

6

Law Enforcement Needs Analysis

This chapter is comprised of an analysis of current law enforcement needs in the lands adjacent to the 100-mile study section of the Sacramento River corridor, including a characterization of the support required to adequately patrol existing recreation areas and uses of the river, and the level of law enforcement support the area will require in the future. Recommendations related to law enforcement needs as they relate to recreation in the Sacramento River corridor are included in Chapter 7 of this report.

With continued increases in the use of the Sacramento River corridor for recreation, as well as significant changes in the population of the region's communities, law enforcement efforts stand to be affected heavily by social changes. As land managers and other government agencies consider public recreation access needs in the river corridor, they will need to consider ways to protect the recreation users of the area, the rights of property owners, and the area's natural resources. To achieve this goal in a widespread rural environment with limited resources, it is imperative that land managers and law enforcement staff in the region coordinate to develop effective approaches for public safety.

Understanding current and future law enforcement service requirements for the study area was accomplished primarily by individual interviews. Law enforcement agencies with jurisdiction over the Sacramento River and adjacent lands were contacted to provide input for the public recreation access study. Survey questions were developed to assess law enforcement efforts and needs as they relate to recreation use of the Sacramento River corridor. A copy of the survey can be found in Appendix E of this document. In addition to the interviews, findings from a recent study were reviewed for relevance to the study sections of the river corridor. The report *California Boating Needs Assessment Law Enforcement Study* (California Department of Boating and Waterways [CDBW] 2002) was sponsored by the CDBW and was administered by the Research Foundation at California State University, Sacramento.

6.1 Methods

Similar to the manager interview efforts, relatively small number of individuals directly involved in law enforcement along the Sacramento River, suggested that a non-purpose, qualitative approach would be the most appropriate method for collecting information on current and potential law enforcement needs in the area.

Eleven local, state, and federal agencies were contacted that might have responsibilities for patrolling lands and waterways within the Sacramento River corridor study area from Red Bluff to Colusa. Full interviews were conducted with three of those who were contacted. Three

additional municipal law enforcement agencies that were contacted indicated that they did not have jurisdiction over the river area, although they assist county sheriffs departments as needed. City departments were, therefore, not interviewed.

EDAW staff members conducted interviews by phone, and comments and responses to the interview questions were compiled and summarized. The main subjects discussed included current patrolling duties related to recreation use of the area, access issues, trends in illegal activities, coordination efforts with other resource protection agencies, law enforcement needs, and budgetary needs. Interviews were conducted by phone or via email, and usually lasted between 15 and 30 minutes. To encourage candor and openness, individuals who agreed to be interviewed were assured of the confidentiality of the interview, and that responses would not be connected with names or agencies.

6.2 Current Duties Related to Recreation Use of the Study Area

Law enforcement agencies responsible for the Sacramento River and adjacent areas range from county sheriffs to federal and state rangers. The agencies with jurisdiction over the Sacramento River have duties ranging from boating safety to homicide and missing persons cases. Enforcement activities include both proactive patrols and reactive responses to emergency calls. Much of the law enforcement activity is related to recreation users of the river and adjoining land. While some enforcement units are primarily responsible for the river, others generally provide support to these primary agencies. Some law enforcement agencies have boating units that are state-funded through boat taxes and registration fees. The boating units are primarily responsible for enforcing boating safety and other state regulations related to recreation activities along waterways. One resource agency ranger said that they use both land-based patrols and waterborne patrols to patrol the river. The ranger stated that “The majority of my time in the summer is spent patrolling the Sacramento River corridor by both truck and boat, while the majority of my time in the winter is spent enforcing game law regulations at nearby game reserves.”

The main recreation activities described by law enforcement officers in the study area include boating, tubing, water skiing, hunting, and fishing. Law enforcement personnel are also involved in search and rescue efforts and with enforcing compliance with state and federal laws. Along the shore, the officers deal with activities associated with trespassing, marijuana cultivation, illegal dumping (i.e., trash and chemicals from methamphetamine labs), poaching, and alcohol abuse. With regard to trespass issues, law enforcement respondents indicated they deal with foot and vehicle trespassing. One officer responded that they deal “mainly with hunters looking for access.” Another indicated that most [of their law enforcement activity along the river] is in response to illegal activities not related to recreation, such as trespass, dumping,

marijuana cultivation, and a methamphetamine lab,” but they also cover “trespass, trash dumping, and vehicle and ATV trespass issues.”

Some enforcement units also provide access to detectives investigating cases along sections of the river that lack land-based access. The California Department of Fish and Game sometimes require additional law enforcement assistance for “enforcement of pollution laws, manipulations to rivers and streams, and hunting violations.” A major issue identified by interview participants is the lack of public facilities in high use areas. One officer commented that they have to “deal a lot with human waste issues,” especially during high use summer events (e.g., tubing events, opening day of salmon fishing). The officer stated, “In one of the popular fishing holes there are over 100 boats working the area on a given day and there are no bathrooms for them to use.”

Patrols along the river are scheduled regularly for some law enforcement units, while other agencies perform general patrols that may include the river corridor on any given day. Law enforcement officers conduct safety and compliance inspections at unofficial launch sites or boat ramps, and patrol parking lots for illegal activities. The main areas covered by daily patrols consist of high use recreation areas. There is usually a concerted effort among all law enforcement agencies during summer events that draw thousands of users to the river, such as Memorial Day, 4th of July, and Labor Day tubing events. As one respondent indicated:

“The Labor Day tubing event has the biggest impact to resources. People abandon their inner tubes and rafts that they bring to float down the river. Lots of plastic ends up in the river and huge amounts of garbage are left. There are 20,000 to 22,000 people that show up for this event. There are no restrooms, so people relieve themselves out there. Every year, the riparian zone is destroyed because of all the people.”

Other issues related to law enforcement needs include congestion problems associated with the fishing seasons for striped bass from mid-April until the beginning of June. Congestion problems occur because in addition to those wanting to access the river area for fishing, PWCs (personal watercraft) and waterskiers also use the same river areas in the southern portion of the study area near the town of Colusa. Law enforcement officers indicate that because of this congestion, there is a higher frequency of accidents. The wakes created by PWC users have been known to cause accidents, property damage, damage to natural resources, and personal injury, particularly in areas adjacent to marinas and boat launches. One officer interviewed indicated that many watercraft operators who are cited claim ignorance to the area speed limits. The officer recommended that signage and buoys posting speed limits would help the need to manage boat traffic.

6.3 Access Issues

There was a mixed response to the need for additional access along the river. While one law enforcement officer reported that the number of boating launches were a limiting factor for river access, the two other respondents felt that there was adequate access to the river. One officer felt that the number and spacing of boating ramps sometimes made search and rescue operations more difficult. With regard to law enforcement access of lands adjacent to the river, two respondents felt they had reasonable access to public and private lands and one felt they did not have proper access. Comments were made that, “private property owners are cooperative,” or that public and private landowners had given permission when they needed it. However, one officer felt their agency did not have proper access to “all of the land because they don’t have access to private or agency-owned land.”

Dredging activities associated with maintaining existing boat launch sites was an issue cited by one officer interviewed in the CDBW (2002) study. The burden of costs on the counties was cited as a constraint to access in the river corridor for public safety activities. The officer indicated that additional funding would be needed to adequately maintain the usability of the boat ramps.

In addition, issues associated with snags and other underwater hazards on the river were also cited during law enforcement interviews. Similar to constraints associated with dredging efforts, the primary barrier to management of these boating hazards was funding to pay for removal costs. One officer indicated that recent snags in the river have already caused four boating accidents. Injuries to people tubing by snags were also reported.

6.4 Trends in Recreation Use and Law Enforcement Activities

There were a few apparent trends in illegal activities identified during the interviews. One of the law enforcement units with river patrols indicated that there was a definite increase in the number of jet boats and anglers on the water. New, inexperienced drivers of jet boats and an increased number of all boaters using the waterways generally increased safety hazards. The officer felt that the increase in the number of anglers on the waterways was associated with the large salmon runs in recent years. A resource protection ranger commented that poaching seems to have been increasing over the years. However, the ranger stated “since I have only been in this area for a year it is hard for me to gauge any type of trend yet.”

Generally, because of the increased population near the river, there seems to be an increasing problem with littering. With an increase in population and recreation access, law enforcement personnel stated there would be a proportionate increase in problems, including damage to the area’s cultural resources. In particular, one officer noted that these problems are associated

“with public lands and trespassing to access public lands.” The officer was concerned that “sensitive resource areas may be put under further pressure through increased access.” He concluded that “there is a sensitive resource area managed by the BLM where there are repeated instances of pilfering at archeological sites.”

One respondent stated that if there are additional acquisitions of land into public ownership “without a concurrent increase in staff, there will be no one to patrol [those areas], and the ability of law enforcement to keep people safe [will be] compromised.” Additionally, to assist law enforcement officers, and to prevent further degradation of water quality, one respondent identified a need to increase proper public facilities.

6.5 Coordination Efforts

Coordination between resource protection and law enforcement agencies was an important issue to most officers. In an effort to deal with the extreme congestion associated with summer tubing events, a “Unified Command” has been assembled to include several state, local, and federal agencies. This configuration consists of upwards of 100 people using helicopters, boats, and ambulances. However, indications from interviews with law enforcement personnel are that these resources are barely adequate to handle the thousands of event participants on the river. The Unified Command includes officers from the following law enforcement entities:

- Alcohol Beverage Control
- Butte County Sheriffs
- California Department of Boating and Waterways
- California Department of Forestry
- California Highway Patrol
- California State Parks
- Local Search and Rescue

While one officer felt that there was an acceptable level of coordination between local, state, and federal agencies, other officers believed there needs to be greater communication between agencies. One of these officers believed that coordination meetings specifically related to law enforcement issues were needed:

“There’s plenty of resource meetings but not specifically related to law enforcement. I would like to have a network of agencies working together in a concerted effort to assist each other with

law enforcement needs. We need coordination meetings to provide an opportunity for people to help each other and share expertise.”

A network of agencies coordinating to provide a concerted effort for law enforcement was identified by one officer as “imperative.” The officer felt that,

“We are behind the times in terms of law enforcement. We need a real coordinated effort rather than individual agencies working alone. Agencies have different expertise that fits together well; we need to work as a unit. The Sacramento River Conservation Forum is doing a good job of coordination.”

On the other hand, one officer stated that their county “is small and rural, and there is good communication between agencies.” This law enforcement unit readily coordinates efforts with game wardens on the opening day of salmon fishing. They not only coordinate with other law enforcement agencies, but have also assisted the State Lands Commission with one “unmanaged” recreation area. The heavily used site was once managed by BLM, but because there are no agencies responsible for managing the property, the law enforcement unit has stepped in to assist:

“This heavily used area has no current management. We’ve been assisting the State Lands Commission with the large number of people living on the site, camping, and launching boats. There are a number of illegal camps used by transients, which causes human waste, littering, and health hazard problems.”

Suggestions to foster better coordination between law enforcement agencies include monthly, quarterly, or annual meetings, automated email mailing list, and specific event-related meetings.

6.6 Law Enforcement Needs

Overall, officers in general indicated that they are in need of more personnel and equipment. Officers’ perspectives included in this chapter indicate that increased population in the region and the resulting increased demands from recreation users, mainly boaters and anglers, increase the need for a greater number of law enforcement officers and additional improved equipment. An officer stated that his unit is in need of a new jet boat, an officer to operate the boat, and associated maintenance costs. A resource protection ranger stated, “We need two-way radios instead of cell phones for communication. Because of the rural areas we patrol, sometimes our cell phones drop out.” The ranger also stated, “To patrol the river adequately, we need one more full-time officer, and one more patrol truck and boat.” All of the officers believed that in the peak user months, they did not have a large enough workforce to adequately patrol areas for which they were responsible.

One proposal brought up by a participating officer included the need for increased formal recreation opportunities such as legal day use areas. He commented, "These areas are easier to patrol and coordinate because people are congregated into one area versus letting people have a 'free-for-all' on the land."

A hindrance to hiring new law enforcement officers is the level of base salaries needed to be competitive within the region. It is difficult in some agencies to recruit new officers because they offer lower salaries and cannot compete with law enforcement positions in larger, unionized organizations.

Additional boat launch sites for better access to the river was a specific need identified by an officer with a river patrol unit, especially in long reaches with no access. The two land-based respondents who were interviewed felt there was sufficient access to the river for their needs. The design of boat ramps and funding constraints was also identified as an issue. The respondent that, "they have just had two new ramps built that were improperly designed and are already silting in. Because of the grant funding process [which provides funding to our agency], sometimes things don't get done as they should." The respondent found it frustrating that, because of the grant funding process for their operation, it is sometimes difficult for their unit to purchase new equipment or hire additional staff and they don't have any input into the hiring of contractors or the design of boat ramp projects.

6.7 Law Enforcement Budget Needs

All agencies that responded to the survey indicated that they need an increase in budget, personnel, and equipment. Specifically, one unit needed a new jet boat (\$50,000), a new salaried position to operate the boat (\$50,000), and annual maintenance costs for a new boat (\$10,000). Thus, initially they would need \$110,000, and then \$60,000 subsequently per year. A resource protection ranger believed that "to hire one additional full-time officer and a patrol truck and boat would cost around \$100,000." Regarding the cost increased coordination would impose on agencies' budgets, law enforcement officers stated more generalized costs. One resource protection ranger gave an estimated cost of \$1,000 for additional coordination efforts, while others stated that the budget would need to be expanded and "would depend" on the amount of over-time required and associated per diem costs.

6.8 Conclusions

Current law enforcement support in the study area is challenged by funding constraints, the dispersed geographic nature of recreation in the expansive river corridor, as well as significant numbers of recreation use from large-scale tubing events during the peak summer holiday season. Law enforcement is supported by coordination efforts during the peak use periods, but

there is a need for increased structure and communication between land management agencies and law enforcement personnel that will direct policing efforts in the area. Law enforcement recommendations resulting from this analysis are provided in Chapter 7.