

Crandall OHV Restroom (34287) Environmental Assessment

Stanislaus National Forest
Mi-Wok Ranger District
Tuolumne County, California

Introduction

The Forest Service prepared this Environmental Assessment (EA) in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and other relevant Federal and State laws and regulations. This EA discloses the direct, indirect, and cumulative environmental impacts that would result from the proposed action and alternatives. Additional documentation, including more detailed analyses of project-area resources, may be found in the project record located at the Mi-Wok Ranger District Office in Mi Wuk Village, CA.

Purpose and Need for Action

The Crandall OHV Restroom project area (Figure 1) is a popular OHV day use parking and camping site for visitors to the Deer Creek/Crandall Peak area. No restroom facilities exist within this high use area. Human waste and toilet paper is often found within the area. Users of this area are digging shallow holes to deposit human waste and toilet paper due to lack of facilities.

The Forest Service completed the Stanislaus National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) on October 28, 1991. The Stanislaus National Forest “Forest Plan Direction” (USDA 2010)¹ presents the current Forest Plan management direction, based on the original Forest Plan, as amended. The Forest Plan Direction that applies to this project includes forestwide standards and guidelines (p. 33-64); and, management area direction for Developed Recreation Sites (p. 165-170). The Forest Plan Goal for Recreation (p. 6) includes:

Provide a wide range of recreation opportunities directed at various experience levels to meet current and projected demand, including campgrounds, hiking trails, picnic areas, OHV trails, etc. Develop recreation management plans for existing and potential areas of concentrated public use. These plans shall address such aspects including: family and group facilities, existing or potential on-site problems, facilities needed to serve dispersed activities. Provide a variety of off-highway vehicle (OHV) recreational opportunities in a manner consistent with protection of wildlife and other resources, and with non-motorized recreation.

The purpose of this project is to install a single unit prefabricated concrete vault² restroom at this site. The action is needed to provide restroom facilities in a high use site, reducing potential impacts associated with site use. The goal of this project is to provide the public with a facility to prevent deposition of human waste and toilet paper throughout the site. This action is needed to move the project area towards desired conditions described in the Forest Plan, while increasing visitor satisfaction and improving health and safety at the site. All proposed actions are designed consistent with the applicable Forest Plan Direction (see Project Design Elements).

Proposed Action

Alternative 1 (Proposed Action) below provides a detailed description of the Proposed Action.

¹ USDA 2010. Forest Plan Direction. Forest Service, Stanislaus National Forest, Sonora, CA. April 2010.

² Vault toilets are self-contained structures requiring periodic removal (pumping) of waste materials.

A legal notice announcing the 30-day Opportunity to Comment on the EA appeared in the Union Democrat on February 13, 2013. The Forest mailed copies of the EA to those parties who previously expressed interest in the project. The 30-day comment period ended on March 15, 2013. During the comment period, two interested parties submitted letters supporting the project.

Alternatives

This section describes one alternative considered for the Crandall OHV Restroom project: Alternative 1 (Proposed Action). NEPA regulations (36 CFR 1502(c)) do not require consideration of a no action alternative in an EA (FSH 1909.15_14.2). The EA may document consideration of a no action alternative through the effects analysis by contrasting the impacts of the proposed action and any alternatives(s) with the current condition and expected future condition if the proposed action were not implemented (36 CFR 220.7(b)(2)(ii)).

Alternative 1 (Proposed Action)

Alternative 1 (Proposed Action) includes the following improvements for the Crandall OHV Restroom project.

1. Install pre-fabricated concrete vault restroom structure excavating a 15 feet long, 7 feet wide by 5 feet deep hole, placing concrete vault and restroom structure with crane, and backfill and compact excavated soil around installed structure (Appendix A).
2. Install ten 8 inch wide by 42 inch long pressure treated barrier posts about 24 inches into ground between the restroom and 17EV238 (Crandall OHV access road) (Appendix B).
3. Grade (level) and harden pathway from roadway to restroom structure and around structure. Tread hardening would include compacted crushed rock aggregate and would meet all accessibility requirements.

Ground disturbing activities which would occur over the course of about three days include: traffic control barriers (e.g., posts); excavation for vault (tank) placement underground; backfilling and compaction of excavated soil around structure; grading of site and placement of rock aggregate for accessibility from road to restroom; placement of erosion control material (e.g., weed free straw) on any remaining bare ground associated with the project; and, signing (e.g., fiberglass marker posts, wood posts, steel channel posts). Hand tools and equipment (shovels, rakes, posthole auger, backhoe, dozer, truck and crane) will be utilized for completion of project activities.

Force account (Forest Service) and/or contract labor would complete the proposed work during the 2013 field season. The project is funded in cooperation with the California State Parks Off Highway Motor Vehicle Recreation Division Cooperative Agreement (Grant) Program.

Project Design Elements

The following project design elements apply to this alternative.

Cultural

A review of the Forest's heritage resource files revealed that all of the Area of Potential Effect (APE) has been previously inventoried and no heritage resources of interest are located within the APE. If any cultural resources are discovered during implementation, all project activities would cease and the District Archaeologist would be notified.

Hydrology

Best Management Practices

Water quality management is a Forest responsibility per agreement between the California Water Quality Control Board and the Pacific Southwest Region of the Forest Service (USDA 2011)³.

Non-point source pollution on National Forests is managed through the Regional Water Quality Management Plan (USDA 2011) and the National Best Management Practices for Water Quality Management on National Forest System Lands (USDA 2012)⁴, which relies on implementation of prescribed best management practices (BMPs). Beneficial uses of water are protected by BMPs, which prevent or minimize the threat of discharge of pollutants of concern.

The Water Quality Management Plan includes ten BMPs for recreation management on National Forest System Land. Recreation activities are required to comply with these BMPs.

Of particular relevance for this project, BMP 4-7-9 (Concentrated – use area management) requires each forest to prevent or minimize the discharge of sediment, petroleum, and chemical products, or human waste into water bodies – and the contamination of groundwater by infiltration through soils – by planning, constructing, installing and maintaining drainage and runoff treatments at OHV staging areas, and by managing the risk of pollution at high-use and high-risk OHV areas.

The following BMPs are provided to reduce the potential for impact from this activity.

- 2-11 – Equipment Refueling and Servicing
- 2-13 – Erosion Control Plans
- 4-4 – Control of Sanitation Facilities
- 4-7-9 – Concentrated – Use Area Management
- 7-6 – Water Quality Monitoring

Special Mitigation Measures

1. Designate a construction staging area, with a specific location for fueling and servicing to minimize water-quality impacts. This area should be away from water and riparian resources and/or any location that may receive concentrated runoff.
2. If there is a spill of petroleum/chemicals products such as gasoline, diesel, oil, grease, hydraulic fluids, antifreeze, coolants, clean it up and properly dispose of spilled materials from National Forest System land following the Stanislaus National Forest Oil and Hazardous Substances Pollution Contingency Plan (Spill Plan), August 2011.
3. An actual Erosion Control Plan is not needed for the project since it meets two of the four listed exemptions documented on the Water Quality Management Plan (USDA 2011, p. 123, Item 1 and 3). The project area is not within a riparian area, the slope is fairly flat, and the impacted area is less than 10,000 square feet. Although an Erosion Control Plan is not necessary for the project, project site specific BMPs would prevent or minimize any erosion or sedimentation caused by the proposed ground disturbing activities.

³ USDA 2011. FSH 2509.22, Soil and Water Conservation Handbook, Chapter 10 Water Quality Management Handbook, Best Management Practices. Forest Service, Pacific Southwest Region, Vallejo, CA. December 2011.

⁴ USDA 2012. National Best Management Practices for Water Quality Management on National Forest System Lands, Volume 1-National Core BMP Technical Guide. FS-990a. Washington, DC. April 2012. online:
http://www.fs.fed.us/biology/resources/pubs/watershed/FS_National_Core_BMPs_April2012.pdf

4. Place silt fences, hay (free of weed) or other sediment entrapment devices around potential sediment sources during earthmoving phases of construction. Maintain and repair them as needed to assure continued performance of their intended function.
5. Consult with State and local authorities prior to the installation of new sanitation facilities, and obtain necessary permits to assure compliance with all applicable State and local regulations.
6. Provide education and training on the principles of backcountry sanitation using signs, printed information, mass media, and personal contact.
7. This site is subject to implementation and effectiveness monitoring using the Best Management Practices Evaluation Program (BMPEP) (USDA 2002)⁵.

Noxious Weeds

All equipment, including backhoes, excavators, graders, post hole diggers, and other tools that work with earth must be free of soil, mud (wet or dried), seeds, vegetative matter or other debris that could contain seeds in order to prevent new infestations of noxious weeds in the project area. Dust or very light dirt that would not contain weed seed is not a concern.

Wildlife

If any threatened, endangered, candidate or Forest Service sensitive species are discovered during or prior to implementation of this project, the District Wildlife Biologist would be notified immediately and adequate mitigation measures would be taken.

Environmental Consequences

This section summarizes the physical, biological, social and economic environments of the affected project area and the potential changes to those environments due to implementation of the alternatives. It also presents the scientific and analytical basis for comparison of alternatives presented in Chapter 2.

The following resource specialist reports prepared for this project are incorporated by reference in this EA: Terrestrial Wildlife Biological Assessment and Biological Evaluation (BA/BE), Aquatic Wildlife Input, Management Indicator Species and Migratory Landbird Conservation Report, Sensitive Plant Biological Evaluation (BE), Invasive Plant Risk Assessment, Hydrology Report, and Cultural Resource Input. These reports are available for review as part of the project record.

Effects Relative to Significance Factors

This section describes the context and intensity factors which provide a basis for determining if an action would have significant effects to the human environment (40 CFR 1508.27). It provides brief, yet sufficient evidence and analysis for the responsible official to determine whether to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement or a Finding of No Significant Impact.

Context

This is a site-specific project that by itself does not have international, national, regional, or statewide importance. Project activities will occur on less than 0.25 acres of National Forest near Crandall Peak (NE ¼ Section 32 T4N R17E MDBM). The project area is extensively used for OHV day use parking and camping. Use of the project area for recreation is expected to continue and potentially increase over time.

⁵ USDA Forest Service. 2002. Investigating Water Quality in the Pacific Southwest Region. Best Management Practices Evaluation Program (BMPEP) User's Guide. Pacific Southwest Region. Vallejo, CA.

Intensity

The following ten elements of impact intensity address the potential significance of project effects.

1. Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse.

The direct and indirect effects of the alternatives are addressed here. Cumulative effects are addressed below under intensity factor 7.

Aquatic Wildlife

The Forest Aquatic Biologist reviewed Alternative 1 (Proposed Action) and determined that there are no aquatic wildlife concerns.

Cultural

A review of the Forest's heritage resource files revealed that all of the Area of Potential Effect (APE) has been previously inventoried and no heritage resources of interest are located within the APE. No further inventory of these areas is required.

Hydrology

The project area is located on a ridge and not within either a Critical Aquatic Refuge or Riparian Conservation Area; therefore, Riparian Conservation Objectives are not applicable to this project. Water quality criteria for sediment would not likely exceed water quality standards primarily because the site is not located near drainages and opportunities for sediment depositions are minimal or none between the site and the nearest drainage.

The proposed hole excavation to place the restroom structure, the installation of barrier posts, and the proposed grading and their effects are considered minor and of short duration. The potential for sediment production resulting from the project is limited. The placement of rock aggregate for accessibility from road to restroom will result in decreased sediment production, which is a beneficial effect. Project design elements will further reduce potential for off-site movement of sediment.

Indirect effects include increased potential for erosion from soil disturbance, soil compaction, and soil displacement. There will also be a long term benefit from the installation of the restroom facilities. Providing on-site restroom facilities would reduce the potential for water quality contamination by hazards such as fecal coliform, which would ensure the health and safety of recreationists that use the site.

Management Indicator Species

There would be no change to habitat for aquatic macroinvertebrates, black-backed woodpeckers (*Picoides arcticus*), yellow warblers (*Dendroica petechial*), Pacific tree frogs (*Pseudacris regilla*), mountain quail (*Oreortyx pictus*), sooty grouse (*Dendragapus fuliginosus*), mule deer (*Odocoileus hemionus*), fox sparrows (*Passerella iliaca*), California spotted owls (*Strix occidentalis occidentalis*), American martens (*Martes americana*), northern flying squirrels (*Glaucomys sabrinus*) or the hairy woodpeckers (*Picoides villosus*) from project implementation; therefore, no further documentation is required.

Migratory Birds

No effects to migratory birds are expected because Alternative 1 (Proposed Action) is limited in scope and duration. There would be no alteration of habitat for migratory species, only minor noise disturbance to individuals in the project area; therefore, impacts to migratory avian species are expected to be temporary and negligible.

Noxious Weeds

Equipment and ground disturbance could increase risk of introducing weed propagules to the area. Implementation of Design Elements (Chapter 2) would result in a low risk of noxious weed introduction and spread by the project activities.

Sensitive Plants

There are no direct or indirect effects to Sensitive Plant species anticipated for this project. Species considered in detail include three bracted onion (*Allium tribracteatum*), Stebbin's lomatium (*Lomatium stebbinsii*), and pansy monkeyflower (*Mimulus pulchellus*). There is no suitable habitat where the bathroom would be installed. There are two areas of unsurveyed suitable habitat located 350 feet and 600 feet from the proposed site along the access routes to the site. These areas of suitable habitat could be impacted by parking and staging for the project; however, they have already been heavily used for parking. Areas with repeated heavy impacts, particularly when impacts are not restricted to roads, do not have sensitive plants; therefore, the suitable habitat nearby is not occupied.

Determination

Alternative 1 (Proposed Action) will not affect any Sensitive Plant species.

Terrestrial Wildlife

Species were considered in detail in the effects analysis if suitable habitat exists within the elevation and geographic range of the project area. Occurrence records were also considered.

Although suitable habitat for the bald eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*), great gray owl (*Strix nebulosa*), and willow flycatcher (*Empidonax trailii*) exists within the elevation and geographic range of the project area, field visits and District records indicate that the project area does not have known occurrences or potential habitat for these species; therefore, Alternative 1 (Proposed Action) would not affect the aforementioned species or their habitat.

Noise disturbance during restroom installation could affect the following Region 5 Forest Service sensitive species and their habitat: northern goshawk (*Accipiter gentilis*), California spotted owl, Pacific fisher (*Martes pennanti*), American marten, pallid bat (*Antrozous pallidus*), Townsend's big-eared bat (*Corynorhinus townsendii*), and western red bat (*Lasiurus blossevillii*). Noise disturbance would be of short duration (about 3 days) and limited scope. It could temporarily cause wildlife to avoid the project area. Project implementation is not expected to affect individual fitness of any of the aforementioned species. No forested habitat alteration would occur as a result of Alternative 1 (Proposed Action); therefore, no indirect effects are expected.

Determinations

Alternative 1 (Proposed Action) may affect individuals, but is not likely to result in a trend toward Federal listing or loss of viability for the northern goshawk, California spotted owl, American marten, pallid, Townsend's big-eared, or western red bats in the project area.

Alternative 1 (Proposed Action) may affect individuals, but is not likely to contribute to the need for Federal listing or result in loss of viability for the Pacific fisher in the planning area.

2. The degree to which the proposed action affects public health or safety.

Alternative 1 (Proposed Action) will improve public health and safety by reducing the amount of improperly disposed human waste and toilet paper.

3. **Unique characteristics of the geographic area such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas.**

Alternative 1 (Proposed Action) does not contain nor would it adversely affect any parklands, prime farmlands, wild and scenic rivers, ecologically critical areas, or wetlands.

4. **The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial.**

Alternative 1 (Proposed Action) is consistent with all laws, regulations and policy including the Forest Plan as amended. In addition, no issues were raised during scoping that indicated that the degree to which this project may affect the human environment is likely to be highly controversial.

5. **The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.**

Other projects (e.g., the Cherry Borrow Toilet project) have successfully installed similar restroom facilities in high use recreation areas without experiencing unforeseen or unique effects. In addition, specialists have reviewed the proposal and determined that it is not likely to affect individual Forest Service Sensitive species or lead to a trend toward federal listing. These determinations, along with past experience indicate that the project does not involve uncertain, unique, or unknown risks.

6. **The degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration.**

Alternative 1 (Proposed Action) would not establish a precedent for any future actions with significant effects. This decision only applies to the project area and does not represent a decision in principle about a future consideration. Any future action not analyzed in this EA would be analyzed separately and on its own merits at the time it is proposed in the future.

7. **Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts.**

Past activities within the planning area have resulted in the existing condition. Additional past activities beyond the planning areas as well as present and future activities, which vary in extent by resource, are addressed below.

Other present and foreseeable future actions in this area are grazing and recreation activities. These actions would occur with or without the Crandall OHV Restroom project. Alternative 1 (Proposed Action) would incrementally contribute to noise disturbance in the area, but because of the limited scope and duration of project activities, this contribution is negligible. Given the high recreational use of the area, the project would result in a cumulative reduction in any adverse impacts related to improper disposal of human waste and toilet paper.

8. **The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources.**

A Cultural Resource Management Report (#12-51-01) was prepared for this project. A review of the Forest's heritage resource files revealed that all of the area of potential effect was previously inventoried and no cultural resources of interest were located.

The Tuolumne band of the Me-Wuk Indians was informed of the proposal during annual tribal consultation meetings. No cultural issues, concerns or comments were brought forth.

There are no scientific research sites that may be affected by the proposed actions, nor is there any indication that this project would affect any scientific resource.

9. The degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species Act of 1973.

On December 4, 2012, the USDI Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) website (<http://sacramento.fws.gov>) was accessed to obtain a list of threatened and endangered species and species proposed for listing that may occur in or be affected by projects in the Crandall OHV Restroom project area. The list is dated December 4, 2012, and can be found in the project record (Document Number 121204113117). The quad species list includes the Pacific fisher, a candidate species. This list fulfills the requirements to provide a current species list pursuant to the Endangered Species Act.

Determination

Alternative 1 (Proposed Action) may affect individuals, but is not likely to contribute to the need for Federal listing or result in loss of viability for the Pacific fisher in the planning area.

10. Whether the action threatens a violation of Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.

Alternative 1 (Proposed Action) was developed in accordance with and does not threaten violation of any Federal, State, or local laws or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment (i.e., National Forest Management Act, Endangered Species Act, National Historic Preservation Act, Federal Clean Water Act, Executive Order 11988 for Floodplain Management, or the Clean Air Act). The Forest Service has obtained concurrence with USFWS, and SHPO, and would obtain required permits from the appropriate county, state, and federal regulatory agencies prior to implementation.

Consultation and Coordination

The Forest Service consulted the following individuals, Federal, State, and local agencies, tribes and non-Forest Service persons during the development of this environmental assessment:

ID Team Members

Marcie Baumbach, District Wildlife Biologist

Ann Denton, District Ranger

Chuck James, District Recreation Specialist

Steve Holdeman, Forest Aquatic Biologist

Fernando Perez, District Hydrologist

Chris Sorensen, District Planning Forester

Margaret Willits, District Botanist

Pete Wisniewski, District Archaeologist

Federal, State, and Local Agencies

United States Department of the Interior Fish and Wildlife Service, Tuolumne County Board of Supervisors, California Department of Transportation, California State Parks Off-Highway Motor Vehicle Recreation Department, Tuolumne County Sheriff's Department Off-Highway Vehicle Patrol, State Historic Preservation Organization

Tribes

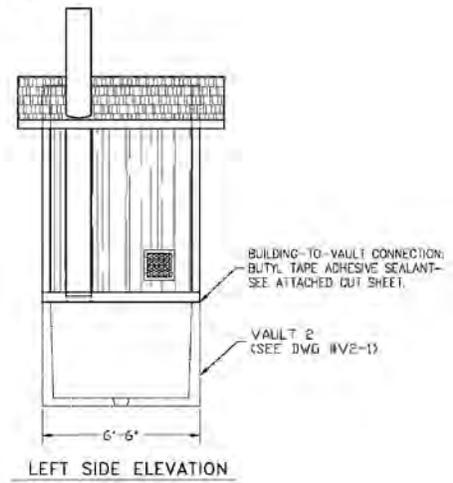
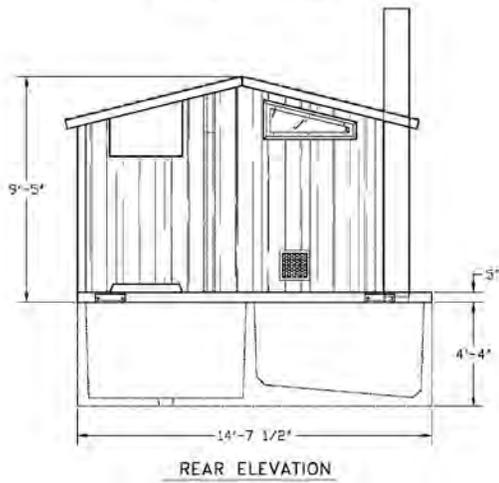
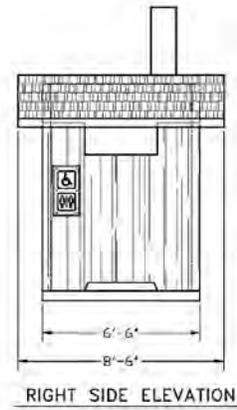
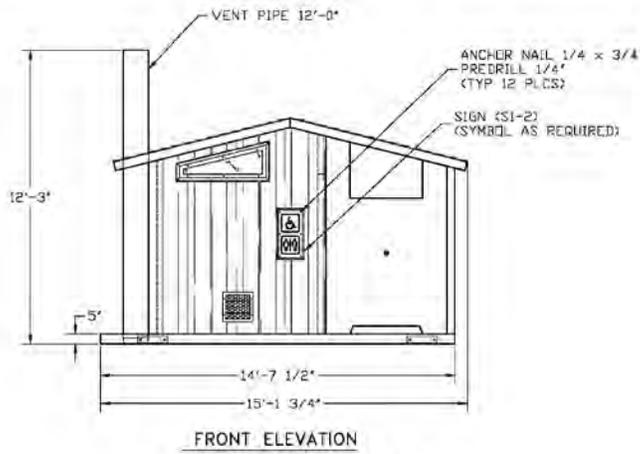
Tuolumne Band of Me-Wuk Indians

Others

Darryl Cully, Mike Damaso (Merced Dirt Riders); Lindsey Myers (Central Sierra Resource Center)

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A. Vault Restroom



B. Barrier Posts

