

14.0 RECREATION

This chapter describes existing recreational resources and activities within the project area and impacts that the proposed project may have on these facilities and on recreation safety.

14.1 ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

14.1.1 AUBURN STATE RECREATION AREA

The Auburn State Recreation Area (SRA) was originally designated in 1979 to be managed as a reservoir-based SRA following the completion of the Auburn Dam. Construction of the dam has been delayed indefinitely; therefore, the SRA is now managed as a river-based recreation area in the interim. The Auburn SRA encompasses more than 35,000 acres and provides for recreational uses such as hiking, swimming, boating, fishing, camping, mountain biking, gold panning, horseback riding, and off-highway motorcycle riding. Whitewater recreation is also very popular on both forks of the American River (State Parks 2004). The Auburn SRA includes numerous hiking, biking, and equestrian trails. These trails include, but are not limited to: Lower Lake Clementine Road, Upper Lake Clementine Road, the Connector Trail, the Foresthill Divide Loop Trail, and the Long Point Trail (Exhibit 14-1).

14.1.2 NORTH FORK AMERICAN RIVER

The North Fork American River use area is located above Lake Clementine between the Foresthill Divide and the Interstate 80 corridor. This stretch of river is approximately 13 miles long and is one of the last remaining free-flowing rivers in California. Popular recreation activities on this stretch of the river include rafting, swimming, fishing, canoeing, and recreational mineral collecting. There are two whitewater rafting runs along this section of the river. Boating on this stretch of the river typically runs from May to mid-June and to a lesser extent during the winter months.

14.1.3 NORTH FORK/MIDDLE FORK AMERICAN RIVER CONFLUENCE

The North Fork/Middle Fork American River confluence (confluence), which is located at the west end of the proposed trail, is a large beach area where the North and Middle Forks of the American River meet. It receives the second highest amount of visitation in the Auburn SRA (Lake Clementine receives the highest visitation in the Auburn SRA) and is accessed by State Route 49 and Old Foresthill Road (Reclamation 1992). There are significant daily flow fluctuations in the river caused by upstream releases from Lake Clementine. Swimming, hiking, fishing, and sunbathing are the main activities at the confluence. The Western States Trail is a multiple-use trail that traverses the confluence area. The confluence receives most of its use in the summer months; however, the mild climate allows for year-round recreation use (Reclamation 1992).

14.1.4 LAKE CLEMENTINE

Lake Clementine, created by a debris-retaining dam in 1935, is roughly 4 miles long and one-eighth mile wide. The lake is located approximately 2 miles upstream and northeast of the confluence. Lake Clementine is divided into Upper and Lower Lake Clementine. Lower Lake Clementine offers opportunities for boating, waterskiing, and sport fishing, as well as a marina. Upper Lake Clementine provides a seasonal parking area, a picnic area, and drive-in and boat-in campsites, as well as passive recreational activities such as canoeing, swimming, and flatwater kayaking. Motorized boats are not permitted in Upper Lake Clementine because of the lake's shallow depth (Reclamation 1992).

14.2 REGULATORY SETTING

14.2.1 FEDERAL PLANS, POLICIES, REGULATIONS, AND LAWS

AUBURN STATE RECREATION AREA INTERIM RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLAN

State Parks manages the Auburn SRA according to the *Auburn State Recreation Area Interim Resource Management Plan* (Auburn SRA IRMP) (Reclamation 1992). The IRMP includes a planning goal to allow and encourage active volunteerism for trail construction, trail maintenance, facilities construction, interpretation, and other projects or programs, where feasible. The IRMP also provides the following relevant design standards for new facilities in the Auburn SRA (Reclamation 1992).

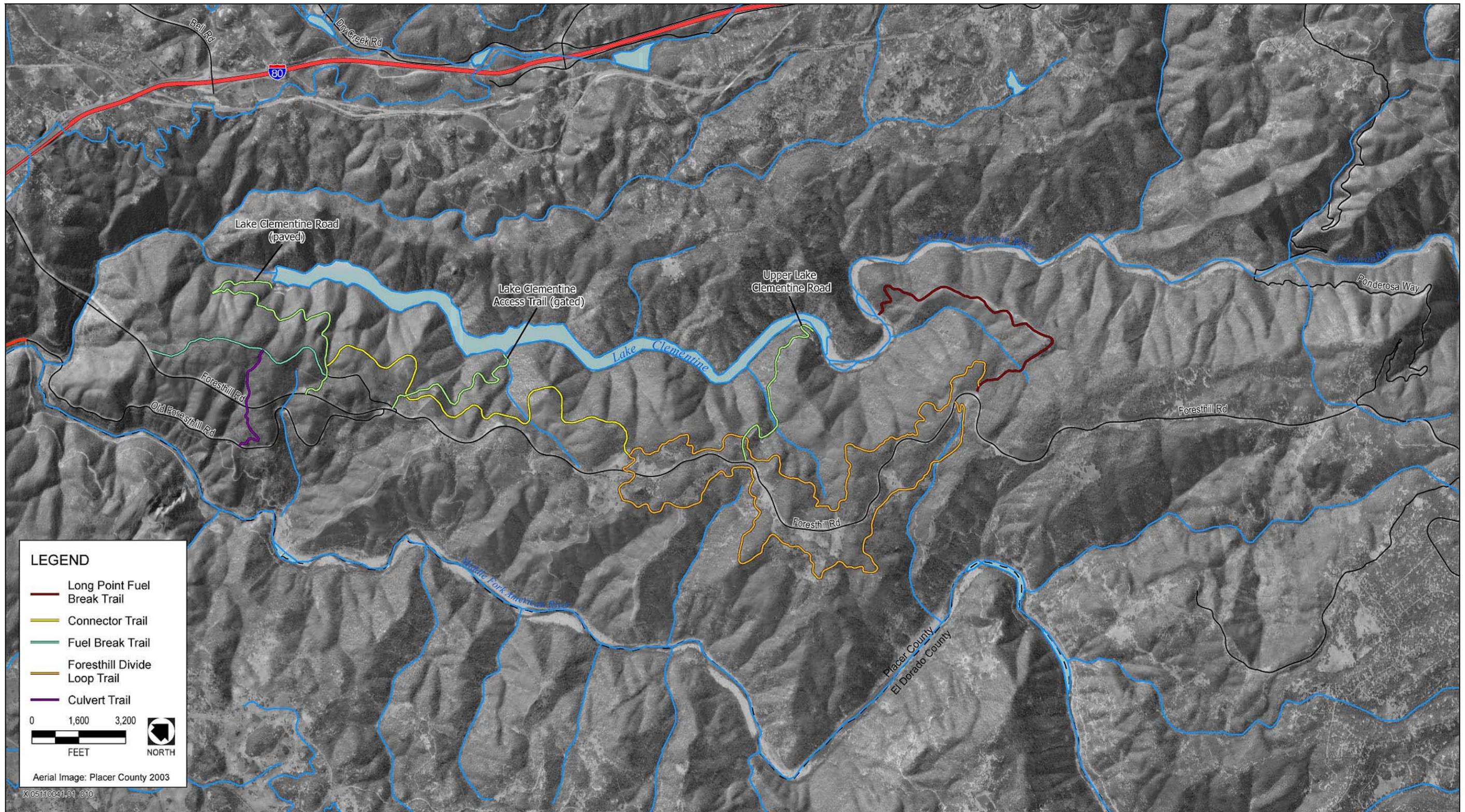
- ▶ Facilities planned for Auburn SRA must not be permanent, due to the fact that construction of Auburn Dam would cause inundation of any facilities built below the reservoir level.
- ▶ Equestrian staging areas should be large enough to permit trailer loading and unloading, trailer parking, and trailhead signs and facilities for tethering and watering horses, where possible. Equestrian staging areas should be unpaved. Restroom facilities should be provided at staging areas.
- ▶ All facilities should be located in such a way as to have minimal conflict with cultural and fish and wildlife habitat values.

The Auburn SRA IRMP also includes the following relevant design and construction standards for trails in the Auburn SRA.

- ▶ Trails should be subject to seasonal closures at the discretion of the managing agency to avoid resource damage.
- ▶ Trail linkages to other trail systems should be encouraged.
- ▶ The design of trails and access points should take into account disabled Auburn SRA users, to the extent possible.
- ▶ All trails should meet State Parks construction and maintenance standards.
- ▶ Maintenance, construction, and clearing of any trail should have the prior approval of the administrative agency to assure conformance to existing trail standards and to ensure the continued ecological, cultural, and scenic integrity of the park.

14.2.2 STATE PLANS, POLICIES, REGULATIONS, AND LAWS

California State Parks laws, regulations, policies and plans which may apply to the North Fork American River Trail include: future specific Trail Management Plan for Auburn State Recreation Area, the California State Parks Departmental Operations Manual (DOM) and Departmental Administrative Manual (DAM), the California State Parks Trails Handbook, California State Parks Departmental Notices, the California State Parks Trail Policy, specific Posted Orders for Auburn SRA, the California Code of Regulations and the California Public Resources Code.



Source: Placer County 2006

Primary Existing Trails and Roads

Exhibit 14-1

14.2.3 LOCAL PLANS, POLICIES, REGULATIONS, AND ORDINANCES

PLACER COUNTY GENERAL PLAN

The following are the relevant goals and policies identified by the *Placer County General Plan* (Placer County 1994) for recreational facilities.

- ▶ **GOAL 5.A:** To develop and maintain a system of conveniently-located, properly-designed parks and recreational facilities to serve the needs of present and future residents, employees, and visitors.
- ▶ **Policy 5.A.11.** Regional and local recreation facilities should reflect the character of the area and the existing and anticipated demand for such facilities.
- ▶ **Policy 5.A.12.** The County shall encourage recreational development that complements the natural features of the area, including the topography, waterways, vegetation, and soil characteristics.
- ▶ **Policy 5.A.13.** The County shall ensure that recreational activity is distributed and managed according to an area's carrying capacity, with special emphasis on controlling adverse environmental impacts, conflict between uses, and trespass. At the same time, the regional importance of each area's recreation resources shall be recognized.
- ▶ **Policy 5.A.17.** The County should be directly involved in the development and operation of community and neighborhood park facilities. These include outdoor recreation facilities to support traditional pursuits such as baseball, soccer, basketball, hiking, walking, riding and picnicking. Where appropriate, the County should consider cooperative agreements with a local park or recreation district to operate County facilities where this would enhance the efficient delivery of parks and recreation services to County residents.
- ▶ **Policy 5.A.22.** The County shall encourage compatible recreational use of riparian areas along streams and creeks where public access can be balanced with environmental values and private property rights.

The *Placer County General Plan* also identifies the following relevant goals and policies regarding trail facilities.

- ▶ **GOAL 5.C:** To develop a system of interconnected hiking, riding, and bicycling trails and paths suitable for active recreation and transportation and circulation.
- ▶ **Policy 5.C.1.** The County shall support development of a Countywide trail system designed to achieve the following objectives:
 - Provide safe, pleasant, and convenient travel by foot, horse, or bicycle;
 - Link residential areas, schools, community buildings, parks, and other community facilities within residential developments. Whenever possible, trails should connect to the Countywide trail system, regional trails, and the trail or bikeways plans of cities;
 - Provide access to recreation areas, major waterways, and vista points;
 - Provide for multiple uses (i.e., pedestrian, equestrian, bicycle);
 - Use public utility corridors such as power transmission line easements, railroad rights-of-way, irrigation district easements, and roadways; and
 - Protect sensitive open space and natural resources.

- ▶ **Policy 5.C.3.** The County shall work with other public agencies to coordinate the development of equestrian, pedestrian, and bicycle trails.

FORESTHILL DIVIDE COMMUNITY PLAN

The *Foresthill Divide Community Plan* (Community Plan), which is currently in draft form, includes the project area. The Community Plan contains the following goals and policies relevant to recreation in the project area.

- ▶ **GOAL 3.E.1:** Provide recreation facilities/opportunities for the residents of the Plan area.
- ▶ **Policy 3.E.1-1.** The County shall strive to achieve and maintain a standard of 5 acres of improved parkland and 5 acres of passive recreation area or open space per 1,000 population.
- ▶ **GOAL 3.E.2:** Develop and maintain centralized recreational facilities providing a variety of parks and programs to serve the needs of present and future residents and visitors.
- ▶ **Policy 3.E.4-2.** Provide links to a major countywide trail system.
- ▶ **Policy 3.E.4-3.** Use public utility corridors such as power line easements, water district easements and other roadways whenever possible when planning and constructing new trails.
- ▶ **Policy 3.E.4-5.** Trails shall be separated from the traveled roadway whenever possible by curbs, barriers, landscaping and spatial distance. Safety is a high priority, also with emphasis on aesthetics.

14.3 IMPACTS

14.3.1 ANALYSIS METHODOLOGY

Potential impacts on recreation that would result from implementation of the proposed project were identified by comparing existing recreational facilities and capacity against anticipated future demand associated with implementation of the proposed project.

14.3.2 THRESHOLDS OF SIGNIFICANCE

Based on the Placer County California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Checklist and the State CEQA Guidelines, the proposed project would result in a potentially significant impact on recreation if it would:

- ▶ increase the use of existing neighborhood and regional parks or other recreational facilities, such that substantial physical deterioration of the facility would occur or be accelerated;
- ▶ increase the demand for neighborhood or regional parks or other recreational facilities; or
- ▶ affect existing recreational opportunities.

14.3.3 IMPACT ANALYSIS

IMPACT 14-1 **Recreation – Increased Demand for Recreational Facilities.** *The proposed trail would be constructed in response to existing demand from population increases and would not create additional demand for recreational facilities. The proposed trail would not be sufficiently different from other trails in the project area to create its own demand. Therefore, implementation of the proposed project would not cause a significant increase in demand for additional recreational facilities.*

Significance *Less Than Significant*

Mitigation Proposed *None Warranted*

Residual Significance *Less Than Significant*

The proposed trail would be constructed in response to growing demand for recreational facilities associated with population increases in the project vicinity. As noted in State Parks' *Recreational Trails Plan*, growing populations drive land development and concurrently increase demands for recreational open space, including trail corridors. The *Recreational Trails Plan* also notes that the continuing growth in California's population is likely the most important trend impacting trails (State Parks 2002). The proposed trail would be used to accommodate this existing demand for recreational facilities and would not create additional demand. There are currently other multiple-use trails in the project area, and the proposed trail would not be sufficiently different from these trails to create its own demand. Because the proposed project would be constructed to accommodate existing demand for recreational facilities, this impact is considered less than significant.

IMPACT 14-2 **Recreation – Increase in Wildlife Attacks as a Result of Increased Recreational Use.** *The proposed trail would introduce more trail users into a fairly remote area of the North Fork American River canyon, which could increase the number of encounters with wildlife. However, wildlife attacks on humans are rare. In addition, informational signage on wildlife safety would be posted at the staging termini to educate trail users.*

Significance *Less Than Significant*

Mitigation Proposed *None Warranted*

Residual Significance *Less Than Significant*

The Auburn SRA is considered to be mountain lion and black bear habitat, and construction of the proposed trail would introduce trail users into a fairly remote area of the Auburn SRA. However, mountain lion and bear attacks on humans are extremely rare. Since 1890, when mountain lion attacks began being recorded, there have been no mountain lion attacks on humans reported in the project area or elsewhere in Placer County; in the El Dorado County portion of the Auburn SRA one mountain lion attack has been reported since 1890 (DFG 2004). Therefore, the risk of a trail user being attacked by a mountain lion is extremely low.

Attacks by black bears are also relatively uncommon. The California Department of Fish and Game (DFG) has recorded 12 bear attacks since 1980, none of which were in the project area or elsewhere in Placer County. Bears are often attracted to areas by the smell of food, which can lead to encounters with people. There would not be any picnic areas in the project area and any garbage cans in the project area would be wildlife-proof; therefore, the project area is not expected to attract bears and other wildlife.

To further reduce the risk of wildlife attacks, signs describing safety precautions to take against mountain lions and bears would be posted at the staging termini to inform trail users. If a wildlife attack were to occur along the proposed trail, State Parks would notify DFG so that the animal responsible for the attack could be located and relocated or euthanized.

Because the risk of wildlife attacks on humans is extremely low, and because measures would be taken to increase trail users' awareness of wildlife safety, this impact is considered less than significant.

IMPACT **Recreation – Increased Degradation of Existing or Proposed Recreational Facilities.** *The proposed trail may redirect trail users from other areas of the Auburn SRA to the project area, thereby increasing recreational use in the immediate project area. Redirecting trail users from other trails in the Auburn SRA would reduce degradation of those trails. Because the proposed trail would not cause a significant increase in demand, it would not cause degradation of existing trails. While regular trail use by equestrians and bicyclists could cause degradation of the proposed trail, routine maintenance of the trail would be performed to address this issue.*

Significance *Less Than Significant*

Mitigation Proposed *None Warranted*

Residual Significance *Less Than Significant*

Other multiple-use trails exist within the North Fork American River area of the Auburn SRA. The proposed trail would be similar to those other trails in the Auburn SRA and would not be sufficiently different to create its own demand. The proposed trail would provide additional recreational facilities in the Auburn SRA to meet the increase in demand for recreational facilities in the area. The proposed trail may redirect trail users from other areas of the Auburn SRA to the project area, reducing degradation of those trails. The proposed trail would not provide access to the American River; therefore, implementation of the proposed project would not increase recreational use of the river. Use of the proposed trail by equestrians and bikers could cause damage to the proposed trail. Placer County would maintain the proposed trail as necessary to keep it in good working order and ensure users' safety. Because the proposed project would not cause degradation of any existing recreational facilities and would accommodate increased demands for recreational facilities, this impact is considered less than significant.

IMPACT **Recreation – Potential for Conflicts between Trail Users.** *Because the proposed trail is a multiple-use trail, the potential exists for conflicts between pedestrians, equestrians, and bicyclists. The proposed project includes measures to minimize the occurrence of these potential conflicts, including a 6-foot wide trail width and informational signage.*

Significance *Less Than Significant*

Mitigation Proposed *None Warranted*

Residual Significance *Less Than Significant*

The proposed trail would incorporate several measures to reduce user conflicts, including a 6-foot trail width and informational signage to remind trail users of trail courtesy. The proposed trail tread would reduce potential user conflicts compared to a narrower trail width, and signage with trail etiquette would be posted at trail entrances. The 6-foot trail width would conform to State Parks' standards for multiple-use trails. Despite these measures, user conflicts may still occur on the proposed trail. However, because no safety issues related to user conflicts along existing trails have been reported (Hendricks, pers. comm., 2006), and because user conflicts do not

constitute an effect on the physical environment, under CEQA this is considered a less-than-significant impact on the environment.

IMPACT 14-5 **Recreation – Increase in Unauthorized Activities in the Project Area.** *The proposed trail may increase the number of visitors to the Auburn SRA, which could increase the occurrence of unauthorized activities in the project area. However, the increase in users as a result of the proposed trail is expected to be minimal, and the project area would be patrolled by State Parks’ rangers.*

Significance *Less Than Significant*

Mitigation Proposed *None Warranted*

Residual Significance *Less Than Significant*

Implementation of the proposed project would bring additional visitors to the project area, which could increase the occurrence of unauthorized activities in the project area. Unauthorized activities such as illegal camping, vandalism, littering, and illegal use of the trail by motorized vehicles could increase in the project area as a result of the proposed project. However, several measures would be taken to reduce the occurrence of these activities. Trash receptacles would be placed at each staging terminus to reduce littering, and walk-throughs or stiles would be installed to prevent use of the trail by motorized vehicles. In addition, the Foresthill Bridge Staging Terminus would be enclosed with a 6-foot cyclone fence, and a gate would be installed. This would allow the staging terminus to be locked during hours Auburn SRA is closed to discourage illegal activity in the area. While vandalism and illegal camping may increase in the project area, the proposed project is not expected to cause a significant increase in these activities. Furthermore, the project area would be patrolled by State Parks’ rangers. Therefore, this impact is considered less than significant.

14.4 MITIGATION MEASURES

No mitigation measures are necessary.