

Decision Memo

Lamoille – Talbot Trail Project

USDA Forest Service
Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest
Ruby Mountains Ranger District
Elko County, Nevada

Background

The Ruby Mountains Ranger District is proposing to construct a non-motorized trail from Lamoille Canyon to Talbot Creek. There is an existing trail, however much of it has become overgrown or is on private land, where it must be re-routed to National Forest System lands. The majority of this trail would be on National Forest System lands with a small portion (<0.10 mile) crossing private lands by written agreement. The project was initiated by local Elko County residents who proposed the trail to Forest Service recreation managers. This is the first phase of a proposed larger non-motorized trail project that one day may connect Lamoille Canyon to Secret Pass. The Lamoille-Talbot section is the only portion of the trail covered under this decision.

Proposed Action

The purpose of this trail project is to provide a new recreational opportunity for hikers, horsemen, and mountain bikers in the Ruby Mountains. It was recognized through discussions with local residents that there is a need for an additional multi-user trail in the Ruby Mountains. The trail will be constructed for hikers and horsemen, with specific design features to allow mountain bike travel.

The project is located in Sections 3, 4, 5, 6; Township 32N; Range 58E and Sections 32, 33, 34, 35; Township 33N; Range 58E in the Mount Diablo Baseline and Meridian. See attached map.

The trail will be designed to accommodate hikers, horses, mountain bikes and other non-motorized uses. The trail will be approximately 11 miles in length and the tread will be 18-24" wide (Class II trail for horses and mountain bikes). The start of the trail will be at the paved pullout above the Powerhouse Picnic Area. No new trailheads will be created for this trail; users will park along the Lamoille Canyon road at one of the existing turnouts or spur roads. The Lamoille-Talbot trail will connect to the existing trail up Talbot Canyon.

Design features of the trail include but are not limited to:

- Signs indicating private property boundaries
- Informational and educational signs to:
 - reduce multi-user conflicts (horses, hikers and mountain bikes),
 - provide information about the local area (local plants and wildlife)

- and to reduce resource damage (switchback cutting, wildfire prevention, pack it in-pack it out for trash, and noxious weeds)
- Grades and tread specifically designed for mountain bike use
- Tread width and clearance height for horse use
- Constructing one 100 foot drift fence along the new trail in the Talbot Creek watershed so that livestock operators and their animals are not negatively impacted.
- Trail corridor will be surveyed for migratory birds during the breeding season and avoidance measures implemented to protect nesting birds.
- The one known cultural resource site will be protected by relocating one section of trail to protect this site.
- Implementation of a noxious weed control and prevention plan during construction.

Decision

I have decided to implement the trail project as described above.

This action is categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental impact statement or an environmental assessment because it fits within category 2 – ***Trail Construction and Reconstruction*** as described in 36 CFR220.6(e)(1).

The categorical exclusion is appropriate in this situation because there are no extraordinary circumstances potentially having effects which may significantly affect the environment. I considered the following factors in this determination:

- a. ***Federally listed threatened or endangered species or designated critical habitat, species proposed for federal listing or proposed critical habitat, or Forest Service sensitive species-***
 - There will be no impacts to listed threatened or endangered species or their critical habitat (Biological Evaluations dated October 29, 2009 and October 1, 2009)
 - For Forest Service sensitive species it was determined that the project may impact but would not cause a trend toward federal listing or loss of viability for bighorn sheep or Northern goshawk. It was also determined that the project will have no impact on any sensitive plant species that has the potential to exist in the Ruby Mountains (Biological Evaluations dated October 1, 2009 and October 29, 2009).
- b. ***Wetlands, Floodplains, Municipal Watersheds*** – The project would have no impact on any of these resource conditions.
- c. ***Congressionally designated areas, such as wilderness, wilderness study areas, or national recreation areas would be affected by this proposal.*** – This project is located outside the Ruby Mountains Wilderness and therefore will have no impact on the wilderness resource. There are no wilderness study areas or national recreation areas located in this project so there is no impact to either of these areas.

- d. Inventoried Roadless Areas* – The trail will be constructed within the Ruby-Lamoille Canyon Roadless Area. Impacts are expected to be minimal to the roadless characteristics and wilderness qualities of the area (Wilderness Qualities and Roadless Area Characteristics worksheets dated October 8, 2009). The cutting of small size timber that is incidental to the construction of the trail is consistent with the Secretary of Agriculture’s direction for the protection of Inventoried Roadless Areas (Roadless Area Review Checklist dated December 4, 2009).
- e. Research Natural Area.* – There are no impacts to Research Natural Areas because there are none in the project area.
- f. American Indian and Alaska Native religious or cultural sites.* – Tribal coordination was initiated in July 2009 and no issues were raised regarding American Indian religious or cultural sites.
- g. Archeological sites, or historic properties or areas* – A cultural survey was completed in 2009. The SHPO concurs with the U.S. Forest Service’s determination that the proposed trail will not pose any adverse effects to historic properties. (*SHPO letter dated October 16, 2009*)

Public Involvement

A proposal to relocate the trail was listed in the Schedule of Proposed Actions on July 2009. A scoping letter was sent to interested public on July 22, 2009. A public meeting hosted by the Northeastern Nevada Stewardship Group in Lamoille, NV was held on October 23, 2009, and on the same day the trail project was discussed on Elko Live, a weekly radio news show broadcast by KELK in Elko. Sue Kennedy gave a presentation to the Elko County Commission on November 3, 2009.

During the public scoping process, numerous comments were received, many of which were in support of this project which provides new recreational opportunities for hikers, mountain bikers, and horsemen. Several other commenters expressed concern about construction of the trail and its potential adverse effects on resources within the area including:

- wildlife
- watershed
- scenic quality
- impacts on adjacent private landowners
- impacts on the nearby Ruby Mountains Wilderness

The Forest Service Interdisciplinary Team has reviewed all of the comments and has concluded that relevant issues have been properly addressed. A summary of all comments is included in the project record and is available for public review if requested.

Tribal Coordination

Information letters were sent to local tribal governments on July 22, 2009. No concerns or issues were raised by tribal governments in regards to this project.

Findings Required by Other Laws

This decision is consistent with the Humboldt National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan as required by the National Forest Management Act. The project was designed in conformance with Forest Plan standards and incorporates appropriate Forest Plan guidelines for recreation, fisheries and water quality.

The project is also in compliance with the Endangered Species Act, National Historic Preservation Act, Clean Water Act, and Migratory Bird Treaty Act.

Implementation Date

This project will be implemented on or after the decision date depending on weather and ground conditions. It is expected that work would not begin before April of 2010.

Administrative Review or Appeal Opportunities

This decision is not subject to administrative appeal.

Contact Person

For additional information concerning this decision or the Forest Service appeal process, contact Nancy Taylor, Recreation Program Manager, Ruby Mountains Ranger District, P.O. Box 246, Wells, NV 89835. Phone is 775-752-3357.

/s/ Gar Abbas
Gar Abbas
Ruby Mountains District Ranger

3/30/2010
Date

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