# Eastern Sierra
# Towns to Trails
## Feasibility Study for Inyo, Alpine, and Mono Counties

Eastern Sierra Council of Governments

MLTPA

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Cover Image: Inyo County

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## Land Acknowledgment

Public lands in the United States hold the creation stories, burial grounds, and ceremonial sites of Indigenous peoples who were killed or forcibly removed during territorial expansion. In the Eastern Sierra region, tribes such as the Miwok, Mono Lake Kootzaduka'a, Mono/Monache, Nüümü (Paiute), Newe (Shoshone), Timbi-Sha, Utu Utu Gwaitu Paiute, and Washoe continue to care for their ancestral lands while navigating the ongoing impacts of colonization.

Two Nüümü terms, Pamidu Toiyabe (Western Mountains) and Payahuunadü (The Place Where Water Flows), provide meaningful context to this region and the ideas discussed here. This acknowledgment is an invitation to all organizations, residents, and visitors to recognize the way this history has shaped the present as all parties work together in anticipation of a better future.

**Image: Silver Lake. Mono County**

# 1 Introduction

Image: Inyo County

## What is the Towns to Trails Plan?

The Towns to Trails Plan is a feasibility and data-gathering study that has analyzed existing infrastructure connecting approximately 350 miles of existing roads and trails spanning from Lone Pine to South Lake Tahoe along the eastern side of the Sierra Nevada Mountain Range linking front county towns in Alpine, Mono, and Inyo County along the way. This effort has gathered the data necessary to recommended a conceptual alignment that uses existing infrastructure and maintains existing allowable uses from South Lake Tahoe to Lone Pine.

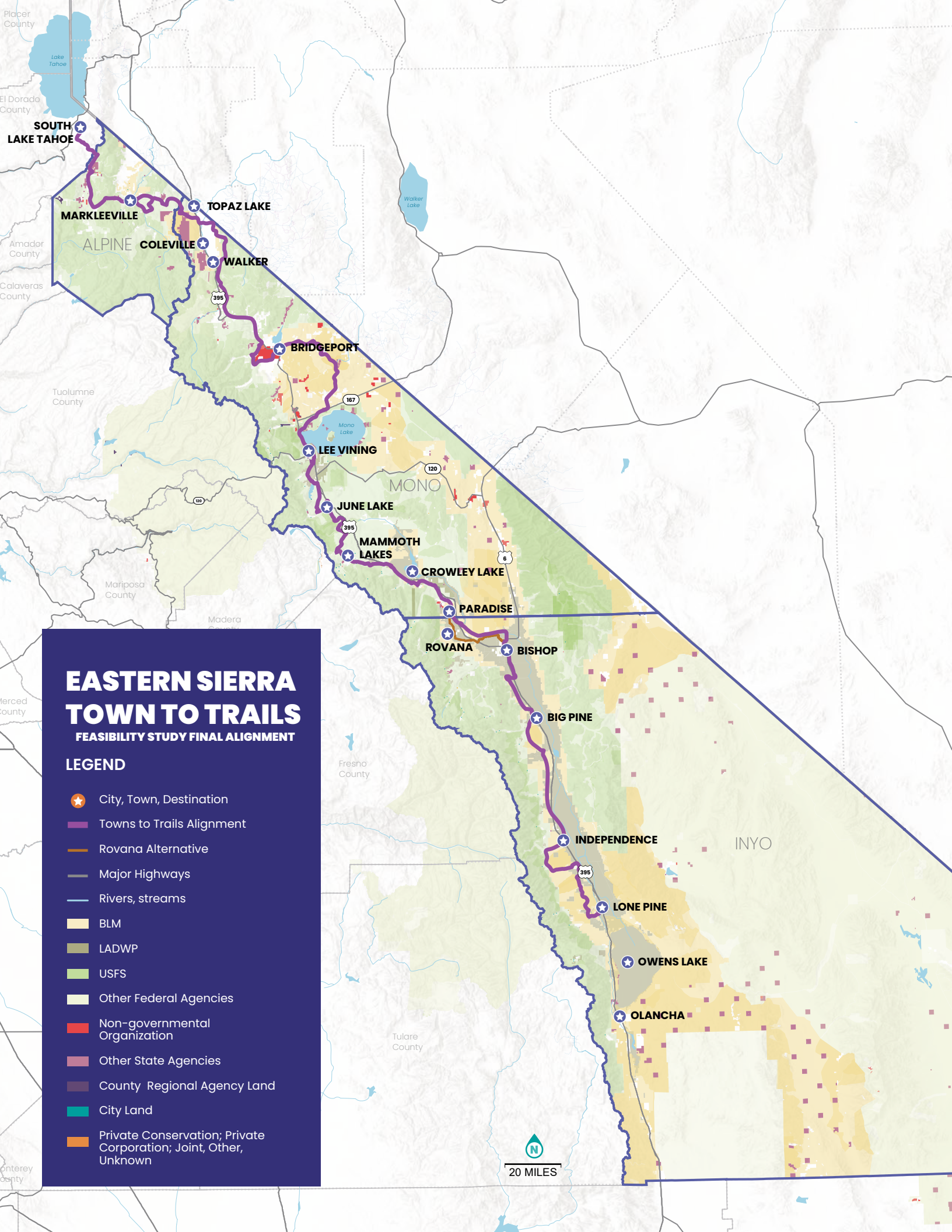
The Eastern Sierra region is characterized by dramatic landscapes, sweeping open spaces, and superb outdoor recreation opportunities made possible through the unusually high percentage of publicly owned and managed lands. The conceptual Towns to Trails alignment crosses or abuts multiple jurisdictions and lands managed by many entities, including regional tribes, the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest, Inyo National Forest, Bureau of Land Management, and the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power.

The data gathering work of the Towns to Trails Feasibility Study aims to leverage existing trail and soft-surface infrastructure in the region and takes advantage of existing priorities for trail connectivity already developed by federal land managers. This study has identified a potential alignment based on considerable analysis of existing infrastructure, alternatives, and public input.  This effort also identified a number of gaps, questions, and next steps, all of which will need to be evaluated or answered before any implementation can occur. Specifically, the proposed alignment requires continued agency/tribal coordination, environmental analysis, and focused studies of segment gaps to realize a fully contiguous alignment.

## Project Goals

This information gathering and mapping phase of the Towns to Trails project was guided by seven overarching goals:

1. Connect Eastern Sierra communities through a public-lands experience
2. Leverage existing regional partnerships
3. Establish an implementation roadmap for next steps
4. Bring economic benefit to communities
5. Enhance recreational opportunities
6. Commit to sustainable recreation
7. Identify gaps and opportunities for connectivity to existing and future networks through a public-lands experience




# EASTERN SIERRA TOWN TO TRAILS

**FEASIBILITY STUDY FINAL ALIGNMENT**

## LEGEND

- City, Town, Destination
- Towns to Trails Alignment
- Rovana Alternative
- Major Highways
- Rivers, streams
- BLM
- LADWP
- USFS
- Other Federal Agencies
- Non-governmental Organization
- Other State Agencies
- County Regional Agency Land
- City Land
- Private Conservation; Private Corporation; Joint, Other, Unknown

## Towns to Trails Route and Usage

The feasibility study focused on linking existing, publicly-accessible soft surface trails and roads. While the project team identified a number of gaps in the route, the goal of the study was to avoid the creation of new trails, roads, or paths to complete the Towns to Trails route. The Plan focused exclusively on utilizing existing trails and roads, such as those shown below. The plan aimed to identify a route that links a mix of soft surface infrastructure currently managed by various agencies into a single, continuous route paralleling the entire Eastern Sierra escarpment. Stakeholders identified hiking and biking as the primary focus of this project; yet, the analysis also considered roads and trails accessible for Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) use. This route is not recommended for through OHV use because it includes sections where OHVs are not allowed, such as county-maintained roads, highways, and single-track trails.

Single Track Trail near Mammoth Lakes

Soft Surface Road - Mono County

Paved Road - Inyo County

## Project Timeline

Below is an outline of the work performed for this study starting in Spring 2023 and ending Spring 2025.

### Spring 2023 - Project Kick-off and Existing Conditions

- Collected corporate GIS trail and road data from land management agencies, reviewed previous planning documents, established points of contact, and prepared materials for subsequent project phases
- Hosted agency and tribal partner kick-off meeting
- Hosted public kick-off meeting

### Summer 2023 - Collaborative Planning Phase 1

- Held meetings with agency partners
- Created draft alignments and solicited feedback in a series of in-person community workshops utilizing large scale plotted maps, 3d imagery, and town-to-town mapbooks
- Workshops focused on identifying backbone trails, essential destinations, key areas of avoidance, and maintaining a continuous alignment

### Winter 2023 - Draft Alignment Refinement

- Reviewed and georeferenced agency/community input
- Explored experiential and connectivity improvements

### Spring 2024 - Collaborative Planning Phase 2

- Met with agency partners
- Presented refined draft alignments and solicited feedback in a series of in-person community workshops utilizing large scale plotted maps, 3d imagery, and town-to-town mapbooks
- Workshops focused on assessing alternatives, addressing gaps, and maintaining allowable uses

### Summer 2024 - Draft Alignment Refinement

- Reviewed and georeferenced agency/community input
- Explored experiential and connectivity improvements

### Fall 2024 - Ground Truthing and Draft Plan

- Rode/hiked the entire draft alignment, verifying through-line integrity, identifying gaps, and exploring alternative alignments through an experiential lens

### Winter/Spring 2025 - Final Plan

- Finalized the draft alignment, documenting underlying agency jurisdiction, allowable use, and other key attributes for further study
- Hosted public wrap-up meeting, providing updates on the draft alignment, key opportunities and highlights near and along the proposed alignment, and recommended next steps

## History of Towns to Trails

### The Sustainable Recreation and Tourism Initiative - 2019 / 2022

In the spring of 2019, the Sierra Nevada Conservancy's Governing Board demonstrated a groundbreaking commitment to rural California's outdoor recreation economy and natural resources by authorizing Proposition 68 funding for the "Sustainable Recreation and Tourism Initiative (SRTI)," a project intended to benefit the Conservancy's Eastern sub-region, which includes Inyo, Mono, and Alpine Counties.

The SRTI supported the Eastern Sierra Sustainable Recreation Partnership (ESSRP) and its goals to, "... design, plan, implement, and report on projects to improve and maintain recreational opportunities, as well as restore ecosystems to their natural resilience and functions." The SRTI comprised four tracks, or areas of focus, including: "Regional Recreation Stakeholder Engagement"; "Climate Adaptation & Resilience Assessment"; "Connection to the Eastern Sierra Visitor Audience"; and "Project Development & Prioritization for Funding."

Through unprecedented public outreach during the COVID-19 pandemic, the SRTI's "Regional Recreation Stakeholder Engagement" track identified 183 project ideas for sustainable outdoor recreation infrastructure and program investment. Reviewed by ESSRP partners and assessed against the long-term strategic pillars of the "ESSRP Prospectus for Future Investments," eight project ideas, including the Towns to Trails Plan, emerged as the final SRTI Projects recommended for future funding and implementation. The eight final SRTI projects were prioritized by the ESSRP, taking into account the feasibility of project implementation from the hundreds of ideas submitted by recreation stakeholders; the highest likelihood of funding success based on currently available funding opportunities in the Summer and Fall of 2021; expected regional benefits for the Eastern Sierra; and alignment with advancing goals for climate resilience and adaptation.

In collaboration with the Mammoth Lakes Trails and Public Access Foundation (MLTPA), the Eastern Sierra Council of Governments (ESCOG) submitted a grant application to the Sierra Nevada Conservancy in October 2021 for an "Eastern Sierra Towns to Trails Plan," which was awarded to the ESCOG in the Spring of 2022.

### Sierra Nevada Conservancy, Proposition 68, and CEQA Statutorial Exemption

Funding for this project has been provided by the Sierra Nevada Conservancy, an agency of the State of California, under the California Drought, Water, Parks, Climate, Coastal Protection, and Outdoor Access For All Act of 2018 (Proposition 68) and in support of the Sierra Nevada Watershed Improvement Program.

On March 9, 2022, the Sierra Nevada Conservancy filed a Notice of Exemption (NOE) (State Clearinghouse Number 2022030262) with the State of California for the preparation of this feasibility analysis. Pursuant to the NOE, "The project is Statutorily Exempt under Section 15262, Feasibility and Planning Studies of the CEQA Guidelines. This project involves only the planning studies for possible future actions which the Sierra Nevada Conservancy has not approved, adopted, or funded. The project is also categorically exempt under CEQA Section 15306, Information Collection (Class 6) because it consists of basic data collection, research, experimental management, and resource evaluation activities which do not result in a serious or major disturbance to an environmental resource. The proposed activities are for information gathering purposes, or as part of a study leading to an action which a public agency has not yet approved, adopted, or funded." The Towns-to-Trails Feasibility Analysis is consistent with Project Description cited in the NOE.

### Goals for Communities and Alignment Criteria

As represented in ESCOG's successful grant application to the Sierra Nevada Conservancy, goals for the proposed Towns to Trails alignment state that "Eastern Sierra communities will have identified ways to connect with one another using a combination of existing trail and soft-surface infrastructure that simultaneously enhances their connectivity to public lands, improves their quality of life and offers enriched, immersive public lands experiences for visitors." Considering these criteria, Towns to Trails does not propose any new infrastructure. Instead, the plan has focused on an alignment that

utilizes existing soft-surface infrastructure(s) and their current allowable uses while also identifying gaps in the alignment where supportive existing infrastructure may not exist. This study focused on identifying a route that connects a mix of infrastructure currently managed by various agencies into a single, continuous alignment linking the entire Eastern Sierra escarpment. The selected routes support compatible uses for hiking and biking. Although the analysis did not prioritize Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) use, portions of the identified routes are currently legally accessible for OHV use.

## Agency and Tribal Partner Roles

### Key Agreements

From the onset, ground rules for collaboration between agency partners and the project team were established to ensure a shared understanding of routes, allowable uses, and management. The project team collected datasets, clarified agency requirements, and discussed involvement in subsequent public workshops. These agreements also clarified the roles of each partner and fostered a unified project identity.

### Insight and Data on Potential Network Gap Closure

Agency partners contributed valuable GIS and spatial data on their existing networks, including use types and identified gaps. As the draft alignment evolved, agency partners provided critical insight into conditions, allowable uses, and potential realignments to close gaps. This information was utilized during the evaluation and prioritization of potential connections to create a cohesive, continuous alignment.

### Collaborative Problem Solving

Agency partners participated in two rounds of interactive community workshops in each of the three counties, as well as individual meetings with the project team, to address and resolve potential challenges with route alternatives. These sessions ensured that insights from all partners were integrated into the decision-making process and shared with the public in a collaborative setting to determine potential alignments within the constraints afforded by each agency's jurisdiction, requirements, and knowledge of the land.

### Tribal Partners

ESCOG is committed to communication and collaboration with tribal partners in the region. As part of this ongoing dialogue, ESCOG requested meetings with interested Tribes throughout the region, including the Bishop Paiute Tribe, the Lone Pine Paiute Shoshone, the Big Pine Paiute Tribe, the Fort Independence Tribe, the Mono Lake Kutzadika'a, the Utu Utu Gwaitu Paiute Tribe, the Hung-a-lel-ti Community of the Washoe Tribe of Nevada and California, the Bridgeport Indian Colony, and the Antelope Valley Indian Community. ESCOG staff held meetings with all responding Tribal partners, including the Bishop and Fort Independence Tribes. ESCOG recommends continued communication and collaboration with all Tribal Nations as vital next steps for Towns to Trails.

**Project Team**

Eastern Sierra Council of Governments | MLTPA | alta

**Partners**

Local and Regional Agencies
- Alpine County
- City of Bishop
- Inyo County
- Mono County
- Town of Mammoth Lakes
- Eastern Sierra Transit Authority

State Agencies
- California Department of Fish and Wildlife
- CALTRANS District 9
- Sierra Nevada Conservancy

Federal Agencies
- Bureau of Land Management
- National Park Service (including Death Valley, Manzanar Historic Site, Sequoia and Kings Canyon)
- United States Forest Service (including Humboldt-Toiyabe and Inyo)

Tribes
- Bishop Paiute Tribe
- Fort Independence Tribe of Paiute Indians

Property Owner/Other
- Los Angeles Department of Water and Power
- Southern California Edison

## Study Area

The Eastern Sierra is a high-desert landscape in California that shares a common border with the state of Nevada. Composed of three California counties (Alpine, Mono, and Inyo), the region is defined by the Sierra Nevada Mountain range, the western terminus of the Northern Basin and Range. The Eastern Sierra hosts both the highest peak and lowest valley in the 48 contiguous States, as well as the oldest living thing on Earth. Annual visitor estimates range between 4 and 7 million, principally from Southern California, but from across the country and from around the world as well.

More than 90% of the region's 17,148 square miles is managed by federal government agencies, including the U.S. Forest Service, the National Park Service, and the Bureau of Land Management.

The principal owner of the region's private property, the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power, acquired more than 450 square miles of farm and ranchland in the early years of the 20th century to secure water rights for the City of Los Angeles. The remaining private property and gateway communities are dispersed across the region, home to a permanent population of about 35,000 residents. Unparalleled opportunities for outdoor recreation have compelled visitors for many generations.

### Alpine County

Alpine County is the smallest and least populated county in California, nestled in the Sierra Nevada mountains with elevations exceeding 11,000 feet. Its landscapes feature alpine meadows, dense forests, and pristine lakes, making it a haven for outdoor enthusiasts. The population, under 1,200 residents, includes a significant Native American community, primarily members of the Washoe Tribe.

### Mono County

Mono County is located east of the Sierra Nevada and is home to iconic landmarks including Mono Lake, Mammoth Mountain, and portions of Yosemite National Park. The Town of Mammoth Lakes (population ~7,000), the only incorporated town in Mono County, serves as a primary tourism destination for the region, particularly skiing and hiking. The county's diverse terrain includes volcanic features, high desert plains, and alpine wilderness areas.

### Inyo County

Inyo County boasts dramatic geographic extremes, from Mount Whitney, the tallest peak in the contiguous U.S., to Death Valley's Badwater Basin, the lowest point in North America. The County's population is approximately 18,000, the largest town is Bishop with around 3,700 people. Known for its stark beauty, the county draws visitors to Death Valley National Park, the Owens Valley, Alabama Hills, Mount Whitney, and ancient bristlecone pine forests.

## Existing Conditions

### Agency Data Collection

The draft Towns to Trails alignment traverses three counties and multiple public land management agencies, each of which have different mandates, budgets, and data maintenance protocols. The project team consulted with agency staff regarding data sources and classifications, as they collected publicly available trail alignment data for subsequent efforts.

### Past Planning Document Review

The project team reviewed over 35 previously prepared planning documents and maps from land management agencies within the study area to better understand and align with previous efforts. These documents highlighted agency priorities, management structures, proposed alignments, and areas under study. Relevant findings were subsequently integrated into the project team's geodatabase to inform and contextualize potential Towns to Trails alignments. See Appendix 5 for more detail.

### Existing Infrastructure Analysis

The project team conducted a preliminary existing conditions analysis to gain a comprehensive understanding of the study area and establish clear parameters for the study. Major areas of investigation during this phase include:

**Inventory Analysis**: The team compiled and analyzed existing data on road and trail infrastructure within the study area. This dataset included details on road classifications, permitted uses, and ownership or managing agencies. Significant effort was required to standardize the data, as contributions from various jurisdictions—including the United States Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, Los Angeles Department of Water and Power, and the three counties—were formatted differently.

Formatting the various datasets into a single combined geodatabase with regularized attributes was an essential step in the planning process as it facilitated cross jurisdictional analysis. As the project team evaluated potential alignments and explored them with Agency partners and members of the public, the unified dataset enabled the exploration of up- and down-stream connectivity of various segment configurations.

**Environmental Considerations**: In addition to alignment opportunities, the team gathered data related to environmental considerations, as this information will be an important part of any future implementation process. Environmental data was gathered to identify locations with sensitive or conflicting uses. Key areas to avoid were mapped, including Sage Grouse habitat, USFS Wilderness Areas, seasonal hunting zones, and California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) Natural Preserves. The team relied on existing databases for this information and did not conduct any additional analyses. These areas were juxtaposed with potential alignments and areas of interest. In addition to these sensitive areas, other environmental attributes such as slope and elevation were mapped to assess their impact on user experience and project feasibility.

**Destinations and Connections**: The project team collaborated with agency partners to identify key destinations and locations within the study area. These included major towns, campgrounds, and other notable sites, vistas, and experiences that could be connected via the Towns to Trails alignment. These opportunities were mapped and helped guide core north-south trail selection during initial alignment development.

**Trail Network Gap Analysis**: Using the compiled trail inventory, the team ran a series of trail network gap analysis tools to identify major non-contiguous trail segments across the tri-county landscape. Alignment segments were classified into contiguous batches that enabled thru-travel of at least 50 miles. While most significant gaps were in response to physical barriers such as topography and existing infrastructure, this analysis also revealed that while the region features an abundant trail and road network, identifying and maintaining a continuous north-south alignment while minimizing changes in allowable uses requires careful review and future collaboration with agency, tribal, and public partners prior to any implementation.


CAUTION

# 2 Engagement Approach

Image: Public meeting in Mono County

# Engagement Overview

The Plan's outreach and engagement activities were an essential aspect of this effort to identify an alignment that incorporated local knowledge as a baseline for appropriate segments and destinations. These activities included soliciting feedback from stakeholders, land management agencies, tribes, and the public throughout the course of the project to ensure that project recommendations reflected community needs and desires, as well as consistency with land management plans and policies. This effort involved leveraging various resources and strategies to meaningfully engage a wide range of community members and agencies. The project team maintained a flexible approach to provide multiple paths for input across the project geography and implemented intuitive, engaging, and low-friction opportunities for community members and stakeholders to help shape the draft alignment. The team provided opportunities to provide feedback through multiple avenues and maintained open dialogue with agency partners and community members.

The planning process featured proactive and intentional community engagement, highlighted by two rounds of in-person community workshops in each county, featuring large scale plotted maps, 3D imagery, and town-to-town mapbooks. These workshops were exploratory and collaborative, with attendees and the project team marking up maps, discussing the various trade-offs of potential alignments, and highlighting areas for further study by the project team.

The project team also emailed updates and meeting invitations to a database of interested parties and maintained a website (www.townstotrails.org) which featured a project overview, meeting information, and contact/email signup links.

The following pages describe the formal meetings held with partners and the public.

## Engagement Schedule

## Regional Stakeholder Pre-Production Meeting

The project began with a virtual stakeholder kickoff and coordination meeting on April 10th, 2023. Regional land managers, tribes, and landowners were invited and 28 representatives attended. This meeting defined the process by which this study would be conducted, set clear project goals, and ensured that all agency partners were aligned in their understanding of the initiative before moving it forward to the public. During this meeting, key agreements were discussed, and main points of contact for each stakeholder were established. The project team also discussed progress on data collection and mapping efforts, and clarified technical considerations related to merging various Agency's datasets. Stakeholders in attendance agreed to be involved in every subsequent phase of the project.

### Meeting Date

- April 10, 2023 (virtual)

### Discussion Topics

- What are your biggest concerns about this process?
- What are the most significant opportunities for your organization?
- What are you willing and able to do to ensure the success of this plan?

### Key Takeaways

- Agencies require sufficient resources to engage meaningfully in the project; subsequent planning efforts should provide funding for agency involvement
- Special consideration must be given to avoid protected areas
- Any new alignments near protected areas will likely require environmental analysis and documentation (i.e. NEPA).
- Planning should include provisions to ensure access to designated campgrounds and other existing amenities along the route
- Inyo County segments will have particular maintenance and access considerations with Los Angeles Department of Water and Power
- Agencies are particularly mindful of securing funding for ongoing maintenance, and the probable need for a long-term partner (such as a "friends of" group) to support maintenance needs

## Agency Stakeholders Kick-Off Meetings

Following the virtual stakeholder kick-off, a series of meetings held with agency partners with jurisdiction in Alpine, Mono, and Inyo Counties. These meetings provided an opportunity to coordinate between agencies and the project team, and prepare/promote the forthcoming collaborative planning meetings with the public. County stakeholder meetings focused on identifying big-picture opportunities and challenges, and identifying rough-alignments/avoidance areas for later review.

### Meetings Dates

- June 12, 2023: Mono County Stakeholder Kickoff (in person)
- June 14, 2023: Inyo County Stakeholder Kickoff (in person)
- June 22, 2023: Alpine County Stakeholder Kickoff (virtual)

### Discussion Topics

- Study area, history, goals, and process
- Big picture coordination, questions, and concerns
- Easy wins, known trail gaps, no-go trails/areas, priority trails/projects

### Key Takeaways

#### *General*

- A continuous north-south alignment featuring a consistent list of allowable uses may not be feasible
- Avoid alignments in wilderness areas, and near cultural resources
- Be particularly careful when reviewing alignments to avoid linking motorized routes to non-motorized areas
- User-created trails should be treated cautiously; each agency/area has particular concerns and needs
- Agencies have limited budgets and bandwidth; identify opportunities to support agency goals/directives via this plan

#### *Alpine County*

- The majority of discussions focused on a non-motorized trail.
- Some members of the public may want to bring forward a motorized trail.
- Explore opportunities to connect the Humboldt-Toiyabe NF to Tahoe/Hope Basin
- Wintertime access and alignments must also be considered

#### *Mono County*

- Many avoidance areas throughout region; coordinate with agencies to explore potential alignments
- Consider camping implications associated with potential alignments, i.e. increased dispersed camping near water sources
- There is a lot of demand for/are many user-generated single-track trails for motorized uses; user conflicts must be anticipated
- Motorized trails may be easier to fund - industry and state programs exist

#### *Inyo County*

- User-created trails surround many communities, often making direct connections to public lands
- There are many communities on the east side of the valley that want more tourism; consider their needs
- LADWP land/roads represents a significant portion of the study area in Inyo County; consider how alignments can meet their requirements
- Many single-track trails have been illegally converted into double-tracks via OHV usage

## Public Kick-off Meeting

Following the agency kick-off meetings, a public kick-off meeting was held virtually to accommodate participants from all three counties. Forty two people tuned in to the event. The public-facing regional stakeholder meeting focused on sharing project history and goals, and underscored the need and desire for community input during forthcoming collaborative planning phases.

The kick-off session included an introduction and project overview, a review of previous work completed, and a discussion of the initial vision and goals presented by the project partners. Additionally, the meeting provided an overview of how the public could get involved, highlighted resources available on the project website, and presented the project timeline. The session concluded with an open discussion and a question-and-answer segment.

### Meeting Date

- June 29, 2023: Regional Public Kickoff (virtual)

### Discussion Topics

- Study area, history, goals, and process
- Base mapping progress and trail tiering
- Trail and network gap analysis
- Timeline and how to get involved
- Questions and comments

### Key Takeaways

- Alignments should not drop off at the community boundaries; identify clear, safe connections to logical destinations
- East-west connections are just as important as a north-south alignment
- Explore opportunities to partner with local and national non-profits, which could help secure funding, and assist with trail maintenance/stewardship
- Attendees expressed excitement to begin the collaborative planning phase

# Phase 1: Collaborative Planning

## Public Workshops

Following the collection of existing trail and soft surface infrastructure alignment data, analyzing connectivity opportunities, and the development of four “straw” alignments (explored in more detail in Chapter 4), the project team held its first round of in-person workshops with agency stakeholders and the public.

These interactive workshops began with a brief introduction to the project, an overview of the work completed to date, and an explanation of the methodology used. Participants were then invited to provide detailed feedback on route alternatives by marking up and commenting on detailed map books, which showcased a variety of alternative routes across the entire study area. Community members were enthusiastic to share their perspectives and contribute to a project borne out of the SRTI process, which many of them had participated in. Over 400 individual notes/alignment annotations were collected during these workshops, which were cataloged and referenced by the project team to further refine the draft alignment.

### Workshop Dates

- September 11, 2023: Inyo County Stakeholder Workshop (in person)
- September 13, 2023: Alpine County Stakeholder Workshop (in person)
- September 14, 2023: Mono County Stakeholder Workshop (in person)

### Discussion Topics

- Project study area, history, goals, and process
- Trail and soft surface network inventory and network gap analysis
- "Least Cost Path" straw alignments
- Alignment evaluation, gap closures, and destinations to connect

### Key Takeaways

The participants annotated a mapbook series spanning the entire project area at a scale that could be legible and enabled community members to share their local knowledge. Following the workshops, public comments were geographically referenced and considered by the project team when evaluating up- and down-stream implications on existing trail and soft surface infrastructure/allowable use contiguity. The culmination of this effort was progression from the four straw alignments developed to serve as starting points to elicit responses into a single draft alignment accompanied by a series of alternates and gaps for continued exploration. Segmented summaries highlighting feedback received and identifying a modified draft alignment accompanied by alternatives/connections are provided in the appendix.

Residents reviewing and discussing the mapbooks with project staff.

# Phase 2: Collaborative Planning

## Public Workshops

Following the alignment refinement based on input received during the Phase 1 collaborative planning meetings and workshops, the project team prepared updated draft alignment materials, showcasing revised draft alignments, trail  and other soft surface infrastructure types and motorized/non-motorized segments. In addition to a digital model of the draft alignment to investigate potential alignments and connections with community members, the project team plotted over 20 large-scale maps of the study area, facilitating close review and comment on potential trail segments, and spurring discussions about in-town connections.

### Workshop Dates

- June 11, 2024: Alpine County Stakeholder Workshop (in person)
- June 12, 2024: 2023: Mono County Stakeholder Workshop (in person)
- June 13, 2024: Inyo County Stakeholder Workshop (in person)

### Discussion Topics

- Project study area, history, goals, and process
- Phase 1 alignment comments received, and updated alignment overview
- Interactive alignment evaluation, gap closures, and identification of desired destinations
- In-town routing, trailheads, and connections
- Use-specific and/or more difficult alternative alignments
- Network and allowable use gaps

### Key Takeaways

During this phase of the planning process, project team and community members collaboratively annotated maps, and discussed how various segments could be integrated into a cohesive whole. Options for some alignment segments were presented as either a Base Alignment (Green), Alternative Route (Blue), Challenge Route (Black). Other linework highlighted: Highways (Yellow), Spurs that could connect to campgrounds or other destinations (Orange), Identified Gaps in infrastructure (Pink), and rail-to-trail (Brown). Agency partners attended these workshops to help clarify regulations related to access and allowable uses, and discuss next steps related to identifying a final alignment. Segmented summaries highlighting feedback received and identifying an updated draft alignment accompanied by alternatives/ connections are provided in Appendix 2.

## Agency Meetings

Concurrent to these public meetings, the project team met in person and virtually with Land Management Agency staff and leadership to discuss progress, challenges, and share feedback received to date from constituents.

### Meeting Dates

- March 28, 2024: Alpine Trails Association
- May 15, 2024: Inyo National Forest
- May 17, 2024: Bureau of Land Management
- April 30, 2024: CALTRANS (emailed comments)

### Key Takeaways

- Underscore that any new trails or connective infrastructure would require extensive review
- Reinforce need to maintain and communicate allowable uses on existing segments
- Identify remaining challenge/opportunity areas for ongoing agency coordination
- Pursue funding for agency staff to facilitate ongoing collaboration and study

## Additional Feedback

### Additional Agency Meetings

The project team continued to correspond with land management agencies within the study area to discuss needs, opportunities, and concerns for continued Towns to Trails planning efforts.

- January 10, 2025: Mono County/June Lake Area
- January 10, 2025: Bishop & Inyo County
- January 14, 2025: Manzanar National Historic Site
- January 15, 2025: Alpine County
- January 15, 2025: Town of Mammoth Lakes
- January 17, 2025: California Department of Fish & Wildlife
- January 30, 2025: Mono Lake Kootzaduka'a Tribe (comments received via email)
- February 7, 2025: Sierra Club (comments received via email)
- February 12, 2025: Sierra Nevada Aquatic Research Laboratory


Project staff presenting to community members in Mono County.

Agency staff preparing for public meeting in Inyo County

- February 12, 2025: Mono Basin
- February 2025: Humboldt-Toiyabe Nation Forest/Bridgeport Ranger District (canceled due to staff layoffs)

### California Department of Fish and Wildlife

#### Slinkard Valley

- Please see the CDFW regulations applying to Slinkard Valley. In particular, please note the regulations pertaining to bicycle use:
    - *Bicycles and bike riding are prohibited on department lands except where authorized and designated in subsection 551(j), Section 552, and subsection 630(g) of these regulations.*
    - *On department lands where trails or roads have been designated for bicycles, no visitor shall ride, operate, leave, or park a bicycle except on those designated areas.*

### Mono County

#### Town of Mammoth Lakes

- There is a future bike path proposed on Minaret Road
- Sherwin Area Recreation Plan (SHARP) project should be included by reference in document

#### Crowley Lake

- Coordinate with staff to make sure it is consistent with their CSA 1 alignment

#### June Lake

- Supervisor McFarland made a request to illustrate motorized vs non- motorized segments in final alignment.
- Supervisor McFarland confirmed the concerns from the community relate to increased OHV use in the village and asked that the plan emphasizes the proposed route does not encourage or expand allowable uses.

### National Park Service

#### Manzanar National Historic Site

- Consider Manzanar's sensitive history and respectful use practices related to the cemetery adjacent to the route.
- Consider rerouting away from sensitive areas.
- Explore temporary pilot projects before its made permanent

#### Inyo County

- Inyo County would like to see a multi-use route from Lone Pine to Diaz Lake
- Inyo County is working on a Phase 2 for Active Transportation Plan for Lone Pine's Downtown

## Additional Community Feedback

Following the conclusion of Collaborative Planning Phase 2, community stakeholders continued to share notes and considerations related to the draft alignment. These items were evaluated and referenced in tandem with ground truthing efforts by the project team.

## Final Public Meeting

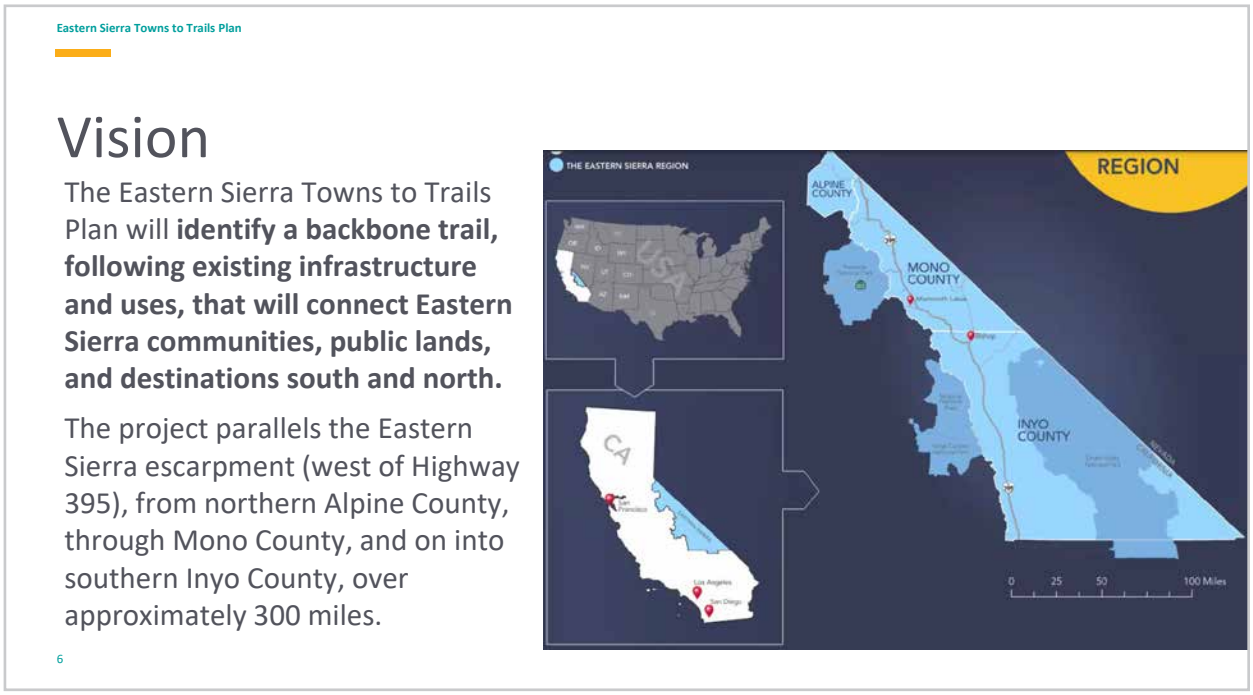
At the conclusion of the planning process described above, the project team presented the final draft Towns to Trails alignment to 50 attendees, providing a segment-by-segment overview of the potential trail, areas for further study, and agency needs/processes required for continued exploration of a final Towns to Trails alignment.

### Meeting Date

- March 27, 2025: Towns to Trails Final Draft Alignment (virtual)

### Discussion Topics

- Study area, history, goals, and process
- Alternatives analysis
- Ground truthing
- Final draft alignment
- Next steps and how to stay involved
- Questions and comments




Slide from the Final Community Meeting Presentation.

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# 3 Alignment Identification Methodology

Image: Mono County

# Alternatives Analysis

The project team conducted an extensive quantitative and qualitative analysis to develop and refine draft alignments. The process included mapping, community input, and on-the-ground exploration in order to finalize a route that is accessible, existing, and enjoyable. All existing soft surface infrastructure and trails in the study area that were available through existing datasets were aggregated and evaluated by the project team utilizing the process described below to determine potential contributions to the overall Towns to Trails alignment.

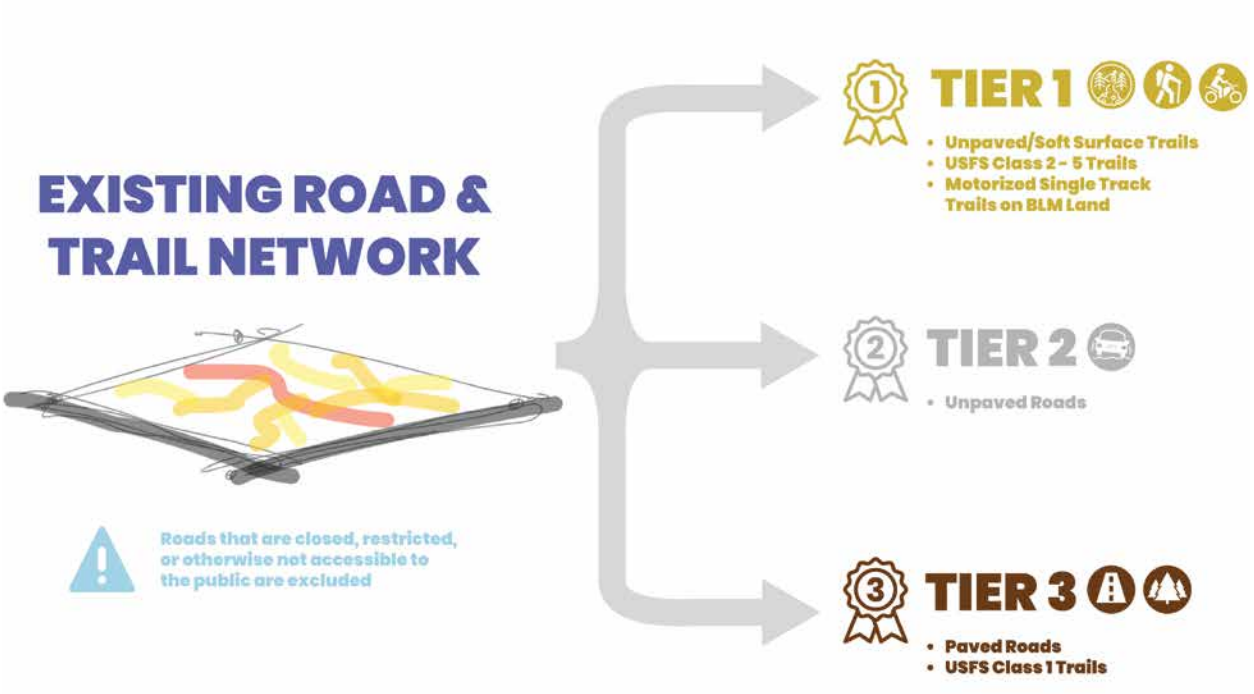
## Ranking System

The analysis began by categorizing soft surface roads and trails into three tiers, representing a preliminary prioritization based on safety, navigability, and the ability to provide a meaningful experience with the natural beauty of the Eastern Sierra. Tier 1 represented the most favorable routes, while Tier 3 represented the least.

- **Tier 1** included trails designated for hiking, biking, or single-track OHV use. These trails were typically unpaved and soft-surface.
- **Tier 2** consisted of existing unpaved, soft surface roads.
- **Tier 3** encompassed paved roads or minimally developed USFS Class 1 trails, which were often poorly defined and obstructed by various obstacles.

## Data Aggregation and Gap Analysis

After completing the tiered ranking, the project team aggregated all layers and trails onto a map to visually analyze gaps in the system. This analysis focused on determining whether there were sufficient Tier 1 and Tier 2 connections throughout the region. The team identified gaps in the network, which were primarily caused by significant geographic obstacles or gaps in the existing soft surface infrastructure.



Tier 1 trail example

Tier 2 example

Tier 3 example

## Least Cost Path Analysis

Following these data aggregation and gap analysis efforts, the project team used digital mapping tools to analyze important features of the area that could impact the project, such as trails, soft surface infrastructure, paved roads, slopes, and environmentally sensitive areas. They focused on seven key factors tied to the project's goals of improving connectivity, promoting sustainability, and enhancing user experience. For each factor, areas were assigned scores on a scale of 1 to 10, reflecting how well they aligned with project goals.

Recreation areas, such as campgrounds, were given a two-mile buffer, and areas closer to these amenities were assigned lower scores to prevent overcrowding. Steeper slopes received higher scores since they are harder to navigate, while flatter areas were given lower scores. Federal and state highways were buffered by ¼ mile, and areas near highways were assigned higher scores to avoid interference with existing soft surface infrastructure. Critical habitats, like those of the threatened greater sage-grouse, as well as federally designated Wilderness Areas, were identified and given higher scores to minimize environmental disruption.

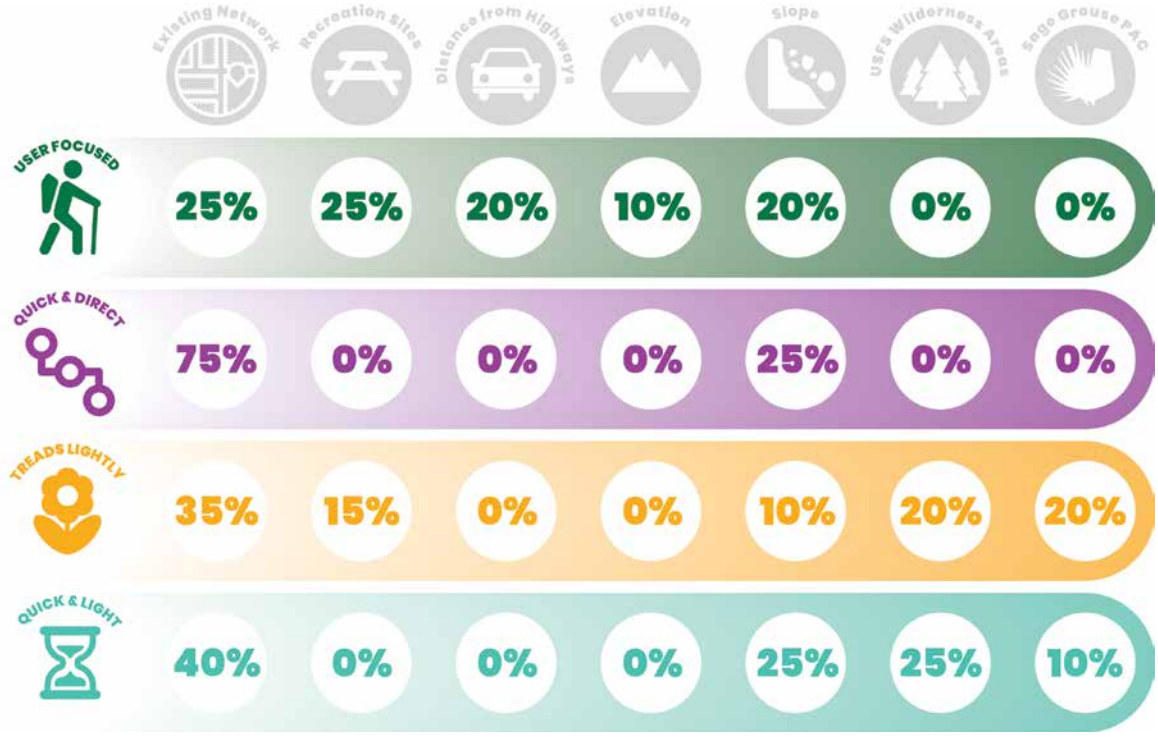
This mapping process created a clear visual representation of the landscape, highlighting where the alignment would be most feasible and should be avoided. The approach helped prioritize decisions based on safety, user experience, and environmental considerations, ensuring the project met its goals effectively.

## Experience Weighting

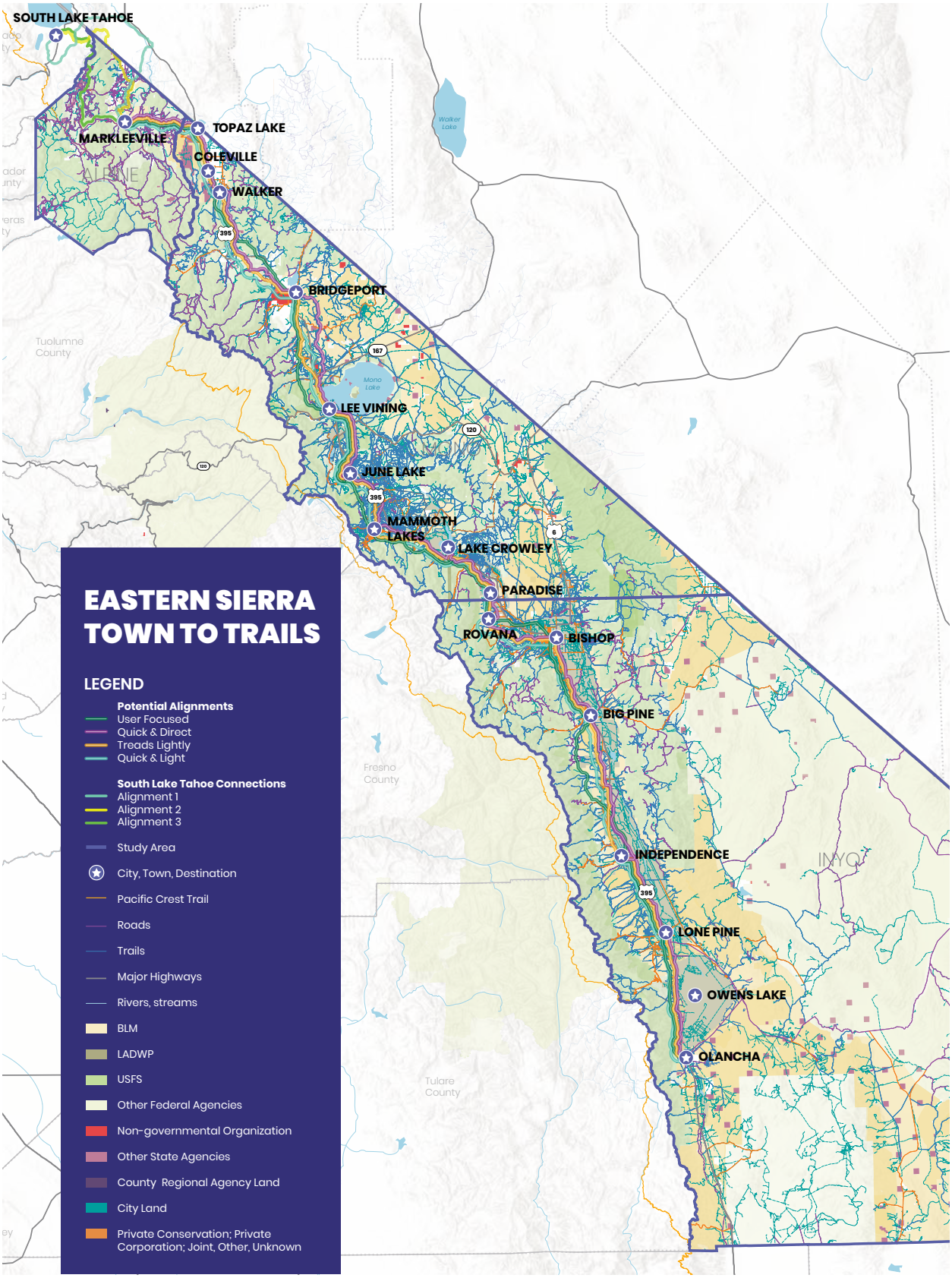
The project team developed weighting scores based on a range of public and partner feedback. They used different weighting strategies to combine the mapped factors into four unique "cost surfaces," each reflecting a different set of project priorities. For example, the "user-focused" cost surface emphasized factors like being close to amenities and staying away from highways, while the "treads lightly" cost surface prioritized protecting sage-grouse habitats, avoiding steep slopes, and minimizing impact on areas without existing roads.

Four "straw" alignment alternatives were developed using the least cost path analysis based on different weighting alternatives. The variables were given different weights in each prioritization matrix in order to generate alternative routes which functioned as conversation pieces for engagement and outreach. The four alignment characteristics were:

- **User Focused:** Placed a high priority on connections to recreation sites and provides major separation from existing highways where possible. This alignment placed less emphasis on following the existing network of soft surface roads and trails and staying out of USFS Wilderness and protected Sage Grouse habitat.
- **Quick & Direct:** Largely prioritized routes that follow the existing network and avoids steep slopes.
- **Treads Lightly:** This alignment was similar in weighting to the User Focused alignment but deprioritized following the existing network and connecting to recreation sites in order to give more priority to routes that stay out of USFS Wilderness and protected Sage Grouse habitat.
- **Quick & Light:** This alignment had a high priority for routes that follow the existing network, maintain fewer steep slopes, and avoided USFS Wilderness and protected Sage Grouse habitat.

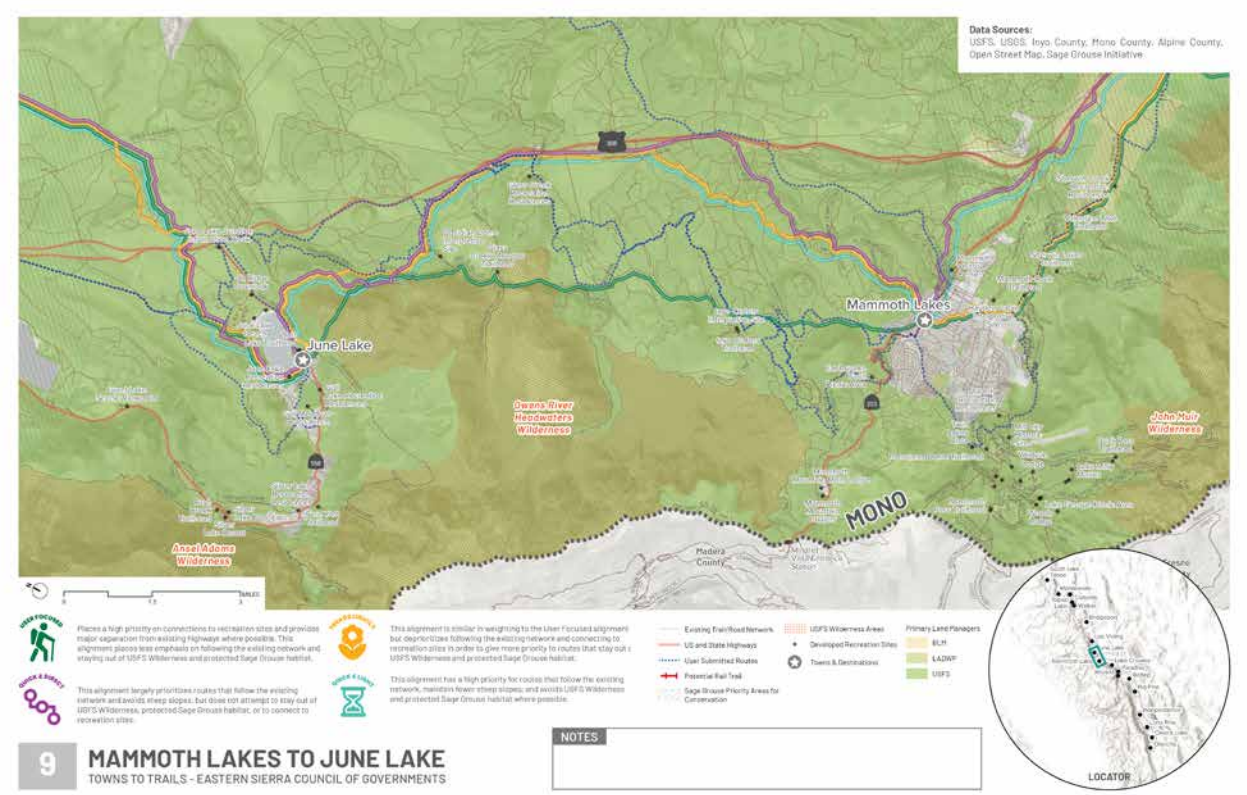


## Map of all Regional Trails, Roads, and Least Cost Path Alignments



## Route Alternative Evaluation and Public Input

The least cost path analysis alternatives were brought to the agency partners, stakeholders, and public for input as described in Chapter 2. Participants also shared alternative trail segments/alignments from those identified utilizing the least cost path analysis based on local knowledge and experience. These paths were verified, investigated, and modified by the team. Valuable feedback was gathered from this process which guided the project team to scenic, feasible potential alignment using existing regional infrastructure.




Example of map book reviewed by community members and stakeholders during Phase 1 Collaborative Planning.

## Feedback Integration and Additional Public Input

Following the processing and analysis of the feedback from the initial alternative exploration, the project team refined the alignment for another round of conversations during the second phase of collaborative workshops. Route modifications resulting from Phase 2 included deciding between parallel alignments offering different experiences and up- and down-stream connectivity opportunities, alternative alignments, destination spurs, network gaps, challenge routes, and more.

Slinkard Valley

## Ground Truthing

Following the conclusion of the Phase 2 workshops and subsequent data processing/alignment adjustments, project team members set out to ground truth the entire alignment using a permissible use - bicycles - to assess feasibility, connectivity and quality of experience. Over the course of 6 days, the team covered nearly 400 miles. This process validated the majority of the proposed draft alignment but also revealed unforeseen obstacles and gaps, which were spatially noted and documented for further analysis. The findings from this effort were brought back to the team and became the foundation for the final draft alignment.

The ground truthing team established a "zero mile" in South Lake Tahoe and traversed the entire proposed alignment as well as potential alternatives. For the purposes of ground truthing, the draft alignment was split into 13 sections, with the entire venture – from South Lake Tahoe to Lone Pine – including approximately 327 miles. For a detailed description of the groundtruthing see appendix 3.

### Opportunities/Findings

- The route offered a range of trail experiences including single track & dirt roads that served both biking and hiking well.
- Good inclusion of towns and communities along the route, with plentiful opportunities for sustainable tourism.
- Resources, such as food, water, camping, and hotels, were accessible regularly along the route.
- No negative interactions with Land Managers (Slinkard, USFS, CASP, etc) during the route scouting period.
- Continuous narratives across route (historical, geology, ecology) were present, providing a further purpose (education and connection) to the route beyond recreation.
- Easily split into "segments" which could be ridden in shorter trips, which may be more feasible for regular users.

### Challenges/Areas for Further Study

- Several areas with difficult route finding due to lack of maintenance or signage
- Several spots near or on major roads and highways due to lack of infrastructure or exclusion by land manager regulations
- Some roads shown on maps no longer exist, likely a result of modern cartography and open use maps. This reinforces the need to groundtruth future studies.

Big Spring Rd. between Markleeville and Topaz

Cottonwood Canyon Rd. south of Bodie

Rock Creek Trail south of Crowley Lake

Soft surface roads north of June Lake

Soft surface roads south of Bishop

Soft Surface Road to Reversed Peak

BLM road south of Big Pine

McMurray Meadows Rd. south of Lone Pine

# 4 Final Alignment

Image: Mono County

# Final Alignment

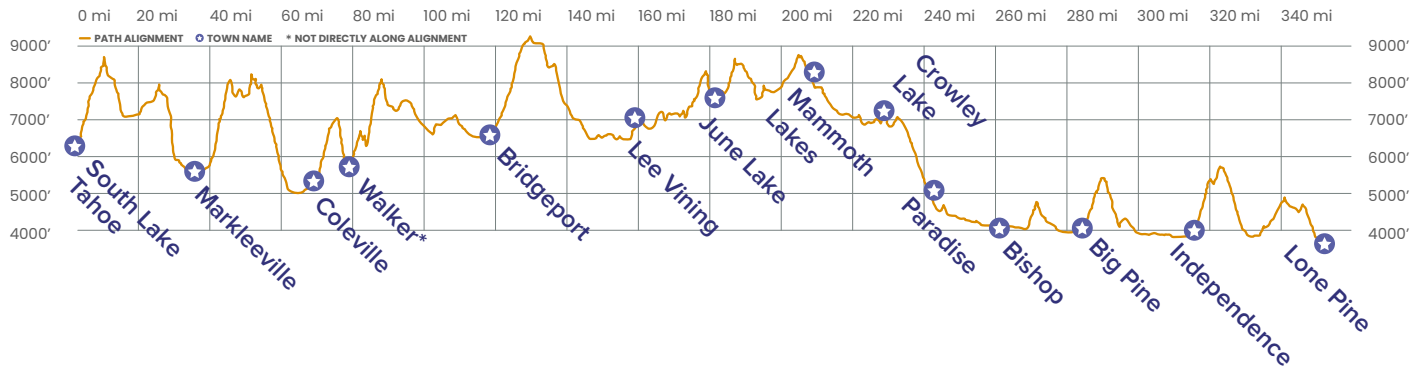
## Overview

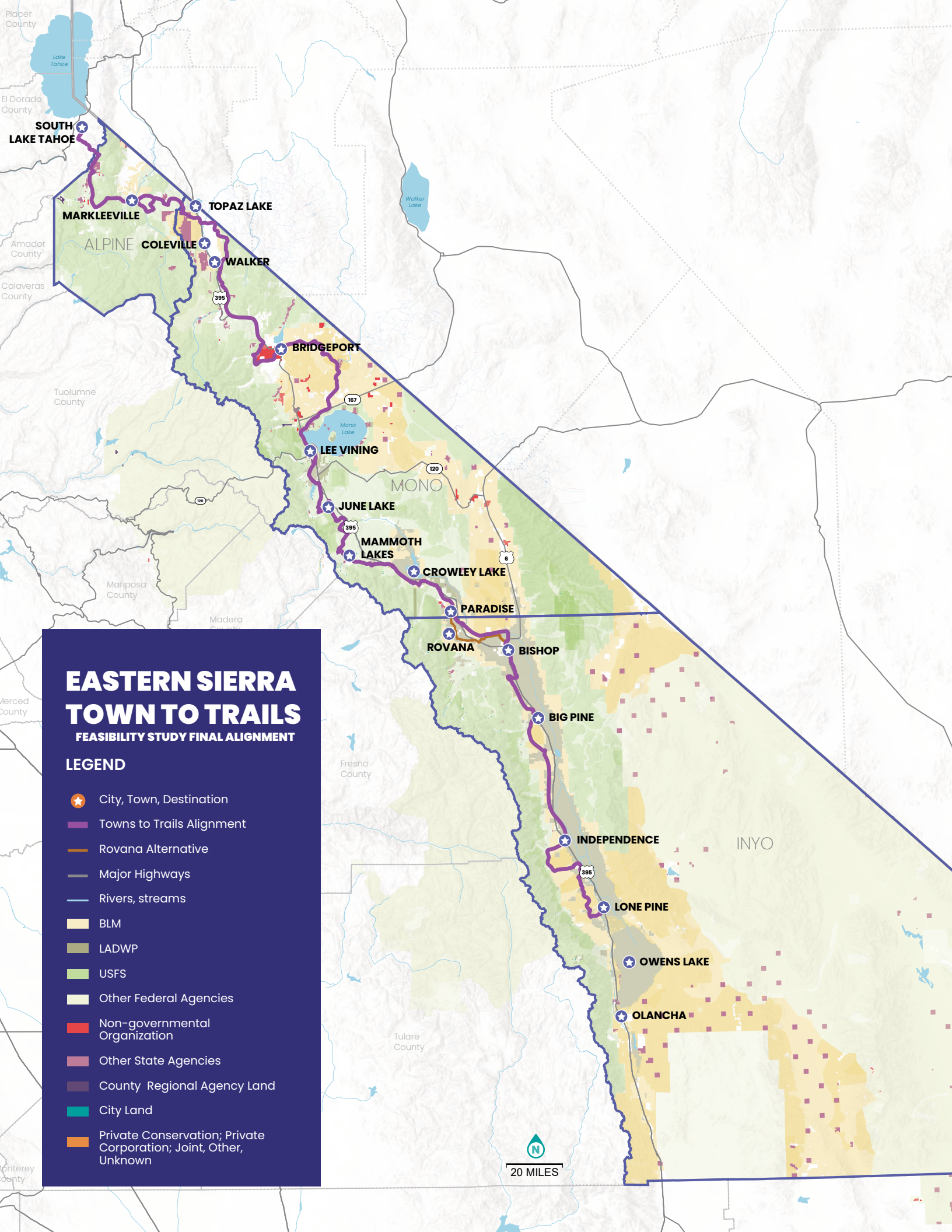
The final Towns to Trails alignment, spanning over 350 miles and featuring thousands of vertical feet of varying elevation, provides opportunities for outdoor recreation access and experiences unique to the Eastern Sierra landscape by utilizing existing infrastructure and their designated uses. End users will need to consult the relevant land management agencies regarding allowable uses for any given segment of the proposed alignment.

Traveling southbound from South Lake Tahoe to Lone Pine, the route begins with scenic, well-maintained single track that connects to soft surface roads. Dropping down from the Sierra Crest at Monitor Pass, the route transitions to historic dirt roads that encourage deeper understanding and appreciation for the Sierra. The route's integration in northern Mono County with local communities and small towns provides convenient opportunities to support local jobs and businesses through restaurants, lodging, entertainment, and events. South of Bridgeport, the route passes through historic Bodie State Park, the eastern entrance to Yosemite National Park in Lee Vining, and the renowned winter and summer sports destination of Mammoth Lakes. Crossing into Inyo County, the route opens up to provide firsthand connections to the LA Aqueduct and the significant infrastructure that channels vital water resources from the Eastern Sierra to the City of Los Angeles. The vibrant and historic City of Bishop serves as a municipal gateway to the Owens Valley, the deepest valley in the United States, and the countless geologic and historic points of interest that lie in the valley of little rain, including volcanic landscapes and the Manzanar National Historic site. The scenic and historic communities of Big Pine, Independence, and Lone Pine offer additional opportunities to support local jobs and businesses through restaurants, lodging, entertainment, and events as the route concludes in Lone Pine, providing access to Mt. Whitney, the highest peak in the contiguous United States.

The final alignment produced from the Towns to Trails feasibility analysis has identified opportunities for continuous non-motorized through-travel throughout the entire Eastern Sierra region and limitless opportunities for on-the-ground interpretive experiences. Implementation efforts will be able to present countless opportunities to provide visitors from around the world who already travel to the Eastern Sierra with ways to enhance their understanding, appreciation, and investment in the unique natural landscapes of the Eastern Sierra through firsthand, on-the-ground, sustainable outdoor recreation experiences.

### Final Alignment Elevation Profile






# EASTERN SIERRA TOWN TO TRAILS

**FEASIBILITY STUDY FINAL ALIGNMENT**

## LEGEND

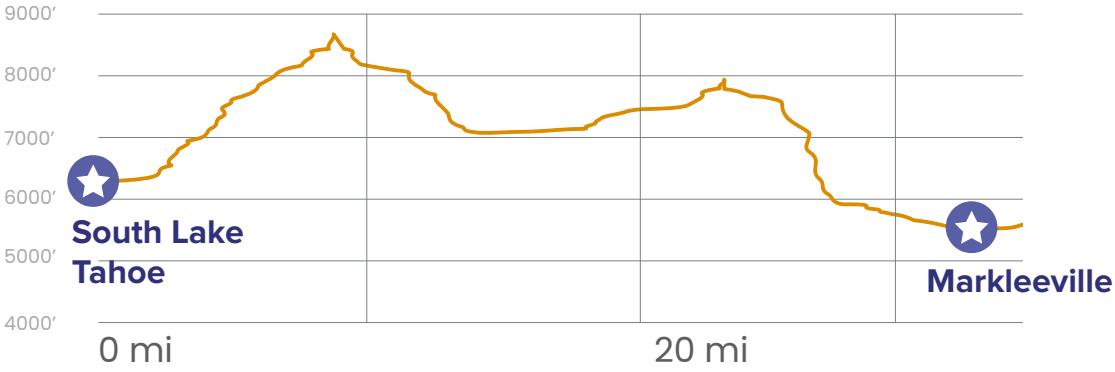
- City, Town, Destination
- Towns to Trails Alignment
- Rovana Alternative
- Major Highways
- Rivers, streams
- BLM
- LADWP
- USFS
- Other Federal Agencies
- Non-governmental Organization
- Other State Agencies
- County Regional Agency Land
- City Land
- Private Conservation; Private Corporation; Joint, Other, Unknown

Charity Valley Trail

## South Lake Tahoe to Markleeville

The northernmost segment of the route begins/ends in South Lake Tahoe, where local trails such as Railroad Grade, Columbine, and Powerline traverse above town until connecting with Armstrong Pass Trail, which climbs up to the crest of the Sierra Nevada at a confluence with the Tahoe Rim Trail. From here, the route begins descending towards the southeast, taking Horse Meadows trail and lower fire roads to a connection with Highways 89 and 88 at the West Fork of the Carson River. From here, the California Trail is followed into Hope Valley, from which dirt OHV roads parallel to Blue Lakes Road are taken to the Charity Valley Trail, which descends into Grover Hot Springs State Park. State Park trails are used to connect onto Hot Springs Road, which leads directly into downtown Markleeville.

### Elevation Profile




### Map Legend

#### Alignment

- Final Alignment*
- Alignment on HWY 395
- Gap Areas

#### Alignment Surface Type

- Trail
- Double Track
- Unpaved Roads
- Paved Roads

#### Destinations

- Cities and Towns
- Campgrounds
- Developed Recreation Sites
- Important Connections

#### Land Managers

- BLM
- LADWP
- USFS
- Other Federal Agency
- Non-Gov Organization
- Other State Agency
- County / Reg Agency
- City Land
- County Boundaries

#### Protected Lands

- USFS Wilderness Areas
- Sage Grouse Habitat Areas
- BLM Wilderness Study Areas
- BLM Areas of Critical Environmental Concern

#### Water Bodies

- Lakes and Reservoirs
- Streams, Rivers, and Canals

*Final alignment route is not suitable for through motorized use, allowed uses are subject to the approved uses of the relevant jurisdiction, refer to the jurisdiction for legal uses.

LAKE TAHOE

NEVADA BEACH CAMPGROUND

SOUTH LAKE TAHOE

ALPINE

NEVADA

EL DORADO

BLM

USFS

KIT CARSON CAMPGROUND

HOPE VALLEY

HOPE VALLEY RESORT CAMPGROUND

HOPE VALLEY CAMPGROUND

CRYSTAL SPRINGS CAMPGROUND

WOODFORDS

HUNG-A-LEL-TI

CARSON RIVER HOT SPRINGS

INDIAN CREEK CAMPGROUND

89

88

PACIFIC CREST TRAIL

KIRKWOOD LAKE CAMPGROUND

CAPLES LAKE CAMPGROUND

CAPLES LAKE

WOODS LAKE CAMPGROUND

TURTLE ROCK PARK CAMPGROUND AND COMMUNITY CENTER

MARKLEEVILLE CAMPGROUND

GROVER HOT SPRINGS SP CAMPGROUND

MARKLEEVILLE

MOKELUMNE WILDERNESS

CENTERVILLE FLAT CAMPGROUND

N

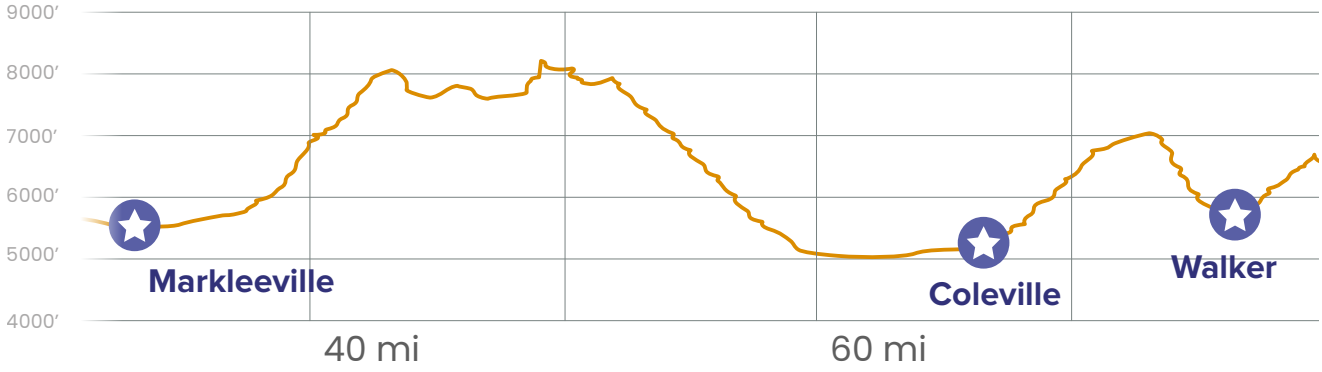
0 2 4 MILES

Big Spring Rd.

## Markleeville to Walker

From downtown Markleeville, the route continues on HWY 89 until intersecting with Morning Star Road, a dirt OHV path that snakes up towards Monitor Pass via a connection with Leviathan Creek Road (dirt OHV). Once back on HWY 89 post Monitor Pass, several paved switchbacks are taken down to the T in the road with HWY 395. A short section of HWY 395 is ridden south and then crossed in order to get on agricultural roads that traverse east across the Walker Valley. At the eastern end of the Valley where topography begins to rise, Blackwell Canyon OHV route is taken to the south, connecting with Burcham Flat Road just to the east of the town of Walker.

### Elevation Profile

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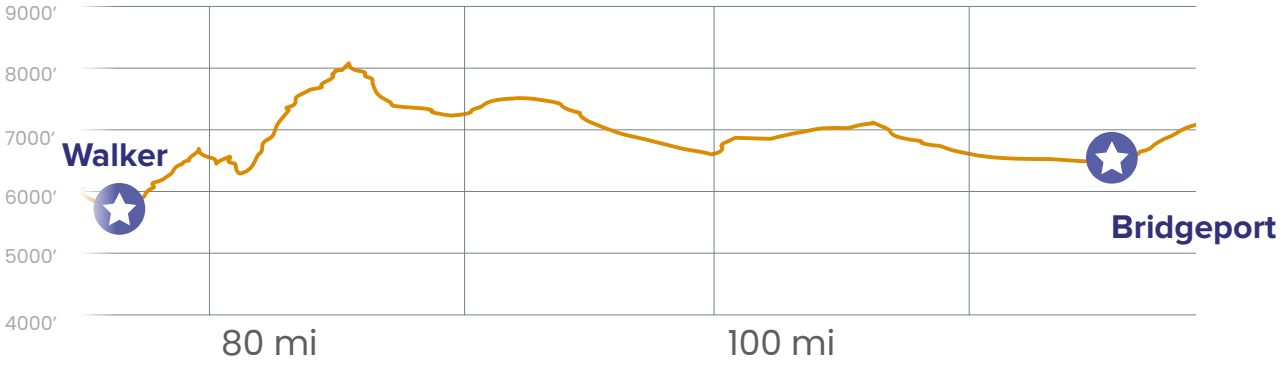
BLM
USFS
HUNG-A-LEL-TI
WOODFORDS
CARSON RIVER HOT SPRINGS
INDIAN CREEK CAMPGROUND
NEVADA
ALPINE
89
TURTLE ROCK PARK CAMPGROUND
PREFERRED NORTH BOUND ROUTE
MARKLEEVILLE CAMPGROUND
MARKLEEVILLE
PREFERRED SOUTH BOUND ROUTE
USFS
TOPAZ LAKE
MONO
89
CENTERVILLE FLAT CAMPGROUND
SLINKARD WILDERNESS STUDY AREA
BLM
MOKELUMNE WILDERNESS
4
SLINKARD VALLEY
395
USFS
SILVER CREEK CAMPGROUND
USF
MONO
ALPINE
BLM
COLEVILLE
USFS
BLOOMFIELD I
BLOOMFIELD II
CARSON-ICEBERG WILDERNESS
WALKER
USFS
395
HIGHLAND LAKES
USFS
N
0
2
4 MILES
USFS
MILL CANYON

View from Gaging Station Trail of alignment on Buckeye Robinson Creek Rd.

## Walker to Bridgeport

Burcham Flat Road is taken south, paralleling HWY 395 along the Walker River until connecting with HWY 395 at Little Long Valley. From here through Devil's Gate Pass the route follows HWY 395 until a juncture with Buckeye Road (FS 32017), which directs travelers south along dirt OHV route to a connection with Twin Lakes Road, which is a paved local road that connects into downtown Bridgeport.

### Elevation Profile

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COLEVILLE

USFS

WALKER

BLM

Carson-Iceberg Wilderness

NEVADA

395

USFS

MILL CANYON

BOOTLEG CAMPGROUND

CHRIS FLAT CAMPGROUND

SONORA BRIDGE CAMPGROUND

108

LEAVITT MEADOWS CAMPGROUND

395

USFS

OBSIDIAN CAMPGROUND

182

BLM

BRIDGEPORT

Travertine Hot Springs

BUCKEYE CAMPGROUND

BUCKEYE HOT SPRINGS AND DISPERSED CAMPING ALONG BUCKEYE ROBINSON CREEK RD

BUCKEYE HOT SPRINGS AND DISPERSED CAMPING ALONG BUCKEYE ROBINSON CREEK RD

USFS

BODIE MOUNTAIN WILDERNESS STUDY AREA

Hoover Wilderness

HONEYMOON CAMPGROUND

395

ROBINSON CREEK CAMPGROUND

LOWER CAMPGROUND

PAHA CAMPGROUND

CRAGS GROUP CAMPGROUND

UPPER SUMMERS MEADOWS

BLM

USFS

N

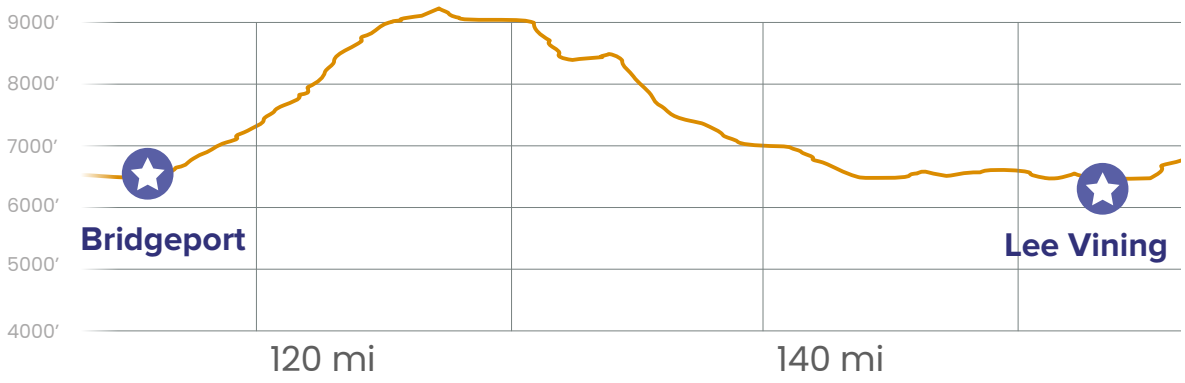
0 2 4 MILES

Approaching Bodie on Bodie Masonic Rd.

## Bridgeport to Lee Vining

From downtown Bridgeport, Aurora Canyon Road is taken to the east into the Bodie Hills, eventually connecting with Bodie Masonic Road, which leads south into Bodie State Historic Park. Cottonwood Canyon Road leads further south out of the Bodie Hills towards connections to Pole Line Road and Cemetery Road, at the terminus of which travelers are again connected to HWY 395 at Mono City. After a brief connection along HWY 395, Picnic Grounds Road is taken towards the Mono Lake Tufa State Natural Reserve Visitor Center. From here, Mattly Avenue leads directly into downtown Lee Vining.

### Elevation Profile

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USFS

BLM

NEVADA

BLM

BODIE WILDERNESS STUDY AREA

395

BUCKEYE CAMPGROUND

**BRIDGEPORT**

Travertine Hot Springs

BUCKEYE HOT SPRINGS AND DISPERSED CAMPING ALONG BUCKEYE ROBINSON CREEK RD

BODIE MOUNTAIN WILDERNESS STUDY AREA

BODIE BOWL

BODIE SPR

ROBINSON CREEK CAMPGROUND

PAHA CAMPGROUND

BLM

CRAGS CAMPGROUND

UPPER SUMMERS MEADOWS

MOUNT BIEDEMAN WILDERNESS STUDY AREA

395

GREEN CREEK CAMPGROUND

Conway Summit

USFS

USFS

MONO

TRUMBULL LAKE CAMPGROUND

EAST LOWER VIRGINA CREEK

WEST VIRGINIA CREEK

Hoover Wilderness

USFS

USFS

395

Mono Lake

SADDLEBAG LAKE CAMPGROUND

Scenic Area Visitor Center

N

0 2 4 MILES

BIG BEND CAMPGROUND

**LEE VINING**

CITY

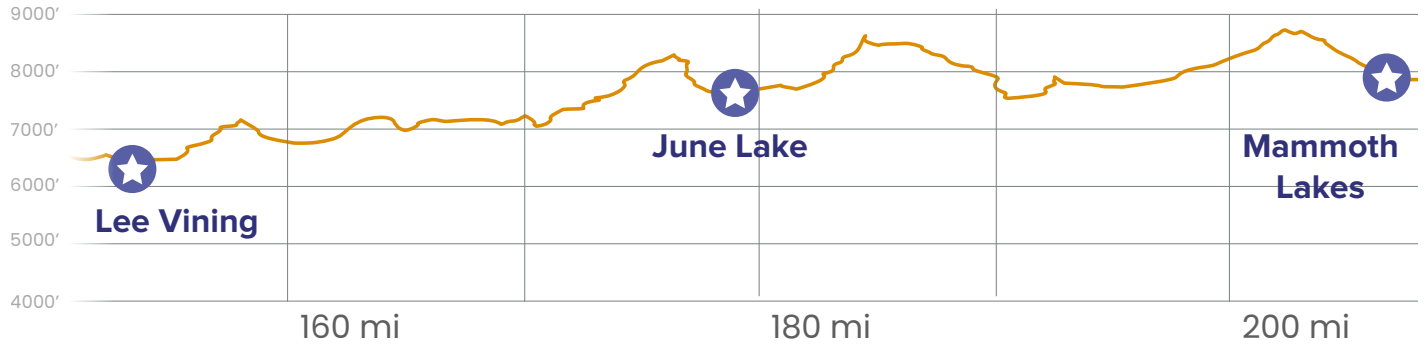
USFS

June Lake Short Cut

## Lee Vining to Mammoth Lakes

From the city of Lee Vining, Utility Road is taken over and along Lee Vining Creek in connection to the Mobil Station, across from which travelers cross HWY 395 for OHV routes leading south. Another crossing of HWY 395 swiftly follows onto Horse Meadows Road with an abrupt turn south for an OHV dirt road that connects to Aqueduct Road (FW 1N17), which in turn is taken south until Grant Lake Rd which then connects to Old State Highway OHV. This dirt road connects to Northshore Drive, which wraps around June Lake counterclockwise to then connect with the Gull Lake Trail further leading into downtown June Lake. From here, June Lake Loop (158) is taken to June Lake Junction, where USFS OHV routes are taken south past Obsidian Dome, Inyo Craters, and Earthquake Dome to a connection with Minaret Road. A mixture of bike path and mountain bike trail are used to connect into downtown Mammoth Lakes.

### Elevation Profile

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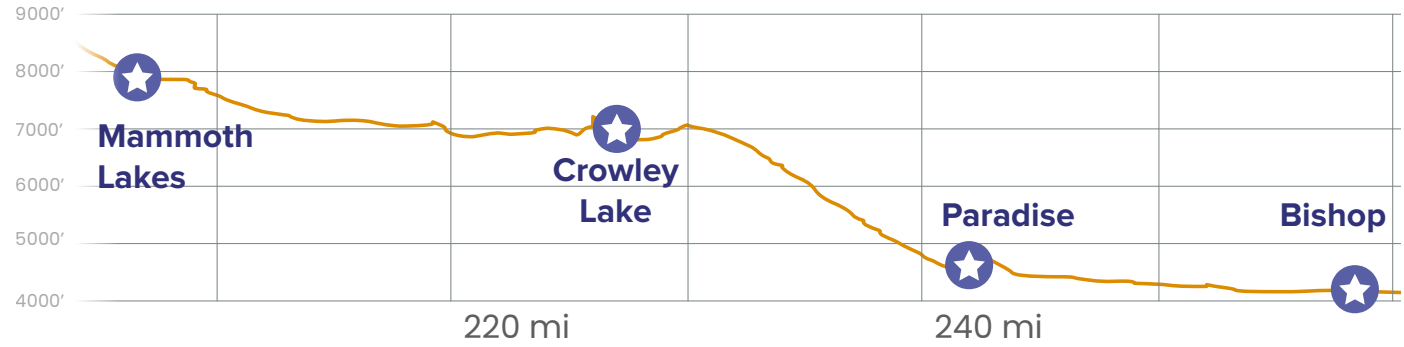
USFS
Hoover Wilderness
395
Mono Lake
LEE VINING
BIG BEND CAMPGROUND
ASPEN CAMPGROUND
MORAINE CAMPGROUND
LOWER LEE VINING CAMPGROUND
BLM
USFS
Ansel Adams Wilderness
OH RIDGE CAMPGROUND
SILVER LAKE CAMPGROUND
OWENS RIVER HEADWATERS WILDERNESS
MONO
REVERSED CREEK CAMPGROUND
HARTLEY SPRINGS CAMPGROUND
JUNE LAKE
OBSIDIAN DOME INTERPRETIVE SITE
USFS
395
GLASS CREEK CAMPGROUND
Owens River
BIG SPRINGS CAMPGROUND
OBSIDIAN FLAT GROUP CAMPGROUND
LOWER DEADMAN CAMPGROUND
UPPER DEADMAN CAMPGROUND
USFS
395
AGNEW MEADOWS GROUP CG
USFS
SODA SPRINGS CAMPGROUND
PUMICE FLAT CAMPGROUND
MINARET FALLS CAMPGROUND
PUMICEFLAT GROUP CAMPGROUND
OLD SHADY REST CAMPGROUND
NEW SHADY CAMPGROUND
PINE GLEN GROUP CAMPGROUND
MAMMOTH MT RV PARK
MAMMOTH LAKES
TWIN LAKES VISTA
TWIN LAKES CAMPGROUND
EARTHQUAKE FAULT PICNIC AREA
PINE CITY CAMPGROUND
COLDWATER CAMPGROUND
LAUREL PONDS
CONVICT LAKE CAMPGROUND
John Muir Wilderness
USFS
USFS
N
0
2
4 MILES

Double track parallel to HWY 395 near Aspen Springs and Tom's Place

## Mammoth Lakes to Bishop

The route continues on HWY 203 through Mammoth on Old Mammoth Road. From Mammoth Creek it continues along Sherwin Creek Road, to HWY 395 by the Mammoth Yosemite Airport, and Crowley Lake Drive to the town of Lake Crowley. The route then takes double track along HWY 395 to Tom's Place and can either go along Lower Rock Creek Trail or through Witcher and Swall Meadows to Sherwin Hill via Witcher Creek/Swall Meadows/Lower Rock Creek Road. These both connect in Paradise. These two routes again diverge connecting back in Bishop via the Bishop Canal to the north of town. The first one continues from Lower Rock Creek Trail to Old Sherwin Grade then Owens River/Chalk Bluff. This route connects to the canal via Five Bridges Road and HWY 6. This route passes several campgrounds on the northern bank of the Owens River. The second route from Mammoth Lake continues from Paradise on Round Valley Road near Rovana and crosses HWY 395 to the south bank of the Owens River meeting up with route one at the Bishop Canal.

### Elevation Profile




### Map Legend

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- Gap Areas

#### Alignment Surface Type

- Trail
- Double Track
- Unpaved Roads
- Paved Roads

#### Destinations

- Cities and Towns
- Campgrounds
- Developed Recreation Sites
- Important Connections

#### Land Managers

- BLM
- LADWP
- USFS
- Other Federal Agency
- Non-Gov Organization
- Other State Agency
- County / Reg Agency
- City Land
- County Boundaries

#### Protected Lands

- USFS Wilderness Areas
- Sage Grouse Habitat Areas
- BLM Wilderness Study Areas
- BLM Areas of Critical Environmental Concern

#### Water Bodies

- Lakes and Reservoirs
- Streams, Rivers, and Canals

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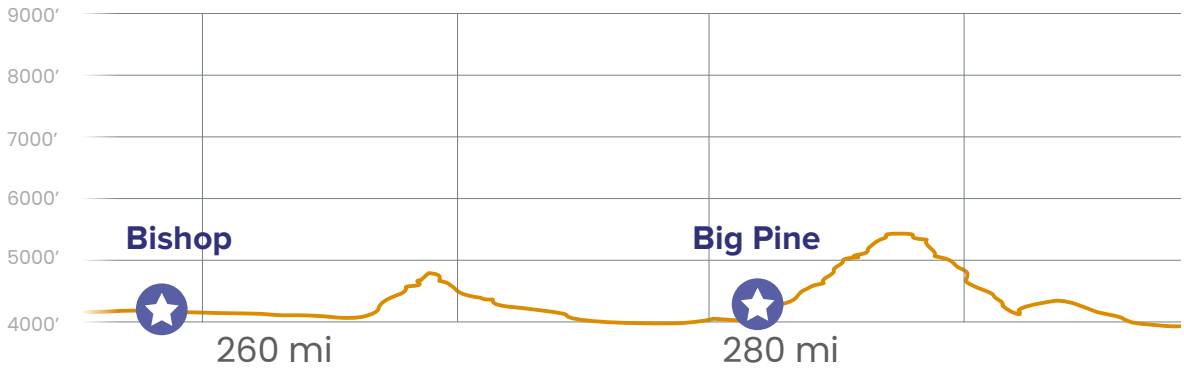
TAYLOR CANYON CAMPGROUND
CROOKED MEADOWS CAMPGROUND
USFS
BALD MOUNTAIN SPRI... CAMPGROUND
SAWMILL MEADOWS CAMPGROUND
Owens
BIG SPRINGS CAMPGROUND
USFS
395
MAMMOTH LAKES
LITTL... HOT C...
OLD SHADY REST CAMPGROUND
NEW SHADY REST CG
PINE GLEN GROUP CG
MAMMOTH MT RV PARK
HOT CREEK INTERPRETIVE SITE
BLM
USFS
LAUREL PONDS CAMPGROUND
COLDWATER CAMPGROUND
CROWLEY LAKE
CASA DIABLO
CROWLEY LAKE
MCGEE CREEK CAMPGROUND
TUFF CAMPGROUND
TOM'S PLACE
FRENCH CAMP
HOLIDAY CAMPGROUND
CASA DIABLO WILDERNESS STUDY AREA
MCGEE BACKPACKER CAMPGROUND
USFS
ASPEN GROUP CG
FISH SLOUGH
BIG MEADOWS CG
IRIS MEADOW CAMPGROUND
MONO
PALISADE CAMPGROUND
FISH SLOUGH WILDERNESS STUDY AREA
395
LOWER PINE GROVE CG
EAST FORK CAMPGROUND
PARADISE
MONO
UPPER PINE GROVE CG
INYO
ROCK CREEK LAKE GROUP CAMPGROUND
ROCK CREEK LAKE CAMPGROUND
BLM
MOSQUITO FLAT BACKPACKER CG
ROVANA
USFS
HORTON CREEK CAMPGROUND
BLM
BISHOP
JOHN MUIR WILDERNESS
395
INYO
BITTERBRUSH CAMPGROUND
USFS
BIG TREES CAMPGROUND
FORKS CAMPGROUND
BISHOP PARK CG
BLM
NORTH LAKE CAMPGROUND
USFS
MT. GLEN CAMPGROUND
SABRINA CAMPGROUND
TABLE MT. GROUP CAMPGROUND
WILLOW CAMPGROUND
N
0
2
4 MILES

Road paralleling DWP canals in Inyo County

## Bishop to Big Pine

The route travels along the Bishop canal after connecting through town via Yaney Street along the northeast corner of Bishop City Park to Hanby Ave. The route crosses HWY 395 at Wilkerson and continues south past Keough Hot Springs on BLM and LADWP roads. It then connects to the Big Pine canal into town along Reynolds Road, East County Road, Baker Creek and Main Street (395).

### Elevation Profile




### Map Legend

#### Alignment

- Final Alignment*
- Alignment on HWY 395
- Gap Areas

#### Alignment Surface Type

- Trail
- Double Track
- Unpaved Roads
- Paved Roads

#### Destinations

- Cities and Towns
- Campgrounds
- Developed Recreation Sites
- Important Connections

#### Land Managers

- BLM
- LADWP
- USFS
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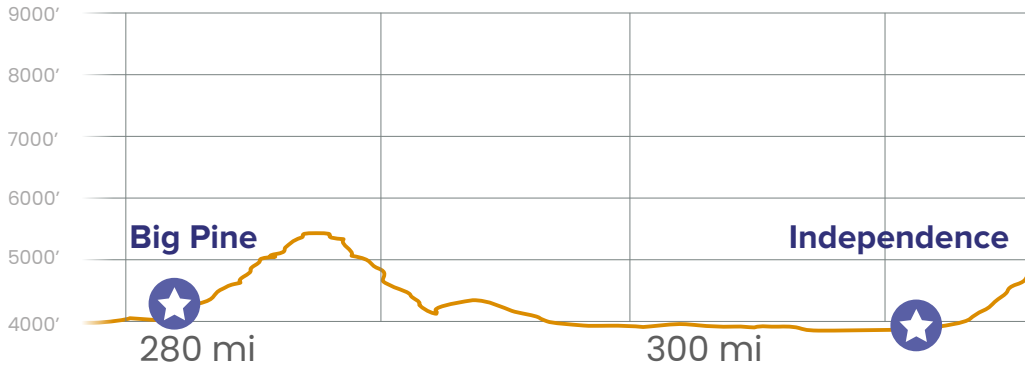
MONO
INYO
WHITE MOUNTAINS WILDERNESS
CITY
BLM
VOLCANIC TABLELANDS
WILDERNESS STUDY AREA
PLEASANT VALLEY
OWENS RIVER
CAMPGROUNDS
BLM
BLM
BISHOP
395
Bishop Creek Canal
Owens River
USFS
NELSON GROUP
CAMPGROUND
USFS
BLM
BLM
USFS
BIG PINE
395
BIG PINE CREEK
CAMPGROUNDS
UPPER SAGE FLAT
CAMPGROUND
GLACIER LODGE
JOHN MUIR
WILDERNESS
CRATER MOUNTAIN
WILDERNESS
STUDY AREA
Big Pine Canal
USFS
USFS
BLM
INYO
TINEMAHA
RESERVOIR
Tinnemaha
Campground
N
0
2
4 MILES

McMurray Meadows Rd on North Side of Crater Mountain.

## Big Pine to Independence

Continuing southwest along McMurray Meadows Road, the route travels around Crater Mountain to Fish Springs and south on Tinnemaha Road passing Tinnemaha and Taboose Creek Campgrounds. It then crosses HWY 395 onto LADWP roadway east of Fort Independence Reservation and back to HWY 395 into Independence via Independence Colony Road.

### Elevation Profile

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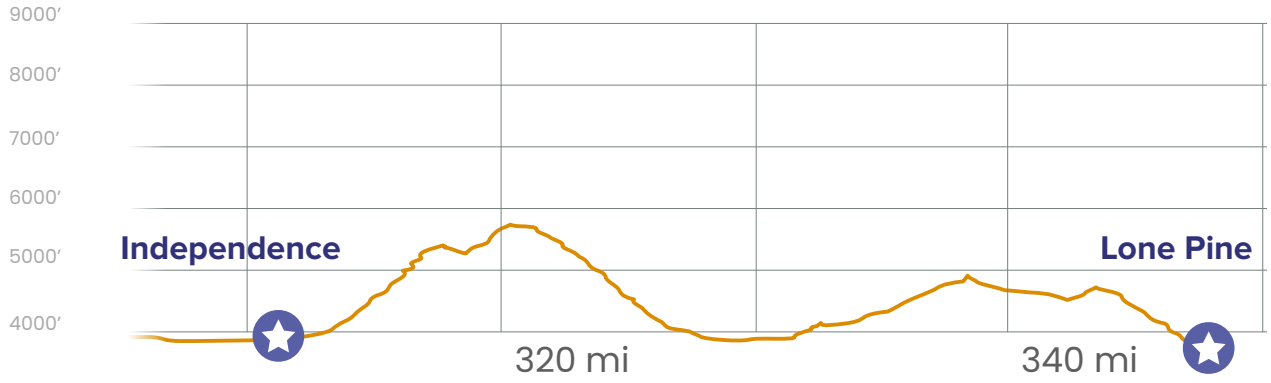
USFS
BLM
BLM
USFS
BIG PINE
395
PALISADE/GLACIER
GROUP CAMPGROUND
UPPER
BIG PINE
CAMPGROUND
SAGE FLAT
CAMPGROUND
CRATER
MOUNTAIN
WILDERNESS
STUDY AREA
USFS
BLM
TINEMAHA
RESERVOIR
USFS
BLM
INYO
MOUNTAINS
WILDERNESS
INYO
395
USFS
BLM
Owens River
Los Angeles Aqueduct
FORT INDEPENDENCE
RESERVATION
BLM
INDEPENDENCE CREEK
CAMPGROUND
INDEPENDENCE
BLM
USFS
N
0
2
4 MILES

Foothill Rd.

## Independence to Lone Pine

From Independence the route continues southwest on Onion Valley Road towards Seven Pines and Grays Meadow Campground. It then heads south on Foothill Road and back east to Manzanar National Historic Site on Shepard Creek Road. It then continues on a combination of BLM and LADWP roads followed by Moffat Ranch Road and Movie Road on the west edge of the Alabama Hills through Movie Flat. The last segment crosses Whitney Portal Road traveling along Horseshoe Meadows Road to Tuttle Creek Road and ends on Whitney Portal Road in Lone Pine.

### Elevation Profile

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BLM
BLM
USFS
395
USFS
INYO MOUNTAINS
WILDERNESS
FORT INDEPENDENCE
RESERVATION
Los Angeles Aqueduct
BLM
INDEPENDENCE CREEK
CAMPGROUND
INDEPENDENCE
GRAYS MEADOW
CAMPGROUND
SYMMES CREEK
WILDERNESS
STUDY AREA
MANZANAR
BLM
395
USFS
INDEPENDENCE CREEK
WILDRENESS STUDY AREA
SOUTHERN INYO
WILDERNESS
STUDY AREA
JOHN MUIR
WILDERNESS
INYO
BLM
ALABAMA
HILLS
Owens River
LONE PINE
CAMPGROUNDS
PORTAGEE JOE
CAMPGROUND
LONE PINE
WHITNEY
PORTAL
CAMPGROUNDS
WHITNEY TRAILHEAD
CAMPGROUND
BLM
N
0
2
4 MILES
GOLDEN TROUT
WILDERNESS
Owens Lake


# 5 Next Steps

Image: Mammoth Lakes

Independence and Onion Valley

## Additional Opportunities and Complementary Efforts

Throughout the Towns to Trails process, the project team was made aware of several complementary trail planning efforts that may yield valuable connections and/or future alignment modifications. Opportunities to advance complementary projects that align with project partners' existing efforts within the study area that may inform/catalyze efforts on the Towns to Trails alignment are outlined below.

### Alpine Trails Association (ATA)

The Alpine Trails Association is a 501 (c)(3) non-profit focused on building and maintaining trail infrastructure in Alpine County. They support all non-motorized trails in partnership with the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest and Bureau of Land Management (BLM) lands to promote hiking, cycling, and horseback riding. The ATA has completed work on over 15 miles of trails and logged over 10,000 hours of volunteer time since their creation. The ATA was an active partner in the development of the Towns-to-Trails alignment, which can serve as a connector route between the trails network they are planning.

### Caldera 500

The Caldera 500 is a 500-mile, self-supported bikepacking loop route in the Eastern Sierra. Starting and ending in Mammoth Lakes, the route traverses five mountain ranges— Sierra Nevada, White Mountains, Inyo Mountains, Sweetwater Mountains, and Glass Mountains—and three distinct biomes—Sierra Nevada, Great Basin, and Mojave Desert.

### Chipmunk Canyon

Spanning the region between the Druid Stones climbing area and the Rossi Hills, the Chipmunk Canyon network of trails is an unauthorized trail system lying on BLM lands, built by individual volunteers from the OHV, mountain bike and trail running communities. This trail system serves the economic and outdoor recreation needs of Bishop, with a long term intended goal of study and inclusion into the public lands official trail networks.

Despite being unpermitted, this trails system has become a highly popular recreation destination near the community of Bishop. In order for the trails network to be legalized by appropriate land management agencies, trail planning and environmental review must be completed. Chipmunk Canyon is a candidate for future study and possible inclusion into the public lands trail network. Formalized study would allow for Chipmunk Canyon to support Towns-to-Trails goals of increasing connectivity between communities and recreation destination and would better serve as an economic asset for the City of Bishop.

### Connected Communities

Connected Communities is a visionary effort led in partnership by federal land managers, the Sierra Buttes Trail Stewardship (SBTS), and community partners to connect 15 mountain towns for economic prosperity through outdoor recreation. It envisions a recreation-focused lifestyle through community investment, shared stewardship, economic opportunity, and important new local jobs, all strengthening economically disadvantaged communities in California's Plumas, Sierra, Butte, Lassen, and Nevada Counties, as well as Washoe County, Nevada.

### Mono County CSA1

CSA1 is a dependent district of Mono County Government that provides enhanced service to CSA1 residents (Long Valley, McGee Creek, Crowley Lake, Aspen Springs, Toms Place/Sunny Slopes). Recreation is one of the enhanced services. CSA1 is conducting initial trail planning and development efforts adjacent to communities, with the goal of future trails connecting communities, and providing additional economic benefit to area businesses. Implementation of the CSA1 plan should coincide to the Towns to Trails plan and visa-versa to gain efficiencies in implementation and closing gaps in the Towns-to-Trails alignment.

### Orogenesis

The Orogenesis Collective's goal is to build a contiguous singletrack trail spanning 5,000 miles along the western edge of the North American Tectonic Plate. They are devoted to 1) the creation and stewardship of a contiguous singletrack trail through the western ranges of the North American continent, 2) to the education and fulfillment of its users and 3) the vibrancy and longevity of communities and landscapes they pass through.

### Owens Lake Trails

The 2020 Olancha Corridor Plan recommends revitalizing the community of Olancha through closer integration to trails and wildlife viewing opportunities adjacent to the Owens Dry Lake. Trails recommendations including bike paths, equestrian improvements, and multi-use trails to key destinations. Implementation of this plan would create additional destinations in Southern Inyo County for future Towns to Trails extensions.

### Pines to Mines

The Pines to Mines trail is envisioned as a multi-use native surface trail system connecting Truckee, CA to Nevada City, CA. The system will be approximately 72 miles in length and will include 50 miles of existing Forest Service trails, as well as 22 miles of new trail construction.

### The Sierra Nevada Aquatic Research Laboratory (SNARL)

The Sierra Nevada Aquatic Research Laboratory (SNARL) is part of the University of California Natural Reserve System (UCNRS) and is a 55-acre research and teaching facility located in the Eastern Sierra near Mammoth Lakes, CA, providing a base for field research and educational programs.

Based on conversations with the SNARL Director, there is an opportunity to plan for and develop a formal trail between SNARL and Convict Creek to focus existing recreation use and impacts currently occurring adjacent to the research facility property. Future trail development should be coordinated with the Towns-to-Trails plan to close the identified infrastructure gap in this location. There are also plans to develop a highway wildlife crossing in the same vicinity. The wildlife crossing should consider opportunities to co-locate recreation infrastructure or minimize conflicting uses.

## Next Steps

Below are a few steps that can be taken to advance and realize the Towns to Trails route:

### Study Alignment Gaps

Despite strenuous engagement, analysis, and coordination, the project team was not able to identify a desirable path. Physical gaps exist in the route, where the final alignment defaulted to HWY 395 or less preferred route. HWY 395 is not the preferred route, as this is not a safe and appropriate bike route. In order to identify a continuous alignment and direct people away from HWY 395, these gaps need to be further studied for environmental impact, connectivity, safety, and coordination with existing land managers. The four gaps are:

- **Bridgeport Gap:** An inventoried road and trail exists up the Obsidian/Yaney area, with potential for future connection. However, the current condition of this route is not suitable for recommended travel.
- **Mono City Gap:** A power line access road runs adjacent to HWY 395, but it is poorly maintained and currently unsuitable for hiking or biking. Use of this corridor would require light maintenance and a formal easement.
- **Sierra Nevada Aquatic Research Lab (SNARL) Gap:** The existing trail behind the research center is poorly defined. However, the managing agency has expressed interest in improving and incorporating this route with proper signage and trail maintenance.
- **Chipmunk Canyon:** Trails through Chipmunk Canyon are currently unofficial and not inventoried by the BLM. While an alternative route exists along the Canal, Chipmunk Canyon could offer a preferred alignment if formalized.

### Conduct Further Environmental Analysis

Future environmental analysis may be required by land management agencies in areas of special concern or for the installation of new infrastructure. Because the Towns-to-Trails plan leverages existing infrastructure and does not recommend modifying currently allowable uses, many segments are already included in roads inventories for through use by the appropriate land management agency.

For instance, environmental review may be required for potential increased use in special resource areas or for installation of facilities or signage to support this route. Land management agencies have requested implementation in phases leveraging already approved routes to better understand any potential increases in recreational use.

### Ongoing Community Engagement

Continued outreach to the small and unincorporated communities throughout the study area to gather input on potential local alignments is recommended. Engaging with local planning groups and community advisory committees offers an effective and locally grounded framework for addressing community-specific questions, priorities, and concerns early in the process. While no implementation of the Towns-to-Trails plan is currently underway, proactive communication with these communities is a critical next step to ensure that future efforts reflect local values and needs.

### Ongoing Agency Coordination, Review, and Support

Continued collaboration with agency partners will be essential for reviewing and refining the trail alignment. Allocating paid time for agency review will help ensure thorough assessments and aid with timely decision-making, particularly with Reduction in Force efforts undertaken by the federal government. Maintaining open communication with agencies will be key to navigating these regulations and securing necessary approvals for a safe and legally compliant trail system.

### Ongoing Tribal Coordination

Continued collaboration with Tribal Councils are essential to ensure the success of this route and avoid any conflict with significant Tribal sites. Future studies should focus on continued Tribal coordination. In addition to ensuring protection of cultural resources, consideration should also given to partnering with Tribal Nations to support Tribally-led efforts to increase awareness of the cultural history of the Eastern Sierra region through storytelling and placekeeping.

### Establish Trail Identification/Blazing

Simple wayfinding signage at trailheads and along the route will improve the navigability and designation of the route. It is important that the signage details allowable uses to help manage expectations and maintain compliance with land-use regulations and protect natural and historic resources. The Connected Eastern Sierra initiative presents opportunities to supplement these efforts with digital wayfinding components. These efforts will improve wayfinding, promote responsible recreation, and support long-term trail sustainability.

### Maintenance and Job Training/Workforce Development

As the Towns-to-Trails project is realized, establishing a sustainable maintenance strategy will be essential for long-term success. One potential model is the use of nonprofit trail crews dedicated to north-south corridor maintenance similar to the approaches taken by the Pacific Crest Trail Association and the Tahoe Rim Trail Association. These examples demonstrate the value of community-driven stewardship and consistent upkeep. A similar structure could play a vital role in maintaining the integrity, safety, and accessibility of the Towns-to-Trails network over time.

### Integrate Wildfire Resilience into Trail Planning

The California Wildfire Task Force's Joint Strategy for Sustainable Outdoor Recreation and Wildfire Resilience offers a timely opportunity to align recreation planning with wildfire resilience. The Towns-to-Trails alignment can support this strategy by identifying segments of the trail network that could also function as strategic fire breaks. This is especially relevant near campgrounds and other high-use recreation areas. Incorporating dual-purpose trail design—serving both recreation and fire protection—can enhance community safety, protect natural landscapes, and contribute to local economic resilience. Collaboration with land management agencies and wildfire experts will be essential to identify priority zones and integrate these goals into future trail development.


EASTERN SIERRA
INYO • ALPINE • MONO