

**File Code:** 1950; 2300

**Date:** June 10, 2020

**Dear Interested Public,**

The Mammoth Ranger District of the Inyo National Forest proposes to implement trail improvements in the Lakes Basin and Sherwins Area to provide diverse trail-based recreational opportunities near the Town of Mammoth Lakes while protecting natural and cultural resources. Proposed improvements include construction of new non-motorized, multi-use trails accessing the Mammoth Lakes Basin from the Town of Mammoth Lakes, and creation of system-trails connecting users to different lakes and discrete facilities within the Mammoth Lakes Basin. The proposed trail improvements emphasize creation of new trails in areas of concentrated and existing use, while protecting sensitive riparian areas to minimize resource damage.

Rationale for proposed trail improvements is elicited from the Inyo National Forest *Land Management Plan*, Town of Mammoth Lakes *Trail System Master Plan* and *Walk, Bike, Ride Action Plan*, *Sherwins Area Recreation Plan*, *Mono County Regional Transportation Plan*, and informed by a “Recreation Users Council” (Mammoth Trails Committee), made up of representatives of the various user groups. A well-designed system of multi-use, non-motorized trails that includes multiple loop opportunities of varying lengths and levels of difficulty adjacent to the Town of Mammoth Lakes will provide for improved trail-user experience while reducing impacts to sensitive natural resources with the purpose of “helping people connect to the benefits of national forests and develop stewardship of public lands”.

**Proposed Action** (Refer to Attachment A)

*Construct Natural Surface Loop/Connection Trails*

Approximately 15 miles of new natural surfaced multi-use, non-motorized trails will be constructed and will adhere to U.S. Forest Service trail design specifications *Designed Use – Pack and Saddle, Trail Class 3* with a target tread width of 18-24”. Work will be performed with hand-tools and/or a small trail machine. It is anticipated that trail construction work will be implemented starting summer of 2020 and into 2021.

Project implementation and ongoing long-term maintenance will occur in partnership with the Town of Mammoth Lakes under authorization of the Mammoth Ranger District. This proposal is consistent with and similar to the categories of action which may be excluded from documentation in an EA or EIS as described in 36 CFR 220.6 (e)(1). Appropriate and legally required environmental studies and consultations will be completed in support of the project.

## **Background**

### *User-Created Trails*

A large number of user-created trails exist within the Sherwins area near the Town of Mammoth Lakes. The area receives a high level of dispersed use by foot, bicycle and equestrian-use resulting in an extensive network of user-created trails to compliment a small number of designated National Forest System Trails. A number of user-created trail segments are exhibiting erosion problems as a result of improper location and/or design. Similar high-demand exists for hikers, anglers, and other recreationists accessing individual lakes and facilities within the Lakes Basin area – resulting in the proliferation of redundant non-system trails connecting users between features. Options to protect natural and cultural resources includes closure of user-created trails. Efforts to close user-created trails however, are often ineffective unless paired with system-trails and prescribed system-maintenance that provide for responsible recreation use. The codification and creation of sustainably built and well-maintained National Forest System Trails in place of an informal network is intended to mitigate these adverse effects to the area’s natural and cultural resources while providing dispersed opportunities for recreation and multi-modal/non-vehicular travel.

## **Preliminary Review**

My preliminary assessment is that this proposal has the potential to fall under categorical exclusion 36 CFR 220.6(e)(1) — *Construction and reconstruction of trails*. Categorical exclusions are a category of actions that do not individually or cumulatively have a significant effect on the environment; therefore, neither an Environmental Assessment nor an Environmental Impact Statement is required (40 CFR 1508.4). I have reviewed the project proposal in cooperation with pertinent Forest Service environmental, resource, and recreation specialists. This preliminary review has identified no extraordinary circumstances that would preclude use of the categorical exclusion cited above.

## **California Environmental Quality Act**

This project is Categorically Exempt from CEQA under Section 15304. A Notice of Exemption with Mono County will be submitted by the Town of Mammoth Lakes.

## **How to Submit Comments**

The proposed action is currently available for a 30-day comment period. This scoping period is intended to provide those interested in or affected by this proposal an opportunity to make their concerns known prior to a decision being made by the Responsible Official. While comments are welcome at any time, they would be most useful if received by July 8, 2020. We would like to invite your comments regarding issues, opportunities, concerns, and suggestions for the proposed project. The Inyo National Forest is committed to “Collaborate with neighboring communities, partner organizations, State and local agencies, Tribes and adjacent Forest Service and National Park Service units to provide recreation opportunities that are economically, socially, and environmentally sustainable.”

Written comments can be submitted to District Ranger Gordon Martin c/o Matthew Paruolo, P.O. Box 148 Mammoth Lakes, CA 93546. The office business hours for those submitting hand-delivered comments are: 8:30-4:30, Monday through Friday, excluding holidays. Oral comments must be provided during normal business hours via telephone to District Ranger Gordon Martin at (760) 924-5553, or in person, or electronically. Electronic comments must be submitted in a format such as an email message, plain text (.txt), rich text format (.rtf), or Word (.doc) to [matthew.paruolo@usda.gov](mailto:matthew.paruolo@usda.gov) with subject line "Lakes Basin and Sherwins Area Trail Enhancement Project". If you have questions regarding this project, you may contact Matthew Paruolo, Eastern Sierra Sustainable Recreation Coordinator, phone number (760) 660-4948 ext. 103, or by email [matthew.paruolo@usda.gov](mailto:matthew.paruolo@usda.gov).

Thank you for your interest in the Inyo National Forest.

Sincerely,

Gordon P. Martin  
District Ranger

Attachment A: Existing and Proposed Trails

