



Keepers of the Kern

Wild and Scenic Kern River Restoration Action Plan

**Sequoia National Forest
California**

August 2020

The Wild and Scenic Kern River



Photograph by Scott Williams

The Wild and Scenic Kern River

The North Fork of the Kern River was in severe danger due to exorbitant, uncontrolled visitor use in "Dispersed Camping Areas" on public lands.

There was too much impact from too many people concentrated along the river's edge that caused vegetation trampling and destruction, soil erosion, and enormous amounts of trash and human waste that was polluting the river and surrounding public lands.

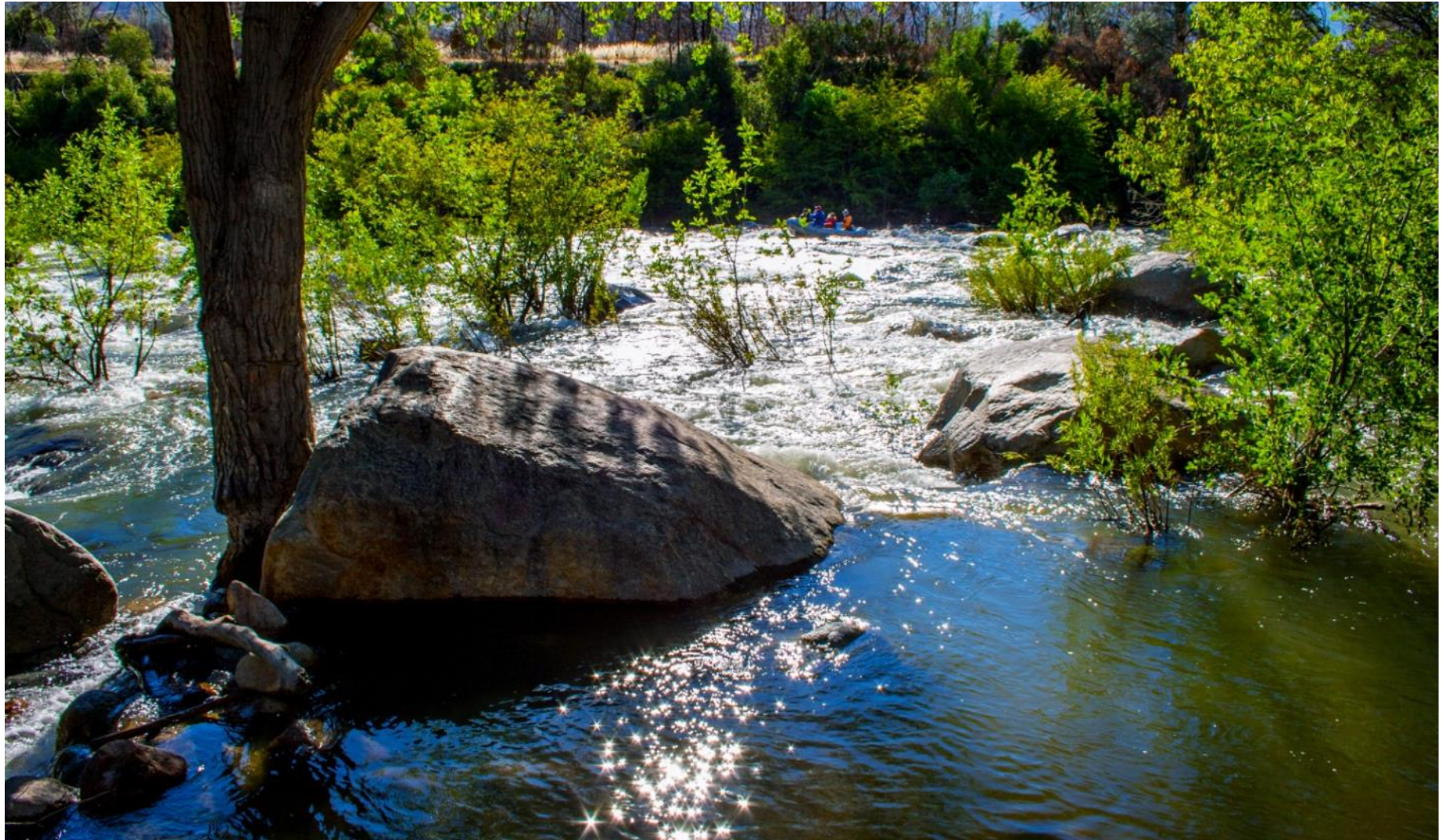
The Wild and Scenic Kern River



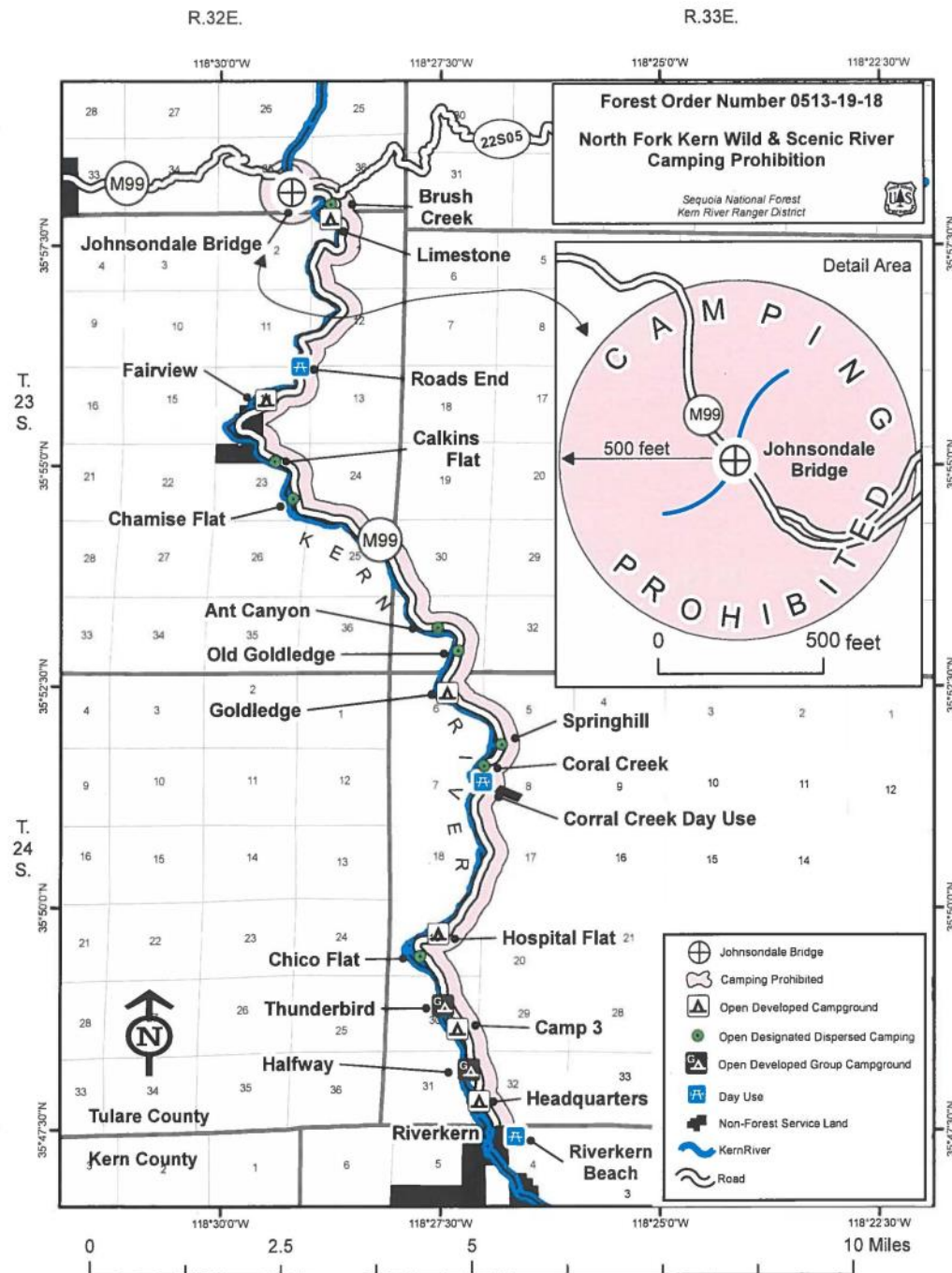
Mission

- ⇒ Keepers of the Kern are dedicated to protecting, restoring, preserving, and enriching the quality of diversity and the delicate biological environment surrounding the Wild and Scenic Kern River corridor.
- ⇒ We are committed to promoting education, to monitoring, and to increase awareness in order to prevent further damage to the water and the environment.
- ⇒ We will be good stewards and will engage in compassionate action to improve and maintain the health of the Wild and Scenic Kern River by bringing about changes necessary, such as to increase management practices and reduce public abuse and overuse.

The Wild and Scenic Kern River



Photograph by Scott Williams



Current Management Situation

The seventeen mile stretch of the Wild and Scenic Kern River from Riverken to the Johnsondale Bridge is designated as a Recreational River Area under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act of 1968.(1)

Currently the USDA Forest Service, Sequoia National Forest manages:

- ⇒ 6 Developed Campgrounds including 232 family campsites that can sustain 1,392 overnight campers and one group site with 30 persons capacity
- ⇒ 2 Group Campgrounds with 214 persons capacity
- ⇒ 3 Day Use Areas
- ⇒ 8 Designated Dispersed Camping Areas

(1) Recreational River Areas – Those rivers or sections of rivers that are readily accessible by road or railroad, that may have some development along their shorelines, and that may have undergone some impoundment or diversion in the past.

Developed Campgrounds versus Designated Dispersed Camping Areas

Along the upper Kern River the U.S. Forest Service, Sequoia National Forest, owns six public developed campgrounds and they provide 232 family campsites that can sustain a maximum of 1,392 occupants. Campers are charged a fee and the developed campgrounds have rules that limit the number of occupants to six people and two vehicles per campsite and they provide adequate sanitation and trash disposal service.

The Forest Service also manages eight designated dispersed camping areas and, except for Old Goldledge, they have no limits on the number of people and vehicles that can jam onto bare ground adjacent to the river. This situation is not new. These areas have been heavily impacted over several decades and they remain a threat to the environmental health and ecological integrity of the river. Other National Forests such as the Inyo closed heavily impacted dispersed camping areas to overnight camping many years ago.

In the upper Kern River area the Forest Service has worked on limiting the degradation of vegetation and soils by placing boulders that delineate parking areas and prohibits overnight camping outside of the developed campgrounds and designated dispersed camping areas. The Forest also prohibits camping within 25 feet of the River's edge and the use of glass containers. These actions help but, except for Old Goldledge, there are no limits on the number of people and vehicles allowed to camp in the designated dispersed camping areas. Because these areas are free to overnight campers the Forest Service does not have the funds to control their overuse and struggle to provide adequate sanitation and trash disposal even with the additional rented trash bins and portable toilets provided by Keepers of the Kern donations.

The photographs below that show two designated dispersed camping areas were taken during July 2020. As you can see they are not dispersed camping areas but rather are maximum impact camping areas.



Trash Warrior Accomplishments

Since its founding in 2013 the Keepers of the Kern have been making a significant impact on improving the environmental and human health and safety of the Wild and Scenic Kern River.

To date, the Upper Kern River corridor has been rid of at least 85% of the trash and waste that has accumulated over the seasons. This monumental task includes 17 miles of roadway, 8 designated dispersed camping areas, several day use areas and a host of riverbank areas that are heavily impacted by river recreationists. Our volunteers spend a minimum of two days a week on the Upper Kern River, several days a month at the historic Keyesville area on the Lower Kern and as often as possible on the shores of Lake Isabella and roadsides in the Kern River Valley.

The ADOPT-A-CAMPGROUND project is a major factor in the health and safety of our Wild and Scenic Kern River. This project supplements the sanitary facilities provided by the U.S. Forest Service, Kern River Ranger District. During 2019 there were 23 trash bins and 17 portable toilets placed in the 8 “designated dispersed camping area” on the Upper Kern. Thanks to the many sponsors who stepped up and donated the funds a total of over \$40,000 was raised to support the project.

Trash Warriors at Work!



The Kern River Desperately Needs New Public Investment

- ⇒ The Kern River Valley's economy is driven by recreation and tourism and a clean and healthy Kern River and Lake Isabella is essential to supporting local businesses, jobs and families. The recreation economics reports below show the importance of tourism and recreation to our economy.(2)
- ⇒ There is tremendous public demand for recreational opportunities along the river.
- ⇒ The existing recreation infrastructure cannot sustain the thousands of overnight campers who camp in the designated dispersed camping areas.
- ⇒ The Keepers of the Kern see opportunities for better protection of the river's wild and scenic values and new public investments should be made in improving sustainable overnight camping and day use infrastructure.

(2) Click On These Links to See Reports About Recreation Economics

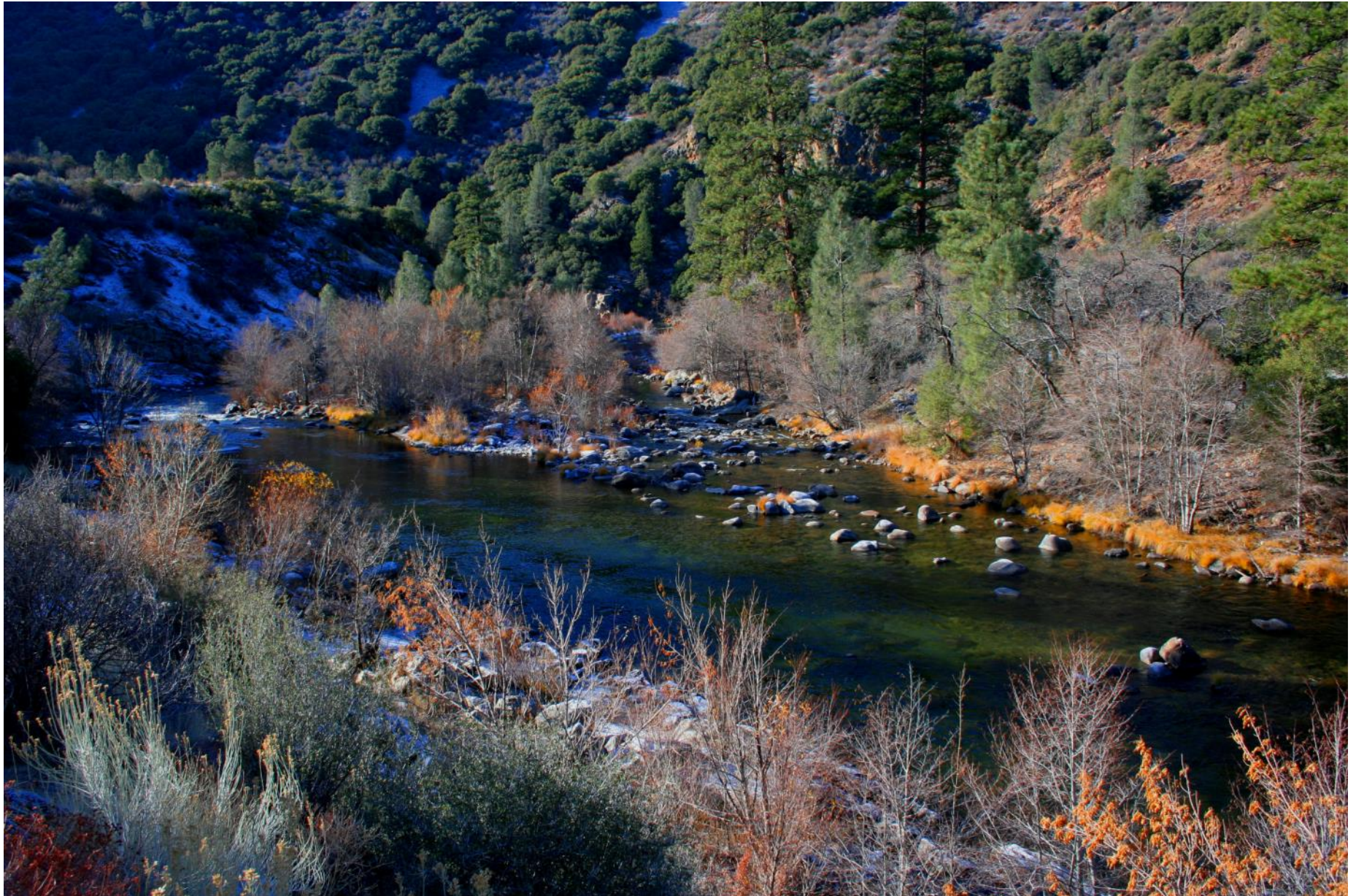
[Giant Sequoia National Monument Economics](#)

[Sequoia National Forest Socioeconomic Indicators](#)

[California Recreation Economics](#)

[How We Pay To Play](#)

The Wild and Scenic Kern River



Photograph by Scott Williams

Current Management Direction

In 1987 the United States Congress designated portions of the North and South Forks of the Kern River as Wild and Scenic under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act of 1968. The Sequoia National Forest completed a management plan for the wild and scenic portions of the Kern River many years ago.(3) The plan called for several actions in order to implement the act and they were designed to protect the river and its surrounding natural environment while also providing for sustainable recreation opportunities to forest visitors.

However, the plan did not adequately deal with the significant environmental impacts from overuse in dispersed camping areas along the recreation portion of the North Fork from Riverkern to the Johnsondale Bridge.

(3) Click On This Link to See The Management Plan

[Comprehensive Management Plan—North and South Forks of the Kern Wild and Scenic River](#)

Current Management Direction

The Forest Service is currently revising the Land Management Plan for the Sequoia National Forest. In the draft there is new direction that will improve management of the river including the following. (Excerpts from the Revised Draft Land Management Plan for the Sequoia National Forest, 2019, Page 105):

Desired Conditions

- ⇒ The free flowing condition, water quality and specific outstandingly remarkable values of designated wild and scenic rivers are protected or enhanced. Development is consistent with the river's classification, and management is consistent with a current comprehensive river management plan.
- ⇒ Public recreation and resource uses are provided that do not adversely impact or degrade the values for which the river was designated.
- ⇒ Consider closing and restoring dispersed campsites to natural conditions that are adversely affecting water quality.

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Current Management Direction

Standards

- ⇒ Uses of facilities in existence at the date of designation that do not conform to the river's classification should be allowed so long as the river's free-flowing condition, water quality, and outstandingly remarkable values are protected.
- ⇒ If new recreation facilities are needed, they should be consistent with river classification, recreation opportunity spectrum classification, scenic integrity objectives, and located to protect outstandingly remarkable values.

Potential Management Approaches

- ⇒ Consider closing and restoring dispersed campsites to natural conditions that are adversely affecting water quality.

This last bullet is the key to the Keepers of the Kern Restoration Action Plan.

After years of leading volunteer trash clean-up and funding supplemental trash bins and portable toilets in partnership with the Sequoia National Forest, the Keepers of the Kern are ready to provide input into future river management.

The Wild and Scenic Kern River



Photograph by Scott Williams

Wild and Scenic Kern River Restoration Action Plan

Our Vision

- ⇒ The Keepers know full well that funding for public recreation improvements and maintenance has been in decline for decades.
- ⇒ Our experience and vision sees an ever increasing need for people of all ages and socioeconomic backgrounds to get outside and explore America's public lands.
- ⇒ The Kern River is visited by tens of thousands of people each year who recreate here and this public resource is vital to America's outdoors future.

Wild and Scenic Kern River Restoration Action Plan

Our goal is to restore the river corridor's ecological values that have been significantly impacted by human use and balance restoration with the tremendous demands for recreation facilities and access to the river. We propose that all existing facilities be retained and rehabilitated except for the following:

- ⇒ Close and restore four Designated Dispersed Camping Areas and one Day Use Area
- ⇒ Convert one large Designated Dispersed Camping Area into a Developed Campground
- ⇒ Convert three Designated Dispersed Camping Areas into Day Use Areas

The following tables show the actions the Keepers of the Kern recommends for the improvement of sustainable recreational opportunities while restoring and maintaining the environmental and human health and safety of the Wild and Scenic Kern River. Our environmental impacts ranking system is qualitative and simple. The higher the cumulative impact number the greater the cumulative impacts:

1-4 = Low Impact

5-8 = Moderate Impact

9-12 = High Impact

Organized from South to North—Riverken to the Jonhsondale Bridge

Name	Current Use and Level of Development	Overnight Camping Capacity	Trash and Human Waste Impacts	Vegetation Impacts	Soil Erosion Impacts	Visual Quality Impacts	<u>Cumulative Impacts Score</u>	Proposed Future Use	Proposed Rehabilitation or Improvements
Headquarters	Developed Campground	Family Campsites—44 (264 Persons Maximum) Group Campsites—0 (0 Persons Maximum)	1	1	1	1	4 Low	Retain	Rehabilitate Campground
Halfway	Undeveloped Group Campground	Group Campsites—5 (160 Persons Maximum)	2	2	2	2	8 Moderate	Retain	Improve to Developed Campground Standards
Camp 3	Developed Campground	Family Campsites—52 (312 Persons Maximum) Group Campsites—1 (30 Persons Maximum)	1	1	1	1	4 Low	Retain	Rehabilitate Campground
Thunderbird	Undeveloped Group Campground	Group Campsites—3 (54 Persons Maximum)	2	2	2	2	8 Moderate	Retain	Improve to Developed Campground Standards
Chico	Designated Dispersed Camping Area	No Limits Future Developed Campground Capacity To Be Determined	3	3	3	3	12 High	Convert to Developed Campground	Improve to Developed Campground Standards

Name	Current Use and Level of Development	Overnight Camping Capacity	Trash and Human Waste Impacts	Vegetation Impacts	Soil Erosion Impacts	Visual Quality Impacts	Cumulative Impacts Score	Proposed Future Use	Proposed Rehabilitation or Improvements
Hospital Flat	Developed Campground	Family Campsites—40 (240 Persons Maximum) Group Campsites—1 (Accessible Group Unit with Ramp)	1	1	1	1	4 Low	Retain	Rehabilitate Campground
Corral Creek - South	Day Use	-	3	3	3	3	12 High	Close	Rehabilitate Land
Corral Creek - North	Designated Dispersed Camping Area	No Limits	3	3	3	3	12 High	Convert to Day Use	Improve to Day Use Area Standards Rehabilitate “Dispersed” Camping Areas
Springhill	Designated Dispersed Camping Area	No Limits	3	3	3	3	12 High	Close	Rehabilitate Land
Goldledge	Developed Campground	Family Campsites—37 (222 Persons Maximum) Group Campsites—0 (0 Person Maximum)	1	1	1	1	4 Low	Retain	Rehabilitate Campground
Old Goldledge	Designated Dispersed Camping Area	Camping by Permit with Limited Capacity	3	3	3	3	12 High	Close	Rehabilitate Land
Ant Canyon	Designated Dispersed Camping Area	No Limits	3	3	3	3	12 High	Close	Rehabilitate Land
Chamise Flat	Designated Dispersed Camping Area	No Limits	3	3	3	3	12 High	Close	Rehabilitate Land
Tulare County Roads Dept. Borrow Area	Illegal Shooting Area	-	3	3	3	3	12 High	Close to Public Entry	Install Gate Continue Borrow Area Use Rehabilitate Surplus Land

Name	Current Use and Level of Development	Overnight Camping Capacity	Trash and Human Waste Impacts	Vegetation Impacts	Soil Erosion Impacts	Visual Quality Impacts	<u>Cumulative Impacts Score</u>	Proposed Future Use	Proposed Rehabilitation or Improvements
Calkins	Designated Dispersed Camping Area	No Limits	3	3	3	3	12 High	Convert to Day Use	Improve to Day Use Area Standards
Fairview	Developed Campground	Family Campsites—55 (330 Persons Maximum) Group Campsites—0 (0 Person Maximum)	1	1	1	1	4 Low	Retain	Rehabilitate Campground
Roads End	Day Use / River Access	-	3	3	3	3	12 High	Retain	Improve to Day Use Area Standards
Limestone	Developed Campground	Family Campsites—22 (132 Persons Maximum) Group Campsites—0 (0 Person Maximum)	1	1	1	1	4 Low	Retain	Rehabilitate and Install Water System
Brush Creek	Designated Dispersed Camping Area	No Limits	3	3	3	3	12 High	Convert to Day Use	Improve to Day Use Area Standards Rehabilitate “Dispersed” Camping Areas
Johnsondale Bridge	Day Use / River Access	-	2	1	1	2	6 Moderate	Retain	Improve to Day Use Area Standards



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