

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A hunter access study evaluated the location of roads and transmission line corridors in the study area in relation to habitat to support game species and locations of important mule deer areas. Game species habitat was identified based on the results of the TERR 14, Mule Deer, and TERR 15, Other Game, technical study reports (SCE 2003). Appropriate habitat for game bird, small game, and big game species includes all of the habitat types in the study area. As such, the information on hunter accessibility in this report is applicable to all game species in the study area.

This report focuses on deer hunting access. Mule deer are one of the most important game species in the Sierra National Forest, and there is abundant information on deer migration routes, summer and winter ranges, and key holding areas. Using information in a Geographic Information System (GIS) database, roads and transmission lines in the study area were overlaid on mule deer holding areas, winter and summer range areas, and migration corridors. The following areas were identified as potential hunter access areas and were evaluated in the field:

- (1) Access Road to Bear Diversion from 5S80, Kaiser Pass Road (FS 6S83).
- (2) Hooper Creek Diversion Access Road (Forest Service (FS) 7S65) along the entire length of road and Access Road to South Fork San Joaquin River Gaging Station Northwest of Hooper Diversion (FS 27E26).
- (3) FS 8S301 South of Dam 2 South of Intersection with 8S66 to Penstock Surge Tubes, FS 8S302 from 8S66 (near Dam 2) to Big Creek No. 1 42 Inch Gatehouse, FS 8S66 from Gate West of Dam 2 to Gaging Station on Big Creek below Huntington Lake, FS 8S66B from Dam 2 to Dam 1, Connector Road between 8S83 and 8S66, and FS 8S83 Segment from 8S302 to Huntington-Shaver Siphon.
- (4) FS 8S12 and 8S12A Access Road to Huntington-Shaver Siphon from Highway 168 and FS 8S305 from Highway 168 to 8S12 to 8S12A, Access Road to Huntington-Shaver Siphon.
- (5) FS 8S02 from Highway 168 to Huntington-Pitman-Shaver Tunnel Adit (Camp 72).
- (6) Big Creek 1-Eastwood Powerhouse (BC1-EPS) Transmission Line along Huntington Lake Road.
- (7) Railroad Grade Road from Dawn Meadows to the South End of Dam 4 (FS 8S08) and Dawn Meadow Road (FS 8S13) from Railroad Grade Road (FS 8S08) to Canyon Road (FS 8S05) along the entire length of road.
- (8) BC1-EPS Transmission Line near Highway 168.
- (9) BC1-EPS Transmission Line near Balsam Meadow Forebay.

- (10) FS 9S32 from Gate Near Highway 168 to West Side of Balsam Forebay, FS 9S32A Segments from 9S32 to East Side of Balsam Forebay, and Road below Balsam Forebay Dam.
- (11) Access Road to Eastwood Powerstation from Highway 168 to Gate (FS 9S58), Access Road to Eagle Point Boat Only Day Use Area (off FS 9S58), and FS 9S58 from Gate to Eastwood Powerstation.
- (12) Big Creek 3–Mammoth Pool Powerhouse (BC3-MPPH) Transmission Line near Mammoth Pool Powerhouse.
- (13) BC3-MPPH Transmission Line off Mammoth Pool Road.
- (14) Mammoth Pool Dam Road (FS 6S25) along the entire length of road.

These areas were evaluated in the field for hunter access, including presence of important game areas, parking areas, and vegetative screening.

Consultation was conducted with the California Deer Association (CDA) to gather additional information on hunting access and project influence on hunting access and/or experience. The CDA reported that secondary and dirt roads are the primary means of accessing hunting areas. However, the prevalence of these types of roads is a concern as too many roads disrupt game and potentially contribute to a safety concern to hunters.

2.0 STUDY OBJECTIVES

Characterize access to hunting opportunities near Project facilities.

3.0 STUDY IMPLEMENTATION

3.1 STUDY ELEMENTS COMPLETED

- Developed a list and GIS map of Project roads.
- Reviewed TERR 14, Mule Deer, and TERR 15, Other Game, for the locations of mule deer holding areas, summer and winter habitat areas, migration corridors, and habitat to support other game species.
- Characterized locations where the Big Creek Alternative Licensing Process (ALP) Project facilities provide access to hunting opportunities. Created a GIS database of controlled access locations on ALP study area roads and transmission lines.
- Determined the effects on hunting opportunities and the value of the hunting experience from controlled access on study area roads and project transmission lines.

3.2 OUTSTANDING STUDY ELEMENTS

None.

4.0 STUDY METHODOLOGY

4.1 MAPPING OF ROADS AND TRANSMISSION LINES

A list was developed that identified study area roads and transmission line corridors. This list also identified roads and transmission line corridors that have controlled access (i.e., locked gates). This list was initially developed as part of the LAND 6, Traffic/Circulation Study, technical study report (SCE 2003) and has been updated as additional information was obtained.

4.2 MAPPING OF GAME HABITAT AND IMPORTANT DEER AREAS

The locations of important game species areas were identified as part of the Terrestrial Resources technical study reports TERR 14, Mule Deer, and TERR 15, Other Game (SCE 2003). These study plans identified the location of habitat to support game bird, small game, and big game species near Project facilities and study area recreational facilities. Because game species are potentially present in all habitat types throughout the study area, this report focuses on deer hunting access. There is abundant information on deer migration routes, summer and winter ranges, and key holding areas. However, the information on hunter accessibility is applicable to many game species.

4.3 HUNTER ACCESS STUDY

The study area road and transmission line GIS layer was overlaid on the important game species areas GIS layer (Figures REC 12-1a through d) to identify areas where Project roads and transmission lines have the potential to provide hunter access. These areas were further evaluated in the field to determine hunter access.

4.4 HUNTER ACCESS CONSULTATION

Consultation with SCE, resource agencies, interested user groups, and hunting guides/outfitters was conducted to further characterize or identify access to hunting locations within the study area. The information requested during the consultation included descriptions and identification of hunting access locations, parking or staging area locations, information on why agencies have requested controlled access in the past, and information on popular hunting locations. During this consultation, interviewees (specifically representatives for special interest groups and guides/outfitters) were asked to identify any areas where access to hunting has been limited or locations where Project facilities may have affected their hunting experience.

Three organizations were contacted to gather additional information on hunting access in the study area. These included: Western Hunter, California Deer Association, and Fresno County Sportsman's Club. Also contacted was Mr. Mark Newquist of SCE.

Mr. Newquist provided specific information on SCE operations as they relate to hunting access.

5.0 STUDY RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

5.1 MAPPING OF ROADS AND TRANSMISSION LINES

A list of study area roads was developed which included identification of both open access and controlled access roads. The roads that were evaluated are those that are within the ALP Project boundaries (both open and closed access) and those roads that are outside of the Project boundaries, but that SCE performs maintenance on, with the exception of snow removal activities. The three ALP transmission lines are: Big Creek 1-Eastwood Powerhouse (BC1-EPS) Transmission Line, Big Creek 3-Mammoth Pool Powerhouse (BC3-MPPH) Transmission Line; and Portal Powerhouse Grid Interconnect Sub-Transmission (PowerLine below 33 kV). Study area roads and transmission lines were mapped in a GIS system and are included in Figures REC 12-1a through d.

5.2 AVIAN GAME SPECIES, SMALL AND LARGE GAME SPECIES, AND IMPORTANT DEER AREAS

Appropriate habitat for game species includes all of the wildlife habitats that were identified in the study area. Wildlife habitat in the study area was determined based on the results of vegetation community mapping. Detailed results of the vegetation community mapping and associated wildlife habitat mapping in the study area are provided in the TERR 1, Vegetation Communities technical study report (SCE 2003). Information on other game and important deer areas within the study area was studied and detailed information on these areas is provided in the TERR 14, Mule Deer, and TERR 15, Other Game, technical study reports (SCE 2003). Mule deer holding areas, key winter and summer ranges, and major migration corridors were also identified from literature review and mapped into a GIS system (Figures REC 12-1a through d).

5.2.1 AVIAN GAME SPECIES AND SMALL AND LARGE GAME SPECIES IN THE STUDY AREA

A number of avian game species are known or expected to occur within the study area. These include, but are not limited to the following:

- California valley quail (*Callipepla californica*)
- Mountain quail (*Oreotyx pictus*)
- Band-tailed pigeon (*Columba fasciata*)
- Wild turkey (*Meleagris gallopavo*)
- Blue grouse (*Dendragapus obscurus*)
- Mourning dove (*Zenaida macroura*)

Additionally, several species of small and large game could potentially occur in the Project area, including, but not limited to the following:

- Western gray squirrel (*Sciurus griseus*)
- Jackrabbit (*Lepus californicus*)
- Cottontail (*Sylvilagus audubonii*)
- Black bear (*Ursus americanus*)
- Coyote (*Canis latrans*)
- Bobcat (*Felis rufus*)
- Mule deer (*Odocoileus hemionus*)
- Wild pig (*Sus scrofa*)

The TERR 15, Other Game, technical study report (SCE 2003) provides information on the preferred habitat, status, hunting season, bag limit, and hunting restrictions for these species.

5.2.2 MULE DEER AREAS

In the central Sierra, mule deer inhabit winter ranges at elevations of 1,200 to 3,600 feet from early October through mid-May (Holl et al. 1979). In the spring, they remain at their winter ranges at an average elevation of 3,400 feet until mid-May, and then begin a gradual upward movement, depending on snow pack (Loft et al. 1989). During the summer, mule deer are commonly found at 6,000 to 10,000 feet from late May to early November (Holl et al. 1979).

The deer herd in the Big Creek area is the San Joaquin deer herd, which ranges from about 2,000 feet along the San Joaquin River up to about 12,000 feet along the crest of the Sierra. They are commonly found in the summer above 4,500 feet. A large number of deer use the summer range in Fresno County and winter on the north side of the San Joaquin River in Madera County. Population estimates for the San Joaquin deer herd ranged from 1,901 to 11,480 from 1953 to 1981. Population estimates were highest during the 1950's, and lowest during the early to mid-1970's (CDFG 1983). The San Joaquin deer herd is divided into two population segments: the Huntington and South Fork segments. Population goals for the Huntington segment are to maintain 800 to 1,500 animals, and population goals for the South Fork segment are to maintain a population of 2,000 to 3,000 animals (CDFG 2000). There has been a steady reduction in the number of bucks harvested in the South Fork segment, which may indicate that deer numbers have dropped significantly in this area (CDFG 2000). However, the Huntington segment appears to be increasing in population (CDFG 2000). The North Kings Deer Herd range also extends into an area east of Shaver Lake to North Fork Stevenson Creek. This is the northern extent of the Kings Herd Range.

The San Joaquin deer herd falls within the D7 deer hunting zone. The hunting season for this zone begins on the third weekend in September and lasts for 44 consecutive days. There were 9,000 available tags in this zone, and the bag and possession limit is one buck with a forked horn or better per tag. The California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG 2002) estimated hunter success at 10% for the D7 zone in 2001. In the South Fork segment, estimated number of bucks killed per year from 1990 to 1999

ranged from 22 to 62, with an average of 44. In the Huntington segment, estimated number of bucks killed per year from 1990 to 1999 ranged from 37 to 90, with an average of 50.

5.3 HUNTER ACCESS STUDY

The areas that were determined to have potential for deer hunter access from the GIS overlay map are summarized in Table REC 12-1 and Figures REC 12-2a through 2e. These areas were assessed in the field for potential hunter access by evaluating the presence of important game areas, accessibility, parking areas, and vegetative screening. Each area is evaluated and discussed below.

5.3.1 ROADS

Access Road to Bear Diversion from 5S80, Kaiser Pass Road (FS 6S83)

This unpaved road from Kaiser Pass Road to Bear Diversion is not within any ALP Project boundary, but is maintained by SCE through vegetation control and road repair/clearing. This road is a potential area of hunter access. There is a deer migration route along Bear Creek. The habitat in this area is not prime deer habitat, consisting of Jeffrey pine forest and granite outcrops. Access to the road is fairly easy, but the road does require a four-wheel drive vehicle. There are abundant parking areas. Vegetative screening is variable, but is primarily open for the length of the road.

Hooper Creek Diversion Access Road (FS 7S65) and Access Road to South Fork San Joaquin River Gaging Station Northwest of Hooper Diversion (FS 27E26)

The unpaved roads from Florence Lake to Hooper Diversion and to the gaging station on the South Fork San Joaquin River are potential areas of hunter access. There is a deer migration route along the north shore of Florence Lake that crosses this road. There is also prime habitat for deer in this area due to the South Fork San Joaquin River as a water source, and meadows (Jackass Meadow complex) and a recent burned area for forage. Four-wheel drive vehicles are not necessary to travel most of the road. There are abundant parking areas in the form of pullouts along the entire length of the road. Vegetative screening is variable. There are areas of dense forest and open meadow along the road. There are also numerous trails leading off from the road. No one was observed hunting in 2002, but in the fall of 2001 there were hunters observed on the roadside during the wildlife reconnaissance survey as part of TERR 5, Common and Special-status Wildlife Species (SCE 2003).

Table REC 12-1. Summary of Potential Hunter Access Areas Determined Through GIS.

| Study Area Road/Transmission Line | Area | Comment |
|---|------------------------------|--|
| Access Road to Bear Diversion from 5S80, Kaiser Pass Road (FS 6S83) | Entire length of road | Parallels a deer migration route |
| Hooper Creek Diversion Access Road and Access Road to SF San Joaquin River Gaging Station NW of Hooper Diversion | Entire length of road | Intersects a deer migration route |
| FS 8S301 South of Dam 2 South of Intersection with 8S66 to Penstock Surge Tubes, FS 8S302 from 8S66 (near Dam 2) to Big Creek No. 1 42 Inch Gatehouse, FS 8S66 from Gate West of Dam 2 to Gaging Station on Big Creek below Huntington Lake, FS 8S66B from Dam 2 to Dam 1, Connector Road between 8S83 and 8S66, and FS 8S83 Segment from 8S302 to Huntington-Shaver Siphon | Entire length of road | Located in a deer summer and winter area |
| FS 8S12 and 8S12A Access Road to Huntington-Shaver Siphon from Highway 168 and FS 8S305 from Highway 168 to 8S12 to 8S12A, Access Road to Huntington-Shaver Siphon | Entire length of road | Located in a deer summer area |
| FS 8S02 from Highway 168 to Huntington-Pitman-Shaver Tunnel Adit (Camp 72) | Entire length of road | Located in a deer summer area |
| BC1-EPS Transmission Line | Along the road to Big Creek | Located in a deer migration area and near a deer summer range area |
| Railroad Grade Road from Dawn Meadows to the South End of Dam 4 (FS 8S08) and Dawn Meadow Road (FS 8S13) from Railroad Grade Road (FS 8S08) to Canyon Road (FS 8S05) | Entire length of road | Located in a deer migration area and near a deer winter range area |
| BC1-EPS Transmission Line | Near Highway 168 | Located in a deer migration area and near a deer population area |
| BC1-EPS Transmission Line | Near Balsam Meadow Forebay | Located in a deer migration area |
| FS 9S32 from Gate Near Highway 168 to West Side of Balsam Forebay, FS 9S32A Segments from 9S32 to East Side of Balsam Forebay, and Road below Balsam Forebay Dam | Entire length of road | Located near a deer population area |
| Access Road to Eastwood Powerstation from Highway 168 to Gate (FS 9S58), Access Road to Eagle Point Boat Only Day Use Area (off FS 9S58), and FS 9S58 from Gate to Eastwood Powerstation | Entire length of road | Located near a deer population area |
| BC3-MPPH Transmission Line | Near Mammoth Pool Powerhouse | Located in a deer migration area and near a deer winter range area |
| BC3-MPPH Transmission Line | Off Mammoth Pool Road | Located in a deer migration area and near a deer winter range area |
| Mammoth Pool Dam Road | Entire length of road | Located in a deer migration area |

Road FS 8S301 South of Dam 2 South of Intersection with 8S66 to Penstock Surge Tubes, FS 8S302 from 8S66 (near Dam 2) to Big Creek No. 1 42 Inch Gatehouse, FS 8S66 from Gate West of Dam 2 to Gaging Station on Big Creek below Huntington Lake, FS 8S66B from Dam 2 to Dam 1, Connector Road between 8S83 and 8S66, and FS 8S83 Segment from 8S302 to Huntington-Shaver Siphon

These unpaved roads provide access to the south side of Huntington Lake in an area of deer herd summer and winter range. These roads are gated and access for hunters is limited. The habitat in this area is not prime habitat for deer, consisting of dense coniferous forest. Vegetative screening is high, as the vegetation is dense in the area. Parking areas are not applicable since the road is gated to vehicular traffic. This area is not an area of hunter access due to the controlled access and lack of prime deer habitat.

Road FS 8S12 and 8S12A Access Road to Huntington-Shaver Siphon from Highway 168 and FS 8S305 from Highway 168 to 8S12 to 8S12A, Access Road to Huntington-Shaver Siphon

The habitat along these unpaved roads consists mainly of dense Jeffrey pine forest with a few small meadows at the end of the roads. There are some parking areas and little vegetation screening along the road due to limited understory vegetation. This area is located within the summer range for deer. However, the area does not appear to be suitable for deer hunting due to the lack of prime habitat.

Road FS 8S02 from Highway 168 to Huntington-Pitman-Shaver Tunnel Adit (Camp 72)

The habitat along this unpaved road consists mainly of dense Jeffrey pine forest. The road is mostly narrow with a few small turnouts, but limited parking overall. However, since the road is gated, parking is not applicable. Vegetative screening is high with dense forest on both sides of the road. This area is in a summer range for deer. However, the area does not appear to be a suitable deer hunting area.

Railroad Grade Road from Dawn Meadows to the South End of Dam 4 (FS 8S08) and Dawn meadow Road (FS 8S13)

Railroad Grade Road (FS 8S08) and Dawn Meadows Road, the unpaved road that runs from the Railroad Grade Road (FS 8S08) to the Canyon Road (FS 8S05) does not provide suitable hunting opportunities. The habitat (dense coniferous forest) is not prime habitat for deer, there are few parking areas, the vegetative screening is high along the road, there are steep slopes on both sides of the road for most of the length of the road, and there is a locked gate near the Canyon Road. There is a transmission line (not part of the ALP Project) that crosses the Road. There is more suitable habitat for deer (open, brushy) under the transmission line, but it is not easily accessed due to the slope and limited parking. Dawn Meadow is small and at least 100 feet from the Access Road, providing limiting hunting opportunities.

Road FS 9S32 from Gate Near Highway 168 to West Side of Balsam Forebay, FS 9S32A Segments from 9S32 to East Side of Balsam Forebay, and Road below Balsam Forebay Dam

These unpaved roads would provide access to prime deer habitat (see discussion on BC1-EPS Transmission Line). However, these roads are gated by SCE. There are several meadows and forest in this area that are also wildlife mitigation and habitat enhancement areas for the Balsam Meadows (Eastwood Powerstation) Project. Therefore, this area should not be opened to hunting. Also, the walk from the gate to the transmission line is relatively short. Hunters were observed using the transmission line corridor during wildlife reconnaissance surveys in 2001 for the TERR 5, Common and Special-status Wildlife Species Study Plan (SCE 2001).

Access Road to Eastwood Powerstation from Highway 168 to Gate (FS 9S58), Access Road to Eagle Point Boat Only Day Use Area (off FS 9S58), and FS 9S58 from Gate to Eastwood Powerstation

These paved roads would provide access to the entire north shore of Shaver Lake, including areas of prime deer habitat (i.e., meadows). This area is also an area of deer migration and a population area. However, the majority of these roads are gated by SCE. Vegetative screening is variable. The road closures and several of the meadows and forest in this area are wildlife mitigation and habitat enhancement areas for the Balsam Meadows (Eastwood Powerstation) Project.

Mammoth Pool Dam Road (FS 6S25)

Access to Mammoth Pool Dam Road is easy, along the paved and unpaved roads. Parking is abundant in pullout areas along the length of the road. The road over Mammoth Pool Dam provides hunters access to the eastside of Mammoth Pool. Access to the eastside of Mammoth Pool would otherwise only be by boat. The habitat along the road and in adjacent areas is not prime deer habitat, consisting of dense chaparral and coniferous forest. However, this is an area where a large number of deer migrate every year. Deer are known to use the Mammoth Pool Dam Road to cross the reservoir. Hunters could hunt deer adjacent to the open road, especially over the dam and spillway where there is no vegetative cover for escape. No hunters were observed on the road in 2002, but hunters were observed in the fall of 2001.

5.3.2 TRANSMISSION LINES

BC1–EPS Transmission Line along the Huntington Lake road to Big Creek

The BC1–EPS Transmission Line parallels the Huntington Lake Road (FS 2710) segment between Shaver Lake and Big Creek for a short distance. There are two locations where the transmission line is adjacent to the road. These areas have a steep slope, dense forest, and no parking areas, and occur on a heavily traveled road, making them unsuitable for hunting. The habitat (coniferous forest) is not prime habitat for deer. There is a narrow band of more suitable brush habitat under the transmission line, but it is not the dominant vegetation in the area.

The BC1–EPS Transmission Line crosses Huntington Lake Road near Big Creek. In this area, the habitat is more suitable for deer, consisting of brush species. There is little vegetative screening. However, there is no parking, the road is well traveled, and the slope to the south of the road is steep, making the area unsuitable for hunting.

BC1–EPS Transmission Line off Highway 168

The BC1–EPS Transmission Line crosses Highway 168 between Shaver Lake and Balsam Meadow Forebay. The north side of the road at the crossing is extremely steep and densely vegetated, hindering hunter access. The south side of the road is also densely vegetated, and there is an unpaved road with a gate leading to the transmission line. The habitat here is prime habitat for deer, consisting of open, brushy and grassy habitat. There is a parking area in the form of a pullout near the road crossing. There is also a gated, paved road leading down the hill to the south end of the transmission line. This would be a short walk from Highway 168. There is no vegetation screening and easy access to the transmission line. However, there is a large transformer station here and signs stating “SCE employees only” that may deter hunters. The south side of the crossing is a potential area for hunter access.

BC1–EPS Transmission Line near Balsam Meadow Forebay

The BC1–EPS Transmission Line passes near Balsam Meadow Forebay. Access to vehicles is restricted along the road to Balsam Meadow Forebay. However, it is an easy, short hike to the transmission line, and there is a large parking area at the gate to the forebay. The habitat is prime for deer with abundant brushy and grassy species, including a meadow for forage and Balsam Creek for water. There is a lot of vegetative screening in some areas with dense trees or brush. This area is suitable for hunting. Hunters were observed using the transmission line corridor during wildlife reconnaissance surveys in 2001 for the TERR 5, Common and Special-status Wildlife Species Study Plan (SCE 2001).

BC3–MPPH Transmission Line by Mammoth Pool Powerhouse

There is an unpaved road (FS 8S44Y) that runs the length of the BC3–MPPH Transmission Line. The north end is gated, but hunters may walk in on foot, although parking is limited on the main road. The habitat is similar both under the transmission line, along the road, and in the surrounding areas, consisting of open oak woodland, which is prime habitat for deer. It is about a one mile walk to the transmission line from the gate. There is a second gate at Kinsman Flat which is marked as a CDFG Wildlife Area. However, the sign does not restrict hunting. There is private property on the other side of the gate blocking access to the road from Mammoth Pool Road.

BC3–MPPH Transmission Line off Mammoth Pool Road

Hunter access to the transmission line road from Mammoth Pool Road is restrictive due to the extensive private property in the area. The south end of the transmission line does not provide good hunter access from Italian Bar Road due to a locked gate and

steep roads. In spite of this hunters have been observed in the area by SCE employees.

5.4 HUNTER ACCESS CONSULTATION

Hunting Access Locations

California Deer Association

During consultation, the California Deer Association did not cite specific hunting locations in the study area, but rather provided a general overview of hunter access routes in the forest. Hunting areas are primarily accessed by secondary and dirt roads. It was estimated that 50% to 70% of hunting is by “road hunters” that use secondary dirt roads to access their hunting areas and tend to stay very close to the road. It was stated that the “best” access was by U.S. Forest Service (USDA-FS) roads, which have been closed to vehicular traffic. A concern was stated that there are too many roads in the areas open to hunting. While these roads do provide access, they diminish the overall quality of the hunting area. A typical example of the type of road configuration that is “excessive” would be multiple roads that circle one to two miles and converge in at the same point. The two primary factors associated with the diminishment of the hunting areas by extensive road access is the disruption of game and heightened safety concerns by those hunting the areas. It is thought that excess vehicular access into the hunting areas disrupt game, or potentially cause game to avoid the area. Extensive road access is also thought to encourage poaching. Poachers can easily access hunting areas, and patrol of the numerous roads is not possible.

Fresno County Sportsman’s Association

Access for the entire study area was described as good. USDA-FS roads and county roads provide the primary access to hunting areas. Secondary and dirt USDA-FS roads are extensively used to access hunting areas. Roads that prohibit vehicle access also provide valuable access for hunters that prefer to walk and are looking to distance themselves from other hunters that primarily stay close to roads having vehicle access. It was noted that vehicle access to hunting areas is important to hunters that are physically challenged and might not be able to walk to hunting areas. For disabled persons, the CDFG issues a special hunting permit that allows the holder of the permit to shoot from a vehicle (normally prohibited by law).

Parking/Staging Areas

California Deer Association

No specific staging areas were identified. Instead, developed and undeveloped camps are typically used for staging activities. Often the staging/camping areas are alongside, or at the terminus, of the secondary and/or dirt access roads.

Fresno County Sportsman’s Association

No specific areas were identified. It was stated that there is ample accessible parking and camping areas throughout the study area. The only limitation was for obvious

safety concerns or impeding access. The ability to park and stage in an uncontrolled manner was identified as a beneficial element of the hunting experience.

Information on Controlled Access

California Deer Association

The California Deer Association was not aware of any specific area where hunting access had been restricted. The interviewee did note that there are times when a temporary closure is beneficial to hunting and, over a period of time, improves the hunting opportunities in that area. The reasons provided for temporary closure are to allow for deer migration, habitat growth, and for resource conservation activities such as erosion control. All of these examples were cited as viable reasons for temporary closure of hunting areas.

Fresno County Sportsman's Association

The only area identified as having controlled access was Mammoth Pool Reservoir. Mammoth Pool Reservoir is temporarily closed to vehicle access from May 1 to June 16 each year to allow for deer herd migration. The closure of roads to vehicle access was not viewed as an "access control" for hunting. These roads are closed to all vehicle use, not just hunting use. In addition, these roads still provide hunting access to hunters that prefer to walk to the hunting areas.

Popular Hunting Locations

California Deer Association

No specific areas were identified as popular hunting locations. Instead, the areas around Shaver Lake and Huntington Lake were identified as the most popular hunting areas. There is good access to these hunting areas and it is a relatively short travel time from the Fresno area. It was felt that there is much more hunting in these areas than the areas over Kaiser Pass Road. It was stated it is not uncommon for local, and Fresno hunters, to engage in two to three hour hunts as time allows.

Fresno County Sportsman's Association

No areas were identified as primary hunting locations. The entire study area was described as having very good hunting opportunities for a variety of game species.

Areas Where Access is Limited

California Deer Association

It was felt that there were no significant hunting access limitations in the study area.

Fresno County Sportsman's Association

No hunting access limitations were identified within the study area.

Southern California Edison

The road at Mammoth Pool to the dam is closed under an agreement with SCE and CDFG to protect the deer herd during the migration period. The closure is not related to SCE operations. There is a Forest Service road near Balsam Forebay that is closed for deer fawning.

Potential Project Operation and Maintenance Activity that May Affect the Hunting Experience*California Deer Association*

It was stated that SCE facilities and operations do not adversely affect the hunting experience. In fact, it was felt that project facilities actually improve hunting access in the areas. It was noted that if SCE was interested in projects to improve hunting, these projects should be focused on deer habitat restoration. Areas that have been overgrown need to be cleared and replanted with species that support foraging for deer herds.

Fresno County Sportsman's Association

No project facilities or operations were identified as having a negative effect on the hunting experience.

6.0 LITERATURE CITED

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FIGURES

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