



Decision Notice / Finding of No Significant Impact

United States
Department of
Agriculture

Galena Recreation Facilities

Carson Ranger District, Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest

Forest
Service

September, 2004



For Information
Contact:
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Decision and Reasons for the Decision

Background

The purposes of this initiative are to provide for additional recreation opportunities for local community residents and visitors to the Reno area and to reduce the threat of wildfire.

The proposal is needed in the Galena Creek area due to the strong demand for outdoor recreation in the Reno area. The proposed site is adjacent to Washoe County's day use facilities and offers opportunities for efficient management in partnership with the County. The environmental assessment (EA) documents the analysis of the proposal to meet this need.

Decision

Based upon my review of all alternatives, I have decided to implement the Proposed Action which was developed in consultation with Washoe County. It includes day use facilities only, including the development of:

- Individual Picnicking
- Group Picnicking
- Trailhead Parking
- Trails
- Restrooms
- New Entrance Road
- Potential site for an Environmental Education/Welcome Center

This proposal includes ten individual picnic sites near the proposed visitor center, six individual picnic sites near the trailhead and approximately 15 individual picnic sites located in a cluster (Map 1). The individual sites would not have fire pits or barbecues.

The Group Picnic Area would be for approximately 80 persons and be similar to the existing Group area on the North side of Galena Creek Regional Park. It would contain either a gas grill or a charcoal grill.

The Trailhead Parking would consist of parking for approximately 25 cars and 8-10 horse trailers. The size of the lot is based on the experience of Washoe County and the Forest Service in providing parking in nearby areas, including Galena Creek Park and the trailheads at Whites and Thomas Creeks. Educational materials regarding proper trail etiquette and use would be provided at the trailhead.

The new Trail segments would link from the trailhead parking to the existing Jones Creek Trail to the south and to the Whites Creek Trail to the Northwest. All trails would be located away from sensitive riparian areas.

Restrooms would be provided in central locations to serve the picnic & trailhead areas. A fire hydrant would be installed to enhance fire fighting capabilities.

The Environmental Education/Welcome Center, when built would occupy approximately 3,000 to 5,000 square feet. It could be linked to a one mile interpretive loop trail that would include a walking bridge across Jones Creek. A parking lot would include space for about 25 cars and 8-10 school busses or RVs. The building would be designed with energy efficiency guidelines. The Center could be located on County Park land or on National Forest Land near the Mount Rose Highway.

A new entrance road from the Mount Rose Highway would be constructed. It would provide access to both the new recreation facilities and to the existing Galena Creek Park north unit, replacing the current entrance. The new entrance would have acceleration/deceleration lanes and a left turn bay and would have improved line of sight compared to the existing entrance.

In addition to these facilities, the proposed action includes a fuels reduction project to protect the facilities, the adjacent County Park,



and nearby homes from the risk of wildfire. The fuels treatment would be located along the northwestern boundary of the project and include about 70 acres of brush and other ladder fuel treatments. No clearcutting would occur and no trees over 8” in diameter would be removed as part of this fuels treatment.

All facilities would be constructed with best management practices to minimize run off and abate dust problems.

The project also includes closing the area and nearby Thomas Creek Canyon to overnight use, also to reduce the risk of wildfire. This would include removal and rehabilitation of user created campsites along the creek. The existing road network north of Jones Creek would be closed and rehabilitated.

The construction contract documents would include a provision prohibiting early or late hours of operation if equipment noise results in complaints from local residents or users. Routine park quiet hours would be established and enforced. Ranger patrols would monitor and enforce noise regulations.

Project facilities would be located to avoid heritage resource sites and locations of Washoe tall rockcress. All known locations of Washoe tall rockcress will be flagged and avoided during implementation. To avoid future excessive trampling and allow for expansion of the species into suitable habitat, a sufficient buffer between plant locations and high impact areas will be retained. While removal of smaller trees and shrubs will be necessary for road and other facility construction, facilities will be located to minimize the removal of larger trees, particularly those over 30” in diameter.

Construction processes and rehabilitation efforts would be designed to prevent the spread of noxious weeds. Rehabilitation efforts would include the use of native seeds only.

The current situation is undesirable from both a fire suppression and recreational user

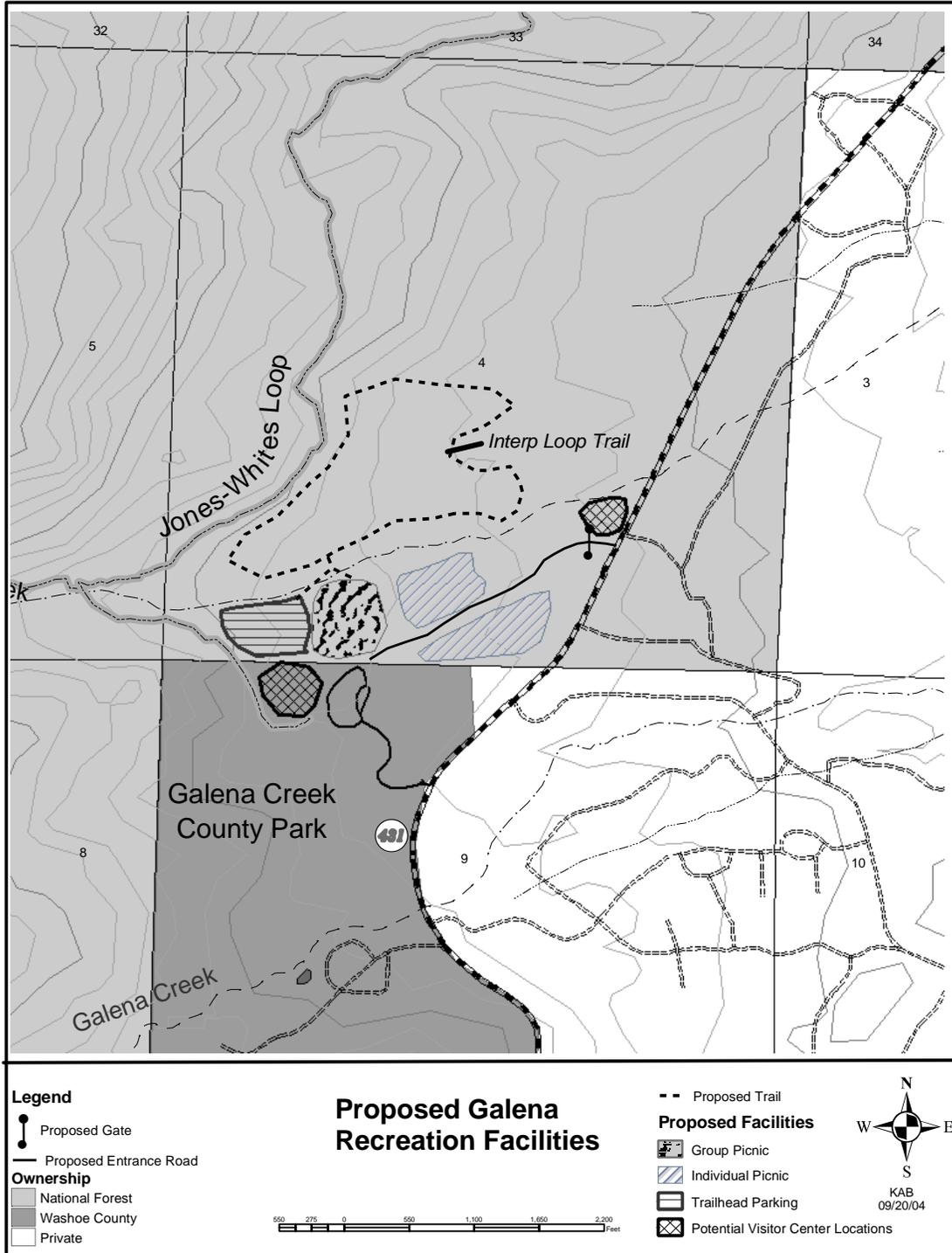
perspective. Agencies have responded to numerous abandoned campfires in the Thomas Creek Canyon area as well as a few in the Galena area. In addition we have seen trash dumping and criminal activity occur in these areas. Hence the need to better define the recreational experience.

There is considerable demand for both day use (trailheads, picnicking, visitor information, etc.) and overnight use in the region. Initially the Forest Service had proposed facilities that would incorporate both needs. However we began the planning of this project with Washoe County. Washoe County voters allocated one million dollars for a project in this area. Washoe County Officials have also agreed to maintain and manage whatever facilities are built much as they have done with the Whites and Thomas Creek trailheads.

There are arguments on both sides of the debate relative to the fire danger posed by overnight facilities or potentially evacuating vehicles. However, our partnership, including funding, operation and maintenance, requires us to strongly consider Washoe County's concerns. There is a significant demand for additional day use facilities. In addition there is a compelling need to address the fire danger and criminal challenges posed by the existing situation. Therefore I am selecting to proceed with the day use alternative as described.



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Other Alternatives Considered

In addition to the selected alternative, I considered two other alternatives. A comparison 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.

Expanded Use Alternative

This alternative would include all of the day use facilities identified for the Proposed Action plus construction of a group overnight camping facility and 18 cabins, all located north of Jones Creek. The cabins could be a log cabin style that sleeps 4 persons. It would be optional to have outdoor gas barbecues either individually or in a group setting. It would be optional to have one or two group campfire areas located within the inner circle of the driving loop. The two group tent camping areas would serve up to 50 people per area. The group cooking area would be either gas or charcoal barbeque area. The group campfire area would be located in a large cleared area. Picnic tables would be provided.

Public Involvement

The proposal to develop recreation facilities in the Galen area was listed in the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest Schedule of Proposed Actions in October, 2003, January, 2004, April, 2004 and July, 2004. A public scoping period was held in March and April of 2004. A Forest Service public meeting was held on March 22, 2004. The project was also the subject of a Galena Citizens Advisory Board meeting on

April 8, Washoe County Parks and Recreation Committee on June 16, and the Washoe County Commission on July 13. Between 100 and 200 individuals attended each meeting. Ten to twenty spoke at each meeting.

The proposal was provided to the public and other agencies for comment from July 22, 2004 to August 23, 2004. The proposed action was mailed to 130 interested individuals, organizations, and agencies for comment on July 22, 2004. Legal notice was posted in the Reno Gazette Journal on July 22, 2004. The project received extensive coverage in the in the Reno Gazette Journal, including the editions of March 21; May 9, 18 and 19; and July 13 and 14, 2004.

About 130 individual and form letters, emails and faxes were submitted during the scoping period. A petition with about 400 signatures was also submitted. Most of the comments were from residents of nearby subdivisions who expressed opposition to overnight camping at the site, primarily due to concerns about fire risk and traffic safety. Most of these supported day use facilities. Comments were also received from other areas of Washoe County, mostly expressing support for overnight camping as a means of enhancing recreation opportunities for the residents of the County.

About 40 individual and form letters, emails, and faxes were submitted during the proposed action comment period. Most of the comments expressed strong support for the proposed action and opposed the construction of group overnight camping facilities and cabins. Other commenters requested clarification of fuel break activities; analysis of the potential for illegal cooking fires; potential impacts to water rights, plants and animals, old growth trees, weeds, rehabilitation of disturbed areas, and energy efficiency. All of these concerns were addressed in the EA document through clarifications of the proposed action or through the impact analysis.



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 the project would reduce current traffic safety problems and the risk of wildfire and create no air quality or other health problems (see EA Environmental Consequences – Public Safety, Smoke/Air Quality).
3. There will be no significant effects on unique characteristics of the area, because a detailed analysis of such characteristics in the EA (see Environmental Consequences Roadless/Wilderness) found limited unique characteristics and little or no impact to them, this included an analysis of
 - o Soil, water, air: While most soils in the area are undisturbed, the existing road network has likely accelerated erosion into Jones Creek, an intermittent stream that flows through the site. Air quality in the area is high, but affected by traffic on the Mount Rose Highway.
 - o Public drinking water: Jones Creek is an intermittent stream that contributes to drinking water mainly through infiltration to the groundwater

aquifer. The current network of roads likely has little impact to the Creek or to drinking water supplies.

- o Diversity of plant and animal communities: Plant and animal communities are common in the area. Refer to the Wildlife and Plants section for further description.
- o Habitat for threatened, endangered, proposed, candidate, and sensitive species: Inventories were conducted for these species and none of these species have been found in the project area.
- o Primitive and semi primitive recreation opportunities. The project area provides no opportunities for primitive recreation opportunities. Semi primitive recreation occurs on the project area, but has no outstanding qualities.
- o Reference landscapes: This area has been subject to substantial human uses since European settlement occurred in the 1860s. Mining, logging, recreation and other activities over this period have compromised the ability of the project area to serve as a reference landscape.
- o Landscape character and scenic integrity: The quality of the landscape character and scenic integrity has been compromised by the existing road network and dumping activities that have occurred on the property.
- o Traditional cultural properties and sacred sites: None exist on the project site.
- o Other locally identified unique characteristics. None have been found on the site.



4. The effects on the quality of the human environment are not likely to be highly controversial. Because there is no known scientific controversy over the impacts of the project. While some nearby residents were concerned that the facility would result in an increase in the risk of wildfire, the data do not support this conclusion and no credible evidence was submitted to support this contention (see EA Environmental Consequences – Public Safety).
5. The Forest Service and Washoe County have considerable experience with the types of activities to be implemented. The effects analysis shows the effects are not uncertain, and do not involve unique or unknown risk (see EA Environmental Consequences – Public Safety).
6. The action is not likely to establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects, because construction and operation of similar recreation facilities are common throughout the country and have occurred on both National Forest and Washoe County lands in the past (see EA Environmental Consequences - Recreation).
7. The cumulative impacts are not significant. While there is some concern regarding the cumulative effects to mule deer habitat, the project area is transitional range only and comprises only .0008 % of the mule deer habitat in the area (see EA Environmental Consequences – Wildlife and Plants).
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 the developments associated with the proposed action will be designed to avoid impacting the historic archaeological resources identified in

the project area. Actively managing access by closing the north side of Jones Creek and the Thomas Creek corridor to vehicle traffic will enhance the preservation of archaeological resources (see EA Environmental Consequences – Heritage Resources). The action will also not cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources, because the only ones that exist in the area are historic and they would not be significantly effected as noted above.

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 exist in the area (see EA Environmental Consequences – Wildlife and Plants).
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 – Environmental Consequences - Smoke). The action is consistent with the Toiyabe Land and Resource Management Plan (See EA Purpose and Need).

Findings Required by Other Laws and Regulations

This decision to construct and operate recreational facilities and close areas to dispersed overnight use is consistent with the intent of the forest plan's long term goals and objectives (see EA Purpose and Need). The project was designed in conformance with land and resource management plan standards and incorporates appropriate land and resource management plan guidelines for watershed protection.



Implementation Date

If no appeals are filed within the 45-day time period, implementation of the decision may occur on, but not before, 5 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 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 USDA-Forest Service, Intermountain Region, Attn: Appeal Deciding Officer, 324 25th Street, Ogden, Utah 84401. FAX 801-625 5277.

The office business hours for those submitting hand-delivered appeals are:[business hours] 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-regional-office@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 Reno Gazette Journal, the newspaper of record. Attachments received after the 45 day appeal period will not be considered. The publication date in the Reno Gazette Journal, 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 copies of the Environmental Assessment, additional information concerning this decision or the Forest Service appeal process, please visit the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest web site at www.fs.fed.us/htnf or contact David Loomis, Carson Ranger District, 1536 S. Carson St., Carson City, NV 89703 775-884-8132.

/s/ Gary Schiff
Gary Schiff
District Ranger
Carson Ranger District

9/22/04
Date