

ORDER NO. 05-04-50-18-04  
USDA Forest Service  
Inyo National Forest  
Weber Lake Trail Closure

Pursuant to 16 USC 551 and 36 CFR 261.50(a) and (b), and to provide for public safety, the following act is prohibited within the Inyo National Forest. This Order is effective from July 12, 2018 through December 31, 2018.

Being on the Weber Lake Trail from its intersection with the Rush Creek Trail, then south to the fork in the Weber Lake Trail at Weber Lake, as shown on the attached map. 36 CFR 261.55(a).


Pursuant to 36 CFR 261.50(e), the following persons are exempt from this Order:

1. Any Federal, State or local officer, or member of an organized rescue or fire fighting force in the performance of an official duty.
2. Persons with a permit from the Forest Service specifically authorizing the otherwise prohibited act.

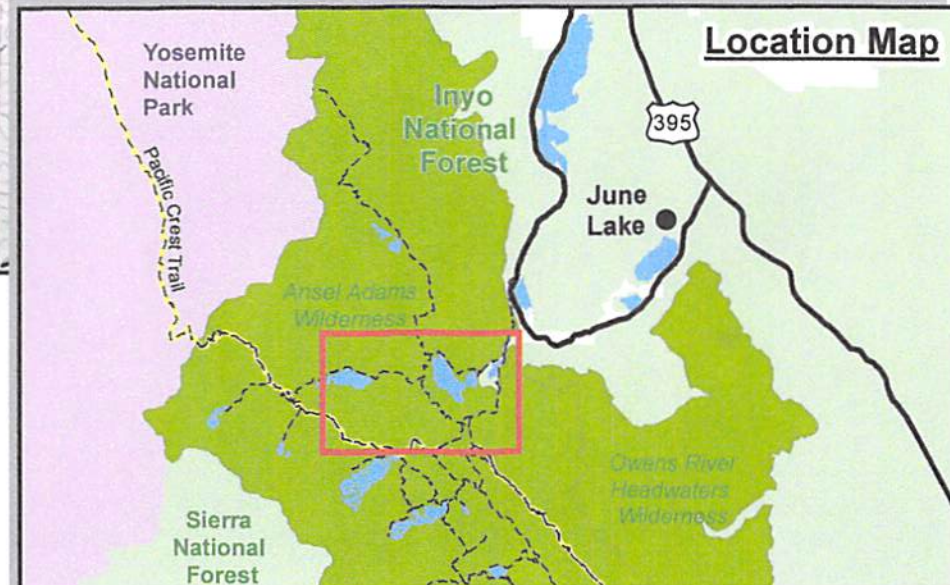
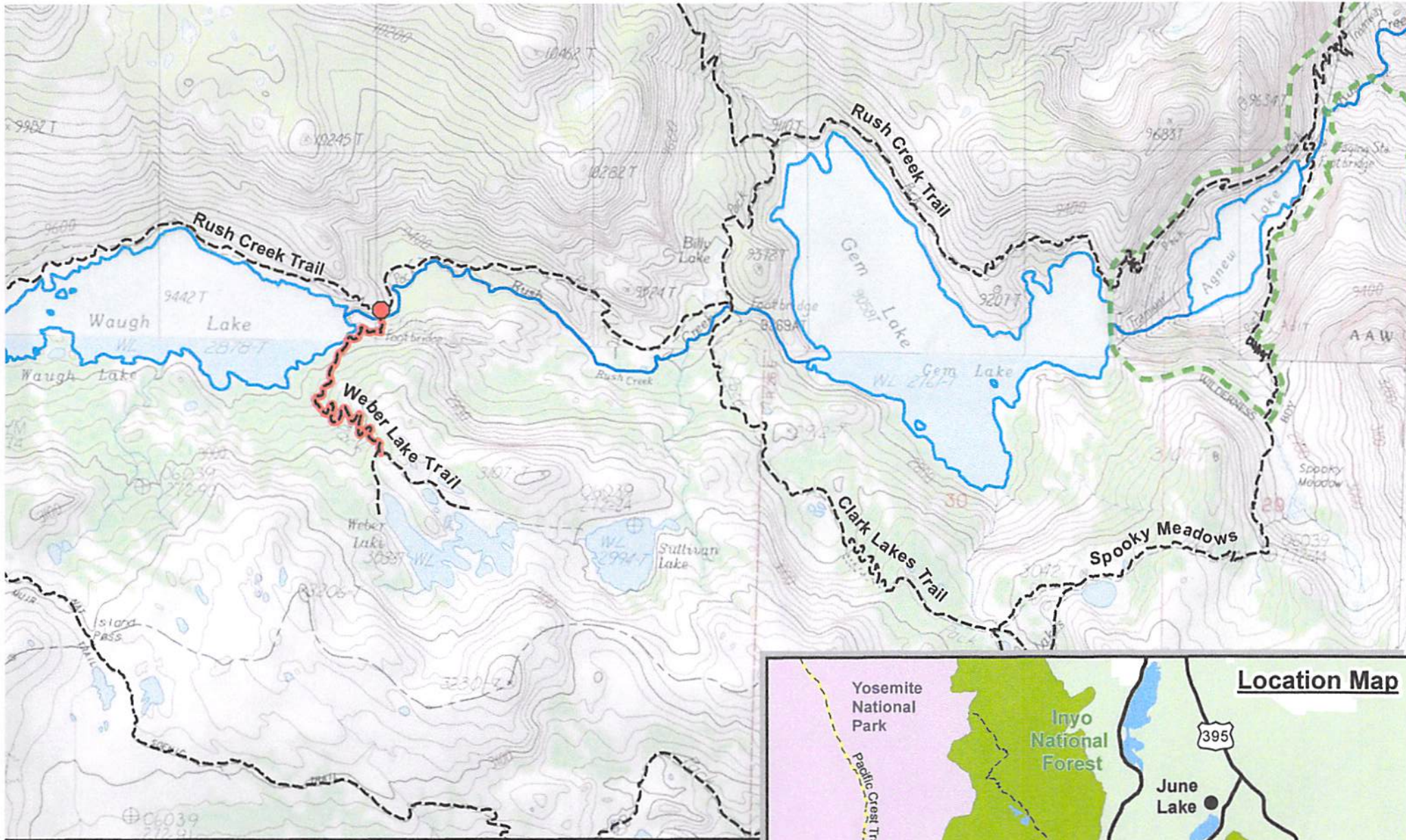
This prohibition is in addition to the general prohibitions in 36 CFR Part 261, Subpart A.

A violation of this prohibition is punishable by a fine of not more than \$5,000 for an individual or \$10,000 for an organization, or imprisonment for not more than six months, or both. 16 USC 551 and 18 USC 3559, 3571, and 3581.

Executed in Bishop California, this <sup>th</sup> 11 day of July, 2018.

  
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Tammy Randall-Parker  
Forest Supervisor





**Forest Order 05-04-50-18-04  
Weber Lake Trail Closure**



0 1,500 Feet

Scale = 1:24,000  
UTM NAD83 Zone 11



- Highway
- Trail
- Wilderness Boundary
- Closed Trail
- Trail Closure Point





Date: July 11, 2018  
To: File  
From: Tammy Randall-Parker, Inyo National Forest Supervisor *JRP*  
Re: Inyo National Forest Order No. 05-04-50-18-04 Weber Lake Trail Closure.

The Inyo National Forest is issuing a Forest Order closing the Weber Lake Trail from its intersection with the Rush Creek Trail, then south to the fork in the Weber Lake Trail at Weber Lake, as shown on the map attached to Forest Order No. 05-04-50-18-04. This Forest Order will be in place from July 12, 2018 through December 31, 2018 and is necessary to protect public safety during construction activities associated with the Rush Meadows Dam modification.

**Issue:** Southern California Edison (SCE) needs to abate an identified safety risk associated with the Rush Creek Hydroelectric System (RCHS) on the Inyo National Forest. A dam modification project will be implemented in July 2018 to fix an immediate safety concern associated with the Rush Meadows Dam on Waugh Lake and requires the use of motorized transport and mechanized equipment in the Ansel Adams Wilderness. The dam modification project is approved by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) and the Forest Service. Modification of the spillway of Rush Meadows Dam will ensure that SCE can maintain the seismic restrictions (reduced reservoir level at Waugh Lake) that were identified as necessary in 2012. Approval of the use of multiple helicopters, generators, concrete saws, a man-lift and a mini- excavator in designated wilderness has already been secured. The closure of the Weber Lake Trail as described in Forest Order No. 05-04-50-18-04 and shown on the map attached to the Order for the duration of the project is necessary due to the proximity of the trail to the approved staging area/construction site at the Rush Meadows Dam. Additionally, the main flight path into the Waugh Lake construction site is directly over the Weber Lake Trail. Helicopters will be delivering supplies and equipment into the construction site as well as removing large blocks of concrete from the site (7,500 lbs each) to be flown out.

**Background:** The RCHS consists of a powerhouse, penstocks, and three reservoirs impounded by concrete dams: Waugh, Gem and Agnew (upstream to downstream). This system was constructed circa 1917 and is currently operated by SCE under license 1389 issued by the FERC. Waugh and Gem Reservoirs are within the Ansel Adams Wilderness. In 2012 it was determined that the nearby Silver Lake Fault could be geologically active and SCE was ordered by the FERC to conduct a seismic stability analyses on these three dams. These studies determined that the dams could fail during earthquakes that the Silver Lake Fault could produce if the lake levels were high, but would be sound at lower water levels impounded behind the dams. In 2016/2017 Rush Creek watershed experienced 200% of average snowpack and runoff that exacerbated safety concerns for dams within the RCHS. SCE determined restricted reservoir levels mandated by FERC could not be maintained through normal operations. This caused SCE to undertake extraordinary measures to protect life and property. These actions were initiated in two phases.



Phase 1 consisted of actions to lower reservoir levels (mobilization of industrial sized pumps to lower Agnew Lake, modification of the penstock below Agnew Dam, and permanent modifications to Agnew Dam so that the dam no longer impounds water) in order to deal with the immediate situation, but also to assure that reservoir levels remained within the FERC-required seismic restrictions in the future. Multiple daily helicopter flights were necessary to deliver construction materials and to service the pumps placed on Agnew Lake (outside of the wilderness). The pumps ran 24 hours a day. Additionally, since a failure of the Rush Meadows Dam (Waugh Lake) would inundate a 1.5 mile stretch of the Rush Creek, including some popular wilderness campsites and a hiking and pack stock trail, the trail and surrounding areas were closed during the period when the water level in Waugh Lake was above the restricted level. This affected those with wilderness permits, day-hikers, and hikers seeking access to the John Muir Trail and Yosemite National Park. Additionally, part of the community of June Lake, and a concentrated Inyo National Forest recreation area near Silver Lake with resorts, campgrounds, and recreation residences lie below the RCHS and could have been inundated if Gem and Agnew Dams were to fail, so SCE and the Inyo National Forest conducted significant outreach with the public, elected officials, and partner agencies such as the Mono County Sheriff and County Supervisors.

**Current Situation:** Activities for the Rush Meadows Dam modification are to take place from July 2018 through November 2018. The project is required to meet the seismic restrictions and alleviate safety concerns at the Rush Meadows Dam as required by the FERC, the Division of Dam Safety and Inspections, and the California Department of Water Resources and Division of Safety of Dams. The notching of the Rush Meadows Dam is the last modification needed in order to permanently ensure the safety of the system. Motorized transport and mechanized equipment will be necessary; heavy lift helicopters, a mini-excavator, man-lift, concrete saws and generators will be flown in to the site in order to notch the Rush Creek Meadows concrete spillway, which entails removing hundreds of thousands of pounds of concrete from the site. Forest Order No. 05-04-50-18-04 is necessary because the construction site at the dam, along with the flight path of the helicopters could impact the safety of the public, if the Weber Lake Trail were to remain open during the dam modification operation.

The Forest is working closely with SCE and FERC regarding the safety of the public during the dam modification effort. The Forest has conducted scoping discussions regarding the restrictions to be implemented by Forest Order No. 05-04-50-18-04 with SCE, FERC, affected special use permittees, wilderness permit holders and the community of June Lake. No significant issues were raised during scoping.

I have concluded that this decision may be categorically excluded from documentation in an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) or Environmental Assessment (EA) under the National Environmental Policy Act. This action falls within the category identified in 36 CFR 220.6(d)(1) – prohibitions to provide short-term resource protection or to protect public health and safety – and does not require documentation in a decision memo, decision notice, or record of decision. I have determined that there are no extraordinary circumstances associated with this prohibition. Implementation of the decision may begin immediately.