

# ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT

## NOTICE OF PREPARATION

<b>Date:</b>	December 17, 2010
<b>To:</b>	State Clearinghouse Responsible Agencies Trustee Agencies Interested Parties
<b>Subject:</b>	Notice of Preparation of a Draft Environmental Impact Report for the proposed Martis Valley Regional Trail
<b>NOP Comment Period:</b>	Written comments are due no later than January 17, 2011 by 5:00 p.m.
<b>Project Location:</b>	The proposed trail is located in the Martis Valley in eastern Placer County. The trail is proposed to begin at the Nevada/Placer County line near the intersection of Shaffer Mill Road and State Route 267, then meander on the west side of the state highway for approximately 1.75 miles, turning south at the Wildlife Viewing Area then crossing Martis Creek and climbing out of the valley to Northstar Village and continuing eastward through the Northstar at Tahoe resort to the ridgeline defining the Lake Tahoe Basin, terminating near Sawmill Flat at a paved Forest Service road atop the ridge near a road intersection known locally as the "Four Corners."
<b>Lead Agency and Contact Person:</b>	Northstar Community Services District Mike Staudenmayer, General Manager 908 Northstar Drive Northstar, CA 96161 (530) 562-0747

## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

The Northstar Community Services District (CSD) has determined that the proposed Martis Valley Regional Trail project could significantly affect the environment. In accordance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), this document provides notice to the public and other agencies that may have jurisdiction over some portion of the project that a Draft EIR will be prepared to evaluate the environmental impacts of the proposed project. As discussed in Section 3.0, the Draft EIR will be focused on the topics of Biological Resources, Cultural Resources, and Hydrology and Water Quality. A detailed Initial Study is provided with this Notice of Preparation.

## **2.0 PROJECT DESCRIPTION**

The Martis Valley Regional Trail project proposes to construct a multiple-use paved trail extending ±9.5 miles from the southern limits of the Town of Truckee at the Nevada/Placer County line eastward to the ridgeline defining the Lake Tahoe Basin, terminating near Sawmill Flat at a paved Forest Service road atop the ridge near a road intersection known locally as “Four Corners.” The trail would provide a regional connection between existing trails in the Town of Truckee and trails in the Lake Tahoe Basin. The trail would be constructed in five segments.

The width of the trail would generally be ten feet, with two-foot unpaved shoulders on either side. The trail would accommodate pedestrians, bicyclists, and other non-motorized transportation, and would be constructed to meet the standards of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The trail grade would provide for maximum accessibility in accordance with ADA requirements.

### **2.1 Project Location**

The proposed trail alignment extends from the southeastern boundary of the Town of Truckee to the ridge separating Martis Valley from the Lake Tahoe Basin. The proposed trail is located south of State Route 267 and crosses through the Northstar at Tahoe community. The project area is shown on Figures 1 and 2 of the attached Initial Study.

### **2.2 Project Objectives**

The project applicant has identified the following objectives for the proposed trail:

- Provide a convenient, safe and accessible non-motorized connection between the Town of Truckee and the North Shore of Lake Tahoe.
- Expand the community, recreational, and transportation opportunities available in Martis Valley.
- Expand and complement existing and planned regional trails; facilitate connections to adjacent residential areas as well as existing and planned trail systems and parking and transit centers throughout the area.
- Provide safe passage for all users, avoiding interface with automobiles to the greatest extent possible.

- Provide a trail that is accessible to the widest variety of potential users during all seasons of the year.
- Ensure respect and protection for scenic, natural, and cultural resources in the area during trail construction and use.
- Highlight the natural, cultural and social context of the region through interpretive opportunities.
- Provide an alternative to automobile transportation, creating a continuous route between regional commercial centers.

### **2.3 Project Setting**

The proposed trail alignment is located on the eastern side of the Sierra Nevada Mountains, north of Lake Tahoe and southeast of the Town of Truckee. The topography is gently rolling to generally flat within Martis Valley, and steep outside of the valley through Northstar and towards the Tahoe Basin. Adjacent land uses include the Northstar Resort (including Northstar-at-Tahoe golf course, Northstar Village, residential areas of Northstar, and the Northstar-at-Tahoe ski area), Lahontan Golf Club, Truckee-Tahoe Airport, Martis Creek Lake, and undeveloped areas of Tahoe National Forest.

The proposed trail alignment crosses through four distinct habitat types in an area that supports several drainages, including Martis Creek, and known cultural resource sites. The climate in the area is characterized by mild, dry summers and cold, wet winters. Annual temperatures range from -28 degrees F to 101 degrees F.

### **2.4 Project Components**

The project proposes to construct ±9.5 miles of trail in the following segments, which are shown on Figure 3 of the attached Initial Study:

**Segment 1:** Nevada/Placer County line, just North of Schaffer Mill Road, to the Martis Creek Wildlife Viewing Area (±1.8 miles, 9,244 linear feet). This segment would establish the trailhead at the County line and would connect the trail to the Town of Truckee trail system. This segment would cross Schaffer Mill Road with a pedestrian signal system integrated into the existing intersection signal controls.

**Segment 2A:** Martis Creek Wildlife Viewing Area southwest to junction with Segment 2B (±1.6 miles, 8,614 linear feet). This segment would cross Martis Valley on existing dirt roads and trails. Known resources in this segment consist of cultural sites, wetlands, floodplain associated with Martis Creek, and potentially special status species.

**Segment 2B:** Martis Creek Lake Recreation Area / Northstar at Tahoe Resort property boundary south to Northstar Village (±1.9 miles, 10,486 linear feet). This segment would ascend through a conifer forest to its termination near the existing bus loop at Northstar Village.

**Segment 3E:** Northstar Village east to junction with Segment 4 (±0.8 miles, 4,398 linear feet). This segment would extend easterly from the Village at Northstar to an elevation

of approximately 6,500 feet on a forested ridgeline where it would junction with Segment 4.

**Segment 4:** Terminus of Segment 3E to Four Corners ( $\pm$ 3.1 miles, 16,451 linear feet). This segment would connect the trail to regional trails in the Lake Tahoe Basin. Segment 4 travels through heavily forested slopes previously disturbed by logging activities.

The trail would include interpretative signage to educate trail users regarding the historic, cultural, and natural context of the project region. Construction of the trail would include grading and soil excavation, vegetation removal, building retaining walls, bridges, and other structures, and paving the trail surface. Both hand and mechanical construction techniques would be used to accomplish trail construction. All cut vegetation would be chipped and broadcast, or lopped and scattered, within the project area. Equipment used in site preparation, trail construction, revegetation, and boardwalk installation will include SWECO trail dozers (small bulldozer), rubber-tired backhoes, motorized wheelbarrows, hand-operated compactors, hand-held power augers, small front-end loader, small tracker, hand-held power tools and hand tools (e.g., Pulaskis, Mcleods, shovels, hammers, saws). Creek crossings would occur on most trail segments. Best Management Practices and a storm water pollution prevention plan (SWPPP) would be implemented to minimize potential impacts from soil transportation, erosion, and siltation during trail construction. The Northstar CSD would be responsible for long-term maintenance of the trail. Maintenance activities including sweeping, crack sealing, surface restoration, vegetation control, and removal of slough would be performed by Northstar CSD staff or volunteers, and maintenance would occur annually or as needed.

### **3.0 PROBABLE ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS AND SCOPE OF THE EIR**

A detailed Initial Study has been prepared to identify the potentially significant impacts of the Martis Valley Regional Trail project. The Initial Study is provided with this Notice of Preparation. The Initial Study finds that some impacts are potentially significant and will be addressed in an EIR. The Initial Study also finds that impacts in most resource areas will remain less than significant, and those issues will not be addressed further in the EIR. The Initial Study identifies mitigation measures necessary to ensure that impacts in some resource areas remain less than significant.

The following paragraphs discuss the results of preliminary impact identification and anticipated analyses that will be included in the EIR. The EIR will include project-level review of Segments 1, 2A, and 2B, and program-level review of Segments 3E and 4. The EIR will be prepared in accordance with the CEQA Statutes and CEQA Guidelines. The EIR will identify feasible mitigation measures to reduce or avoid impacts, will consider project alternatives, and will evaluate the project's potential to contribute to cumulative impacts in the region.

#### **Potential Impacts to be Evaluated in the EIR**

*Biological Resources.* The proposed trail alignment crosses through four distinct habitat types, including coniferous forest, sagebrush scrub, wet meadow, and riparian. Construction of the proposed trail could result in significant impacts to special-status species and sensitive habitats (including wetlands). The EIR will evaluate the potential impacts of the trail on natural habitats and wildlife and vegetation species known to exist in the area.

*Cultural Resources.* The proposed trail alignment crosses through the Martis Valley, which is known to support historic and archeological resources. The area is located within territory commonly attributed to the Washoe people. The area was also heavily affected by historic activities, including emigrant travel into California and logging. Field assessments in the project area have identified several historic period isolates and prehistoric sites. Construction of the proposed trail could result in significant impacts to cultural resources in the Martis Valley. These potential impacts will be addressed in the EIR.

*Hydrology and Water Quality.* The proposed trail alignment would cross several drainages, including bridge or boardwalk crossings of Martis Creek and a tributary to Martis Creek within the Martis Creek Lake Recreation Area, and would require grading and other construction work adjacent to and within delineated wetland areas. Due to the sensitivity of work conducted within these areas, the potential for significant impacts to water quality will be addressed in the EIR.

### **Topics Focused Out of the EIR**

Based on the analysis in the Initial Study, which is attached to this Notice of Preparation, the EIR will not address the following topics:

*Aesthetics.* Portions of the trail would be visible from surrounding properties and from State Route 267. Construction of the trail could affect scenic vistas and scenic resources in the area. The Initial Study identifies mitigation measures to ensure that impacts to aesthetics in the area remain less than significant.

*Agriculture and Forest Resources.* The project site and adjacent properties do not currently support any agricultural activities. The trail alignment passes through some properties that are designated for forestry and timber production uses. Recreational uses are permitted in these areas subject to approval of a Minor Use Permit by Placer County. The project would not result in any impacts to agriculture and forestry resources.

*Air Quality.* Construction of the trail would generate air pollutant emissions. Those emissions are expected to remain below the thresholds of significance established by the Placer County Air Pollution Control District. The Initial Study identifies mitigation measures to ensure that impacts to air quality remain less than significant.

*Geology and Soils.* Although the project site is not located within any designated earthquake zones, the area could be subject to seismic activity. However, use of the trail is not expected to expose individuals to substantial seismic-related risks. Soil erosion during construction would be minimized by the use of Best Management Practices required under grading permits issued for each construction phase and under the requirements of the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System. The project is not expected to result in any significant impacts related to geology and soils.

*Greenhouse Gas Emissions.* Emissions of greenhouse gases associated with construction of the proposed trail are expected to remain below thresholds recently established by the Bay Area Air Quality Management District, and suggested for use by the Placer County Air Pollution Control District, and thus would remain less than significant.

*Hazards and Hazardous Materials.* The project site is geographically removed from natural hazards, and no known releases of hazardous materials have occurred within the proposed trail alignment. The trail alignment is in the vicinity of the Truckee Tahoe Airport, but the proposed trail use is consistent with the land use compatibility zones for that airport. The Initial Study identifies mitigation measures to ensure that the use, storage, and transport of hazardous materials during trail construction do not result in significant impacts. The Initial Study also identifies a mitigation measure to ensure that construction activities do not result in increased fire risks in the region.

*Land Use and Planning.* The proposed trail would not divide an established community. The proposed trail would be consistent with applicable land use plans and policies for the area. No habitat conservation or natural community conservation plans have been adopted for the project area.

*Mineral Resources.* The project site and adjacent properties are not known to support any mineral removal activities. The project would not result in any impacts to mineral resources.

*Noise.* Trail construction would result in temporary increases in noise levels but would not change the permanent ambient noise conditions in the area. The Initial Study identifies mitigation measures to ensure that construction noises do not result in significant impacts.

*Population and Housing.* The proposed trail is not expected to generate population growth in the region. The project would not generate the need for new housing. The project would not demolish existing housing or displace existing residents.

*Public Services.* The proposed trail is not expected to generate population growth in the region. The project would not generate the need for new or expanded public services.

*Recreation.* The proposed trail is not expected to generate population growth in the region. The project would not generate the need for new or expanded recreation facilities. The physical impacts of the proposed trail, which is a recreation facility, are evaluated throughout the Initial Study. The potentially significant impacts of the project will be addressed in the EIR.

*Transportation/Traffic.* The proposed trail is not expected to generate substantial new vehicle trips in the project area, alter the mix of vehicle traffic on existing roadways, or conflict with transportation plans in the region.

*Utilities and Service Systems.* The proposed trail is not expected to generate population growth in the region. The project would not generate the need for new or expanded utilities and services.

#### **4.0 PROJECT APPROVALS**

Several permits would be required prior to construction of the proposed project. The responsible agencies and types of permits are discussed below.

*Trail Authorization.* The Northstar CSD Board of Directors must authorize construction and maintenance of the trail.

**Corps MOU:** The proposed Martis Valley Regional Trail would cross lands owned and managed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps). For Northstar CSD to construct and operate a trail through Corps' lands, the CSD and Corps would need to establish an MOU identifying the responsibilities of each party regarding access and trail maintenance.

**Clean Water Act Section 404:** The Corps regulates the placement of fill or dredged material that affects waters of the United States, which include streams and wetlands. The Corps regulates these activities under authority granted through Section 404 of the Clean Water Act. The project site includes wetland resources under the jurisdiction of the Corps that may be impacted by trail crossings. Any discharge of dredged or fill materials to wetlands would require permitting pursuant to Section 401 of the federal Clean Water Act.

**Water Quality Certification:** Because approval and implementation of the proposed project has the potential to affect wetlands or other waters of the U.S., the Lahontan RWQCB would need to provide water quality certification of the project in compliance with Section 401 of the Clean Water Act. In providing water quality certification, the RWQCB would review the Corps' permit conditions of approval and may require the project to implement additional water quality protection measures.

**Federal Endangered Species Act Section 7 Consultation:** When a project may affect federally-listed endangered species and requires Corps' approval, the Corps will consult with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to ensure that appropriate mitigation measures are incorporated in the project to avoid impacts to federally-listed endangered species.

**National Historic Preservation Act Section 106 Consultation:** When a project requires Corps' approval, the Corps must ensure that the project will not substantially affect historic or archeological resources. The Corps will consult with the State Historic Preservation Officer to ensure that appropriate mitigation measures are incorporated in the project to avoid such impacts.

**Streambed Alteration Agreement:** The California Department of Fish and Game must approve activities that may alter an area within a streambed or stream zone pursuant to Section 1600 et seq of the California Fish and Game Code.

**Minor Use Permit:** The trail crosses land within unincorporated Placer County, subject to the Martis Valley Community Plan. Based on the land use and zoning designations of this land, the Martis Valley Community Plan requires that Placer County issue a Minor Use Permit to allow establishment of recreational land uses in this area.