



# LOWER OWENS RIVER RECREATION USE PLAN

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Lower Owens River Project (LORP) is one of the largest river ecosystem restoration projects in the nation, encompassing 77,657 acres of high desert land located east of the Sierra Nevada in central California. The return of a consistent flow of water to the Lower Owens River has created new opportunities to enhance and better manage community and visitor recreation experiences, while continuing to prioritize ecosystem recovery. To accomplish this, Inyo County has joined with the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power (LADWP) to create this *Draft Recreation Use Plan* for the Lower Owens River.



Local residents and stakeholders were involved in draft plan development through a variety of activities, including stakeholder interviews, community workshops, and an online questionnaire. The goal of this public involvement process was to match the plan's goals and recommendations with the vision and priorities of the surrounding community. The public involvement process and process results are described in Chapters I and III and Appendix B of this plan.

This document seeks to provide a framework for future recreation use that helps protect the area from the unintended consequences of continuing area use in the absence of a common, balanced recreation vision and management strategy. This plan presents three alternative levels of recreation use:

- *Option 1* proposes the lowest level of recreation, concentrating use at a few key points along the river.
- *Option 2* adds several areas for recreation and upgrades the types of facilities.
- *Option 3* provides a higher level of service in the number, location and types of facilities.

While the options presented can be said to provide low, moderate and higher levels of recreation use, all three options represent a natural, primitive scale of recreation development consistent with LORP goals.

Each alternative includes the following facilities:

- Gateways/portals to the recreation area along Highway 395
- Lower Owens River Trail
- Staging areas for trail access
- Birding trails and bird blinds
- River access, including put-in and take-out points and marked water trails for non-motorized boating
- Picnic areas
- Wayfinding signage to support navigation and improve the visitor experience



Under all options, fishing and hunting continue as dispersed uses not limited to any specific area but remain subject to California Department of Fish and Game regulations. Interpretive amenities that bring focus to local culture, history and environment -- and particularly the creation of an interpretive center focused on the story of the Lower Owens River -- could complement other uses under all of these options.

In addition to use and facility recommendations, each alternative presents potential management and operations strategies to maintain, program and sustain LORP recreation facilities and resources in the future. Alternatives define a broad approach for limited tule management and control.

Chapter IV provides a description of each plan alternative, or option, and includes a summary table highlighting and comparing the major features of each option.

Funding for the first phase of plan development has been provided by the Sierra Nevada Conservancy. Decision-makers are tasked with reviewing this draft plan, and selecting and refining a preferred option. Members of the community will also have the opportunity to review the draft plan and submit comments for consideration. The County is seeking additional grant funding to develop a final *Lower Owens River Recreation Use Plan*, which will be submitted to the Los Angeles Board of Water and Power Commissioners and the Inyo County Board of Supervisors for consideration and possible approval.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Inyo County has joined with the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power (LADWP) to create this *Draft Recreation Use Plan* for the Lower Owens River to enhance and better manage community and visitor recreation experiences. Initiated in spring 2011, this long-range plan provides direction and guidance for the continued investment and collaboration needed to establish the Lower Owens River area as a recreation destination for local and regional outdoor enthusiasts. It presents three alternative levels of recreation development for consideration.

### LOWER OWENS RIVER PROJECT

The Lower Owens River Project (LORP) is one of the largest river ecosystem restoration projects in the nation, affecting 77,657 acres of high desert land in Inyo County, California. The LORP area includes 62 miles of sinuous river, more than 1,500 acres of wetland, and numerous off-river lakes and ponds. It includes the area on both sides of the Owens River, near the towns of Lone Pine and Independence, between the Los Angeles Aqueduct to the north and the Owens Dry Lake to the south. The land is owned by the City of Los Angeles and managed by Los Angeles Department of Water and Power (LADWP).

The Lower Owens River was substantially de-watered in 1913 when the flow was diverted to the Los Angeles Aqueduct to augment Los Angeles' water supply. A long process of multi-party negotiations and litigation resulted in a series of agreements to return managed flow to the river based on fishery and riparian needs. LADWP maintained off-river lakes and ponds through their watershed management practices for many years prior to 2006. However, the return of a consistent flow of water (since 2006) has opened new opportunities for recreation and habitat conservation.

### PURPOSE OF THE RECREATION USE PLAN

The LORP planning area includes ecologically sensitive lands and wildlife habitat that are in early stages of recovery. Ecological issues are complex and still evolving as the Lower Owens River and its associated riparian and wetland ecosystems adapt to an increased flow of water. Resource conservation and recovery, and the continuing productivity of ranching lands and the LORP "working landscape", remain essential priorities for area managers. The purpose of this *Draft Recreation Use Plan* is to support LORP goals while creating opportunities for local residents and visitors to experience recreation, learn more about the ecosystem, and become active stewards of the Lower



Owens River. This document seeks to provide a framework that helps protect the area from the unintended consequences of continuing area use in the absence of a common, balanced recreation vision and management strategy. More specifically, the Plan:

- Defines a recreation vision, along with goals and strategies for providing ecologically-sensitive recreation opportunities on the Lower Owens River.
- Presents and evaluates three alternatives for future recreation development, based on differing levels of use and investment.
- Summarizes next steps for plan implementation, including the development, management and operations of recreation facilities and programs.

## COMMUNITY OUTREACH AND ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

The support of local residents, businesses, Native American tribes, ranchers, recreation users and conservationists is critical to the success of this *Recreation Use Plan* and its implementation. For this reason, a variety of public involvement activities were held between October 2010 and August 2011 to match the Plan's goals and recommendations with the vision and priorities of key stakeholders and the surrounding community. These activities included:

- *Community Interviews/Meetings:* In December 2010, the project team conducted interviews and attended meetings to gain an understanding of the key planning issues from a local perspective. Team members met with more than 30 community representatives, asking them to describe their involvement in activities related to the Lower Owens River, share their issues and concerns about potential recreation uses, and comment on a variety of potential recreation activities. In addition to meeting individual community members, the team also discussed the project and identified key issues and opportunities with the Bishop Rotary Club and the Board of the Interagency Visitor Center.
- *Public Workshops:* In May 2011, Inyo County hosted two public workshops in Lone Pine and Independence to explore issues and recreation opportunities for the *Recreation Use Plan*. Participants—including local recreationists, residents, County and LADWP staff, community leaders and educators, tribal members, environmental and community health advocates, and business owners—reviewed and discussed preliminary recreation concepts and opportunities.





- *Online Questionnaire:* After the May workshops, the County posted an online questionnaire on their website. This questionnaire was designed to collect additional opinions on the same recreation opportunities discussed during the public workshops, providing community members who did not attend the workshops or lived at greater distances a chance to share their thoughts and ideas.

The feedback from participants in these outreach efforts, along with management concerns of the County and LADWP, provide the foundation for the three recreation alternatives that are presented in this plan. Key community members and agency managers now have an opportunity to review these alternatives and the *Draft Recreation Use Plan*, provide additional comments, and eventually to help refine them into a final plan.

## PLANNING BACKGROUND

The concept of creating a recreation plan for the Lower Owens River is a direct outgrowth of a 1997 Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between Inyo County and LADWP that states:

*“The goal of the LORP is the establishment of a healthy, functioning Lower Owens River riverine-riparian ecosystem, and the establishment of healthy functioning ecosystems in the other elements of the LORP, for the benefit of biodiversity and threatened and endangered species, while providing for the continuation of sustainable uses including recreation, livestock grazing, agriculture, and other activities.”*

A policy framework for recreation use and management was developed and described in a series of guiding documents created over the past two decades. This *Draft Lower Owens Recreation Use Plan* is intended to be consistent with the directions provided in these documents:

- *1991 Long Term Water Agreement:* This agreement called for LADWP to help fund rehabilitation and new development of County-managed recreation facilities on City-owned land (including day use and camping areas) as well as a recreational use plan for the Owens River. Some funding for operations and maintenance was also to be included. To date, this funding has been spent in its entirety on County recreation projects exclusive of the *Recreation Use Plan*.
- *1997 Memorandum of Understanding (MOU):* This guiding document includes recreation as a goal or benefit of the overall project to restore the river. It states that recreation use must be compatible with other





**The Lower Owens River Project (LORP) is guided by the following objectives:**

- 1. Establishment and maintenance of diverse riverine, riparian and wetland habitats in a healthy ecological condition.*
- 2. Compliance with state and federal laws (including regulations adopted pursuant to such laws) that protect Threatened and Endangered Species.*
- 3. Management consistent with applicable water quality laws, standards and objectives.*
- 4. Control of deleterious species whose presence within the Planning Area interferes with the achievement of the goals of the LORP. These control measures will be implemented jointly with other responsible agency programs.*
- 5. Management of livestock.*

LORP goals, particularly ecosystem improvement and recovery. A warm water recreational fishery is called out as a key goal of the project.

- *LORP Ecosystem Management Plan:* This document addresses potential conflicts between ecosystem recovery and recreation, and between ecosystem recovery and aqueduct and ranching operations, by stating that recreation must not negatively impact the natural ecosystem or working landscape. It calls for recreation management including seasonal closures and other methods to prevent and reduce conflicts. It does not call for the development of any specific recreation facilities.
- *Framework for the Recreation Plan: Technical Memo #10:* This joint project of LADWP and Inyo County identified recreation use patterns prior to river re-watering, issues of concern, constraints and opportunities. The memo includes case study examples of other large natural area recreation issues, and presents some general ideas for types of recreation suited for the Lower Owens River. It does not propose any specific recreation facilities or uses.
- *LORP Monitoring, Adaptive Management and Reporting Plan:* The LORP Monitoring Report includes a brief section on recreation that describes the primary current recreation use as fishing and notes that overnight camping is prohibited. LADWP expects an increase in recreation use, particularly wildlife viewing, bird watching, hunting and fishing over the next 10 to 15 years, and expresses concerns about damage to natural resources.
- *LORP Final Environmental Impact Report/Environmental Impact Statement (EIR/EIS):* This document introduced strategies to mitigate impacts to livestock operations resulting from increased recreation, including but not limited to installation of fences and cattle guards, and signage requesting that recreation users keep cattle gates closed. It also called for the installation of signage and fencing with pass-throughs by LADWP, which were implemented in 2010. Six kiosks were installed to help orient recreation users and establish use rules. The fence pass-throughs allow foot access to the river, primarily for fishing. No additional pass-throughs are planned at this time, but access may be modified if necessary.

- *LORP Post-Implementation Plan:* This document describes how LADWP and the County will divide financial costs of administering the LORP. It includes language describing the funding of recreational improvements within the LORP.

## DOCUMENT ORGANIZATION

The *Draft Lower Owens Recreation Use Plan* is organized as five chapters and two appendices.

- *Chapter I: Introduction* describes the purpose of the plan and provides an overview of the planning process, related documents, and the Plan's organization.
- *Chapter II: Existing Conditions* summarizes key findings from the analysis of existing conditions, recreation constraints and opportunities.
- *Chapter III: Recreation Preferences and Goals* highlights key findings from the outreach activities, which are used to define goals and strategies for recreation development.
- *Chapter IV: Plan Alternatives* presents three planning alternatives for future site development and recreation uses.
- *Chapter V: Next Steps* summarizes directions for next steps in the planning process to implement this plan and manage the site.
- *Appendix A: Recreation Impacts* notes the anticipated impacts of proposed site uses according to varying levels of development.
- *Appendix B: Public Involvement Findings* presents findings from the three outreach activities conducted as part of the planning process to date.



## II. EXISTING CONDITIONS

The high desert Eastern Sierra landscape in Inyo County is largely in public ownership, including federal and state jurisdictions and the City of Los Angeles. These public lands attract millions of visitors, mostly from urban regions of California, but also from across the nation and even internationally. Seasonal tourism is increasingly important to the area's economy. While one goal of the *Lower Owens Recreation Use Plan* is to improve access that may attract more visitors to the Lower Owens River Project (LORP) area and help in economic development, it is important to note that ecosystem recovery and LADWP aqueduct operations take precedence over other land uses, including recreation, and that future plans must provide for the continuation of sustainable uses including livestock grazing and agriculture. This means that recreation is allowed and expected, but should not be developed at the expense of habitat preservation and enhancement or other pre-existing land use activities.



In accordance with this direction, an existing conditions analysis was undertaken to describe current recreation activities in the context of the existing landscape, and to identify opportunities and constraints for the development of additional recreational uses in this area. This chapter summarizes findings from the Existing Conditions Memo, which is available under a separate cover.

### NATURAL AND IN-STREAM CONDITIONS

The LORP area is a flat to gently sloping mid-elevation, north-south valley flanked by two of the highest mountain ranges in North America: the Inyo-White Mountains on the east and the Sierra Nevada on the west. The elevation of the Lower Owens River Valley ranges from a low of 3,620 feet at the Owens River Delta at Owens Lake to a high of 3,820 feet at the Los Angeles Aqueduct (LA Aqueduct) Intake. The surrounding mountain peaks rise to more than 14,000 feet.

Several seasonal creeks flow from the Sierra into the valley. While some of these creeks disappear into the ground, others are conveyed to the LA Aqueduct. The Inyo Mountains, which are much dryer than the Sierras, have no creeks that flow into the Lower Owens River.

The Owens River ends at Owens Lake, a shallow salt water body that is now mostly dry. Because of the water diversion to the aqueduct, the river itself ran mostly dry from 1913 until 2006, when a minimum, consistent flow of 40 cubic feet per second (cfs) was established, along with annual seasonal



habitat flows up to 200 cfs, dependent on forecast runoff from snowmelt. These seasonal flows are meant to mimic natural spring freshet flows during high run-off years.

The dominant vegetation of the valley floor is a mix of alkali scrub and grassy meadow. Riverine-riparian trees and shrubs are taking root along the river as the shallow water table rises and gradually spreads laterally. This riparian area covers about 6,500 acres, or 8 percent of the total LORP area. A series of constructed and managed wetlands occur within the approximately 1500-acre Blackrock Waterfowl Management Area (WMA) in the northwest end of the LORP. Water levels are adjusted seasonally to maintain key habitats, particularly for waterfowl.

The Delta Habitat Area encompasses approximately 325 acres where the river meets the northern part of Owens Lake, forming a series of wetlands and shallow pools of water. The Delta wetlands are key habitats for wading and shorebirds, and are reportedly becoming a popular area for bird watching.

A series of off-river lakes and ponds occur along a fault line as a result of a massive 1872 earthquake. They include popular fishing areas, such as Lower Twin Lakes, the Coyote/Grass Lakes complex, Upper and Lower Goose Lakes and Billy Lake. These lie mostly within the Blackrock WMA.

The majority of the LORP area is characterized by dry uplands with a range of desert shrubs and grasses. Most of this area is grazed by cattle and riparian pastures are fenced. There are few large or tall trees in the LORP. A few groves of Fremont cottonwood near the river grow up to about 40 feet in height. The open landscape character of the LORP permits outstanding, mostly uninterrupted views of the surrounding mountains, but also provides little shade during the hot summer months. Along the river, tall and dense vegetation limits mountain views.

Water in the desert landscapes of the western United States is a limited and precious resource. The addition of water to the Lower Owens River has re-created habitat for fish, birds and mammals. It has also attracted recreational users and other people to the area.

## EXISTING RECREATION ACTIVITIES

Since the return of flowing water to the river in 2006, the resurgence and recovery of the local ecosystem has resulted in a rediscovery of the area by anglers, paddle boaters, bird watchers and other recreationists. The recovering river, wetlands and riparian ecosystem together have greatly increased existing and potential recreation use. As the river ecosystem and off-river lakes and wetlands continue to recover, recreation use is expected to grow in popularity.

Although not well supported by facility development, the following recreation activities take place in the LORP area today:

- *Non-Motorized Boating:* The return of flowing water to the river created the expectation that canoeing and kayaking would become significant recreation uses. However, a lack of access points and signage, small culverts under roadways that have restricted passage, and the widespread growth of tules and other aquatic vegetation have limited non-motorized boating. Some canoeing and kayaking does occur, but only along short stretches of the river. Repeat visits by people other than locals are unlikely given current conditions.
- *Fishing:* Fishing is a well-established use that pre-dates the return of water to the river. Prior to the return of water, most of the fishing occurred in off-river lakes and ponds. Some fishing also occurred in parts of the river channel below Billy Lake, where groundwater and surface flows remained. No native fish are present in the Lower Owens River, though most of the river is a productive and highly valued warm-water bass fishery.

LADWP has worked with the Warmwater Fishing Association and local anglers to identify important access points, and has provided multiple fence pass-throughs to facilitate access to the river. The LORP Final Environmental Impact Report also called for signage describing LADWP policies on recreational uses, and showing major access points and where fences cross the river. LADWP installed six kiosks in key locations in 2010 that included this and other relevant information for users.

- *Birding and Wildlife Viewing:* The addition of water to the Lower Owens River has re-created habitat for fish, birds and mammals. As a result, birding and wildlife viewing are growing activities in the LORP area, with birding activities increasing significantly over the past few years. Birding is both a self-directed and programmed activity, with the California Audubon leading trips to the area for local and out of area



visitors. Popular birding areas include the Blackrock Waterfowl Management Area (WMA), the Delta area and the riparian area of the river.

- *Hunting:* Waterfowl hunting takes place primarily in the Blackrock WMA, Delta, and riparian areas in season. Elk, deer and upland game hunting also takes place along the river.
- *Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) Riding:* OHV/ATV use is a popular activity that is expanding in use, particularly in the Lone Pine area. OHV use is increasingly restricted on nearby federal lands, while anecdotal evidence suggests that OHV activity has increased in the LORP area. While most OHV users drive responsibly, even a small number of irresponsible users can create significant damage to fragile desert and riparian ecosystems. Further, it is anticipated that OHV use will increase in the LORP area as a result of the launch of the Eastern Sierra Adventure Trails System, a State and County supported program that could allow OHV use on main arteries (County roads) within the LORP.
- *Swimming and Tubing:* Local residents currently take advantage of several popular swimming holes on the Lower Owens River, such as one near the old railroad trestle. Tubing opportunities are limited, because of the growth of tules and aquatic vegetation that make the shallow river impassible in many places.
- *Picnicking:* There are no existing formal picnic facilities in the LORP. Even though several suitable sites exist along the main access roads, the lack of shade and other amenities and facilities (tables, trash receptacles, shelters, etc.) does not encourage the use of these sites for family or group picnics.
- *Camping:* Camping is prohibited by LADWP, as are all overnight uses. Occasional overnight camping has been reported to occur within the LORP. There are several camping opportunities near the LORP, including private campgrounds, public campgrounds at Diaz Lake and Boulder Creek, as well as dispersed camping allowed on nearby Bureau of Land Management (BLM) lands.
- *Hiking/Walking:* There are no established hiking trails or designated paths in the LORP. However, existing roads (with little vehicle traffic) provide access for hikers.
- *Scenic Driving and Road Biking:* Scenic driving and road biking mostly occur along Highway 395. The portion of Highway 395 from Independence to north of Tinemaha Reservoir is a designated State





Scenic Highway. Few drivers and road cyclists travel off the main road, because of poor road conditions, including a lack of paved roads and directional signage.

- *Mountain Biking:* Mountain biking may take place along the many unimproved roads in the LORP, but present levels of use are not documented. Constraints include a lack of marked routes, “sand traps” in areas of deep alkali dust, fencing, gates and cattle guards.
- *Historic and Cultural Tourism:* Local attractions include the Manzanar National Historic Site, the Lone Pine Film History Museum, both of which are considered attractions of national interest. The Eastern California Museum at Independence draws visitors from around the state and region, as does the Federal Interagency Visitor Center just south of Lone Pine. The County is exploring grant opportunities to fund an interpretive center in Independence focused on the Lower Owens River.

The Lower Owens River area is rich in Native American cultural artifacts. Although federal laws require these artifacts be left undisturbed, Native American artifacts have been collected illegally along the river for many years.

- *Volunteer Stewardship and Environmental Education:* An annual clean-up event in the LORP area has encouraged volunteer support of site maintenance, even though no on-going environmental stewardship programs have been organized. In addition, local schools have incorporated lessons about the Lower Owens River into their curriculum. A lack of facilities limits on-site programs. Environmental education will be a focus of the LORP interpretive center that Inyo County plans to develop (noted under *Historic and Cultural Tourism* above).

Organized recreation activities have been limited by policies, site constraints, a lack of developed facilities and programs, impediments to site access, as well as the absence of signage, maps and marketing materials to inform people of opportunities present in the LORP area. Recreation has also been limited, in part, by concerns that increased recreation use would create conflicts with habitat enhancement mitigation goals and established aqueduct and ranching operations. Understanding and responding to the concerns, issues and constraints are important if the development and implementation of a successful recreation use area.





### III. RECREATION PREFERENCES AND GOALS

As noted in Chapter I, a variety of public involvement activities were held to identify the concerns, preferences, priorities and needs of local community members in the planning process. Key findings from the community member interviews, public workshops, and the online questionnaire are presented in Appendix B of this document. This chapter highlights several of the dominant issues, preferences and goals for recreation development that were identified during the planning process.

#### KEY ISSUES

While the community interviews, workshops and questionnaire results revealed a wide range of interests and concerns, there was substantial agreement that the following issues should be addressed at some point in the future through recreation management and development:

- Tule growth and management
- Public information and outreach
- Access, signage, and wayfinding
- Recreation on privately-held lands
- Environmental education and stewardship
- Economic development
- The interface between ranching and recreation uses
- Protection of cultural resources
- Recreation operations and management

These issues are described in more detail below.

#### Tule Growth and Management

Tules, large bulrush plants and cattails that are abundant in marshy areas have grown extensively over portions of the Lower Owens River channel since re-watering, significantly reducing recreation access while providing wildlife and fish habitat. Tules occupy some areas that were previously open water, reducing fishing and boating access and reducing open water habitats. Several stakeholders noted that tules impede access and may create unsafe conditions in portions of the channel. Many stakeholders feel that active management of tules is critical to expanding open water habitat for fishing and boating purposes, as well as for other uses such as environmental education. To date, some limited mechanical management of tules has been used in portions of the river, but this has not been aimed at improving recreation access.



LADWP and Inyo County have recently agreed to study how more variable river flows may help control tules in some areas and improve water quality for fisheries. Variable water flows may be successful in establishing some river stretches that would be adequately tule-free for recreationists including boaters and anglers.

### Public Information

Community participants noted a critical need to better publicize recreation opportunities, along with clear communication of policies and regulations regarding public access and use. As the number of recreation users increase, clear enforceable policies will be needed to define allowable activities, overnight use restrictions, OHV/ATV restrictions, gate use, laws protecting cultural artifacts, and “leave no trace” principles. Community members believe these policies, and their publication and improved implementation, are needed to ensure that recreation use co-exists with other desired site uses. Signage, brochures, website information, maps and other tools can be used to publicize and market recreation opportunities, rules, and regulations.

### Access, Signage, and Wayfinding

The LORP area represents a unique recreation destination which, currently, few people know about or can find. Community participants in the public involvement process noted that basic wayfinding and directional signage is needed to encourage visitation and to help users identify appropriate access points, as well as to avoid getting lost. Beyond signage, amenity and facility development at targeted locations, improved recreation access, and public information about these access points will help direct users to appropriate areas and recreation activities.

Several community members noted the potential environmental benefits of improving river and area access: “Without access, people will carve their own paths, leading to stream bank erosion and environmental degradation. Non-motorized river recreation can be very low impact, as long as access issues are addressed, signed and properly managed.” Another participant articulated the importance of providing clear, unobtrusive signage within the recreation area.



### Environmental Education and Stewardship

Many community members have expressed strong interest in enhanced environmental educational and stewardship in the Lower Owens River area. One workshop participant noted, "Environmental education is a critical component in any management plan, provides an outdoor classroom for local and visiting schools, and helps connect people with place." As another workshop participant commented, "The river restoration process is such a great learning, teaching and research opportunity." Schools and educators, boy scouts, and organized groups of all ages were identified as target audiences for future activities.

### Economic Development

According to many community members, increased recreation tourism in the LORP has a tremendous potential to support local communities through the direct and secondary economic benefits associated with site use. Public involvement participants hope that new recreation opportunities will encourage tourists to make the area more of a destination, rather than just a brief stopover. According to public comments, Lower Owens River visitors are likely to shop in local stores, buy lunch and possibly extend their stay. While few believe that increased recreation will be a significant boon to the area, modest expectations suggest that recreation will boost local businesses. Chamber of Commerce officials noted that during peak season (summer months) hotels already have a high occupancy rate. Some stakeholders noted that communities might experience greater economic benefits if recreation on the LORP helped increase visitation during the spring, fall, and winter seasons. This would require a focus on the expansion of appropriate recreation opportunities during the shoulder seasons (i.e. spring and fall).

### Cultural Resource Protection

Illegal artifact gathering has been identified as a significant concern of local tribal members. Tribal representatives and others fear that increased river recreation will increase opportunities for this damaging and illegal behavior. These historical artifacts are important, irreplaceable resources that should remain undisturbed. Community members expressed a desire that recreation facilities be located away from areas known to have artifacts. Signage and information should be installed to remind visitors that found artifacts must be left undisturbed, as per federal law. Some community participants pointed out that given the long history of human use in the area, the recovering river provides an excellent opportunity for programs and education that can teach visitors and locals about the integral value of cultural resources, and create a greater sense of stewardship and a desire to support their long-term protection.



### Operations and Maintenance

Another important issue raised by community participants is facility maintenance. Currently, some County facilities are operated through contractors in part due to lack of staff. LADWP does not have park rangers or recreation managers, resulting in limited enforcement of current regulations. An increase in facility development and the number of visitors will inevitably increase the need for maintenance, facility repair, visitor contact and communication, site monitoring and safety measures.



As the landowner and primary manager of the LORP, LADWP is concerned about the potential for increased recreation use to interfere with LADWP's regular operations and maintenance, cattle management and ecosystem recovery. Ongoing maintenance operations may require temporary road closures, heavy equipment occupying or using roads, and access to water control facilities. It is imperative that LADWP be able to carry out these necessary tasks independent of public recreation opportunities. Further, ecosystem recovery is a primary objective of LORP management. Recreation users could trample recovering riparian vegetation, harass wildlife, or damage fragile areas by using OHVs off-road.



The current day-use only policy is supported by most community members who have participated in plan development to date. Concerns are that any overnight use, especially camping, could increase the risk of fire, and there are ample camping opportunities in nearby areas.

### Ranching Leases and Recreation

Most of the LORP has been leased by ranchers for many years. Lease holders are concerned about the impact that increased recreation will have on their operations, including cattle management and the condition of the rangeland. The City of Los Angeles has a policy to keep at least 75 percent of their lands open to the public. Under this policy, ranchers can post up to 25 percent of leased land as no trespassing; however, few restrict access to more than 10 percent. Ranchers are concerned that recreation users will leave gates open, block gates, and otherwise create conflicts with existing ranching operations.

LADWP requires that each lessee carry insurance to indemnify the City of Los Angeles against any liability claims. In addition, any damages caused by site visitors to cattle, fencing, gates, etc., is a loss ultimately borne by the ranchers. In addition, ranchers are concerned about the financial and management responsibilities they may incur as a result of increased recreation use. Many ranchers noted that improvements such as new cattle guards at key locations, directional signage and user information could help reduce recreation impacts on their operations.

Other community members expressed a desire to better balance recreation needs with cattle grazing. Some local residents oppose the practice of allowing ranchers to lock gates because this limits public access to what they consider public lands. In some cases locks have been vandalized. On the other hand, a number of community members support continued cattle grazing in the LORP and believe that it is compatible with recreation.

### COMMUNITY PRIORITIES FOR ENHANCED RECREATION

Most community participants have indicated that there are multiple opportunities to enhance recreation along the Lower Owens River. A variety of recreation activities can be fostered through facility development, programming, and events. Community priorities for recreation enhancement are summarized below. The *Recreation Use Plan* will need to consider how to balance these recreation priorities with other land uses and considerations, such as funding, operations, maintenance.

- *Trail development and use* is strongly supported by local community members and the wider public. LADWP and the County should increase efforts to develop trails to support a variety of trail users. According to community members, the following should be considered:
  - The Lone Pine Economic Development Corporation, along with several partners and with support from the National Park Service, has planned the Lone Pine Heritage Trail to integrate various interpretive, environmental and cultural learning opportunities with trail-based recreation. One version of this trail would connect Lone Pine with the river to the east and the Alabama Hills to the west, the Interagency Visitor Center and the Diaz Lake Recreation area to the south. This project would include a reconfiguration of Highway 395 as more of a “main street” atmosphere through central Lone Pine.
  - The Independence Chamber of Commerce and several partners have proposed developing a trail along the river. This trail would extend along the entire 62-mile length of the river, from the LA Aqueduct intake to the north to the Owens Dry Lake to the south. The trail would be designed to enhance existing recreation uses (hunting and fishing) and to add new uses, including hiking, birding and outdoor photography. A





series of hand drawn maps by trail proponents shows sections of the trail along with side trips and ideas for birding, picnicking and interpretive stations.

- A designated trail network throughout the LORP area appealed to many participants. Future trails are needed to accommodate a variety of non-motorized activities, such as hiking, bicycling, running and interpretation/education. Turning the former railroad right of way into a trail is one option to consider in this network, as is providing trail access in the most scenic areas.



- *Hiking and bicycling* (on paved roads and non-paved roads) are established uses and should continue. Users, especially those who are not locals, would likely benefit from improved signage and general information about trails and routes.
- *Non-motorized boating and tubing* should be encouraged if access can be improved. Community members believe that tule management will have the biggest influence on the quality and safety of a user's boating experience. Other considerations include how best to establish river access points in select locations (put-in and take-out points) and identifying the types of amenities and facilities to include at boat launch areas (parking, trash cans, toilets, informational and interpretive signs, docks, etc.).
- *Water access for swimming, fishing, wildlife observation* and other uses is important and could be encouraged. These uses could be facilitated in similar or different locations as non-motorized boat launches, if appropriate facilities and water access is provided.
- *The expansion of birding* is a key opportunity for recreation and tourism growth. Birding opportunities could be encouraged by providing facilities and programs that could attract visitors from outside the area.
- *Picnicking* could be facilitated at key locations. Information and infrastructure (e.g., picnic tables, shade, trash cans, parking, and restrooms) is needed to direct users to accessible picnic areas.
- *Volunteer stewardship and environmental education* are important to the community and should be increased. These activities can be supported by organized programs, but also through the use of signage

and facilities (e.g., nature trails) that encourage and facilitate and understanding and stewardship of the natural and cultural resources in the LORP area. In particular, programs could foster a connection between youth and the river ecosystem. Partnerships, with schools, local tribes, volunteer groups and others could support environmental education, cultural resource protection, and stewardship.

- *Hunting* is an established use and should be continued in accordance with California Department of Fish and Game regulations.
- *ATV and OHV riding* could be continued, but limited to appropriate areas to avoid damage to natural resources. Community members suggest that riders be provided with information on defined routes and areas available for ATV/OHV use. Off-limits could be clearly identified and posted.
- *Horseback riding* currently occurs near the river, but the level of interest in riding is not known. If riding is to be encouraged, parking to accommodate horse trailers and other equestrian trailhead amenities should be provided.



## PLANNING DIRECTIONS AND GOALS

Public involvement feedback, along with staff direction and information provided through related planning documents were used to identify several directions and goals for the *Draft Lower Owens Recreation Use Plan*:

- Support LORP goals for ecological restoration of riparian habitat.
- Minimize conflict with ranching and LADWP operations.
- Improve the nature-based tourist economy of the area.
- Provide gateways along Highway 395 to attract visitors to recreation facilities and opportunities.
- Improve signage, wayfinding, and public information to publicize recreation opportunities, rules, and regulations.
- Support cultural and historical education, interpretation, and stewardship, and avoid impacts to native cultural sites and resources.
- Improve river access by developing and maintaining access points.
- Increase trail-related recreation opportunities.



- Designate and develop multiple areas for picnicking.
- Provide opportunities for birding and wildlife viewing.
- Provide facilities, events, and organized programs to support environmental education and site stewardship, particularly in conjunction with volunteers, potential partners, existing stewardship groups, and schools.
- Support other low-impact recreation activities that are consistent with community priorities and LORP goals.

### RECREATION USE PLAN OPTIONS

At the May 2011 workshops, a set of ideas for recreation uses were presented and tested with community members to find the right combination of elements to achieve the goals noted above. An Opportunities Map illustrated potential locations for a set of integrated facilities, including the following:

- Gateways along Highway 395 to direct users to the river and facilities
- Staging areas, including orientation, trail access, possibly river access, and user amenities.
- A Lower Owens River Trail running the entire length of the lower river.
- Birding Trails in areas conducive to birding, such as portions of Blackrock, the Delta, and in the Riparian area.
- Improved river access for canoes and kayaks at designated locations.
- Wayfinding signage
- Picnic facilities in designated areas.
- Continued hunting and fishing, but not concentrated in any particular area.

The workshops included a discussion of ideas for cultural and historic interpretation, environmental education and community stewardship. But these were not area specific.



Based on community workshops and online questionnaire results, there appears to be significant community support for all uses listed above. For example, improved river access for canoes and kayaks received over 90 percent favorable response from workshop participants, and 85 percent favorable from online survey respondents. The Lower Owens Trail received a 75 percent favorable response at the workshops, and an 83 percent favorable response in the online survey. Consequently, these planning options were used to create planning alternatives for increasing recreation opportunities, as discussed in the next chapter of this document.



## IV. RECREATION USE PLAN ALTERNATIVES

Public support for the plan concepts presented in the last section indicates that the right mix of facilities and use has been identified. The next step is to determine the right scale of development and level of service. This chapter presents three alternatives for managing recreation use along the Lower Owens River.

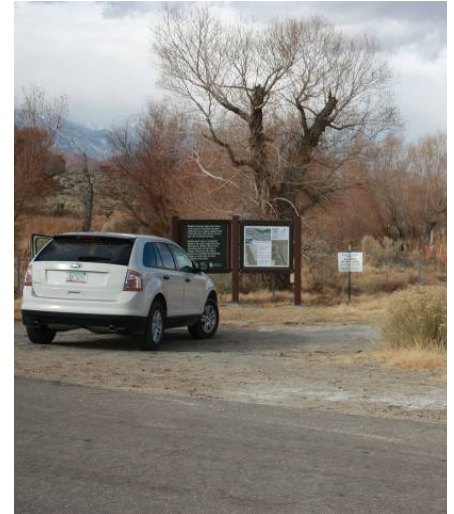
- *Option 1* proposes the lowest level of recreation, concentrating use at a few key points along the river.
- *Option 2* adds several areas for recreation and upgrades the types of facilities.
- *Option 3* provides a higher level of service in the number, location and types of facilities.

Each alternative supports the same types of recreation activities, but at different levels of use. **While the options can be compared as a low, moderate and higher level of service, all three represent a natural, primitive scale of recreation development consistent with LORP goals.** The activities and facilities in each alternative include:

- Gateway/portals along Highway 395
- Staging areas for trail access
- Lower Owens River Trail
- Birding trails
- River access, including put-in and take-out points and marked water trails for non-motorized boating
- Picnic areas
- Wayfinding signage

Fishing and hunting continue in all options as dispersed uses not limited to any specific area. Cultural, natural and historic interpretation uses can be included under any option. The same is true for environmental education and stewardship uses. These uses will take advantage of any facilities provided for recreation, particularly parking areas, toilets, trails and river access points. At this time, no facilities are dedicated only to environmental education and stewardship.

In addition to a description of facilities, each alternative describes applicable management and operations strategies that will be needed to maintain, program and sustain these resources in the future. Alternatives also include a defined approach for tule management and control.



The three options are summarized on the next several pages. A map of each option highlights proposed locations for development, and photos are presented to suggest the quality and scale of facilities to be provided.

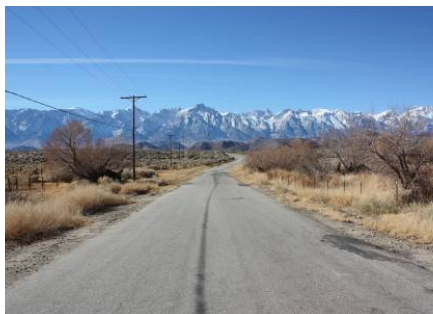
The table below provides an overview comparison of Options 1, 2 and 3, and is followed with more detailed descriptions of each option.

	Option 1	Option 2	Option 3
<i>Gateways</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Three signed gateways along Highway 395.</li> <li>• Use of ordinary road signs to direct users.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Four signed gateways, including gateway at Delta access road.</li> <li>• Higher visibility welcome/entry signs.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Five to six signed gateways along Highway 395.</li> <li>• Additional gateway at Manzanar Reward Road.</li> <li>• High visibility welcome/entry signs.</li> </ul>
<i>Staging Areas</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Three multi-use staging areas to serve as orientation points and trailheads.</li> <li>• Few improvements beyond signage and paths.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Four multi-use staging areas.</li> <li>• Two provide river access for boating.</li> <li>• Vault toilets provided.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Seven multi-use staging areas.</li> <li>• At least three provide river access for boating.</li> <li>• Vault toilets provided.</li> </ul>
<i>River Trail</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trail parallel to river along existing roads and tracks. Signage is primary improvement.</li> <li>• From Aberdeen Station to the Delta, primarily on east side.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trail parallel to river along existing roads and tracks.</li> <li>• Roads/tracks resurfaced in some areas.</li> <li>• Occasional side trails for non-motorized access to riparian area.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Entirely new multi-use trail, mostly within riparian area.</li> <li>• Existing roads and tracks open for motorized use.</li> <li>• Side trails, interpretive sites, frequent signage.</li> </ul>
<i>Birding Trails</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Birding trails within Blackrock Waterfowl Management Area (WMA) that follow existing roads or tracks.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Signed birding trails within Blackrock WMA, Delta area, and riparian area.</li> <li>• Rustic/natural viewing blinds at key locations.</li> <li>• Limited interpretive signage.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Signed birding trails within Blackrock WMA, Delta area, and riparian area.</li> <li>• Permanent viewing blinds.</li> <li>• Interpretive signage.</li> </ul>

	Option 1	Option 2	Option 3
<i>River Access</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limited to a designated put-in at Lone Pine staging area, with downstream take-out near Keeler Bridge.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Two paddle segments with river access.</li> <li>• Signed put-ins and take-outs.</li> <li>• Signs along paddle routes.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Three paddle trails/segments.</li> <li>• Signed put-ins and take-outs.</li> <li>• Signs along paddle routes.</li> </ul>
<i>Picnic Areas</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No facilities or amenities.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rustic picnic facilities at staging areas.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Picnic facilities at staging areas.</li> <li>• Additional picnic tables at strategic points along trail.</li> </ul>
<i>Wayfinding Signage</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rustic and sparse.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Modern and more frequently located.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Modern and more frequently located than Options 1 and 2.</li> </ul>
<i>Management and Operations</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• County and/or LADWP.</li> <li>• Facilities free of charge.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• County and/or LADWP, or contracted management.</li> <li>• Possible fee-based system.</li> <li>• Free passes for locals.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Possible new local non-profit entity.</li> <li>• Fee-based system.</li> <li>• Grants and donations.</li> </ul>
<i>Tule Management</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unmanaged except for manipulating seasonal water levels.*</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unmanaged except for manipulating seasonal water levels.*</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Managed primarily by adjusting seasonal water levels.*</li> <li>• Mechanical methods to facilitate creation of paddle routes.**</li> </ul>

\* This method may have limited effectiveness due to geographic constraints; it is unlikely to achieve appropriate inundation levels in all areas due to the variable landscape.

\*\* Application of this method may be limited due to expense.



## OPTION 1

Option 1 envisions the lowest level of recreation use.

### Gateways

Option 1 establishes three signed *gateways* along Highway 395. Gateways are intended to both attract and direct users to the recreation area, and often vary in design and intensity from discrete road signs to highly visible welcome areas. The southernmost gateway would be at Lone Pine Narrow Gage Road. The middle gateway would be at Independence, at the Mazourka Canyon Road. The northernmost gateway would be located at the Blackrock WMA, at the fish hatchery road. Design of gateways under Option 1 would be low-key, possibly using only ordinary road signs to direct users off of Highway 395 to staging areas near the river or other points of interest.

### Staging Areas

Staging areas under each option are envisioned as recognizable access and orientation points for users, generally with one or more trailheads. Depending on the level of desired use, staging areas may include other facilities such as river access points, toilets or potable water. There are three proposed *multi-use staging areas* in Option 1: one at the point where the Lone Pine Narrow Gage Road meets the river, the second where the Mazourka Canyon Road meets the river near Billy Lake, and the third at Blackrock near the fish hatchery. The one nearest Lone Pine would also serve as a river access point, with a boat takeout provided downstream, possibly near Keeler Bridge. Under Option 1, there would be few improvements other than signing and paths to the river. Toilets and potable water would not be provided.

### Lower Owens River Trail

The *Lower Owens River Trail*, which would parallel the river from Aberdeen Station to the Delta, would be identified by signs placed along existing roads and tracks nearest the river, primarily on the east side. These roads and tracks would not be improved or re-surfaced, except to the extent LADWP chooses to do so for its own operations. Signage marking mileage would be placed at regular intervals and at all intersections to help keep trail users on the right path. The trail would be open to all users, including motorized uses.

### Birding Trails

Signed *birding trails* would be created within the Blackrock Waterfowl Management Area. These would follow existing roads or tracks. They would be subject to seasonal closures where necessary.

### River Access

Developed river access for boats or anglers would be limited to the Lone Pine staging area as a designated put-in, with the takeout located downstream near the Keeler Bridge.

### Picnic Areas

Picnicking facilities would not be provided. People would bring whatever they need, a simple blanket on the ground, or folding chairs and tables that could be placed near staging areas. No amenities, such as shade trees, grassy areas, or refuse containers would be provided.

### Wayfinding Signage

*Signage* would be rustic, low key, and sparser than in other alternatives.

### Management and Operations

The low-key nature of Option 1 implies that management of facilities would best be done by the County, or LADWP, or both working together under an agreement. Rustic facilities are difficult to charge for, so the assumption is that they would be provided free of charge.

### Tule Management

River tules would be unmanaged except through manipulating seasonal water levels. However, this method is not expected to entirely eliminate tules from the river and may only be effective in some areas.







gateway



staging area



wayfinding



paddle trail



picnic



birding



river trail



## OPTION 2

Option 2 envisions a somewhat greater level of recreation use than described in Option 1.

### Gateways

Option 2 establishes the same three *gateways* along Highway 395 as in Option 1, but provides higher visibility by constructing *entry portal* signs, similar to what one would see in a State park. A fourth gateway is added at the Delta access road at Boulder Creek Resort. *Entry portal* signage is expected to increase recreation use by pulling more traffic in from Highway 395 due to higher visibility.

### Staging Areas

There are four proposed *multi-use staging areas*, the same three as in Option 1, plus one at the Delta. Each staging area would serve as an orientation point and trailhead. Two would provide river access for boating, one at Lone Pine and the other at Mazourka Canyon. Vault toilets would be provided at all staging areas.

### Lower Owens River Trail

The *Lower Owens River Trail* would mostly follow existing roads and tracks nearest the river, primarily on the east side. These roads and tracks would be improved or re-surfaced in some areas to reduce dust and mud. Occasional side trails or loops would allow non-motorized users to go into the riparian area, in some cases all the way to the river's edge. Motorized users would be restricted to existing roads and tracks, and would not be allowed on the riparian zone trails. Signage marking mileage would be placed at regular intervals and at all intersections to help keep trail users on the right path.

### Birding Trails

Signed *birding trails* would be created within the Blackrock Waterfowl Management Area, in the Delta area, and in the riparian area as part of the Lower Owens River Trail. *Rustic viewing blinds* made of natural materials like willows or tules would be placed at key points. Some *interpretive signage* would also be provided. Birding trails would be subject to seasonal closures where necessary.

### River Access

Option 2 includes two *paddle segments* with river access signed and improved. One would be the Lone Pine segment, described in Option 1. The second would be near the Mazourka Canyon Road staging area. Both would have signed put-ins and take-outs, with signs along the paddle routes. LADWP reserves the right to temporary road closures to allow for necessary operations and maintenance activities.

### Picnic Areas

Rustic picnic facilities would be provided at staging areas. These could include picnic tables, shade trees, trash receptacles and rough grass areas.

### Wayfinding Signage

Signage would be modern looking and more frequent than in Option 1.

### Management and Operations

The higher quality and quantity of facilities makes it feasible to create a County managed, fee-based system to generate revenues to supplement management costs. Collection could be in the form of unenforced fee boxes, with day use or seasonal stickers sold in local stores. Locals could be given free passes, with costs passed onto out-of-town visitors who are more accustomed to paying fees for recreation facilities. Operations could be contracted out or done by County or LADWP staff.

### Tule Management

*River tules* would be unmanaged except by manipulating seasonal water levels. However, this method is not expected to eliminate tules from the river entirely, and may only be effective in some areas.







gateway



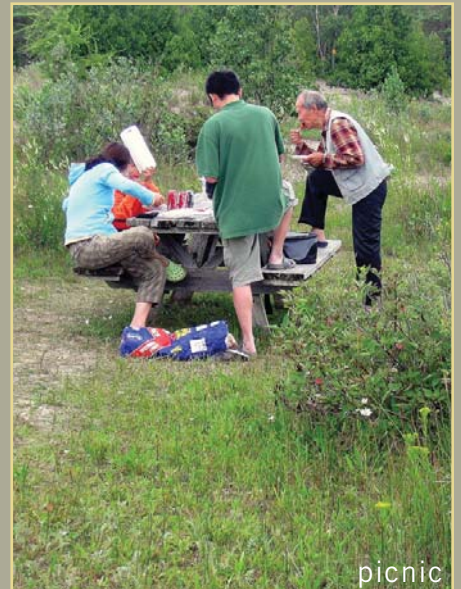
paddle trail



wayfinding



staging area



picnic



bird blind



river trail





### OPTION 3

Option 3 envisions the highest level of recreation use.

#### Gateways

Option 3 would establish five to six *gateways* along Highway 395, including all of those noted in Option 2, plus an additional gateway at Manzanar Reward Road. As in Option 2, these gateways would provide higher visibility by including “portal” or welcome signs, similar to what one would see in a national park. This alternative is expected to increase use by pulling more traffic in from Highway 395.

#### Staging Areas

There are seven proposed *multi-use staging areas*, including all of those in Option 2, plus staging areas at Manzanar Road and the Pumpback Station. Each staging area would serve as an orientation point and trailhead. At least three would provide river access for boating (at Lone Pine, Blackrock and Aberdeen Station). Vault toilets would be provided.

#### Lower Owens River Trail

An entirely new *Lower Owens River Trail* would be developed mostly within the riparian area east of the river. This trail would be multi-use, soft surface and “single track,” generally less than 36 inches wide. It would be closed to motorized vehicles. Existing roads and tracks would remain open for motorized use. Occasional side trails or loops would be included to the river's edge or other points of interest, including a potential observation tower that provides views of the area. Picnic or interpretive sites would be spaced along the trail as rest areas. Signage marking mileage would be frequent, placed at regular intervals and at all intersections to help keep trail users on the right path.

#### Birding Trails

Signed *birding trails* would be created within the Blackrock Waterfowl Management Area, in the Delta, and in the riparian area spurs or loops accessed off of the Lower Owens River Trail. *Viewing blinds* of a more permanent nature would be built at key points. *Interpretive signage* would also be provided. Birding trails would be subject to seasonal closures due to high water or nesting.

#### River Access

This alternative envisions three *paddle trails* with river access signed and improved. One would be the Lone Pine segment. The second would be near Mazourka Canyon Road, with the third at Aberdeen Station. All would have signed put-ins and take-outs, with occasional signs along the paddle routes.

### Picnic Areas

Picnic facilities would be provided at staging areas. These could include: tables, planting of shade trees and cultivation of rough grass areas as well as refuse containers. Additional picnic table may be provided at strategic points along the trail.

### Wayfinding Signage

Signage would be more modern looking and more frequent than in the other two options.

### Management and Operations

This option has the highest potential to attract additional visitors and generate revenue. It might be feasible to establish a local non-profit entity, backed by local businesses or the Chamber of Commerce, to manage and operate the recreation facilities. A good model for this is the Methow Valley Ski Association, which manages an extensive cross country ski trail system in Washington State. A fee system can be supplemented by grants and donations under a 501(c)(3) structure.

Since fees would cover most or all operational costs, enforcement is needed. Locals could be given free or discounted passes, with most costs passed to out-of-town visitors who are used to paying fees for recreation facilities. Some facilities, like the trail, might be adopted by trail user groups, such as the International Mountain Biking Association. Local outfitters might adopt the boat trails. This option could include a ranger program to enforce fees and monitor user behavior.

### Tule Management

River tules would be managed primarily by adjusting seasonal water levels. However, this method is not expected to eliminate tules from the river entirely, and may only be effective in some areas.

If necessary to facilitate designated paddle routes, mechanical methods would be employed as resources and habitat conservation permits.







gateway



staging area



wayfinding



river trail



picnic



bird blind



paddle trail



## EVALUATION OF OPTIONS

The following is a generalized evaluation of the three alternatives, focusing on logical advantages and disadvantages of each. A more detailed analysis will be needed once a preferred alternative is selected. More specific environmental impacts for further study are outlined in Appendix A.

### Option 1 Advantages

- Least amount of change from present conditions.
- Lowest cost of facility development.
- Fewest impacts on ranching operations.
- Least impact on wildlife and plant communities, especially in riparian area.
- Fewest potential impacts to cultural sites.
- Least impact on LADWP aqueduct operations.
- Relatively low maintenance and operational costs.

### Option 1 Disadvantages

- Does little to attract additional tourism for economic development.
- Fails to realize potential of area for recreation.
- Lacks a fee system to pay for facility upkeep.
- Fails to discourage inappropriate uses (e.g., OHVs in wrong areas, artifact gathering) through self-policing that occurs with higher number of users.
- Lacks a ranger program or additional enforcement to monitor user behavior.
- Presents greater liability to the City of Los Angeles than status quo.
- Fails to focus recreation activities in specific access areas to minimize disturbance in other places.



### Option 2 Advantages

- Moderate cost of facility development.
- Higher tourist attraction than in Option 1.
- Supports more diverse recreation needs.
- Can be tested with pilot development, added to later.
- Collects some fees to supplement operations and management costs.

### Option 2 Disadvantages

- Fails to realize full potential of river for recreation.
- Fees probably not sufficient for facility upkeep.
- Would require additional enforcement.
- Presents greater liability to the City of Los Angeles than status quo and Option 1.

### Option 3 Advantages

- Maximizes potential for tourist growth and development.
- Provides a significant river-paddle experience.
- Supports a variety of recreation needs.
- Provides more amenities and opportunities via riparian zone trail.
- Highest potential to generate revenues from users.
- Highest potential for recreation programming, including environmental and cultural resource education and stewardship.
- Most opportunity to generate public interest in the protection, stewardship and restoration of physical and historical assets.
- Supports a ranger program.
- Most likely to focus recreation activities into specific access areas to minimize disturbance in other places.

### Option 3 Disadvantages

- Greatest degree of change.
- Highest potential impact to LADWP operations, ranchers, cultural sites and habitat.
- Highest capital cost.
- Highest operations and maintenance costs.
- Would require additional enforcement.
- Presents greater liability to the City of Los Angeles than status quo and Options 1 and 2.



## V. NEXT STEPS

The three recreation options presented in the *Lower Owens River Recreation Use Plan* are based on community input to date, management concerns expressed by LADWP and lease holders, and observations by the consultants. Together, these options represent a range of modest recreation investments. By building an integrated recreation and wayfinding system around an organized visitor experience, Inyo County can gain economic value from affordable investments in recreation facilities and management.

As the next step in the planning process, Inyo County, LADWP, stakeholders and the community will have an opportunity to review the three options, discuss them, and decide which (if any) best fits their goals for the Lower Owens River area.

Over the following months, the planning team will continue to reach out to community members to review and comment on developing and managing recreation in the LORP area to ensure public support of the final plan. Early indications suggest that reaching a working consensus around modest facility and visitor improvements is within reach. A key challenge will be making sure that there is adequate opportunity for local residents to become involved and share their knowledge and ideas regarding the best balance for future site uses, as well as strategies to maintain and operate new and existing facilities. At the same time, while community input is key to this process, LORP goals and aqueduct operations cannot be discounted. The final decision regarding land use of City property is in the hands of the City of Los Angeles Board of Water and Power Commissioners.

### PLAN FUNDING AND IMPLEMENTATION

Funding for the first phase of the *Lower Owens River Recreation Use Plan* has been provided by the Sierra Nevada Conservancy, a California State agency. The Conservancy supports efforts that improve the environmental, economic and social well-being of the Sierra Nevada Region. The Conservancy has the following program objectives:

- Provide increased opportunity for tourism and recreation.
- Protect, conserve and restore the region's physical, cultural, archaeological, historical and living resources.
- Aid in the preservation of working landscapes.
- Reduce the risk of natural disasters, such as wildfire.
- Protect and improve water and air quality.



- Assist the regional economy.
- Enhance public use and enjoyment of lands owned by the public.



Financing for the implementation of Sierra Conservancy programs comes from the California Environmental License Plate Fund and Proposition 84, The Safe Drinking Water, Water Quality and Supply, Flood Control, River and Coast Protection Bond Act, approved by voters in 2006. The Conservancy was allocated \$54 million for grant distribution and administration this fiscal year.

With the completion of this *Draft Recreation Use Plan*, next steps include:

- Community review of the three options.
- Selection and refinement of a preferred option by decision makers.
- Evaluation of additional enforcement needs, if necessary.
- Development of a cost estimate for implementation and management of that preferred option.
- Development of a funding strategy for implementation and management.
- Completion and adoption of a final *Recreation Use Plan*.
- California Environmental Quality Act review of the plan.
- Implementation of the plan.

Future work to refine and adopt the *Lower Owens River Recreation Use Plan* is dependent on the availability of funding, possibly through an additional grant from the Sierra Conservancy. Grant funding for plan revision and further development is being sought by the County. Once funding is secured, the plan will be completed and implementation can begin to achieve the community's vision for recreation in the Lower Owens River area.

## APPENDIX A: POTENTIAL IMPACTS FOR FURTHER STUDY

The tables on the following pages provide a preliminary overview of potential impacts for further study and analysis. This outline is intended to help establish the scope for a comprehensive plan impact analysis that explores the three plan alternatives and their relative levels of proposed recreation use. This summary identifies the plan components and options with greatest potential impact and the types of potential impacts to the Lower Owens River Project area associated with implementation of the Lower Owens River Recreation Use Plan.

Possible impacts to the following are broadly addressed:

- River and riparian habitat area
- Off-river lakes and ponds
- Delta habitat area
- Blackrock Waterfowl Management Area (WMA)
- Upland uses and ranch operations
- LADWP operations

In addition to the areas listed above, further analysis of the economic impacts of the plan alternatives, and the anticipated impacts to native cultural and archeological resources, is recommended.

Once a final project is selected, a thorough evaluation of impacts will be conducted prior to implementation, pursuant with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).

## GATEWAYS

Areas of Potential Impact	Level/Type of Potential Impact
<i>River and Riparian Habitat Area</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No direct impacts anticipated. Potential indirect impacts from increased visitation/access via proposed gateways at Mazourka Canyon and Lone Pine Rd. (all options), and Manzanar Reward Rd. and pumpback station (Option 3).</li> </ul>
<i>Off-River Lakes and Ponds</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No direct impacts anticipated. Potential indirect impacts anticipated from increased visitation/access via proposed gateway at fish hatchery road (all options) and Aberdeen Station Rd. (Option 3).</li> </ul>
<i>Blackrock WMA</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Potential indirect impacts resulting from increased visitation/access via proposed gateway at fish hatchery road (all options) and Aberdeen Station Rd. (Option 3).</li> </ul>

Areas of Potential Impact	Level/Type of Potential Impact
<i>Delta Habitat Area</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Potential indirect impacts resulting from increased visitation/access via proposed gateway at Boulder Creek (Option 3).</li> </ul>
<i>Upland Uses and Ranch Operations</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Potential impacts to roadside vegetation and hedgerows that provide valuable nesting areas.<sup>1</sup></li> <li>• Potential increase in conflicts with steer and cattle resulting from increased motorized vehicle access (all options).</li> </ul>
<i>LADWP Operations</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Potential direct and indirect impacts to area access for maintenance and operations.</li> <li>• Potential impacts to berms, levees resulting from increased motorized vehicle access/use (i.e. Blackrock WMA)</li> </ul>

## STAGING AREAS

Areas of Potential Impact	Level/Type of Potential Impact
<i>River and Riparian Habitat Area</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Potential impacts associated with Lone Pine and Mazourka Canyon staging area design and construction (all options), and the Manzanar Reward Rd. and pumpback station staging area design and construction (Option 3).</li> <li>• Potential disruption to habitat, streamside recharge and habitat connectivity at Lone Pine and Mazourka Canyon staging areas/river access points (Options 2 and 3).</li> </ul>
<i>Off-River Lakes and Ponds</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Potential impacts associated with Blackrock staging area design and construction (all options), and Aberdeen Station staging area design and construction (Option 3).</li> </ul>
<i>Blackrock WMA</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Potential impacts associated Blackrock staging area design and construction (all options), and Aberdeen Station staging area design and construction (Option 3).</li> </ul>
<i>Delta Habitat Area</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Potential impacts associated with Delta staging area design and construction (Options 2 and 3).</li> </ul>

<sup>1</sup> Ecosystem Sciences. *Lower Owens River Project Monitoring, Adaptive Management and Reporting Plan*. Prepared for LADWP and Inyo County. April 2008.



Areas of Potential Impact	Level/Type of Potential Impact
<i>Upland Uses and Ranch Operations</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Potential impacts associated with staging area design and construction (all options).</li> <li>• Possible mitigation: Locate staging areas outside of lease boundaries, away from actively grazed pastures, and/or within riparian pastures or other areas subject to strict grazing prescriptions or where grazing is prohibited.</li> </ul>
<i>LADWP Operations</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Potential impact associated with staging area location relative to existing infrastructure and access roads (Options 2 and 3).</li> </ul>

## LOWER OWENS RIVER TRAIL

Areas of Potential Impact	Level/Type of Potential Impact
<i>River and Riparian Habitat Area</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Potential increased run-off during rainy season from resurfaced roads and new multi-use trail, and associated impacts to stream-side recharge, water flow and quality (Options 2 and 3).</li> <li>• Anticipated disturbance to riparian community and establishment of desired riparian plant species and diversity (Options 2 and 3).</li> <li>• Potential mitigations: clear signage to keep users to the trail/path, establish natural barriers between trail and most critical habitat areas.</li> </ul>
<i>Off-River Lakes and Ponds</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Potential disturbance to water quality and waterfowl resulting from trail location, design and construction (Option 3).</li> </ul>
<i>Blackrock WMA</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Potential disturbance to waterfowl and adjacent habitat areas resulting from trail location, design and construction (Option 3).</li> </ul>
<i>Delta Habitat Area</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Potential habitat disturbance resulting from trail location, design and construction (all options).</li> <li>• Potential increased run-off during rainy season from resurfaced roads and new multi-use trail, and associated water quality impacts (Options 2 and 3)</li> <li>• Potential impacts to wetland health/hydrologic connectivity (Options 2 and 3).</li> </ul>
<i>Upland Uses and Ranch Operations</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Possible physical disturbance/interruption of fence lines, with potential indirect impacts on grazing management (Options 2 and 3).</li> </ul>
<i>LADWP Operations</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Potential direct and indirect conflicts with flooding/manipulation of water resources for aqueduct and flood management and habitat creation (Blackrock WMA; Options 2 and 3).</li> <li>• Proposed mitigation: seasonal/periodic trail closures during periods of high water.</li> </ul>

## BIRDING TRAILS

Areas of Potential Impact	Level/Type of Potential Impact
<i>River and Riparian Habitat Area</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Anticipated disturbance to riparian community and establishment of desired riparian plant species/diversity (Options 2 and 3).</li> </ul>
<i>Off-River Lakes and Ponds</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Potential disturbance to waterfowl and water quality associated with new trail location, design and construction (Options 2 and 3).</li> </ul>
<i>Blackrock WMA</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Potential disturbance to waterfowl and adjacent habitat areas resulting from new trail location, design and construction (Options 2 and 3).</li> </ul>
<i>Delta Habitat Area</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Potential disturbance to waterfowl and adjacent habitat areas resulting from new trail location, design and construction (Options 2 and 3).</li> </ul>
<i>Upland Uses and Ranch Operations</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Potential decrease in grazing area and/or impact to irrigated pastureland (Options 2 and 3).</li> <li>• Possible physical disturbance/interruption of fence lines, with potential indirect impacts on grazing management (Options 2 and 3).</li> </ul>
<i>LADWP Operations</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Potential direct and indirect conflicts with flooding/manipulation of water resources for aqueduct and flood management and habitat creation (Blackrock WMA, all options).</li> <li>• Proposed mitigation: seasonal/periodic trail closures during periods of high water.</li> </ul>

## RIVER ACCESS

Areas of Potential Impact	Level/Type of Potential Impact
<i>River and Riparian Habitat Area</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Potential disturbance of riparian vegetation and habitat, including bank stability and fragmentation/disruption to riparian corridor connectivity, at identified access locations (all options).</li> <li>• Potential disturbance to stream-side recharge at identified access locations (all options).</li> <li>• Potential disturbance of in-stream habitat conditions (all options).</li> </ul>
<i>Off-River Lakes and Ponds</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No direct impact anticipated.</li> </ul>
<i>Blackrock WMA</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No direct impact anticipated.</li> </ul>
<i>Delta Habitat Area</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No direct impact anticipated.</li> </ul>

Areas of Potential Impact	Level/Type of Potential Impact
<i>Upland Uses and Ranch Operations</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No direct impact anticipated.</li> </ul>
<i>LADWP Operations</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Potential interruption to/conflict with river drawdowns/manipulation of river water levels (indirect impact, all options).</li> </ul>

## PICNIC AREAS

Areas of Potential Impact	Level/Type of Potential Impact
<i>River and Riparian Habitat Area</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Potential disturbance to riparian communities associated with Lone Pine and Mazourka Canyon picnic facilities design and construction (Options 2 and 3), and the Manzanar Reward Rd. and pumpback station picnic facilities design and construction (Option 3).</li> <li>• Potential visual impacts along trail in riparian area (Option 3).</li> </ul>
<i>Off-River Lakes and Ponds</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Potential impacts associated with Blackrock picnic facility design and construction (all options), and Aberdeen Station picnic facility design and construction (Option 3).</li> </ul>
<i>Blackrock WMA</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Potential impacts associated Blackrock picnic facility design and construction (all options), and Aberdeen Station picnic facility design and construction (Option 3).</li> </ul>
<i>Delta Habitat Area</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Potential impacts associated with Delta picnic facility design and construction (Options 2 and 3).</li> </ul>
<i>Upland Uses and Ranch Operations</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Potential impacts associated with picnic facility design and construction (all options).</li> <li>• Possible mitigation: Locate picnic facilities outside of lease boundaries, away from actively grazed pastures, and/or within riparian pastures or other areas subject to strict grazing prescriptions or where grazing is prohibited.</li> </ul>
<i>LADWP Operations</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No direct impact anticipated.</li> </ul>