficial Public Value: Preservation of Historic Values

Objective: Identify and manage cultural resources in order to ensure their protection, as well as to support opportunities for public education.

Although a search of FS records indicates that the Rushing Meadow area (parcel numbers 1024, 1025, 1026, 1027) have not been formally surveyed for the presence of heritage resources, the Agency does have a great deal of knowledge about the area. Due to the presence of the South Fork of the Stanislaus River and the gentle slope, the area was ideal for both prehistoric and historic human occupation and use. The South Fork River corridor - from the north end of Lyons Reservoir to Strawberry - was formally designated a cultural Special Interest Area (SIA) in the Forest Plan due to its overwhelming cultural importance. Although there is only one formally recorded prehistoric site on the parcels, the area is known to have bedrock mortars and associated habitation debris suggesting long term use by the Miwok. There are likely culturally important plants along the river that our local Tribe would appreciate having access to.

On an ongoing basis, the STF coordinates activities with the Tuolumne Band of Me-Wuk to use public land to teach their youth about Me-Wuk material culture. The Tribe assists the Forest in maintaining Me-Wuk cultural interpretive sites and provide interpretive programming to the general public. A recent project on the Calaveras Ranger District will result in re-establishing native plants used by the Me-Wuk at a known pre-historic site. Using plants grown at the Tuolumne Native Plant Nursery and hands-on labor contributed by members of the Tuolumne Band of Me-Wuk, plants will be reintroduced to this site. Similar projects can be conducted at Lyons Reservoir/Rushing Meadow area.

In addition to the prehistoric cultural importance, the Sugar Pine Railway runs through the center of all four parcels. Like other areas of the Forest that have been surveyed and that offer a rich railroad logging history, it is very likely that associated trestles, sidings, dumps, etc. will be found as well. Forest records indicate that Hale's Mill (1890-1910) is located in Section 8. This site was

used in the construction of Lyons Dam. Railroad enthusiasts have also mentioned the presence of a hoist line somewhere above Lyons Dam on PG&E lands.

At a minimum, as specific projects are proposed and developed within the Rushing Meadow area, potentially impacted lands would be surveyed for cultural resources. Ideally, a full survey of both the prehistoric and historic human occupation and use of the area would be completed within a couple of years of acquiring the land. Such an effort would result in a Historic Properties Management Plan (HPMP) identifying the significant resources and offering management requirements to ensure the long term protection of those resources. In addition, visitor use of the area will be enhanced through interpretive and conservation education efforts.

Physical Enhancements/Capital Improvements

Conceptually, a variety of physical enhancements and capital improvements have been identified for the Rushing Meadow by the STF. If the STF gains fee title to this land, the opportunities identified will be further considered and developed based on the annual Forest program of work and association funding priorities (considering both appropriated funds as well as other partnership/funding mechanisms). Please refer to the section titled Budget and Funding Plan for additional/related discussion regarding the Agency's annual program development and funding.

A summary of the opportunities for physical enhancements/capital improvements identified to date are as follows:

1. Lyons Creek OHV Restoration Project: implementation of this project will permanently close and restore 12 unauthorized user-created OHV route segments (totaling approximately 2 miles) and will restore 4 acres of meadow habitat in the Lyons Creek area on adjacent NFS lands. Educational and interpretive signing regarding the restoration project will be installed. Planning and implementation efforts are being funded through a State of CA OHV Grant. These efforts are consistent with the measures identified to enhance the PBV of protecting the natural habitat of fish, wildlife and plants. Project costs and funding associated with this effort total approximately \$45,000. The planning for this project is complete. Implementation is scheduled to take place over the next year.
2. Future OHV Restoration Projects: if the STF gains fee title to the Rushing Meadow area, future project proposals will include the closure and restoration of existing, unauthorized OHV routes in the area. The STF has been very successful in applying for and being granted funds for similar efforts through the State of CA OHV Grant Program. We fully expect this successful partnership to continue. Specific cost estimates/funding needs would be developed as part of future project proposals. Once projects are identified, the opportunity to apply for grant funding occurs annually with funds available for implementation within a year for successful applicants. The STF has identified a one-time cost of approximately \$12,000 for a complete survey of the Rushing Meadow area existing unauthorized OHV routes & and a subsequent management plan to identify an approach for restoration/rehabilitation needs. (Site specific NEPA and implementation costs would be additional and are difficult to estimate at this time).

3. Trailhead/Staging Area Opportunities: formalizing the Sugar Pine Railroad Trail as a non-motorized route connecting existing Rails-To-Trails to the east and west of Lyons/Rushing Meadow area has been identified as an opportunity to enhance recreation use of the area. Non-motorized recreation uses (hiking, mountain biking, equestrian use) would be the focus. Physical enhancements/capital improvements could include trail head facilities (most likely limited to defining parking areas and directional and interpretive signing along the route). These efforts would be consistent with the outdoor recreation BPV. Cost estimates are difficult to determine at this time. Costs would be one time only for NEPA and trail head development. Once formalized, going maintenance of the Sugar Pine Railroad Trail would depend on volunteers and user group partnerships.
4. Great Gray Owl Habitat Improvement Project: Rushing Meadow, with its surrounding timber stands, provide habitat for the Great Gray Owl. Opportunities to enhance the existing habitat include creating artificial nesting structures should an area survey determine that natural nest structures are lacking. Based on a similar recent project, the project cost estimate ranges from \$1,000 to \$7,000. Cost estimates include: \$1,000 for initial survey/inventory of existing nesting trees; NEPA planning - \$3,000 (if additional nest structures are needed); and project implementation of \$3,000 (\$600 per nest site structure tree developed if needed, up to 5 nesting trees). These physical enhancements would improve the existing habitat consistent with the BPV of protecting the natural habitat of fish, wildlife and plants.
5. Interpretive Sign Plan: the interpretive opportunities in the Rushing Meadow area and along the Sugar Pine Railroad Grade are extensive. Whether sharing the historic use of the area (railroad logging, the prehistoric occupation, or the modern day importance of the water/water supply), important key message are many and could be displayed through a variety of means (self guided interpretive tour with a brochure to larger, on-site interpretive panels, to a combination of methods). The cost of interpretive planning and signing is difficult to predict at this time. Once a full heritage resources survey, inventory, and management plan is developed, a logical offshoot of this effort is the development of an associated Interpretive Plan. The eventual physical enhancements sharing knowledge and information are consistent with several BPV's (preservation of open space, outdoor recreation, preservation of historic values). (The cost of an initial heritage resources survey/and a resulting HPMP is estimated to be \$18,000).
6. Resource/land management projects: as a land management Agency, our ongoing management efforts include routine resource related projects across the Forest landscape. Should the STF gain fee title to these lands, the acquired lands would be considered for ongoing land management/resource projects. Projects are planned and implemented to meet a variety of purposes including habitat protection, restoration, and enhancement; sustainable forestry (timber harvesting, thinning, etc.); fuel reduction (protection of communities and resources); and grazing (protect open space, contribute to local economy). Since specific projects have not yet been identified, it is impossible to estimate project costs at this time. Routine projects planned and implemented by the STF would serve to meet one or more of the BPV's identified by the Stewardship Council for the Lyon's area. It is noted that the existing Term Grazing Permit on NFS lands surrounding

Lyons Meadow is due for a new NEPA analysis/grazing authorization within the next few years. Any acquired lands would be incorporated into such an analysis with grazing subject to Forest Plan standards and guidelines.

Land Conservation Partners and Youth Opportunities

The STF has numerous land conservation partners and opportunities for youth related to the acquisition of the Rushing Meadow area. The Forest enjoys a long history of partnering with other Agencies, volunteers, local governments, youth groups, various user groups, conservation groups, and tribes on projects in which we share a common goal. We work with many partners to accomplish a variety of land management activities including trail maintenance and restoration, meadow restoration, habitat restoration, stream bank stabilization, environmental education and interpretation, and cultural resource maintenance and enhancement. Examples of formal partnerships during past Forest efforts have included the following groups: Backcountry Horsemen of California, CA Consotium, CA Department of Fish & Game, CA Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE), CA Regional Environmental Education Community Network (CREEC), Columbia College, Central Sierra Arts Council, the Central Sierra Environmental Resource Center (CSERC), Homeowner and Landowner Associations, Modesto Junior College, Mother Lode Job Training, Office of Education (Tuolumne, Stanislaus, & San Joaquin), Student Conservation Association, Sonora High School, Summerville High School, Tuolumne Band of the Me-Wuk Indians, the Twain Harte Horsemen, UC Cooperative Extension & 4H, WildLink, Merced Dirt Riders, Tri-County Off Road Club, various user clubs, associations, permittees and many individuals.

While the STF is confident that many past partners will join in our project efforts as opportunities arise in the Rushing Meadow area, the following entities have formally offered their interest and commitment in jointly pursuing enhanced land management activities:

CA Department of Forestry and Fire Protection

It is our understanding that the CA Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) is also interested in acquiring fee title to the Rushing Meadow area parcels for the purpose of establishing a Demonstration Forest. A Demonstration Forest is timberland that is managed for forestry education, research and recreation. It demonstrates innovations in forest management, watershed protection and restoration, and environmentally sensitive timber harvest techniques. As identified above, some of our proposed enhanced land management activities share common themes. During the development of this proposal, the STF has engaged in conversations with CAL FIRE regarding the opportunities to work together in partnership to jointly manage the Rushing Meadow parcels to meet common goals and objectives of each Agency. We look forward to continuing this dialogue to identify key concepts and a strategic plan should the opportunity present itself.

Central Sierra Environmental Resource Center (see attached letter)

The Central Sierra Environmental Resource Center (CSERC) is a local conservation organization that serves as the 'environmental defender of water, wildlife and wild places across the Sierra Nevada'. CSERC has provided volunteer labor for a variety of projects on the Mi-Wok Ranger District over the years. Support and involvement of their staff and their volunteers for meadow restoration, wildlife habitat improvement projects, OHV route decommissioning and restoration,

and fencing projects has been greatly appreciated. CSERC staff and volunteers are committed to participating in such projects in the Rushing Meadow area.

Willie Ritts, Permittee, Rushing Allotment (see attached letter)

Mr. Willie Ritts is a long term Tuolumne County cattle rancher. In addition to owning private low elevation land, Mr. Ritts comes to the mountains to graze on two STF allotments during the summer. Mr. Ritts runs cattle on both the Kennedy Allotment on the Summit Ranger District as well as on the Rushing Allotment on the Mi-Wok District. The Rushing Allotment runs from the lower elevations of Deer Creek north of Twain Harte, CA to the higher elevation of Bald Mountain west of Highway 108. A steward of the resources, Mr. Ritts is open to the opportunity of teaching cattle ranching techniques and methods to youth and adults alike. He offers his support to meadow restoration and enhancement projects.

Motherlode Job Training (see attached letter)

Mother Lode Job Training (MLJT) is an organization that provides employment and job training services to residents of Tuolumne, Calaveras, Amador and Mariposa Counties. Youth employment is one of their emphasis areas. MLJT has been a multi-year partner with the STF in the Summer of Success, a cooperative program employing youth during the summer months to participate in Forest projects. Environmental education, land stewardship, and are all vital and important components of this grant funded youth partnership.

Summerville Union High School Ecology Club (see attached letter)

The Summerville High School Ecology Club has been a long term partner of the STF volunteering time and labor for a variety of land stewardship projects since 1995. Over 400 students have had a hand in accomplishing on-the-ground natural resource related projects while gaining a better understanding and knowledge of natural resource and land management. Club members have worked with Agency personnel to help with a variety of projects including repairing gullies, building fences, planting trees, maintain interpretive trails and obliterating and restoring unauthorized OHV trails. The successful volunteer effort of these high school aged students also serves to establish and encourage the importance of community service and volunteerism for future endeavors.

Public Input

In addition to the public support and commitment identified above, other public input regarding the PG&E divestiture of land in the Lyons Reservoir Planning Unit was invited during public meetings hosted by the Stewardship Council (SC). On March 3, 2011, a Public Information Meeting was held at the Sonora Opera Hall in Sonora, CA. The SC provided a thorough review and update on the origin, purpose, requirements and status of the SC's Land Conservation Program. Next steps, timelines, and future opportunities for public input were shared. At the meeting, opportunities for reviewing maps, parcel information, and capturing public input were provided for.

Specific input received by the SC at the Sonora Opera Hall and other public meetings is still being synthesized. FS representatives at the meeting listened and dialogued one-on-one with members of

the public. Specific to the Rushing Meadow area parcels that the STF is interested in acquiring, the following comments/questions/ideas/suggestions were heard:

- The current holder of the PG&E Grazing License expressed his desire to continue to graze the land. Others inquired about what the allowable use or grazing standards would be for the area if the FS acquires it.
- Public and other Agency personnel expressed an interest in the area being proactively managed for great gray owls.
- Members of the public and conservation community expressed an interest in seeing unauthorized motorized use of the area (off highway vehicles) curtailed with resource restoration efforts taking place to return the area to more natural conditions.
- Interest was expressed in meadow restoration and improvement projects.
- Given the history of the area (both Native American occupation and railroad logging), interest was expressed in developing non-motorized trail and interpretive opportunities.

Budget and Funding Plan

To the extent possible, the STF completed the excel Budget and Funding spreadsheet per the LSP directions. In addition, narrative information addressing the specific Budget and Funding Plan is provided below. **It should be noted, however, that use of the Budget and Funding Plan as a management tool to evaluate our ability to fund baseline management, enhancement activities, and one time and ongoing costs associated with the Rushing Meadow area, is very limited given the Agency budget processes.**

As a Federal land management agency, the Forest Service relies on annual Congressional budgetary appropriations for funding. While some programs and emphasis areas receive similar funding from year-to-year, others do not. In addition, the appropriations the STF receives are applied to the overall administration of the Forest and then to site-specific projects and targets. As such, there is no way to guarantee that any Agency funding in any given year will go directly to the approximately 628 acres of land in the Rushing Meadow area that the STF is interested in acquiring fee title for. It is also difficult to estimate meaningful baseline management costs since Agency priorities and resources shift from year to year. Finally, the estimated costs cannot be realistically developed for management/enhancement activities or projects that are not yet proposed or developed yet.

A narrative summary of the transaction costs, revenue generation, baseline resource inventory costs, and costs associated with enhancement activities identified to date are provided below. All costs are an approximation only. The only cost the Agency would be requesting from the current landowner/Stewardship Council would be the cost of testing/remediation needs identified as a result of the Phase I Environmental Site Assessment. This cost, if applicable, cannot be determined until the ESA is complete.

Transaction Costs

Should the STF receive fee title to the four Rushing Meadow parcels, transaction costs are estimated to be approximately \$40,000. No property line surveys or boundary line adjustments

would be needed as the parcels can be described using aliquot parts and the desired parcels are nearly completely surrounded by existing NFS lands. Forest Service policy is to cover most transaction costs associated with acquiring lands through a donation process. Typical transaction costs include obtaining a preliminary title commitment/report (\$700); obtaining a chain of title, if needed (\$2,000); title insurance (\$1,000); escrow (\$500); recording (\$500); and case processing (conducting a Phase I ESA, verifying the legal description, and preparing the deed and other legal documents associated with the transaction, \$35,300). As stated above, costs associated with any identified hazmat remediation are generally borne by the landowner.

Revenue Generation

As explained earlier in this proposal, revenues generated from the Rushing Meadow area parcels are expected to be minimal. Where consistent with future opportunities, stewardship contracts may be used to ensure that any revenue generated from timber receipts would be reinvested into the same general area.

Baseline Resource Activities/Inventories

As the landowner surrounding the Rushing Meadow parcels, the baseline activities performed on adjacent FS land would also take place on the lands to be acquired. Routine activities and presence by the FS may include patrols (fire prevention and dispersed recreation) along with administration of existing permits or contracts (grazing, timber sale or fuel reduction, for example).

If the FS is successful in gaining fee title to the Rushing Meadow parcels, the Agency would be interested in conducting baseline inventories for all natural resources to determine the resources present along with potential resource management activities and opportunities that would serve to enhance the public values associated with the resources. Specific baseline inventory desires are as follows:

1. Unauthorized OHV Route Inventory/Restoration Plan: a one-time cost to inventory the existing unauthorized OHV routes and use in the Rushing Meadow area is estimated to be approximately \$7,500. An Inventory/Restoration Plan would include the results of the full inventory, mapping (using GPS) existing routes, and identifying potential restoration needs and methods. (Site specific NEPA associated with proposed restoration would be an additional cost once specific restoration projects are identified).
2. Botany/Noxious Weed Baseline Inventory: a one-time cost to inventory for existing sensitive botany species or habitat and for existing noxious weeds is estimated to be \$6,500. Baseline inventories would provide initial occupation and habitat information. Specific project proposals over the next few years would rely on baseline inventories and/or would be augmented with current information as species lists change, etc.
3. Wildlife Baseline Inventory: a one-time cost to inventory for existing terrestrial wildlife/habitat related to great grey owl management is estimated to be \$1,000.
4. Meadow Restoration Needs/Opportunities: a one-time cost to identify on-the-ground meadow restoration opportunities within the Lyons Meadow area is estimated to be

approximately \$3,000. Specific project proposals could be developed from this broad scale/initial general condition inventory. Planning (NEPA) and implementation costs would be determined later as specific proposals are developed. Existing opportunities may range from stabilization of a short segment of streambank to extensive treatments occurring to influence the water table (removal of encroaching conifers, for example, or re-location of the existing road that bisects the meadow).

5. Baseline Steamscape Inventory/Aquatic Species Inventory: a one-time cost to gain information regarding existing stream conditions and aquatic/amphibian species present/habitat potential is estimated to be \$6,000. Specific project proposals over the next few years would rely on baseline inventories and/or would be augmented with current information as species lists change, etc., and specific project proposals are developed.

Enhancement Activities

The following summary displays the enhancement activities that have been identified to date for the Rushing Meadow parcels. Project descriptions were previously provided above in the document section titled Physical Enhancements/Capital Improvements.

1. Lyons Creek OHV Restoration Project: estimated project costs are \$45,000. This project is already funded on adjacent NFS lands with implementation taking place over the next year.
2. Future OHV Restoration Projects: once a baseline inventory is complete, site specific restoration proposals can be developed. Partnership funding through the State of CA OHV Grant Program for both NEPA planning and implementation will be applied for. Resource Advisory Grants (RAC) may also be a possibility.
3. Trailhead/Staging Area Opportunities: once the Sugar Pine Railroad Trail is formalized as a non-motorized trail route, a specific project proposal for trail head facilities can be developed. Funding for planning (NEPA) and implementation would be needed and would be sought through both Agency appropriations and external sources/partnerships. Ongoing maintenance of the Sugar Pine Railroad Trail would depend on volunteers and user group partnerships.
4. Great Gray Owl Habitat Improvement Project: should the initial wildlife inventory of the area show that additional Great Gray Owl nesting structures are desired, the estimated project cost is \$6,000. Funding sources sought would include both Agency appropriations and external sources/partnerships.
5. Interpretive Sign Plan: the cost of interpretive planning and signing is difficult to predict at this time. Once a full heritage resources survey, inventory, and management plan is developed, a logical offshoot of this effort is the development of an associated Interpretive Plan. Project costs would be developed at that time. Both Agency and external funding sources/partnerships would be sought.

6. Resource/land management projects: enhancement activities accomplished through specific resource projects will be identified as part of the ongoing land management activities and efforts on the surrounding NFS lands if fee title is acquired for the Rushing Meadow parcels. Project proposals and planning efforts will encompass the newly acquired lands. Project funding may come from a combination of federal appropriations along with stewardship contracting receipts.

PART 3 – SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

Exhibit 1: Attachment A: Letter from Susan Skalski, STF Forest Supervisor/executive director approving the submission of the land stewardship proposal and the organization's participation in the Stewardship Council's land conservation process for the subject planning unit.

Attachment B: Stanislaus National Forest – Summary of Forest Plan Direction.

Attachment C: Letters from Land Conservation Partners

Attachment D: Budget and Funding Plan

Exhibit 2: Attachment E - 2011 Region 5 Forest Allocation (1 spreadsheet)

Attachment F - Stanislaus National Forest expenses for the past three years (2008-2010)