

INTRODUCTION

This visual analysis has been prepared to identify the scenic context and evaluate the potential visual impacts and mitigation measures associated with the proposed Ski Back Trail from the top of chair 7 at the Mammoth Mountain Ski Area (MMSA) (near the garage facility) to the North Village complex in the Town of Mammoth Lakes (Town), California. Figure 1 illustrates the regional and specific locations of the proposed Ski Back Trail project. This report 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 mitigation measures incorporated as part of proposed project design features.

The need for alternative trails, including this Ski Back Trail, has been included in several planning documents and publications. This trail was included in the approved ski area Master Development Plan in 1981, as well as the Transportation Systems Management and Air Quality Mitigation Plan for State Highway 203 in the Vicinity of Mammoth Lakes in Mono County that was adopted by the Mono County Board of Supervisors in 1980. Additionally, the North Village Specific Plan (adopted in 2000) proposes improved circulation partly based on construction of this Ski Back Trail.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

No Project Alternative _____

In this scenario, the Ski Back Trail is not constructed and all other transportation features remain constant with the exception of the proposed modern roundabout at the Minaret Road/Forest Trail intersection.

No Action Plus Enhanced Transit Alternative _____

In this scenario, the Ski Back Trail is not constructed, but there is an increased emphasis on transit provisions focused on returning skiers from Main Lodge, Chair 2/10, and Chair 4/20 to The Village and other destinations in Town.

The increased transit emphasis is roughly equivalent to the projected level of skiers carried on the trail originating from Main Lodge and associated parking areas. This would require four additional buses in the peak hour running only from Main Lodge to The Village. These buses would have a capacity of 240 skiers. In context, this represents about 10 percent of the total skiers coming down via private auto from Main Lodge and associated parking areas in the peak afternoon hour.

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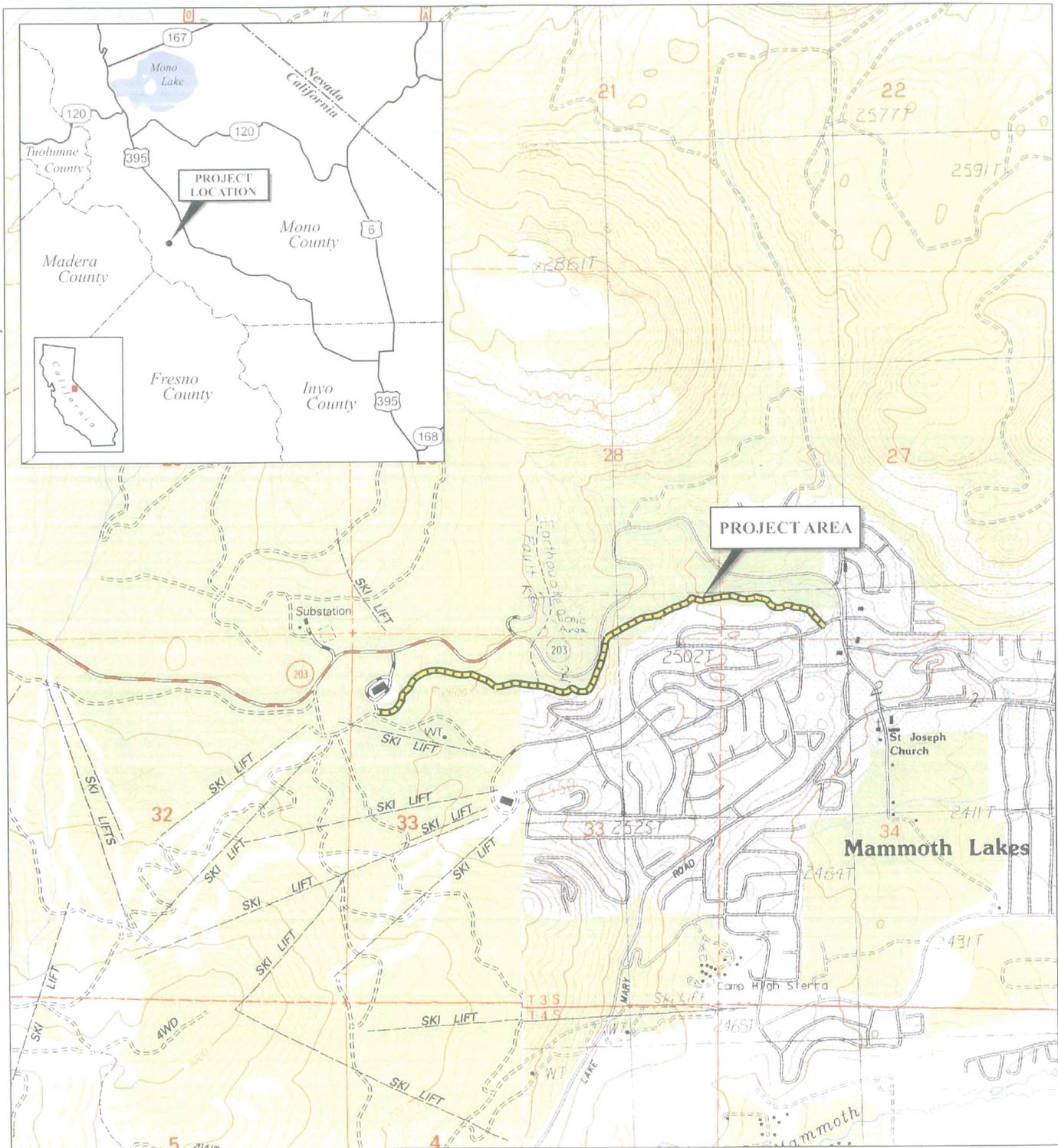


FIGURE 1

LSA

PROJECT AREA

0 1000 2000
FEET

SOURCE: USGS 7.5' Quads - Mammoth Mt. & Old Mammoth, CA.

E:\MMS431\G Location.edr (8/7/07)

Mammoth Mountain Ski Back Trail
Project Location

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If all this increase to transit came from private vehicles, a reduction of about 96 vehicles¹ in the peak hour would occur, again equivalent to about 10 percent of the total vehicular traffic in the peak hour. In terms of potential traffic impacts, a reduction of this level would be a measurable improvement.

It is not likely, however, that this level of traffic reduction would occur. This is because the demand for this additional transit would primarily come from latent transit demand of other transit riders riding before or after the peak hour. Latent transit demand in this case are transit riders who desire to ride the bus between 3:30 and 5:00 p.m. but because the buses are all full they either go on an earlier bus or wait in line until a later (after 5:00 p.m.) bus comes. If more buses are added between 4:00 and 5:00 p.m., the line of transit riders is reduced, but no change in traffic congestion occurs.

In order to divert vehicular traffic into the transit mode it would be necessary to develop another strategy (e.g., parking removal) to physically limit the number of vehicles accessing Main Lodge and associated roadway parking areas. Even with reduced parking, the congestion levels would not necessarily be reduced by the volumes noted. It is more likely that a combination of volume reduction and the duration of congestion (length of time) would be reduced.

Original Project Alignment

Specifically, the original project alignment alternative coincides with the proposed alignment for approximately 1,600 feet at the upper reach and then deviates to the north approximately at Station 60. At this point, the original project proceeds approximately 400 feet upslope in a southeast to northwest direction. The original project roughly parallels the proposed alignment for approximately 1,100 feet between SR-203 and the proposed project alignment.

The original project alternative continues to parallel and even coincides with the proposed alignment as it turns northward until approximately Station 37, where the original alignment suddenly turns north, cutting across a downslope, and turns south again, intersecting the proposed project alignment at approximately Station 30. At this point, the original project alignment extends in a general west to east direction, again parallel to and south of the proposed alignment. It continues in this manner until the trail's terminus near the intersection of Forest Trail and Minaret Road.

Although it would not be visible from many public vantage points, the original project alignment would require a greater degree of grading, and accompanying retaining walls, throughout its entire length when compared to the proposed project alignment.

Proposed Project Alignment

The proposed Ski Back Trail will provide primarily skiers (not snowboarders) an alternative modal choice to reach The Village without the use of private autos, transit, or the gondola.

¹ Assumed 2.5 skiers/car Mammoth Mountain Master Plan, Table II.20, page II-58.

Figure 2 illustrates the proposed alignment for the Ski Back Trail, as well as the original project alignment. This trail will enable skiers from the ski area to return to the lodging facilities or meeting places in The Village without the use of private or public motor vehicles or the gondola from Canyon Lodge. Generally paralleling the southerly side of State Highway 203, the ski back trail will be accessible from the top of chairs 4 and 17, Canyon Express, Goldrush Express, and from the top of chairs 5, 9, 20, 21, 22, 25, and Panorama Gondola.

The proposed trail will be at the upper-beginner/lower-intermediate level. It will be approximately 8,000 feet (ft) long with a width of approximately 22 ft (which will accommodate snowcat grooming). A 2:1 sideslope will be attainable for the majority of the trail; however, retaining walls will be necessary for some sections of trail for several hundred feet. All retaining walls will be of geotextile/native boulder construction, using rocks with colors representative of this area and will be approximately four feet high. It is expected that there will be sufficient numbers of rocks from trail excavation to construct the walls using all local material. The retaining wall covering the part of the trail from Stations 43–53 varies in height from 5 to 12.5 ft and will use soil nail construction techniques. An additional retaining wall will range from 1 to 4 ft in height from Stations 56 to 63. The architectural wall treatment will visually reflect the existing, surrounding natural landscape.

Trail construction will utilize cut slopes rather than fill as much as possible in order to minimize the visual impact to residents in the adjacent Mammoth Slopes neighborhood. Both temporary and permanent erosion control measures are shown on the plans, including proposed revegetation using primarily grasses for the trail surface and a mix of native shrubs, wildflowers, and grasses for the disturbed slope areas.

Trail and retaining wall construction will be performed using existing access corridors (utility pole line and utility access road from State Highway 203) as feasible. However, establishment of additional corridors will be necessary. Proposed access corridors are approximately at Station 66 (single point-of-entry from State Highway 203 north of alignment); Station 58 (single point-of-entry from State Highway 203 north of alignment); Station 17 (access to State Highway 203 north of alignment); and Station 2 (north of power line to State Highway 203). These corridors will be approximately 10–15 ft wide, accommodating one-way traffic, and stabilized construction entry/exit measures will be installed at the access road/highway transition. Dust control will be accomplished through periodic watering of the access corridor and area of disturbance. Proposed staging areas are at the garage and/or Chair 4. Any new access corridors constructed will be eliminated upon project completion by regrading and revegetation.

The trail will terminate on an Intrawest-owned parcel on Forest Trail, immediately downhill of the Val d'Isere condominiums. Intrawest owns the parcel on which the trail terminates and will be responsible for the design and construction of a bridge over Forest Trail that will connect skiers from the Ski Back Trail to The Village.

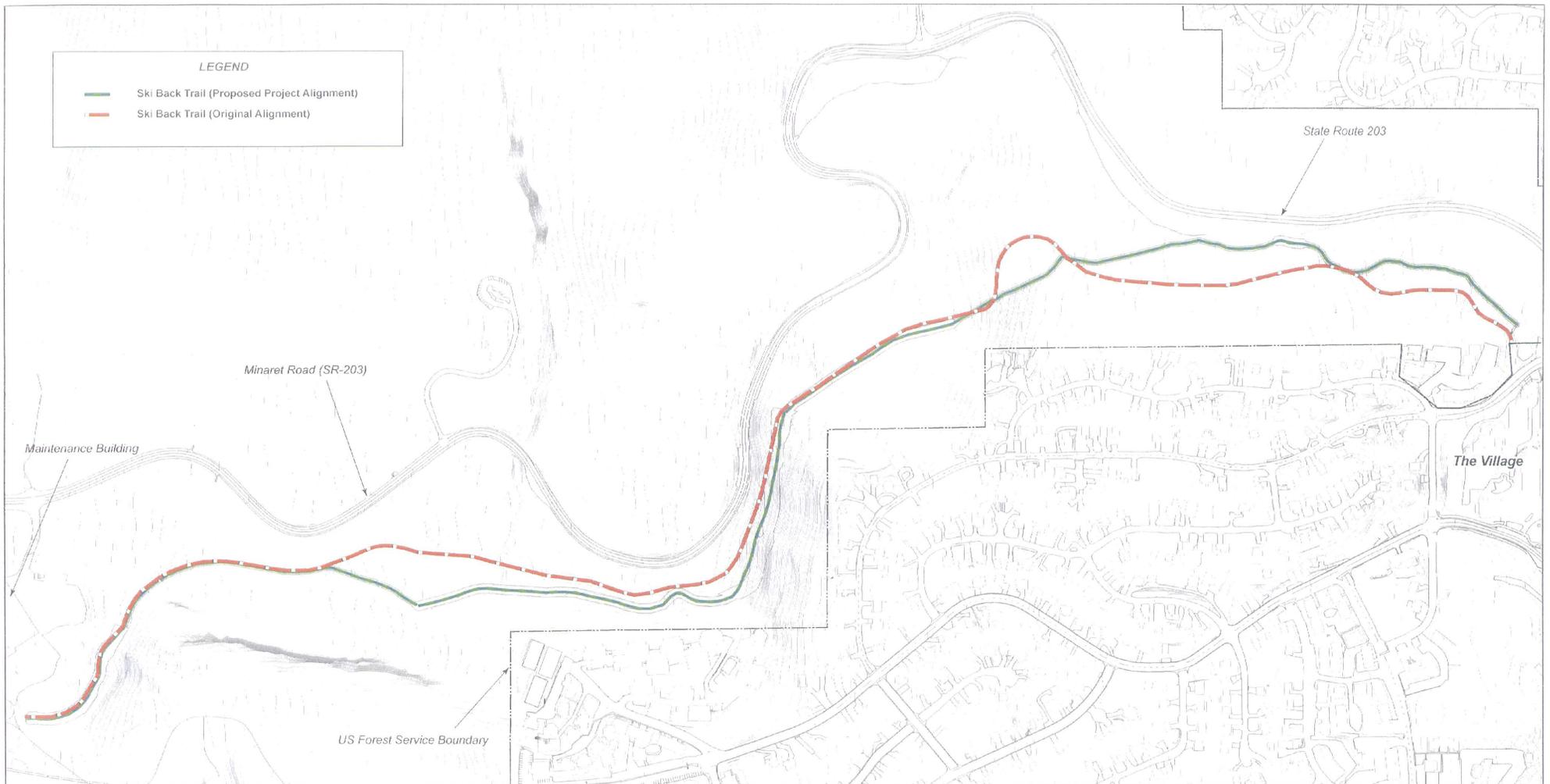
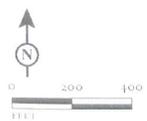


FIGURE 2

LSA



SOURCE: Tract Holdings, Inc. 6/28/04
 U:\MMS4314\Trail alignments Rev2.dwg (7/13/07)

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Snow-making is also proposed, but full implementation is not planned until snow-retention information on the trail has been collected over several snow seasons. In general, snow-making and grooming will not take place between the hours of 8 p.m. and 7 a.m. Snow-making generally only takes place early in the ski season (November–December). It is estimated that a total of 60 hours would be required for snow-making activities for the entire ski season. Times of day for snow-making vary and are dependent upon ambient temperatures around 32 degrees Fahrenheit (°F). In general, the trail will be groomed once daily, although on heavily trafficked days an additional grooming pass may be considered.

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 caldera²) surrounded by moderately to steeply rising slopes on the south, west, and north. Physical and visual access into Mammoth commences from the east at the State Highway 203 and U.S. 395 interchange. Traveling westerly directly into town, urbanization typical of a destination resort dominates the immediate horizontal view. State Highway 203 consistently rises as it proceeds west, which directs the eye upward toward the mountains. Mammoth Mountain, located directly to west of the 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 State Highway 203 and existing residential development. The proposed trail alignment, State Highway 203 and residential development are oriented in general west to east direction. State Highway 203 is located to the north and at a higher elevation than the proposed trail alignment. The residential development is located to the south of and at a lower elevation than the proposed trail alignment.

This area has a moderately dense cover of Jeffrey pines (*Pinus jeffreyi*), with trees ranging from several inches to nearly 80 ft above the ground surface. In addition, red fir (*Abies magnifica*) populates the proposed ski back trail area. 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*

² 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).