

MASTER PLAN UPDATE

OWENS LAKE CONSERVATION AREA

The Owens Lake is a cultural resource with a long history and wildlife heritage in the Eastern Sierra of California. The Master Plan proposes the Owens Lake Conservation Area to realize the goals of improved air quality, enhanced public trust uses, cultural resources protection, water conservation, wildlife conservation, public access and education, and solar energy potential. The Master Plan integrates dust control with habitat protection and water conservation while developing public access and interpretive opportunities.

PLANNING COMMITTEE DEVELOPING PLAN

Approximately 30 participants representing diverse interest groups are on the Planning Committee developing the plan. Governmental entities include the Lone Pine Paiute-Shoshone Tribe, the Owens Valley Indian Water Commission, California State Lands Commission, California Department of Fish & Game, Inyo County, Great Basin Unified Air Pollution Control District, and LA Department of Water & Power. Ranchers, residents, mining, local business, and the Lone Pine Chamber of Commerce are all contributing. Non-governmental organizations are active participants including Audubon, California Waterfowl, Ducks Unlimited, Eastern Sierra Land Trust, Owens Valley Committee, Native Plant Society and Sierra Club. Planning Committee meetings are open to the public, and about fifty people including Committee members have been attending the day-long meetings in Keeler and Bishop. The Planning Committee has met ten times since March 2010 and has small work groups focusing on water conservation, habitat, dust control, cultural resources, and public access. The Master Plan builds on conservation action planning that Audubon convened in 2008.



BRIEFINGS HELP SHAPE PLAN

The Planning Committee conducted briefings with nearly 25 organizations in the fall. Feedback received is being integrated into the Master Plan. New briefings are taking place this spring.

FINAL PLAN READY IN 2012

The goal is to complete the draft Master Plan in June 2011 and environmental review in early 2012. Once the environmental review is complete, implementing entities would consider final approval of the Master Plan.

In March, three independent scientists vetted by stakeholders conducted an independent review of the Habitat Suitability Index, an analytical tool that may be used to quantify the value of habitat considering different types of wildlife guilds (shorebirds, water fowl, and meadow wildlife).

PLAN IMPLEMENTATION

The Master Plan will include an implementation schedule. Full implementation will involve state and local agencies, Tribes, and non-governmental organizations working together. Implementation will likely occur in phases as funding and other resources allow. The Planning Committee will continue to meet twice annually to guide implementation. The Planning Committee is a broad-based group with six non-governmental organizations, local residents, Tribes and other governmental representatives.

TIMEFRAME

Summer 2011: Complete Draft Master Plan

Early 2012: Environmental Impact Report with Draft Master Plan Released for Public Comment

Mid-2012: Implementing Organizations Consider Approving Final Plan once Environmental Review Complete

Schedule a Briefing to Learn More and Provide Feedback

Planning Committee members will conduct briefings on the Master Plan at your organization.
Call (760) 873-0214

MASTER PLAN KEY ELEMENTS

The Owens Lake is a cultural resource with a long history and wildlife heritage in the region. The Master Plan proposes the **Owens Lake Conservation Area** to realize the multiple goals developed in the Master Plan. The Master Plan integrates all planning elements into a unified management approach. Dust control measures consider habitat needs and water conservation. Habitat enhancements blend water conservation with access opportunities. These objectives and goals are realized through an implementation schedule with monitoring and adaptive management.

DUST CONTROL

The plan identifies measures to control dust that enhance habitat and conserve water. The plan sets a schedule for testing measures. Existing dust control measures combine to enhance habitat and use less water (adding islands into large ponds or reducing water on wetlands vegetation). Other measures explore lake resources, such as salt pans and brine that conserve water by reducing evaporation.

CULTURAL RESOURCES

The educational program will provide information about the lake as a cultural resource and help the public understand how to protect cultural resources.

WATER CONSERVATION

Water conservation will occur over time by modifying approved dust control measures to enhance habitat, testing new water efficient dust control measures, and identifying priority areas for habitat enhancement.

PUBLIC TRUST

The California State Lands Commission defines public trust as habitat, public access and scenic viewshed. Public trust uses will be enhanced. Dust control activities will integrate efforts to improve habitat. Improving public access will include hiking, a scenic driving loop, and educational kiosks. Viewshed will be enhanced by designing features that are sensitive to the landscape.

HABITAT & WILDLIFE

The Master Plan proposes the Owens Lake Conservation Area to provide and protect habitat for native plant species, wildlife, and migratory birds.

PUBLIC ACCESS & INTERPRETATION

Visitors will enjoy enhanced access, recreation, and educational opportunities. Recreation will include hunting, wildlife viewing, and hiking. Key educational themes are wildlife, cultural resources protection, water conservation, dust control, and economic development opportunities.

SOLAR ENERGY

Developing solar energy on the lake will require a pilot project first, possibly in 2012. In the mean time, testing the ground conditions for a solar installation continues. If solar energy is ultimately deemed a feasible option to control dust, then developing a solar project will depend on technology, costs, and funding.

MINING

Mineral mining has taken place on the lakebed for over a century. This is a significant economic development activity for the region and is included in the Master Plan.

GRAZING

Grazing around the lake will also continue in designated areas.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The Master Plan continues existing mining and grazing activities and creates the opportunity for renewable energy and enhanced public access.

MONITORING AND ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT

The Master Plan will include performance criteria to help determine if implementation activities are achieving plan goals. Monitoring will also evaluate habitat, wildlife, and public access activities.