

**Date:** December 13, 2021

Lynda Salcido  
Mayor  
Town of Mammoth Lakes  
PO Box 8105  
Mammoth Lakes, CA 93546

Dear Mayor Salcido,

In August 2022 the Town of Mammoth Lakes (TOML) shared with me a list of priorities to consider bringing forward into the Inyo National Forest program of work. On September 22, 2022 I met with Dan Holler, Stuart Brown, Joel Rathje, and Haislip Hayes to discuss the TOML projects in more detail. This helped me understand the projects further and make the recommendation to the Forest Leadership Team on which projects to consider in the Inyo National Forest's program of work.

The Inyo National Forest will be organizing the majority of the program of work around four areas, or four "R"s: **R**egulatory Requirements, **R**esource Management, **R**ecreation and Facilities, and **R**elationships/Work Environment (see attached Inyo National Forest Program of Work Direction Letter). Among the projects included in these focus areas are large and complex priority planning efforts, including: Eastern Sierra Climate and Communities Resilience Project (ESCCRP); Travel Management Subpart C (over snow vehicle travel designation); developing a wild horse management plan for the Montgomery Wild Horse Territory; and we anticipate a large development proposal from the Mammoth Mountain Ski Area. The Forest has one interdisciplinary team that will be working on all of these efforts in some capacity over the next year, and the formal planning for these projects is projected to start in fiscal year 2023.

Given the capacity of Forest and Mammoth Ranger District staff and the workload of the priority projects listed above, only a few of the TOML priority projects will be included in the Inyo National Forest's program of work in fiscal year 2022 (FY22). This letter provides information on the TOML priority projects and describes why, or why not, the project is included in the Forest work.

#### Projects included in the Inyo National Forest FY22 Program of Work

##### *Snow Pit Special Use Permit*

This project includes re-authorizing the temporary permit for use of 15 acres of National Forest System lands for the purposes of a snow removal site. The TOML would like to move this into a 5-year or longer-term permitting process. Since further details needs to be worked through for a more long-term permit, I will be issuing a one-year temporary permit to cover activities in 2022 (January 2022-December 2022).



The permit will maintain the 15-acre use limit and the fees will be waived and an agreement finalized to use those fees for other priority uses, such as maintaining recreation sites on the Mammoth Ranger District. Any fees collected by the contractor shall also be reported to the Forest, as a term of the permit. Sheila Irons is the permit administrator and has already issued the Town the permit. Lawson Reif will be the main point of contact for the recreation work associated with the waived fees and will work on the associated agreement. I will communicate the needs the Town has for a long-term permit to the new Ranger, Fred Wong.

### *Sherwin Trails*

This project has been proposed for many years, with some progress made on designating a few trails within the Sherwin area. The TOML would like to continue with this planning effort to complete the full trail proposal. The Forest is committed to providing sustainable recreation opportunities and working with partners in the development of these opportunities where it is meeting the needs of the public. This project will be included in the FY22 program of work for the Inyo National Forest. Lawson Reif will be the project lead and his responsibilities include working with our interdisciplinary team and NEPA Planner, and continue coordination with the TOML, specifically Joel Rathje on this project.

The project goals for FY22 will be to re-engage with the public about this project and determine a final proposed action. The TOML Sherwins Area Recreation Plan and Town of Mammoth Lakes Trail System Master Plan will provide the baseline of the proposed action. However, I would like to ensure that the public has more opportunity to provide further input on this project, such as: 1) Are there opportunities for single-use trails or trail loops? 2) Are there any areas where trails should connect that haven't been included in the current proposal (for example, trails from the north side of the Sherwin Creek road)? 3) What types of interpretive experiences would the public like to see along the trail system?

The District will work in partnership with the TOML to host a few public meetings throughout the year to determine if anything else needs to be considered in the proposed action. A final proposed action will be developed at the end of the fiscal year (late summer) and the formal NEPA process will begin in fiscal year 2023.

We will also need to work closely together on addressing the cultural sites in the project area. Complete avoidance of sites may not be an option and therefore further archaeology surveys and study may be warranted. The Forest can help provide insight on archaeology contractors we have worked with in the past and provide a scope of work and permit to the chosen contractor. My intent for FY22 would be to have open discussions on how to proceed with the archaeology work that may be needed to complete the NEPA on this project and best manage for the resource. Fred Wong will be involved in those conversations as the decision-maker for the project.

I understand that this project has had many starts and stops and this is one of the reasons I brought it forward as my top TOML priority to the Forest Leadership Team. This project strives to meet many of the desired conditions of our forest plan, including working with partners. It meets the needs of the District by also addressing the issue of user-created trails that may be impacting cultural or natural resources.

### Projects not included on the Inyo National Forest FY22 Program of Work

#### *Shady Rest/Inyo Crater (SIRC) Project*

This TOML project is part of a planning grant from the California State Parks Off-Highway Motor Vehicle Division Grant Program. The project will enhance the existing Off Highway Vehicle (OHV) trail network and devise new OHV trail facilities, to mitigate resource concerns while providing a more enjoyable and safer experience for OHV users. This is a partnership between the TOML and OHV user groups. The project includes the Shady Rest and Inyo Crater areas north to June Lake, along the west side of Highway 395. The TOML did receive a support letter from former District Ranger Gordon Martin when this project was proposed to the State of California.

I understand the TOML has put a lot of effort in working with partners and the public into this project and will develop a proposal for moving forward at the end of this planning grant. If an additional planning grant is requested to move into the formal NEPA process and have a final decision, the Forest will not have the capacity to provide guidance, oversight, or review for this project. With the larger priority planning projects noted above, the Forest does not have the capacity to take on another Travel Management decision. Although the TOML has identified issues with the OHV use in this area, the Forest has many other areas that have been identified for future restoration or planning grants. This includes the Laurel Lakes road on the Mammoth Ranger District, and several others across the Forest. This will be where the Forest will focus on OHV efforts for the next several years.

The Forest appreciates the efforts the TOML puts into these types of projects and especially in working with all users and the public in developing these planning products. I would like to encourage the TOML to work with Fred Wong when he arrives to better understand the areas the Forest needs to focus on for providing sustainable recreation. For example, with the amount of mountain bike use in this area, would there be interest in working together on a plan for a mountain bike park or use area? These are the types of issues the District is seeing that need to be addressed and we look forward to continuing work on this issue in partnership with the TOML.

#### *Mammoth Dog Park*

This proposal included modifying the special use permit for the Mammoth Creek Park East to authorize this area for use as a dog park. Although there may be a need to offer a safe location for dog owners to allow their dogs to play off-leash, this use is already allowed on National Forest System lands. This proposal also doesn't meet the Forest Service screening of non-commercial special use authorizations (FSM 2703.2), as the proposal can be accommodated off National Forest System lands (private land within the TOML boundaries should be assessed for this use) and because this project should not be authorized solely because it affords the applicant a lower cost or less restrictive location.

In discussion on September 22, 2022, the proposal that the Forest would consider is for a land-exchange for a part of the Mammoth Creek Park East parcel under the current special use permit.

The exchange of lands used as parks by State, County, or Municipal agencies does meet our Forest manual direction. If a proposal is given to the Forest for a land exchange, we can work with the Regional Office Lands office to get this on their program of work for fiscal year 2023.

The TOML did receive a grant from T-Mobile to build the dog park. If the use of this grant needs to occur during a quick timeframe, I would recommend the TOML build the park on private lands, as land exchanges can take many years to complete.

*Mammoth Airport Land Exchange*

The TOML is interested in a land exchange of the parcel of land that surrounds the Mammoth Airport; a strip of land that is in between the airport and Highway 395 and a larger parcel to the west and north of the airport.

After review of this proposal and looking into the other priority uses occurring in this area, specifically the land adjacent to Highway 395, the Forest will not be moving forward with this proposal for a land exchange. The National Forest System lands in between Highway 395 and the airport are currently managed under an easement with CalTrans. The Forest Service does not conduct land exchanges if lands are being managed under an easement. If a land exchange were to occur here it would be with the proponent with the easement, in this case CalTrans. The Pacific Southwest Regional Office would also not support a land exchange with these circumstances.

The part of the parcel to the west and north of the airport, although not being managed under an easement, does provide for wildlife movement of the resident mule deer herd. Although impacts from airport activities may limit the use of the area by deer, migration still occurs in this area. The Forest encourages the TOML to continue working with other partners, like the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, in determining other methods of providing for airport safety, while reducing or minimizing the impacts to deer migration within this area.

The Mammoth Ranger District looks forward to continuing to build our relationship with the TOML and working together during the development of future projects. Fred Wong will be briefed on all of these priorities, and any other concerns I have heard from the TOML, during my tenure as the Acting District Ranger.

Sincerely,

LEEANN MURPHY  
Acting District Ranger

Enclosed: Inyo National Forest Program of Work Direction Letter

cc: Mayor Pro Tem John Wentworth, Bill Sauser Council Member, Kirk Stapp Council Member, Sarah Rea Council Member, Dan Holler Town Manager