
3.0 ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

3.8 VISUAL RESOURCES

INTRODUCTION

This visual analysis has been prepared to identify the scenic context and evaluate the potential visual impacts associated with the proposed Ski Back Trail. This section is intended to satisfy the requirements of Inyo National Forest (INF) for a project-specific visual impact analysis by examining the potential impacts in the project vicinity and evaluating the effectiveness of the design features.

It should be noted that the analysis contained in this section is based upon the Scenery Management System (SMS), which is a regional approach to understanding and classifying the visual context of an area as established by the United States Department of Agriculture Forest Service (USDA Forest Division) (*Agricultural Handbook No. 701*, December 1995). The SMS creates an inventory and analysis of aesthetic values while attempting to determine the relative value and importance of scenery in a national forest.

The SMS establishes a series of components to analyze in a rational sequential format in order to arrive at a set of visual goals and objectives for Forest Service lands. First, the Ecological Unit Description describes the basic physical and biological elements of the study area. Based upon the Ecological Unit Description, the Landscape Character Description is developed by characterizing the existing landscape and describing its unique, natural elements. Once this general description is established, Scenic Attractiveness Classes are developed: Class A (Distinctive), Class B (Typical), and Class C (Indistinctive). Scenic Attractiveness Classes attempt to further describe the existing landscape in terms of line, color, form, texture, and the combined context.

Next, Landscape Visibility rates the viewing constituency in terms of vantage points and distance to the area in question. This is further developed into a Constituent Analysis, which connects the relative importance of the viewed landscape to the public, resulting in Concern Levels ranging from High to Low. Seen Areas and Distance Zones are mapped to indicate the distance of the public viewers from the viewed landscape, with general categories of Foreground, Middleground, and Background.

Finally, Scenic Integrity is also described, mapped, and categorized in qualitative rankings ranging from Very High to Unacceptably Low. Further, the SMS applies to all Forest

Service property when developing an inventory, database, and management objectives, as well as in considering potential changes to the landscape.

Pursuant to the aforementioned publication, the SMS should identify the following:

- Visual Sensitivity;
- Landscape Character; and
- Scenic Integrity.

Overall, the SMS communicates the importance of the natural landscape of the national forest in both its intrinsic state and as viewed by constituents. Being a “system,” several sequential phases of analysis characterize the SMS process. First, the Landscape Character is defined by identifying the Existing Land Uses within the Ecological Unit. Then Scenic Attractiveness values, Distinctive, Typical, and Indistinctive, are established for subunits within the study area. The SMS then sets forth the Scenic Integrity (e.g., degree of intactness vs. disruption and/or alteration) for these areas. Landscape Visibility is based upon public vantage points in terms of the uniqueness of and distance from the viewed area. Scenic Attractiveness and Landscape Visibility are combined to determine a numerically ranked Scenic Class. These Scenic Classes are ranked in an order identifying relative scenic importance, or value, of discrete landscape areas.

This analysis is based on the *Ski Back Trail Visual Resources Analysis/Assessment, Mammoth Mountain Ski Back Trail*, conducted by LSA Associates, Inc. dated July 2007. This technical report is included in Appendix H of this Final EA.

3.8.1 REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

a. Inyo National Forest Land and Resources Management Plan

The Inyo National Forest Land and Resources Management Plan (INFLRMP 1988) was developed to provide an “integrated, multiple resource management direction for all Forest resources” and thereby contributes to defining the area’s land use and visual policy context. The Forest Standards and Guidelines set the stage for management of visual resources. Each management prescription includes an assigned Visual Quality Objective (VQO). For visual resources, the following list of concerns is provided in Chapter 2 of the INFLRMP:

- Maintain and manage for visual quality;

- Resolve conflicts between visual quality and other resources; and
- Maintain or enhance current visual resources and scenic attractions.

Chapter 3 of the INFLRMP provides a summary analysis of the management situation for each of the resources within this region. It is noted in this chapter that the “Mammoth and June Lake communities and associated winter sports development represent the most significant visual impacts within the Forest boundary.” This section further notes that, “additional winter sports development could cause major visual resource disruptions during the planning period,” and that there is a need to establish direction for applying VQOs to such developments. Chapter 3 also emphasizes the need to maintain the visual resources values of the INF, particularly as it is viewed from U.S. Highway 395. Finally, this chapter recognizes the following:

The Plan emphasizes a continued high level of visual quality for its economic and social benefits to local communities and to millions of annual recreation visitors. This emphasis is expressed by assigning VQOs to specific acres of land that are consistent with the overall management direction for that land.

In Chapter 4 of the INFLRMP, the management direction for visual resources within the proposed Ski Back Trail area is described as meeting or exceeding “the Partial Retention [VQO] for runs, lifts, and base areas as seen at middle ground distances from Sensitivity Level 1 routes and occupancy sites.” Applicable Management Direction statements provided in Chapter 4 of the INFLRMP include the following:

Maintain foregrounds and middlegrounds of the (scenic) corridors of the following travel routes to Retention and/or Partial Retention VQOs as inventoried, but not (lower) than Partial Retention:

1. Highways officially designated by the State as California State and County Scenic Highways.
2. California State Scenic Highway System reroutes as designated in the September 1970 Master Plan. [These] highways include:
 - State Highway 120, west of U.S. Highway 395 to Tioga Pass;
 - U.S. Highway 395;
 - State Highway 158;
 - State Highway 203; and
 - State Highway 168.

The Mammoth area can be partially viewed from U.S. Highway 395 and State Highway 203 (SR-203 or Minaret Road). Although the Ski Back Trail would not be visible from U.S. Highway 395, it is within the immediate foreground and foreground view distances of SR-203. However, it should be noted that although the Ski Back Trail is within immediate foreground and foreground distances, the majority of the trail cannot be seen from SR-203 due to elevation differences and existing tree cover. Therefore, Management Direction of maintaining the Partial Retention VQO would apply to the Ski Back Trail.

3.8.2 AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

a. Visual Context

Mammoth is the most identifiable and largest Eastern Sierra Nevada alpine resort. Mammoth is located within a valley floor (actually within a portion of an ancient caldera) surrounded by moderately to steeply rising slopes on the south, west, and north.⁶⁶ Physical and visual access into Mammoth begins from the east at the SR-203 and U.S. Highway 395 interchange. Traveling west into town, urbanization typical of a destination resort dominates the immediate horizontal view. Minaret Road (SR-203) consistently rises as it proceeds west, which directs the eye upward toward the mountains. Mammoth Mountain, located directly to west of the Town of Mammoth Lakes (Town) provides a prominent visual backdrop. Again, mountains rise quickly to the south and north.

During all seasons it is apparent that Mammoth Mountain has been altered to accommodate skiing. Stands of Jeffrey pines are interspersed among large, extended open areas. Ski lifts and roadways are seen on the face of the mountain, particularly to the west. The mountains to the south and north do not have the degree of physical alteration apparent on Mammoth Mountain; however, several roadways can be seen on these slopes from the valley floor.

The proposed Ski Back Trail is located within a relatively localized and narrow area between SR-203 and existing residential development. The proposed Ski Back Trail alignment, SR-203, which is located to the north of the trail alignment, and the residential development located to the south of the trail alignment, are all oriented in general west to east direction. SR-203 is located to the north and at a higher elevation than the proposed Ski Back Trail alignment.

⁶⁶ *A caldera is a large depression commonly formed by collapse of the ground following explosive eruption of a large body of stored magma (Wright and Pierson, 1992, Living with Volcanoes, The U.S. Geological Survey's Volcano Hazards Program: U.S. Geological Survey Circular, 1973).*

b. Ecological Unit Description

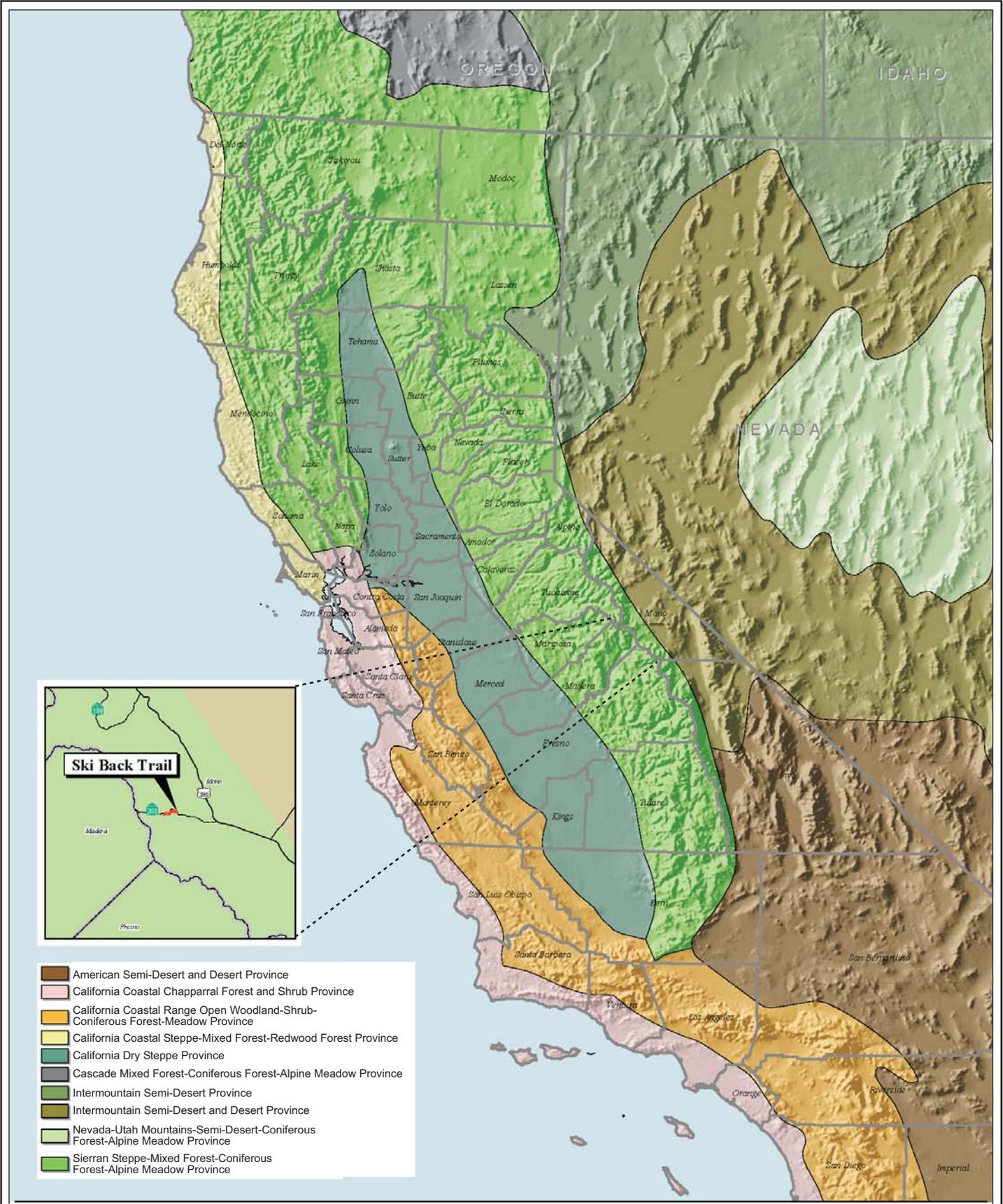
(1) Regional Landscape Character

The proposed Ski Back Trail alignment lies within the Sierran Steppe-Mixed Forest-Coniferous Forest-Alpine Meadow Ecological Province (Ecological Province). This province covers an area of approximately 68,300 square miles and includes most of the Sierra Nevada range in California, extending northward into southern Oregon. Its landform description includes steeply sloping to precipitous mountains crossed by many valleys with steep gradients. The long west slope of the Sierra Nevada rises gradually from 2,000 feet to more than 14,000 feet; the east slope drops abruptly to the floor of the Great Basin, approximately 4,000 feet. Much of this region has been glaciated. Figure 13 on page 192 depicts the Proposed Action's location within this Ecological Province.

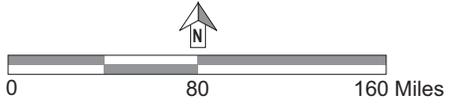
Climatic description of this Ecological Province includes temperature averages ranging from 35 to 52 degrees Fahrenheit, falling with rising elevation. The base of the west slope receives approximately 10 to 15 inches of rainfall per year and has a long, unbroken, dry summer season. At higher elevations, the dry summer season shortens and precipitation rises to as much as 70 inches, with a larger portion falling as snow. Prevailing west winds influence climatic conditions for the whole region, which results in the eastern slopes being much drier than the western slopes. Winter precipitation makes up 80 to 85 percent of the total precipitation during the year with mostly snow at the higher elevations. The greatest total precipitation reported is on slopes between 3,000 and 7,000 feet, which support the luxuriant mixed conifer forests of the montane zone. The subalpine zone coincides with the altitude of greatest snowfall, where precipitation is 40 to 50 inches per year.

The combination of the land surface form, elevation differences, and climatic environment results in vegetation zones that are well defined. The lower slopes and foothills, from approximately 1,500 to 4,000 feet, are covered with coniferous and shrub associations. On higher slopes, digger pine and blue oak dominate, forming typical open or woodland stands. Most of the low hills are covered by close-growing evergreen scrub, or chaparral, in which buckbrush and manzanita predominate including several types of oaks.

The montane zone lies between approximately 2,000 and 6,000 feet in the Cascades, 4,000 and 7,000 feet in the Central Sierras, and 5,000 and 8,000 feet or more in the south. The most important trees are ponderosa pine, Jeffrey pine, Douglas-fir, sugar pine, white fir, red fir, and incense cedar; however, several other conifers are also present. The giant Sequoia is one of the most spectacular species, but grows only in a few groves on the western slope. Dense chaparral communities of manzanita, buckbrush, and buckthorn may appear after fire, sometimes persisting for years. Within the Sierran rain shadow, on the dry eastern slopes, Jeffrey pine



- American Semi-Desert and Desert Province
- California Coastal Chapparral Forest and Shrub Province
- California Coastal Range Open Woodland-Shrub-Coniferous Forest-Meadow Province
- California Coastal Steppe-Mixed Forest-Redwood Forest Province
- California Dry Steppe Province
- Cascade Mixed Forest-Coniferous Forest-Alpine Meadow Province
- Intermountain Semi-Desert Province
- Intermountain Semi-Desert and Desert Province
- Nevada-Utah Mountains-Semi-Desert-Coniferous Forest-Alpine Meadow Province
- Sierran Steppe-Mixed Forest-Coniferous Forest-Alpine Meadow Province



Source: LSA, 2007.

Figure 13
Eco-Provinces of California

replaces ponderosa pine. At lower elevations, pine forests are replaced by sagebrush pinyon forest, part of the Intermountain Desert Province.

The subalpine zone begins from 6,500 to 9,500 feet, depending on latitude and exposure, and extends up-slope approximately 1,000 feet. Mountain hemlock, California red fir, lodgepole pine, western white pine, and whitebark pine are also common. Conditions are severe and timberline varies from approximately 7,000 feet in the north to 10,000 feet in the south. Lodgepole pine is said to have climax characteristics near the upper limits of this zone. The alpine zone covers the treeless areas above timberline.

(2) Local Landscape Character

The Sierra ridgeline creates a distinct rain shadow, resulting in a progressively dry climate to the east. Within two horizontal miles, the climate will range from a moist mountain ecosystem to a semiarid desert. An example is Mono Lake lying at the foot of the Eastern Sierras. At its westerly shoreline, the average annual rainfall is approximately 12 inches, while the east side of the lake experiences approximately six inches of annual precipitation.⁶⁷

Great Basin sagebrush steppe and bitterbrush vegetation exist at the base of the Eastern Sierra escarpment. These arid shrublands have much less species diversity than western slope chaparrals. Depending on the latitude, the conifer zone initiates at elevations ranging from 3,000 to 5,000 feet above sea level. Pinon pine and juniper are at the lower elevations with Jeffrey and ponderosa pines emerging just above in moderate to higher elevations. As the elevation increases, white and red fir begins to appear. Above these zones, alpine vegetation adapted to cold, dry conditions of the highest elevations remain characterized by low shrubs and cushion plant communities that grow between rock crevices and survive wind and ice.⁶⁸

In general, the Mammoth area is a combination of a developed, resort community in the valley floor flanked on the north, west, and south, by moderately to steeply rising slopes accommodating conifer stands, residential units, and ski runs and associated facilities. Volcanic domes are apparent, particularly to the west and north, providing an undulating skyline. Most foreground views are dominated by urbanization, with the middle ground view providing a mixture of structures and trees on moderate to steeply rising slopes. Distance views from the valley floor provide a view of the topographic shape resulting from combined volcanic and tectonic forces.

⁶⁷ *Centers for Water and Wildland Resources, University of California, Davis, Status of the Sierra Nevada, Wildland Resources Center Report No. 39, June 1996.*

⁶⁸ *Ibid, Page 12.*

(3) Site Specific Landscape Character

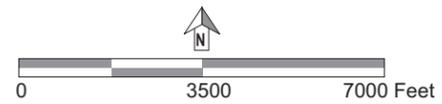
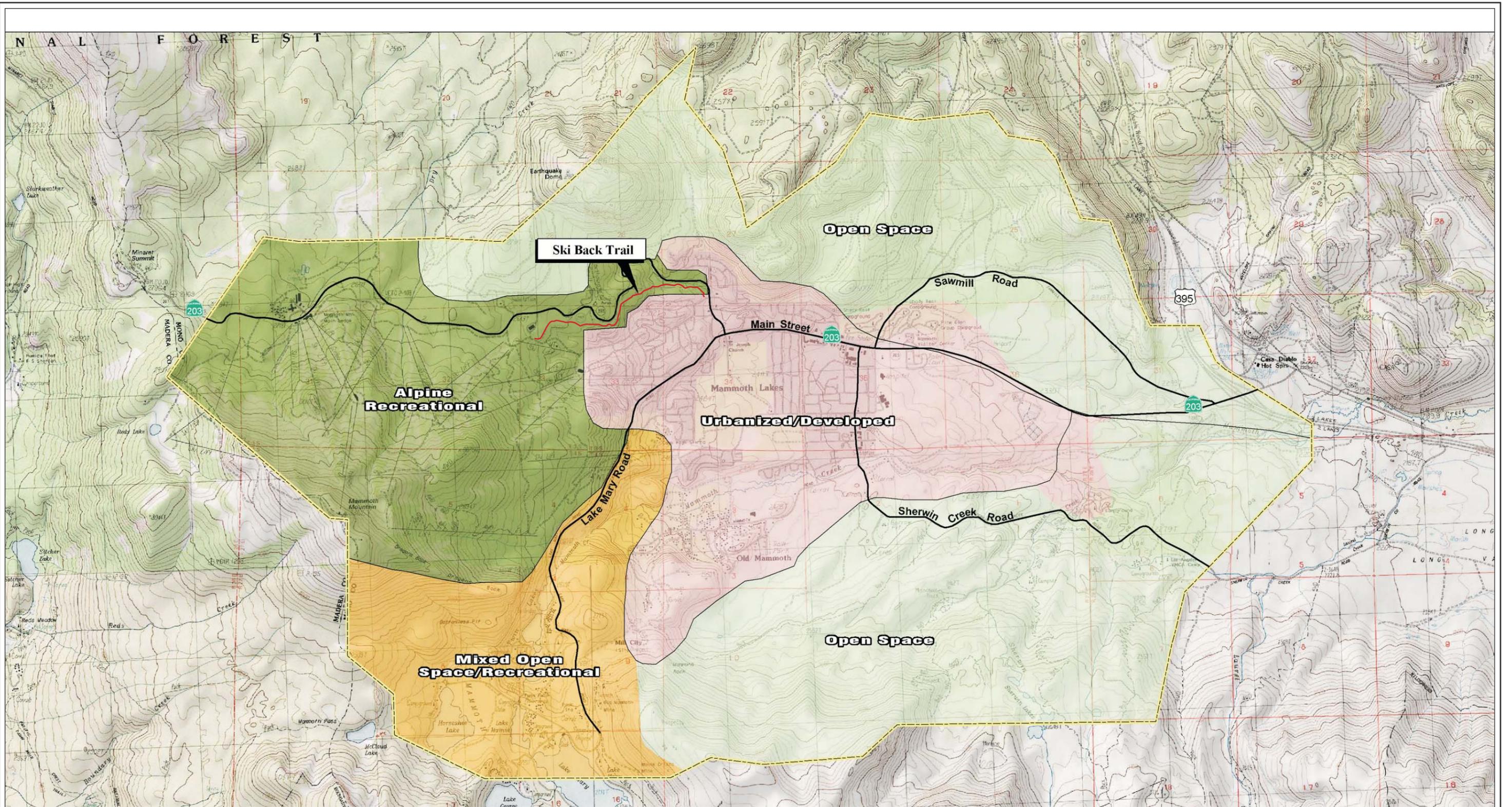
The Ski Back Trail area has a moderately dense cover of Jeffrey pines (*Pinus jeffreyi*), with trees ranging from several inches to nearly 80 feet above the ground surface. In addition, red fir (*Abies magnifica*) populates the proposed Ski Back Trail alignment. The understory is a mixture of manzanita type shrub, buff ground cover, and fallen woody debris.

The dominant cover in sunny, open areas consists of greenleaf manzanita (*Arctostaphylos patula*), pinemat manzanita (*Arctostaphylos nevadensis*), tobacco brush (*Ceanothus velutinus*), big sagebrush (*Artemisia tridentata*), and antelope bitterbrush (*Purshia tridentata*). The dominant cover on shaded slopes consists of less common shrubs and the understory is comprised mainly of herbaceous perennials and grasses, including nude buckwheat (*Eriogonim nudum*) and bottlebrush squirreltail (*Sitanion hystrix*). Although SR-203 and the residential areas are relatively close to each other, there are only a few areas along this entire proposed Ski Back Trail alignment where these facilities are visible to each other due to the elevation differences and existing stands of trees.

c. Existing Land Use Patterns/Themes

Three general land use patterns and themes exist for the Mammoth area. There is a central core (Urbanized/Developed) of the Town, characterized by development and infrastructure. The ski area (Alpine Recreational) is located directly to the west on the higher elevations and is defined by open areas that accommodate ski runs interspersed with tree cover. Facilities in this area directly support the recreational skiing and include lifts, gondolas, huts, and maintenance buildings. The southwestern portion of this area has a mixture of open space, roadways, camping areas, and other recreational facilities and is termed as Mixed Open Space/Recreation. To the north and south of the Town are areas with a small amount of facilities and infrastructure characterized by steeper terrain and varied topography, termed as Open Space. Figure 14 on page 195 depicts the existing land use patterns and themes.

Figure 15 on page 196 illustrates the proposed Ski Back Trail alignment within the subregional area of the Town. Approximately 25 square miles are represented within this area. The area is characterized by a centrally located developed area with a mix of residential, commercial, and recreational uses/buildings, and supporting infrastructure surrounded by rising topography. The surface area is covered with mixed stands of conifers and cleared areas accommodating recreational uses. As such, the evidence of alteration from the natural landscape can be seen from most public vantage points within this subregion.



Source: Triad/Holmes Associates, June 28, 2004.

Figure 14
Existing Land Use Patterns and Themes

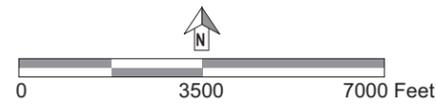
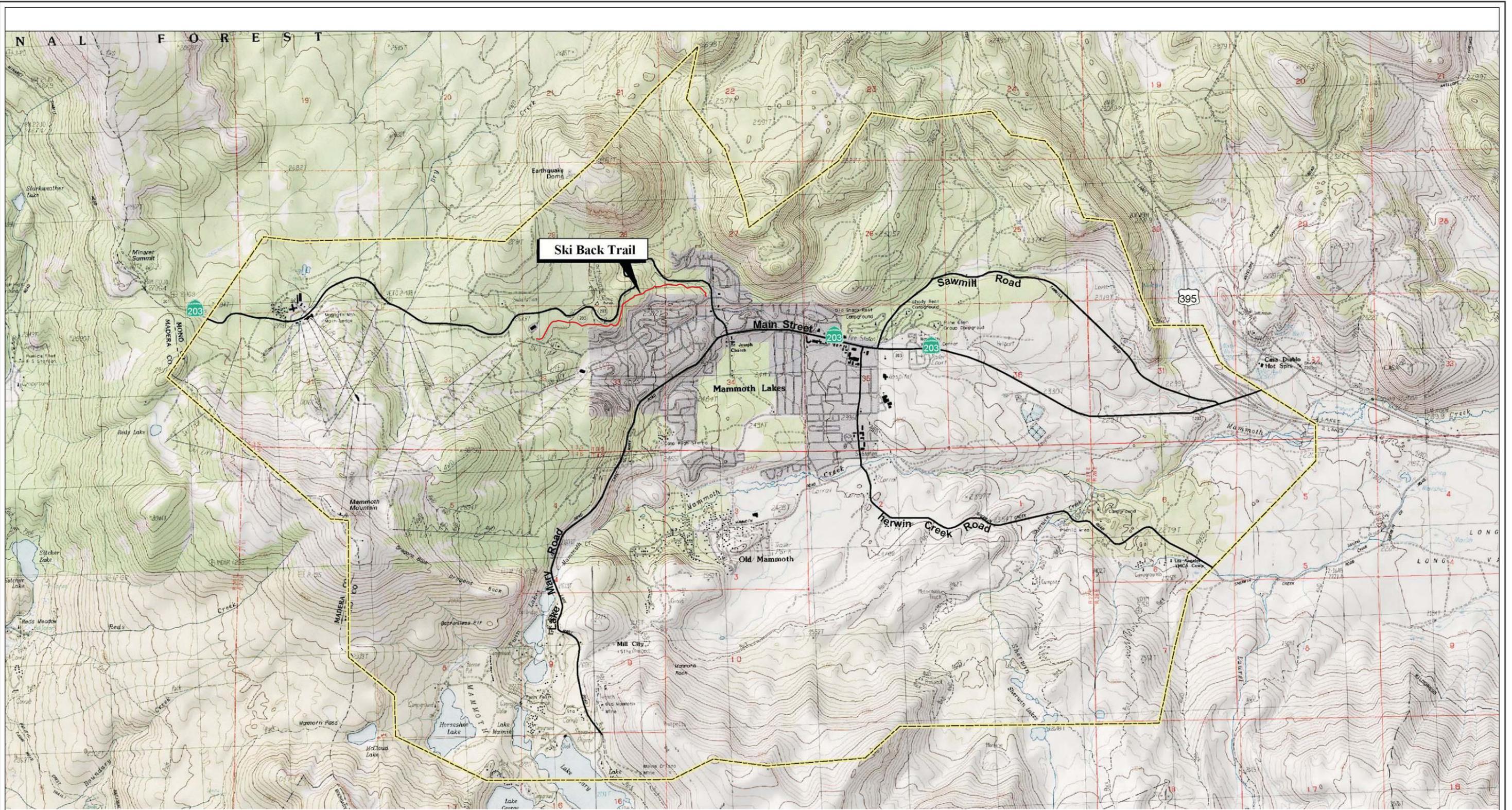


Figure 15
Mammoth Subregion

As previously described, the proposed Ski Back Trail alignment is placed within a relatively narrow strip of USDA Forest Service area between SR-203 to the north and a series of privately owned multi-story residential units to the south. The proposed Ski Back Trail roughly parallels SR-203; however, it would be on a lower elevation than the road surface within an area of moderate slopes and a mix of timber cover of conifers, with a range of heights and maturity that generally obscure views of development south of SR-203.

3.8.3 ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

a. Methodology

(1) Visual Sensitivity

Visual sensitivity is measured by what is defined as “Scenic Attractiveness.” Scenic Attractiveness usually involves the combined visual effect of the natural landscape and its stability. Three classes normally encompass the category of Scenic Attractiveness: Distinctive (Class A), Typical (Class B), and Indistinctive (Class C). The following defines the different classes for Scenic Attractiveness.

Class A: Distinctive - Areas where landform, vegetation patterns, water characteristics, and cultural features combine to provide ordinary or common scenic quality. These landscapes have strong positive attributes of variety, unity, vividness, mystery, intactness, order, harmony, uniqueness, pattern, and balance.

Class B: Typical - Areas where landform, vegetation patterns, water characteristics, and cultural features combine to provide unusual, unique, or outstanding scenic quality. These landscapes have generally positive, yet common, attributes of variety, unity, vividness, mystery, intactness, order, harmony, uniqueness, pattern, and balance. Normally, they would form the basic matrix within the ecological unit.

Class C: Indistinctive - Areas where landform, vegetation patterns, water characteristics, and cultural land use have low scenic quality. Often water and rockform of any consequence are missing in Class C landscapes. These landscapes have weak or missing attributes of variety, unity, vividness, mystery, intactness, order, harmony, uniqueness, pattern, and balance.

(2) Landscape Visibility

Landscape visibility is generally defined as the ability to view national forests from public spaces such as roadways and use areas. Landscape visibility is a function of several considerations: (1) context of viewers; (2) duration of views; (3) degree of discernable detail; (4) seasonal variation; and (5) number of viewers.

(3) Scenic Integrity

The following is a frame of reference for the various scales of Scenic Integrity:

- **Very High:** These areas are unique and classic examples of outstanding natural landscape that has been completely unaltered over a large area. It has been preserved in its natural form.
- **High:** These areas may have been altered in the past; however, they appear to have maintained their natural state and have retained their natural integrity.
- **Moderate:** These areas have been slightly, yet noticeably, altered and changed from their natural state. They are classified as having been partially retained.
- **Low:** These areas have been altered and changed in a noticeable manner. These areas have been modified with potential remnants of the past natural landscape.
- **Very Low:** These areas have been completely altered and changed and have experienced maximum modification.
- **Unacceptably Low:** These areas' natural state cannot be recognized as it has been extremely altered.

Table 30 on page 199 provides further assistance in understanding Scenic Integrity of a given area.

b. Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action

(1) Construction Impacts

Construction of the Proposed Action would involve clearing and grading along the proposed Ski Back Trail right-of-way for approximately two and a half months. Construction of the five retaining walls would occur over the next approximately two months, with the final grading, storm drain improvements, and soil erosion control measures implemented over an

Table 30
Scenic Integrity Summary

Criteria for Scenic Integrity of the Landscape Character Image/Sense of Place	Very High (VH)	High (H)	Moderate (M)	Low (L)	Very Low (VL)	Unacceptably Low (UL)
<i>Dominance</i> Landscape Character vs. Deviation	Landscape Character	Landscape Character	Landscape Character	Deviation	Deviation	Deviation
<i>Degree of Deviation</i> From the Landscape Character	None	Not Evident	Evident but not dominant	Dominant	Very Dominant	Extremely Dominant
<i>Intactness</i> of the Landscape Character	Landscape character Fully Expressed	Landscape character Largely Expressed	Slightly Altered and character Expression Moderate	Altered and Low Expression of Character	Heavily Altered and Very Low Expression of Character	Extremely Altered

Source: LSA Associates, Inc.

approximately 45 day period. Trail and retaining wall construction would generally utilize existing access corridors, including utility pole lines and utility access roads from SR-203. In addition, construction of the Ski Back Trail would also require establishment of additional corridors to provide adequate access points to the trail. The unimproved temporary access roads would be approximately 10 to 15 feet wide. After completion of the Ski Back Trail is completed, the temporary access roads would be decommissioned by grading the compacted soils and revegetating the areas with native plants. The Proposed Action does not incorporate any soil or debris hauling as a result of clearing or grading activities since all materials would be maintained and reused on-site.

Construction of the Ski Back Trail would be short-term, occurring for approximately six months. In addition, most of the construction activity would occur out of the line of site for travelers along SR-203 and the residential uses to the south, due to intervening topography and vegetation. The most visible portion of the construction activity would be the construction equipment traversing the access corridors. However, as noted above, these access corridors would utilize existing corridors, including utility pole lines and utility access roads, which have already been cleared and/or are currently being utilized by mechanical equipment. In addition, the access corridors would be decommissioned after construction activities are complete, which would include re-vegetation with native plants and materials. As such, there would be no adverse effect since the construction activities would be short-term with limited viewsheds of the construction activities. No mitigation measures would be required.

(2) Operational Impacts

(a) Visual Sensitivity

As previously described, Scenic Attractiveness is a “primary indicator of the intrinsic scenic beauty of a landscape and of the positive responses it evokes in people.”⁶⁹ Scenic Attractiveness usually involves the combined visual effect of the natural landscape and its stability. Refer to Figure 16 on page 201 for an illustration of the classes for this subregion.

(i) Class A

In the general Mammoth subregion, distinctive landscapes are exemplified by the landforms resulting from the combined tectonic and volcanic forces, most notably the upper slopes and skyline. Specifically, this area appears to be unaltered and retains much of the natural landscape.

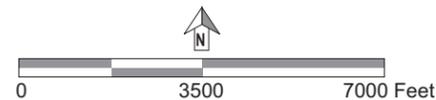
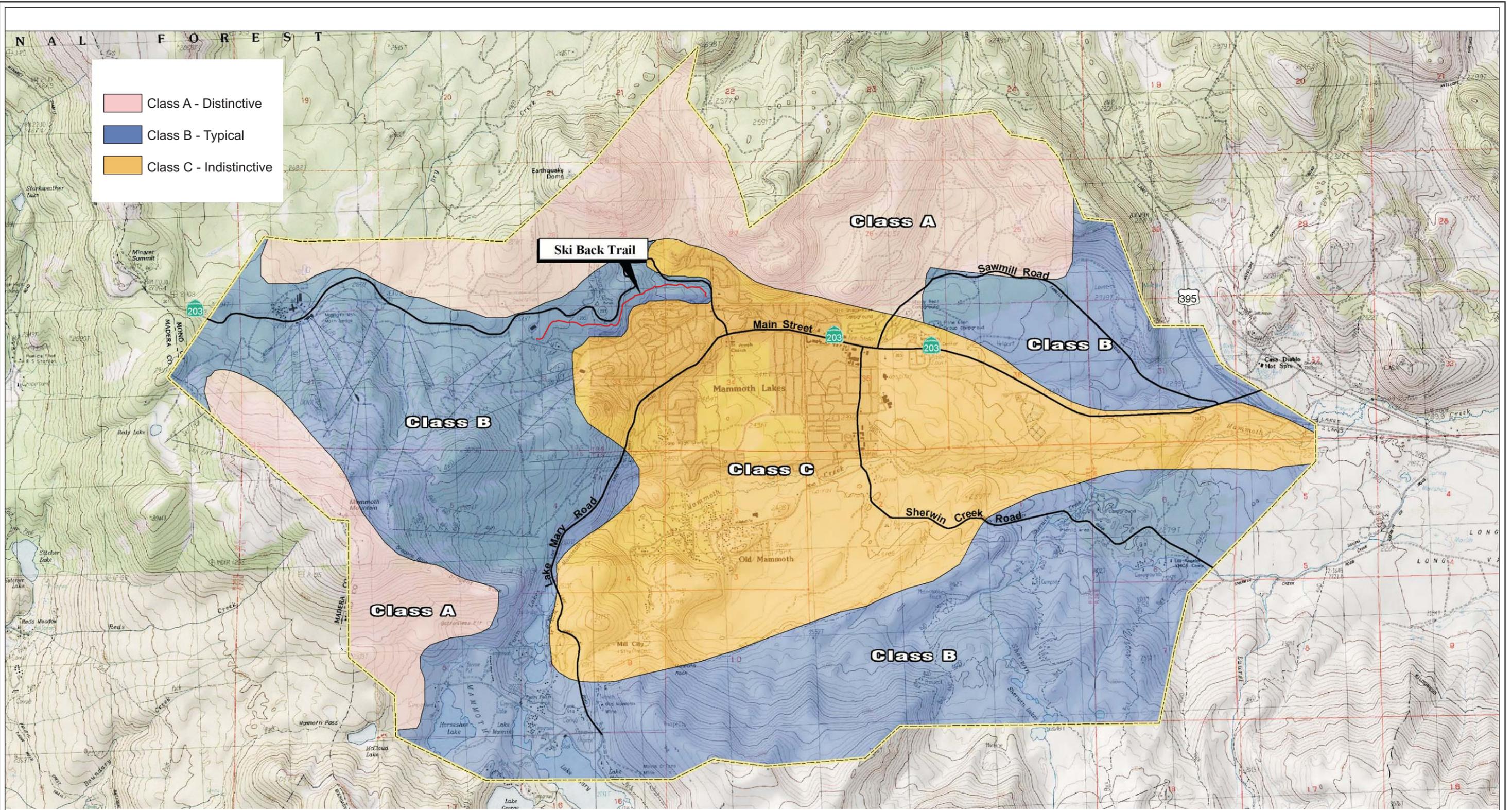
(ii) Class B

The green timber and other Eastern Sierra vegetation provide an aesthetically pleasing contrast to the abrupt topography, sheer rock faces, and blue sky. Again, it is apparent that the tree stands have been isolated by urban development on the lower slopes, recreational development (e.g., ski runs) on the upper slopes, and the network of roadways connecting these areas. The design, form, color, and massing of the ski-related structures and facilities attempt to acknowledge and complement the surrounding natural landscape. The residential development, while being influenced by and reflective of the surrounding alpine context, tends to be more intense and warrants a greater degree of infrastructure than the recreational facilities. Generally, a positive scenic quality has been maintained.

(iii) Class C

The majority of the valley floor and lower slopes is occupied by urban development that is distinct from the areas dedicated to public ski areas. The Town core is an intense development of residential, commercial, and institutional uses with supporting infrastructure. This development has changed the natural landscape character of much of the valley floor, resulting in a relatively low scenic value.

⁶⁹ *USDA Forest Service, Landscape Aesthetics, A Handbook for Scenery Management, Agricultural Handbook No. 701, 1995, p. 1–14.*



Source: LSA, 2007.

Figure 16
Scenic Attractiveness

(b) Landscape Visibility

There are several general ranges of landscape visibility: Immediate Foreground visibility is typically defined as 0 to 300 feet from the vantage point; Foreground visibility range is 300 feet to 2,500 feet; Middleground visibility is from 2,500 feet to four miles; and Background views include four miles and beyond. Figure 17 and Figure 18 on page 203 and 204 respectively, illustrate these categories.

Immediate Foreground can be qualitatively defined as a distance where viewers can distinguish vegetation details such as leaves, grasses, and flowers along with small animals. Foreground is described as the distance where viewers can distinguish large tree branches, shrubs, moderately sized animals, and movement of plant material due to wind. Middleground is normally the distance zone where national forest landscapes can be viewed on a regional level. At this distance, viewers can determine vegetation forms, unique topographic formations and flower fields. Background usually includes mountain ranges, large expanses of wooded hillsides, and open spaces.

Figure 19 on page 205 depicts three landscape visibility ranges, primarily due to limited visual range within the study area. Visibility ranges were determined from the major roadways, which provide the greatest range and variation of views. In addition, the Proposed Action would be seasonably visible from existing off-road bike trails (e.g., Uptown/Downtown bike trails) that are in the same area. These bike trails could be classified as secondary travelways experiencing seasonal moderate use. Travelways are “linear concentrations of public viewing, including freeways, highways, roads, railroads, trails, commercial flight paths, rivers, canals, and other waterways.”⁷⁰ These travelways are then separated into categories ranging from Primary Travelways with High Use to Secondary Travelways with Low Use. SR-203, near the Ski Back Trail area, is classified as a Secondary Travelway with Moderate Use. This roadway extends from the Town, connecting the main urban center with a few residential areas and resort facilities. The primary function of this roadway segment is to facilitate traffic between the urban core and the resort facilities (and residential areas) within a relatively short distance. There are no turnouts or scenic viewpoints along this portion of SR-203.

Use areas are defined as “spots that receive concentrated public-viewing use.”⁷¹ Samples include visitor centers, vista points, ski areas, and recreational sites. The Ski Back Trail area is not readily visible to any significant degree from such areas. The degree of public importance assessed to landscapes as viewed from travelways and use areas are measured in terms of Concern Levels. Table 31 on page 206 identifies the hierarchy of the Concern Levels.

⁷⁰ *Ibid*, p. 4-6.

⁷¹ *Ibid*, p. 4-7.

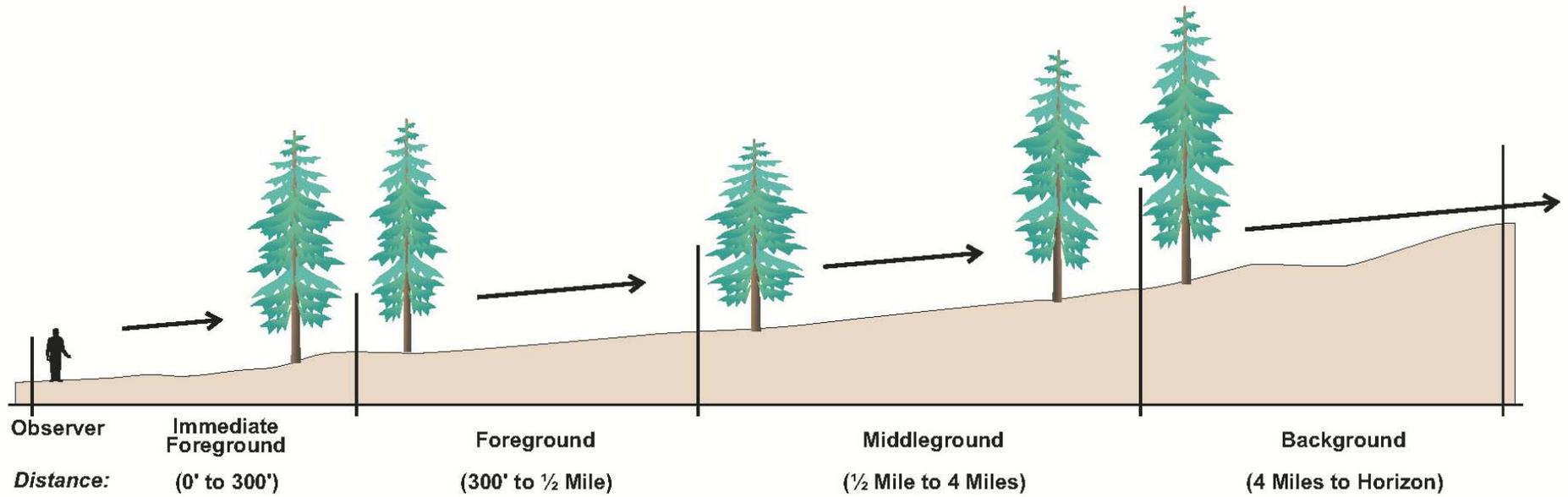
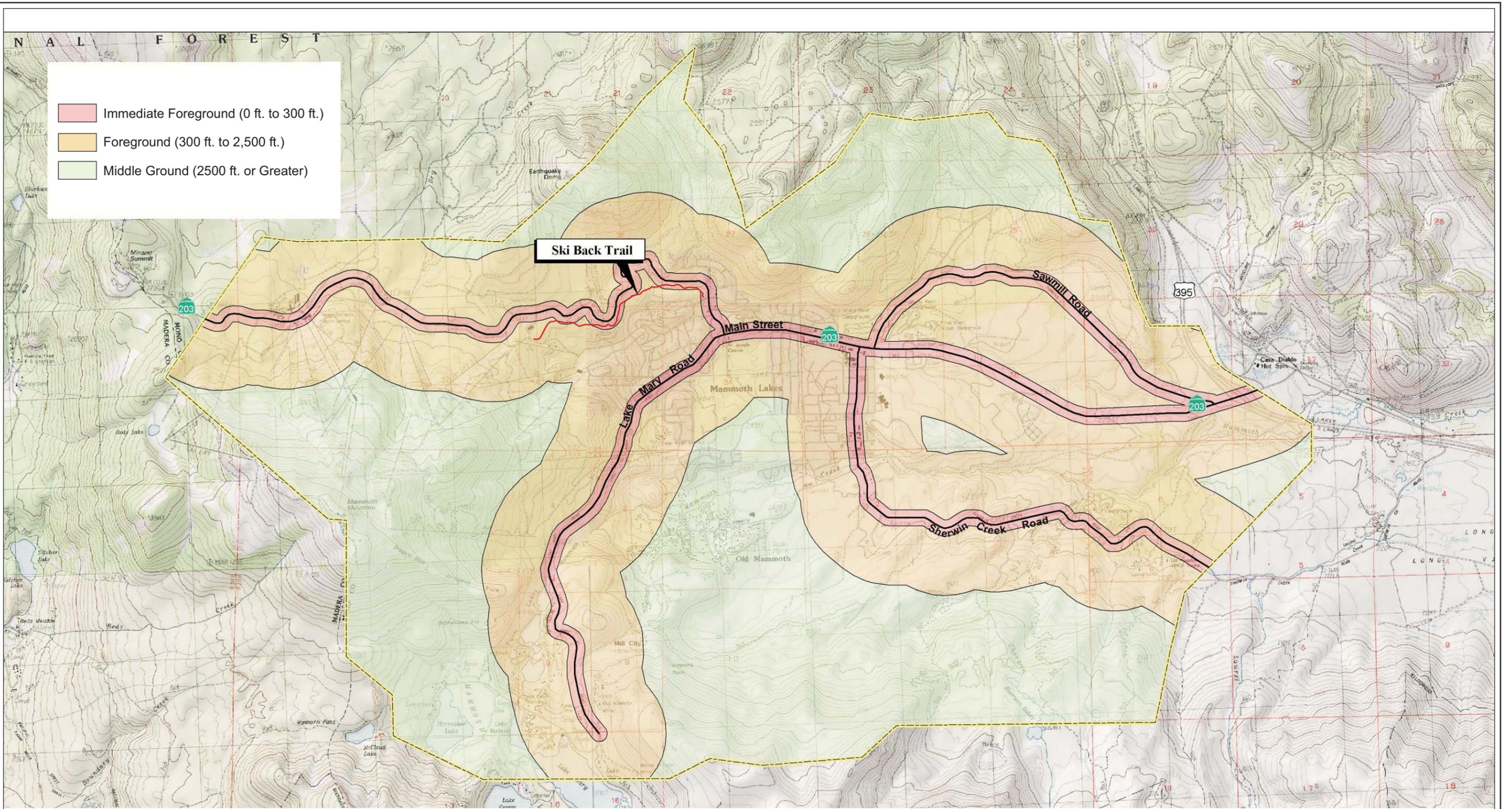
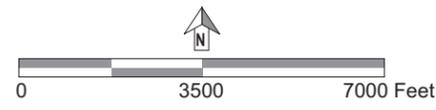


Figure 17
Landscape Visibility (Typical Cross-Section)

Source: LSA, 2007.

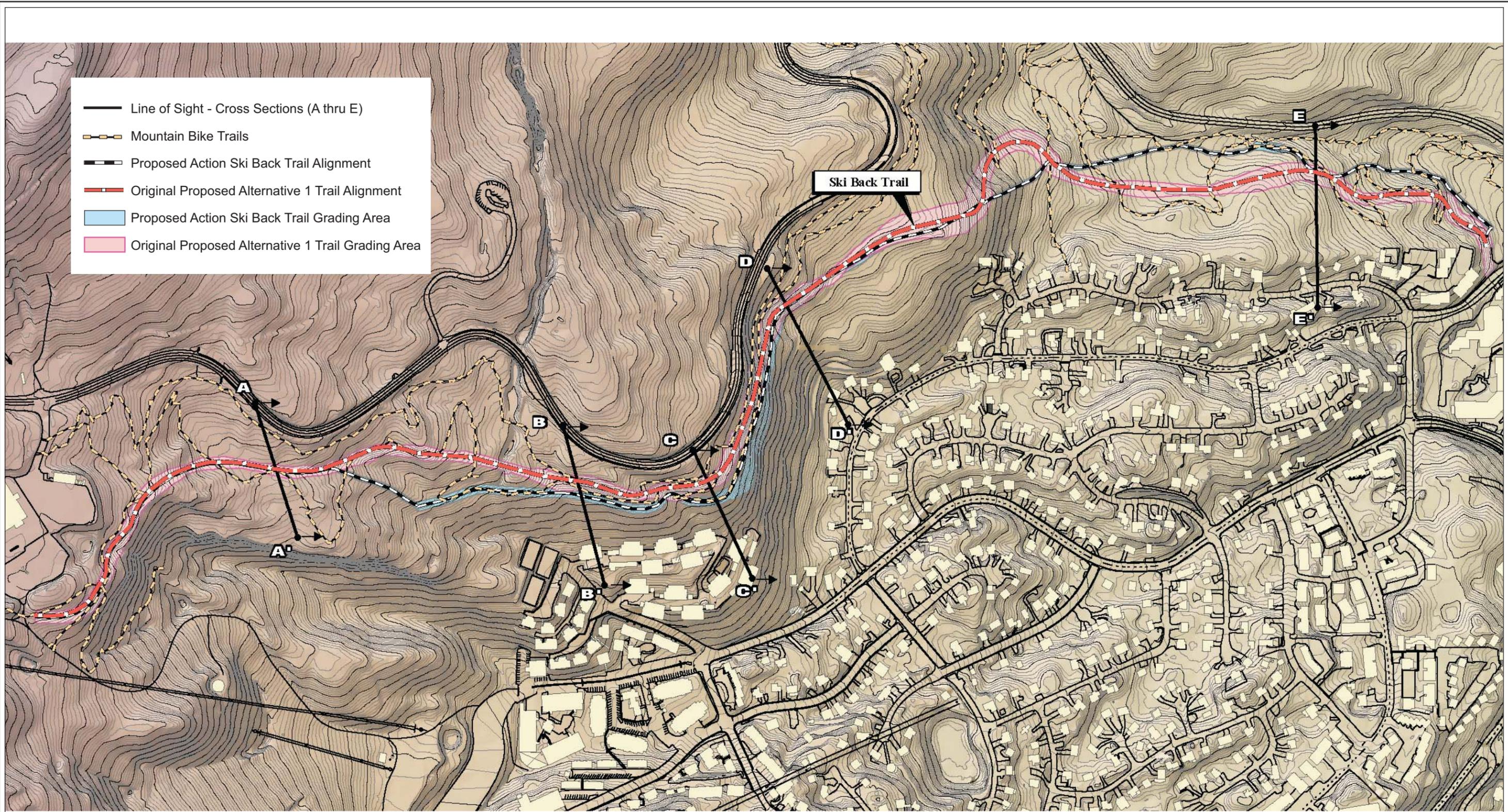


- Immediate Foreground (0 ft. to 300 ft.)
- Foreground (300 ft. to 2,500 ft.)
- Middle Ground (2,500 ft. or Greater)



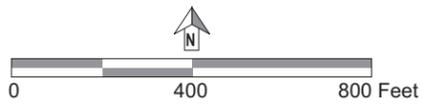
Source: LSA, 2007.

Figure 18
Landscape Visibility



- Line of Sight - Cross Sections (A thru E)
- - - Mountain Bike Trails
- - - Proposed Action Ski Back Trail Alignment
- - - Original Proposed Alternative 1 Trail Alignment
- Proposed Action Ski Back Trail Grading Area
- Original Proposed Alternative 1 Trail Grading Area

Ski Back Trail



Source: LSA, 2007.

Figure 19
Plan View with Cross-Sections

Table 31
Hierarchy of Concern Levels

	Interest in Scenery		
	High	Moderate	Low
Primary Travelway/Use Area High Use	1	2	2
Primary Travelway/Use Area Moderate Use	1	2	2
Primary Travelway/Use Area Low Use	1	2	3
Secondary Travelway/Use Area High Use	1	2	2
Secondary Travelway/Use Area Moderate Use	1	2	3
Secondary Travelway/Use Area Low Use	1	2	3

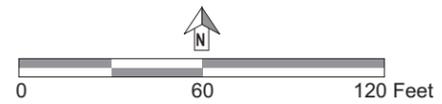
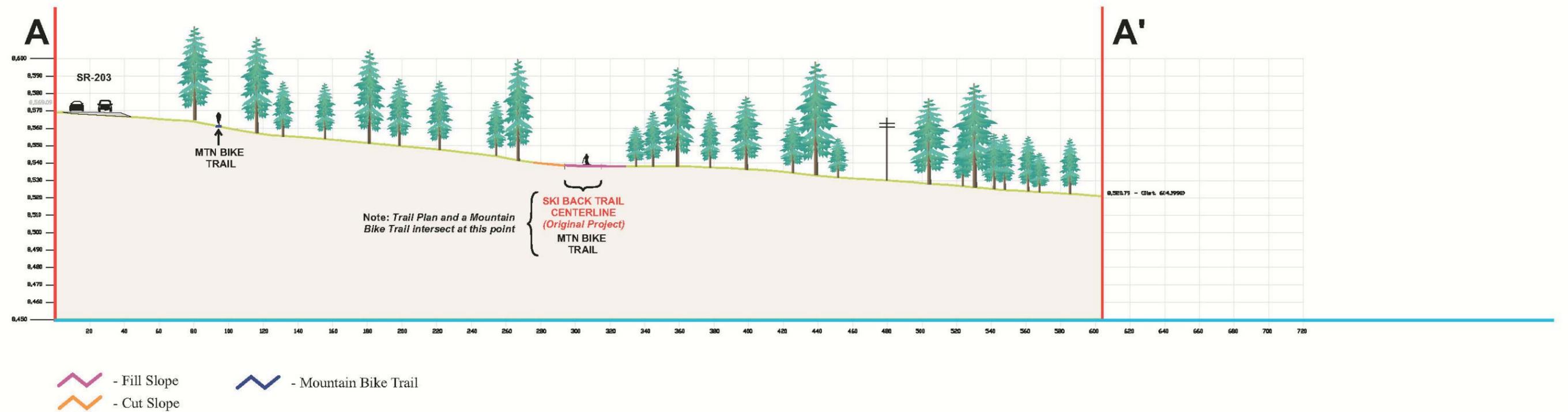
Source: LSA Associates, Inc.

The combination of the existing travelways and lack of appropriate use areas would result in a Concern Level of 2 (combination of Secondary Travelway/Use Area: Moderate Use with a Moderate Interest in Scenery).

It should be noted, however, that Figure 18 depicts these visibility ranges on a two dimensional scale and does not account for the varying topography and landscaping that may inhibit views from these locations. For example, the proposed Ski Back Trail is relatively close to SR-203; however, continual direct views of the proposed alignment are not possible due to differences in elevation. Figure 19 is a plan view of the Ski Back Trail area with a series of cross sections that illustrates the topography and actual visible areas from SR-203 to the south toward the proposed Ski Back Trail alignment. Figure 19 also depicts the previously mentioned bike trails. Figure 19 does not take into account the presence of the existing timber stands, which further serve to impair potential views of the proposed alignment from SR-203. These cross sections were based upon points that would provide the most optional vantage points from SR-203. Figure 20 through Figure 24 on page 207 through 211, respectively, are cross sections that illustrate the perspective from SR-203. With the exception of Figure 23, the topography prevents direct views of the proposed Ski Back Trail alignment. This limited portion of SR-203 essentially provides the only potential public views of the Ski Back Trail alignment.

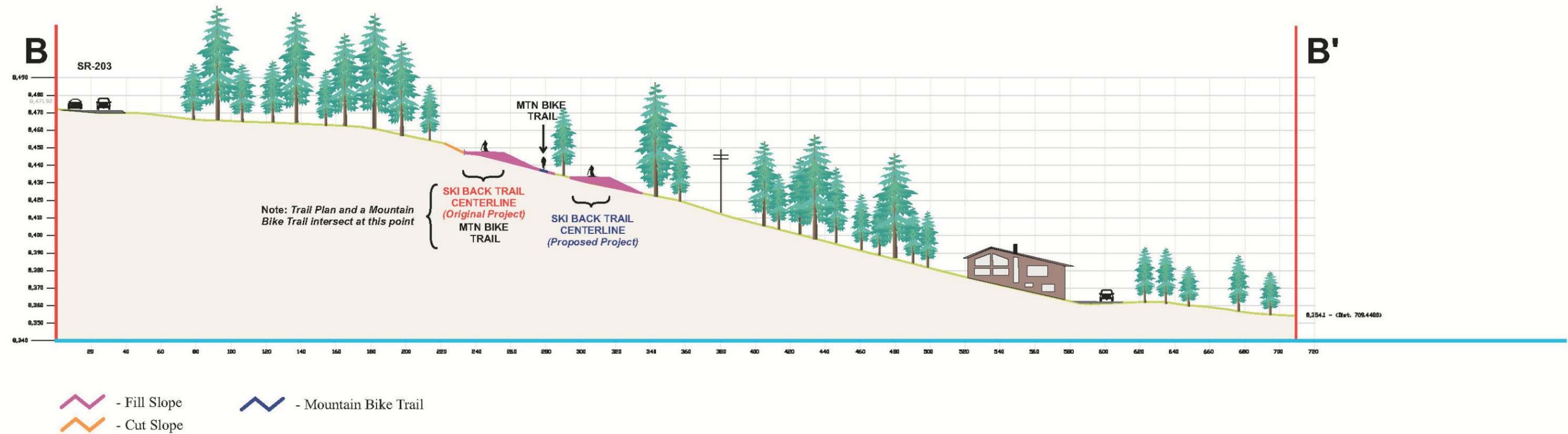
(i) Scenic Classes

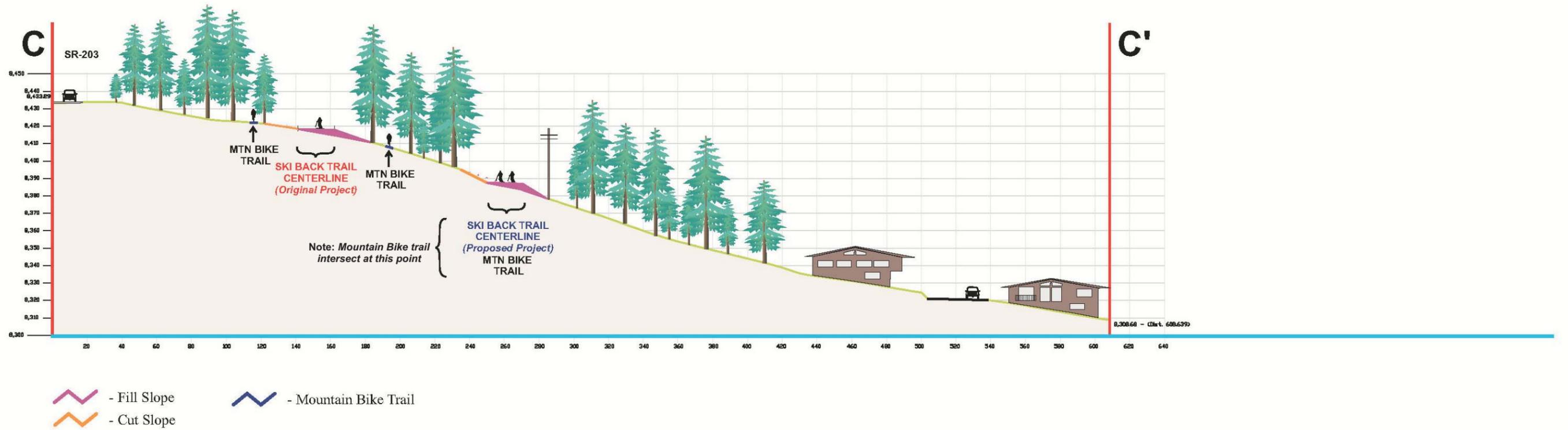
Scenic classification is possible by combining the Scenic Attractiveness classification and Landscape Visibility (Distance Zones). As previously noted, Scenic Attractiveness measures the visual importance of the natural landscape and is divided into three general categories: (1) Distinctive, (2) Typical, and (3) Indistinctive. The proposed Ski Back Trail alignment is within

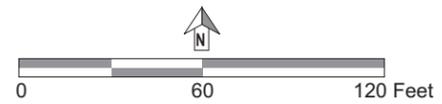
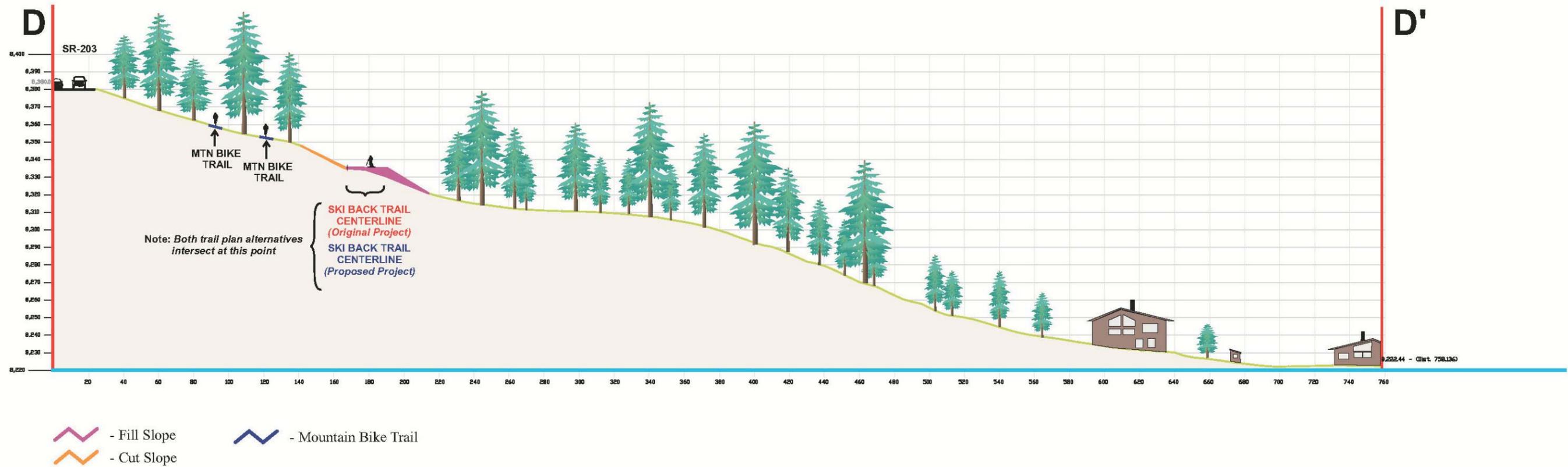


Source: LSA, 2007.

Figure 20
Vantage Point A - Line of Sight Cross-Section

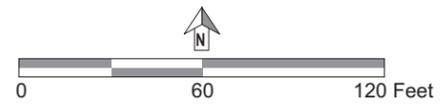
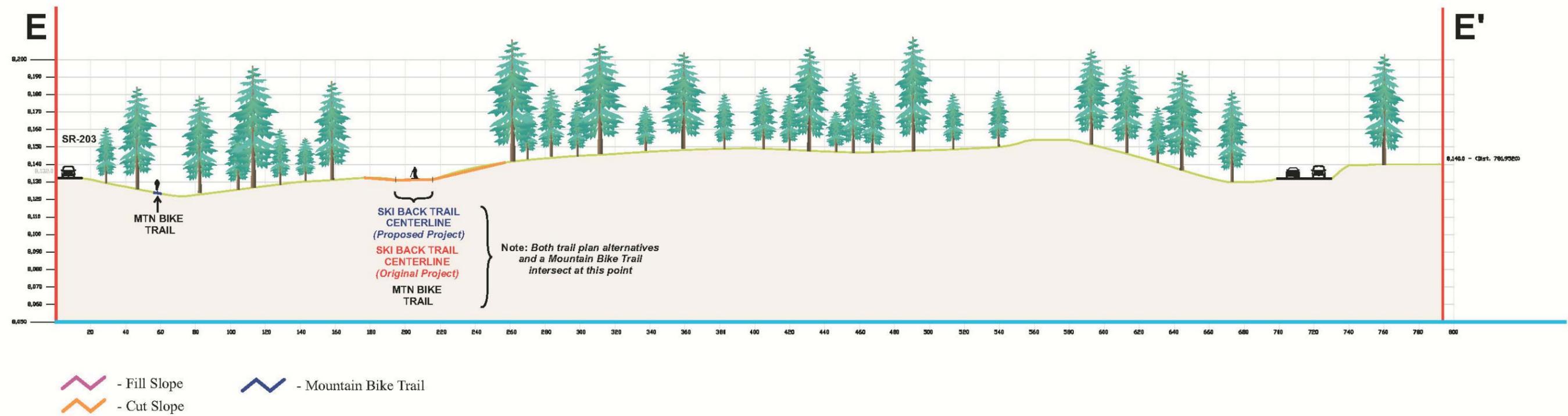






Source: LSA, 2007.

Figure 23
Vantage Point D - Line of Sight Cross-Section



Source: LSA, 2007.

Figure 24
Vantage Point E - Line of Sight Cross-Section

an area tentatively identified as a Typical landscape for the Mammoth area. The higher degree (or relatively closer distance) of visibility from a public vantage point, the greater (or higher) the concern level. Combining these two qualitative facts results in a relatively high concern level.

As previously noted, the proposed Ski Back Trail alignment is not readily viewed from (although in close proximity to) SR-203, due to the grade difference and existing vegetation. Figure 25 on page 213 provides a simple analysis of the applicable Scenic Class by combining the following factors:

- Scenic Attractiveness: Class B, Typical;
- Visibility Distance: Immediate Foreground/Foreground, FG1/FG2; and
- Concern Level: Secondary TW/UA Moderate Use, Moderate Scenery Interest, 2.

Figure 25 depicts a compilation of Scenic Attractiveness (Figure 16) and Landscape Visibility (Figure 18) using GIS. Each of the categories within Scenic Attractiveness and Landscape Visibility were assigned a value, mapped as such, and then combined revealing a range of Scenic Classes. All values were assigned equal weight allowing for a simplified methodology. These values are expressed as follows:

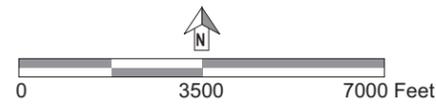
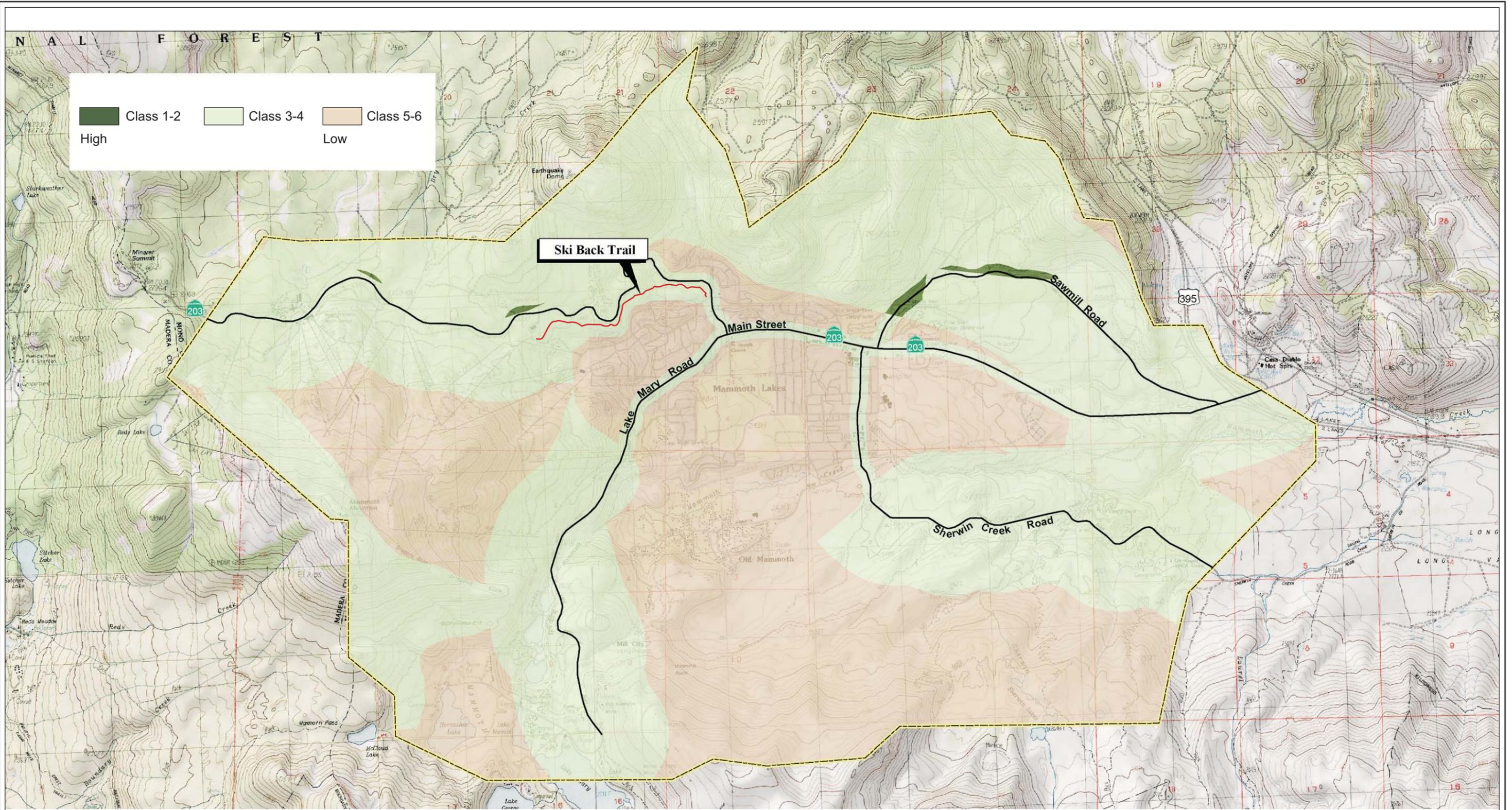
<u>Category</u>	<u>Description</u>	<u>Value</u>
Scenic Attractiveness		
Class A	Distinctive	1
Class B	Typical	2
Class C	Indistinctive	3
Landscape Visibility		
Immediate Foreground	0–300'	1
Foreground	300–2,500'	2
Middle Ground	2,500' +	3

The lower the combined “score,” the higher the public value. Generally, Scenic Classes 1 to 2 have high public value, Classes 3 to 5 have moderate value, and Classes 6 to 7 have low value.⁷² Figure 25 illustrates that the specific Ski Back Trail area received a relative ranking of 3 to 4, or one of having moderate value.

(c) Scenic Integrity

Scenic Integrity speaks to an area’s “completeness” or preservation within its natural state. In regards to the Proposed Action, Scenic Integrity will describe the existing condition as

⁷² *Ibid*, p. 4–14.



Source: LSA, 2007.

Figure 25
Scenic Classes

opposed to establishing a standard for management or preferred future condition. As described below, there are four Scenic Integrity Classes applicable to the study area within the relative aesthetics context.

High: The far upper reaches of the area retain the natural landscape character with no evidence from public vantage points of much, if any, deviation from this landscape character. The ridgeline form, rocky outcrops, and Eastern Sierra landscape appear to be intact.

Moderate: This class includes the mid-slopes of the recreational ski area as well as the relatively unaltered topography to the west, south, and east of the Town. This area maintains a natural landscape dominance with a very minor degree (if noticeable at all) of deviation from this landscape character. This area has been slightly altered by recreational facilities on public land; however, these facilities have been designed to reflect the surrounding natural context with scale, massing, and materials. The natural landscape has generally remained intact.

Low: This class is assigned to the area immediately south of the Town and represents a combination of clustered residential development with open space recreational uses (e.g., golf courses). This development generally depicts a degree of deviation from the natural landscape character. The landscape character has definitely been changed from its natural state.

Very Low: In relative terms, the Town core represents a Very Low Scenic Integrity class due to the intensity and dominance of the built environmental and accompanying infrastructure. The degree of deviation from the natural landscape context can be defined as dominant, with a small portion of the natural landscape remaining intact.

Due to its proximity to SR-203 and the residential areas, and due to the presence of overhead power lines, the Ski Back Trail alignment area is considered to have a “Moderate” level of scenic integrity. Figure 26 on page 215 illustrates the various Scenic Integrity classes assigned to the study area.

(d) Site Specific

As previously mentioned, the SMS is oriented toward large-scale, regional inventories and not necessarily small projects with relatively small magnitudes and significance. Therefore, the traditional SMS has been augmented by a site-specific analysis of the Proposed Action by analyzing its potential impacts to the visual environment. Several steps characterize this analysis. First, the proposed Ski Back trail alignment was mapped. Then potential public vantage points were mapped, primarily focusing on such vantage points along SR-203, located just north of the proposed Ski Back Trail alignment. Photographs were taken from these vantage points portraying existing (pre-Proposed Action) conditions. Where the Ski Back Trail alignment was visible from the public vantage point; the post-Proposed Action condition was depicted using digitally placed improvements or project design features as prescribed by the improvement plans.

Existing landscaping between SR-203 and the proposed Ski Back Trail alignment would be left in place, as much as feasible, in order to retain the existing visual context. Finally, natural rock material from the area would be used to fortify any manufactured slopes on an as-needed basis.

Figure 27 on page 217 depicts the locations of the various vantage points. As noted above, the proposed Ski Back Trail alignment is not readily visible from most of the SR-203 segment in this area, thereby limiting the potential number of vantage points. Four public vantage points (A–D) were established and photographed. In addition, two privately oriented vantage points (E and F) augment the analysis to provide views of the project design features (rock wall).

Vantage Point A

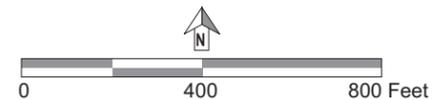
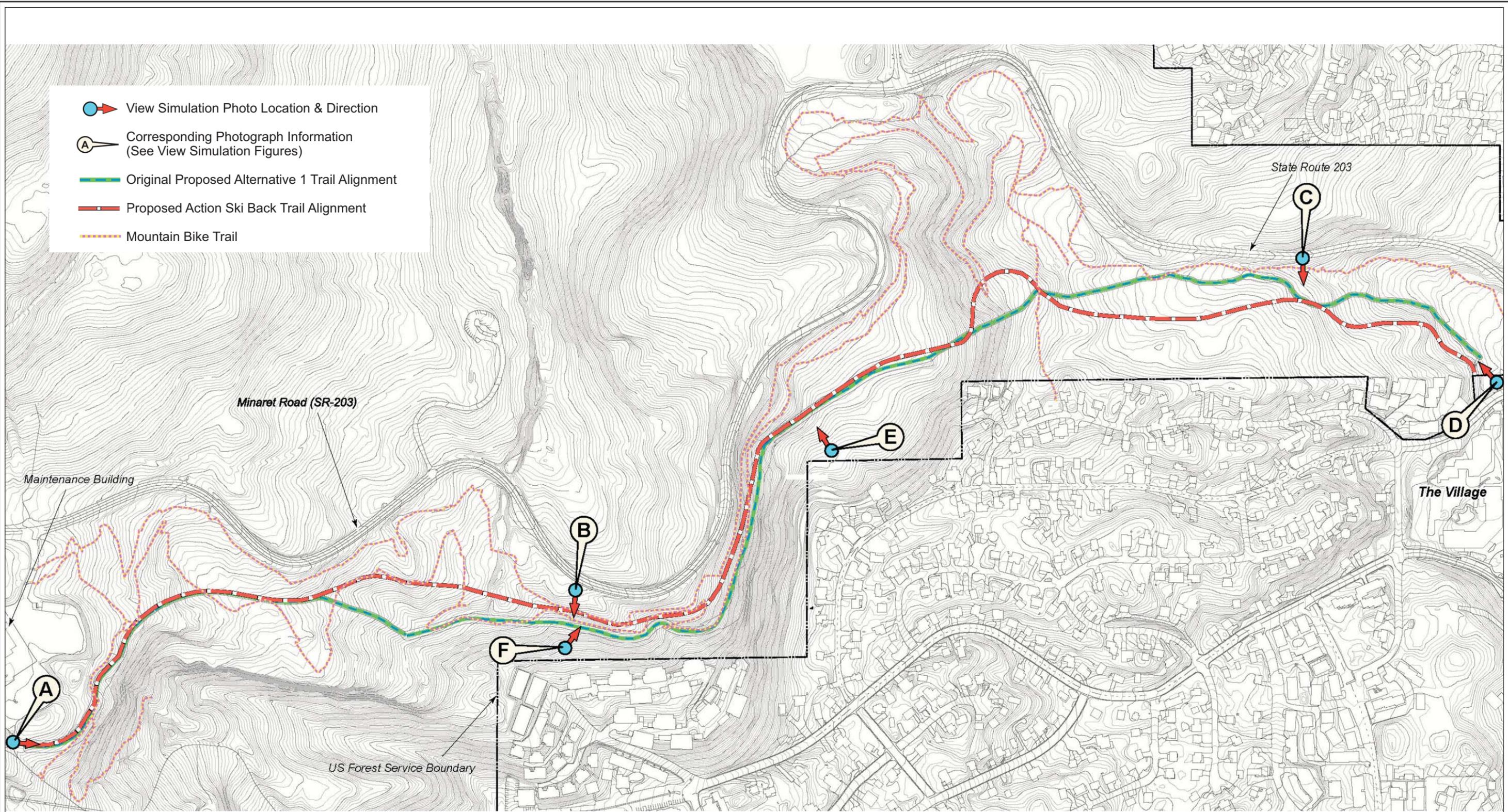
This vantage point depicts the start of the Ski Back Trail at the uppermost elevation. Figure 28A on page 218 provides the existing view, while Figure 28B on page 219 illustrates the post-Proposed Action view. The most notable change in view would be the removal of several trees and signage indicating the trail's location and direction. The existing visual context remains unchanged because the remaining Jeffery pines and red firs are of significant enough size, maturity, and density.

Vantage Point B

Figure 29 on page 220 depicts the vantage point that would provide the best opportunity to view the trail from this portion of SR-203. Due to the elevation difference between the vantage point and proposed Ski Back Trail alignment and the existing tree variety and density, the trail and its support improvements would not be visible from this location.

Vantage Point C

Figure 30 on page 221 depicts the vantage point that would probably be the closest and most direct view of the proposed Ski Back Trail alignment. However, there are no structural improvements proposed for this segment of the trail. The person in the photograph provides a sense of scale and is standing within the alignment of the Proposed Action. The tree density would allow the trail to be constructed without removing these trees. No post-Proposed Action analysis is warranted since the visual change would be minimal, if at all.



Source: LSA, 2007.

Figure 27
View Simulation Photo Locations



Figure 28A
Vantage Point A (Before)

Source: LSA, 2007.



Figure 28B
Vantage Point A (After)

Source: LSA, 2007.



Figure 29
Vantage Point B

Source: LSA, 2007.



Figure 30
Vantage Point C

Source: LSA, 2007.

Vantage Point D

Figure 31A on page 223 provides a vantage point from the intersection of SR-203 and Forest Trail Road. Vantage Point D also illustrates the terminus of the proposed Ski Back Trail. A bridge is located to the left of the scene portrayed in Figure 31B on page 224, connecting the trail to The Village. Figure 31B depicts the post-Proposed Action view from this vantage point. Figure 31B illustrates the proposed use of a slope stabilization measure using vegetation to support the Ski Back Trail. Also, some smaller trees have been removed to accommodate the proposed Ski Back Trail alignment in this area.

Vantage Point E

Figure 32A on page 225 illustrates a vantage point of the proposed Ski Back Trail from a private residential area. Although not a public vantage point, this perspective is provided to allow a view of the use of the slope stabilization measure using natural vegetation and ground cover as a potential design feature, as depicted in Figure 32B on page 226.

Vantage Point F

Figure 33A on page 227 illustrates a vantage point of the proposed Ski Back Trail from a private residence that is located in relatively close proximity. Figure 33B on page 228 depicts the post-Proposed Action condition with the slope stabilization measure using natural vegetation and ground cover.

Summary

In summary, the analysis identified the potentially affected area as having a Scenic Class that reflects the general goals of the INFLRMP, Partial Retention, and even perhaps Retention, so that the existing visual character would not change as a result of the Proposed Action. Therefore, the Proposed Action would not have an adverse effect to regional visual resources.

The site specific visual simulations further support this conclusion. Project design features such as natural rock walls and minimal tree removal would minimize any potential impact to the existing visual resources as a result of the Proposed Action. As such, the Proposed Action would not have an adverse effect to the visual resources along the Ski Back Trail alignment.

(3) Mitigation Measures

Since there would not be an adverse effect due to construction and operational impacts regarding visual resources with implementation of the Proposed Action, no mitigation measures are required.



Figure 31A
Vantage Point D (Before)

Source: LSA, 2007.



Figure 31B
Vantage Point D (After)

Source: LSA, 2007.



Figure 32A
Vantage Point E (Before)

Source: LSA, 2007.



Figure 32B
Vantage Point E (After)

Source: LSA, 2007.



Figure 33A
Vantage Point F (Before)

Source: LSA, 2007.



Figure 33B
Vantage Point F (After)

Source: LSA, 2007.

c. Environmental Consequences of Alternative 1 – Original Alignment Proposal

(1) Construction Impacts

Construction of Alternative 1 would take approximately six months for clearing and grading along the trail right-of-way, construction of the six retaining walls, final grading, storm drain improvements, and implementation of soil erosion control measures. Construction of the Ski Back Trail would also require establishment of additional corridors to provide adequate access points to the trail. The unimproved temporary access roads would be approximately 10 to 15 feet wide. After the construction of Alternative 1 is completed, the temporary access roads would be decommissioned by grading the compacted soils and re-vegetating the areas with native plants. However, Alternative 1 would require a substantially greater amount of cut and fill along the proposed alignment. Specifically, Alternative 1 would require the export of 23,000 cubic yards of cut and the import of 2,000 cubic yards of rock stack, thereby resulting in an increase in the amount of construction equipment traversing the trail and access corridors and the amount of construction time.

Regardless, construction of Alternative 1 would be short-term with most of the construction activity occurring out of the line of sight for travelers along SR-203 and the residential uses to the south. The most visible portion of the construction activity would be the construction equipment traversing the access corridors. However, as noted above, these access corridors would utilize existing corridors, including utility pole lines and utility access roads, which have already been cleared and/or are currently being utilized by mechanical equipment. In addition, the access corridors would be decommissioned after construction activities are complete and re-vegetated with native plants and materials. As such, there would not be an adverse effect since the construction activities would be short-term with limited viewsheds of the construction activities.

(2) Operational Impacts

(a) Visual Sensitivity

Scenic Attractiveness for Alternative 1 can be classified as follows (refer to Figure 16 for an illustration of the classes for this subregion):

(i) Class A

In the general Mammoth subregion, distinctive landscapes are exemplified by the landforms resulting from the combined tectonic and volcanic forces, most notably the upper

slopes and skyline. Specifically, this area appears to be unaltered and retains much of the natural landscape.

(ii) Class B

The green timber and other Eastern Sierra vegetation provide an aesthetically pleasing contrast to the abrupt topography, sheer rock faces, and blue sky. Again, it is apparent that the tree stands have been isolated by urban development on the lower slopes, recreational development (e.g., ski runs) on the upper slopes, and the network of roadways connecting these areas. The design, form, color, and massing of the ski-related structures and facilities attempt to acknowledge and complement the surrounding natural landscape. The residential development, while being influenced by and reflective of the surrounding alpine context, tends to be more intense and warrants a greater degree of infrastructure than the recreational facilities. Generally, a positive scenic quality has been maintained.

(iii) Class C

The majority of the valley floor and lower slopes is occupied by urban development that is distinct from the areas dedicated to public ski areas. The Town core is an intense development of residential, commercial, and institutional uses with supporting infrastructure. This development has changed the natural landscape character of much of the valley floor, resulting in a relatively low scenic value.

(b) Landscape Visibility

Figure 19 depicts three landscape visibility ranges, primarily due to limited visual range within the study area. SR-203, near the Alternative 1 trail alignment, is classified as a Secondary Travelway with Moderate Use. The Alternative 1 area is not readily visible from visitor centers, vista points, ski areas, and recreational sites to any significant degree. The combination of the existing travelways and lack of appropriate use areas would result in a Concern Level of 2 (combination of Secondary Travelway/Use Area: Moderate Use with a Moderate Interest in Scenery). However, as illustrated in Figure 20 through Figure 24, with the exception of Figure 23, the topography along the Alternative 1 trail alignment prevents direct views of the proposed Ski Back Trail alignment. Therefore, this limited portion of SR-203 essentially provides the only potential public views of the proposed Ski Back Trail alignment.

(i) Scenic Classes

As previously noted, the Alternative 1 trail alignment is not readily viewed from (although in close proximity to) SR-203 due to the grade difference and existing vegetation.

Figure 25 illustrates that the Alternative 1 area received a relative ranking of 3 to 4, or one of having moderate value.

(c) Scenic Integrity

Due to its proximity to SR-203 and the residential areas, and due to the presence of overhead power lines, the Alternative 1 alignment area is considered to have a “Moderate” level of scenic integrity. Figure 26 illustrates the various Scenic Integrity classes assigned to the Alternative 1 alignment area.

(d) Site Specific

Existing landscaping between SR-203 and the Alternative 1 trail alignment would be left in place, as much as feasible, in order to retain the existing visual context. In addition, natural rock material from the area would be used to fortify any manufactured slopes on an as-needed basis. Finally, the Alternative 1 alignment is not readily visible from most of the SR-203 segment in this area, thereby limiting the potential number of vantage points. Four public vantage points (A–D) were established and photographed. In addition, two privately oriented vantage points (E and F) augment the analysis to provide views of the project design features (rock wall).

Vantage Point A

This vantage point depicts the start of the Alternative 1 trail alignment at the uppermost elevation. Figure 28A provides the existing view, while Figure 28B illustrates the post-Alternative 1 view. The most notable change in view would be the removal of several trees and signage indicating the trail’s location and direction. The existing visual context remains unchanged because the remaining Jeffery pines and red firs are of significant enough size, maturity, and density.

Vantage Point B

Figure 29 depicts the vantage point that would provide the best opportunity to view the Alternative 1 trail from this portion of SR-203. Due to the elevation difference between the vantage point and the Alternative 1 trail alignment and the existing tree variety and density, the trail and its support improvements would not be visible from this location.

Vantage Point C

Figure 30 depicts the vantage point that would probably be the closest and most direct view of the Alternative 1 trail alignment. However, there are no structural improvements

proposed for this segment of the trail. The Alternative 1 alignment is located several yards/meters beyond this point. However, the tree density would allow the trail to be constructed without removing these trees. No post-Alternative 1 analysis is warranted since the visual change would be minimal, if at all.

Vantage Point D

Figure 31A provides a vantage point from the intersection of SR-203 and Forest Trail Road. Vantage Point D also illustrates the terminus of the Alternative 1 trail alignment. A bridge is located to the left of the scene portrayed in Figure 31B, connecting the trail to The Village. Figure 31B depicts the post-Alternative 1 view from this vantage point. Figure 31B illustrates the proposed use of a slope stabilization measure using vegetation to support the trail. Also, some smaller trees have been removed to accommodate the Alternative 1 alignment in this area.

Vantage Point E

Figure 32A illustrates a vantage point of the Alternative 1 trail from a private residential area. Although not a public vantage point, this perspective is provided to allow a view of the use of the slope stabilization measure using natural vegetation and ground cover as a potential design feature, as depicted in Figure 32B.

Vantage Point F

Figure 33A illustrates a vantage point of the proposed trail from a private residence that is located in relatively close proximity. Figure 33B depicts the post-Alternative 1 condition with the slope stabilization measure using natural vegetation and ground cover.

Summary

In summary, the analysis identified the Alternative 1 area as having a Scenic Class that reflects the general goals of the INFLRMP, Partial Retention, and even perhaps Retention, so that the existing visual character would not change as a result of Alternative 1. Therefore, Alternative 1 would not have an adverse effect to regional visual resources.

The site-specific visual simulations further support this conclusion. Project design features such as natural rock walls and minimal tree removal would minimize any potential impact to the existing visual resources as a result of Alternative 1. As such, Alternative 1 would not have an adverse effect to the visual resources along the Ski Back Trail alignment.

d. Environmental Consequences of Alternative 2 – Transit Emphasis Alternative**(1) Construction Impacts**

Under Alternative 2, the Ski Back Trail would not be constructed. Instead, there would be an increased emphasis on transit provisions focused on returning skiers to The Village. Therefore, there would not be an adverse effect since there would not be any construction activities or associated construction impacts for the Transit Alternative.

(2) Operational Impacts

Alternative 2 involves providing four additional bus trips originating from the Main Lodge and associated parking areas to The Village during the peak hour. As such, the increase in bus trips would occur along SR-203, which is a road that currently carries a large amount of traffic. An additional four bus trips along this roadway would not alter the visual character, landscape character, or scenic integrity of the area. As such, Alternative 2 would not result in an adverse effect regarding visual resources.

e. Environmental Consequences of Alternative 3 – No Action Alternative**(1) Construction Impacts**

Under Alternative 3, the Ski Back Trail would not be constructed. Therefore, there would not be any construction activities or associated construction impacts for the No Action Alternative.

(2) Operational Impacts

Under Alternative 3, the Ski Back Trail would not be constructed. Therefore, there would be no impacts to the visual character, landscape character, or scenic integrity under the No Action Alternative.

f. Conformity with Applicable Plans and Policies

The Proposed Action and Alternative 1 would be consistent with Chapter 2 of the INFLRMP, since it would maintain the visual quality of the Ski Back Trail area by limiting the amount of grading required, since the majority of the trail would be developed within existing access corridors and along existing utility lines. In addition, due to the intervening topography and vegetation between the trail and the residential community located south of the Ski Back

Trail, the Proposed Action and Alternative 1 would not conflict between the visual quality of the mountain the residential uses viewsheds. Finally, the Proposed Action would work to maintain current visual resources and scenic attractions by significantly reducing the amount of grading required for the Ski Back Trail compared to Alternative 1. In addition, both the Proposed Action and Alternative 1 would utilize cut from the trail for fill where needed elsewhere in the trail and provide retaining walls developed with materials native to the area. As Alternative 2 and Alternative 3 would not involve development of the Ski Back Trail, the visual quality of the area would be maintained, there would be no conflict between visual quality and other resources, and the current visual resources and scenic attractions would be maintained.

While the Proposed Action and Alternative 1 would result in additional winter sports development, it would not result in major visual resource disruptions. While the Ski Back Trail would be developed between SR-203 located north of the trail and residential uses located south of the trail, viewsheds from either the roadway or residential uses would be limited due to intervening topography and vegetation. In addition, it should be noted that the Ski Back Trail is not visible from Highway 395. Therefore, the Proposed Action and Alternative 1 would be consistent with Chapter 3 of the INFLRMP. Alternative 2 and Alternative 3 would not result in an increase in winter sports development and therefore, would not conflict with Chapter 3 of the INFLRMP.

Finally, as concluded above, the Proposed Action and Alternative 1 would not alter the existing visual character of the area, thereby maintaining the Partial Retention designation of the area and having a Scenic Class that reflects the general goals of the INFLRMP. Therefore, the Proposed Action and Alternative 1 would be consistent with Chapter 4 of the INFLRMP and there would not be an adverse effect. Since Alternative 2 and Alternative 3 would not impact the Scenic Class of the Ski Back Trail area, they would be consistent with Chapter 4 of the INFLRMP.