

10. Emergency Services & Fire Prevention



BACKGROUND

During the scoping process for the Lower Mokelumne River Watershed Stewardship Plan, watershed stakeholders identified two issues related to health and safety within the watershed:

- ✓ The need for special training and equipment for local public safety agencies (e.g., sheriff, fire departments) to assist in making swift water rescues and performing similar emergency functions for citizens using the Mokelumne River and Lodi Lake; and
- ✓ The need to address fire prevention and fire suppression along the Mokelumne River in coordination with PG&E, landowners, river users and other groups.

Emergency response. The San Joaquin County Sheriff's Department has jurisdiction over the Mokelumne River's waterways. The Sheriff's Department maintains a Swift Water Rescue (SWR) Unit and the SAR Delta Unit which is responsible for conducting swift water rescues.

In recent years, the Sheriff's Department has conducted some boat patrols along the Mokelumne. Due to a recent drowning, the Sheriff's Department has committed to patrolling the Lower

Mokelumne during the summer months and on weekends.

However, when the Sheriff's Department is not on patrol, local fire districts are often the first on scene to emergencies occurring within the Mokelumne River waterways. Because the Mokelumne River is under the jurisdiction of the Sheriff's Department, these local fire districts do not receive funding to support rescue services provided within the banks of the Mokelumne River. Instead, funding for local fire districts for emergency rescues is limited to rescues undertaken on the banks and shores of the river (but not within the river itself).

Further complicating the issue of emergency rescue services is the number of calls for swift-water rescues annually. These calls average only 1-2 annually making funding for these services a lower priority than for other emergency services occurring more frequently.

The San Joaquin County Sheriff's Department Division of Boating and Safety is conducting ongoing discussions with local fire districts to establish a joint agreement addressing mutual aid and, potentially, funding.¹

The following fire districts are located within the watershed:

- ✓ Lodi City Fire Department - 217 W. Elm, Lodi
- ✓ Clements Rural Fire District - 18901 E. Highway 88, Clements
- ✓ Mokelumne Rural Fire District - 13157 E. Brandt Rd., Lockeford
- ✓ Woodbridge Fire District - 400 E. Augusta, Woodbridge
- ✓ Liberty Fire District - 24124 N Bruella Rd., Acampo
- ✓ Thornton Rural Fire Protection District - 25999 N. Thornton Road, Thornton

Two of these districts are actively involved in on-the-water rescues.

The Woodbridge Fire District (WFD) reports that the 1-2 calls annually for swift water rescues come from areas concentrated along the Mokelumne River upstream of Woodbridge dam. The WFD, a first-responder to many of the river's rescue calls, has numerous personnel trained in flood rescue with several individuals certified in swift water rescue. However, WFD lacks the capability of performing on-the-water rescues because it lacks funding for a boat. The district is currently pursuing grant funding to acquire this necessary piece of equipment. The agency hopes to obtain a Zodiac-type boat which can be easily launched and transported to various locations along the river.²

The Mokelumne Rural Fire District also has personnel trained in swift-water rescue and, through volunteer fund-raising efforts, has acquired a boat to assist in on-the-water rescues. Rescues made on the river by the Mokelumne Rural Fire District occur at the district's own expense.

¹ Mike Cockrell, San Joaquin County Sheriff's Dpt.

² Mike Kinkle, Chief - Woodbridge Fire District

The Mokelumne Rural Fire District provides mutual aid to the Woodbridge Fire District when water-related rescue calls are received. However, transporting the Mokelumne Rural Fire District's boat to emergency sites located far downstream takes time that is not always available in swift water rescue operations.

In addition to these districts, the East Bay Municipal Utility District's Mokelumne Watershed & Recreation Division Resource Patrol Unit assists with fighting grass fires and providing basic life support on EBMUD property. Medical responses from this unit are primarily at the Mokelumne River Day Use Area and at the Mokelumne River Hatchery. The Resource Patrol Unit also provides assistance to local fire districts for emergencies which occur on or adjacent to EBMUD lands including fires, water rescues and similar emergencies. This unit is responsible for implementing fire prevention measures on EBMUD lands, including annual discing to create fire breaks.

Fire. Fire prevention is an important aspect of watershed planning. During community scoping for the Lower Mokelumne River Watershed Stewardship Plan, it was noted that electrical transformers crossing the river have been known to start wild land fires in the watershed. Similarly, recreationists have been blamed for starting wild land fires from campsites.

In addition to protecting lives and property, fire prevention also plays a role in watershed ecology. Fire prevention is frequently tied to vegetation management and may, at times, conflict with wildlife management practices and vice versa. Similarly, fire is sometimes an essential element of vegetation management, but its controlled use may be restricted due to air quality concerns.

Fire prevention education is one tool which may assist in reducing the risk of wild land fires within the Lower Mokelumne River watershed.

GOALS

- ✓ **Assist and support local public safety agencies in acquiring special training and equipment necessary to meet the unique emergency-response needs of the watershed.**
- ✓ **Promote fire suppression, prevention and management education within the watershed.**

IMPLEMENTATION PROGRAMS:

- 1. Provide Support to Properly Equip the Watershed's Fire Districts for Swift-Water**

and Related On-River Rescues

Provide assistance in preparing grant applications to acquire and maintain rescue boats for fire districts located within the watershed especially in areas where trained personnel already are available.

Include representatives from local fire districts when undertaking public outreach and watershed education programs.

Keep stakeholders located adjacent to the river advised of the needs of their local fire district to encourage public-private partnerships improving safety along the Mokelumne River.

Time Frame for Implementation: Ongoing.

2. Fire Prevention, Suppression and Management Education

Include fire prevention, suppression and management education materials in LMR public education and outreach efforts. Include information on special management actions necessary within the urban/wildland interface. Add guidelines for fire prevention and suppression to future editions of the *Mokelumne River Watershed Owner's Manual*, *Lodi Winegrower's Workbook* and similar stewardship-based publications and programs.

Add links to fire prevention and suppression websites on the LMR website including links to sites which provide guidelines for alternatives to the controlled use of fire for vegetation management.

Include fire prevention planning in restoration efforts undertaken along the LMR.

Time Frame for Implementation: Ongoing.

3. Increase Coordination and Cooperation with PG&E

Establish a contact with PG&E's local vegetation management unit.

Provide an e-mail link on the LMR website to report hazardous vegetation located adjacent to power lines to PG&E.

Inform PG&E when opportunities arise for tree trimming or similar fire prevention measures to occur from within the river (e.g., from boats).

Time Frame for Implementation: Commence within three years of Plan adoption.