

Decision Memo
Sawmill Loop Trail
Spring Mountains National Recreation Area
Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest
Clark County, Nevada

March 2007

Purpose and Need

The Spring Mountains National Recreation Area (SMNRA) has an identified need to provide the public with trail opportunities accessible to a wide range of visitors including hikers, equestrians and mountain bikers. The SMNRA existing trail system is primarily located at high elevation and within Wilderness, is not available for long periods of the year due to weather and snow conditions, and is comprised primarily of “Most Difficult” trail opportunities more suitable for experienced outdoors people.

To help meet this need, the SMNRA is in the process of planning a major trail development for the Blue Tree area of Middle Lee Canyon adjacent to State Highway 156 (see Map 1 – Project Location). This development will include a multi-use trail system including trail opportunities for hikers, mountain bikers and equestrians as well as a trailhead. The Sawmill Trailhead portion of the Blue Tree project was constructed during 2005 and 2006, and was opened for public use in September 2006.

Due to the length of the proposed trail system and the need to complete trail planning and NEPA analysis, construction would not begin until 2008. In the interim, there are no designated trails accessed by the Sawmill Trailhead. To prevent the proliferation of user trails, it is important to construct a limited trail opportunity from the Sawmill Trailhead as soon as possible. This would help protect resources from potential damage by visitors creating user trails while meeting a need for easy multiple-use trail opportunities.

This trailhead and the trail system are funded by the Southern Nevada Public Lands Management Act (SNPLMA) through a series of Capital Improvement Project grants.

Decision

I have decided to designate 1.5 miles of new trail named the Sawmill Loop Trail. This new trail will use 0.4 miles of existing user created trail and construction of 1.1 miles of new trail for the total of 1.5 miles. The trail will be a multiple use non-motorized that is accessible from the Sawmill Trailhead and provides connections to other existing user defined trails in the area. This trail will provide a scenic loop opportunity for visitors to the trailhead facility. The trail tread will be 24” wide and the vegetation clearing will be 8’ wide by 10’ high, which is the Forest Service standard for equestrian trails which are the primary use. The trail will be developed to Forest Service “Easy” trail standards and is not accessible (see Map 2 – Project Location). The Conservation Plan starting on page 5 is part of this decision.

I have decided to close and rehabilitate user created trail that is poorly located south of the existing trailhead. (See Conservation Plan #2a and Map #2 for details.)

I have also decided to close and allow for natural rehabilitation of a Concentrated Use Area (CUA) located north of the intersection of Highway 156 and Mack's Canyon Road. (See Conservation Plan #2b and Map 3 for details).

This decision is consistent with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). This project is not a connected action with the planned Blue Tree Trail System. This project will serve a stand alone purpose by providing a trail opportunity regardless of the decision on the remainder of the trail system.

This action is categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental impact statement or an environmental assessment per FSH 1909.15, Sec. 31.2. Trail construction is included in "Categories of Actions for Which a Project or Case File and Decision Memo are required." I considered the Extraordinary Circumstances listed in FSH 1909.15, Section 30.3. Of these extraordinary circumstances, I gave strong consideration for the following which are present in the project area:

1. Federally listed threatened or endangered species or designated critical habitat, species proposed for Federal listing or proposed critical habitat, or Forest Service Sensitive Species (including species of concern).

The biological evaluation - biological assessment (BEBA) for the Sawmill Loop Trail project includes documentation on the effects of the project on federally listed species, as well as species of concern. A finding of "May Impact individuals but, not likely to lead to a trend towards listing" was reached. A copy of the BEBA and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife concurrence is available in the project files.

2. Congressionally designated areas, such as Wilderness, Wilderness Study Areas (WSA), or National Recreation Areas.

Trail opportunities, including the construction of new trails, are appropriate within a National Recreation Area. The project is not located within Wilderness or a WSA.

3. American Indians and Alaska Native religious or cultural sites.

Nation to Nation communication on the project was initiated with a pre-scoping letter to tribal representatives on June 30, 2006. This was followed up with a meeting on August 7, 2006 where projects, including this one, were presented and discussed. A draft copy of this Decision Memo was provided to tribal representatives prior to finalization as was previously agreed upon.

4. Archaeological sites, or historic properties or areas.

The State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) Sawmill Loop Trail Report includes documentation on American Indian cultural sites associated with the project. A finding of "No Adverse Affect" was reached. A copy of the SHPO Report and the Nevada State Historic Officers concurrence is available in the project files.

There are no extraordinary circumstances potentially having effects which may significantly affect the environment.

Public Involvement

A proposal to construct and rehabilitate the Blue Tree Trail System was listed in the Schedule of Proposed Actions beginning on July 1, 2006. The proposal was provided to over 600 individuals, organizations and public agencies in a letter dated July 24, 2006. Additional information in the form a scoping package was made available to all interested parties. This project proposal was presented to local American Indian tribal representative in June and August of 2006.

Comments that were relevant to this project are displayed and discussed under Public Involvement - Issues and Responses for the Sawmill Loop Trails Project which is located on Page 9.

Findings Required by Other Laws

This decision is consistent with the SMNRA General Management Plan as required by the National Forest Management Act. The project was designed in conformance with Area-Wide Objectives, specifically objectives 0.47, 0.48 and 0.49 and Standards and Guidelines (S&G), specifically S&G 0.142 and 0.143.

This decision is in conformance with the Clark County Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan, particularly with Section 1.2.3. The Goals and Objectives of this Section include a Measurable Biological Objective of "...no net unmitigated loss or fragmentation of habitat...where they represent the majority of the habitat for the species". See the Biological Evaluation and Specialists Reports for a discussion of this item. There is no known scientific documentation of fragmentation of habitat for wildlife or plant species as a result of construction and use of low density non-motorized trails with 24 inch or less tread width.

This decision is also in conformance with the Conservation Agreement for the Spring Mountains NRA. The loop trails and trailhead are not within any Biodiversity Hotspots and are located to encourage recreation use outside of the hotspots.

Implementation Date

This project will be implemented on or after the date that this Decision Memo is signed.

Administrative Review or Appeal Opportunities

This decision is not subject to administrative appeal.

Contact Person

For additional information concerning this decision or the Forest Service appeal process, contact:

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/s/ Timothy J. Short

March 27, 2007

TIMOTHY J. SHORT
District Ranger

Date

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Conservation Plan

Including
Design Standards, Rehabilitation and Monitoring
For The
Sawmill Loop Trail Project

1. **Construction Scheduling** - Construction would be completed outside of bird breeding season (May 1 to August 1) to protect against impacts to nesting birds for all activities. Construction may occur if breeding bird surveys are accomplished beforehand and all nest sites protected until fledging. The protection buffer would be 50 feet for neo-tropical migratory and other songbirds and ¼ mile for raptors.
2. **Closure and Rehabilitation**
 - a. User Trail Closure – Close and rehabilitate 0.6 miles long by 2 feet wide (0.1 acres) of user created trail as identified on the attached Project Map #2. The objective of the closure is rehabilitating the trail for the recovery of the native vegetation while stopping existing erosion. Close the user trail as the new trail becomes available.
 - b. Fencing and Concentrated Use Area (CUA) Closure Adjacent to Mack Canyon Road - Fencing to protect a discrete population of Clokey milkvetch in the vicinity of the Mack’s Canyon-Highway 156 intersection was a mitigation for the Sawmill Trailhead Decision Notice. Based on additional survey and field work we now believe this is not the most effective closure to protect the resources. Instead, we will erect approximately 450 feet of fencing to prevent vehicle use and discourage foot traffic in the area (see Map #3). This fencing will better protect 0.5 acres of Clokey milkvetch habitat, facilitate trail rehabilitation efforts, and protect cultural resources.
 - c. Rehabilitation activities will include:
 - i. Construct 450 feet of fencing
 - ii. Install signing per #3a in this plan.
 - iii. Decompact soil as necessary
 - iv. Install structures as necessary to minimize existing erosion
 - v. Disperse rocks, scree, logs, other vegetation over the rehabilitated trail surface to:
 1. make it physically unobtrusive to the trail users;
 2. facilitate rehabilitation of the trail by providing shelter for animals and seed;
 3. help prevent erosion on the trail.
 - vi. Monitor the success of the rehabilitation (effectiveness monitoring) at 1 year using photo points. Establish at least 2 photo points for the trail and the CUA. If monitoring shows that the rehabilitated trail is not revegetating with native species naturally and is not trending toward total recovery, additional steps, including seeding, shall be identified and implemented.

Responsibility – A. Meketi

3. **Education and Visitor Information** –
 - a. Place temporary closure/education signs at the ends of the obliterated sections of user trail. Signs should include available options and the reason for the closures.

- b. Develop education materials regarding the dark blue butterfly, Clokey milkvetch, and other Conservation Agreement (CA) species in the area to be included in kiosks at the Sawmill Trailhead to explain the environmental sensitivity of the area and need to remain on designated trails only. Post a trail map at the trailhead/kiosk.

Responsibility – A. Ellis

4. **Weed Monitoring and Mitigations**

- a. This section was developed using the following documents:

Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest
Noxious Weed and Invasive Plants Management Plan – 2002

Environmental Assessment
Noxious Weed Control Program
Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest
Austin, Bridgeport, Carson, and Tonopah Ranger Districts
And Spring Mountains National Recreation Area
April 2001

FSM 2000 – National Forest Resource Management
Chapter 2080 – Noxious Weed Management
Supplement No.: 2000-2004-1

- b. Sawmill Loop Trail Weed Management Plan - Take the following measures to limit the introduction of weeds during and after trail construction:
 - i. When practical clean all equipment that will be used for the project prior to coming on site. Identify sites where equipment may be cleaned.
 - ii. If equipment cleaning occurs in the field, choose sites away from watercourses or areas that will drain into a stream system.
 - iii. It is preferable to use a pressure washer that is capable of 2,000 PSI.
 - iv. Maintain as much microhabitat for desirable vegetation as feasible in areas that will have ground disturbance to help suppress invasive weeds. Minimize the removal of trees and other vegetation during trail construction and rehabilitation.
 - v. Select invasive weed-free staging areas and parking sites.
 - vi. Identify areas to be avoided during construction.

For the Public

- vii. Use only Certified weed free hay or pellitized feed.

- viii. Request the public to clean the hooves and brush all pack and saddle animals before entering the National Forest and feed the animals weed-free forage 64 hours before traveling in the National Forest.
- ix. Post signs informing Forest visitors about weeds, encourage them not to pick and transport flowers or other plant materials, and inform the Forest of any infestations.

c. Baseline inventory

Weed data has been collected in the Sawmill area in 2006 as documented in the Sawmill Loop Survey report. Crossflower (*Chorispora tenella*) was documented in the vicinity of the project. If encountered, this plant should be pulled, bagged, and removed from the site for proper disposal.

d. Monitoring Plan

Monitor the trail for weeds the spring following construction. Pull weeds as they are encountered during surveys.

Responsibility – K. Walker

5. **Cultural Resources Implementation Monitoring** - To ensure adequate protection of the archaeological resources identified within the Sawmill Loop Trail APE, it is suggested that an archaeologist (Kelly Turner – SMNRA) be present at specific times (or at the discretion of the archaeologist) during project implementation to monitor trail construction/modification. The primary areas of concern will be in the vicinity of archaeological sites 26CK6855 and 26CK6624. Specific implementation directives, as described in the archaeological survey compliance report, should be adhered to as not to further damage these sites (this report is available through Kelly Turner). Due to the high concentration of archaeological resources in the project area, it is also highly recommended that the archaeologist be updated on project progress on a daily basis if possible. Responsibility – K. Turner
6. **Tracking Projects and Mitigations** - To comply with the Clark County Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan (MSHCP) of no net unmitigated loss commitments, we must work with USFW to begin tracking project impacts to and mitigation for CA species. To meet this objective, the SMNRA staff will recreate all projects and mitigations on an appropriate data table from the date of the MSHCP – September 2000. Once this data table is developed, it will be kept current for future projects and mitigations and will serve as a record of change. This table will help us address no net unmitigated loss (see #7 below). FS Responsibility – B. Lund

7. **Summary of Project Disturbance and Mitigations – No net loss**

- a. Disturbance - Acreage permanently removed from habitat
 - i. 1.1 miles of new trail construction x 24" wide = 11,616 ft² = 0.27 = 0.3 acres
 - ii. 0.4 miles of existing user trail converted to permanent trail x 24" wide = 0.09 = 0.1 acres

- b. Mitigations
 - i. User trail rehabilitated and returned to habitat – 0.6 miles x 24" = 0.14 = 0.1 acres
 - ii. Closure of Concentrated Use Area of 0.5 acres (some of this closure is mitigation for Sawmill Trailhead construction project)
 - iii. Provide recreation opportunities outside of Biodiversity Hotspots
 - iv. Provide education as defined in #3 above
 - v. Help prevent random use of the area and additional user created trails. This protects abundant biological and cultural resources in the project area.

Public Involvement - Issues and Responses For The Sawmill Loop Trail Project

Following are relevant comments received from the public in response to scoping for the project. The letter numbers reflect the actual number assigned to the letter when it was received and are maintained here for tracking purposes. Our responses follow each comment.

Letter 3 – The letter focused on the author’s desires and uses of trails for mountain biking (MTB). The author did raise an issue about “opening some of the trails not proposed for MTB’s to MTB’s.”

Response – The Sawmill Loop trail will allow mountain bike use.

Letter 4 – This letter voiced concern over proposed closures of some routes in the project area. She is concerned that these closures would isolate some of the loop trails making them inaccessible and that there would be no tie between Blue Tree and the gravel pit.

Response - This proposal does not isolate existing user trails and in fact improves access to them with the exception of the 0.7 miles of user trail that will be closed and rehabilitated. This particular trail is poorly located and is impacting sensitive plant species. There will be improved access from the Sawmill Trailhead to the gravel pit.

Letter 6 – The author expressed a concern that it was not clear which dispersed camps would be permanently closed.

Response – No dispersed camps will be closed by this decision.

Letter 13 – This letter is focused on the trailhead and trail access in and out of Sawmill to connect with existing trails. The comments reflect the need for a good trail to get out of the trailhead and to connect once outside, particularly to the dispersed camping area at Blue Tree.

Response – This letter is similar to Letter 4 above. Access will be greatly improved out of the Sawmill Trailhead with this project.