
File Code: 1910
Date: May 2, 2023

Dear Interested Party:

I am seeking your input on eight separate proposals involving lands special uses, research, road maintenance, developed and dispersed recreation activities, recreation special uses, and mineral exploration. All but one project is located on the Bridgeport Ranger District of the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest (HTNF); a portion of one project is located on the Carson Ranger District of the HTNF as described below.

Project Descriptions and Background

Maps of the following projects are included with this scoping letter. Alternately, an electronic version of this letter and project area maps can be accessed on the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest webpage here <https://www.fs.usda.gov/projects/htnf/landmanagement/projects>.

Project 1: Finley Mine Road Repair and Maintenance

A segment of FS Road No. 32062, also known as Wolfe Creek Road or Finley Mine Road, in T. 6N., R. 22E., Section 30 is eroding under an existing culvert, resulting in narrowing of the road on the inside curve, which reduces the available travel width and impacts larger vehicles' ability to safely negotiate the curve. The culvert outlet features a considerable hydraulic jump that further exacerbates ongoing erosion. Additionally, the culvert is undersized for its location and cannot accommodate peak flows, sending water onto the road surface, which further undermines it. This road provides access for recreation opportunities as well as supports the Marine Corps Mountain Warfare Training Center activities.

To address safety and resource concerns, road maintenance on approximately 75 feet of Finley Mine Road is necessary, including significant maintenance of the existing culvert. The culvert would be excavated, resituated, and extended five feet on the outlet end. The existing channel downhill of the culvert outlet would be re-graded for approximately 25 feet from the end of the culvert extension, where it would intersect the bottom of the channel. Both the downhill and inlet end of the channel would be armored with boulders and riprap. Upon completion of the culvert maintenance and replacement, new road base would be laid over the top of the road through the curve.

This project would likely occur in late August or early September—depending on runoff—and require temporary closure of the road for approximately two weeks from the intersection of Finley Mine Road to CA State Route 108 (Sonora Pass). Road maintenance activities would include the use of heavy equipment such as a front-end loader, backhoe, excavator, dump truck, road grader, and compactor.

Based on preliminary review of the proposed action, this project would be authorized under the



following category of actions found in FSH 1909.15 Chapter 30 that are excluded from documentation in an Environmental Assessment (EA) or Environmental Impact Statement (EIS):

(4) Repair and maintenance of roads, trails, and landline boundaries. 36 CFR 220.6(d)(4)

Project 2: Installation of Snowpack Telemetry (SNOTEL) Sites at Willow Flat and Lost Lakes

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is requesting to upgrade an existing snow course site to a SNOTEL system and install one new SNOTEL site. The existing snow course site to be upgraded is located at Willow Flat in T. 5N., R. 23E., Section 21 in Mono County on the Bridgeport Ranger District. The new SNOTEL site would be located at Lost Lakes in T. 9N., R. 18E., Section 1 in Alpine County on the Carson Ranger District. SNOTELs are automated sites that provide data such as snow water equivalent, snow depth, precipitation, air temperature, soil moisture, and soil temperature. This data, which is publicly available, helps inform water availability for downstream users.

The Lost Lakes location is needed to enhance water supply forecasting to the West Fork Carson River where NRCS currently has a gap in their data network. The site would also provide snow data for avalanche forecasting for recreational users. The Willow Flat location would be upgraded with newer SNOTEL infrastructure to assist with similar water data collection functions for the Walker River basin and would replace an existing snow course. The replacement of the snow course would allow for more data availability and accuracy. Installation of these two SNOTEL sites would help reduce the number of site visits NRCS must make throughout the winter because the new installation uses remote sensing technology to transmit data.

The Forest Service is proposing to authorize the installation, operation, and maintenance of the two SNOTEL sites under a special use permit to NRCS. The two sites would be constructed in the summer of 2023 and would each require a 150 sq. ft. footprint consisting of a snow pillow, precipitation gage, electronics shelter, meteorological tower situated on a concrete base, soil sensors, and fence. A track hoe/tool cat, power tools, and hand tools would be used at each installation site.

Based on preliminary review of the proposed action, this project would be authorized under the following category of actions found in FSH 1909.15 Chapter 30 that are excluded from documentation in an Environmental Assessment (EA) or Environmental Impact Statement (EIS):

(3) Approval, modification, or continuation of special uses that require less than 20 acres of NFS lands. 36 CFR 220.6(e)(3)

3. Water Level Validation Sites for Surface Water and Ocean Topography (SWOT) Research

NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL) submitted a request to install remote sensing

equipment, referred to as water level validation sites, at two locations on NFS lands outside of Congressionally-designated wilderness near Twin Lakes and Virginia Lakes in T. 2N., R. 25E., Section 7; T. 4N., R. 24E., Section 33; and T. 3N., R. 24E., Section 6. NASA's Surface Water and Ocean Topography (SWOT) satellite mission, launched in December 2022, will measure water surface elevation and inundation extent of water bodies around the world, which will allow them to quantify water storage changes in lakes at sub-monthly time scales.

To support that research, NASA needs to conduct in-situ experiments to facilitate post-launch calibration and validation of in-flight SWOT measurements using in-situ observations. The goal of this research is to collect in-situ field measurements of water surface elevation and shoreline position coincident or nearly coincident with SWOT satellite overpasses so that NASA researchers can understand SWOT's error characteristics in different environments. In the case of Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest, these environments include relatively high elevation lakes with high topography adjacent to the lakes. Different orientations of topography can influence SWOT radar signals differently, so it is important to observe a range of different lakes.

Establishment of two remote sensing sites using Global Navigation and Satellite System (GNSS) survey techniques would include a Solinst pressure transducer and barologgers. These instruments would be located in a shoreline area of each lake, with PTs mounted on rebar placed discretely underwater and fitted inside a black PVC pipe approximately 20cm in length and 5cm in diameter. The barologgers, approximately 20cm in length and 2cm in diameter, would be mounted to nearby tree trunks using zip ties. Total implementation time would take up to two days at each location and the instruments would remain in place for up to four months.

Based on preliminary review of the proposed action, this project would be authorized under the following category of actions found in FSH 1909.15 Chapter 30 that are excluded from documentation in an Environmental Assessment (EA) or Environmental Impact Statement (EIS):

Inventories, research activities, and studies, such as resource inventories and routine data collection when such actions are clearly limited in context and intensity. 7 CFR 1b.3(a)(3)

Project 4: Reissuance of a Special Use Permit for Doc and Al's Resort

Doc and Al's Resort, a privately-owned resort operating under special use authorization from the Forest Service, recently changed ownership. The Forest Service intends to issue a 20-year recreation special use permit to the new owners for the operation and maintenance of the resort. No change in scope or intensity of the authorized activities and infrastructure is being proposed. A new special use permit is needed to reflect new ownership.

Based on preliminary review of the proposed action, this project would be authorized under the following category of actions found in FSH 1909.15 Chapter 30 that are excluded from documentation in an Environmental Assessment (EA) or Environmental Impact Statement (EIS):

Issuance of a new special use authorization to replace an existing or expired special use authorization, when such issuance is to account only for administrative changes, such as

a change in ownership of authorized improvements or expiration of the current authorization, and where there are no changes to the authorized facilities or increases in the scope or magnitude of authorized activities.. 36 CFR 220.6(d)(11)

Project 5: Issuance of a New Outfitting and Guiding Special Use Permit for Mountain Biking

The Bridgeport Ranger District received a proposal from Pedal Up Bike Tours to provide guided mountain biking activities on existing system roads on NFS lands in the Buckeye and Green Creek drainages from June through November, weather permitting, in T. 3N., R. 24E., Sections 12, 13, and 18; T. 3N., R. 25E., Sections 8, 17, 18; T. 4N., R. 24E., Sections 3, 4, 5, 9, 10, 11, and 15. Activities would include shuttling clients, outfitting, camping, guiding, and provision of food. The proponent would like to offer both day and overnight trips. Camping would be permitted in existing developed and dispersed sites. All trips would be human-powered but some trips would include the use of support vehicles on established system roads. Group size would be limited to no more than 6 clients with up to two guides per trip. Authorized activities would be subject to existing regulations including limited season of use per the 2016 Greater Sage-grouse Bi-State Distinct Population Segment Forest Plan Amendment as well as food storage requirements and Leave No Trace practices.

Based on preliminary review of the proposed action, this project would be authorized under the following categories of actions found in FSH 1909.15 Chapter 30 that are excluded from documentation in an Environmental Assessment (EA) or Environmental Impact Statement (EIS):

Issuance of a new authorization or amendment of an existing authorization for recreation special uses that occur on existing roads or trails, in existing facilities, in existing recreation sites, or in areas where such activities are allowed. 36 CFR 220.6(d)(12)

Project 6: Issuance of a New Outfitting and Guiding Special Use Permit for Heliskiing

The Bridgeport Ranger District received a proposal from Sweetwater Heli Adventures, LLC for heliskiing in the Sweetwater Mountain Range (see attached map for township, section, and range locations). The proponent is requesting to operate day trips between December 15 and March 31 using an Airbus helicopter to deliver up to four clients and one guide from private property off of State Route 208 in Wellington, Nevada to several landing zones in the Sweetwater Mountain Range. Drop off and pick-up locations (landing zones) would include Black Mountain, Wild Horse Mountain, East Sister Peak, Middle Sister Peak, South Sister Peak, Mount Patterson, Wheel Peak, and Mount Jackson. Up to 16 drop-offs and pick-ups between 0700 and 1500 could occur in any one given day. Activities would not occur below 7,000 feet. The proponent estimates operations could occur from 25 to 60 days per season, snowpack conditions permitting.

Authorized activities would include the use of the U.S. Marine Corps' existing air strip off Nevada State Route 338 for refueling and an emergency landing area; outfitting and guiding backcountry skiers; and the installation of temporary wind flagging at drop and pick-up locations.

Based on preliminary review of the proposed action, this project would be authorized under the following category of actions found in FSH 1909.15 Chapter 30 that are excluded from documentation in an Environmental Assessment (EA) or Environmental Impact Statement (EIS):

Approval, modification, or continuation of special uses that require less than 20 acres of NFS lands. 36 CFR 220.6(e)(3)

Project 7: Expansion of Groomed Non-Motorized Winter Trail System

The Forest Service is proposing an expansion of the existing non-motorized groomed winter trail system established on Buckeye Road (FS Road No. 32017), including the Buckeye Campground Loop Road, which was first piloted in 2021. Based on feedback from the recreating public and the popularity of the groomed trail, two additional segments are being proposed in T. 4N., R. 24E., Sections 3, 4, 5, 9, 10, 15, 22, 27, 28, 33, 34; and T. 5N., R. 24E. Sections 23, 26, 34, and 35. The first segment would involve expanding grooming on Buckeye Road to include the northern end of the road (near the Forest Service warehouse/fire station and U.S. Hwy 395) to the intersection with Buckeye Campground Road, which totals approximately 6.35 miles. The second segment would establish a new 3.15 mile-groomed trail at Paha and Twin Lakes Campground off of Twin Lakes Road.

Activities would include grooming system roads (paved and unpaved) with a tracked UTV 72" Nordic trail groomer; establishment of two parking areas at Paha and Twin Lakes Campgrounds; installation of temporary directional and informational signage; nonmotorized uses such as cross-country skiing, skate skiing, walking, snowshoeing, and fat tire biking; and use of existing restroom facilities. Grooming would only occur when there is a minimum of 12" (1 foot) of snow on the roads.

Based on preliminary review of the proposed action, this project would be authorized under the following category of actions found in FSH 1909.15 Chapter 30 that are excluded from documentation in an Environmental Assessment (EA) or Environmental Impact Statement (EIS):

Repair and maintenance of roads, trails, and landline boundaries. 36 CFR 220.6(d)(4)

Project 8: Keane Minerals Exploration Project

Evergold Corporation is proposing a mineral exploration project on approximately two acres of NFS lands in T. 9N., R. 26E, Sections 8 and 17. Access to the project area is via Nevada State Route 208 south from Yerington, then along the Pine Grove-East Walker Road for 10 miles to FS Road Nos. 059 and 193. Bladed equipment may be used as needed to maintain and repair existing roads southwest of the main Pine Grove-East Walker Road, mainly on FS Road No.193 and the upper-most system roads.

In addition to road maintenance, the proposal includes establishment of 12 drill sites. Three of the proposed drill sites would require short constructed spur roads approximately 100 to 200 ft.

in length. Two of the proposed drill sites would require approximately 200 to 300 ft. of newly constructed road. The remaining drill sites would require the most road construction while also involving re-establishing a non-system road previously used by another mining company in the late 1980s. Due to steeper topography in the project area, no cross-country travel is being proposed.

Proposed activities include drilling initial exploration core and reverse circulation rotary holes at the 12 drill sites. Individual drill site footprint would include an area for side-cast (windrow) material as well as two or more sumps to be placed within the footprint of the drill sites. Drill site dimensions would be 70 ft. by 60 ft. No more than one drill hole would be open at any given time. Average drill hole depth for proposed drilling would be approximately 800 feet. For core drilling, two shifts per day would be utilized, and for reverse circulation rotary drilling, one single 12-hour shift per day would occur.

Vehicles accessing the project area on a daily basis would include pickup trucks for transport of work crews and a water truck. Other vehicles that may access the project area on an occasional basis would include truck- or track- or buggy-mounted core or reverse circulation rotary drills; supply truck delivering drill steel and bits; Case 420 backhoe or equivalent; dozer or grader for light road dressing; 1,100-gallon flatbed water and drill pipe truck; and two other four-wheel drive (4WD) flatbed support vehicles.

Equipment not being actively used would be parked in the staging/laydown area. Because the laydown area is a previously disturbed site, no additional disturbance would be required. Work would be confined to existing disturbance (access roads, pullouts, and road junctions) as much as possible. Where new drill road construction is necessary, water bars would be installed to minimize runoff and erosion and would be located according to best management practices in consultation with the Forest Service.

The Project boundary area lies within the Pine Grove South Inventoried Roadless Area (IRA) as shown in Figure 1. The Pine Grove South IRA totals approximately 88,945 acres. Approximately 0.16 acres of the Pine Grove South IRA is located within the project area. The project proposes 187 ft. of road construction just within the IRA and no timber cutting. Surface disturbance would be temporary, short term, and reclaimed when no longer needed. The disturbance would be linear and would disturb a very small portion (less than 1 percent) of the IRA.

Based on preliminary review of the proposed action, this project would be authorized under the following categories of actions found in FSH 1909.15 Chapter 30 that are excluded from documentation in an Environmental Assessment (EA) or Environmental Impact Statement (EIS):

Short-term (1 year or less) mineral, energy, or geophysical investigations and their incidental support activities that may require cross-country travel by vehicles and equipment, construction of less than 1 mile of low standard road, or use and minor repair of existing roads. 36 CFR 220.6(e)(8)

How to Comment

Please share your comments, concerns, or ideas with me at the Bridgeport Ranger District, 75694 U.S. Hwy 395, HC 62 Box 1000, Bridgeport, CA 93517. I can also be reached by phone at (760) 932-5801 or by fax at (760) 932-5899. If you prefer, you can send me your comments electronically to comments-intermtn-humboldt-toiyabe-bridgeport@usda.gov and reference the project name cited above in the subject line.

Your comments are welcome anytime but will be most helpful if they are received by **June 9, 2023**. Comments in response to this scoping notice, including the name(s) of the commenter, will be considered part of the public record and available for public review. If you do not respond to this letter you will receive no further information on these proposals. However, you may always find information about these and other HTNF projects on our website at <https://www.fs.usda.gov/projects/htnf/landmanagement/projects>.

Sincerely,

MEGAN MULLOWNEY
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MEGAN MULLOWNEY
District Ranger

Enclosures

