

2. PROJECT SUMMARY: Mammoth Lakes Trails and Public Access Concept and Master Planning (MLTPA CAMP)

The Town of Mammoth Lakes has been described as “a town within a park,” as its Urban Growth Boundary defines the town within Inyo National Forest, effectively containing a 4.5-square-mile urban environment within hundreds of square miles of public lands. Residents and tourists alike come to Mammoth for its abundant and spectacular natural beauty, peaceful seclusion, and, most notably, the numerous outdoor recreation activities this landscape affords, from fishing, mountain biking, and camping, to skiing, snowmobiling, and snowshoeing. Mammoth serves as a premier portal to the Eastern Sierra, hosting approximately 2.8 million visitors annually, and is a top recreation destination for Southern California.

MLTPA CAMP’s overarching goal is to connect people to nature easily, safely, and enjoyably, and to help preserve the beauty and health of Inyo National Forest and its resources by keeping the Urban Growth Boundary porous, yet well planned. This will be accomplished by a multi-agency partnership in which the Town of Mammoth Lakes, Mammoth Mountain Ski Area, the USFS, and MLTPA, among others, cooperatively engage two teams of planning consultants (natural surface and urban specialists) to work with the jurisdictional entities and the public to evaluate current trails and public access systems, then make recommendations to improve their internal flow as well as their connectivity to one another. The result of this effort will be an actionable trails and public access master plan for the Town of Mammoth Lakes and the land within its Urban Growth Boundary that will seek to guarantee access to public lands in anticipation of the town’s impending build-out. Though master plans for bikeways and Class 1 pathways within the urban limit exist, these documents date from the early 1990s and have not been revised to match Mammoth’s explosive growth in the last decade; furthermore, these plans reflect little if any attention paid to how people actually move from the urban setting of the town to the natural settings of the forest. When completed, CAMP’s proposed master plan will seek to enhance the visitor experience, promote “feet first” mobility as identified in the Town’s recently revised and adopted General Plan (August 2007), promote the stewardship and sustainability of trails and recreation areas on public lands, and reduce or eliminate adverse impacts on water, land, and other natural resources.

MLTPA is responsible for initiating the CAMP process and for bringing local agencies, private-sector interests, and jurisdictions into the partnerships necessary to turn the idea of CAMP into a reality. Initially budgeted at \$475,133 (see the MLTPA Planning Proposal, attached), the CAMP project was focused through MLTPA’s work with Jurisdictional, Funding, and Planning Partners. Determining that the Town of Mammoth Lakes should hold and administer the consultant contracts, and coming to consensus with Jurisdictional Partners as to the desired scope of work, the CAMP budget was revised to \$356,898. Through its Funding Partners MLTPA has been able to secure cash commitments of \$225,000, leaving a project balance of \$131,898. After deducting budgeted contingencies per SNC guidelines, MLTPA is submitting this application for \$120,099, which represents the balance of the revised CAMP budget and the funds necessary to deliver to the Town of Mammoth Lakes a trails and public access master plan for consideration and adoption, and the ultimate fulfillment and completion of the MLTPA CAMP project.

4. PROJECT PROPOSAL

A. Land and Water Benefits

As its name implies, Mammoth Lakes includes in its unique geography a rich and varied system of lakes, creeks, streams, springs, and riparian zones, all of which provide scores of both motorized and non-motorized outdoor recreation opportunities for the town's average 2.8 million annual visitors. It sits within the Mammoth Basin watershed, which falls within the Long Valley Groundwater Basin recognized by the Department of Water Resources as part of the South Lahontan Hydrologic Region. Though some of Mammoth's recreation amenities, such as Mammoth Creek, are located within the Urban Growth Boundary (UGB), the majority—including the heavily used Lakes Basin—is accessed by crossing the UGB to reach Inyo National Forest, which surrounds Mammoth Lakes on all sides and which is partially defined by the perimeters of the 71-square-mile Mammoth Basin: Convict Creek drainage divide to the south, Mammoth Crest to the west, Dry Creek drainage divide to the north, and a portion of the watershed of Hot Creek to the east.

To date, a lack of proper planning and management of trails and public access has engendered a “path of least resistance”-style nest of shortcuts to recreation areas that has negatively affected the quality and health of the area's water and other natural resources, particularly in such popular areas as the Lakes Basin, Mammoth Creek, Kerry Meadow and its adjoining lands, and the lands divided by Sherwin Creek Road. Identified and maintained portals do exist, as does a partially completed network of Class 1 pathways in town, yet without a comprehensive, cooperative system, the area cannot sustain the predicted 98,000-person increase in visitors to Inyo National Forest by 2025, nor the Town's projected peak population of 52,000, as noted in the 2007 General Plan Update. As stated in Section 4.6.1.3: Drainage and Runoff of the May 2007 General Plan Update, “Continued buildout of the Mammoth Lakes community has gradually increased the density and extent of the urbanized area within the UGB, resulting in a potential for greater peak flows from snowmelt and rainstorms. As this growth occurs, the potential for erosion and flooding continues to increase, as well as water quality degradation in Mammoth and Hot Creeks.” Thoughtful planning will allow the public, including the development community, to help design access to and enjoyment of the watershed while ensuring that their impact and long-term effects on water, fish and wildlife habitats, land, and other natural resources are minimal, which increases the community's stake in their public lands and their capacity to eventually steward such a system.

The CAMP process will provide the following land and water benefits:

- 1.** Consultants will analyze current recreation land use and, with public input, propose connections and revisions to the existing trail system to disperse and manage use as appropriate to landscape. Care will be taken to reduce compound impact by multiple user groups on heavily visited areas and trails by proposing alternative zones dictated by activity. This will lessen the literal human footprint on sensitive wet-meadow and riparian areas, as well as on creek embankments and lakeshores, reducing erosion and allowing already damaged areas to recover.
- 2.** Mammoth Basin is the watershed of Mammoth Creek, the primary drainage course through town and the most popular in-town amenity for fishing. Managing use of the creek area through

trails and public access planning will help minimize human impact on soils and vegetation, thereby reducing opportunities for erosion.

3. New connections proposed to link existing pathways will reduce “short-cutting” between popular areas by guiding human traffic flow via appropriate, clearly marked routes, which will reduce or eliminate damage from both motorized and non-motorized activities and travel. Trails and access points currently in use that are deemed unsustainable can be identified and possibly closed, and acceptable routes earmarked for improvement during implementation.

4. According to its 2005 Urban Water Management Plan, Mammoth Community Water District (MCWD) diverts 2,760 acre-feet annually from Lake Mary as a surface water source, which is filtered and disinfected. The MCWD’s 2006 Water Quality Report states that “...raw surface water supplies are considered most vulnerable to recreation activities...”; as the Lakes Basin is widely recognized as one of Mammoth’s most popular and heavily used recreation amenities, the CAMP process, by generating a plan for managing recreation and other use, will help to reduce the number of pollutants resulting from human activity and therefore assist in the preservation of this critical water source.

5. CAMP complements and is aligned with the July 2005 MCWD Groundwater Management Plan, which “...ensure[s] that groundwater resources are managed in a manner that ensures sufficient, high quality groundwater resources for the community of Mammoth Lakes while minimizing potential environmental impacts.” Groundwater is pumped from the Mammoth Basin watershed via eight production wells. As with the Lakes Basin, informed trails and public access planning for the Mammoth Basin can help reduce human impact on sensitive areas as well as lessen pollutants that may leach into the soil, thereby protecting groundwater sources.

6. Consultants will work together and with jurisdictional stakeholders to ensure connectivity between paved, multi-use pathways in town and natural-surface trails and recreation areas on public lands, thereby lessening the need for motorized transportation between portals. This will reduce greenhouse gas emissions from vehicles, and therefore reduce air (and, consequently, water) pollution, as well as pollution achieved through “dirty snowmelt.”

7. Planning to connect the Town to USFS lands respects and anticipates the results of current agency planning, such as the Route Designation program, to ensure that no actionable plans are brought forward through CAMP that would conflict with or otherwise hinder ongoing efforts to reduce impacts and restore wetlands and watersheds.

Investment of public funds into this project will enable MLTPA to directly and effectively represent the interests of the community to the Town staff, consultants, and federal agencies that make up the planning team. Mammoth Lakes is founded upon recreation on public lands, and bringing forward the opinions of those who regularly use these amenities will provide for a system that reflects community will—and therefore helps to ensure that this new system will be used as planned once adopted. MLTPA’s role as an intermediary between the public and CAMP partners will allow the nonprofit to educate its constituency about why and how an updated trails plan provides for the protection and restoration of the lands to which they are so intimately and passionately connected, from the viewpoint of a neutral, community-based third party with no financial or jurisdictional stake in the land. Such neutrality has enabled MLTPA to reach many segments of Mammoth’s diverse population, and to gain their trust; as a result, the organization has acquired credibility on trails and public access issues in Mammoth Lakes. The successful

completion of CAMP can create a baseline for ongoing stewardship of lands under management by jurisdictional partners by allowing MLTPA to involve the public early on in the process.

B. SNC Program Goals

Goal 1: Committing to CAMP means evaluating the outdoor-recreation experience as a whole—not simply how one gets from Point A to Point B, or which amenities are available at specific access points, but how a visitor enjoys a day outdoors from the moment she steps out of her home or hotel to the moment she returns. CAMP will improve the visitor experience, and thereby increase draw to the area, by making certain that access to public lands from anywhere in town is convenient, pleasurable, and economically and environmentally responsible. Residential developers will be able to market their projects as true “trails adjacent” properties, hotel and other lodging developers may incorporate new amenities to serve the improved recreation experience, and the Town can promote the “walkability” and healthful “livability” of a community linked by trails and centered on recreation—all of which drive tourism, and therefore can enrich economic opportunity for the entire community. Further, the Town of Mammoth Lakes and Mammoth Mountain Ski Area are currently in the latter stages of a joint re-branding process that may seek to present both entities as simply “Mammoth.” CAMP’s efforts to identify opportunities for connectivity and link the town to the ski area and public lands reflects this shared strategy, and the project’s final product may help to actuate these new marketing opportunities, resulting in new and repeat tourism as Mammoth becomes a destination truly competitive with first-class Western resorts. Additionally, new trail connections will allow both the Town and the resort to move quickly from one recreation focus to another as the seasons inevitably dictate, shortening the slow “shoulder seasons” by having alternatives at the ready. The predictable economic hardships of shallow winter snowpacks, for example, can be turned into opportunities for varied recreation activities during spring, summer, and fall.

Goal 2: From its early days as a gold-mining town to its current status as an outdoor-recreation destination, Mammoth Lakes boasts a rich culture and history. Improving the ways people travel and play in town and on surrounding public lands reminds this community of its cultural roots. Since Dave McCoy got permission to run a rope tow in 1941, Mammoth has represented outdoor adventure, but its physical resources will cease to flourish without articulated plans to steward and protect them. CAMP seeks to ensure that whether one wants to ski a breathtaking peak, picnic in an alpine meadow, fill the boat with Alpers trout, or even visit the remains of a mining camp, she will be able to get there without disturbing or compromising the physical landscape that she came to experience.

Goal 5: The concept of “feet first” mobility permeates the recently adopted 2007 Town of Mammoth Lakes General Plan Update. CAMP helps to implement this by making connections between currently disjointed in-town pathways, which will enable employees to get to work, children to get to school, and tourists to get from one district to another without having to drive. Fewer cars on the road means less air pollution year-round, less greenhouse gas emissions, and, in the winter, less snow pollution, which in turn results in improved water quality.

Goal 7: As a project that grew out of a grassroots, recreation-based effort to ensure public access to public lands, MLTPA CAMP is at heart a community-driven attempt to broaden the scale of that first success, such that residents and visitors have a wealth of options by which they may easily reach and enjoy public lands year-round from within the Urban Growth Boundary. Approximately 2.8 million people come to Mammoth each year seeking adventures in camping, hiking, rock climbing, fishing, horseback riding, skiing, snowmobiling, snowshoeing, and more than 30 other activities, a figure predicted to increase dramatically as noted in Section A: Land and Water Benefits. The planning products produced by MLTPA CAMP will help to ensure that each tourist is offered enjoyable and efficient recreation opportunities through portals and via trails that are easy to navigate, provide the most direct, yet least impactful, route, and are systematic and cohesive in nature. Managed, well-planned access promotes a door-to-door experience that enhances one's enjoyment of the Mammoth environment and the public lands that completely surround the town.