

File Code: 1950 – NEPA

Date: February 9, 2015

Dear National Forest User,

The USDA Forest Service, Inyo National Forest (INF) has initiated National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) analysis for the *Lake George Multiple Use Path Trail Construction project* and for the issuance of special use permits to the Town of Mammoth Lakes for 1. The construction, operation, and maintenance of the proposed path and 2. The maintenance of public roads within the Mammoth Lakes Basin.. The project is located within the Mammoth Ranger District on the Inyo National Forest. See the enclosed vicinity maps and project area detail maps for more information.

Project Location

The proposed *Lake George Multiple Use Path Trail Construction project* would be located in the Mammoth Lakes Basin with beginning and ending termini at the “Main Lake Mary Road/Pokenobe Resort” intersection (adjacent to the bus stop across from Pokenobe Resort) and at the Lake George/Crystal Crag trailhead and parking area. The proposed trail would run parallel to the road departing from the Pokenobe intersection, cross the outlet of Lake Mary adjacent to the existing bridge, cross the road and climb up the north facing slope below Lake George and end just below the stop sign at the Lake George parking lot. There would also be a spur that drops from the main trail and connects to the Lake Mary Road, designed for users wanting to travel around the “Lake Mary Loop.”

Purpose and Need for action

INF and TOML work cooperatively to deliver the *Mammoth Lakes Trail System (MLTS)*, a network of trails on the Inyo National Forest and on municipal lands in and near the Town of Mammoth Lakes. The INF and TOML share an interest in enhancing the MLTS to provide diverse recreation experiences that promote the use and enjoyment of public lands in the Eastern Sierra. The INF and TOML also share a goal of promoting public land access and transportation networks that reduce vehicle congestion and carbon emissions.

The Mammoth Lakes Basin (Lakes Basin) is a heavily used recreation area, both in summer and winter seasons. In the summer, the Lakes Basin is used for camping, lodging, fishing, equestrian riding, biking, cycling, running, paddling, and several other recreation activities. In many places, these uses overlap, causing congestion and potential safety issues. From July 4th through Labor Day, all campsites and lodging are often full and it can be very difficult to locate an available parking spot. Providing walkers, runners, and bicycle users additional mileage of developed surface to travel on will reduce pedestrian/vehicle conflicts within the project area and encourage users to travel on foot or bicycle to visit one of the premiere destinations within the Lakes Basin.

In 2011, with support from the INF, the TOML applied to and received a Federal Highways Administration grant to plan, design, and construct a paved multiple use trail in the Lakes Basin that would improve pedestrian and bicycle access, reduce the demand for vehicle use, and improve road safety for vehicles and pedestrians alike. The INF and TOML have been working cooperatively to study trail options, vehicle use patterns, parking, recreation access, natural and cultural resources, and other uses and issues within the project area. Cooperatively, the INF and TOML have developed this proposal for a multiple-use path trail project.



Proposed Action

The INF proposes to authorize, under special use permit to the TOML, the construction and maintenance 0.75 miles/3850 feet of multiple use path/trail to Trail Development Class 5 standards (high level of development). The new trail would begin at the “Pokenobe” intersection of Lake Mary Road and travel on the west side of the road towards the “Lake George/Lake Mary” intersection, crossing the Lake Mary outlet adjacent to the existing bridge, just below the spillway. The trail would continue by crossing the Lake George Road at the intersection and climbing the north facing slope below the Lake George Campground, ending at the road just below/north of the stop sign in the Lake George parking lot and Crystal Lake trailhead. A short spur would connect back to the Lake Mary Road for those traveling around the “Lake Mary Loop.” The entire trail would be paved and approximately ten feet in width with pullouts for users to rest and to provide opportunities for interpretive and educational signs. Benches would be placed in pullouts. At both termini, trailhead kiosks and 20’x20’ kiosk plazas would be constructed to orient visitors and allow users to gather. The kiosk plaza at Lake George would include bike racks for those wanting to bike to the trailhead, secure their bicycles, and continue on foot along one of the several area trails. Adjacent to the kiosk plazas, picnic tables and other day use infrastructure will be placed to accommodate the anticipated recreation use. The shoulder of the road near the Lake George stop sign would be widened at the crossing to accommodate bicycle and pedestrian traffic.

The proposed trail would take over the alignment of existing day ride trails used under special use permit by the *Mammoth Lakes Pack Outfit*. As a result, the day ride trails will be relocated, necessitating the reconstruction of 0.35 miles of class 2 (low level of development) trail and amendment of the special use permit to include the newly added trails. In addition, boulders, logs, and other obstacles will be placed along the paved multiple use path, adjacent to existing roadways, and in other locations required to keep bicycles from riding on trails used by commercial pack stock.

Along the Lake Mary Road, in front of the Lake Mary Campground, construction of the proposed trail will require realignment of the existing road. The existing road was constructed in manner that created a gentle bend and narrowing of the road corridor to climb a slight hill and use natural terrain features. The realignment of the road will serve both purposes of accommodating the newly constructed multiple use path and improving vehicle safety along the road corridor. The U.S. Forest Service proposes to issue to the TOML a ten year permit to maintain up to nine miles of publicly traveled roads within the Lakes Basin, including this section of road that will require realignment. Issuance of a multi-year road maintenance permit will, over time, help TOML and the INF collaborate and leverage funding to repave and maintain the public road network within the Lakes Basin and seek funding to support trail development, safety enhancements, and continued delivery of public transportation infrastructure.

Trail construction and road realignment will require the removal of approximately 85 small to moderately sized lodgepole trees, with the majority of the trees required to be removed less than 12 inches diameter at breast height. The trail alignment has been designed and engineered to minimize tree removal and to avoid removal or impacts to any of the Western White Pine trees that grow within the project area.

How you can give input

This letter initiates the public involvement (scoping) part of the NEPA process. The U.S.F.S seeks your comments on the *Pokenobe to Lake George Multiple Use Path Trail Construction project*. Scoping comments will be used in analyzing the effects of, and possibly altering, the proposed action. They may also be used to develop mitigation or conservation measures in supplement to the proposed action.

Comments on this project may be submitted by telephone, electronically, or through the mail. Electronic comments are preferred. They should be sent to jkazmierski@fs.fed.us. They need to be in message,

text, .doc, .rtf, or .pdf format. Mailed comments should be sent to the District Ranger Jon Regelbrugge at the address listed in the header of this letter. For comments by telephone, contact Jon Kazmierski at 760-924-5503. Comments received in response to this letter, including names and addresses of those who comment, will be considered part of the Project Record and available for public review. Comments received within 30 days of the date of this letter are the most helpful and most likely to be considered in the analysis of this project.

I will be the Responsible Official for this project. Upon completion of the environmental review, I will decide whether or not to authorize the activities proposed in the *Pokenobe to Lake George Multiple Use Path Trail Construction project*. I expect that this project will be categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental impact statement or an environmental assessment because it will qualify for exclusion under Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), Title 36, Section 220.6 (e) (1): *Construction and reconstruction of trails*, and CFR, Title 36, Section 220.6 (d) (4): *Repair and maintenance of roads*. Therefore, when the U.S.F.S. completes the project analysis it likely will be documented, along with my decision and rationale, in a Decision Memo. Updates and additional documents will be posted on the Inyo National Forest website at: www.fs.usda.gov/projects/inyo/landmanagement/projects.

For more information about this project, please contact Jon Kazmierski, District Recreation Officer, at jkazmierski@fs.fed.us or at the above-listed phone number.

The USDA Forest Service no longer offers a formal notice, comment, or appeal opportunity for categorically excluded projects under 36 CFR 215. This is the case as of March 5, 2014, per Pub. L. No. 1-13-76, Section 431 and Pub. L. No. 113-79, Section 8006, and a directive from U.S.F.S. Chief Thomas Tidwell. A final rule, published in the Federal Register July 29, 2014, formally removed 36 CFR 215 and amended 36 CFR 218 to clarify that categorically excluded projects documented with Decision Memos no longer have formal notice and comment or appeal periods. The INF will continue to offer public involvement opportunities for categorically excluded projects or activities as required by the agency's NEPA procedures.

I appreciate your interest in this project and in the management of the Inyo National Forest.

Sincerely,


JON C. REGELBRUGGE
District Ranger

Enclosures: Vicinity maps, Project maps (Five pages)