



MOUNT SHASTA BIOREGIONAL ECOLOGY CENTER

Dedicated to restoring the outstanding natural and cultural values of Mount Shasta and the surrounding bioregion

February 22, 2018

RE: Scoping Comments for Gateway Phase 2 Trail Project

Carolyn Napper, District Ranger

ATTN: Becky Cooper

Shasta-Trinity USFS

204 West Alma St.

Mt. Shasta, CA 96067

Email: comments-pacificsw-shasta-trinity-mtshasta-mccloud@fs.fed.us

Dear Mrs. Napper, Mrs. Cooper and the Shasta-Trinity US Forest Service,

We are pleased to learn about your plans to increase recreation opportunities in the Mount Shasta area, and are writing to express our enthusiastic support of expanding the Gateway Trail system.

The Ecology Center formed 30 years ago to protect Mount Shasta's bountiful natural resources, and motivate a regional transition to ecological economy. We are deeply grateful for the clean waters, healthy forests, natural beauty and open space that nurtures vitality in northern California. In addition to stimulating local economies by attracting active and fun-loving residents and visitors to the area, trails encourage people to get outside and experience the elements in a visceral way. Few infrastructure projects have the potential to cultivate appreciation for the environment quite like robust trail networks.

We are glad to see that a NEPA analysis will be performed so that interested parties can better understand potential impacts the expansion will have on the watershed. We heartily support your stated intention to avoid significant cultural, botanical, wildlife, and wetland/riparian habitat resources that may be identified in the surveys. Because the plan includes decommissioning and/or retrofit of approximately 30 miles of renegade trails, we are hopeful that proper trail engineering, siting and implementation will minimize soil erosion and noxious weed infestation.

The scoping document indicates that land management activities, such as thinning and prescribed burning, will continue in the trail vicinity. We hope the NEPA document will extrapolate on future management actions as directed in the Forest Plan. We would like to see actions that transition the pine plantations towards mixed conifer forest, and mimic historic conditions, such as prescribed burning. Considering the proximity to human activity, we would like to see how recreation and trail use will be mitigated during times of active forest management.

As a partner of the Shasta-Trinity in the Honoring Our Mountain Environment (H.O.M.E.) program, we are well aware of the ongoing maintenance needs, and potency, of recreation facilities once they are established. We are curious if the expansion of McBride Springs campground, or any other trailheads, will include a lavatory? We are pleased to see inclusion of interpretive signage at each trail head, as they can be very informative, thereby reducing preventable strains, when composed properly. Will

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Forest Service employees be responsible for composing the signage, and maintaining the trails and infrastructure once they are established? Will there be opportunity for community input during the design stages of developing the signage?

We anticipate that Gateway Trail expansion will attract higher usage of Everitt Memorial, as well as more visibility to Bunny Flat and Panther Meadows, three of our regions greatest assets. We recall a relatively recent USFS conversation regarding usage fees on Everitt Memorial. We did not see any mention of trail usage fees, and we would like to know if this project has any bearing on your efforts to generate revenue in order to maintain high-quality user experiences in our National Forests. We hope your revenue plan encourages access, and rewards non-motorized recreational uses.

Another potential outcome of trail expansion is attracting more visitors, and potentially transients, homeless, and/or people who are prone to getting lost in the woods. We are very grateful for the efforts of agencies like yours, and community organizations such as the Trails Association, for tackling the horrendous trash problem, and increased threat of man-made forest fires, that can accompany well-intended projects such as this. We encourage USFS cooperation and integration with community groups to appropriately place clear signage, and manage potential undesired consequences in advance. If possible, it would be great to secure sources of ongoing funding for trail maintenance, as well as for backcountry education and interpretation.

We have read some community comments and support local proposals such as including a hikers-only Sisson Trail in the Proposed Action. We also imagine you have already sought Winnemem Wintu Tribal consultation, and trust that you've incorporated their feedback into this plan.

Again, we applaud you for taking the initiative to expand recreation opportunities in our area, and we are eager to experience the many benefits this project portends for our area. We hope that once this is successful, you will expand recreation trails all of the way to McCloud, Dunsmuir and Weed, further encouraging our innate sense of adventure, and non-motorized connectivity between our mountain communities. Please let us know if we can be of support at any stage of this process.

Sincerely,

Angelina Cook
Program Director