

**Environmental Assessment For
Team Big Bear – Mountain Bike Race Permit
USDA Forest Service, San Bernardino National Forest
Mountaintop Ranger District
San Bernardino County**

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I. INTRODUCTION

A. Proposed Action

The San Bernardino National Forest (SBNF) is in the process of analyzing a proposal by Team Big Bear, Incorporated, to be issued a multi-year special use permit for a series of mountain bike race events they would hold during the summer and fall each year. Under this multi-year permit, Team Big Bear would be authorized to conduct mountain bike racing events and related activities over 8 to 12 weekend periods from May to October annually. Team Big Bear requested that a special use permit be issued for a minimum of 5 years. For the past 12 years Team Big Bear has been issued temporary (annual) special use permits by the SBNF for their race series. The requested multi-year permit would authorize racing and other related activities to take place just as the temporary permits have done. No new race routes are proposed.

Under this proposal, Team Big Bear mountain bike races would start and end at the Snow Summit Ski Resort. Cross-country races would take place on National Forest system roads and trails, and on existing trails that currently are not system trails. The enclosed project area maps show all of the roads and trails, outside of the ski resort permit boundary, that cross country races would occur on over the course of a summer race season. In addition, downhill race events would take place on mountain bike trails within existing ski runs and associated access roads within the Snow Summit Ski Resort permit boundary.

Team Big Bear estimates the average number of event participants is seven hundred and fifty. The number of spectators is estimated to be about the same. Most spectators remain near the race start-finish line in the base area of the Snow Summit Ski Resort. Vehicle parking for race participants, spectators and support vehicles is located within the paved parking area located on private land at the base of the resort.

Under this proposal, non-system trails would become designated system trails. Team Big Bear would be responsible for maintaining all newly designated system trails, including signing, trail clearing, erosion control, and monitoring use. Likewise, Team Big Bear would be expected to complete maintenance work necessary as a result of their mountain bike race activities on existing system trails.

B. Location

The project area is entirely within the boundaries of the Mountaintop Ranger District, San Bernardino National Forest, in San Bernardino County, California. Roads and trails used for the mountain bike races over the past twelve years lie generally between Big Bear Lake and the Santa Ana River drainage. (See the attached project location maps for more detailed information.)

C. Purpose and Need

The need to consider permit applications for special uses of National Forest lands and to protect resource values were both identified in the San Bernardino National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (LRMP) (U.S. Forest Service 1989). The need to ensure that adverse environmental effects are minimized or mitigated was also directed in the LRMP. The need to protect federally-listed species is directed by the Endangered Species Act. The purpose and need for action in this EA is to provide for mountain bike recreation opportunities, while also protecting habitat for Threatened, Endangered, and Sensitive (TES) species and habitats in accordance with State and Federal regulations.

D. Applicable Requirements and Direction

Applicable requirements and direction may be found in the Endangered Species Act, National Forest Management Act, Department of Agriculture 9500-4 Regulations, Forest Service Manual, and the San Bernardino National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (LRMP) of 1989.

The San Bernardino National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (LRMP) contains direction on management of issues and resources within the Forest boundaries. The project area is within the Big Bear and Santa Ana Management Areas and Recreation, Wildlife, and Watershed/Wildlife Management Emphasis Zones. LRMP direction that applies to this project and associated issues can be found in **Appendix A**.

Also, a servicewide Memorandum Of Understanding (MOU) has been entered into between the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, and the International Mountain Bicycling Association. The stated purpose of this MOU is to continue to develop and expand a framework of cooperation upon which bicycling opportunities may be planned and accomplished.

E. Decision To Be Made

For this proposal, the authority for decision falls to the District Ranger. The Mountaintop District Ranger must decide whether to adopt the proposed action to issue a multi-year special use permit to Team Big Bear, or adopt an entirely different strategy that still fully meets the Purpose and Need for action, or take No Action at all (which would mean that a multi-year permit would not be issued).

F. Public Involvement

On January 11, 2001, the Forest Service sent letters to interested agencies, organizations, and individuals requesting comment on a proposal to issue a multi-year special use permit to Team Big Bear, Incorporated, for the series of mountain bike races they conduct May through October each year. Four letters of comment were received during the comment period.

G. Issue Identification

Several preliminary concerns were raised by the public during the public outreach. Each comment was considered relative to the Proposed Action. Comments are considered to be significant issues if they are points of dispute, debate, or disagreement over the Proposed Action or its effects. There were three significant issues raised during scoping that are addressed in this analysis:

1) Comment: A concern about the safety of other forest users and mountain bike riders on forest roads and trails during events.

This analysis will assess potential safety issues. Measures to reduce impacts to other forest users, including other mountain bike riders, are incorporated into the proposal.

2) Comment: A concern that undesignated forest routes not formally incorporated into the forest transportation system should not be allowed for the mountain bike races.

Under this proposal, the undesignated trails/roads used for mountain bike race events under special use permit would be included in the forest transportation system. Trail maintenance and signing would become the responsibility of Team Big Bear, as a condition of the special use permit. The impacts of this proposal will be evaluated in this analysis.

3) Comment: A concern that the San Bernardino National Forest has enough designated roads and trails, and considerable difficulty in managing them.

Trail maintenance and signing for the trails that would be brought into the forest transportation system would become the responsibility of Team Big Bear, as a condition of the special use permit. No new roads and trails would be constructed. The impacts of this proposal will be evaluated in this analysis.

Public scoping also identified ten non-significant issues, comments and questions regarding the proposal. See the descriptions below for a brief explanation of why each of these issues is non-significant to this decision. Non-significant issues are not analyzed for potential effects in the EA.

1) Comment: Monthly publication of the Forests Schedule of Proposed Actions should be considered.

This is outside the scope of this decision and already decided by regulation

2) Comment: The Forest Land and Resource Management Plan, pg. SG-34, prohibits races.

The decision to allow non-motorized racing was already made. The Forest has frequently allowed non-motorized racing events, such as foot races, alpine/nordic ski races, and mountain bike races. The intent of this Standard and Guideline in the Forest Plan is to prohibit motorized vehicle racing. Under the current land management plan revision process the plan will state more clearly that motorized vehicle racing is not allowed.

3) Comment: An overall policy for mountain biking should be developed.

This is outside the scope of this decision. However, the Forest does plan to address mountain biking during the forest plan revision process.

4) Comment: The commenter would like the environmental analysis to describe the events in detail, including frequency, length, duration, number of contestants, number of spectators and their locations, etc..

The comment does not disagree with the proposed action. The environmental analysis will describe the proposal in sufficient detail in order to adequately determine the potential impacts.

5) Comment: The commenter would like a complete in-depth analysis of impacts, such as soil erosion and associated consequences, impacts on wildlife and vegetation, aesthetics and displacement of other users.

The comment does not disagree with the proposed action. All types of potential impacts will be evaluated during the analysis before a decision is made. This Environmental Assessment documents the analysis.

6) Comment: Off-trail riding should be taken into account.

No disagreement with the proposed action. The special use permit would specify that race participants caught riding off of the designated routes may be disqualified.

7) Comment: The Code of Federal Regulations do not authorize racing on the National Forests, and the Forest Plan has not been amended to authorize mountain bike races.

The Code of Federal Regulations does not provide blanket restrictions on activities such as mountain bike races.

The decision to allow non-motorized racing was already made. The Forest has frequently allowed non-motorized racing events, such as foot races, alpine/nordic ski races, and mountain bike races. The intent of the Standard and Guideline in the Forest Plan (pg. SG-34) is to prohibit motorized vehicle racing. Under the current land management plan revision process the plan will state more clearly that motorized vehicle racing is not allowed.

8) Comment: The commenter submitted a general letter of support for the mountain bike race activities, stating they are good for the community as a whole, good for the business community, and that they help introduce many people to the National Forest.
No disagreement with the proposed action. Comment noted.

9) Comment: The commenter submitted a general letter of support for the mountain bike race activities, stating that the permitting process should be expedited, and that the permit should be granted for a ten-year period.
No disagreement with the proposed action. For this proposal the District Rangers authority is limited to issuing a five-year permit. After five years, the permit may be renewed without completing another Environmental Assessment, if conditions have not changed significantly.

10) Comment: The commenter submitted a general letter of support for the mountain bike race activities, and stated that the Forest Service should pay all expenses and reimburse Team Big Bear for any lost revenues, if the permit is delayed beyond the first scheduled race weekend this summer.
This is out of the scope of this decision and is already decided by regulation.

II. ALTERNATIVES

Alternative 2 - No Action: Under this alternative, the Forest Service would take no action to issue a multi-year special use permit to Team Big Bear, Inc.

Alternative 1 - Proposed Action: Under this alternative, the Mountaintop Ranger District, San Bernardino National Forest, would issue a multi-year Special Use Permit to Team Big Bear, Incorporated, for a series of race events they would hold annually. The permit would authorize Team Big Bear to conduct mountain bike racing events and related activities on up to 12 weekends between May and October each year. Cross-country races would take place on National Forest system roads and trails, and on existing trails that currently are not classified as system trails (see attached map).

In addition to the use of these trails/roads for mountain bike race events under special use permit the proposed action includes designating these routes for public mountain biking with the trail maintenance being the responsibility of Team Big Bear. As such, advertisement of these trail routes may be included in many types of publications, including brochures, magazine articles, websites, etc.

In addition, downhill events would occur on authorized mountain bike trails on existing ski runs and access roads within the Snow Summit Ski Resort permit boundary. All events within the ski resort permit boundary are limited to existing roads and trails; no new surface disturbance is proposed. No new surface disturbance is expected to occur directly or indirectly as a result of the proposed permit issuance.

A typical event weekend consists of:

- between 150-900 race participants in most event weekends. There is one annual event that is a national race that has about 2200 participants;
- between 100-2000 spectators, with most remaining in Snow Summit's base area;
- participants practicing on Fridays;
- cross-country races on Saturdays (those courses extend onto the FS roads/trails outside Snow Summit's ski area boundaries and generally last up to 2 hours);
- cross-country races are broken down into different classes based on age, sex, and riding ability. There are a total of 48 different groupings. Classes are grouped into starting "waves" with about 30-50 racers in each starting "wave", which are started at 2-3 minute intervals. There are usually about 15 waves during a typical race.
- downhill races on Sunday (conducted entirely within the Snow Summit Ski Resort boundaries).
- the fastest downhill racers may achieve speeds of 25 mph; good cross-country riders average 10 mph, with higher speeds on downhill sections.

Some event weekends consist of downhill races only, with no cross-country races.

Most race spectators remain near the start-finish line in the base area of the Snow Summit Ski Resort.

The paved parking lot located on private land in the resort base area is used for vehicle parking for race participants, spectators and support vehicles.

Under this proposal, all non-system trails used for proposed events (see attached maps) will be brought into the National Forest trails system. Team Big Bear will adopt and be responsible for maintaining all trails added to the system under this action. Maintenance will include signing, clearing, erosion prevention/control work, and regular monitoring. Where new unclassified trails originating from adopted trails are detected through monitoring, Team Big Bear will block and/or disguise such trails to discourage continued use. In addition, Team Big Bear is expected to adopt and maintain (as defined above) some of the existing system trails used for their events.

In order to minimize impacts to other forest users and forest resources, the following requirements would be included in the special use permit and/or operating plan:

1. Team Big Bear would submit each summers proposed race schedule and course maps to the Forest Service for review and final approval each year by May 1st.
2. Team Big Bear would be required to provide each seasons race schedule and course maps to Camp Osito and the Wildlands Conservancy camp managers, and the Rocking K permittee each year by May 15th.

3. Races would not be held over holiday weekends, with the exception of the fall classic that is typically held over the Columbus day weekend in mid-October.
4. Forest system roads shall not be closed to normal travel under most circumstances. Team Big Bear shall provide road and trail monitors who will be stationed at strategic points along the routes to inform other forest users that races are in progress, ask that they stay to the right side of the road as much as possible and to proceed slowly and use caution. Prior to each race, the race starter shall inform event participants that the forest roads are open to public travel and that they may encounter vehicle traffic, hikers, and other mountain bike riders.
5. Signs informing forest users that races are in progress shall be placed at strategic locations. All information and directional signing shall be removed from the roads/trails within 48 hours after each race weekend.
6. Use of the Pineknot Trail is limited to the "Fall Classic" race weekend only, during the month of October when other use of the trail is minimal. Team Big Bear will coordinate with the Rocking K stable permittee, and no guided horseback rides will be conducted on the Pineknot Trail during the few hour period when race participants would be on the trail.

Proposed Avoidance/Minimization Measures

The following avoidance and minimization measures will assure avoidance of adverse effects to threatened, endangered, and sensitive species and habitats and will be mandatory conditions of the permit:

1. Prior to each race season, the Forest Service permit administrator and Forest Service botanist will meet in the field with Team Big Bear, identifying specific avoidance areas. Avoidance areas will include all areas where the event course passes adjacent to occupied threatened and endangered plant habitat, and some areas where the event course passes adjacent to suitable habitat or occupied sensitive plant habitat.
2. Prior to each race season, Team Big Bear employees will receive training by the permit administrator on the importance of following all regulations outlined in the special use permit and operating plan, including the protection of all avoidance areas. Specifically, that any impacts to threatened and endangered species or habitat within defined avoidance areas may lead to revocation or modification of the permit as needed to assure future avoidance. Such modification may trigger re-initiation of Section 7 Formal Consultation with US Fish and Wildlife Service.

3. Prior to each event weekend (by the end of Thursday), Team Big Bear shall clearly delineate all mapped avoidance areas adjacent to the event course using continuous flagging tape, or another effective method, along the inside edges of the road or trail. Flagging tape will be removed within 24 hours after each event weekend.
4. During each event, Team Big Bear will place monitors at the two avoidance areas adjacent to listed plant occurrences (Pine Knot Trail and Bristlecone Trail), and any other avoidance areas along the course as needed to ensure flagging is not breached by participants or spectators.
5. The Forest Service permit administrator or other designated Forest Service representative will coordinate with Team Big Bear's monitors, and will periodically monitor the Team Big Bear races, avoidance areas, and avoidance monitors, during and following events.
6. Immediately before each race event, Team Big Bear will notify all participants of race regulations and importance of avoiding flagged areas. Participants shall be notified that they will be disqualified from the race if they deviate from the designated course at any point; this includes cutting corners on trails.
7. Team Big Bear will continue to fund surveys to detect presence of nesting willow flycatchers within identified suitable habitat along race routes. As part of an agreement with U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, in 2002 and subsequent even-numbered years, pre-event surveys will be conducted in identified suitable habitat areas. Even year surveys will consist of a monitoring visit to each site 2-4 days prior to the event starting with any events held in June. In 2003 and subsequent odd-numbered years, protocol-level surveys will be conducted during the event season. If willow flycatchers are found to be present within the project area during the nesting season, consultation with U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service will be re-initiated to address potential adverse effects prior to the subsequent event season.
8. Events on roads and trails will be limited to daylight hours only.
9. Use of the trail segment in the north half of Section 35 (called "Wet Dream" by Team Big Bear) would be limited to August and September events in order to limit potential impacts to water quality during the wetter months.
10. Use of the popular Pineknot Trail would be limited to just one race weekend (the Fall Classic in October) per year in order to reduce conflicts with other Forest users during busy summer months.

Additional measures to protect other species of concern to be included in the permit:

- Prior to the first event, race staff will be trained to identify southern rubber boas and proper procedures to avoid harm/harassment should any boas be encountered during events, event setup/cleanup, and trail maintenance. Likewise, race participants will be informed in event sign-up paperwork that deliberately harming or harassing native wildlife species during races or practice runs is prohibited and can result in disqualification.

III. ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

The project area lies within the Big Bear and Santa Ana Management Areas. Pages 4-41 through 4-45 in the Forest Plan identify management issues and concerns relative to the Big Bear Management Area. Intensive residential and commercial development within the Big Bear Basin may create more conflicting or incompatible uses along the private-federal land interface. The area has a great demand for water and for recreation opportunities. The Big Bear Basin supports the greatest concentration of TES species on the SBNF. Management direction for the Big Bear Management area includes an emphasis of habitat enhancement for sensitive plant and wildlife species. The portion of the Big Bear Management Area that contains the proposed project has a Recreation Management Emphasis.

Pages 4-50 through 4-56 in the Forest Plan identify the management issues and concerns relative to the Santa Ana Management Area. The area within the Santa Ana Management Area has a Watershed/Wildlife Management Emphasis. Specific management direction and standards/ guidelines for each emphasis prescription are included in the Forest Plan.

A. Wildlife and Botanical Resources in the Project Area:

Focused threatened, endangered and sensitive plant and habitat surveys of all proposed permit roads and trails, and adjacent habitat, were performed during May, 2000, by Mountaintop District botanists and biologists Scott Eliason, Deveree Volgarino, Robin Butler, Marc Stamer, and Linda Stamer. Detectability for all focal plant species was high throughout the survey period.

Focused surveys were not performed for the southwestern willow flycatcher, however, small riparian areas that may be suitable habitat for this endangered species were noted and mapped during the May 2000, surveys. This survey data, along with previously mapped riparian habitat and the habitat model developed through the Southern California Conservation Strategy (SCCS) collectively form the basis for the effects analysis of this proposed action.

A number of conversations between U.S. Fish and Wildlife biologist Jesse Bennett and Forest Service botanist Scott Eliason occurred over the course of several weeks in February 2001. Informal consultation was initiated by the SBNF by letter dated March 6, 2001. USFWS concurred with the determination that the proposed action, with the

inclusion of the avoidance and minimization measures, is not likely to adversely affect the federally-listed species (letter of concurrence from UFSWS dated April 25, 2001).

Informal consultation for similar mountain bike events occurred in spring 2001 (initiated by the SBNF's letter of 5/11/2000 with a USFWS concurrence letter dated 5/16/2000).

B. General Impacts to Wildlife and Plants:

a) Environmental Consequences of the Alternative 1—Proposed Action:

The proposed action would result in up to 12 mountain biking event weekends per year being held under permit by Team Big Bear. In addition to the activities directly associated with the actual mountain bike races on the event weekends, there is an increased use and human presence on all trails during times leading up to each event weekend. Before each event weekend, Team Big Bear personnel inspect and flag the race routes. Additionally, many racers arrive in town early to practice on the race routes. As an indirect result of the proposed action, higher levels of use of the routes would be expected due to Team Big Bear's adoption of the routes and inclusion in their brochures and maps. If mountain biking popularity continues to grow at current rates, the non-event use of those routes would be expected to increase yearly.

During a visit to the trails in Section 27 on a day when no races were scheduled (Sunday June 3rd of an event weekend), approximately 20 bikes passed the observers in about 1-1/2 hours. Bikes often travel at very high speeds (approximately 20 mph on the downhill sections). After only two weekends of events in 2001, soils within the trails of this area were powder dry and well-worn. As a result of the events and non-event use of the routes, it is likely that there will be increased mountain bike presence on the routes during most summer and fall weekends. Impacts from this level of use would be higher than those solely associated with event use. Rather than an occasional/intermittent disturbance and use, a more constant and consistent level of use and disturbance is anticipated.

As a result of the proposed events and associated use of the trail/road system, overall impacts to wildlife and adjacent vegetation are expected to occur during the months that snow will not prevent use. The specific types of impacts are described in the following sections. While some impacts associated with events may be reduced or avoided through permit conditions, there will remain a certain level of impacts associated with mountain bike use of the routes during non-event times. For example, while night-time riding would not occur during events, such action may take place by other Forest visitors.

b) Environmental Consequences of the Alternative 2—No Action: Under the No Action alternative, no changes to the current situation are expected.

C. Impacts to Threatened, Endangered, and Proposed Wildlife

a) Environmental Consequences of the Alternative 1—Proposed Action:

No wildlife species under Endangered Species Act protection are known to occur along the road/trails proposed for use in this project. Suitable habitat for two listed animal

species, southwestern willow flycatcher and mountain yellow-legged frog, occurs at several sites where roads/trails cross riparian areas.

The mountain bike use would occur on existing roads and trails adjacent to habitat that may be suitable for these species. Modeling based on habitat criteria indicated that suitable habitat might be present for each species. Neither species is known to occur in the mapped suitable habitat. Surveys conducted in summer 2001 at modeled habitat within the project area for both species found no occurrences of either species. As part of the permit conditions for events, these sites will be evaluated for actual suitability in the field and then those suitable sites will be surveyed according to protocol. The event permit would be conditioned with sufficient avoidance measures to assure that the event permit issuance would lead to no direct or indirect adverse effects to this species.

Potential impacts to willow flycatcher if they are nesting within 50 feet of route/riparian crossings include short-term disturbance from noise and activity. The passing of 75 bikes in about a 20-minute period of time up to 12 times in a weekend would likely be slightly greater levels of disturbance than status quo use of the roads/trails. Disturbance during territory establishment and nest building would be more likely cause displacement to other areas than if it happens after egg-laying during brooding. Once eggs are laid, nest fidelity for most birds is relatively strong.

Willow flycatchers nesting at Thurman Flats Picnic Area appear to be fairly tolerant of disturbance (people walking on trails and/or berry picking) less than 50-feet away, even during territory establishment and nest building. No abandonment caused by human activity disturbance has been noted at Thurman Flats. No habitat loss is expected to result from the proposed events since all activities would occur in existing disturbed trails and roads.

Potential impacts to mountain yellow-legged frogs include losses of eggs and tadpoles from crushing if they are present in water in the roadbed/trail-bed itself. By the beginning of June, these potential impacts would be very low since most of the tadpoles would have metamorphosed into adults. Loss of adults is unlikely for the following reasons: 1) individuals are unlikely to be in the open non-vegetated areas of roadbeds, but would instead be found with some vegetative or rock cover; and, 2) individuals would likely quickly move away from disturbance. No habitat loss is expected to result from the proposed events since all activities would occur in existing disturbed trails and roads.

Potential indirect effects include higher levels of suspended sediments in water in and downslope from road/trail crossings. Research has shown that suspended sediment has little or no effect to aquatic ecosystems. However, if there exists a high level of suspended sediment, there would also be a high level of deposited sediment. Deposited sediments have a greater impact than those expected from suspended sediments.

Given that these road/trail crossings are pre-existing, elevated suspended sediment levels near these crossings probably already exist to some extent. The soils evaluation indicated that the soil types in the project area are relatively stable—thus, suspended and deposited sediment levels are not likely to be any higher than existing levels associated with normal vehicle use. Motorized vehicle use on the event routes is generally much lower during the mountain biking events (race monitors inform the public about the events and most chose to explore other FS roads instead), so, in effect, mountain bike traffic replaces normal traffic. Since bike tires are narrower than most motorized vehicle tires, the amount of suspended sediment associated with an event weekend may not be any higher than that of a normal weekend.

The wildlife impact analysis determined that the Proposed Action may affect, but is not likely to adversely affect southwestern willow flycatcher or mountain yellow-legged frog. Informal consultation was initiated by the SBNF on March 6, 2001. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service concurred with the Forest Service determination of "not likely to adversely affect" in a letter dated 4/25/2001.

1) Cumulative Impacts/Effects to Southwestern Willow Flycatcher: Habitat for southwestern willow flycatcher is being impacted by urban development and encroachment near the Mojave River and Little Horsethief Flats north of Silverwood Lake. This species is known to nest in those areas. Encroachment into the riparian zones by recreationalists using the area for off-road vehicle use, enjoying nature, cooling off in the water, mountain biking, dog-walking, etc. can be expected to disturb nesting birds, possibly causing displacement, nest abandonment, lowered breeding success, degraded habitat, and individual mortality. On the Mountaintop Ranger District, probably the greatest potential impact to willow flycatchers and their habitat is dispersed recreational use of riparian and shoreline zones where there is potential to disturb nesting flycatchers. Other potential cumulative impacts to willow flycatcher habitat include degradation of desert-influence springs and riparian zones through water diversions and development.

2) Cumulative Impacts/Effects to Mountain Yellow-Legged Frogs: Encroachment into the riparian zones by recreationalists using the area for off-road vehicle use, enjoying nature, cooling off in the water, mountain biking, dog-walking, etc. can be expected to disturb mountain yellow-legged frogs, possibly causing displacement, losses of egg masses and juveniles, lowered breeding success, degraded habitat, and individual mortality. On the Mountaintop Ranger District, probably the greatest potential impact to mountain yellow-legged frogs and their habitat is dispersed recreational use of riparian and shoreline zones where there is potential to disturb or injure larval tadpoles and frogs.

b) Environmental Consequences of the Alternative 2—No Action: Under the No Action alternative, no changes to the current situation are expected.

D. Impacts to Sensitive Wildlife Species, Wildlife Species of Concern, and General Wildlife

a) Environmental Consequences of the Alternative 1—Proposed Action:

Impacts from the proposed events can be generalized in several categories:

- i. **Direct loss of habitat:** No direct loss of habitat is expected since the events will be restricted to existing established roads and trails.

- ii. **Short-term displacement:** Disturbance from human activity may result in short-term displacement of animals from a small area adjacent to the roads/trails. This zone of disturbance about ¼-mile wide likely already exists from normal human use of the existing roads/trails. Mule deer in the San Bernardino Mountains generally avoid the areas adjacent to the developed roads and trails. They also appear to have altered much of their behavior patterns from crepuscular to nocturnal, and thus are unlikely to be disturbed by the events. Mountain bike events would not likely change the level of disturbance over status quo.

Mountain bikes have a greater tendency to surprise and startle animals than do motorized vehicles because they generate less noise and move at high speeds. Animals (except snakes) tend to hear motorized vehicles coming with enough time to move out of the area. But mountain bikes are generally silent during approach and often are not heard until present.

A number of the species that potentially occur in the project area are nocturnal (bats, mountain lions, poorwills, rubber boas, etc.) and would not be disturbed by the events since mountain bike activities would occur when those species are not active.

Bird species are most susceptible to disturbance and area abandonment during territory establishment and egg-laying. However, because of existing use levels of these roads and trails, it is unlikely that individuals are nesting in areas directly adjacent to roads/trails. Thus, a higher level of abandonment as a result of the proposed events is unlikely.

- iii. **Loss of individuals:** In some rare cases, individual animals may be injured or killed by impact with bikes. Small, slow-moving terrestrial species are most at risk. This impact is likely to be relatively low and rare.

- iv. **Indirect impacts to habitat quality:** Aquatic habitats adjacent to road/trail crossings with riparian zones may experience some reduced habitat quality levels associated with suspended sediments and deposited sediments (see mountain yellow-legged frog discussion). Again, the mountain bike events would not likely change these levels over status quo since mountain bike use would essentially replace motorized vehicle use on any given weekend.

The wildlife impact analysis determined that implementation of the proposed action as described may affect individual sensitive animals, but is not likely to result in a trend toward Federal listing of these sensitive animal species.

b) Environmental Consequences of the Alternative 2—No Action: Under the No Action alternative, no changes to the current situation are expected.

E. Impacts to California Spotted Owl

a) Environmental Consequences of the Alternative 1—Proposed Action:

All routes proposed for the mountain bike events avoid spotted owl nest sites. Since mountain bike events occur during daytime, disturbance during nighttime foraging activities would not occur.

b) Environmental Consequences of the Alternative 2—No Action: Under the No Action alternative, no changes to the current situation are expected.

F. Impacts to Threatened, Endangered, and Proposed Plant Species

a) Environmental Consequences of the Alternative 1—Proposed Action:

Only one plant species under Endangered Species Act protection is known to occur along the road/trails proposed for use in this project: *Castilleja cinerea* is listed as a threatened species. Suitable habitat for several other listed plant species occurs but no occurrences are known or observed during the surveys.

Based on the surveys, previously mapped plant and habitat distributions, and habitat models developed through the SCCS, the roads and trails under the proposed permit pass through or adjacent to the following lengths of habitat:

- Occupied *Castilleja cinerea* habitat (and suitable habitat for *Arenaria ursina* and *Eriogonum kennedyi* var *austromontanum*): 0.44 miles (700 m) of habitat along the Pine Knot and Bristlecone trails (existing designated hiking/biking trails).
- Additional pebble plain habitat (suitable for *Castilleja cinerea*, *Arenaria ursina*, and *Eriogonum kennedyi* var *austromontanum* – but no occurrences previously mapped or found adjacent to proposed routes during focused surveys): 0.14 miles (228 m) along the Pine Knot Trail.
- Meadow habitat (suitable for *Taraxacum californicum*, *Sidalcea pedata*, and *Poa atropurpurea* – but no previously-recorded occurrences and no occurrences were noted adjacent to proposed routes during focused surveys): 0.74 miles (1184 m)

Impacts to *Castilleja cinerea*: The proposed events would occur on existing roads and trails adjacent to suitable and occupied habitat. Areas of sensitivity will be flagged/delineated during events to ensure avoidance of adjacent habitats. The permit will be conditioned with sufficient avoidance measures to assure that the permit issuance will lead to no direct or indirect adverse effects to this species.

The botanical impact analysis determined that the proposed action may affect, but is not likely to adversely affect *Castilleja cinerea*. Informal consultation was initiated by the SBNF on March 6, 2001. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service concurred with the Forest Service determination of "not likely to adversely affect" in a letter dated 4/25/2001.

Impacts to *Arenaria ursina*, *Eriogonum kennedyi* var. *austromontanum*, *Taraxacum californicum*, *Poa atropurpurea*, and *Sidalcea pedata*: The proposed events would occur on existing roads and trails adjacent to suitable habitat not known to be occupied by these species. Areas of suitable habitat will be flagged/delineated during events to ensure avoidance of adjacent habitats. The permit will be conditioned with sufficient avoidance measures to assure that the permit issuance will lead to no direct or indirect adverse effects to these species.

The botanical impact analysis determined that the proposed action may affect, but is not likely to adversely affect *Arenaria ursina*, *Eriogonum kennedyi* var. *austromontanum*, *Taraxacum californicum*, *Poa atropurpurea*, or *Sidalcea pedata*. Informal consultation was initiated by the SBNF on March 6, 2001. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service concurred with the Forest Service determination of "not likely to adversely affect" in a letter dated 4/25/2001.

Cumulative Impacts/Effects to Pebble Plain Plant Species (*Arenaria ursina*, *Eriogonum kennedyi* var. *austromontanum*, and *Castilleja cinerea*):

Pebble plains, due to their general openness and flatness, are inviting sites for camping, driving, staging large groups, and prospecting. Probably the greatest threat in the past has been off-road vehicle trails that developed in the pebble plains. The SBNF has completed extensive barrier and restoration work to control this impact. Roads in pebble plains remain visible for years. Extensive damage has been done to pebble plains when driven on during wet seasons. The clay soils make it easy for vehicles to become mired, causing more damage during extrication. These deep ruts can alter the hydrology of the habitat, providing channels that quickly drain the area. In addition, often the microhabitat is created in many of the old vehicle tracks: many are grown in with weedy species, especially *Bromus tectorum*. Illegal off-road vehicle use in pebble plains is a continuous threat and controlling it is ongoing effort.

Cumulative Effects/Impacts to Meadow Plant Species (*Taraxacum californicum*, *Poa atropurpurea*, and *Sidalcea pedata*):

Montane meadows support communities of obligate and facultative wetland species, have alluvial loam soils, and are inundated with water for four or more weeks per year. Montane meadows cover approximately 55,446 acres in southern California, with about 38 percent of that on public lands. The practice of overgrazing likely resulted in a shift of native perennial species to non-native annual grasses in many areas (USDA Forest Service 1998c).

Significant loss of meadow habitats in the Bear Valley began in the late 1880s with the construction of a dam that resulted in the formation of Big Bear Lake. There were 6200 ha (15300 acres) of meadow/grassland in the Big Bear Valley region and Big Meadow area of the Santa Ana River prior to construction of the dam and 1190 ha (2900 acres) about 30 years later, an 81 percent decrease. Current estimates suggest that there are fewer than 400 ha (1000 acres) of meadow habitat remaining in Big Bear and Holcomb valleys. Overall, 91 percent of the meadow habitat in those areas has been destroyed since the turn of the century (USFWS 1998).

Before development, water diversions, and inundation of Big Bear Lake, a large meadow system filled the center of the basin. Ribbons of riparian/meadow habitat likely connected the Big Bear Meadow to smaller outlying meadows. Now, the central Big Bear meadow has been reduced to small meadow remnants around the lake, resulting in isolation of postage-stamp fragments of outlying meadow habitats. The connectivity of habitat for gene flow, pollination opportunities, and seed dispersal has been compromised. Some riparian areas (*e.g.*, Santa Ana River, Rathbun Creek, Shay Creek, etc.) contain meadow habitat along the stream banks, also supporting known and historic occurrences of T/E meadow plants. Degradation of riparian zones connecting meadow systems has also reduced the amount of occupied T/E meadow plant habitat.

The communities in the Big Bear Valley have and are expected to experience increased growth in the next couple of decades. Most of the present and historic occurrences of the four listed species are on private lands. Between 77% and 93% of the known occurrences of the 4 listed meadow species are on private lands. Increased urban development will continue to add to the pressures on the few remaining areas of private lands with known occurrences of the T/E meadow species as well as potential habitat. Continued habitat degradation can continue to be expected for privately-owned T/E occurrences and habitat.

The Big Bear area is currently experiencing more residential building than has occurred in the last decade. Impacts from urban development include losses of known occupied habitat to development for houses, commercial uses, and lawns/landscaping; greater demands on ground and surface water supplies; and increased pressure on open space areas and NFS lands for recreation activities. As a result, each habitat fragment with T/E plants becomes more isolated and more susceptible to local extirpation.

In addition to the special use permits for water diversions on NFS lands, there are many other impacts on the water table that supplies Baldwin Lake and Big Bear Lake. Ground and surface water diversions alter hydrological regimes necessary to maintain meadow habitats.

It is the cumulative impacts of the water diversions on private and NFS lands, as well as grazing practices, road maintenance, and stream bed alterations on private lands, that create a precarious situation for the Baldwin Lake and Big Bear area occurrences of the plant species. All of the impacts are having an adverse effect, and correcting only part of the problem will not likely improve the habitat or conditions of the population, if the others are not also modified or corrected.

b) Environmental Consequences of the Alternative 2—No Action: Under the No Action alternative, no changes to the current situation are expected.

G. Impacts to Sensitive and Watch-List Plant Species

Since the proposal restricts all activities to existing roads and trails, no additional direct or impacts are expected to the sensitive and watch list plant habitats found adjacent to the event routes. Areas of sensitive plant habitat will be flagged/delineated during events to ensure avoidance of adjacent habitats. The permit will be conditioned with sufficient avoidance measures to assure that the permit issuance will lead to no direct adverse effects to these species. Extensive occurrences of *Phlox dolicantha* and *Mimulus purpureus* exist in the general area of the events. These areas are likely to receive substantially elevated use by mountain bikers during event weekends as a result of the many participants practicing and recreating in the general event area. An unquantifiable level of indirect impacts to these sensitive species is expected to occur.

The botanical impact analysis determined that implementation of the proposed action may affect individual sensitive plants, but is not likely to result in a trend toward Federal listing of these sensitive plant species

H. Heritage Resources

An archaeological records check from the San Bernardino Archaeological Information Center (AIC), San Bernardino County Museum, was reviewed prior to field surveys. The Project Area was surveyed by archaeologists Michael Lerch, Sharon Rushing, Julie Scrivner, and Dennis Taylor. All previously-recorded sites were visited during the field surveys.

The area of potential effects (APE) for the survey was defined as the width of the existing trails plus a buffer area of 10 feet (3 m) on each side for mountain bike trails, and the width of the current graded roads plus a buffer area of 5 feet (1.5 m) on each side for the Forest Service roads that are already listed as existing routes.

No prehistoric archaeological resources were found to be located anywhere within or adjacent to the APE for the Team Big Bear mountain bike trails and roads. Based on the results of the archaeological records check, the intensive field inventory of trail segments, and the reconnaissance survey of the study area, the sensitivity of the area for prehistoric resources appears to be low, especially in comparison with surrounding regions.

a) Environmental Consequences of the Alternative 1—Proposed Action:

Because no archaeological or historical cultural resources were found to be located within or immediately adjacent to the APE for the surveyed trail segments and “water holes,” and the balance of the routes in the Proposed Action are located on authorized trails or Forest Service roads, the Proposed Action would have “No Effect” on properties listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. No measures for avoidance or mitigation of potential effects to cultural resources are necessary.

According to stipulation III.D (2) of the SBNF's Programmatic Agreement with the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), the undertaking may be implemented without further review or consultation with the SHPO.

b) Environmental Consequences of the Alternative 2—No Action: Under the No Action alternative, no changes to the current situation are expected.

I. Recreation Opportunities/Conflicts with Other Forest Users

The LRMP used Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) as a method for classifying and managing recreation opportunities within the SBNF based on physical, social, and managerial settings (LRMP pg. A-25). ROS classes for the project area are "*Roaded Natural*" (areas that are natural in appearance where resource modifications range from evident to strongly dominant), and "*Rural*" (areas that are substantially modified and may have a considerable number of facilities designated to accommodate large numbers of people).

The LRMP outlines specific management direction and standards/guidelines for ROS (LRMP pg. SG-27).

"Roaded natural" ROS areas are managed so that resource modification and utilization practices are evident but harmonize with the natural environment. Conventional motorized use is provided for in construction standards and design of facilities. Opportunities for both motorized and non-motorized forms of recreation are possible. Activity opportunities include viewing scenery, photography, hiking, horseback riding, bicycling, automobile touring, OHV use (motorcycles, ATVs, and 4-wheel drive), camping, picnicking, organization camps, recreation residences, resorts, lodges, gathering forest products, nature study, interpretive services, hunting, fishing, swimming, canoeing, boating, snowplay, downhill skiing, snowmobiling, cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, and tobogganing.

"Rural" ROS areas are managed so that resource modification and utilization practices enhance specific recreation activities and to maintain vegetative cover and soil. Facilities for intensified motorized use and parking are available. Activity opportunities include viewing scenery, photography, hiking, horseback riding, bicycling, automobile touring, OHV use (motorcycles, ATVs, and 4-wheel drive), camping, picnicking, organization camps, recreation residences, resorts, lodges, gathering forest products, nature study, interpretive services, hunting, fishing, swimming, canoeing, sailing, power boating, snowplay, downhill skiing, snowmobiling, cross-country skiing, and snowshoeing.

Portions of several Forest Service system roads (1N04, 1N54, 2N06, 2N08, 2N10, 2N10A, 2N17, 2N51Y and Bristlecone Road) are used as event routes. These roads are travelled by various recreationists and other forest users, primarily by motorized vehicle and mountain bikes. Hikers and equestrians also use these roads to some extent.

Approximately 62 Forest Service permitted recreation residences are located along Forest Road 2N10 and connected side roads near the west end of the project area.

Three small Forest Service developed group camps (Deer, Boulder, Bluff Mesa) are located near the west end of the project area. One large developed campground (Pineknot), and a small developed group camp (Buttercup) are located along Bristlecone Road, east of the Snow Summit Ski Resort. The United States Marine Corps resort/camp is also located along Bristlecone Road, east of Pineknot Campground.

Camp Osito Girl Scouts of America camp is located on private property off Forest Road 2N17, and the Wildlands Conservancy camp property is located off 2N10 at Bluff Lake, near the west end of the project area.

The Pineknot trail is used by the general public for mountain biking, horseback riding and hiking. Rocking K Stables also conducts guided horseback rides under permit from the Forest Service on the Pineknot trail.

a) Environmental Consequences of the Alternative 1—Proposed Action:

Some limited conflict between mountain bike race participants and other Forest road and trail users has occurred during the cross-country race events over the past several years, as the roads and trails have not been closed to the general public during the events. There is also limited conflict with people traveling to and from the Pineknot Campground and the USMC camp, both located on Forest Service land along Bristlecone Road; however, during past years this conflict has been minimal. Cross-country races are started at the Snow Summit resort, near the west end of Bristlecone Road. The west end of Bristlecone road is closed to vehicle traffic for several minutes during the start of each group of racers. The limited conflict that has occurred over the past several years would be expected to continue, during the mountain bike cross-county races.

In order to reduce potential conflicts between mountain bike race participants and other forest road and trail users, several measures are taken: (1) Road and trail monitors are stationed at strategic points along the routes to inform other forest users that races are in progress, and ask that they stay to the right side of the road as much as possible and proceed slowly and with caution; (2) Signs informing forest users that races are in progress are also placed at strategic locations; (3) Use of the Pineknot Trail is limited to the "Fall Classic" race weekend only, during the month of October when other use of the trail is minimal; (3) Team Big Bear coordinates with the Rocking K stable permittee, and no guided horseback rides are conducted on the Pineknot Trail during the few hour period when race participants would be on the trail; and (4) Team Big Bear would also be required to provide each seasons race schedule and course maps to Camp Osito and the Wildlands Conservancy camp managers each year, at least two weeks prior to the first race weekend each year.

b) Environmental Consequences of the Alternative 2—No Action:

Mountain Bike races would not occur on the Forest roads and trails in the area. Conflict between mountain bike riders and other recreationists would be minimal, or similar to what has been experienced in the project area on non-race weekends over the past several years.

J. Visual Quality

The LRMP designates the visual quality objectives for the Project Areas as “retention” which is defined to mean that “*management activities must not be visually evident,*” and “partial retention” meaning “*management activities must remain visually subordinate to the characteristic landscape.*”

a) Environmental Consequences of the Alternative 1—Proposed Action:

No changes in the status quo are expected associated with the proposed action.

b) Environmental Consequences of the Alternative 2—No Action:

Under the No Action alternative, the visual impacts would remain at current levels.

K. Soils/Water Quality

The project area consists of approximately 52 miles of existing roads and trails. The roads and trails occur on the north facing slope adjacent to the south shore of Big Bear Lake, Skyline ridge, and the south facing slope between Skyline Ridge and Santa Ana River. Approximately 95% of the road/trail use is expected to occur on roads/trails between Skyline ridge and Big Bear Lake.

On the northern side of the project area, elevations range from approximately 7000 feet at the parking lot for Snow Summit Ski Area to 9120 feet at Snow Summit. Elevations drop to 5000 feet in the southern part of the project area.

Slopes adjacent to the roads/trails range from 0-140 %, with most of the roads/trails occurring on slopes of less than 30%. Steep sections occur around Clarke's Grade and on the hill-slopes between Coldbrook Campground and Snow Summit Ski Area.

About 90% of the annual precipitation occurs between November and April and the remaining 10% is produced by summer thunderstorms that occur between May and October. Most years, snow occurs above 5000 feet. Annual precipitation varies considerably from year to year. The Big Bear area is subject to high intensity storms (more than 5.5 inches within 24 hours). Flooding and accelerated erosion rates can result from rain on snow events or high intensity summer thundershowers.

The project area occurs within the Bear Creek and Santa Ana watersheds. Both watersheds are part of the Santa Ana River basin. Within the Bear Creek watershed, the road/trail system intersects the stream channel system 20 times. Stream channels intersecting the road/trail system are Metcalf Creek, North Creek, a tributary to Rathburn

Creek, Red Ant Canyon, Knickerbocker Canyon, and un-named tributaries 1 through 5. Metcalf is perennial and the others are intermittent or ephemeral. The lower reaches of Metcalf creek provide valuable fisheries spawning habitat. Where they pass through residential/developed areas, stream channels on the Bear Creek side become part of the city storm-water drainage system and, in most areas, are channelized and do not have functioning floodplains.

Within the Santa Ana watershed, the road/trail system intersects the stream channel system 13 times. Stream channels intersecting the road/trail system are Converse Creek, Hamilton Creek, Sand Creek, Mile Creek, and unnamed tributaries 6-11. Converse, Hamilton, Mile and Sand Creeks are perennial and un-named tributaries 6 through 11 are intermittent or ephemeral.

There are 15 meadows within the project area. There are 9 places where the road /trail network is in or very close to a meadow. Meadows function as important "filter and groundwater recharge zones" within the watershed. Meadows and springs are sensitive areas and their proper functioning condition is easily impacted by disturbance, especially when soils are moist. For this reason, it is recommended that roads and trails do not intersect meadow habitat.

There are 9 springs within the project area. Generally, springs have saturated soil moisture conditions, are often developed for wildlife use and are usually water sources for intermittent or perennial stream channels.

Most of the soils in the project area are derived from granite, granodiorite and gneiss bedrock. Other soils within the project area are derived from alluvial deposits of the same rock types. Soil map units within the Team Big Bear Project Area are DDDE, FBE, DAE, FBF, TODF, DXG, BOD, DHG, OMD, RLG and very small proportions of some other soil types. Properties of the soils are maximum erosion hazard rating (EHR), texture, structure effective rooting depth and hydrologic group. Maximum EHR is a qualitative prediction of erosion hazard based on little or no vegetative cover and the occurrence of 2 year/6 hour storm events. Soil texture is a measure of the relative amounts of sand, silt and clay in a soil. Soil structure is the arrangement of soil particles into aggregates. Effective rooting depth is the depth to which the main body of plant roots extend, generally shallow bedrock or other restricting layers. Hydrologic soil groups are used to estimate runoff from precipitation. Hydrologic Group A is assigned to soils with low runoff potential and soils in Hydrologic Group D have high runoff potential.

These soil properties are considered when locating, constructing or maintaining a road/trail system and are used to assess the suitability or limitations of project area soils for the proposed use.

- Erosion hazard rating is used to evaluate the likelihood that a soil disturbing activity would cause accelerated sheet and rill erosion. Most of the soils within the project area have high or very high erosion hazard ratings.

- Most of the soils within the project area have sand to sandy-loam textures and weak granular to single grain (loose) structure, common characteristics for soils of granitic origin in dry climates. Generally sandy soils have rapid permeability, low water holding capacity and are well to excessively drained.
- Effective rooting depth for soils within the project area ranges from 10-60 inches. Most soils probably have an effective rooting depth of less than 30 inches.
- Most of the project area falls into hydrologic soil groups B and C. Runoff potential is generally moderate to high.

a) Environmental Consequences of the Alternative 1—Proposed Action:

There is a low risk for adverse watershed effects associated with the use of the existing road/trail network for the Team Big Bear Mountain Bike Event. There is also a low risk for adverse watershed effects associated with continual recreational use of road/trail network. The risks are low because existing roads and trails will be used and road/trail density within the watershed will not increase. Also, the road/trail network has traditionally been used extensively for motorized and non-motorized recreation, so “new” impacts are not expected. Additionally, monitoring and trail maintenance will identify and mitigate potential watershed concerns associated with this road/trail use. Appendix B includes a monitoring plan that is part of the proposed action.

The project is not expected to adversely affect long-term soil productivity, water quality, or riparian and aquatic resources provided the appropriate management recommendations are implemented.

The proposed section of trail in the north half of Section 35 (near the headwaters of North Creek) has consistently wet trail surfaces, riparian vegetation, and steep trail sections. Because of those features, some slight adverse watershed impacts may occur resulting from erosion and sedimentation. Re-routing of the events off of that trail onto Mill Creek Road (2N10) would avoid the risk of creating adverse watershed impacts in this area.

Potential watershed effects associated with event use of the road/trail system include: 1) rutting/puddling in flat, poorly drained sections when the soils are wet; 2) entrenchment of trails can result in gullying and accelerated water delivery to stream channels during storms; 3) accelerated sediment delivery to streams and road/trail crossings resulting in increased turbidity and nutrient loading; and 4) changes in hydrological patterns/drainages in or near meadows and springs.

Implementation of the monitoring plan (Appendix B) will allow remedial actions to be taken if unacceptable impacts are observed.

Cumulative watershed disturbance is the sum of disturbance caused by past, present and planned activities within the watershed. Examples of watershed disturbances include soil compaction, reduction of soil cover, alteration of stream channel banks, diversion of overland flow, etc. These are caused by wildfire, road and trail construction, urban

development, development of ski resorts, stream channel alteration and many other natural or planned processes within the watershed.

b) Environmental Consequences of the Alternative 2—No Action:

Under the No Action alternative, no additional risk for adverse watershed effects would be created.

L. Fire Danger

a) Environmental Consequences of the Alternative 1—Proposed Action: Because the events use non-motorized vehicles, no increase in fire danger would be expected under the Proposed Action.

b) Environmental Consequences of the Alternative 2—No Action: Under the No Action alternative, no changes to fire danger would occur.

M. Air Quality/Dust

a) Environmental Consequences of the Alternative 1—Proposed Action: Some dust would be generated along the event routes, especially during long dry periods and along steep downhill trail sections where speed is faster. However, the mountain bike races have been observed and monitored over several years by Forest Service personnel. Dust has been minimal and very localized over short periods of time. During very dry periods, Team Big Bear has watered the ground to reduce dust levels in the base area of Snow Summit.

b) Environmental Consequences of the Alternative 2—No Action: Under the No Action alternative, no changes to air quality would occur.

N. Noise Disturbance

a) Environmental Consequences of the Alternative 1—Proposed Action:

Almost all of the noise associated with the events is generated at the start and finish areas, at the base of the Snow Summit ski resort. Spectators gathered at the start and finish lines applaud and cheer for racers. The race announcers and starters use a loud speaker system at the start/finish areas to communicate with the racers and spectators.

Noise levels generated on the race course outside the ski resort are very low. The racers themselves and their mountain bikes are quiet and spectators generally do not observe along the race routes. Because of the nature of racing events, noise impacts would be concentrated around Snow Summit's base area. These noise levels are consistent with noise generated on weekends during the ski season and during other ski area events. The City of Big Bear Lake has restrictions on the noise levels on the private lands at the ski areas and the noise associated with the Proposed Action would comply with those regulations, in association with the City of Big Bear Lake's permitting process.

Those closest to the noise source would be people renting the nearby condominium units, and campers at Pineknott Campground. On race event weekends, most of the nearby rental housing and the Pineknott Campground are occupied by race participants and spectators. Presumably, those people would not consider the event noise to be a disturbance.

b) Environmental Consequences of the Alternative 2—No Action:

Under the No Action alternative, no races would occur and no noise would be generated.

IV. Consequences Relative to Significance Elements

In 1978, the Council of Environmental Quality promulgated regulations for implementing the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). These regulations (40 CFR Parts 1500-1508) include a definition of "significantly" as used in NEPA. The ten elements of this definition are critical to reducing paperwork through use of a finding of no significant impact when an action will not have a significant effect on the human environment and is therefore exempt from requirements to prepare an environmental impact statement.

A. Context—The context of this proposal is limited to the locale of the Mountaintop Ranger District area. The proposed event area would avoid sensitive areas for biological and heritage resources. Even in a local context, this proposal would not pose significant short or long-term effects. Past, current and reasonably foreseeable actions within the vicinity of the project area were considered in determining that no significant cumulative effects are expected as a result of the proposal.

B. Intensity

1. **Beneficial and adverse impacts**—The proposal's beneficial impacts relate to providing the opportunity for mountain bike race activities on the Mountaintop Ranger District. Adverse impacts to biological and physical resources which would result from this proposal are minimal and nonsignificant.
2. **Public health and safety**—The proposed action is not likely to present a significant threat to public health and safety, although race participants may be subject to injury from falling from their mountain bikes.
3. **Unique characteristics of the geographic area** —No parklands, prime farmlands, or Wild and Scenic Rivers would be affected by this project. The project area avoids ecologically critical areas such as pebble plain habitat, carbonate soils, heritage resources, and plant populations that are Threatened, Endangered or Sensitive. Though not completely avoided, impacts to riparian areas are minimized through project design and event timing.
4. **Controversy**—The effects on the quality of the human environment are not likely to be highly controversial due to the nature of the activity (non-motorized recreation). The proposed action can be implemented without significant adverse

effects to the environment if all of the avoidance/minimization measures and permit/operating plan requirements are implemented and the events are monitored for unacceptable impacts.

5. **Uncertainty, unique or unknown risks**-- No uncertainty or unknown risks would be associated with this proposal. Similar events have been held over the past several years under annual permits. Standard guidelines and monitoring methods were incorporated into the Proposed Action in order to minimize impacts.
6. **Precedence** --The proposed action follows standard practices for permitting special events on NFS lands. The agency may analyze additional areas outside those proposed in this project, but such future efforts would be analyzed separately and on their own merits. For these reasons, this proposal would not establish a precedent for future actions or represent a decision about future management considerations.
7. **Cumulative Effects** -- No significant cumulative effects were identified.
8. **Cultural, or historical resources** --No prehistoric archaeological resources were found to be located anywhere within or adjacent to mountain bike trails and roads proposed for use. Based on the results of the archaeological records check, the intensive field inventory of trail segments, and the reconnaissance survey of the study area, the sensitivity of the area for prehistoric resources appears to be low, especially in comparison with surrounding regions.
9. **Endangered, threatened, and sensitive species/habitats** -- No significant impacts to TES species or habitats would occur from this proposal (see previous discussion).
10. **Federal, State, or local law or requirements** --The proposed action does not violate of Federal, State or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment. The proposed treatments conform to the Clean Air Act and State Implementation Plan for the South Coast Air Basin. All actions are consistent with the San Bernardino National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan and the National Forest Management Act.

V. AGENCIES AND PERSONS CONTACTED

A scoping letter was sent to the following people and agencies on January 11, 2001:

California Department of Fish and Game
Patrick Marley (Save Our Forest Association)
Congressman Jerry Lewis (Congressional District #40)

Steve Church (San Bernardino Sun)
John Heitman (Sierra Club – Mountains Group)
Eddie Phillips (Americans for Forest Access)
Crestline/Lake Arrowhead Water Agency
US Fish and Wildlife Service – Carlsbad office
Supervisor Dennis Hansberger (County of San Bernardino)
Carol Sebastian (Sierra Club)
Jack McCarthy (Sierra Club – Big Bear Group)
Greg Rawuka (Big Bear Bikes)
Joyce Burk (Sierra Club – San Geronio Chapter)
Tom Walsh (Sierra Club)
Jan Sears (Sun Telegram)
Liz Stevens (The Grizzly)
B.H. Wetherly (Public Lands for the People)
Martin Argo (Southern California Trials Association)
Leslie Klein (NORBA)
Big Bear Lake Resort Association
Big Bear Lake Chamber of Commerce
Bear Mountain Ski Resort
Escape Condos
Summit Townhouses
Robinhood Inn
Alpine Sports Center
La Montana Restaurant
Janice Etter (City of Big Bear Lake)
Pat Follett (Team Big Bear)
Diane Stockl (Sierra Club – Mountains Group)

VI. COMMENTS

The San Bernardino National Forest invites your comments on this Pre-Decisional Environmental Assessment for the proposal to issue a multi-year special use permit to Team Big Bear, Incorporated, for a series of mountain bike race events they would hold each year during the summer and fall. The comment period ends 30 days following the publication of notice in the *Grizzly* newspaper. All comments received during the comment period will be considered in making a decision on the proposed action.

Comments received in response to this solicitation, including names and addresses of respondents, will be considered part of the public record on this proposed action and will be available for public inspection. Comments submitted anonymously will be accepted and considered; however, those who submit anonymous comments will not have standing to appeal the subsequent decision under 36 CFR Parts 215 or 217. Additionally, pursuant to 7 CFR 1.27(d), any person may request the agency to withhold a submission from the public record by showing how the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) permits such confidentiality. Persons requesting such confidentiality should be aware that, under the FOIA, confidentiality may be granted in only very limited circumstances, such as to

protect trade secrets. The Forest Service will inform the requester of the agency's decision regarding the request for confidentiality, and where the request is denied, the agency will return the submission and notify the requester that the comments may be resubmitted with or without name and address within 7 days.

VII. CONTACT PERSON

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Fawnskin, CA 92333
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VIII. LIST OF PREPARERS/REVIEWERS

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Eliason, Robin. ABNF. District Biologist
Eliason, Scott. SBNF. District Botanist.
McCarthy, Daniel. SBNF. Forest Archaeologist
Shroeder, Eric. Stanislaus National Forest. Soil Scientist.
Wenstrom, Ruth. SBNF. Forest Planner

IX. REFERENCES

San Bernardino National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (LRMP)

Memorandum of Understanding, USDA Forest Service and International Mountain Bicycling Association, Agreement # 00-SU-11130124-224

APPENDIX A. APPLICABLE LEGAL REQUIREMENTS AND MANAGEMENT DIRECTION

Applicable requirements and direction may be found in the Endangered Species Act, National Forest Management Act, Department of Agriculture 9500-4 Regulations, Forest Service Manual, and the San Bernardino National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan; USDA Forest Service 1989a)

National Forest Management Act

The National Forest Management Act of 1976 and its implementing regulations direct the Forest Service to maintain viable and well-distributed populations of all native vertebrate species. In addition, the Secretary of Agriculture's policy on fish and wildlife (Department Regulation 9500-4) directs the Forest Service to avoid actions "which may cause a species to become threatened or endangered".

Forest Service Manual

Forest Service Manual 2670 further directs the Forest Service:

- *to avoid or minimize impacts to species whose viability has been identified as a concern.*
- *that if impacts cannot be avoided, analyze the significance of potential adverse effects... line officer can allow or disallow the impact but the decision must not result in loss of species viability or create a significant trend towards Federal listing.*
- *to develop/implement management practices to ensure that species do not become threatened or endangered because of Forest Service actions.*

San Bernardino National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan

The Forest Plan direction for threatened, endangered, and sensitive species and wildlife management includes:

- *Standards and Guidelines include "Impacts to Threatened/Endangered/Sensitive (TE&S) species must be mitigated." (SG-32)*
- *Under wildlife and fish management direction, "Manage habitat for TE&S species to enhance populations and to permit their timely removal from designated lists. Manage for genetic and geographic diversity and long-term viability of the species on the Forest." Standards and Guidelines include, "Strive to maintain at least the current distribution of all TE&S species." and "Fully mitigate for unavoidable impacts to TE&S species and riparian habitat." (SG-57 & 58)*
- *Also under management direction for wildlife and fish, "Emphasize sensitive species habitat protection and improvement in all forest management activities." Standards and Guidelines include, "Restrict uses and activities to protect sensitive fish and wildlife where needed." (SG-59)*

The Forest Plan includes direction for threatened, endangered and sensitive plants:

- *Manage sensitive plant species to avoid future listing as threatened and endangered. Ensure maintenance of genetic and geographic diversity and viable populations (SG-65).*

- *Emphasize sensitive plant species habitat protection and improvement in all forest management activities. (SG-66).*
- *Permit no activities which may adversely alter surface or subsurface hydrology or meadow habitats where sensitive plants are present (SG-66).*

Forest Plan direction for riparian areas (SG-42-43) and riparian-dependent species (SG-63) includes:

- *Managing for riparian-dependent species.*
- *Protect and enhance riparian areas, giving emphasis to riparian dependent resources; manage existing uses and activities in riparian areas to reduce conflicts with riparian-dependent resources; inventory and monitor riparian areas to identify and quickly correct problems; and maintain water flow needed to support aquatic and riparian areas and dependent uses.*
- *Relocation of conflicting uses from riparian and wetland areas on a planned basis and as opportunities present themselves.*
- *Fully mitigate for reductions in habitat capability resulting from uses and activities.*
- *Improve habitat for these emphasis species.*

Forest Plan direction for Forest roads and trails includes (SG-7):

- *Operate and maintain Forest system roads and trails according to maintenance levels and objectives appropriate to the planned use, and considering costs and effects on land and resources.*
- *Control public and administrative use on Forest transportation system by closures. Closures may be instituted for: 1) fire restrictions and closures; 2) fish, wildlife, and plant mitigation or enhancement; 3) adverse weather or subgrade conditions; 4) safety hazards on the facility; and, 5) watershed protection.*

Forest Plan direction for competitive events (SG-34) includes:

- *Evaluate on a case-by-case basis.*

Forest Plan direction for Ski Areas (SG-32) includes:

- *Continue to limit the summer use of winter sports sites to activities that are compatible with National Forest management and resources.*
- *Impacts to TES species must be mitigated.*
- *Encourage the retention of the natural quality of the area, while providing for an economically feasible ski area development.*
- *Interpret the unique resource values for summer and winter users.*

Forest Plan direction for off-road (mountain) biking (SG-40) includes:

- *Allow mountain bikes to use Forest trails except for the Pacific Crest Trail and trails within wilderness.*
- *Individual trails may be closed if safety or resource problems cannot be mitigated.*

Forest-wide Standards and Guidelines for Wildlife (SG-57-59) and Threatened, Endangered, and Sensitive Plants (SG-65-67) that are applicable to this proposal include:

- *Coordinate with California Dept. of Fish and Game and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service during preparation of EAs and Plans having significant effects on fish and/or wildlife habitat.*
- *Manage habitat for TES species to enhance populations and to permit their timely removal from designated lists. Manage for genetic and geographic diversity and long-term viability of the species on the SBNF. Conduct all FS management activities and regulate uses to support the needs of TES species, including maintaining current distribution of all TES species and re-establishing species in unoccupied suitable habitat.*
- *Fully mitigate for unavoidable impacts to TES species and riparian habitat.*
- *Mitigate for impacts to non-TES species, as appropriate for the emphasis area.*
- *Emphasize sensitive species habitat protection and improvement in all forest management activities.*
- *Avoid introducing barriers to movement of deer, bear, mountain lion, and bighorn sheep. Fully mitigate barriers to movement.*
- *Protect cliffs occupied by TES cliff-nesting raptors during the nesting season. Avoid disturbance of occupied nests, including blasting, operating heavy equipment, and concentrated recreation use.*
- *Manage vegetation to correct habitat deficiencies in important bighorn sheep habitat. Establish seasonal closures as necessary, to minimize disturbances in lambing areas and at mineral licks.*
- *Manage sensitive plant species to avoid future listing as threatened or endangered.*
- *Integrate management direction for TES plants endemic to limestone into mining operation and reclamation plans.*

Soil Productivity

- *Soil quality standards are designed to ensure long-term soil productivity. Soil cover, porosity, and organic matter should not be altered to the degree that would result in a 15% or more reduction to the inherent productivity potential of the soil.*
- *Application of appropriate erosion control (trail maintenance) and control unauthorized expansion of the trail network will ensure that soil productivity standards are met*

Riparian Areas and Wetlands

- *Riparian areas include the lands within 100 feet of perennial stream-banks and natural bodies of water, as well as all wetlands. Riparian vegetation is an excellent indicator of presence of year round soil moisture*
- *Comply with State and Federal laws on all activities resulting in streambed modification. Activities will be appropriately documented*
- *Rehabilitate stream-banks which have deteriorated*
- *Control management activities and other uses in riparian areas to reduce stream-bank and lakeshore damage and maintain areas in a stable condition*
- *Conduct periodic inventory to determine the condition and trend of riparian areas*

- *Maintain herbaceous cover (riparian vegetation) in good to excellent condition in riparian areas*
- *Relocate conflicting uses from riparian areas on a planned basis and as opportunities present themselves*
- *Adverse impacts from uses and activities will be fully mitigated*

Water Quality

- *Forest Service activities must meet State and Federal water quality laws and objectives.*
- *Implement best management practices (BMPs) and other management to meet water quality objectives*
- *Monitor implementation and effectiveness of BMPs and other management requirements to determine if soil and water quality goals are being met.*

Big Bear Management Area direction (Pp 4-44) includes:

Recreation: Local communities will be encouraged to supply recreation opportunities for local residents, including cooperative partnerships to manage Forest Service recreation facilities. Local communities and San Bernardino County will be encouraged to provide snow play and other recreation opportunities.

Integrated Management, Lands, Wildlife: Management activities will emphasize habitat enhancement for sensitive plant and wildlife species. Increased efforts will be made to maintain adequate snags and dead/down logs for wildlife and site productivity. Interpretive activities are encouraged. If suitable private lands exist, National Forest System lands will not be available for special uses.

Santa Ana Management Area direction (Pp 4-50) includes:

Recreation:

Recreation Management Emphasis Zone direction (Page 4-16) includes:

Optimize the recreation resource on the Forest by intensively managing for the variety of developed and dispersed recreation opportunities while meeting the appropriate Standards and Guidelines for other resources. Provide greater administrative controls on dispersed use to help resource protection. Manage vegetation to maintain and enhance structural and species diversity with emphasis on large and mature trees in the conifer and hardwood types.

Wildlife Management Emphasis Zone direction (Page 4-16) includes:

Manage for an intensive resource program with emphasis on wildlife habitat improvement for emphasis species. Vegetation management is designed to create a diversity of ages, size classes, and species composition. Provide for recreation use compatible with and in support of the wildlife emphasis.

Watershed/Fisheries/Wildlife Management Emphasis Zone direction (Page 4-17)
includes: Manage to maintain or enhance watershed integrity and health through an active sediment management program. Provide for high levels of habitat for emphasis species through vegetation management activities, instream improvements for fisheries and other habitat improvements. Manage for increased water yields as opportunities become available. Emphasize a variety of recreation activities compatible with watershed, fish and wildlife objectives.

Southern California Conservation Strategy

In early 2001, the four southern California National Forests completed Section 7 Formal Consultation with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on the impacts of ongoing activities on the National Forests on proposed, threatened, and endangered species. The Biological Opinions (USFWS 2001a, USFWS 2001b, USFWS 2001c) contain interim management direction and conservation measures that must be followed to ensure compliance with the Endangered Species Act.

Endangered Species Act

The Endangered Species Act contains protection for all species federally-listed as endangered or threatened: *Federal agencies shall seek to conserve endangered species and threatened species and shall, in consultation with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, utilize their authorities in furthering the purposes of the Endangered Species Act by carrying out programs for the conservation of endangered and threatened species.*

Regulations for species that are proposed for listing as endangered or threatened are included in the Endangered Species Act: *Federal agencies shall confer with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on any agency action that is likely to jeopardize the continued existence of any species proposed to be listed.*

California Spotted Owl Management Policies

Forest Service Pacific Southwest Region policy (USDA Forest Service 1984) is to protect all identified spotted owl territories (the area within a 1.5-mile radius of each nest). The Forest Plan direction is to protect all identified territories and to develop territory management plans for protection of each territory.

The SBNF Spotted Owl Habitat Management Plan (USDA Forest Service 1989b) established guidelines for spotted owl habitat protection within territories, calling for establishment of "owl management areas" within a 1.5-mile radius of nest sites for each pair on the Forest. These areas are broken down into a 300-acre "core area" which encompass nesting/roosting habitat, and an additional 300-acre area "habitat block" which primarily contain foraging habitat. As a general rule, vegetation management activities are allowed on a limited basis in habitat blocks but not allowed at all in core areas.

These acreages were based on profession opinion at that time. Adequacy of those acres is now being questioned as a result of The California spotted owl: a technical assessment of

its current status (CASPO Report; Verner et al. 1992) and the Sierran Province National Forests' Interim Guidelines (USDA Forest Service 1993).

The Interim Guidelines for eastside Sierran mixed conifer forests call for protection of 2550 acres of mixed conifer forest of at least 40% canopy closure within 1.5-miles of each spotted owl nest. Within those 2550 acres, habitat should be managed for at least 450 acres of suitable nesting/roosting habitat (at least 70% canopy closure).

Since Regional guidelines have not been developed to more specifically address habitat needs in southern California forest types, the Interim Guidelines standards were used to assess impacts to spotted owls for this project. Under these guidelines, all suitable habitat within 1.5-mile radius of each nest is to be protected unless there are more than 2550 acres available.

The SBNF policy also calls for added protection of nest sites and habitat: management activities within 1/4 mile of nests, which would be disruptive to spotted owls, will be scheduled for periods outside the nesting seasons. The nesting season is normally from March 15 to July 1. Disruptive activities within 1/4 mile of core areas and habitat blocks, when authorized, will be restricted to daylight hours.

Recent studies, cited in CASPO Report, noted the importance of the San Bernardino Mountains population for maintaining smaller populations in adjacent southern California mountain ranges. They recommended that southern California National Forests continue current management policy to protect all identified territories.

APPENDIX B—Soil Monitoring Plan

Soils Monitoring Plan

The monitoring plan will be used to determine the implementation and effectiveness of management recommendations and management strategy. In other words, monitoring will determine whether the proposed management recommendations and management strategy are providing adequate protection for long-term soil productivity, water quality, and riparian and aquatic resources. Monitoring should be conducted prior to the event to collect baseline information, following the event, following the heavy use season (summer), following major thundershowers and following snow melt. Monitoring should be developed and coordinated by Forest Service Recreation, Engineering and Watershed personnel. Monitoring efforts should cover the entire road/trail system but focus on heavy use and sensitive areas. Trail maintenance, re-routing and/or changes in management strategy should be conducted as needed following review of the monitoring data.

The monitoring plan should incorporate the following observations:

- Identify and monitor areas where ruts or puddling are occurring due to trail use under wet soil conditions
- Identify and monitor damage to stream-banks, stream-beds, or riparian areas
- Identify and monitor unauthorized expansion of the trail network and any associated resource damage
- Identify and monitor soil and water resource concerns associated with trail access roads
- Monitor condition and effectiveness of cross-drainage structures, trail surface armoring and other trail maintenance *techniques*
 - Is cross-drainage or armoring present where necessary?
 - Is spacing and construction adequate to prevent formation of gullies or entrenchment on the trail surface?
 - Is the trail channeling water and causing erosion where water exits the trail?
 - Is the placement of vegetation and rock effectively disguising unauthorized trails?

The following methods may be used to implement the monitoring plan:

- Develop a photo-monitoring plan for the project
- Use best management practice (BMP) implementation and effectiveness monitoring guidelines and forms
- Develop a monitoring form which addresses the soil and hydrology LMP Standards and Guidelines and Management Recommendations described in this report