



DECISION MEMO
BUCKEYE HOT SPRINGS RECREATION ENHANCEMENT PROJECT
U.S. FOREST SERVICE
BRIDGEPORT RANGER DISTRICT
HUMBOLDT-TOIYABE NATIONAL FOREST
MONO COUNTY, CALIFORNIA

BACKGROUND

The Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest is undertaking the Buckeye Hot Springs Recreation Enhancement Project to address water quality issues at a very popular and busy area on the Bridgeport Ranger District. The project is located at the Buckeye Hot Springs area on the Bridgeport Ranger District located north of the town of Bridgeport, CA on Buckeye Road.

Increased visitation has had significant recent impacts on Eastern Sierra public lands including its many unique geological sites. The hot springs area is easily accessed from Highway 395 and the town of Bridgeport and is beloved by locals and visitors of the Eastern Sierra. The absence of a formal system trail, restroom, and day-use parking area have resulted in substantial trail braiding, impacts to sagebrush steppe, degraded water quality, and erosion caused by users accessing the hot springs from the informal parking area on Buckeye Road. Mammoth Lakes Recreation, in coordination with the Eastern Sierra Sustainable Recreation Partnership, Mono County, and the Bridgeport Ranger District, successfully competed for a Sierra Nevada Conservancy grant to provide a more sustainable recreation experience that addresses these issues.

This project will improve existing conditions by installing a single vault toilet, decommissioning multiple user-created trail segments, designating, and maintaining a preferred alternative, and installing trailhead infrastructure that mitigates vehicle encroachment and provides interpretation of National Forest System lands. These improvements will restore approximately 3,500 square feet of previously disturbed area and \approx 500 linear feet of user-created trail to provide a more sustainable recreation experience that benefits the natural environment and water quality of Buckeye Creek.

SELECTED ACTION

Minor spot grading will be performed to the existing parking area on Buckeye Road. Other improvements include: decommissioning a redundant vehicle access/egress point using boulders and downed woody-material; improving existing drainage features (contour dips) on Buckeye Road; distributing compact aggregate to provide better soil stability and drainage; installing parking barriers to limit encroachment outside of the parking area, and; installing interpretive panels, regulatory, and trail signs as prescribed. A single stall vault toilet will be installed within an existing vehicle footprint located on the shoulder of Buckeye Road. The structure measures

6'6" x 14'8" with a maximum depth of 5'. All maintenance work and parking area improvements will be performed within the existing disturbed area. Reducing the size of the current parking area will reclaim and rehabilitate approximately 3,500 square feet of existing disturbance. Classification and management as a formal day-use "developed recreation area" will also diminish the increased impacts of dispersed camping directly adjacent to Buckeye Creek (existing conditions) – directing users to the facilities provided at nearby Buckeye Campground.

To mitigate resource damage caused by the proliferation of user-created trails and substantial "trail braiding", trail work will consist of designating and improving an existing (\approx 1,000 ft.) section of natural surface trail to bring within U.S. Forest Service specifications and decommissioning unsustainable trail segments (\approx 500ft.) using locally sourced material such as boulder, cobble, and slash. The official trail will be consistent with U.S. Forest Service, Trail Class 3, Non-Wilderness, Hiker/Pedestrian terra-trail specifications with a target grade of 3%-12% and will be standardly signed. The trail will conform to the terrain, including grade, curves, and switchbacks. Improvements will include suitable drainage measures, such as water bars or out-sloping, to collect and disperse runoff and avoid or minimize erosion of trail surface and adjacent areas. This alternative was selected to rectify existing and ongoing resource damage with a focused trail alignment and formal parking area that provides public access while discouraging further trail development and impacts to soil and water quality. There will be no new ground disturbance outside of existing conditions and the overall area of compaction and soil disturbance will be reduced.

DECISION

I have decided to implement the project in full, constructing an access trail and vault toilet, installing parking barriers and erosion-control measures, new interpretive signs and displays, and restoring areas impacted by previous users within the identified project boundary (Figure 1).

This action is categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental impact statement (EIS) or an environmental assessment (EA). The applicable category of actions is identified in agency procedures as *Approval, modification, or continuation of minor special uses of NFS lands that require less than five contiguous acres of land* (36 CFR 220.6 (e)(3)) as described in FSH 1909.15 Sec. 31.2. This category of action(s) is applicable because it includes construction and use of the land on less than five contiguous acres.

I find that there are no extraordinary circumstances that would warrant further analysis and documentation in an EA or EIS. I considered resource conditions identified in agency procedures that should be considered in determining whether extraordinary circumstances might exist:

- *Federally listed threatened or endangered species or designated critical habitat, species proposed for Federal listing or proposed critical habitat, or Forest Service sensitive species.* No Federally listed threatened or endangered species or designated critical habitat, or species proposed for Federal listing or proposed critical habitat occurs within the project area (personal communication Orlando, 2021 and Kellison, 2021).
- *Flood plains, wetlands, or municipal watersheds.* The project area is not located within a flood plain, wetland, or municipal watershed. The following Best Management Practices will be followed (personal communication, Champion 202):

- Trail Construction: Trail will be designed and constructed to conform to the terrain, including grade, curves and switchbacks. Trail construction will include suitable drainage measures, such as water bars or out-sloping, to collect and disperse runoff and avoid or minimize erosion of trail surface and adjacent areas.
- Parking Area: Reconstruction and improvement to parking area will include drainage features to disperse runoff and avoid or minimize erosion.
 - *Reference: National Best Management Practices for Water Quality Management on National Forest System Lands, Volume 1: National Core BMP Technical Guide, FS-990a, April 2012*
- *Congressionally designated areas such as wilderness, wilderness study areas, or national recreation areas.* The project area is not located within a wilderness, wilderness study area, or national recreation area.
- *Inventoried roadless areas or potential wilderness areas.* The project area is not within an inventoried roadless area or potential wilderness area.
- *Research natural areas.* The project area does not occur within a research natural area.
- *American Indians and Alaska Native religious or cultural sites.* The District consulted with the Bridgeport Indian Colony about this project and received strong support for any effort to better manage the uses there, including providing a letter of support for the Sierra Nevada Conservancy Grant submitted in February 2020.
- *Archaeological sites, or historic properties or areas.* There are no archaeological sites or historic properties or areas within the project area. (personal communication Dillingham, 2021).

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

- This action was listed as a proposal on the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest Schedule of Proposed Actions. The project was shared with the Bridgeport Regional Planning Advisory Committee beginning in January 2020 and provided updates throughout the planning process. The Bridgeport RPAC provided a letter of support for the Sierra Nevada Conservancy Grant in February 2020. The project is limited in scope and scale, only occurring on National Forest System lands designated general use. Tribal consultation occurred with the Bridgeport Indian Colony with initial notification of this project in January 2020 and regular updates at the District's monthly Tribal coordination meeting. Consultation occurred with the Lahontan Water Board from the initial planning stages and in April 2020 the Water Board provided a letter of support for the Sierra Nevada Conservancy Grant. Consultation with the Water Board will continue as ground disturbing elements of the project are finalized.

FINDINGS REQUIRED BY OTHER LAWS AND REGULATIONS

This decision is consistent with the Toiyabe National Forest Land Management Plan (1986).



This decision is consistent with the goals of the Clean Water Act. This project would be conducted in accordance with requirements of the Federal, State, and local regulations to ensure compliance with California Water Code and the Federal Clean Water Act.

IMPLEMENTATION DATE

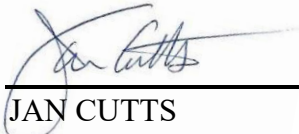
The project can be implemented immediately upon signing of this decision.

ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW

Decisions that are categorically excluded from documentation in an Environmental Assessment (EA) or Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) are not subject to an administrative review process (Agriculture Act of 2014 [Pub. L. No. 113-79], Subtitle A, Sec. 8006).

CONTACT

For additional information concerning this decision, contact: Kim Murcia, District Recreation Staff Officer, Bridgeport Ranger District, HC 62 Box 1000, Bridgeport, CA 93517, 760-932-5812.



May 3, 2021

JAN CUTTS

Date

District Ranger

In accordance with Federal civil rights law and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) civil rights regulations and policies, the USDA, its Agencies, offices, and employees, and institutions participating in or administering USDA programs are prohibited from discriminating based on race, color, national origin, religion, sex, gender identity (including gender expression), sexual orientation, disability, age, marital status, family/parental status, income derived from a public assistance program, political beliefs, or reprisal or retaliation for prior civil rights activity, in any program or activity conducted or funded by USDA (not all bases apply to all programs). Remedies and complaint filing deadlines vary by program or incident. Persons with disabilities who require alternative means of communication for program information (e.g., Braille, large print, audiotape, American Sign Language, etc.) should contact the responsible Agency or USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TTY) or contact USDA through the Federal Relay Service at (800) 877-8339. Additionally, program information may be made available in languages other than English. To file a program discrimination complaint, complete the USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form, AD-3027, found online at http://www.ascr.usda.gov/complaint_filing_cust.html and at any USDA office or write a letter addressed to USDA and provide in the letter all of the information requested in the form. To request a copy of the complaint form, call

(866) 632-9992. Submit your completed form or letter to USDA by:

- (1) mail: U.S. Department of Agriculture
Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20250-9410;
- (2) fax: (202) 690-7442; or
- (3) email: program.intake@usda.gov.

USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer, and lender.

