

Written Determination Bicycle Use in Whiskeytown National Recreation Area

The National Park Service (NPS) has prepared a Trails Management Plan and Environmental Assessment (EA) for Whiskeytown National Recreation Area. The EA identifies a preferred alternative that would expand the trail network in the Recreation Area and result in approximately 79.8 miles of trails open to bicycle use. The preferred alternative also would continue to allow bicycles on approximately 42.2 miles of administrative roads within the recreation area. On March 11, 2022, the Regional Director for DOI Unified Regions 8, 9, 10 and 12 signed a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) selecting the preferred alternative for implementation.

Multi-Use Trails.

Congress established the Whiskeytown-Shasta-Trinity National Recreation Area in 1965 for public outdoor recreation, use and enjoyment. 16 U.S.C. 460q. From 1966 until 1987, NPS regulations allowed bicycles on trails in recreation areas unless they were restricted by posted signs or markings on a map. See 31 FR 16650 (December 29, 1966) and 39 FR 11882 (April 1, 1974). Bicycle use has occurred in the recreation area since its establishment and was authorized on most of the trails in the trail system under the “open unless closed” management framework for several decades. Under the selected alternative, trail work will occur on approximately 32.8 miles of trails and will include minor improvements to existing trails, the construction of new multiuse trails, the rerouting of some existing trails, and trail closures that will restore natural conditions. In total, the selected alternative will expand the trail network and result in approximately 79.8 miles of trails open to bicycle use within the recreation area.

Under the selected alternative, bicycle use will be allowed on the following multi-use trails identified in Table 1:

Table 1: Multi-Use Trails and Distance

Trail Name	Approximate Mileage
Boulder Creek Trail	3.8
Brandy Creek Falls Trail (between the trailhead and Rich Gulch Trail intersection)	1.1
Brandy Creek Picnic Trail	0.3
Brandy Creek RV Trail	0.2
Brandy Creek Trail	2.0
Buck Hollow Trail	1.0
Camden Water Ditch Trail	1.1
Clear Creek Canal Trail	5.2
Clear Creek Picnic Trail	0.3
Clear Creek Vista Trail	2.5
Crystal Creek Falls Trail	0.5
Crystal Creek Trail	2.3
East Boundary Vista Trail	1.4
Guardian Rock Equestrian Trail	1.3
Horse Camp Trail	0.4
Hydraulic Mine Trail	0.5

Table 1: Multi-Use Trails and Distance

Trail Name	Approximate Mileage
James K. Carr Trail (between the trailhead and Mill Creek Trail intersection)	0.4
Kanaka Peak Trail	3.3
Knobcone Trail	0.3
Ladybug Lane Trail (WES only)	0.3
Logging Camp Trail	0.9
Martha's Ditch Trail (WES only)	2.5
Mill Creek Trail	3.9
Mount Shasta Mine Loop Trail	5.0
Mule Mountain Loop Trail	1.2
Mule Mountain Pass Trail	1.3
Oak Bottom Water Ditch Trail	2.8
Orofino Trail	0.3
Papoose Connector Trail	0.2
Papoose Pass Trail	5.2
Peltier Bridge Trail	0.6
Peltier Trail	2.5
Princess Ditch Trail	2.1
Prospect Trail	1.1
Rich Gulch Trail	2.4
Ridge Trail (WES only)	1.8
Salt Gulch Trail (connecting Peltier Trail to Rich Gulch Trail)	2.0
Shasta Divide Trail (connecting the Visitor Center with the NPS and BLM trail system in the area of Mule Mountain)	7.0
Tower Grave Trail	0.2
WES Camp Emergency Access Road	0.6
Whiskeytown Lake Trail (connecting the Brandy Creek area with Carr Powerhouse area)	8.0

Administrative Roads.

Administrative roads are roads where motor vehicles are used only by the NPS for official activities such as maintenance, firefighting, research, and search-and-rescue. Under the selected alternative, bicycle use will be allowed on the following administrative roads identified in Table 2. All of these administrative roads are open to bicycle use under current conditions and will continue to be open to bicycle use under the selected alternative:

Table 2: Administrative Roads and Distance

Administrative Road Name	Approximate Mileage
Brandy Creek Spur Road	0.1
Carr Housing Area Road	0.3
Clear Creek Picnic Area Access Roads	0.3
Coggins Flat North Access Road	0.1

Table 2: Administrative Roads and Distance

Administrative Road Name	Approximate Mileage
Crystal Creek Camp Access Road and Recreation Areas	0.2
Crystal Creek Falls Road	0.4
Dog Gulch Road	0.4
East Beach Access Road	0.1
Grizzly Gulch South Spur Road	0.3
Grizzly Gulch North Spur Road	0.1
Merry Mountain Roads	0.6
Mexican Springs Road	0.2
Mt. Shasta Mine Loop Road	0.1
Monarch Mountain Road	0.6
New York Gulch Area Roads	1.5
PG&E Roads	14.0
Tower House Historic District Road/El Dorado Mine Road	0.5
Transfer Station Road	0.1
Western Area Power Administration (WAPA) Roads	22.3

WRITTEN DETERMINATION

NPS regulations in 36 CFR 4.30 require the NPS to determine that bicycle use on administrative roads and trails is consistent with the protection of the park area's natural, scenic and aesthetic values, safety considerations and management objectives, and will not disturb wildlife or park resources. The EA and the FONSI provide information and context for this written determination, including additional analysis of the potential effects of bicycle use on park resources and visitors. The EA and FONSI are available online at:

<https://parkplanning.nps.gov/projectHome.cfm?ProjectID=71676> by clicking the link entitled “Whiskeytown NRA Trails Management Plan” and then clicking the link entitled “Document List.”

Purpose and Significance of the Recreation Area

Congress established the Recreation Area in 1965 to fulfill the conservation and recreational purposes of the Central Valley Project in Northern California. The recreation area provides opportunities for recreation in both a lake-based and scenic mountain setting while conserving the scientific, natural, historic, and cultural values for the enjoyment and inspiration of present and future generations.

Whiskeytown National Recreation Area encompasses 42,497 acres nestled within the Klamath Mountains. The 3,200-acre Whiskeytown Lake is a dominant feature of the park. The recreation area is characterized by steep and rugged terrain. Winter rains, long dry summers and frequent wildfires create diverse habitats, from old-growth forests to oak woodlands and chaparral. Acorns, fish, deer, and other plants and animals provided a means for American Indians to sustain their way of life for thousands of years. The discovery of gold nearby in 1848, only months after it was found farther south at Sutter’s mill, brought fortune hunters known as

“49’ers.” Today, visitors value the recreation area’s water, wildlife habitat, recreational opportunities, and the power-generating facilities of the Central Valley Water project.

Significance statements express why an area’s resources and values are important enough to merit designation as a unit of the National Park System. Statements of significance describe the distinctive nature of an area and why it is important within a global, national, regional, and Systemwide context. They focus on the most important resources and values that will assist in planning and management.

The following significance statements have been identified for the recreation area.

- From the peak of Shasta Bally to the Sacramento Valley floor, the wide range in elevation, location, connection to surrounding areas, and convergence of four ecological provinces support diverse ecosystems and provide habitat for protected plant and animal species, including the only known global location of Howell’s alkali grass (*Puccinellia howellii*).
- Whiskeytown Environmental School, managed by the Shasta County Office of Education, is one of the longest-running outdoor environmental education centers among all of the national recreation areas administered by the NPS. Together with the recreation area’s interpretive program, research, and partnerships, the school provides outstanding opportunities for understanding and appreciating the recreation area’s natural and cultural resources.
- The recreation area provides a variety of outdoor recreation opportunities in both a lake-based and scenic mountain setting, ranging from family boating to inspirational experiences in wild, undeveloped places.
- The recreation area’s landscape, historic sites, and remnant gold mining features provide unique opportunities within the national recreation area system to understand the dramatic effects of the California Gold Rush.
- Whiskeytown Lake is an important component of the Central Valley Project that transformed California’s growth, economy, and agriculture through the delivery of clean water. The creation of the recreation area helped fulfill one of the goals of the Central Valley Project—to provide recreational opportunities to the local community and visitors from afar.
- The recreation area protects and preserves a continuous record and remnant sites of people. Beginning with Native American settlement thousands of years ago, the recreation area’s landscape reflects the stories of how diverse groups of people have utilized the area’s resources through time.

With 36 miles of shoreline, the crystal-clear water of Whiskeytown Lake is perhaps the most recognized feature of the recreation area. Due to its forested, mountain setting and consistent water level, the lake provides high-quality recreational opportunities throughout the primary recreation season. Visitors enjoy swimming, beaches, lakeside camping, boating, sport fishing,

and picnicking. Beyond the shoreline of the lake, the rugged canyons, forests, streams, and waterfalls within the recreation area provide visitors with outstanding recreational opportunities. An extensive trail system allows visitors to experience a variety of forested terrain for birdwatching, camping, picnicking, wildlife viewing, hiking, horseback riding, and bicycling. Trails are located primarily upon historic logging and mining infrastructure south, east, and west of Whiskeytown Lake. In total, more than 800,000 visitors come to enjoy the recreation area each year, including casual sightseers, experienced adventurers and everyone in between.

Fundamental resources and values of the park are those features, systems, processes, experiences, stories, scenes, sounds, smells, or other attributes that are essential to achieving the purpose of the park and maintaining its significance.

The recreation area's 2014 Foundation Document identifies the following fundamental resources and values of the recreation area: (1) recreational opportunities; (2) opportunities to enjoy scenic resources and explore special places; (3) legacy of learning; (4) high biodiversity supported by natural processes; (5) stories related to human use of the land; (6) sites, structures, and archaeological resources; and (7) water resources.

Natural, Scenic, and Aesthetic Values

The existing trail system is primarily based upon old logging and mining infrastructure that currently range from asphalt walkways to engineered dirt trails, including a historic ditch system located throughout the recreation area. The NPS will upgrade and reroute some popular multiuse trails and establish new multiuse trails to disperse users and improve connectivity to natural and scenic features within the recreation area as well as other areas outside the unit. For example, the NPS will establish a new trail along the Shasta Divide at the east side of the recreation area. This trail, covering about 7 miles, will provide visitors with views of Mount Shasta and the Cascade Range. The trail will be designed to provide a potential new connection with the adjacent BLM trail network at Mule Mountain where mountain biking occurs.

The improved trail system will offer a diverse range of visitor experiences. Trail construction projects will be designed to uphold the natural, scenic, and aesthetic conditions where they are located in the recreation area, consistent with the desired conditions outlined in the Recreation Area's 1999 General Management Plan (GMP), Foundation Document, and as outlined in chapter 2 of the EA. Each trail will have design specifications that are consistent with its trail class (from moderately developed to fully developed) and will provide a range of opportunities—from highly social recreation in front country areas to peaceful solitude along backcountry trails. The implementation of scenic rest points and destination points along the multiuse trails will enable more visitors to explore and observe the recreation area's natural wonders and rich cultural heritage.

The location of new multiuse trail miles will be particularly beneficial for visitors seeking quiet and contemplative experiences. These trails will feature few signs of human intervention, fostering a sense of discovery and deep immersion in the natural habitat. The NPS will give special consideration to visitor viewshed and aesthetics: tree and brush removal will be done selectively to maintain a naturalistic character such as preventing the creation of a linear trail edge. The NPS will implement other project design criteria and trail maintenance methods

guided by a standard of environmental integrity that will allow natural processes to prevail. (see Appendix D of the EA).

Continuing to allow bicycle use on the identified administrative roads will have no adverse impacts to natural, scenic, and aesthetic values because this use is ongoing.

Safety Considerations

The Superintendent's Compendium for the recreation area establishes a speed limit of 15 miles per hour on all designated trails, and 5 miles per hour around blind curves on all trails open to bicycles. The NPS will educate visitors about multiuse protocols on trails shared by pedestrians and bicyclists (i.e., when and how to pass others safely) and enforce speed limits for bicyclists through the presence of law enforcement staff. The NPS will implement strategies to educate visitors about the diversity of trail opportunities and promote lesser-known trails to manage possible congestion, disperse visitors, and reduce potential trail conflicts.

The use of ABA Accessibility Standards (ABAAS) to improve accessibility of trails as practicable will benefit visitors of differing abilities. The NPS will provide enhanced information regarding trail conditions and difficulty that will enable visitors of all abilities to make informed choices about which trail to explore. This alignment of expectations with actual experiences will significantly enhance the overall quality of their visit while promoting safety. Depending on trail class, the NPS will post signs with important safety and regulatory information about bicycle use, resource protection, user reassurance, directional signs at junctions, and mileage. Improved trail identification and signage will allow visitors to more easily find their way and reconcile on-the-ground trails with mapped trails. Likewise, the rehabilitation or designation of visitor created trails will prevent confusion and disorientation for visitors, who often mistake them for official trails. Additionally, trail reroutes will enhance both visitor safety and overall experience by addressing identified safety concerns and potential conflicts between user groups. (see 2020 Bike Matrix in appendix E of the EA).

Continuing to allow bicycle use on the identified administrative roads will not create any new safety issues because this use is ongoing. Ongoing monitoring and maintenance of the administrative roads will help ensure a safe environment for all users. The current conditions and user behaviors on the existing administrative roads do not indicate any foreseeable risks that would arise from continued bicycle use.

Management Objectives

Overall management objectives for the recreation area are guided by NPS Management Policies 2006, which direct superintendents to develop management plans that allow for recreation in National Park System units, but in a manner that avoids unacceptable impacts to park resources or values. See NPS Management Policies 2006, Section 8.2.2.1. They also emphasize the need for alternative transportation systems, especially those that promote nonmotorized means of accessing and moving within System units. See NPS Management Policies 2006, Section 9.2.

Consistent with these NPS-wide policies, the NPS has established management objectives for the recreation area in the GMP and Foundation Document. Management objectives for trail use are established in the EA. All of these documents promote an appropriate balance between visitor access and enjoyment, and the protection of resources. One way to further this management

objective is to increase visitor appreciation and understanding of the resources and values of the recreation area by providing experiences that foster deeper connections with them. This strategy enhances visitor satisfaction and promotes responsible recreation, as users are encouraged to experience and respect the natural and cultural resources found throughout the recreation area.

Under the selected alternative, the NPS will improve and expand the existing trail system to create a more sustainable, manageable system that provides diverse, high-quality experiences for visitors. The new trail system will bring visitors to more of the recreation area's diverse landscapes and features, such as rugged mountains and canyons, lush forests, and the expansive Whiskeytown Lake. For example, the longest new trail, the Whiskeytown Lake trail, will be about 8 miles in length, improve access to the lake and will connect the Brandy Creek area with Carr Powerhouse area. Connecting these areas and points of interest will enrich the visitor experience by making it more engaging and purposeful. Visitors will enjoy the natural beauty of these locations and at the same time learn about their ecology, biodiversity, and cultural history.

Engineering improvements and constructed features, which will vary depending on trail class, will enable the trail system to accommodate visitor use levels on a sustainable basis. The establishment of visitor capacities for the trails, and monitoring selected natural resource indicators, will also enable recreation area managers to take proactive measures to avoid or minimize impacts to erosive soils if conditions approach visitor capacity thresholds.

Continuing to allow bicycle use on the identified administrative roads will continue to provide a safe and enjoyable visitor experience with no additional impacts to recreation area resources because this use is ongoing.

Wildlife and Recreation Area Resources

The EA and FONSI concluded that resources in the recreation area, including cultural and natural resources and sensitive species, would not be impaired or significantly impacted by continued bicycle use on the existing trails and administrative roads or expanded bicycle use on re-routed, upgraded or new multi-use trails.

In accordance with NPS Management Policies 2006, for all trail construction activities, recreation area staff will apply sustainable practices to minimize potential environmental impacts. New or rerouted trails will not compete with or dominate recreation area features or interfere with natural processes, such as the seasonal migration of wildlife, forest regeneration, hydrologic activity, and geological processes. All trail work will emphasize environmentally sensitive construction, use of nontoxic materials, resource conservation, and recycling.

The rerouting of trails and the development of new trails would result in the short-term loss and disturbance of soil and removal of trailside vegetation in localized areas. The application of mitigation measures and best management practices for all these actions will help minimize the loss and disturbance of soil on steep slopes and help retain native vegetation. For example, the trail along the Shasta Divide will largely follow existing utility access roads and fuel breaks and is therefore not expected to result in much new clearing of trailside vegetation and soil loss. As another example, the development of the Whiskeytown Lakeside Trail will result in the loss of soil and trailside vegetation, but the overall impact is not expected to contribute to long term erosion outside of the paved trail prism and will be minimized based on the proposed location of

the trail, its mainly low grade (i.e., slope), soil types, and plant communities the trail will pass through.

The trail construction projects for new multiuse trails, reroutes, and other improvements will result in varying levels of sediments potentially transported into Lower Clear Creek and other drainages throughout the recreation area. This will result in increased turbidity, which will be a short-term, adverse impact on salmonid habitat and fish spawning in recreation area drainages. Implementation of trail management planning goals, mitigation measures, and best management practices included in the Trail Maintenance Handbook (see appendix D of the EA) will improve existing trails, new trails, and reroutes, making them more stable and less prone to erosion and will provide a long-term benefit to federally listed salmonid species and other special status species. For spring-run chinook salmon and Central Valley steelhead trout, the closure and rerouting of problem trails will decrease erosion and sedimentation, which will a long-term beneficial effect on the fish spawning in the recreation area. The application of mitigation measures and best management practices will further minimize erosion and sedimentation from trail construction.

None of the recreation area's existing trails, new trails, rerouted trails, or other trail construction projects in the selected alternative will occur near activity centers or within suitable habitat for northern spotted owl. Existing activities within the recreation area and future trail improvements under the selected alternative will not affect this owl species. With regard to bald eagles, the development of the proposed Whiskeytown Lake Trail could affect nesting habitat near Whiskeytown Lake. Human disturbance could cause eagles to abandon nesting attempts; however, potential impacts would be avoided by applying a buffer to this proposed lakeside trail (see mitigation measures in chapter 2 of the EA). Infrequent disturbance could occur to Pacific fishers due to occasional encounters with trail users or maintenance crews; however, no changes in the fisher population is expected. Habitat modification due to trail construction will include habitat components important to fishers such as large trees, snags, denning sites, and riparian habitat, but these habitat components will be retained, and some areas restored or otherwise improved by the implementation of the selected alternative. Many of the sightings of fishers in the recreation area's wildlife observation database are along existing trails, so it is unlikely that the presence of new trails or trail users would cause fishers to avoid the area.

Rare plant communities are not expected to be disturbed along proposed trails and reroutes due to the NPS's ongoing implementation of mitigation measures and best practices to reduce potentially serious impacts to rare plants from occurring. Areas planned for reroutes longer than 660 linear feet and/or vegetation destruction from new trail construction will be surveyed by resource management staff for rare species (see appendix D in the EA for specific trail maintenance measures). If federally listed or other special status plants are located, they will be clearly flagged and avoided during construction activities when possible.

Ongoing consultation between the NPS and tribes will continue to take place to ensure that ethnographic resources or resources of significance will not be impacted during trail construction activities. The new trails and reroutes will not impact known ethnographic resources or impede tribes' ability to utilize the recreation area for traditional purposes. The new trails or existing trail reroutes will be designed to avoid known ethnographic resources in consultation with tribes. All tribal consultation will take place in accordance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act under 36 CFR Part 800. Should construction unearth previously undiscovered

cultural resources, work will be stopped in the area of discovery, and resource area managers will consult with the state historic preservation officer and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, as necessary, according to 36 CFR 800.13. In the unlikely event that human remains, funerary objects, sacred objects, or objects of cultural patrimony are discovered during construction, provisions outlined in the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (25 USC 3001) of 1990 and related implementing regulations at 43 CFR will be followed.

Under the selected action, four new trails, the Camden Water Ditch Trail Extension, the Horse Camp Trail, the Orofino Trail, and the Whiskeytown Lake Trail, will be constructed within 50 meters of a historic ditch. This will be accomplished by rerouting the trail out of the ditch channel to the levee berm to reduce channel cutting and rutting and to improve and preserve the levee and control vegetation or to reroute the trail out of an archaeological site and avoid features. Additional trail segments are designed to reduce social trailing, provide visitor access, restore historic circulation footprints/conditions, and reduce impacts to subsurface archaeological resources. Use of heavy equipment is limited within the historic districts and on ditch trails. All work on trails will be done in coordination with Director's Order 28 – Cultural Resource Management.

Continuing to allow bicycle use on the identified administrative roads will have no adverse impacts to wildlife or resources because this use is ongoing. Bicycles typically travel at lower speeds and create less noise than motor vehicles, allowing wildlife to detect and respond to human presence more easily. The established nature of the roads limits habitat disruption, and ongoing management practices can ensure that these areas remain conducive to wildlife activity.

Conclusion.

Based upon the foregoing and as required by 36 CFR 4.30, the NPS has determined that bicycle use on (1) the multi-use trails identified above (see Table 1); and (2) the administrative roads identified above (see Table 2), is consistent with the protection of the recreation area's natural, scenic, and aesthetic values; safety considerations; management objectives; and will not disturb wildlife or recreation area resources.

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Date

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