



Decision Notice / Finding of No Significant Impact

Martis Area Travel Management Plan

USDA Forest Service

Carson Ranger District, Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest

Washoe County, Nevada

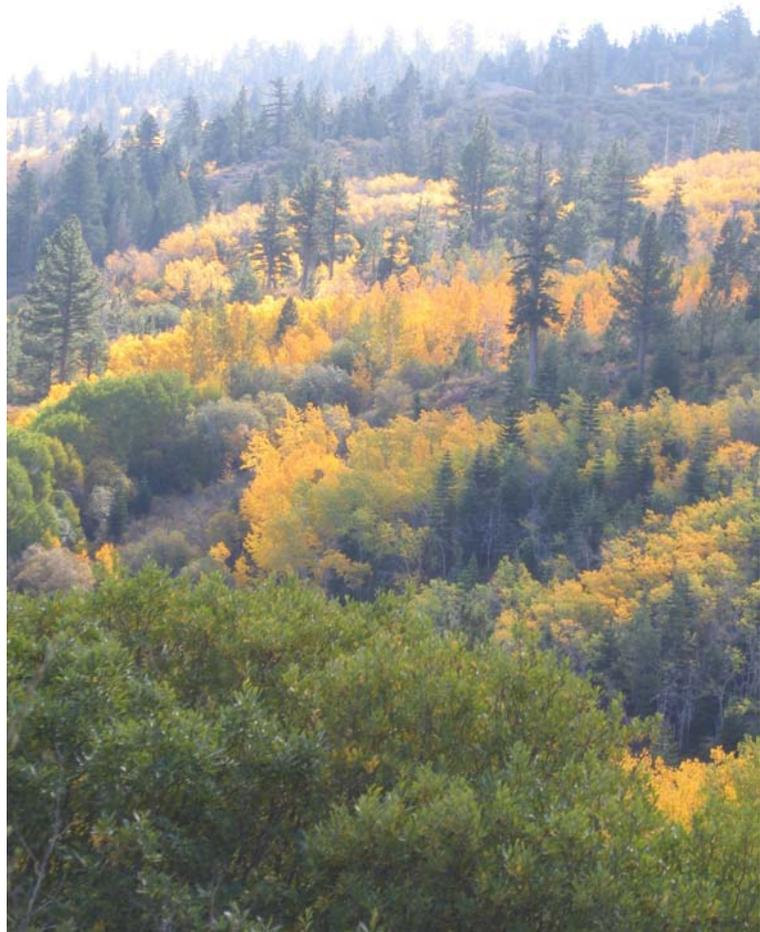
Nevada and Placer Counties, California

United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

August, 2007

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DECISION AND REASONS FOR THE DECISION

Changes to the June 2007 Decision

I signed a *Decision Notice/Finding of No Significant Impact* for this project on June 1, 2007. That decision was appealed by several individuals. After reviewing the appeals, I decided to withdraw my original decision and issue this new decision. I have incorporated some of the recommendations from the appellants, and clarified other portions of my decision. I believe these changes have improved the decision and will result in better management of the area.

Short spurs 462B, C, and D will be left open to motorized travel. Spur 462C accesses a potential trailhead to the Reno-to-Rim Trail. Spurs 462 B and D access vista points, where there is little potential for off-road damage due to the steep terrain and vegetation

Garson Road Seasonal Closure: Once public legal access is obtained across private lands, the District will seasonally close the Garson Road on National Forest system lands when the road surface is at risk of damage. Potentially damaging road conditions generally occur in early spring during snow melt. These road conditions do not generally occur during the fall hunting season.

Iceland Road Status: This decision does not address public access on the Iceland Road from Hirschdale to the forest boundary. Legal jurisdiction for the

“Iceland Road” is held by Nevada County, California.

All other decisions stand as originally described.

Background

This project was identified in the 2005 Martis/Interstate 80 Corridor Landscape Strategy prepared by the Carson Ranger District in cooperation with Washoe County and the City of Reno. The Strategy covers approximately 54,000 acres, of which 38,500 acres are National Forest System lands located west of Reno and south of Verdi. Most of the area is in Nevada with a portion in California. The area includes the Gray Creek, Bronco Creek and Deep Creek watersheds. The 2001 Martis Fire burned about 15,000 acres of the project, primarily in the Bronco Creek watershed.

The purpose of this project is to provide access and an efficient road system needed for both public and administrative motorized purposes. The Martis area currently has poor access and is lightly used in comparison to nearby forest areas, such as Peavine Mountain. Access from Garson road is gated on private land, and the Hunter Lake Road and the Bronco Creek Road are in poor condition and require 4WD.

Over the next ten years, thousands of new homes will be built in the Verdi and Martis Valley areas. The demand for use in the adjacent National Forest lands will increase dramatically. The Carson Ranger District needs to be proactive in planning for access and well-defined motorized recreation use.

The Forest Service worked cooperatively with the City of Reno and Washoe County to analyze the issues in the



Martis area and to make a series of recommendations that helped set the stage for future management decisions. These recommendations were published in the Martis/Interstate 80 Corridor Landscape Assessment and Strategy developed by the Carson Ranger District. One of the primary recommendations from the strategy included developing a road system that is usable by a variety of motorized user groups, provides strategic access for firefighters and is designed to protect natural and cultural resources.

The Landscape Strategy was developed under the direction of the Toiyabe Forest Plan. The Plan calls for a diversity of recreational opportunities in this management area.

A separate plan will be developed for non-motorized travel, including a Reno-to-Rim trail in the Mt. Rose Wilderness connecting Reno with the Tahoe Rim Trail. This plan will include connector trails and trailheads.

Decision

Based upon the 2005 Landscape Strategy and my review of the alternatives, I have decided to implement the proposed action as described in the EA, with a couple of exceptions. This decision includes these provisions:

- Access

The travel plan would allow motorized access from Garson Road, the Hunter Lake Road, and Bronco Creek near Hirschdale. The Carson RD would work with the City of Reno to establish legal access from Garson Road. Access from Levintina Canyon and Murphy Meadow would be

designated for non-motorized use only.

- Motorized Trailhead

Establish a motorized trailhead at the National Forest boundary on Garson Road. The site would be approximately two acres with room for horse and ATV trailers and 20-30 parking spaces. The trailhead would be surfaced and have toilet facilities and an information kiosk. A gate would be installed just past the trailhead to close the road when the road surface is at risk of damage. These conditions generally occur in early spring during snow melt.

- Motorized Travel

Update the Carson Ranger District Travel Management Plan for the Martis area by authorizing a system of motorized routes on National Forest System lands that will meet user needs and protect the environment. The primary road system would be Garson Road (Forest road 462) south to Bronco Creek and the Hunter Lake Road (Forest road 392), which connects with the Garson Road at Big Meadow. The road from Bronco Creek south to Gray Creek would remain open to provide view points for the public. A number of spur roads would remain open to provide loop opportunities, view points, and recreational opportunities. The Fuller Lake spur would also remain open to provide access to private property. In addition a short section of new motorized



trail, less than one mile in length, would be constructed to connect two existing spur roads and provide a loop opportunity.

Approximately 34 miles of roads and trails within the project area would be authorized for motorized use. This mileage does not include most of the Hunter Lake Road, which is outside of the project area. Roads would be maintained for use by high clearance vehicles.

Roads at the north end of the project area, accessed from Garson Road, Levintina Canyon and Hunter Creek, along with several spur roads would be closed to motorized use. There is significant interest in non-motorized recreation, including mountain biking, in this area. The roads at Murphy Meadows would also be closed to motorized use. Approximately 22 miles of road would be closed.

The decision to authorize motorized use on four trail segments, approximately four miles in length, will be deferred to the Carson District Travel Management Planning effort which is planned for completion in 2009. These motorized trail segments are old logging roads which are currently being used by the public, but have not been authorized for use by the Forest Service. These segments are shown on the map and are all within the Bronco Creek watershed.

- **Signing and Patrolling**

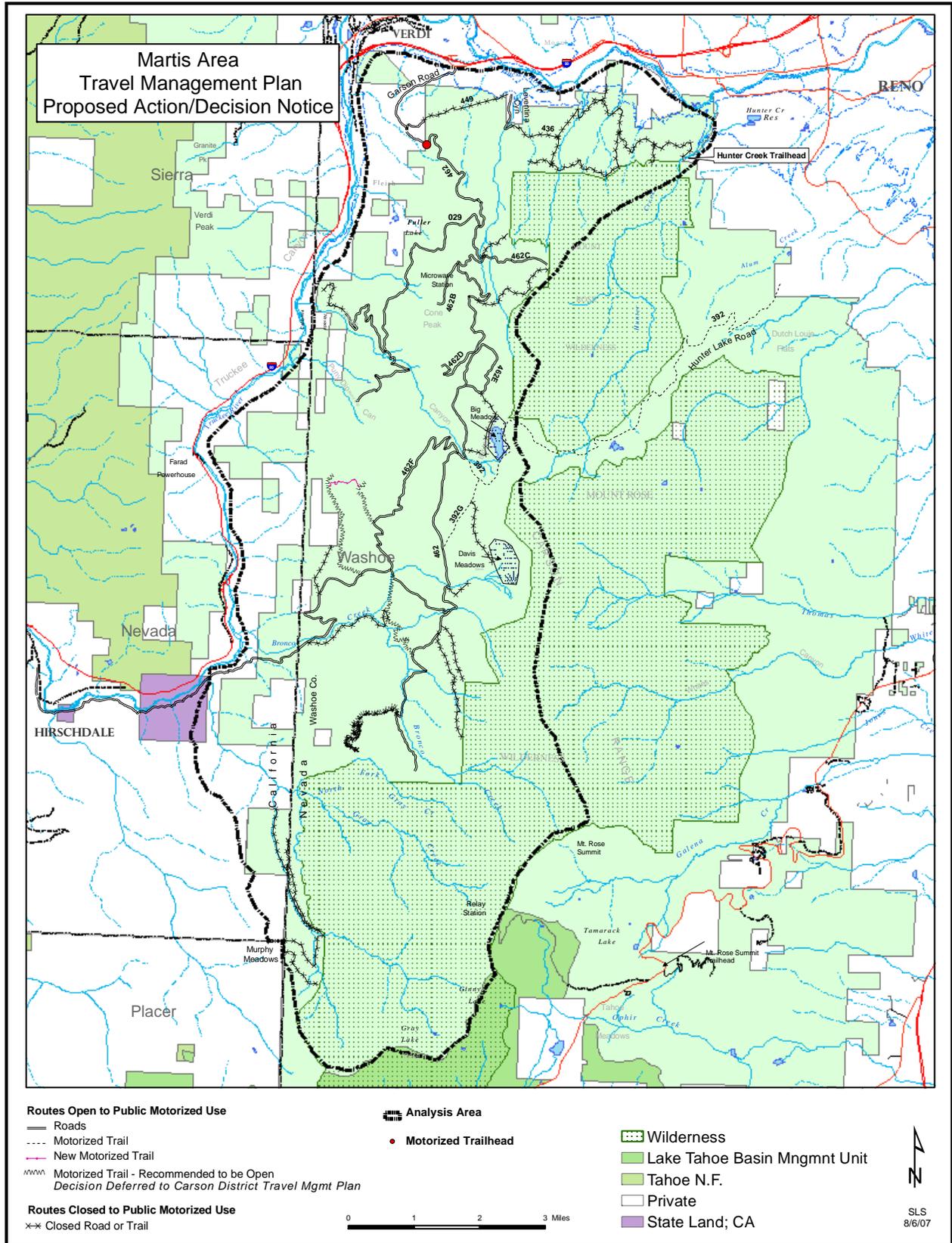
Designated routes would be mapped and signed. The area would be patrolled by Forest Service personnel, as budget and scheduling allow, to enforce closures. Volunteers would be solicited from both motorized recreation communities to help with monitoring, enforcement, and public education efforts.

- **Rare Plants**

Rare plants endemic to the northern portions of the Carson Range, including the Martis area, will be protected under this proposal. Protection measures include placing boulders along road sides to keep vehicles from traversing or parking in areas where rare plant populations exist. Prior to construction of the new section of road, surveys will be conducted to determine if rare plants are present. If rare plants are detected, they will be flagged and avoided. If the road cannot feasibly be constructed to avoid rare plants, no road construction will occur.

- **Heritage Resources**

A cultural resources survey will be conducted and Section 106 compliance completed on both the motorized trailhead site and the new motorized trail prior to construction. The Forest Service will consult with the Nevada SHPO on the results of the survey.





Decision Rationale

In selecting the action alternative, I considered a number of issues and factors.

First, I considered the purpose and need for the action and the recommendations outlined in the Martis/I-80 Corridor Landscape Strategy. The Strategy was developed in cooperation with the City of Reno and Washoe County. The decision outlined in this notice is in alignment with that Strategy. The no action alternative is not.

Second, in arriving at this decision, I have closely examined the analysis of effects in the Environmental Assessment. The Environmental Assessment demonstrates that travel management as proposed is not free of environmental impacts, but that those impacts do not rise to the level of significance that is defined by the National Environmental Policy Act and Council on Environmental Quality regulations as requiring an Environmental Impact Statement. My conclusion is based on a review of the record that shows a thorough review of relevant scientific information, a consideration of responsible opposing views, and the acknowledgment of incomplete or unavailable information, scientific uncertainty, and risk.

This position is supported by the site-specific analysis provided in the Environmental Assessment. Specific environmental effects and conclusions provided in the Environmental Assessment include recreation, roadless and wilderness character, and heritage and natural resources.

Other Alternatives Considered

In addition to the selected alternative, I considered the no action alternative. An analysis of these alternatives can be found in the EA.

No Action Alternative

Under the No Action alternative, current management plans would continue to guide management of the project area. The recommendations identified in the Martis/I-80 Corridor Landscape Strategy would not be implemented.

Public Involvement

The proposal was listed in the July, 2006 Schedule of Proposed Actions. A Notice of Proposed Action was published in the Reno Gazette Journal on September 5, 2006 for a 30 day public comment period. Notices of the proposed action were also mailed to interested parties and posted on the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest web site. A total of 15 comments were received during this period.

In addition, the Martis Area Travel Management Plan was part of the overall Martis/Interstate 80 Corridor Landscape Strategy. That project was based on extensive public consultation. A public meeting was held in April 2004, which was attended by about 20 local residents and agency representatives. An overview of the landscape strategy was presented to the Washoe County Planning Commission, Washoe County Board of Supervisors, and the Reno City Council. The U.S. Forest Service worked in close cooperation with the City of Reno and Washoe County Community Development Departments in developing the recreation issues and associated recommendations. Agencies consulted included the Nevada Division of Wildlife and Nevada County, California.

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

After considering the environmental effects described in the EA, I have determined that



these actions will not have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment considering the context and intensity of impacts (40 CFR 1508.27). Thus, an environmental impact statement will not be prepared. I base my finding on the following:

After considering the environmental effects described in the EA, I have determined that these actions will not have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment considering the context and intensity of impacts (40 CFR 1508.27). Thus, an environmental impact statement will not be prepared. I base by finding on the following:

1. My finding of no significant environmental effects is not biased by the beneficial effects of the action.
2. There will be no significant effects on public health and safety.
3. There will be no significant effects on unique characteristics of the area, because the motorized closure would protect Cultural and Natural resources. (see EA Environmental Consequences).
4. The effects on the quality of the human environment are not likely to be highly controversial. There is no known scientific controversy over the impacts of the project.
5. The Carson Ranger District has considerable experience with travel management planning. The effects analysis shows the effects are not uncertain, and do not involve unique or unknown risk (see EA Environmental Consequences).
6. The action is not likely to establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects. Travel planning of this type is a common, nonprecedent setting action for the Forest Service.

7. The cumulative impacts are not significant (see EA Environmental Consequences).
8. The action will have no significant adverse effect on districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, because the motorized closure would reduce the potential for impacts to cultural resources. The action will also not cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources, because the project reduces the potential for impacts to those resources (see EA Heritage Resources).
9. The action will not adversely affect any endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species act of 1973, due to the lack of suitable habitat (see EA Wildlife and Plants).
10. The action will not violate Federal, State, and local laws or requirements for the protection of the environment. Applicable laws and regulations were considered for this project. The action is consistent with the Toiyabe Forest Plan (See EA Background/Purpose and Need).

Implementation Date

If no appeals are filed within the 45-day time period, implementation of the decision may occur on, but not before, five business days from the close of the appeal filing period. When appeals are filed, implementation may occur on, but not before, the 15th business day following the date of the last appeal disposition.



Administrative Review or Appeal Opportunities

This decision is subject to appeal pursuant to Forest Service regulations at 36 CFR 215. Appeals must meet the content requirements of 36 CFR 215.14. Appeals must be postmarked or received by the Appeal Deciding Officer within 45 days of the publication of the legal notice for this project decision in the Reno Gazette Journal. The Appeal Deciding Officer is Forest Supervisor Ed Monnig. Appeals must be sent to: Appeal Deciding Officer, Intermountain Region USFS, 324 25th Street, Ogden, Utah 84401; or by fax to 801-625-5277; or by email to: appeals-intermtn-regional-office@fs.fed.us. Emailed appeals

must be submitted in rich text (rtf) or Word (doc) and must include the project name in the subject line. Appeals may also be hand delivered to the above address, during regular business hours of 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday.

Contact

For additional information concerning this decision, the environmental assessment, or the Forest Service appeal process, contact Sally Champion, Project Manager, Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest, 1536 S. Carson St. Carson City, NV 89701 Ph 775-882-2766. Additional information is available at <http://www.fs.fed.us/r4/htnf/projects/>.

GARY SCHIFF
District Ranger
Carson Ranger District

Date