

**DECISION MEMO  
SHARP PHASE II  
U.S. FOREST SERVICE  
TOWN OF MAMMOTH LAKES  
MAMMOTH RANGER DISTRICT  
MONO COUNTY, CA**

**BACKGROUND**

A large number of user-created trails exist within the Sherwins area near the Town of Mammoth Lakes in Mono County, California. The area receives a high level of dispersed use by foot, bicycle as well as horseback resulting in an extensive network of user-created trails to compliment a small number of designated National Forest System Trails. A number of user-created trail segments are exhibiting environmental impacts such as erosion or problems with muddiness as a result of improper location and/or design. Options to protect natural and cultural resources include closure of user-trails. However, efforts to close user-trails are often ineffective unless paired with development of a trail system that provides opportunities trail-users desire. Development of a well-designed system of system trails in place of an informal network will allow for improved management of trail facilities encouraging sustainability and improved user experiences and protection of natural and cultural resources.

Demand for multi-use, non-motorized trail based opportunities adjacent to the Town of Mammoth Lakes has steadily increased over the years and continues to grow. There are currently 17 miles of public non-motorized, multi-use trails within reach of Mammoth Lakes. In response to resource impacts and growing community interest, the Sherwin Working Group (SWG), an independent, community-based body of stakeholders formed to assess and formulate potential solutions. As a result of convening the SWG, a comprehensive plan (Sherwins Area Recreation Plan (SHARP)) was adopted as part of the Town's updated "Trail System Master Plan" in October of 2011. The programmatic CEQA analysis was completed with funding from a grant to the Town of Mammoth Lakes from the Sierra Nevada Conservancy (SNC).

In February 2017, a Decision Memo for phase 1 of SHARP was signed with project implementation being completed the following summer season by paid Town staff, fire crews and volunteers working with the "Mammoth Lakes Trail System Trail Days" planned and hosted by the Town of Mammoth Lakes. Phase 2 builds upon a continued need for establishing sustainable, highly desirable trail-based opportunities in the area. Phase 2 is relatively small with a trailhead and ¼ mile of approximately 24" wide natural soft surface trail. A third phase will be necessary to complete the proposed trail alignments included in the Sherwins Area Recreation

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Plan/Town of Mammoth Lakes Trail System Master Plan.

## DECISION

I have decided to approve the implementation of Phase II of the Sherwin Area Recreation Plan (SHARP). In partnership with the Town of Mammoth Lakes under a cost-share agreement, improvements including a trailhead and approximately 0.25 mile, 24" wide natural soft surface trail will be constructed and maintained under a cost-share agreement.

This action is categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental impact statement (EIS) or an environmental assessment (EA). The applicable category of actions is identified in agency procedures as 36 CFR 220.69(e)(1) and 36 CFR 220.6(e)(2). These categories of action(s) are applicable because they fall within the scope of construction and reconstruction of trails and approval modification or continuation of minor special uses of NFS lands that require less than five contiguous acres of land.

## REASONS FOR CATEGORICALLY EXCLUDING THE DECISION

I find that there are no extraordinary circumstances that would warrant further analysis and documentation in an EA or EIS. I took into account resource conditions identified in agency procedures that should be considered in determining whether extraordinary circumstances might exist:

- Federally listed threatened or endangered species or designated critical habitat, species proposed for Federal listing or proposed critical habitat, or Forest Service sensitive species – The project area was assessed for the presence of threatened, endangered, proposed and candidate species as well as Forest Service sensitive animals. Based on a review of corporate data, imagery and several site visits, I determined that the immediate project area does not provide habitat for any of these species. American martens (FS sensitive) have been detected to the south of the project area at higher elevations in Sherwin Bowl. However, it is unlikely that non-motorized use of the proposed trails would negatively impact this species. It is therefore my determination that the SHARP Phase 2 project will not affect any species listed under the Endangered Species Act of 1973 ( as amended), and would have no impact on any Forest Service sensitive species.
- Flood plains, wetlands, or municipal watersheds – **None are present**
- Congressionally designated areas such as wilderness, wilderness study areas, or national recreation areas – There are no congressionally designated areas within the project area. Therefore, there will be no effects to these areas.
- Inventoried roadless areas or potential wilderness areas – **None are present**
- Research natural areas – There are no research natural areas within or adjacent to the project area. Therefore, there will be no effects to these areas.
- American Indians and Alaska Native religious or cultural sites – **None are present**
- Archaeological sites, or historic properties or areas – **None are present**

(R2018050402311)

- There were several proposed trail alignments that have been removed from this project due to identified resources during field survey work.

This action was originally listed as a proposal on the Inyo National Forest Schedule of Proposed Actions (SOPA) on April 6, 2018 and updated periodically during the analysis. In addition to SOPA listing, the scoping letter was distributed to interested parties in the community to include local tribes, SHARP stakeholders, residents, businesses and special use permit holders. Mono County, the Town of Mammoth Lakes and other regulatory organizations including the Lahontan Water Board were also engaged for comment.

Of the comments received, most were supportive of the proposed action and referenced benefits of the work in Phase 1 whereas a small number were seeking clarification/questions regarding the project. One comment was submitted regarding alignment of the multiple use path near Hayden Cabin and Sierra Meadows Ranch. In response, the district met with the commenting party onsite to discuss alignment and design options to reduce potential concerns. Following the site visit, a determination was made that the comment did not provide adequate grounds for modification of the proposed action. This specific alignment will not be included in this phase of work. It will likely be considered as part of Phase 3.

## **FINDINGS REQUIRED BY OTHER LAWS AND REGULATIONS**

This decision is consistent with the Inyo National Forest Land Management Plan. The project was designed in conformance with Management Area #9 (Mammoth) direction for establishment of trail interface opportunities with the community of Mammoth Lakes.

## **ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW (OBJECTION) OPPORTUNITIES**

This decision is not subject to objections pursuant to 36 CFR 218.

## **IMPLEMENTATION DATE**

Prior to implementation, final designs for the trailhead improvements will need to be approved by Inyo National Forests, Engineering Department. A letter will be issued to the Town of Mammoth Lakes following the final engineering approval. This project will be implemented starting summer of 2019 with ongoing work occurring into fall and summer 2020.

## **CONTACT**

For additional information concerning this decision, contact: Janelle Walker at 2500 Hwy 203, Mammoth Lakes, CA, by phone at 760-924-5523 or by email at [Janelle.walker@usda.gov](mailto:Janelle.walker@usda.gov).



7/24/2009

GORDON P. MARTIN

Date

DISTRICT RANGER

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... INF System Trails

■ Sherwins\_Trailhead

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