

White Paper on Joint Town/County Gateway Recreation Specialist Position

Need

There is a growing need and support for local agencies to provide agreed upon assistance to the Forest Service. There are growing unfunded demands in at least the following areas:

- Permitting (i.e. use permits, film permits, other agreements)
- Visitor Centers (maintenance and staffing)
- Existing “hard infrastructure” – Bathrooms, pavement maintenance, water, sewer, buildings
- Existing “soft infrastructure” trail maintenance, signage, campground services

The reduction in funding at the national level has exacerbated the decline in the quality of existing infrastructure, adequate staffing levels and limited to no new services or infrastructure. Similar needs exist in much of the County and Town recreational assets as well as on Federal lands.

It is recognized that the Town of Mammoth Lakes and Mono County’s economic engine is tied to Tourism. A significant tourism draw is the recreational opportunities afforded through the Inyo and Humboldt Toiyabe (HT) Forests. The draw is enhanced by the municipal assets and programs (i.e. – Whitmore Park, fish stocking, advertising, municipal multi-use trails, events, wayfinding).

To the extent that the quality of visitor experience(s) are negatively impacted by the condition of infrastructure and services this makes it more difficult to attract return visitors and new. For the Town and the County to work with permittees to be successful and to have their own permits in proper order, also adds to the visitor experience and the ability of local agencies to assist the USFS in meeting other needs. This includes short-term permits for filming as well as long-term permits for guides, campgrounds etc.

For the Town, this is vitally important as it directly affects the use of restricted funds to meet needs on Forest Service Land. This includes: trail maintenance, sign placement, construction of new trails, clean-up of recreational areas, planning efforts to enhance all of these, addressing dog waste, to note a few.

With existing and growing backlog of infrastructure projects, the Inyo and HT can both use assistance in developing “shovel ready” projects that may be able to access new State and existing Federal funding sources by working with local agencies. Similar support is needed for municipal eligible projects.

There is also a lack of staff resources on the Forests to focus on convening community based organizations and individuals who may be interested in assisting in meeting the noted needs but do not know how or the exact nature of the need. Town and County resources are also limited in ability to provide a single point of contact to assist in the facilitation of community based requests for both municipal recreational improvements as well as federal land based enhancements.

Response

In August, the County convened a “Recreation Task Force” that developed a recommendation to create a County position that was focused solely on recreation. The County Board approved \$50,000 funding and now is considering the highest potential use and benefit of those funds.

A first step in assisting the USFS (Inyo and HT) in meeting the needs of the Town’s and County’s tourism, and providing direct support for municipal amenities serving the visitor experience is to provide direct

support to areas of mutual benefit. Representatives of the Town, County and USFS have been exploring ways to provide this support.

The Forest Service, from the local office to Washington is supportive of looking at a creative public-to-public partnership. The concept is to have a joint Town/County position to work directly with the Inyo and HT Forests to assist in addressing key areas of need as noted above. The position will also assist in facilitation of public discussion, support and direct involvement in municipal recreational assets as well as those on federal lands.

The position will need to have:

- Focus (a single position cannot not address everything)
- Priorities (address agreed upon items that bring success to all the parties)
- Access (support from Town and County personnel and access to key USFS personnel)

The above will need to be jointly fleshed out by the participating agencies.

Structure

The proposed structure options include:

- a. Structure and Organization
 - i. Option A:
 - 1. Full-time County Position (alternately, Part-Time (960 hour) non-benefitted County position
 - a. Position focused on unincorporated Mono County, including lands adjacent to Town
 - 2. Part-time Town Position
 - a. Position focused on lands within Town limits
 - ii. Option B:
 - 1. Shared Full-time Position
 - a. 3 out of 5 workdays devoted to Town of Mammoth Lakes goals
 - i. Town provides 3/5 funding
 - ii. Town provides direction and oversight
 - b. 2 out of 5 workdays are devoted to Mono County goals
 - i. County provides 2/5 funding
 - ii. County provides direction and oversight of this work load
 - c. Payroll for position is within Town – on books as a Town employee
 - d. Office space is provided within Town offices on Town days
 - e. Position works remotely, or from County office work station in Mammoth, or in Bridgeport on County days
 - iii. Option C: Same as above but with ‘flipped’ allocation of time, etc.
 - b. Position is modeled loosely similar to the Town’s Trails Manager/Coordinator position

Cost

For a full year of service:

The Town will also need to set aside funding – Estimated at \$100,000 - \$120,000
For FY17-18 – it is likely the position will only be in place for 3-4 months so the funding is less but to be successful this program needs to have ongoing commitment.

If a priority – – Next steps:

Confirm funding

Finalize a job description

Development of the initial areas focus, priorities and support structure

Finalize agreement with USFS as appropriate

Prepare MOU between the parties (town & county) as appropriate to set expectations

Initiate a recruitment