

USDA



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest Service

Humboldt-Toiyabe
National Forest

June 2010

NOTICE OF PROPOSED ACTION

AND

OPPORTUNITY TO COMMENT

PACIFIC CREST TRAIL CROSSING

BRIDGEPORT RANGER DISTRICT

MONO COUNTY, CALIFORNIA

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COMMENTS WELCOME

The Bridgeport Ranger District of the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest welcomes your comments on the Pacific Crest Trail (PCT) Crossing Project. This is a proposal to establish a motorized crossing of the PCT and an egress route through the PCT Crossing Area.

Written, facsimile, hand delivered, oral, and electronic comments concerning this action will be accepted for 30 calendar days following the publication of the 36 CFR 215 Notice of Proposed Action in the Reno Gazette Journal. For detailed information on how to provide comments, please refer to the “Comment Process” section of this document.

PURPOSE AND NEED FOR ACTION

The area known as the Pacific Crest Trail Crossing Area is adjacent to the Bridgeport Winter Recreation Area (BWRA), just south of Sonora Pass on the Bridgeport Ranger District (Figure 1). The Omnibus Public Land Management Act of 2009 (Act) created the BWRA and directed the Forest Service to establish a crossing of the PCT as stated in section (3)(f):

Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail - The Secretary shall establish an appropriate snowmobile crossing point along the Trail in the area identified as “Pacific Crest Trail Proposed Crossing Area” on the map entitled “Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest Proposed Management” and dated September 17, 2008 –

- (1) In accordance with –
 - (A) The National Trails system Act (16 U.S.C. 1241 et seq.) and
 - (B) any applicable environmental and public safety laws; and
- (2) Subject to the terms and conditions the Secretary determines to be necessary to ensure that the crossing would not –
 - (A) interfere with the nature and purposes of the Trail; or
 - (B) harm the surrounding landscape.

The purpose of this project is to establish a winter motorized crossing of the PCT through the PCT Crossing Area that meets the intent of the Omnibus Public Lands Act of 2009 and has the following characteristics:

- Is identifiable and enforceable.
- Provides year-round protection of area’s high scenic quality.
- Minimizes user exposure within the PCT Crossing Area to avalanche danger.

DECISION FRAMEWORK

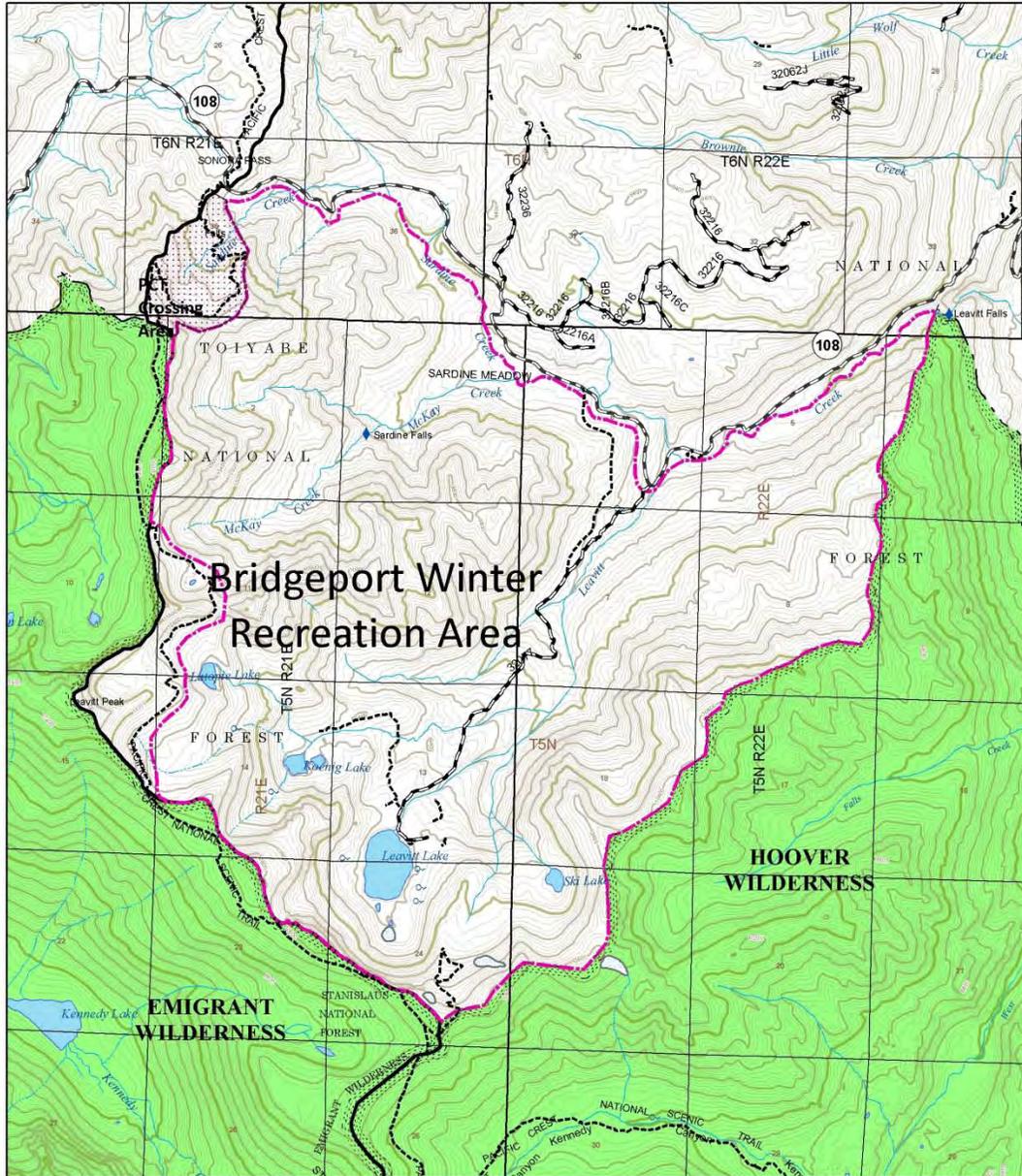
The Bridgeport Ranger District is preparing an Environmental Assessment (EA). Based on that environmental analysis and disclosure (EA), the District Ranger will decide:

- 1) Whether to approve the crossing as proposed or modified, or as described in an alternative.
- 2) What mitigation is needed.
- 3) What monitoring is required for this project.

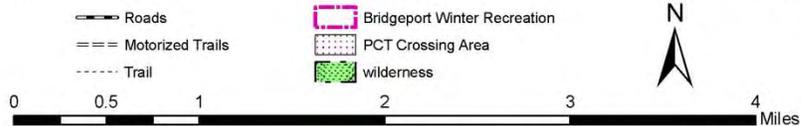
LOCATION

The project area is located approximately ½ mile south of Sonora Pass (Figure 1). This area is within the Bridgeport Ranger District of the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest, Mono County, California. Legal description of the project is Township 6 North, Range 21 East, Section 35 and Township 5 North, Range 21 East, Section 2.

Figure 1. Area Map.



Bridgeport Winter Recreation Area & PCT Crossing Area



This map and data has no warranties to its content or accuracy when used for purposes other than those intended by the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest - DCMC 20100408

PROPOSED ACTION

The Bridgeport Ranger District, Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest, proposes to designate a winter motorized crossing of the PCT within the PCT Crossing Area and establish a route to allow snowmobilers egress from the BWRA to Highway 108 on the east side of Sonora Pass as shown in Figure 2. The crossing route would enter the PCT Crossing Area from the east, below an unnamed peak (10,970 feet) along the divide between McCay Creek and Sardine Creek. The crossing route would immediately drop into the Sardine Creek drainage and exit the PCT Crossing Area at Highway 108 on the east side of Sonora Pass.

The proposed crossing route would cross the PCT at two points and parallel the PCT for approximately 1400 feet. Signs would be placed, during the winter use season, at each crossing point notifying users to stay on the designated crossing route. In addition, maps and other printed material would indicate the location of the PCT crossing and notify users to stay on the designated crossing route. The entire crossing route would be identified with winter-appropriate markers (e.g., bamboo poles). Public education efforts such as websites, visitor contacts, and trailhead signs would provide information about the location of the crossing route.

Avalanche conditions exist in the PCT Crossing Area. The proposed crossing route would provide less exposure to avalanche danger than alternative routes.

*Mitigations*User Conflict

- Educate users about significance of PCT, its location in relation to the BWRA, and why it is managed for non-motorized use.
- Require users to obtain a daily self-issuing permit when entering adjacent BWRA. Permit will contain information about staying on designated route while in PCT crossing Area.
- Close the PCT Crossing Route to motorized use when Caltrans reopens Highway 108 to vehicle traffic.

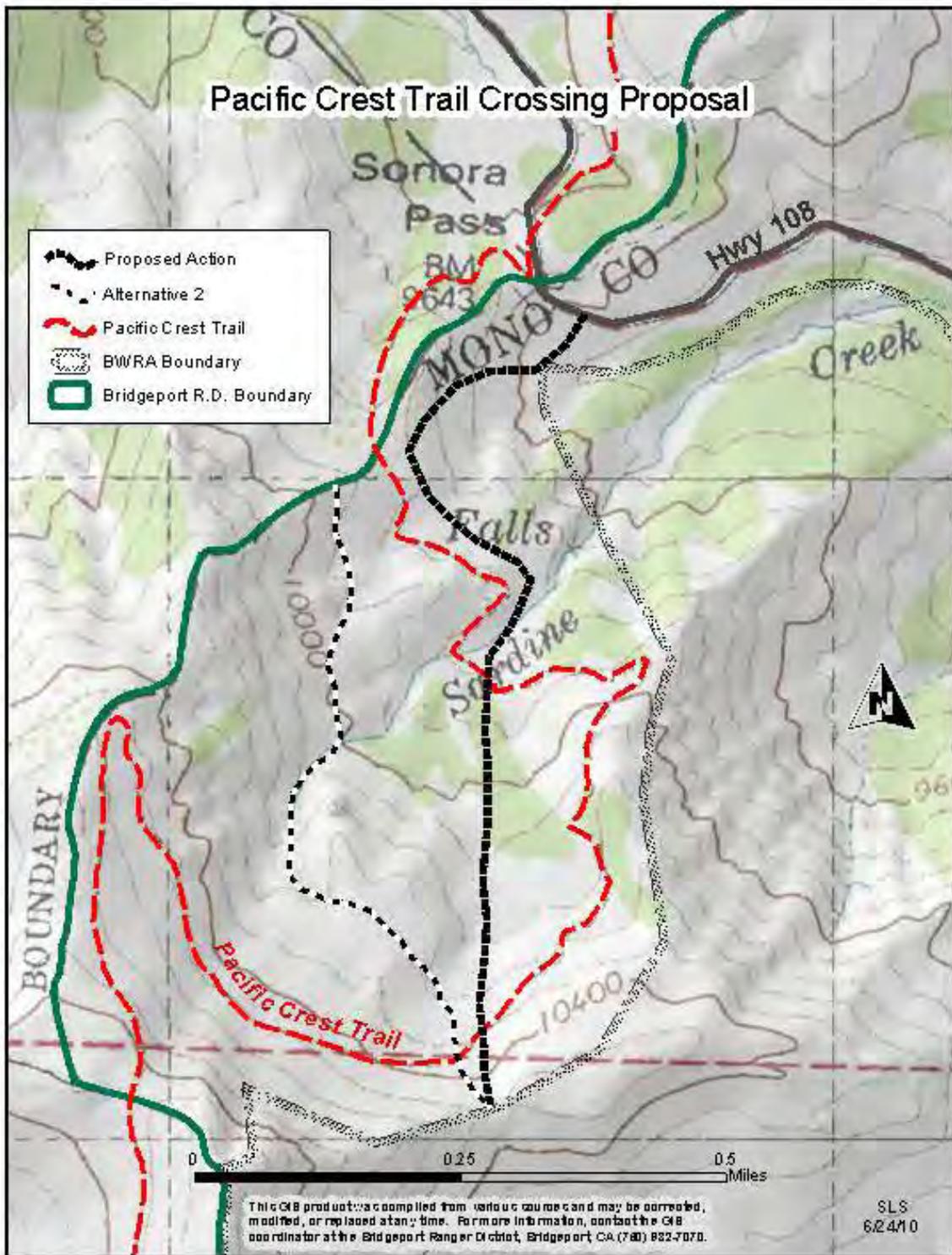
Signing

- Conduct a field review to determine exact locations for permanent and temporary signs.
- Locate signs to effectively identify crossing route.
- Temporary signs will complement permanent signs.
- Permanent and temporary signs are located to minimize visual impacts.

Public Safety

- Notify users of risks associated with traveling in avalanche terrain.
- Post daily avalanche forecast at trailheads and on website.
- Encourage users to take an avalanche class and carry the appropriate equipment in avalanche terrain.

Figure 2. Proposed crossing route and upper route alternative.



Monitoring

Required monitoring is proposed to 1) assess the effectiveness of implementation (in achieving objectives); 2) identify unintended impacts; and 3) determine success in achieving desired condition. Lesson learning would be applied to similar future projects.

Off-route motorized use

- Number of violation notices and warnings for off-route motorized use in the PCT Crossing Area using the LEIMARS system.

Conflict

- Number of reported conflicts from user comment forms, emails, and patrol reports.

Impacts to PCT

- Observed violations (including snowmobile tracks) crossing the PCT.

ALTERNATIVES

An upper route crossing alternative will be analyzed in the Environmental Assessment. Under this alternative, the Forest Service would designate a winter motorized crossing of the PCT and establish a route to allow snowmobilers to egress from the BWRA to the Stanislaus National Forest boundary as shown in Figure 2. The crossing route would enter the PCT Crossing Area from the east below an unnamed peak (10,970 feet) along the divide between McCay Creek and Sardine Creek. The upper crossing route would head west across the north face of the slope below the peak and exit the PCT Crossing Area just below 10,000 feet at the boundary with the Stanislaus National Forest. The upper route crossing would cross the PCT at one point and would not parallel the PCT, and would provide more exposure to avalanche terrain.

A current condition (no action) alternative will be analyzed in the Environmental Assessment. Under this alternative, no winter motorized crossing of the PCT would be designated and snowmobilers would not be allowed to egress the BWRA through the PCT Crossing Area.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Scoping for the PCT Crossing occurred during the development of the BWRA Management Plan. Public meetings were held in Bridgeport, California in November 2009 and February 2010. A news release was issued on January 29, 2010.

ANALYSIS/ISSUES

Scoping comments included concerns about public safety associated with avalanche danger, the number of motorized crossings of the Pacific Crest Trail, and motorized use in the PCT Crossing Area. These issues are identified as significant issues and will be analyzed in detail in the Environmental Assessment.

COMMENT PROCESS

The Bridgeport Ranger District of the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest is providing an opportunity to comment on this proposal in accordance with Forest Service Appeal regulations (36 CFR 215.11 (a)). Appeal eligibility is limited to those who provide comment

or otherwise express interest in this proposed action and submit comments by the close of the comment period.

Written, facsimile, hand-delivered, oral, and electronic comments concerning this action would be accepted for 30 calendar days following the publication of this notice in the Reno Gazette Journal. Comments may be submitted to: District Ranger, Bridgeport Ranger District, HC 62 Box 1000, Bridgeport, CA 93517.

The telephone number is (760) 932-7070; Fax (760) 932-5899. Office business hours for those submitting comments in person are: 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday, excluding holidays.

Electronic comments must be submitted in a format such as an e-mail message, plain text (.txt), rich text format (.rtf), and Word (.doc) to comments-intermtn-humboldt-toiyabe-bridgeport@fs.fed.us, with PCT Crossing in the subject line. Comments must have an identifiable name attached or verification of identity would be required. A scanned signature may serve as verification on electronic comments.

Comments must be received by the close of the comment period. Those who provide comments during this comment period are eligible to appeal the decision. Individuals and organizations wishing to be eligible to appeal must provide the information identified in 36 CFR 215, including:

- Name and Address,
- Title of the Proposed Action;
- Specific comments (36 CFR 215.2) on the Proposed Action, along with supporting reasons that the Responsible Official should consider in reaching a decision,
- Signature or other verification of identity upon request; identification of the individual or organization who authored the comments(s) is necessary for appeal eligibility,
- For multiple names or multiple organizations, a signature must be provided for the individual authorized to represent each organization, or for each individual that wishes to have appeal eligibility, and
- Individual members of organizations must submit their own substantive comments to meet the requirements of appeal eligibility as an individual, comments received on behalf of an organization are considered as those of the organization only.

Comments received in response to this solicitation, including names and addresses of those who comment, would be considered part of the public record for this project and would be available for public inspection and released if requested under the Freedom of Information Act.

RESPONSIBLE OFFICIAL

The Responsible Official for this project is Barbara Drake, Acting District Ranger, Bridgeport Ranger District.

CONTACT PERSON

For further information regarding this proposal please contact Rachel Franchina, Team Leader at (760) 932-5830.