



2010



Bridgeport Winter Recreation Area Management Plan

Bridgeport Ranger District
Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest
5/07/2010

Signature Page

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1. Introduction

The Bridgeport Winter Recreation Area (BWRA) was designated with passage of the Omnibus Public Land Management Act of 2009¹ (Act), making it the first winter motorized recreation area in the nation. The Act requires the Forest Service to prepare a BWRA management plan using a public process that addresses the following:

- Adequate signage.
- A public education program on allowable usage areas.
- Measures to ensure adequate sanitation.
- Measures to ensure protection of the Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail (PCT).
- A monitoring and enforcement strategy.

The Act also directs the Forest Service to prioritize enforcement activities to:

- Prohibit the degradation of natural resources in the BWRA.
- Prevent interference with non-motorized recreation on the PCT.
- Reduce user conflicts in the BWRA.

Finally, the Act directs the Forest Service to establish a snowmobile crossing of the Pacific Crest Trail in the Pacific Crest Trail Crossing Area, which is outside the BWRA. The crossing will be in accordance with the National Trails system Act and any applicable environmental and public safety laws. The Forest Service will ensure the crossing does not interfere with the nature and purposes of the PCT or harm the surrounding landscape.

This plan provides guidance for the Forest Service and its partners to deliver quality winter motorized recreation opportunities and protect natural resources in the 7,254 acre Bridgeport Winter Recreation Area. This plan does not constitute a new decision; rather, it implements with the 2005 West Hoover Travel Management Plan decision as designated by the Omnibus Public Lands Management Act of 2009. An Appropriate level of environmental analysis will be conducted for any proposed ground disturbing activities or activities that constitute a change from the existing condition.

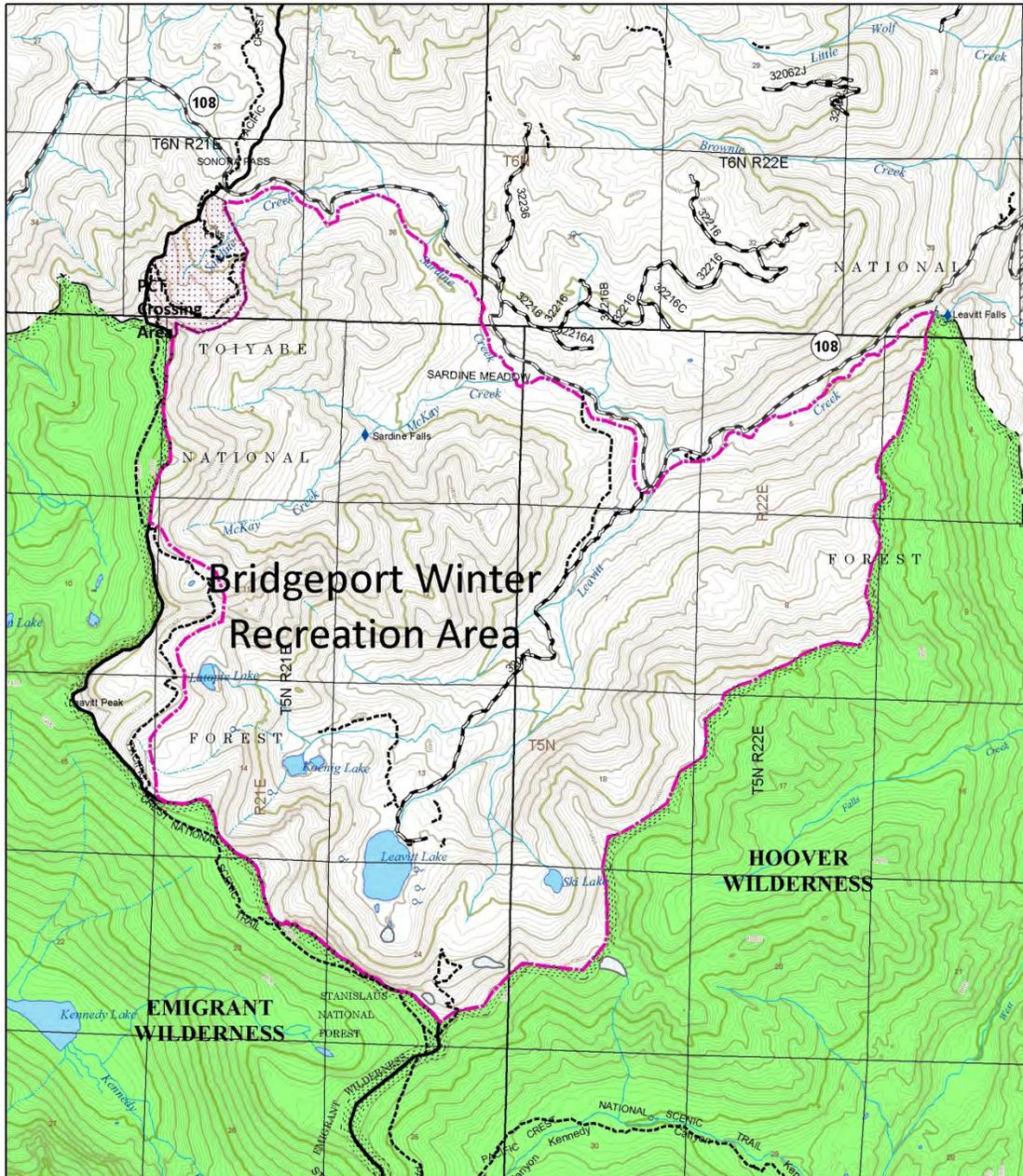
Bridgeport Winter Recreation Area management plan outcomes include the following:

- Provide opportunities for quality semi-primitive motorized winter recreation.
- Reduce user conflicts in the BWRA and surrounding lands.
- Protect natural resources in the BWRA.
- Protect specially designated areas adjacent to the BWRA (PCT, Wilderness).
- Allow for Marine training activities as specified in the special use permit issued to the Mountain Warfare Training Center (MWTC) from the Forest Service.²

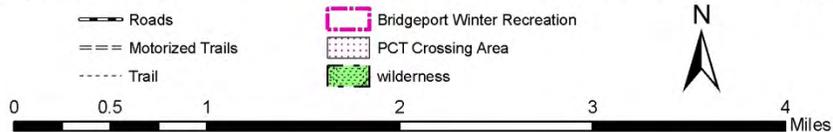
¹ Public Law 111-11.

² The National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2010 also provides direction for MWTC use of the BWRA (see Appendix A).

Figure 1. Bridgeport Winter Recreation Area.



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

- Manage the BWRA cooperatively by the Forest Service with support of the US Marine Corps (USMC), PCTA, snowmobilers, and other stakeholders.

1.1 Document Structure

This plan is a dynamic document intended to be updated regularly. Management strategies are identified to address elements required in the Act (see above). However, monitoring all actions is a critical element of this plan. Monitoring may indicate the success or failure of specific actions, which will require adjustment of future actions. Therefore, this plan is built on adaptive management principles and is designed to allow updates and improvement to better meet the plan's goals and objectives.

1.2. Area Description

The 7,254 acre BWRA is located just south and east of Sonora Pass on the Bridgeport Ranger District of the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest (Figure 1). Sonora Pass is the second highest pass crossed by a highway in the Sierra Nevada Mountains. The BWRA is bordered by the Hoover Wilderness on the south and east and the Emigrant Wilderness on the west. The PCT is also adjacent to the west side of the BWRA.

From atop the ridges in and adjacent to the BWRA, dramatic views of Sierra peaks can be seen in all directions. Scenic integrity is high with minimal evidence of human caused disturbance, particularly in the winter. The BWRA consists of rolling mountain forests, pocket meadows, and steep ridges with expansive bowls falling away from the ridges. The Leavitt Lake Road (Forest Road 077) corridor climbs approximately three (3) miles from its junction with Highway 108 to Leavitt Lake. High ridges bound the area to the east and west, with several peaks above 10,000 feet in elevation. Natural terrain features such as ridgelines and saddles define most of the winter recreation area. However, the PCT is located above Latopie Lake and outside the BWRA, creating a mid-slope boundary that has been difficult to mark and enforce during the winter.

2. Background

The BWRA was designated with passage of the Omnibus Public Lands Management Act of 2009 (Act). Past area uses included mining and prospecting. Summer recreation includes fishing, camping, and hiking. The MWTC conducts winter military training and experiments, and has historically been the area's largest user.

By the early 1980s, many recognized the area for its natural features and wilderness character. In 1984, with passage of the California Wilderness Act of 1984, Congress directed the Toiyabe National Forest to evaluate the portion of the Bridgeport Ranger District west of the existing Hoover Wilderness to determine its suitability for wilderness designation. The Forest determined the entire area, including the area designated as the BWRA, was suitable for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System. The Toiyabe National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan³ (LRMP) provided direction for the area to be managed with a "wilderness prescription." Adjacent areas were already designated as wilderness, including the Hoover Wilderness, designated by

³ USDA Forest Service. 1986. Toiyabe Land and Resource Management Plan Final Environmental Impact Statement.

the original Wilderness Act in 1964⁴ and expanded in 2009; the Emigrant Wilderness designated in 1975; and Yosemite National Park Wilderness designated in 1984.

Management direction for the BWRA is provided by the 1986 Toiyabe National Forest LRMP as amended by the 2005 West Hoover Travel Plan decision.⁵ That decision amended the LRMP to provide for snowmobile use in approximately 7,000 acres southeast of Sonora Pass now known as the Bridgeport Winter Recreation Area. The 2005 decision authorized motorized use over snow in the winter, and retained the wilderness recommendation for the entire area. The decision did not authorize motorized use the areas now known as the PCT Crossing Area.

In addition to designating the BWRA, the Act added 60,310 acres to the Hoover Wilderness and released Area X (commonly known as Pickel Hill) from recommended wilderness. However, the Act did not change the BWRA from recommended wilderness status as described in the Toiyabe National Forest LRMP.

Any recommendations and subsequent decisions contained in this management plan only affect winter use of this area. Winter is defined as the time when adequate snow cover allows for over-snow use of the BWRA and its access routes as specified in this plan.⁶ Management of this area in the summer is in accordance with the Toiyabe National Forest LRMP. Nothing in this management plan changes summer management prescriptions or permits motorized use outside the Leavitt Lake Road corridor outside the winter season.⁷

3. Existing Condition⁸

3.1. Recreation

As a result of the West Hoover Travel Plan decision, motorized use over snow has been permitted since the winter of 2005-2006 in the BWRA. Motorized use is not permitted in the PCT Crossing Area. BWRA management is guided by the 1986 Toiyabe LRMP and is primarily in a semi-primitive recreation opportunity spectrum (ROS) class, with areas of semi-primitive motorized and roaded natural along road corridors.

The majority of winter recreation use is from snowmobilers and skiers/snowboarders using snowmobiles as transportation. Backcountry skiers also use the BWRA and PCT Crossing Area, although skiing typically occurs later in the season after Caltrans opens Highway 108.

⁴ The area was originally a Forest Service primitive area established in 1931.

⁵ The decision added Recreation MIH code A15 to the Toiyabe LRMP "Manage a 7,000 acre area of the West Hoover Recommended Addition to the Hoover Wilderness Area to allow for snowmobile use. Ensure that this use does not compromise the long term wilderness character of the area. This 7,000 acre area is around the Leavitt Lake Road Corridor."

⁶ Winter varies annually based on snow depth and conditions.

⁷ The Bridgeport Ranger District Motor Vehicle Use Map (MVUM) shows areas, roads and trail open to motorized use outside the winter season.

⁸ A full description of the BWRA affected environment is found in the 2005 West Hoover Travel Plan Environmental Assessment, pages 10-34.

Snowmobile use estimates are based on Forest Service personnel observations. On the east side, weekend use is approximately 35 vehicles with trailers or 100 snowmobiles per day. During the week, an average of seven (7) vehicles with trailers or 20 snowmobiles a day can be seen. On the west side, the sno-park is at capacity on most weekends and approximately 50% of snowmobilers travel to the BWRA. Snowmobile use includes skiers and snowboarders who use snowmobiles as transportation. Use is highly dependent upon weather conditions, including snow depth.

Non-motorized recreation use (e.g., backcountry skiers and snowshoers) is significantly less than motorized use. Informal reports indicate a small number of skiers use the area once or twice a week, though no monitoring protocol has been established. More non-motorized recreation use seems to occur during the spring (March-June), particularly after Hwy 108 over Sonora Pass is opened to vehicles.

The 2005 West Hoover Travel Plan Decision opened the BWRA to snowmobile riding when conditions are suitable (generally sometime in December or January) until April 15 each year. The Decision also allowed the Bridgeport District Ranger to determine if an earlier or later closing date is appropriate and would provide proper protection from potential resource damage. Since the 2005-2006 season, the Bridgeport District Ranger has extended the snowmobile riding season into May using the following resource and social criteria:

- Toad emergence.
- Snow depth.
- Resource damage (e.g. tree topping, open-water riding).
- Respect for boundaries.
- Conflicts with non-motorized users.
- District work load.

3.2. Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail

The PCT, a 2,650-mile trail from Mexico to Canada, was designated by the National Trails System Act of 1968 (Public Law 90-543) as a non-motorized/non-mechanized trail that provides recreation opportunities for hikers, equestrians, skiers, and snowshoers. The National Trails System Act prohibits motorized use on national scenic trails (Sec. 7c). The Omnibus Public Land Management Act, in designating the BWRA, directs the Forest Service to establish an appropriate snowmobile crossing of the PCT. Approximately eight miles of the PCT is adjacent to the BWRA western boundary.

3.3. Wilderness

The BWRA is adjacent to the Hoover Wilderness (east and south) and the Emigrant Wilderness (west). Wilderness, by definition, is “an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not

remain.”⁹ Motorized or mechanized use is not permitted in wilderness. Wilderness is also congressionally designated, and actions must be taken to ensure protection of wilderness characteristics in these wilderness areas adjacent to the BWRA.

3.4. Access

Access to the BWRA is provided along the Highway 108 corridor, from both the east and west sides. On the east side, Caltrans manages a series of three gates, which are closed or opened depending on snow cover. No official trailhead exists on the east side of Sonora Pass. However, the bottom gate on Highway 108 is the most heavily used staging point for the BWRA. Once snow makes Highway 108 impassable, Caltrans closes the bottom gate approximately five (5) miles from the junction with Highway 395.

Highway 108 is periodically groomed from the bottom gate (also known as the People’s Gate) on the east side of Sonora Pass to the junction with Leavitt Lake Road. The MWTC grooms the highway inconsistently according to their training needs. On the west side, Highway 108 is groomed from the Dardanelle Sno-park to the junction with Kennedy Meadows (18.5 miles). From there, the road is ungroomed to the top of Sonora Pass (7 miles).

At the east side bottom gate, approximately one (1) mile of parking exists along the shoulder of either side of Highway 108. This equates to space for roughly 176 vehicles with trailers along the highway shoulder; however, parking is rarely at or near capacity. There is very limited parking at the other gates, which also occurs along the highway shoulder. On the west side of Sonora Pass, 58 parking spaces are available at the Dardanelle Sno-Park on Highway 108, located on the Stanislaus National Forest. Snowmobilers coming from the west side typically cross the pass and continue down the highway corridor to access the BWRA from Leavitt Road.

3.5. Natural Resources

Vegetation in the BWRA varies with elevation and aspect, ranging from mixed conifer, , and aspen at the lower- to mid-elevations to whitebark pine in the sub-alpine zone at higher elevations. The topography is very steep, ranging from 30 percent slope to over 70 percent slope near the crest. The area’s steep terrain causes snow to avalanche during and soon after heavy snowfall.

The BWRA contains tributaries of the West Walker River: Leavitt Creek, Sardine Creek, and McKay Creek. Several lakes, including Leavitt, Latopie, Koenig and Ski, lie within the BWRA, as well as several unnamed ponds. Macroinvertebrates inhabit water bodies throughout the area.

Yosemite toad has been identified as a candidate for listing under the Endangered Species Act, but is not listed at this time. However, Critical Aquatic Refuges (CARs) have been established in known Yosemite toad habitat, including the areas around

⁹ The Wilderness Act, 1964.

Leavitt Lake, Latopie Lake, Koenig Lake, and Sardine Meadows. The California Department of Fish and Game has adopted a Biodiversity Management Plan for this area that includes Yosemite toad population surveys every two years for the first 10 years, then once every 10 years thereafter.¹⁰ While CDFG is responsible for management of the toads themselves, the Forest has a responsibility to manage activities within and around the CARs.

The area provides winter habitat for subnivean mammals and numerous bird species. Habitat for great grey owl and pine marten is also found in the BWRA. Great grey owls have not been observed in the area since 1960 and pine martens have not been observed since 1993, but systematic surveys have not been conducted for either species. Other mammals such as mule deer winter at lower elevations. During the winter months forage availability is low and the environment is harsher, causing naturally increased stress levels for non-hibernating wildlife that remains in the area instead of migrating to lower elevations.

The 2005 West Hoover Travel Plan Decision included the following resource protection measures:

- Using Yosemite toad population monitoring and other resource information to monitor ecosystem integrity, including flora, fauna, viewsheds, and soundscapes.
- Using water quality data collected by Lahontan Water Quality Control Board and others in the West Walker River watershed to determine water quality impacts.
- Using air quality data collected by the Great Basin Unified Air Quality Control district to determine air quality impacts.
- Collecting and analyzing snow samples in 2005 and 2006 to determine contaminant levels due to snowmobile use.¹¹

3.6. Mountain Warfare Training Center

The USMC has conducted training on the Bridgeport Ranger District since 1951 because the BWRA provides terrain and conditions similar to those in Afghanistan and Korea. Winter skills courses, unit training, and equipment testing take place near the Leavitt Road corridor¹² and include activities such as ice breaching, snow cave construction, avalanche initiation, and high-angle shooting. Safety measures include posting signs and range guards, marking snow cave locations, and informing users when activities are occurring. Winter recreationists and the Marines note few conflicts with MWTC activities.

Areas of the BWRA are still used for military live fire training (.50 caliber and smaller). In the 50+ years the military has conducted such activities in the area, the Marines have not documented any deaths, major injuries, or significant conflicts between military and civilian users in this area as a result of military training. As recreation use increases in

¹⁰ California Dept. of Fish and Game, 2004.

¹¹ DRI samples

¹² Other winter training occurs throughout the MWTC permit area.

the BWRA, there is a need to provide for ongoing military operations and ensure the long-standing record of safety continues.

The BWRA designation does not affect MWTC activities. The National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2010 (Public Law 111-288) amended the Omnibus Public Land Management Act of 2009 to include provisions for not restricting or precluding military use in the BWRA. See Appendix A for the full text of that amendment.

3.7. Special Uses

In 2010, the Forest authorized six (6) special use permits for commercial activities within the BWRA. The primary commercial uses are filming and outfitting and guiding which includes instructional ski mountaineering, ski touring, and avalanche instruction. However, these permits cover larger areas, and use in the BWRA is incidental. If competitive interest exists for outfitting and guiding in the BWRA, a needs assessment will be conducted to determine the public and Forest Service need for commercial use.

4. Desired Condition

BWRA management meets the legal requirements of the 2009 Omnibus Lands Act, meets the needs of the people who use BWRA, and is sustainable.

This management plan identifies actions to sustainably manage visitor use to achieve the desired condition. Sustainability requires thoughtful choices that recognize the interconnections between environmental, social, and economic conditions. Sustainable recreation management recognizes that only humans can place value on a landscape. Thus, sustainable recreation management strategies holistically consider these values to meet the needs of present and future generations and protect natural resources.

The following goals provide management direction for the Bridgeport Winter Recreation Area:

Goal 1: Provide opportunities for quality semi-primitive motorized¹³ winter recreation.

- Allow natural terrain features to dominate the landscape.
- Provide facilities for user orientation and convenience at trailheads/sno-parks.
- Provide outstanding opportunities for challenge and self-reliance to experienced¹⁴ winter recreationists.

Goal 2: Reduce user conflicts in the BWRA and minimize impacts to the PCT.

- Educate all users about recreation and military uses of the BWRA.
- Educate all users about the areas that are open and closed to motorized use.
- Enforce motorized closures when in effect (e.g., after April 15).

¹³ See Appendix x for a description of Semi-primitive-Motorized ROS class

¹⁴ Experienced is defined as a familiarity with terrain, snow conditions, avalanche safety and self-rescue techniques. Experienced users have traveled in the area multiple times.

- Prevent interference with non-motorized recreation on the PCT.

Goal 3: Protect natural resources in the BWRA.

- Determine adequate snow coverage for winter motorized use.
- Identify sensitive areas and species.
- Establish baseline conditions and monitor the effects of recreation use.
- Establish indicators and identify triggers for management actions

Goal 4: Protect specially designated areas adjacent to the BWRA (PCT, Wilderness).

- Clearly designate BWRA boundaries on all maps and brochures.
- Erect signs marking wilderness boundaries and PCT by opening date of the BWRA.
- Implement a permit system for all winter users.
- Monitor illegal motorized use of wilderness and PCT.

Goal 5: Allow for Marine training activities as specified in the special use permit issued to the MWTC by the Forest Service.

- Educate all users about MWTC activities and the MWTC's contribution to the management of the BWRA.
- Minimize conflicts between MWTC activities and winter recreation.
- Clearly mark known hazards and obstacles from MWTC activities.

Goal 6: Provide a model for sustainable multiple-use winter recreation management.

- Consider social, environmental, and economic benefits and consequences of all management actions.
- Secure funding and other support for management of the BWRA.
- Actively monitor conditions in the BWRA and employ adaptive management as needed.

Goal 7: Manage the BWRA cooperatively by the Forest Service with support of the USMC, PCTA, snowmobilers, and other stakeholders.

- Identify individuals, organizations and businesses that support BWRA.
- Develop a "Friends of the BWRA" group.
- Develop an annual BWRA operation plan.

5. Management Strategies

See Appendix D for the implementation schedule and Appendix E for annual tasks. Note the implementation schedule may be adjusted based on the availability of funding and resources.

5.1. Organizational Structure

The 2005 West Hoover Travel Plan decision did not lead to increased staff, funding, or other resources for managing winter motorized use near Sonora Pass. With the designation of the BWRA, minimum staffing identified to successfully manage the area includes the following new positions:

- Winter recreation program manager – operations, implementation (see Table X), hiring patrollers, supervision, volunteer management.
- Law enforcement – Law Enforcement Officers (LEOs) and Forest Protection Officers (FPOs) for education, enforcement, and coordination with other law enforcement agencies.
- Winter patrollers – Forest Service staff and volunteers to conduct education and daily operations.

In addition to these positions, other areas of assistance and expertise include the following:

- Grant writing.
- Partnership and volunteer coordination.
- Website development.
- On-site education.
- Signing.
- BWRA opening and closing.

5.2. Employee Safety

Steep terrain, difficult access, and changing weather conditions present challenges to safely managing the BWRA. However, employee, partner and volunteer safety is the top priority for managing the BWRA. Managing the BWRA includes the following employee safety expectations:

- Patrollers are Forest Service employees or representatives of the Forest Service under a signed volunteer agreement or MOU.
- Employees who work in and around the BWRA must have avalanche training and carry beacons and probes. Employees must obtain the daily avalanche forecast prior to conducting work.
- The District Ranger must certify employees to ride snowmobiles in the BWRA.
- Signs posted in the BWRA to mark closed areas (PCT and Wilderness) should be installed in the late fall before significant snow fall to provide a safe working environment for installers.

5.2a. Actions

- Develop a Job Hazard Analysis (JHA) for all work in and around the BWRA.
- Identify patrol protocols for known avalanche zones.

5.3. Public Education

BWRA management emphasizes public education to provide knowledge of the areas that are open and closed to winter motorized use. Particular emphasis will be placed on the PCT, wilderness, MWTC activities, and multiple recreation uses. To ensure users are receiving the necessary education, a user registration system will be implemented. Specifically, all publications, kiosks, and websites will contain the following information:

- Significance of the PCT, its location in relation to the BWRA, and why it is managed for non-motorized use.
- Significance of wilderness, the location of wilderness areas in relation to the BWRA, and why they are managed for non-motorized use.
- Significance of the MWTC, the location of training zones, and regularly updated information about on-going training activities.
- Significance of multiple-use management, what visitors can expect when they travel in the BWRA, and how to avoid conflicts with other winter recreationists.

5.3a. User Registration

A permit is required for all winter users. Self-issuing permits will be available at trailhead kiosks and Forest Service offices. The Forest Service will use permits to manage the following:

- Provide information about open and closed areas.
- Provide rules and regulations.
- Monitor visitor use.

5.3b. Reducing Conflict

The BWRA is a winter motorized recreation area and is available for all types of winter recreation. The Act directs the Forest Service to reduce conflict among BWRA users. Information about types of uses found in the BWRA, user etiquette, and mutual respect will be emphasized.

- Conflicts will be documented and monitored to understand how well education efforts are working.
- Military training activity awareness will help reduce conflicts between recreationists and Marines. The Marines will provide information updates about location and timing of training activities on trailhead kiosks and the BWRA website.

5.3c. Maps and Brochures

- Produce a map showing boundaries, open and closed areas, PCT location, and geographic features.
- Develop a brochure with information about safety considerations (e.g., avalanches), military training activities, motorized prohibitions in designated wilderness and on the PC, and GPS coordinates for boundary locations. Use

photographs to show boundaries and recognizable geographic features (e.g., Koenig/Latopie Area and Sonora Pass Area).

- Post maps and brochures at trailheads and staging areas and make them available on Forest Service and partner websites. Distribute maps and brochures to the public, businesses and partner organizations in Bridgeport, Walker, Turquoise Lake, Garden City, Carson City, Reno, Lake Tahoe, and Sonora.

5.3d. Website

- Develop a “one-stop shopping” website where users can obtain up-to-date information. Include links to real-time MWTC information so users know when and where military activities will be occurring in the BWRA. Link the website to regional snowmobile group websites, PCTA website, and county and tourism websites.

5.3e. Community Outreach

- Attend meetings of local and regional snowmobile groups to disseminate information regarding the boundaries and the importance of following them.
- Work with local businesses and organizations to disseminate information about the BWRA. Develop a BWRA outreach list and assign an outreach coordinator for each contact.

5.3f. Trailheads/Sno-parks

East Side

- Provide a permanent information kiosk with self-issuing permits, maps, GPS waypoints, panorama boundary photos, etc. on the north side of the road at the lower gate near Pickel Meadow along Highway 108. Marines will post information about MWTC activities in the BWRA and the rest of their permit area.
- Design and build a portable information board with the above information that can be moved up and down the highway when Caltrans opens and/or closes the upper gates.

West Side

- Provide self-issuing permits, maps, GPS waypoints, panorama boundary photos, etc. to the Stanislaus National Forest to post at the Highway 108 Sno-park.
- Marines will provide information about MWTC activities in the BWRA and the rest of their permit area.

Leavitt Lake

- Install a bulletin board in the Leavitt Lake area with area information and panoramic views of the area showing the boundary.
- Construct the sign board with poles inside metal sleeves to accommodate changing snow conditions and allow for summer removal.

5.3g. Messages

Educate users about low-impact winter travel techniques. Use existing education programs such as Leave No Trace and Tread Lightly! to develop key education messages:

- <http://www.treadlightly.org/page.php/responsible-snowmobiling/Responsible-Snowmobiling.html>
- http://www.Int.org/training/PDFs/Winter_Use_Principles.pdf

5.3h. Actions

- Work with PCT Manager, Forests, and PCTA to develop information about the PCT for publications, kiosks, and websites.
- Work with Forests, Wilderness Society, and others to develop information about wilderness for publications, kiosks, and websites.
- Work with MWTC to develop information about the MWTC for publications, kiosks, and websites.
- Develop and produce BWRA map.
- Develop and produce brochure.
- Develop 'one-stop shopping' website.
 - Identify partner for website hosting and management.
 - Develop website content and links.
- Identify contacts in local communities to help distribute BWRA information.

5.4. Signing

Signing is used to delineate boundaries, identify areas (e.g. MWTC activities), and orient users to the BWRA. Standards for signing in the BWRA include the following:

- Signs are appropriate for the semi-primitive motorized setting. Permanent and temporary signs are designed to complement the natural environment.
- Permanent and temporary signs do not impair visual quality for winter or summer users.
- Boundary location will not vary year to year.
- Signing will be placed in the most effective location to enforce boundaries.
- Employee and volunteer safety is the top priority for sign placement and removal.
- Signs are used in conjunction with technology, photos and maps to educate BWRA users.
- The signing strategy is adjusted based on monitoring information.

5.4a. Permanent and Temporary Signs

- Conduct a field review to determine exact locations for permanent and temporary signs. Locate signs to effectively enforce boundaries and minimize visual impacts. Temporary signs will complement permanent signs.
- The mapped boundary identified in the Act used physical features that are largely definable under snow. However, there are two areas where the boundary does not follow easily identifiable features: Koenig/Latopie Lake area and Sonora

Pass. In those areas, the boundary uses available geographic features, contours, and signing. See Appendix B for the sign plan.

5.4b. MWTC Activities

- MWTC conducts various training exercises throughout the winter season. Marines will annually identify concentrated training activities and areas. Training units may be in other areas of the BWRA. Marines will provide timely information about training activities and dates that training activities occur to BWRA users (see Education Program).
- During actual training, Marines will use temporary signs to mark hazards such as snow caves. Temporary signs will be removed as hazards are mitigated (e.g., snow cave filled in). Marines will post range guards during training activities that involve live fire.

5.4c. Technology

- Provide GPS waypoints for strategic locations along the boundary including downloadable files on websites, at trailheads, and in brochures and other publications so that users can program those coordinates into their GPS units.

5.4d. Actions

- Identify locations for permanent and temporary signs.
 - Conduct winter and summer field review of locations for permanent and temporary signs.
 - Construct or purchase permanent and temporary signs.
 - Install permanent and temporary signs.
- Develop and produce permanent and temporary signs to identify the PCT crossing.
- Place temporary signs by the opening date of the BWRA each year.
- Adjust temporary sign height as snow levels change.
- Monitor permanent and temporary signs for removal, vandalism, or other damage.

5.5. PCT Designated Crossing

The 2005 West Hoover Travel Plan decision did not authorize motorized use in the area now known as the PCT Crossing Area. The Act requires the Forest Service to establish a motorized crossing of the PCT in that area. The inconsistency between the 2005 decision and the Act requires environmental analysis to be conducted before establishing a designated crossing of the PCT.

The PCT crossing is intended to provide a winter motorized crossing of the PCT while protecting the integrity of the trail. The crossing provides a way for snowmobilers to enter and exit the BWRA, specifically the upper reaches of the McKay Creek drainage. Crossing elements include the following:

- Reduce conflict by providing an identifiable motorized crossing point.
- Identifiable and enforceable.

- Year-round protection of area's high scenic quality.

5.5a. Signing

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

5.5b. Closure

- Close the PCT Crossing Route to motorized use when Caltrans reopens Highway 108 to vehicle traffic.

5.5c. Actions

- Conduct environmental analysis (NEPA) to determine and designate a PCT crossing route.
- Develop a sign plan for identifying the selected PCT crossing route.

5.6. Human Health and Safety

Health and safety issues such as human waste, trash and litter, and fuel and oil spillage are a direct result of BWRA recreation use. BWRA management seeks to minimize these issues through the following:

- Minimizing impacts from visitor use to natural resources.
- Preventing foreseeable/predictable sanitation issues.
- Educating visitors about low-impact winter recreation techniques.
- Providing human waste facilities where appropriate.

5.6a. Trailheads/Sno-parks

East Side

Permanent facilities are needed on the east side of Highway 108.

- Form a small team to research long-term parking and sanitation options on the east side in the Pickel Meadows area. This may include a state sno-park, Forest Service managed trailhead, or other options.
- Until permanent facilities are built, provide a temporary toilet in this area between BWRA opening to closing (or whenever Caltrans opens the gate).

West Side

The Highway 108 Sno-park on the west side of Sonora Pass is part of the California sno-park system.

- The California Department of Parks and Recreation clears and maintains the sno-park. Sanitation facilities are available, users are required to obtain a daily or annual sno-park permit, and the funds are used for maintenance.

5.6b. Leavitt Lake

Winter use is concentrated around Leavitt Lake, and sanitation is likely to be an issue in this area.

- Due to visual impacts in the summer, a toilet facility located near Leavitt Lake is not ideal.
- Sanitation issues may be adequately addressed with a toilet at the Leavitt Road and Highway 108 junction.

5.6c. Fuel/Oil Spillage

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) requires all new snowmobiles to meet emission standards by the year 2012. According to the EPA¹⁵, these standards will result in an overall 72-percent reduction in HC emissions from these engines; an 80-percent reduction in NOx emissions; and a 56-percent reduction in CO emissions by the year 2020. These controls will help reduce ambient concentrations of ozone, CO, and fine particulate matter. In addition, they will reduce personal exposure for people who operate, work with, or are otherwise close to these engines and vehicles. The EPA also developed permeation standards that will minimize fuel lost through the walls of plastic fuel tanks and rubber hoses. Based on these standards, snowmobile emissions are expected to decrease over time.

Fuel caches are not permitted in the BWRA.

- Users must carry enough fuel for their expected length of travel.
- Refueling is not permitted where spillage could leak into water.
- Refueling locations may be designated and spill response protocol established if fuel spillage becomes an issue.

5.6d. User Risks

The BWRA is in a natural state. The Forest Service takes no measures to mitigate the hazards to which users might be exposed when entering this area. BWRA users are responsible for learning about and avoiding natural hazards, including avalanches.

5.6e. Actions

- Develop education materials about minimum impact winter recreation.
 - Identify a location for temporary toilet facilities at bottom gate of Highway 108.
 - Research and award a contract.
- Form a small group to identify options for permanent parking and sanitation facilities.
 - Identify potential locations for permanent facilities.
 - Seek funding to develop facilities in the preferred location.

5.7. Enforcement

In combination with education efforts, enforcement of regulations is used to ensure successful BWRA management. The enforcement strategy is based on the following philosophy:

- Education is the primary tool for gaining user compliance.
- Rules and regulations will be included on the self-issuing daily permit.

¹⁵ <http://www.epa.gov/OMS/regs/nonroad/2002/f02037.pdf>

- Enforcement is used to gain compliance with regulations and meet the goals of BWRA management.
- A variety of enforcement techniques are used.
- Concentrate on areas of conflict.

5.7a. Staffing

Develop an annual work schedule using law enforcement, forest protection officers, volunteers, and other forest employees.

- All personnel will fill out daily monitoring reports.
- Develop an annual work schedule for snowmobile patrols of the BWRA and presence at trailheads.
- Coordinate with Stanislaus National Forest for presence on the west side.

Law Enforcement

- Forest Service LEOs will patrol on average two days per week from mid-December to mid-April. Law enforcement officers will enforce state and federal laws. LEOs will coordinate with the Mono County Sheriff's Department for additional patrols.
- Coordinate saturation patrols with other law enforcement agencies (Forest Service, National Park Service, Mono County) on high-use weekends.

Forest Protection Officers

- Forest Service FPOs provide monitoring and enforcement presence in the BWRA. FPOs can enforce Forest Service regulations (warnings and violation notices) and some state regulations (OHV regulations).

5.7b. Equipment and Technology

- Continue to explore opportunities to integrate emerging technologies to enhance enforcement efforts.

5.7c. Actions

- Develop an annual work schedule.
- Coordinate saturation patrols with multiple law enforcement agencies.

5.8. Monitoring

Monitoring is used to determine the effectiveness of BWRA management strategies. Table 1 identifies monitoring indicators and associated protocol. Monitoring information is also used to determine if adjustments to management strategies are necessary in the future.¹⁶ Monitoring efforts will focus on the following:

- Areas that are difficult to sign because of topography and employee safety concerns (e.g., Koenig/Latopie Lakes).
- Potential trespass into wilderness and PCT by motorized users.
- Designated PCT crossing.
- Impacts to natural resources.

¹⁶ See West Hoover Travel Plan Decision Notice/Finding of No Significant Impact in Appendix G.

- Use season.
- User conflicts.

5.8a. Monitoring Forms

- Patrollers will fill out monitoring form after each day in the field, whether in the BWRA or at the trailhead.
- Incorporate Marine observations into monitoring. The Marines will provide an annual report documenting conflicts, observed violations of rules and regulations, and other information.
- Develop and distribute an annual monitoring report.

5.8b. Wilderness and PCT

- Track violation notices and warnings for intrusion into wilderness and/or crossing the PCT using the LEIMARS system.
- Schedule air patrols using aircraft to monitor intrusions in designated wilderness and Yosemite National Park.

5.8c. User Experience

- Provide a feedback mechanism for users to report experiences, conflicts and other information.

5.8d. Natural Resources

Protocols have been established for monitoring recreation effects to Yosemite toads and have been factored into seasonal opening and closing dates (see Table 1).

- Biologists will continue to identify and assess sensitive plant and animal species that occur within the BWRA.
- A baseline for water quality will be established for Leavitt Lake. Periodic monitoring will establish trends in recreation effects to water quality.

5.8e. Season of Use

- The BWRA will open no earlier than the first Saturday in December and when a minimum of 24" of snow is available at the Leavitt Road and Highway 108 junction.
- The BWRA will close no later than the last Sunday in April. The following indicators will determine if an earlier closing is necessary:
 - 12" or less of snow is available at the Leavitt Road and Highway 108 junction
 - 10% or more bare ground at Leavitt Lake.

5.8f. Actions

- Develop and distribute annual monitoring report

5.9. Cooperative Management

To successfully manage the BWRA, the Forest Service needs help from a partnership that may include a formal "friends" group and continued collaboration with snowmobilers, MWTC, PCTA, Wilderness Society, and other organizations and

individuals with an interest in the area. Successful management requires a variety of partners to handle the following:

- Provide information and education in the field and in communities.
- Provide peer-to-peer contacts.
- Monitor conflicts and natural resource conditions.

5.9a. Funding

A collaborative funding approach will include grants, in-kind contributions, appropriated funds, and volunteer support.

- California OHV grants (Green Sticker) will be a primary funding source for winter patrol staff salaries and overhead.
- An annual funding strategy will be developed.

5.9b. Actions

- Research and develop “Friends of BWRA” group.
 - Contact existing Friends group for ideas and recommendations.
 - Develop charter, organization structure, etc.
- Develop an annual funding strategy with partners.

Table 1. Monitoring Indicators.

Monitoring Requirement	Indicator	Protocol
Determine BWRA opening date	Minimum 24" of snow at Leavitt Road and Hwy. 108 junction.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Establish snow stakes on Leavitt Road and adjacent unroaded area. 2. Begin monitoring approx. one week before 1st Saturday in December. Continue until 24" of snow is available and BWRA can be opened.
BWRA closure	No more than 10% bare ground at Leavitt Lake.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Establish GPS reference points for monitoring locations 2. Take photos to use as training/reference tools for people who will conduct monitoring. 3. Begin monitoring in mid-March and continue until 10% bare ground visible or last Sunday in April.
	Minimum 12" of snow at Leavitt Road and Hwy. 108 junction.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Establish snow stakes on Leavitt Road and adjacent unroaded area. 2. Begin monitoring in mid-March or earlier in low snow years. Continue until <12" snow available or last Sunday in April.
Amount of use	Number of self-issuing permits per season.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Users deposit part of self-issuing permit in collection box and keep part of permit on their person. 2. Patrollers collect permits that are kept at Bridgeport Ranger District office. 3. Number of permits tracked by month and annually.
User conflicts	Number of reported conflicts.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Users asked to submit comments via collection box at trailheads or website. 2. Comments tallied as received by month and season and compared to overall use.
Motorized trespass in wilderness and PCT	Number of law enforcement incident reports.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. LEOs document observed violations (including tracks). 2. Violations tallied by month and season and compared to overall use.
Recreation effects to natural resources	Baseline water quality.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Collect Year 1 water samples at Leavitt Lake in spring and fall. 2. Evaluate water quality every 5 years.

Appendix A: MWTC Use in the BWRA

The National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2010 (Public Law 111-288) amends the Omnibus Public Land Management Act of 2009 to provide direction for continued operation of the Mountain Warfare Training Center. The following paragraph is found on page 508:

SEC. 2874. MILITARY ACTIVITIES AT UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS MOUNTAIN WARFARE TRAINING CENTER.

Section 1806 of the Omnibus Public Land Management Act of 2009 (Public Law 111-11; 123 Stat. 1059; 16 U.S.C. 460vvv) is amended by adding at the end the following new subsection: “(g) MILITARY ACTIVITIES AT UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS MOUNTAIN WARFARE TRAINING CENTER.—The designation of the Bridgeport Winter Recreation Area by this section is not intended to restrict or preclude the activities conducted by the United States Armed Forces at the United States Marine Corps Mountain Warfare Training Center.”.

Appendix B: Signing Plan

Signing priority:

1. PCT crossing
2. PCT crossing area
3. BWRA boundary near Latopie/Koenig
4. Wilderness boundaries

The following locations refer to areas on the attached map (Figure 1):

Northeast Side

In this area, the boundary is not important to mark since the area north and east is open to snowmobiles.

Southeast Side

The boundary is the ridge between Leavitt and Kennedy Canyon that forms the Hoover Wilderness boundary. This ridge is an easily definable feature. Additional signs will be needed in three (3) spots along this ridge, as they are the only main bowls that snowmobilers use to go south from Leavitt into Kennedy. Along the rest of the area, permanent numbered sign posts will be installed (these are lower priority than along the western boundary of the area). GPS waypoints will also be established along the ridge.

Leavitt Bowl Area

The boundary follows the Mono/Tuolumne county line (also the Forest boundary) around Leavitt Lake. Because this is a very definable feature, little signing will be done on this part except on the south end of the lake where the old mining road reaches the ridge. From the west side of Leavitt Lake, the boundary follows the ridge to the peak just southwest of Koenig Lake.

Koenig/Latopie Lake Area

From the peak southwest of Koenig, the boundary drops down into an open bowl to avoid the PCT. The boundary along here will be signed heavily and is a UTM coordinate roughly on contour with the backside of Latopie Lake. From the middle of that shallow draw, the boundary contours around to the backside of Latopie Lake. From the back of Latopie, the line follows contour in the draw up to the 11,000 foot peak just northeast of Latopie. Including photo maps clearly showing this area and the boundaries in brochures and on kiosks may be the best way to communicate these boundaries to visitors. A winter and/or summer field review will identify the most effective location for signing to protect the PCT.

McKay Creek Area

From either location in the previous section, the boundary follows the lateral ridge into the head of McKay Creek. A ridge bisects the southwest bowl at the head of McKay. The PCT is to the west of this ridge, and the snowmobile boundary is on the lateral ridge over to the main McKay Creek drainage. From there it shoots straight for the

highest ridge along the Forest boundary. A winter and/or summer field review will identify the most effective location for signing to protect the PCT.

Sonora Pass Area

The boundary is below the ridge between Sardine Creek and the west fork of McKay Creek on the west side. The boundary is below the ridge because the PCT is on the south side of the ridge, and snowmobiles cannot be allowed along the same ridge without being right adjacent to or on top of the PCT. The boundary cuts up into the saddle approximately one (1) mile down the ridge and swings north above the rocks at the falls on Sardine Creek. This route puts the snowmobile boundary within less than 50 feet from the PCT where both routes hit the shallow saddle in the ridge and above the rocks at the falls. This area will be signed every year. North of that ridge/saddle, the boundary follows the jumble of rocks at the top of the falls and then goes along the contour to the Mono County line. The area north of the rocks will also be signed.

PCT Crossing Area

A signing strategy for the PCT Crossing Area will be developed when the crossing route is designated.

Appendix C: Desired Condition ROS Standards

Nationally the Forest Service uses a system called the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) to inventory and classify National Forest System lands. ROS classifies the range of recreational experiences, opportunities, and settings available on a given area of land. Classifications include: Primitive, Semi-primitive Motorized, Semi-primitive Nonmotorized, Roded Natural, Rural, and Urban. The ROS is a framework for inventorying, planning, and managing the recreational experience and setting.

Semi-Primitive Motorized (SPM)

Area is characterized by a predominantly natural or natural-appearing environment of moderate-to-large size. Concentration of users is low, but there is often evidence of other users. The area is managed in such a way that minimum on-site controls and restriction may be present, but are subtle. Motorized use is permitted.

Roded Natural (RN)

Area is characterized by predominantly natural-appearing environments with moderate evidences of sight and sounds of man. Such evidences usually harmonize with the natural environment. Interaction between users may be low to moderate, but with evidence of other users prevalent. Resource modification and utilization practices are evident, but harmonize with the natural environment. Conventional motorized use is provided for in construction standards and design of facilities.

Table 2. ROS Standards.

Setting Indicators	Semi-primitive Motorized	Roaded Natural
<p>Physical a. Remoteness b. Size c. Evidence of humans d. Trails/Facilities e. Parking</p>	<p>a. > ½ mile from primary access roads. b. Typically >2,500 acres. May be <2,500 acres in corridors and transition zones. c. Evidence of humans minimal and does not detract from natural setting. d. Motorized routes may be marked but not groomed. Facilities are not provided for user comfort. e. None.</p>	<p>a. Adjacent to access roads. b. Typically 640 acres, but exceptions may occur. c. Landscape partially modified by man-made improvements, but none overpower natural features. d. Marked and groomed trails. Modest rustic facilities such as warming huts and restrooms. e. Small-moderate sno-parks (up to 100 PAOTs). Designed parking capacity accommodates visitor demand on 100% of non-peak and 95% of peak days.</p>
<p>Managerial a. Motorized Use b. Visitor Services c. Outfitter-guides d. Enforcement e. Safety</p>	<p>a. Yes. b. Maps and information available at trailheads; on-site personnel provide visitor information. c. Guided opportunities to provide access and enhance resource and social values. d. Signs at boundaries and access points. Enforcement presence common at boundaries. e. High degree of self-reliance.</p>	<p>a. Yes. b. Variety of information materials describe recreational opportunities; on-site personnel provide visitor information. c. Guided opportunities to provide access and enhance resource and social values. d. Rules clearly posted at facilities and access points. Enforcement presence common. e. Moderate feeling of safety.</p>
<p>Social a. Opportunities b. Encounters c. Satisfaction</p>	<p>a. Opportunities for challenge and self-reliance prevail. b. Infrequent encounters. Groups are typically 6 or less. c. No more than 10% of visitors dissatisfied with their experience due to crowding or other visitors' behavior.</p>	<p>a. Through-travel and access to backcountry areas. b. Regular encounters on travel routes. c. Percent of visitors satisfied with winter recreation opportunities is the same as or better than FY 2009.</p>

Appendix D: Implementation Schedule

The following is an implementation schedule to successfully manage the BWRA. However, this schedule is highly dependent on developing dedicated partners, volunteers and funding other than appropriated funds. The annual work schedule meeting will outline and assign realistic commitments based on that year's funding and resources. The Forest Service cannot accomplish these tasks alone.

Table 3. Implementation Schedule¹⁷

Action	Tasks	Lead	Start By
Conduct PCT crossing environmental analysis.	Identify alternatives and analyze effects using NEPA process.	Forest Supervisor	Summer 2010
Identify locations for permanent and temporary signs. Signing priority: 1. PCT crossing 2. PCT crossing area 3. BWRA boundary near Latopie/Koenig 4. Wilderness boundaries	Winter field review of potential locations for signs. Collect GPS coordinates.	District recreation staff	End of 2010 season by priority
	Summer field review of actual sign locations.	District recreation staff	Summer/Fall 2010 by priority
	Purchase removable permanent signs.	District recreation staff	Purchase by priority over fiscal years
	Install removable permanent signs at PCT crossing route.	District recreation staff	1 st operational winter of designated PCT crossing
	Install removable permanent signs at boundaries by priority.	District recreation staff	Fall 2010
Develop public education program.	Produce GIS/Google Earth map of BWRA.	District recreation staff/Line Officer	Fall 2010
	Produce BWRA brochure.	District recreation staff, Mono County economic development committee	2011
	Develop BWRA website.	District recreation staff, Mono County economic development committee	Basic information by fall 2010; Comprehensive website in 2012
	Identify partners/ community contacts and roles.	District Ranger, Mono County, snowmobile groups, MWTC, PCTA, Wilderness Society,	2010
Develop and implement user-registration system.	Build and install kiosk at People's Gate (use existing kiosk on west side).	District recreation staff, MWTC	Beginning of 2010/2011 season
	Develop Supervisor's Order requiring permit.	District Ranger, District recreation staff, Patrol captain	Summer 2010
	Design and print permit.	District recreation staff, Patrol captain	Summer 2010

¹⁷ Dependent on available funding

2010 Bridgeport Winter Recreation Area Management Plan

Action	Tasks	Lead	Start By
	Distribute permits.	District recreation staff	Beginning of 2010/2011 season
	Produce annual summary.	District recreation staff, law enforcement	June 2011
Identify permanent trailhead location on east side.	Install temporary toilet facilities.	District recreation staff, MWTC	2011
	Create a working group to identify potential trailhead locations.	District recreation staff, Forest engineering group	2012
Develop "Friends of BWRA" group.	Contact existing Friends groups.	District Ranger, Mono County	2010
	Develop charter, organization structure, etc.	District Ranger, Mono County	2011

Appendix E: Annual Tasks

The following are annual implementation tasks to successfully manage the BWRA. However, these tasks are highly dependent on developing dedicated partners, volunteers and funding other than appropriated funds. The annual work schedule meeting will outline and assign realistic commitments based on that year's funding and resources. The Forest Service cannot accomplish these tasks alone.

Table 4. Annual Implementation Tasks¹⁸

Task	Lead	Due by
Develop annual work schedule and tasks.	District recreation staff, District Ranger, partners	November 1
Determine opening date (monitor snow stakes, > 24" of snow).	District recreation staff, District Ranger	1 st Saturday of December
Install temporary signs in metal sleeves.	District recreation staff, MWTC, PCTA, Wilderness Society, snowmobilers	Before significant snowfall, usually September 30
Install temporary signs at boundary locations without permanent signs.	District recreation staff, MWTC, PCTA, Wilderness Society, snowmobilers	BWRA opening date
Install signs at PCT crossing.	District recreation staff, MWTC, PCTA, Wilderness Society, snowmobilers	BWRA opening date
Adjust temporary signs based on snow levels.	District recreation staff	Weekly or as needed
Monitor permanent and temporary signs for removal, vandalism, or other damage.	District recreation staff, patrollers, LEO, volunteers	Weekly or as needed
Update kiosks, websites, etc. with current information.	District recreation staff, MWTC	As needed
Complete monitoring reports.	Patrollers, LEO, volunteers	Daily
Monitor snow cover at Leavitt Lake.	District recreation staff	Mid-March through end of April
Monitor snow stakes for snow depth (min. 12 ").	District recreation staff	Mid-March through end of April (unless conditions warrant earlier monitoring)
Compile and distribute annual monitoring report.	District recreation staff	June 1 each year
Take down temporary and removable permanent signs.	District recreation staff, PCTA, Wilderness Society, snowmobilers	June

¹⁸ Dependent on available funding

Appendix F: List of Preparers

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Appendix G: West Hoover Decision Notice



Decision Notice / Finding of No Significant Impact

West Hoover Travel Plan

USDA Forest Service
Bridgeport Ranger District, Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest
Mono County, California

United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

July 2005



For Information Contact:
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DECISION AND REASONS FOR THE DECISION

Background

The project area includes about 7,000 acres near Sonora Pass in Mono County, California. It is part of the 47,000 acre recommended western addition to the Hoover Wilderness Area (West Hoover Addition). It has been closed to snowmobiles since 1981. It is bounded on the west and south by the Pacific Crest trail and the Emigrant Wilderness Area, on the east by the rest of the West Hoover Addition and on the north by the Sonora Pass Highway, a steep narrow seasonal mountain pass usually closed from November to May. The area is nearly bisected by the Leavitt Lake Road Corridor, a motorized use area from the Sonora Pass Highway to Leavitt Lake.

Current winter use includes US Marine Corps mountain warfare training, a minor amount of backcountry skiing and snowshoeing, and some trespass snowmobiling. The Bridgeport Ranger District has been enhancing its patrols and enforcement since the winter of 2003/2004 in an effort to end the trespassing.

In 1984, Congress passed the California Wilderness Act, which included direction to the Forest Service to study the area and recommend whether or not it should be designated as Wilderness. In 1986, the Forest Service Toiyabe Land and Resource Management Plan recommended that it be designated as Wilderness and provided for management under a wilderness prescription. This prescription prohibits snowmobile use, however, signing of boundaries and enforcement has been limited by funding. Trespassing has increased in recent years due to

improvements in snowmobile technology. New faster and more powerful machines have made the area more readily accessible to snowmobiles. These changes have prompted the Forest Service to revisit its management of the area.

Decision

Based upon my review of the alternatives, I have decided to implement the Proposed Action as described in the EA.

The decision updates the Bridgeport Ranger District Travel Plan and amends the Toiyabe Land and Resource Management Plan to provide for over-snow motorized vehicle use in a 7,000-acre area around the Leavitt Lake Road Corridor (See Map). The closing date will be April 15 of each year unless the Bridgeport District Ranger determines on an annual basis that an earlier or later closing date is appropriate and would provide proper protection from potential resource damage. The closures will be determined on an annual basis as on-the-ground conditions warrant. Implementation of this project is scheduled for the winter of 2005-2006.

Plan Amendment

This decision would amend the Toiyabe Land and Resource Management Plan. The Plan currently provides for management of the area under the wilderness management prescription. This decision amends the Plan to provide for snowmobile use in the area around the Leavitt Lake Road Corridor. The amendment would apply to only this 7,000-acre area.

The Toiyabe Land and Resource Management Plan would be amended as follows:

- Add to footnote 1 on page IV-96: "Except as identified in Recreation MIH code A15."



- Add Recreation MIH code A15:
“Manage a 7,000 acre area of the West Hoover Recommended Addition to the Hoover Wilderness Area to allow for snowmobile use. Ensure that this use does not compromise the long term wilderness character of the area. This 7,000 acre area is around the Leavitt Lake Road Corridor (Map).”

Resource Protection Measures

Measures to protect nearby closed areas and other uses would include:

- Enlisting volunteers from both motorized and nonmotorized recreation communities to help with monitoring, enforcement, and public education efforts.
- Cooperating with the Inyo and Stanislaus National Forests, Yosemite National Park, and Mono County to monitor snowmobile use and protect closed areas. This will include continued cooperation on overflights to monitor and protect closed areas.
- Enhancing Forest Service public education efforts through personal contacts, patrols, web site information, and press releases.
- Enhancing signage of boundaries and entrance points, including maps of boundaries, opening and closing dates, potential avalanche danger, U.S. Marine Corps training activities, and descriptions of regulations.
- Continuing Forest Service patrols of the area, including citations for those violating boundaries.

- Requesting that the State of California require more visible snowmobile ID tags.
- Conducting a field review to determine final placement of boundaries below the Pacific Crest Trail (See Map). Request Pacific Crest Trail Association and other public participation in this field review. The Pacific Crest Trail boundaries depicted in this document are conceptual. Actual boundaries could vary when they are laid out on the ground.
- Using enforcement related monitoring to determine incursions into closed areas, including the 40,000 acres of the West Hoover Addition that would remain closed to snowmobile use, Yosemite National Park, the Hoover and Emigrant Wilderness Areas, and the Pacific Crest Trail. Any adjustments in snowmobile use needed to address these incursions would be consistent with this decision.
- Using Marine Corps information on the effects of changes in snowmobile use on their training activities. Any adjustments in snowmobile use needed to address these conflicts would be consistent with this decision.

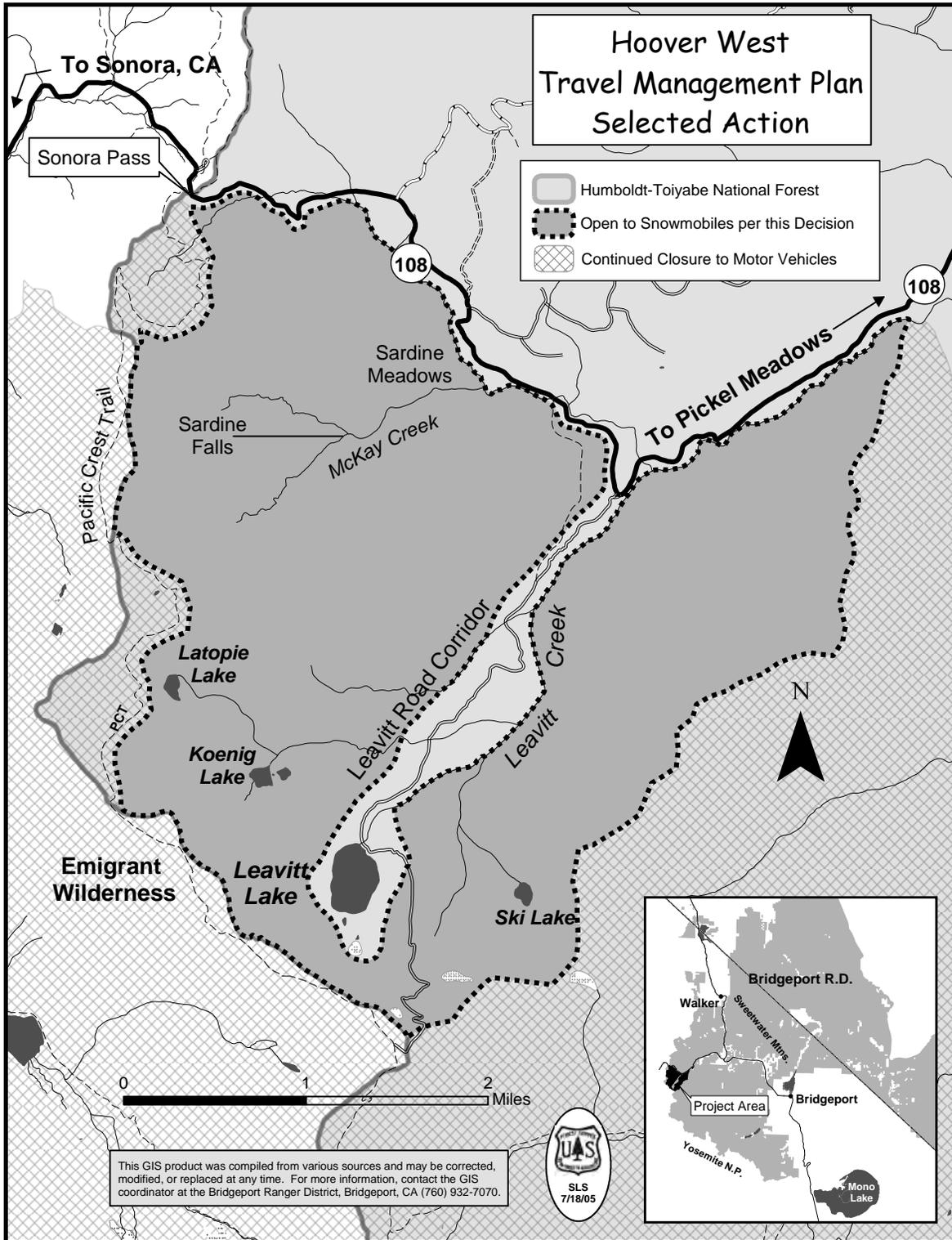
Measures to protect ecosystem integrity would include:

- Using Yosemite toad population monitoring and other resource information from the California Department of Fish and Game Biodiversity Management Plan, the Sierra Nevada Forest Plan Amendment Yosemite Toad Conservation Strategy (In development), other Sierra Nevada Forest Plan monitoring efforts, and



on the ground observations of Forest Service personnel to monitor ecosystem integrity, including watersheds, flora, fauna, viewsheds, and soundscapes. Any adjustments in snowmobile use needed to address ecosystem integrity would be consistent with this decision.

- Using water quality data collected by the Lahontan Water Quality Control Board and others in the West Walker River watershed to determine water quality impacts over time. Any adjustments in snowmobile use needed to address water quality would be consistent with this decision.
- Installing rest rooms or garbage receptacles at the Pickel Meadows Gate trailhead if conditions warrant
- The Forest Service, in cooperation with the Desert Research Institute, will collect and analyze snow samples in 2005 and 2006 to determine before and after decision contaminant levels in the area. Any adjustments in snowmobile use needed to address snowmobile related contaminants would be consistent with this decision.
- The Forest Service is required to comply with the Clean Air Act. Should the Great Basin Unified Air Quality Control District determine unacceptable levels of air quality, any adjustments in snowmobile use needed to address air quality would be consistent with this decision.





Decision Rationale

In selecting the action alternative I seriously considered a number of issues and factors.

First, I considered whether I had the authority to make this change to the Forest Plan and our management of the West Hoover Addition. As noted above, in 1984 Congress enacted the California Wilderness Act that directed the Forest Service to manage this area as wilderness for the four years following enactment of the statute. Once that four-year period expired, management of the area became discretionary to the Forest Service consistent with Forest Plan direction.

The Forest Service planning regulations clearly outline the process, authority, and purpose for amending a Forest Plan. As outlined in our planning regulations our Forest Plans are intended to be responsive to changing biophysical conditions, to the increased understanding of scientific principles, and to the evolving interests and values of society. As I will discuss in greater detail below I have seriously weighed these factors in deciding to amend the Forest Plan.

Second, I considered how well the selected alternative met the purpose and need for the proposed action. I fully understand that many will find this consideration to be specious and will likely dismiss this rationale as circular. The purpose of this proposal is based on the stated need to expand snowmobile opportunities and only the action alternative does this. However, the consistency of the selected alternative with the purpose and need is an important procedural issue which must be satisfied.

More important is whether the purpose and need is consistent with our legislative mandates for managing the National Forest System. As I discuss further below, I have attempted to balance conflicting recreational

demands consistent with our multiple-use mandates.

Third, in arriving at this decision, I have closely examined the analysis of effects in the Environmental Assessment. I considered impacts of the proposed action and weighed them against the direction I am given to protect National Forest System resources and values from impairment and to ensure their enjoyment by future generations. This direction gives Forest Service managers the discretion to allow some impacts to forest resources and values when appropriate and necessary to fulfill the purposes of the National Forest System. The principles guiding our management as contained in legislation such as the National Forest Management Act and the Multiple-Use, Sustained-Yield Act provide for the enjoyment of forest resources and values by the people of the United States. Forest Service policies acknowledge that providing opportunities for public enjoyment is a fundamental part of the Forest Service mission.

The Environmental Assessment demonstrates that snowmobile use as proposed is not free of environmental impacts, but that those impacts do not rise to the level of significance that is defined by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations as requiring an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).

The proposed Forest Service travel management regulations generally support this conclusion by providing an exemption for snowmobile use because:

“... a snowmobile traveling over snow results in different and less severe impacts to natural resource values than wheeled motor vehicles traveling over the ground. Consequently, in contrast to wheeled motor vehicles, it may be appropriate for snowmobiles to travel off route. Nevertheless, since there are impacts associated with snowmobile use, and since snowmobiles are



included in the definition of off-road vehicle in E.O. 11644 and E.O. 11989, the agency is preserving the authority currently in part 295 to allow, restrict, or prohibit snowmobile use on a discretionary basis in §212.80 of the proposed rule, as discussed in the description of that section.”¹

This position is supported by the site-specific analysis provided in the Environmental Assessment. Specific environmental effects and conclusions provided in the Environmental Assessment include:

- **Wildlife:** Due to the April 15 closure, the minimal nature of over-snow vehicle impacts, and the measures to adjust snowmobile use as needed, use would not have major impacts on wildlife habitat.
- **Watershed and Air Quality:** Scientific analysis from Yellowstone National Park indicates minimal impacts should occur in the Sonora Pass area, particularly given the small number and dispersed nature of snowmobiles here compared to Yellowstone. In addition measures would be in place to adjust snowmobile use if needed.
- **Special Uses:** Potential impacts to Marine Corps training would be addressed through education, sentry posting, and adjustments in snowmobile use if conditions warrant.

I have also carefully considered issues and measures to minimize resource damage. Issues addressed in the Environmental Assessment were:

- **Recreation:** The proposed action addresses recreation impacts by providing expanded opportunities for snowmobiling; providing for non-motorized recreation opportunities after April 15 each year, based on annual conditions; and by providing the opportunity for input from the Pacific Crest Trail Association and other interested parties as we define trail setbacks.
- **Wilderness/Roadless:** The proposed action protects wilderness and roadless characteristics in the project area to the extent that it would continue to be recommended to Congress for designation as Wilderness and would continue to be managed as a roadless area. Nearby closed areas such as the Yosemite National Park and the Emigrant Wilderness would be protected from snowmobile trespass through on-going enforcement activities that would occur under either alternative. The proposed action includes additional information and education efforts as well as a provision that would adjust snowmobile use as identified through future monitoring of trespass use.

These measures rely on on-the-ground patrols by Forest Service personnel, flights over adjacent closed areas, as well as input from other agencies regarding water and air quality and trends in Yosemite toad populations. They also rely heavily on the judgment and discretion of the Bridgeport District Ranger rather than precise quantified triggers.

For example, the decision provides for an annual closure date of April 15 and gives the District Ranger the authority to modify that date based on on-the-ground conditions. Some commenters proposed that minimum snow depths be used as a trigger point.

¹ USDA, Forest Service. Travel Management; Designated Routes and Areas for Motor Vehicle Use: Proposed rule; request for comment. Federal Register: July 15, 2004 Volume 69, Number 135, Pages 42381-42395.



However, there is no scientific basis for choosing six versus twelve versus eighteen inches as the required trigger.

Implementation problems would also be problematic. If a square foot of this area on a rocky outcrop has one less inch than the trigger point, would that justify closing the entire area? For these reasons, I have decided that the use of quantified triggers for this project would be arbitrary and unmanageable and that it is best to rely on the discretion and knowledge of the District Ranger to make decisions needed to protect resources.

Fourth, in making this decision I carefully considered the public's input as provided in a variety of venues and formats. In general the public input has convinced me that the issues of greatest importance in the conflict over this decision are ultimately issues of human values as reflected in differing perspectives on the appropriate uses of this land.

The potential environmental impacts of snowmobiles on this land are arguably quite transitory. For many who oppose this proposal the potential political impacts of opening this area to snowmobiles are of greatest concern. They point out that we will be reinforcing a non-wilderness constituency that will be further motivated to oppose wilderness designation of the West Hoover Addition. They also argue that this decision rewards bad behavior. In their view snowmobilers who have violated a sanctioned closure are now being rewarded by the Forest Service by our removing the sanctions. Where will it end, they argue, when snowmobiles cross the next ridge in search of new territory?

Snowmobile proponents, not surprisingly, argue a different set of circumstances. They point out that Congress, in a sense, gave itself four years to make a decision on wilderness designation of the West Hoover Addition. Since it did not designate this

area as wilderness in this time frame (or in the subsequent nearly two decades), proponents argue that Congress has made a decision on the importance of this area as wilderness and that the Forest Service should countenance a wider variety of uses of the area, particularly uses with minimum environmental impact.

There is obviously no way to bridge or resolve these differing perspectives. Final resolution of the "wilderness question" is beyond my authority. Congress has reserved for itself the power to designate Wilderness as part of its broader Constitutionally-derived authority to "make all needful rules and regulations respecting the territory...belonging to the United States... Ultimately Congress must resolve these conflicts in values and uses.

In the interim I believe my decision preserves a wide variety of options for the resolution of these issues in the political arena. I clearly recognize that this proposal is changing past land use planning direction. This direction is being deliberately updated based on changing patterns of recreation use in the area and the direction for the Forest Service to provide for a variety of recreation opportunities. I also recognize that this is not a 180-degree reversal of the preexisting land use plan. It upholds the ban on snowmobile use on 85 percent of the West Hoover Addition, opening only 15 percent or 7,000 acres.

I intend to work cooperatively with all user groups to make this decision work. I will also enforce the boundaries of the use areas to protect the legitimate uses of all areas and to avoid any appearance that land use decisions can be made by trespass.

Finally I recognize that like all decisions that weigh the values of conflicting positions, this decision will not satisfy all participants. If it were easy, Congress would have resolved the issue long ago. Pending that resolution, I will work with all



interested parties to implement this decision in a fair and accountable manner.

Other Alternatives Considered

In addition to the selected alternative, I considered the no action alternative. An analysis of these alternatives can be found in the EA.

No Action Alternative

Under the No Action alternative, current management plans would continue to guide management of the project area. The area would continue to be closed to snowmobile use.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

The proposal was listed in the Schedule of Proposed Actions in January, April, and July, 2005. The proposal was provided to the public and other agencies during scoping in December 2004.

Following refinement of the proposed action and purpose and need, a Notice of Proposed Action was released for public review on March 17, 2005. Legal notice was published in the Mammoth Times on that day and press releases were sent to the Reno Gazette Journal, South Lake Tahoe Tribune, and Sonora Union Democrat. The Forest Service published the Notice on the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest website. Thousands of email and standard mail notices were sent to interested parties.

A summary of the public comments can be found in the public involvement section of the Environmental Assessment. The summary includes a description of modifications to the proposed action that were made in response to public comments.

Consultations with other agencies included Mono County, the U.S. Marine Corps, Yosemite National Park, Great Basin

Unified Air Quality Control District, and California Department of Transportation.

Using the comments from the public, and other agencies, the interdisciplinary team identified several issues regarding the effects of the proposed action. Main issues of concern included recreation, wilderness/roadless characteristics, wildlife, special uses, watershed, air quality, economics, and visual resources.



FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

After considering the environmental effects described in the EA, I have determined that these actions will not have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment considering the context and intensity of impacts (40 CFR 1508.27). Thus, an environmental impact statement will not be prepared. I base my finding on the following:

1. My finding of no significant environmental effects is not biased by the beneficial effects of the action.
2. There will be no significant effects on public health and safety, because appropriate information regarding avalanche danger will be made available to the public, potential safety problems between public users and US Marine Corps training will continue to be monitored and managed by the Marine Corps, and the potential for any human health risks from air or water quality impairment is minimal (see EA Watershed and Air Quality analyses).
3. There will be no significant effects on unique characteristics of the area, because the wilderness character of the land would not be impaired. Congress would continue to have the opportunity to designate the area as Wilderness. The Forest Service continues to recommend that the area be designated as Wilderness. While the Environmental Assessment acknowledges that snowmobile use can result in some minor level of damage to individual trees, overall impacts are minor and would not

impair Congress' ability to designate the area as wilderness. (See EA Wilderness/Roadless analysis).

Another unique characteristic of the area is its proximity to Yosemite National Park. As noted in the EA, snowmobiles have been trespassing into the park and could continue to do so under either the proposed or no action alternatives. Under either alternative, enforcement activities would be enhanced to minimize or eliminate these impacts.

A third unique characteristic is the presence of ecologically unique areas, in this case critical aquatic refuges that provide habitat for Yosemite toads. As documented in the wildlife section of the EA, impacts to these refuges are expected to be minimal, particularly given the closure to snowmobiling on April 15 each year, subject to annual conditions.

4. The effects on the quality of the human environment are not likely to be highly controversial. Scientific controversy over the effects of snowmobile use has been largely put to rest through the extensive scientific analysis conducted by the National Park Service at Yellowstone National Park. That scientific analysis was used extensively in the preparation of the Environmental Assessment for this project. The Environmental Assessment acknowledges that there is public controversy over the project between advocates for and against snowmobiles in this area. Opposition to the proposed action exists, but the nature of the action's effects on the environment has not been credibly disputed. Consequently, this opposition does



not rise to the level where it meets the CEQ definition of controversy for the purposes of complying with NEPA (see EA Public Involvement section).

5. Federal agencies have considerable experience with the management of snowmobile use. Such use is found on National Forest System lands throughout the nation. Detailed scientific evidence from Yellowstone National Park and site-specific on-the-ground information from Sonora Pass were used to help analyze the potential impacts of the proposed action. While uncertainty exists over the amount of snowmobiling that could occur in the future, the effects of snowmobiles on the environment are well known and are not uncertain and do not involve unique or unknown risks (see EA Environmental Consequences sections). Uncertainty over the amount of future snowmobiling is addressed through resource protection measures that provide for adjustments in snowmobile management based on monitoring the effects of snowmobiling (EA Resource Protection Measures).
6. The action is not likely to establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects, because the Forest Service manages snowmobile use in other areas that have been recommended for designation as wilderness, including areas on the Boise, Sawtooth, Payette, Caribou-Targhee, and Wasatch-Cache National Forests.²

The planning regulations provide Forest Service managers the discretion to amend the Forest Plan

² USDA Forest Service, 2003. Final Environmental Impact Statement: Wasatch-Cache National Forest Revized Land And Resource Management Plan. Pg. 3-303.

as needed to address new or changing circumstances. The Forest Service routinely amends Forest Plans throughout the nation. Such amendments are not precedent setting.

Adoption of the proposed action does not represent a decision in principle about any future actions. The proposed action is specific to the 7,000 acres around the Leavitt Lake road corridor. The Forest Service has recommended this area to Congress for designation as Wilderness and nothing in this decision changes that recommendation.

Some commenters felt that this proposal set a precedent for adverse impacts to the Pacific Crest Trail. However, in response to public concerns the proposed action was modified to exclude snowmobile use along the Trail. The proposed action also includes a provision to seek input to define the trail setback through an on-the-ground workshop with the Pacific Crest Trail Association and any other interested parties.

7. The cumulative impacts are not significant. While some commenters expressed concern about cumulative winter and summer impacts to Yosemite toad habitat, the area will fall under the management of the Yosemite toad Conservation Strategy as directed by the Sierra Nevada Forest Plan Amendment. On-going monitoring of Yosemite toad habitat will continue and be used to adjust the proposed action as needed (see EA Wildlife section).
8. The action will have no significant adverse effect on districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects



listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, because snowmobile use does not affect these resources³. The action will also not cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources, because there is limited potential to affect toad habitat as noted above. This habitat is the only known scientific resource in the area. As noted above, snowmobile use would not affect cultural or historical resources in this area.

- 9. The action will not adversely affect any endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species act of 1973, because none exists in the area⁴.
- 10. The action will not violate Federal, State, and local laws or requirements for the protection of the environment. Applicable laws and regulations were considered in the EA (see EA Resource Protection Measures). The action would amend the Toiyabe Land and Resource Management Plan and therefore be consistent with the Plan as amended.

Findings Required by Other Laws and Regulations

The National Historic Preservation Act requires consultation with American Indian Tribes and the State Historic Preservation Officer. This was completed as required. Other than a general need for inventories in the area, no specific issues of concern to the

³ USDI Park Service, 2000. Final Environmental Impact Statement: Winter Use Plans Yellowstone and Grand Teton National Parks and John D Rockerfeller, Jr., Memorial Parkway. Pg. 291.

⁴ USDA Forest Service, 2005. Biological Evaluation/Assessment: West Hoover Travel Management Plan.

tribe were identified with this project.⁵ The State Historic Preservation Officer did not communicate any concerns.

The decision to implement the proposed action includes an amendment to the Toiyabe Land and Resource Management Plan. Pursuant to the 1982 planning regulations, I have determined that the amendment is not significant. This is based on my conclusion that the adjustments in management prescriptions have resulted from further on-site analysis and those adjustments do not cause significant changes in the multiple-use goals and objectives for long-term land and resource management planning. The long-term goal to designate and protect wilderness values as identified on Page IV-5 of the Toiyabe Land and Resource Management Plan would not be affected by the amendment because the long-term recommendation to Congress for wilderness designation would not be changed. This project clearly does not result in changes that would have an important effect on the entire forest plan or affect land and resources throughout a large portion of the planning area. It comprises less than one-half of one percent of the forest plan area.

Implementation Date

If no appeals are filed within the 45-day time period, implementation of the decision may occur on, but not before, five business days from the close of the appeal filing period. When appeals are filed, implementation may occur on, but not before, the 15th business day following the date of the last appeal disposition.

Administrative Review or Appeal

⁵ USDA Forest Service, 2005. Letter from Robin Redman, Bridgeport District Ranger to David Loomis, West Hoover Project Manager.



Opportunities

This decision is subject to administrative review (appeal) pursuant to 36 CFR Part 215.

The appeal must be filed (regular mail, fax, email, hand-delivery, or express delivery) with the Appeal Deciding Officer at Appeal Deciding Officer, USDA Forest Service, Intermountain Region, 324 25th Street, Ogden, Utah 84401 fax 801-625-5227.

The office business hours for those submitting hand-delivered appeals are 8 to 4:30 Monday through Friday, excluding holidays. Electronic appeals must be submitted in a format such as an email message, plain text (.txt), rich text format (.rtf), or Word (.doc) to appeals-intermtn@fs.fed.us. In cases where no identifiable name is attached to an electronic message, a verification of identity will be required. A scanned signature is one way to provide verification.

Appeals, including attachments, must be filed within 45 days from the publication

date of this notice in the Mammoth Times, the newspaper of record. Attachments received after the 45-day appeal period will not be considered. The publication date in the Mammoth Times, newspaper of record, is the exclusive means for calculating the time to file an appeal. Those wishing to appeal this decision should not rely upon dates or timeframe information provided by any other source.

Individuals or organizations who submitted substantive comments during the comment period specified at 215.6 may appeal this decision. The notice of appeal must meet the appeal content requirements at 36 CFR 215.14.

Contact

For additional information concerning this decision, the environmental assessment, or the Forest Service appeal process, contact David Loomis, Project Manager, Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest, 1536 S. Carson St. Carson City, NV 89701 Ph 775-882-2766.

EDWARD C. MONNIG
Acting Forest Supervisor
Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest

Date