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Pine Nut Mountains Proposed Plan Amendment and Environmental Assessment

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Bureau of Land Management

Carson City Field Office
5665 Morgan Mill Road
Carson City, NV 89701
702-885-6100

In Reply Refer to:
1619 (NV-030)

Dear Reader:

Enclosed is a proposed amendment to the Walker Resource Management Plan. The amendment addresses the management of motorized vehicles in the Pine Nut Mountains of Carson City, Lyon, and Douglas Counties, Nevada. We would appreciate your thoughts on the proposed amendment and draft finding of no significant impact.

A final decision on the amendment will be based on your comments and the analysis in the environmental assessment. We are providing a 45-day period for you to prepare your comments. Please send them to this office by April 30, 1998. The address is:

Bureau of Land Management
Attn: Arthur Callan
Carson City Field Office
5665 Morgan Mill Road
Carson City, NV 89701

You are also invited to stop by our open house meeting on the amendment. It will be held on Tuesday, April 7 at the BLM Carson City Field Office. You are invited to visit with BLM staff anytime during the open house hours of 4 to 6 PM., and give us your comments in writing on a comment sheet provided at the meeting. You are also welcome to visit our office in person on or before April 30, 1998. Calling ahead is recommended. The phone number is 702-885-6100.

Sincerely,

John O. Singlaub
District Manager

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PINE NUT MOUNTAINS PROPOSED PLAN AMENDMENT AND ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

INTRODUCTION

PURPOSE AND NEED

This proposed amendment to the Walker Resource Management Plan (RMP) involves public lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management in the Pine Nut Mountains. The purpose of the amendment is to improve management of motorized vehicle recreation in this range. The amendment is intended to identify areas that will be designated open, limited or closed to motorized vehicles, and to establish desired conditions for motorized and nonmotorized recreational uses.

The amendment is needed to protect the long term quality of the human environment, including public land ecosystems and the public's health, safety, use, and enjoyment of public lands. This includes resolving conflicts associated with the direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts of motorized vehicle use in the Pine Nut Mountains. Vehicle use has grown rapidly over the last decade. During this time, private lands adjacent to the Pine Nut Mountains have experienced a rapid growth in residential development.

BLM's private land neighbors in these areas have expressed concerns about the noise, dust, visual impacts, and safety issues generated by the use of motorized vehicles. Other issues that need to be addressed include conflicts between competitive and casual use recreation, the effects of competitive motorized events on management of wildlife habitat, and protection of natural resources.

LOCATION

The planning area includes approximately 362,000 acres in the Pine Nut Mountains of Carson City, Douglas and Lyon Counties, Nevada (Figure 1).

CONFORMANCE WITH PUBLIC LAND USE PLANS

The Walker RMP identifies the majority of the area as open to motorized vehicles, including areas adjacent to residential developments. Since the proposed action includes measures to limit motorized vehicles adjacent to residential areas it is not in conformance with the plan and an amendment is necessary.

The planning area overlaps a portion of the Carson City Urban Interface Plan Amendment Area in the Pinyon Hills region. The Urban Interface Amendment protects the long term quality of the human environment in Carson City by preventing unplanned case-by-case disposal of public lands and degradation from mining and other development activities.

The Carson City Fire Management Plan Amendment addressed fire management throughout the Carson City District, including the Pine Nut Mountains. It designated most of the western and southern Pine Nuts for Fire Management Category B -- where wildfire is not wanted, but if fires escape, options are available to manage fires to achieve resource goals and prevent severe fires through hazardous fuel reduction. Most of the eastern Pine Nuts are

Figure 1

Plan Amendment Area

designated for Fire Management Category C -- where fire has a significant role in maintaining the natural environment, but unplanned wildfire would be limited to no more than 2,000 acres.

RELATIONSHIP TO STATUTES, REGULATIONS OR OTHER PLANS

Public lands are managed under the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976. That act emphasizes that the public lands will be managed in a manner that will protect the quality of scenic, ecological, environmental, and archaeological values; preserve and protect certain public lands in their natural condition; provide feed and habitat for wildlife and livestock and will provide for outdoor recreation. The Act also provides for harmonious and coordinated management of the various resources without permanent impairment of the quality of the environment.

This plan amendment environmental assessment is tiered to the Walker RMP Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).

The plan amendment has been prepared in compliance with BLM Manual 1620, which provides guidance on planning for recreation management. It includes a process to identify recreation management areas and establish management direction for those areas, including recreation opportunity management classes and motorized vehicle management designations.

PROPOSED AMENDMENT AND ALTERNATIVES

INTRODUCTION

This section presents the proposed amendment, and a continuation of present management alternative for the management of motorized recreation on public land in the Pine Nut Mountains. Also included is an alternative that emphasizes nonmotorized recreation opportunities. Table one summarizes land management categories by acreage for each alternative.

PROPOSED AMENDMENT

The objectives of the amendment are to: 1) reduce conflicts associated with motorized vehicle recreation; 2) provide outstanding opportunities for motorized and nonmotorized recreation in a unstructured, casual use setting; and 3) protect natural resources and the safety of public land users. The proposed amendment consists of the following management prescriptions:

Motorized Vehicle Management

- Designate the Pine Nut Mountains as a Special Recreation Management Area with emphasis on *Roaded Natural*, *Semi-primitive Motorized* and *Semi-primitive Nonmotorized* recreation opportunities. As part of the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum, these three classes would support relatively unrestricted, unstructured, casual use recreational activities. In terms of motorized use, the Pine Nut Mountains would provide outstanding opportunities to ride, but not necessarily race.
- Increase the current *Limited* motorized vehicle designation (Figure 2) from 45,000 acres to 350,000 acres (Figure 3). Within this *Limited* area:
 - Motor vehicle use would be limited to existing roads and trails in order to stop the proliferation of new roads and trails, and to protect natural and cultural resources.
 - Cross country vehicle use would be prohibited except: 1) where necessary to protect life and property or; 2) within 200 feet of an existing road, way or trail to park, camp, gather firewood, collect pine nuts, Christmas trees, etc. as long as **no** unnecessary and undue degradation is occurring.
- Designate a system of primary roads and a network of secondary roads and trails (Figure 3) for special events and permitted activities.
 - Motorized vehicle events involving more than 50 vehicles or competitive racing could be permitted only on the designated primary road system.
 - Non-competitive motorized vehicle events or activities with 15 to 50 vehicles could be permitted only on the designated network and primary road system. Use of the network system would be limited to May 1 thru October 31.
 - Commercial guide activities with less than 15 vehicles could be permitted on existing roads and trails.
- On public lands west of the powerline, near Johnson Lane and Pinyon Hills, designate 7,400 acres restricting motor vehicle use to designated routes as shown in Figure 4.

Figure 2
Current Management Designations

Table 1

Management Prescription Acreage

Silver Saddle Ranch (Indian Closure)

Wilderness Study Area (closed)

Limited Area

Open Area

0 5 miles

Figure 2
Current Management Designations

Figure 3
Proposed Management Designations

Figure 4
Designated Routes Within
Limited Area

Roads/Trails

Amendment Boundary

LIMITED AREAS:

designated routes

existing routes

OHV play area

- Off Highway Vehicle (OHV) route designations for the Silver Saddle Ranch (702 acres), adjacent public lands and other acquisitions would be addressed in a future project plan. Future route designations would be consistent with this amendment.
- Designate an OHV play area east of the powerline near Johnson Lane (Figure 4). The play area would be open to concentrated OHV activities with restrictions on use to protect areas of high erosion potential. The area would be subject to additional cultural and environmental review.
- The Burbank Canyon Scenic Area/Wilderness Study Area (WSA) (13,395 acres) would remain closed to motorized use as determined in the existing Walker RMP, regardless of wilderness status.
- Road and trail alignments that are experiencing resource damage may be rerouted or, in certain cases, closed to protect natural and cultural resources. This effort would focus on riparian areas and steep, erosive slopes.
- A monitoring and evaluation program would be established to determine the effectiveness of the management prescriptions. This would include the collection and analysis of data to determine the effects and results of implementing the management prescriptions. This information would be used to adjust management prescriptions and levels of use. Adjustments based on scientific monitoring and analysis conclusions would be consistent with this plan amendment.

ALTERNATIVE A

Alternative A emphasizes non-motorized recreational opportunities and natural resource protection for the Pine Nut Mountains. This alternative would include the following management prescriptions:

- Establish a *Limited* motorized vehicle designation for the entire Pine Nut Mountain planning unit. Motorized vehicle use would be limited to designated routes as depicted in Figure 5.
- Exclude competitive and other permitted OHV activities which exceed 15 vehicles from the Pine Nut Mountain Range.
- Non-competitive events with less than 15 vehicles would be permitted only on the designated network and primary road systems.
- OHV route designations for the Silver Saddle Ranch (702 acres), adjacent public lands and other acquisitions would be addressed in a future project plan. Future route designations would be consistent with this amendment.
- The Burbank Canyon Scenic Area/WSA (13,395 acres) would remain closed to motorized use as determined in the existing Walker RMP, regardless of wilderness status.
- Road and trail alignments that are experiencing resource damage may be rerouted or, in certain cases, closed to protect natural and cultural resources. This effort would focus on riparian areas and steep, erosive slopes.

Figure 5
Designated Routes
(Alternative A)

- **Silver Saddle Ranch (Interim Closure)**
- **Road/Trail Network**
- **Other Designated Roads/Trails**
- **Wilderness Study Area (closed)**
- **Limited to Designated Roads**

5 0 5 Miles

CONTINUATION OF CURRENT MANAGEMENT ALTERNATIVE

The Continuation of Current Management alternative would:

- Maintain the current *Open* (290,000 acres) and *Limited* (45,000 acres) motorized vehicle designations as depicted in Figure 2. The *Open* designation would allow unlimited cross-country motor vehicle use to continue. The *Open* designation would continue to allow motorized vehicles unlimited use of public lands in the Johnson Lane and Pinyon Hills areas
- Continue to permit competitive events and commercial activities on a case-by-case basis with emphasis on pre-approved routes and areas.
- The Burbank Canyon Scenic Area/WSA (13,395 acres) would remain closed to motorized use as determined in the existing Walker RMP, regardless of wilderness status.

AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

This section describes the environment for potentially affected portions of the Carson City District. Since this document is tiered to the Walker RMP/EIS, the affected environment sections of that EIS will not be repeated here in their entirety. Rather, this section emphasizes motorized vehicle recreation and includes information specific to recreation and summary descriptions of relevant portions of the affected environment sections of the EIS. For comprehensive descriptions please refer to the EIS.

Soils

The soils of the Pine Nut Mountains vary widely in depth, drainage class, texture, percent coarse fragments, erosion susceptibility, and many other factors, not only physical and chemical, but also biological. Detailed soil descriptions concerning specific locations within the area can be found in three published soil surveys (Douglas County Soil Survey, Lyon County Soil Survey, and the Carson City Area Soil Survey). These surveys not only contain specific information on soil series and mapping units, but also contain general soil maps, and detailed tables addressing: temperature and precipitation, freeze dates and growing season information, recreational and building site development ratings, and engineering properties.

To date, no all-inclusive watershed assessment or management plan has been developed for the Pine Nut Mountains. However, it is known that existing roads and trails have caused some channeling of runoff, and the resultant rills and gullies are obvious in numerous locations both on public and private land. This problem can be especially serious adjacent to riparian areas, if roads and trails are not located properly.

Map unit descriptions within the mentioned published soil surveys include site specific erosion susceptibility and runoff data, and the engineering tables contain rating criteria for the location of paths and trails, as well as roads.

Vegetation

The Pine Nut Mountains include three general habitat zones - Alpine, Pinyon-Juniper woodlands, and Desert Shrub. The Alpine zone occurs above 7,600 feet in elevation. It is characterized by steep to rolling terrain with numerous rock outcrops and talus slopes. The climate is relatively cool and moist (15 to 20 inches annual rainfall) with a short growing season. Snowpack can be significant and persist through mid summer on north trending slopes. The predominant plant community is the mountain shrub type which includes low sagebrush (*Artemisia arbuscula*), black sagebrush (*Artemisia nova*), bitterbrush (*Purshia tridentata*), snowberry (*Symphoricarpos longiflorus*), and oceanspray (*Holodiscus bicolor*). This habitat zone supports small stands of aspen (*Populus tremuloides*), chokecherry (*Prunus virginiana*), and willow (*Salix spp.*) on moist sites and mountain mahogany (*Cercocarpus ledifolius*) along ridge tops and well drained hillsides.

Under the current situation, vehicular travel in the Alpine zone has been primarily limited to existing roads due to the topography and the rocky nature of the soil surface. This zone is fragile, so any disturbance (soil and/or plant loss) will take an inordinate amount of time to recover. Areas that have been impacted occur in the vicinities of Bald Mountain, Mt. Siegel, Mineral Peak, Galena Peak and Mt. Como. To date, disturbance has been minimal but is of concern.

The Pinyon-Juniper woodland habitat zone occurs at mid-elevations (6,000 to 7,600 feet). Climate

is cool with an average annual precipitation range of 12 to 15 inches. Snowpack is light and generally persists from December through March. This habitat zone is characterized by a dense, closed canopy stand of pinyon pine (*Pinus monophylla*) and Utah-juniper (*Juniperus osteosperma*) dotted with small fire-caused clearings of various ages. The terrain is generally steep hillsides and canyons with occasional cliffs and rock outcrops. Aggressive fire control practices have reduced the number and size of wildfire in this area and encouraged a monotypic woodland with little understory vegetation. In areas where the tree canopy does not dominate, understory plants such as bitterbrush, sticky currant (*Ribes viscosissimum*), mountain sagebrush (*Artemisia tridentata vasayana*), mountain ephedra (*Ephedra vividis*), Nevada bluegrass (*Poa nevadensis*), cheatgrass (*Bromus tectorum*), squirreltail (*Sitanion hystrix*), and buckwheats (*Erigeron spp.*) are present. Riparian habitats such as aspen, willow and cottonwood (*Populus fremontii*) groves and grassy meadows are interspersed.

Due to the terrain and the rocky nature of these sites, overall plant disturbance under the existing situation in the Pinyon-Juniper zone has not been significant. The areas of highest impact are those with designations as Christmas tree and firewood cutting areas, with the latter by far having the greatest impacts. These sites were chosen based on accessibility and vegetation manipulation objectives. As the firewood alongside the roads becomes more scarce, the woodcutters are forced to pull off the existing roads to reach the trees. This has resulted in significant soil disturbance. In order to mitigate this impact, a requirement to spread the limbed portions of the trees onto the soil surface to provide protection was initiated. This measure has been successful in keeping

the soil in place as well as releasing key understory species, particularly bitterbrush.

The Desert Shrub habitat zone occurs at elevations below 6000 feet. Climate is moderate and relatively dry with 8 to 12 inches of annual precipitation. Topography consists of rocky hills and alluvial fans extending to valley slopes. The upper reaches of this habitat zone support sparse stands of low sagebrush, Mormon tea (*Ephedra fasciculata*), bitterbrush, big sagebrush (*Artemisia tridentata*), desert peach (*Prunus andersonii*), rabbitbrush (*Chrysothamnus spp.*), needlegrass (*Stipa spp.*), Nevada bluegrass, squirreltail, cheatgrass, buckwheat, and occasional pinyon and/or juniper trees. The valley slopes support many of the same plants that are found in the upper reaches, as well as fourwing saltbush (*Atriplex canescens*), horsebrush (*Tetradymia spp.*), galleta grass (*Hilaria jamesii*) and Indian ricegrass (*Oryzopsis hymenoides*). The riparian areas include willow and cottonwood groves and small meadows.

The Desert Shrub zone is receiving the bulk of the surface disturbance under current motor vehicle management. It is accessible from all points within the Carson Valley. Numerous roads dissect this area. Cross country motor vehicle use is common. This zone contains the most productive sites, as far as vegetative components, for livestock, wildlife, and wild horses. The removal of vegetation, for example in the Pinyon Hills and Johnson Lane areas, has been extensive.

Noxious Weeds

Known areas of noxious weed invasion have been identified in the area. One such site is in the vicinity of Fish Spring, east of Gardnerville. Russian knapweed (*Acroptilon repens*), considered a very serious weed, has become established. Due to its efficient root system, it is

difficult to eradicate. It grows in disturbed soil, forming colonies in cultivated fields, ditches, pastures, roadside, and waste places. Treatment was initiated in 1997. With continuing off-road disturbance, infestations are likely to increase.

In the vicinity of Sunrise Pass, within a small meadow, Canada thistle (*Cirsium arvense*) is present. The area affected is less than one-tenth of an acre. It is one of the most dreaded weeds known to agriculture, as it grows in all cultivated crops, fields, and waste places. This site too has been treated.

Riparian

Red Canyon Creek, Pine Nut Creek, and Eldorado Canyon Reservoir are the major aquatic habitats on public land within the Pine Nut Mountains. Illinois Canyon and Sullivan Canyon also have intermittent streams.

Vegetation located in and around water sources are composed of coyote willow (*Salix exigua*), Pacific tree-willow (*Salix lasiandra*), baltic rush (*Juncus balticus*), Nebraska sedge (*Carex nebrascensis*), silver sedge (*Carex praegracilis*), wild rose (*Rosa woodsii*), tufted hairgrass (*Deschampsia cespitosa*), creeping wildrye (*Elymus triticoides*), spikerush (*Eleocharis palustris*), Kentucky bluegrass (*Poa pratensis*), and numerous sedges (*Carex spp.*). Watercress (*Nasturtium officinale*) is also present in shady areas where pooling and/or overland flow occurs.

Red Canyon Creek drains east from the southeastern crest of the Pine Nut Range near Bald Mountain. The watershed is steep and rocky and fed by numerous riparian springheads in the Alpine and Pinyon-Juniper woodland habitat zones. The lower four miles of the creek supports a Brook trout (*Salvelinus*

fontinalis) fishery and is within a bald eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) wintering area.

Pine Nut Creek originates at the confluence of Blossom, Mill and Thompson Canyons on the west slope of Galena Summit and Bald Mountain. Most of the watershed is on private land. The creek does not have a perennial flow adequate to support a fishery over its nearly six miles length. It has been reported that in the upper reaches of the creek a small population of Brook trout exist. Approximately one mile of the creek occurs on public land.

Eldorado Canyon Reservoir is located at the north end of the Pine Nut Range and is fed by runoff water from Eldorado Canyon. This 750 acre-foot impoundment was constructed in 1973 for irrigation purposes. Reservoir water levels fluctuate dramatically, thereby making it impractical as a fishery.

Other small springs and seeps are scattered throughout the area. These include Mineral Valley, Erastra, upper Eldorado, Bull Run, Lebo and Badger springs. Mineral Valley, Dutch Canyon, and Blossom Canyon areas contain substantial damp grassy meadow areas. Many of these areas are located either on private or Native American Allotted lands. Located mainly beyond the 5,000 foot elevation and in proximity to a mountain peak or canyon, the riparian areas vary considerably in their vegetation, soil type and wildlife associations. This is likely dependent on the tenure of the water source. Riparian habitats supporting year-round springs are focal points for wildlife activity.

Under the existing situation, substantial off-road travel is taking place in Eldorado Canyon and Pine Nut Creek riparian zones. Roads cross the canyon bottoms in numerous places, resulting in loss of vegetation and increased erosion. Concentrated OHV activity is occurring within a

relatively small basin located east of the powerline near Johnson Lane. This basin drains into the main drainage which parallels Johnson Lane.

Many of the meadow/spring sites scattered throughout the Pine Nuts have one or more routes that pass through their midst. This is resulting in gully erosion and the diversion/loss of water from these critical areas. With riparian habitats comprising less than one percent within the bounds of the Carson City District, the loss of any area is significant. As OHV pressure increases, the likelihood of these areas disappearing becomes more probable.

Wildlife Habitat

Mule Deer (*Odocoileus hemionus*) are found throughout the Pine Nuts, but they are concentrated in certain areas. Key winter areas include the south end, from Pine Nut Creek south and west across Highway 395 towards the Carson River; the slopes along the west side of Smith Valley, and the Carson River area. Winter areas of lesser importance include the triangle bounded by Brunswick Canyon and Hot Springs Mountain, and north and east facing slopes in the Bull Canyon/Mill Canyon/Carson Plains/ and east of Mt. Como. Winter ranges are characterized by Pinyon-Juniper (P-J) and desert shrub vegetation. Deer summer along the Pine Nut crest in the alpine and P-J zones.

Sage Grouse (*Centrocercus urophasianus*) are found near the meadow complexes along the Pine Nut crest, notably east and south of Mt. Siegel. Chukars (*Alectoris chukar*) are found primarily in the desert shrub zone at the northeast end of the mountains. The Nevada Division of Wildlife (NDOW) and BLM have constructed many small game water catchments for them in the

Bull/Mill/Churchill canyon areas.

Other wildlife species include a wide variety of raptors (hawks, eagles, and owls), neotropical migrant and other non-game species. Small fauna include coyotes (*Canis latrans*), black-tailed jackrabbits (*Lepus californicus*), cottontail rabbits (*Sylvilagus spp.*), badger (*Taxidea taxus*), an occasional black bear (*Ursus americanus*), Mountain Lion and Bobcats (*Felis concolor* and *Lynx rufus*) and several species of ground and tree squirrels. Snakes and amphibians are not numerous.

The vast majority of the wildlife species, about 80 per cent, use riparian areas at some time during the annual cycle. Thus, while riparian habitat covers less than one percent of the area, it is very important to wildlife. There are roads throughout all of the life zones and riparian habitats. These roads (including powerline corridor roads) have fragmented much of the habitat in the Pine Nuts, especially for the larger wildlife such as mule deer. The deer winter area in the Hot Springs Mountain/Brunswick Canyon area is almost unused at present because of habitat fragmentation caused by OHV's, and the proliferation of dwellings in Johnson Lane and the Jacks Valley areas, which have effectively cut off the migration corridors from the Sierras to the Pine Nuts. The roads, where they cut through or across meadows, such as around Mt. Siegel, have caused additional degradation. Use of the road network by everything from organized off-road-vehicle race competitors to families out for a drive have served, depending upon timing and location, to disrupt and harass wildlife. The negative effects are most apparent in the spring and summer, when young are being reared or hatched, brooded, and fledged. Continuation of the existing situation, wherein there is increasing use of motorized vehicles, will continue the habitat fragmentation, degradation, and wildlife harassment. The riparian habitats

are the most fragile, followed by roads in the alpine zone.

Threatened and Endangered Species

There are no federally listed threatened, or endangered fauna or flora species of record in the Pine Nuts, except for the Bald Eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*), which is found as a winter visitor only, and only along the Carson River at the extreme north end of the Pine Nuts.

BLM Sensitive species (which are those designated by the State Director in cooperation with the Nevada Department of Conservation and Natural Resources) which are affected by OHV activities include Northern Goshawk (*Accipiter gentilis*), Western Sage Grouse, and Mountain Quail (*Oreortyx pictus*), which are found mostly in the PJ or alpine zones along the crest of the Pine Nuts. Plant species include *Ivesia pityocharis*, which is found in meadows along the Pine Nut crest near Mt. Siegel, and *Ivesia webberi*, found near the Veta Grande mine road south of Gardnerville. Sage grouse and *Ivesia pityocharis* are both impacted as vehicles pass through the meadow areas near Mt. Siegel: grouse by harassment, and *Ivesia* by continued destruction of habitat. Goshawk are adversely impacted during spring months, when they are nesting. Human activity, either as vehicles or people camping in aspen groves, will cause nest abandonment.

Wild Horses and Habitat

The Pine Nut Herd Management Area (HMA) encompasses the northern end of the Pine Nut Mountains from Johnson Lane and the Sunrise Pass road north. The HMA includes all three of the habitat types in the Amendment area - Alpine, Pinyon-Juniper woodlands, and Desert Shrub. Wild horses predominately are located

in the Desert Shrub communities, but can be found throughout the HMA.

The Pine Nut HMA is managed to sustain a population of 179 wild horses. The critical time of the year for wild horses tends to be late winter through the foaling season in spring. During the foaling season the herds will locate near available forage and water. Human intrusion at these critical times can affect the health of the animals.

Land Use

Recreation. The diverse landscape and high scenic values of the Pine Nut Mountains provide outstanding back country opportunities in a natural, undeveloped setting. Popular recreational activities include hunting, sight-seeing, pine nut picking, firewood and Christmas tree cutting, rock-hounding, camping, horseback riding, mountain biking, hiking, walking for pleasure and OHV (4X4's, motorcycles, ATV's, snowmobiles) play and racing.

An estimated 30,000 recreationists visit the Pine Nut Mountains every year. The majority of these visits are concentrated along the western (Carson, Eagle Valleys) flank of the Pine Nut Mountains. Public lands located near residential communities, particularly in the Johnson Lane and Pinyon Hill areas, maintain a variety of recreational activities ranging from casual walking to OHV play.

Recreation access in the Johnson Lane area is provided by several main roads and numerous secondary roads and trails. Local motorized and nonmotorized access occurs on secondary roads and trails which intertwine throughout the residential zones. These access roads and trails accommodate both motorized and nonmotorized activities. The noise, dust and speed associated with OHV use has created conflict with homeowners and safety concerns for the

nonmotorized user.

The back country receives less intensive, casual use activities. The back country is primarily accessed by motorized vehicles. Main access into the back country is provided by Sunrise Pass, Brunswick Canyon and the Dayton to Wellington Back Country Byway (Como Road). These roads allow access to an estimated 700 miles of existing roads, jeep and single track trails in the Pine Nut Mountains.

General recreation use begins as soon as roads dry out, which is usually in April, but can be much earlier in dry years. Use is moderate until summer when activity tapers off due to hot and dusty conditions. Use picks up again in the fall as the weather cools, and peaks in December during hunting and Christmas tree cutting seasons.

In some areas roads and trails pass through meadows, springs, and other riparian zones. In the upper elevations, where slopes are typically steeper and soils less stable, access is limited due to poorly developed roads located on steep, erosive slopes.

Concentrated OHV use occurs in the vicinity of the two gravel pits at the end of Johnson Lane. Access to each pit is provided by a main road and a series of secondary roads and trails which originate from the residential area. Concentrated OHV play also occurs along the Carson River in the Pinyon Hills area. To a lesser degree, OHV play occurs at the south end of Hot Springs Mountain.

Historically, special recreation events such as dual sport rides, poker rallies and enduro style races have been held in the northwest and mid west areas of the Pine Nuts. During the period from 1985 to 1994, one major motorcycle event was held annually in the Pine Nuts. This

event attracted up to 400 participants. These events exclude the public from accessing certain areas of the Pine Nuts during race day(s), creating potential conflicts between the general user and exclusive uses. Large race events can lead to increased post event use as participants return to ride on their own.

Currently, one commercial operator conducts All Terrain Vehicle tours in the northwest portion of the Pine Nut Mountains.

Most of the public lands in the Pine Nut Mountain planning boundary are currently designated *open* to motorized use. Exceptions to the open designation include the Burbank Canyons Scenic Area/WSA, which is closed to motorized vehicles, and the crest of the Pine Nut Mountains, where vehicles are limited to existing routes.

Livestock Grazing. The Pine Nut Mountains include portions of the Buckeye, Pine Nut, Spring Gulch, Sunrise, Rawe Peak, Eldorado, Hackett Canyon, Sand Canyon, Mill Canyon, Clifton, Red-Burbank, and Churchill Canyon grazing Allotments. Interspersed among the public lands are significant amounts of private land, with the highest concentrations occurring in the Buckeye, Clifton, Eldorado, and Sunrise Allotments. A substantial amount of Native American Allotted lands are located in the Pine Nut, Spring Gulch, and Buckeye Allotments.

Both sheep and cattle grazing occur on public lands throughout the Pine Nut Mountains. The seasons of use for grazing Allotments are shown in Table 2. Use in the Eldorado and Sand Canyon Allotments is authorized on a nonrenewable basis. Use has no priority for renewal and cannot be transferred or assigned. The Washoe Tribe grazes the Native American

Table 2

Grazing Allotments Within the Pine Nut Mountain Planning Unit

Season of Use

Allotted Lands. This use generally occurs between April 1 and August 31.

Under the existing situation, the increase in motorized vehicle traffic, particularly off road or cross country travel in "*Open Areas*" of the Pine Nut Mountains, is adversely affecting livestock grazing. Habitat degradation is resulting in loss of valuable forage species and soil. This potentially can lead to less desirable and/or noxious weeds gaining a foothold. Animal stress can result in decreased animal performance.

Mining. The Pine Nut Mountain Range has not experienced significant minerals exploration activity over the past few years. Precious metals exploration activity is centered around the historically mined sites throughout the range. Salable minerals activity is nearly nonexistent, as is leasable minerals activity, with the exception of geothermal development at Hot Springs Mountain.

The United States mining laws provide for reasonable access to conduct prospecting, locating, and mining on public lands open to mineral entry. Such activity must be in accordance with 43 CFR 3809, the BLM's surface management regulations.

Cultural Resources

Aboriginal territories of the Northern Paiute and the Washoe overlap in this mountain range. The seeds (pine nuts) from the pinyon pine were an essential food source for Native Americans. Pine nuts are not produced in the same abundance year after year. Consequently, the people traveled throughout the Pine Nut or adjacent mountain ranges where nuts could be harvested. Although nuts were gathered from various ranges, the Pine Nut Mountain Range continues to be the central focus of activity and

importance to Native Americans inhabiting this region. Today the Pine Nut Mountain Range retains its importance in both Washoe and Northern Paiute cultures.

Prehistoric sites which may be found within this range include rock rings, hunting blinds, rock art, pine nut caches/processing sites and lithic scatters.

During historic times, this range was predominantly occupied by livestock (primarily sheep) operators, woodcutters, and miners. A significant historic mining townsite, Como, is located at the northern end of the range. An historic transportation network connected mining, milling, woodcutting, and ranching areas and distributed goods throughout the range and to adjacent areas. Historical sites related to ranching, mining/milling, woodcutting/processing, and transportation are likely present in the Pine Nut Mountains. One probable World War I era communication site on a mountain top has been recorded.

Visual Resources

Scenic values in the Pine Nut Mountains are high. The combination of pinyon forest, riparian vegetation, high mountain ridgelines, and rough dissected topography contribute to a overall pleasing and diverse desert mountain landscape. Areas of outstanding scenic value include the Carson River corridor, the deep riparian landscapes of Eldorado, Minnehaha, Pine Nut Creek, Red and Burbank drainages, and the main high ridge lines and peaks. The highest scenic values are recognized in the diverse and rugged mountain landscapes at the south end of the mountain range around Mt. Siegel and Bald Mountains.

The lower mountain slopes provide a dramatic visual backdrop to the communities in Eagle,

Carson, Dayton, and Smith Valleys. The public is sensitive and concerned about the visual landscape close to their community. The area considered to be the least sensitive and containing more common scenery is located in the western pinyon foothills out of direct view of the residential areas.

Negative impacts to scenic values from OHV use are occurring on the steeper slopes near the residential areas of Pinyon Hills and Johnson Lane, in lower Brunswick Canyon, and along the Carson River in Carson City. Negative impacts to scenic values have also occurred in isolated locations at the higher elevations where steep jeep trails have been created on exposed hillsides, and where riparian areas have been crossed with vehicle traffic.

Overall, the western foothills have withstood a substantial amount of OHV trail use without significant negative impacts due to the diverse topography and pinyon cover that helps to screen the activity from view.

Large competitive events and intensive use near the urban area have worn on the road and trail system. Over time some trails have changed in visual character to rougher race course appearance.

Social Economic Conditions

The region around the Pine Nut Mountains includes Carson City, Douglas and Lyon Counties. This region has been among the most rapidly growing areas of the country. Population grew from 77,000 in 1986 to 114,000 in 1996, a sustained growth rate of four percent¹. Much of this growth has occurred in the Pine Nut foothills, adjacent to public lands in the planning area. This includes the Pinyon Hills and Carson River areas of Carson City, the Dayton and Smith

Valley areas of Lyon County, and the Johnson Lane, Holbrook Junction, and Fish Springs areas of Douglas County.

The gaming/tourism/services sector contributes the most to regional income (34%). Most of this is associated with gaming in Douglas County at Lake Tahoe. Government is also a large contributor (24%) with Carson City as the State Capitol. Manufacturing (13%) is growing throughout the region. Retail trade (8%) is also important, with Carson City serving as a regional trading center. Mining and agriculture each account for about one percent of regional income, but are important industries in portions of Lyon and Douglas Counties.²

OHV recreation plays an important role in terms of recreation opportunities for the region. Data are not available to quantify its economic value, although the overall sporting goods trade sector accounts for about one tenth of one percent of the region's employment.³ In addition, competitive events, such as the Carson Valley Qualifier have brought in visitors who have contributed to the hotel and services sector. Data are not available to quantify this benefit.

Public lands in the region generally have a positive effect on adjacent private land real estate values, but areas with significant dirt bike use may be reducing market values.⁴

Access to public lands is an important part of the quality of life of the region. Preservation of open space is a significant concern in Carson City and Douglas Counties.⁵ The quality of life of homeowners near intensive OHV use areas is affected by noise and dust nuisance and degradation of open space values.

Conflicts between motorized vehicle use and other recreation are becoming more common as

population pressures increase. The following scoping comments are indicative:

"I recently took my daughter back to the mountains on horseback . . . The dirt bikers were courteous once they saw us, but it was too late. Our horses bolted at the sight of 15 to 20 helmeted riders coming down the trail, and my daughter was thrown . . . we have never gone back."⁶

"In years past we took our 4-H groups into these mountains for horseback rides, campouts, nature and geology trips. These activities are no longer possible for us. The volume of dirt bikes has literally crowded us out."⁷

Many others, who use motorized vehicles in the Pine Nuts do not feel there is a significant problem or feel conflicts can be easily addressed:

"It seems to me that the Pine Nut mountains are doing just fine in general. Closing any major parts of it will cost the BLM money, irritate the public, and won't solve anything, because there aren't any real problems at this time."⁸

"I think that the OHV users of the Pine Nut Mountains would be willing to help manage the area in a responsible manner and could be a great ally. Allow clubs and individuals to adopt trails, educate kids and new riders and find suitable areas for the local kids to have practice tracks. OHV use is a great way to keep kids out of trouble."⁹

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

This section analyzes the impacts of the proposed and alternative management prescriptions for recreation use in the Pine Nut Mountains. Based on the public scoping process the analysis is focused on impacts to soils, wildlife, recreation and social economic conditions. Only those resources affected as a result of the proposed amendments or alternatives are discussed. Critical resources (including environmental justice concerns) not discussed have been determined to either not exist in the planning area or would not be affected by the proposals.

PROPOSED AMENDMENT

Soils

Any decrease in cross-country motorized travel would bring an immediate benefit to watershed condition by limiting the amount of surface soil damage, and thereby lessening the potential for accelerated water erosion (rill, interrill, and gully). Limiting competitive OHV events to primary roads would substantially decrease the potential for damage caused to the watersheds by widening and rutting of network roads, which are not maintained, and are a source of channelized runoff into ephemeral drainage ways. This runoff would otherwise infiltrate into the soil and be available for uptake by existing vegetation. Re-aligning roads away from high value natural resources like riparian areas would decrease the potential for damage to these areas, and would allow areas that have already been damaged to heal.

Moving high impact OHV "play areas" away from housing subdivisions to the area east of the powerline near Johnson Lane could negatively impact the soil resource in that area, while allowing a portion of the old high impact

areas to heal. As OHV activity increases in the play area, erosion within the drainage basin would probably increase. This would increase the amount of sediment entering the main drainage which parallels Johnson Lane.

Vegetation

Of optimal benefit is the closure of cross country travel. This would decrease the potential for continued vegetative disturbance and degradation. Those areas currently being impacted would have the opportunity to recover, though recovery would be a slow process, particularly in the Alpine zone. Of greatest concern are hillsides which are highly susceptible to loss of vegetation and soil. Additional acreage that could be lost due to the expansion of new trails/ways would be averted.

Noxious Weeds

Decreasing the amount of lands that could be denuded of desirable vegetation results in less habitat that noxious weeds need for establishment. Due to extreme cost and difficulty in controlling and/or eradicating noxious weeds, the proposed action is the most cost effective means to address this problem.

Riparian

Realignment of roads around meadows, springs, and seeps would result in improved water quality and quantity. In addition the integrity of the sites would be enhanced. The soil and vegetative component would remain intact, resulting in increased vegetation production and water storage capacity.

Eliminating access in areas where perennial water flow occurs would allow the streamside riparian vegetation to become fully established. This would result in bank stabilization. As the

amount and diversity of riparian vegetation increases, the duration and amount of flow also increases. For those areas that currently have only intermittent flow, the potential for year-round flows becomes a realistic outcome.

Wildlife Habitat

The cumulative effects of the proposed action would reduce habitat fragmentation and the harassment of most wildlife species, including those using riparian areas, such as mule deer and sage grouse. The effects would be positive. Restricting use west of the powerline would reduce negative effects in that area.

Realigning roads through riparian areas, particularly along the Pine Nut crest/Mt. Siegel area, would allow those areas to heal, which would benefit wildlife species in the long run and reduce animal harassment.

Threatened and Endangered Species

Bald eagles would not be affected by the proposed amendment. BLM-Sensitive species, both flora and fauna, would. The *Ivesia* found in the meadows near Mt. Siegel should particularly benefit from road realignment, which would allow for sustaining more individual plants, and would improve the microclimate in which these plants grow.

Wild Horses and Habitat

The proposed action would be a benefit to wild horses. The elimination of cross country travel reduces possible harassment and stress to wild horses and reduces the potential for habitat degradation. Restricting motor vehicle use to designated routes in the Pinyon Hills area would have similar results.

Realigning roads away from riparian areas would be a benefit, particularly during the foaling season. Also the possibility of increased water flow from improved riparian areas could benefit wild horses during times of drought. Limiting competitive events to primary roads and commercial tour operations to existing roads and trails would further reduce harassment and stress to the wild horses.

Land Use

Recreation. Public lands would remain readily accessible to the public for recreation activities including hunting, sight-seeing, pine nut picking, firewood and Christmas tree cutting, rock-hounding, camping, horseback riding, mountain biking, hiking, walking for pleasure and OHV (4X4's, motorcycles, ATV's, snowmobiles) riding.

Conflicts between nonmotorized recreationists, local homeowners and OHV users would be reduced. Increased regulation and enforcement on public lands near Johnson Lane and Pinyon Hills could negatively affect some user perceptions of freedom in the area. Residents and other public land users may perceive restrictions as a positive step toward reducing conflict near the residential areas.

Concentrated OHV use could increase at the gravel pit and adjacent lands east of the powerline. Concentrated OHV use near homes would be reduced.

Existing access in the back country would remain relatively the same. Although motor vehicle use in meadows, springs and other riparian zones would be reduced, alternative routes would be provided. In many cases these routes would provide better access since they would be less susceptible to vehicle damage. Roadless areas would remain so, decreasing OHV opportunities

in these areas. Nonmotorized recreational opportunities would be maintained in roadless areas.

Residential growth along the urban interface would increase motorized and nonmotorized recreation activity in the west, northwest and southeast portions of the Pine Nut Mountain Range.

Tourism activities directly related to competitive and other large events would be negatively impacted. Future demand for large OHV races may shift east of the Pine Nut Mountains or elsewhere in the District.

Potential conflicts between large scale race events and casual use activities would be reduced. The number of special recreation events permitted each year could fluctuate depending on monitoring results. Public access on portions of the main road system would continue to be restricted during competitive race events.

Livestock Grazing. Overall, the cumulative effects of the proposed action benefits livestock grazing. The potential for harassment is substantially reduced, particularly from elimination of cross country travel. With the locations and types of recreational activities known, this allows permittees to adjust management of livestock so as not to be in conflict with organized events. Both activities, recreation and livestock grazing, benefit.

Reducing the invasion of undesirable species would help maintain an important forage base for livestock in the Pine Nut Range.

Under the existing situation, lands adjacent to the Johnson Lane area support limited livestock use. Shifting concentrated OHV use east of the powerline would have a somewhat adverse

effect on livestock grazing near Johnson Lane. An increase in concentrated OHV activity east of the powerline could conflict with the livestock operation during certain times of the year within the Buckeye Allotment. This could result in poorer animal performance, as it is likely that animals could be targeted by a certain segment of riders using the area.

•The Pinyon Hills closure would have no effect upon livestock grazing. This area is already closed to grazing.

Mining. Little or no impact to mineral exploration or development is anticipated since the United States mining laws provide for reasonable access to conduct prospecting, locating, and mining on public lands open to mineral entry. Such activity must be in accordance with 43 CFR 3809, the BLM's surface management regulations.

Cultural Resources

The prohibition of cross-country travel and the limited designations for OHV use should have a decrease of impacts to cultural resources. Cross country travel can damage cultural resource sites. Furthermore, this type of travel also provides access into areas without established roads, which increases the potential for illegal collection/vandalism of cultural resources. The limitation of competitive events to primary roads should lessen impacts by directing attention to heavy visitor use areas, rather than creating new areas of interest where potentially undisturbed cultural resources may exist. Closure of the Johnson Lane/Pinyon Hills areas may not affect cultural resources. The likelihood of undamaged sites in these areas is small.

Realignment of roads may negatively impact features of historic roads. Road realignments can benefit cultural resources by reducing erosional

processes affecting cultural resource sites as well as guiding traffic away from sites which may exist near riparian areas.

Visual Resources

The potential for new adverse impacts to visual resources would be reduced since further expansion of the existing vehicle trail system would not occur. In the majority of the area, the visual values and impacts associated with OHV use would remain at the current level. Due to the high mileage of existing roads and trails, some negative visual impacts would continue to be apparent in the western foothills and at isolated locations on ridgelines where trails are located on exposed steep hillsides.

Positive impacts would occur near the western residential areas and Carson River, where OHV use would be restricted away from sensitive areas and off steep hillsides. Localized positive impacts would occur in the most scenic higher elevations and canyons, where steep slopes, meadows and other riparian areas would be protected. The scenic values of the Burbank Canyon Scenic Area would continue to be protected from motor vehicle related damage.

The elimination of race events on the back country trails, and concentration of play activity in a designated area near Johnson Lane, would help to maintain a more undeveloped and primitive visual character of the trail system in the back country.

The majority of the proposed play area east of Johnson Lane is situated in a basin screened from view. Visual impacts will be created around the edge of the play area as new surface disturbances are created.

Social Economic Conditions

The proposed amendment would have mixed impacts to social and economic conditions. Reductions in potential future tourism related economic activity could occur from reduced competitive racing opportunities. This would affect businesses in the Carson Valley. Little or no change in resident oriented OHV economic activity is anticipated, since existing roads and trails would remain open.

Some improvement in market values for private property near current OHV plan areas could result from a decrease in noise and dust nuisances.

Further decreases in the quality of life for non-motorized recreationists would be prevented by eliminating the spread of new roads and trails and improving degraded riparian/meadow areas.

Homeowners adjacent to current OHV play areas would see an improved quality of life as noise and dust nuisance declines.

The quality of life for motorized recreationists that prefer cross country use would likely decrease.

ALTERNATIVE A

Soils

Impacts to soils would be essentially the same as the proposed action, only more beneficial.

Vegetation

Designating the entire Pine Nut Mountain planning unit as *Limited* would further enhance the benefits described under the Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action for vegetation.

Noxious Weeds

Designating the entire Pine Nut Mountain planning unit as *Limited* would further enhance the benefits described under the Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action for noxious weeds.

Riparian

Designating the entire Pine Nut Mountain planning unit as *Limited* would further enhance the benefits described under the Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action for riparian areas.

Wildlife Habitat

Increased habitat fragmentation would cease under this alternative, but animal harassment would not. Riparian areas would benefit from road realignments, improving critical wildlife habitat.

Threatened and Endangered Species

The Bald eagle would not be affected by this alternative. Species such as the sage grouse and the Mt. Siegel area *Ivesia* would be

positively impacted by improvement of riparian meadows.

Wild Horses and Habitat

Designating the entire Pine Nut Mountain planning unit as *Limited* would further enhance the benefits described under the Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action for wild horses.

Land Use

Recreation. Impacts would be similar to the proposed action except that nonmotorized recreation opportunities would be further enhanced while motorized recreation opportunities would be further limited.

Motorized vehicle access to some of the more remote areas in the back country would be reduced. Concentrated OHV use activities would be eliminated from the Pine Nut Mountains. Opportunities for nonmotorized recreation would increase.

Increased regulation would be evident in the Pine Nut Mountains, negatively impacting some user perceptions of unlimited motor vehicle use and challenge in the area. Increased costs associated with implementation and law enforcement would be realized.

Tourism activities directly related to competitive and other large events would be negatively impacted. Future demand for large OHV races may shift east of the Pine Nut Mountains or elsewhere in the district.

Small scale tour guide operations would be limited to less scenic and challenging areas.

Livestock Grazing. Designating the entire Pine Nut Mountain planning unit as *Limited* would

further enhance the benefits described under the Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action for livestock grazing.

Mining. Little or no impact to mineral exploration or development is anticipated since the United States mining laws provide for reasonable access to conduct prospecting, locating, and mining on public lands open to mineral entry. Such activity must be in accordance with 43 CFR 3809, the BLM's surface management regulations.

Cultural Resources

Limited designations for the Pine Nuts may lessen the potential for destruction of cultural resources. Exclusion of competitive motorized vehicle events may decrease the potential for destruction of cultural resource sites since these events attract a great deal of attention to the area and increased visitor use. Restricting commercial and other OHV activities to primary roads or the designated network may also lessen the potential for destruction of cultural resource sites by focusing attention on those areas which already receive visitor use, rather than creating interest in other areas where potentially undisturbed cultural resources may exist.

Visual Resources

Positive impacts to visual resources would occur near the urban areas and at isolated locations throughout the Pine Nut Mountains. Single track trails near the urban area and isolated routes in the most sensitive and scenic areas would have a potential to visually heal over time. Some trails near the urban area would remain open and visible because of nonmotorized use. The addition of signs and barriers to control use would be a negative

visual impact particularly in the more scenic back country areas.

The elimination of motorized use on a substantial portion of the existing single track trail system would help to maintain a more undeveloped visual character for nonmotorized uses near the residential areas and in the back country.

Social Economic Conditions

Impacts would be similar to the proposed action except that quality of life factors would be further improved for non-motorized recreationists and further degraded for motorized recreationists.

CONTINUE CURRENT MANAGEMENT ALTERNATIVE

Soils

Continued proliferation of new roads and trails and unlimited cross-country use by an ever increasing number of motorized vehicles would increase surface soil disturbances and accelerate watershed damage by rill, interrill, and gully erosion, loss of ecological site potential, sedimentation of drainage ways, loss of available water for existing vegetation, and increasing the probability of noxious weed infestation with the resultant increases in sheet flow and sediment yield.

Continuing to allow competitive events on a case-by-case basis would increase the potential for road widening and rutting, contributing to the above described impacts.

Vegetation

Continued cross country motor vehicle use would increase the potential for continued vegetative disturbance and degradation. Those areas currently being impacted would not have the opportunity to recover. As the scope of use expands throughout the area, the degree of damage increases. Of greatest concern are hillsides which are highly susceptible to loss of vegetation and soil.

If the current situation is left unchecked, and as the population in the adjoining areas continue to increase, more and more vegetation communities would be disturbed, some to such a degree that artificial means of revegetation would be needed to rehabilitate these areas. The potential for undesirable plant species to become established would be enhanced.

Noxious Weeds

Increasing the amount of lands that could lose desirable vegetation results in more habitat that noxious weeds are likely to invade. Due to the difficulty in controlling and/or eradicating noxious weeds, allowing the current situation to continue would degrade public, private, and Native American Allotted lands throughout the Pine Nut Mountains.

Riparian

Continued use of motor vehicles through meadows, springs, and seeps would result in declining water quality and quantity. In addition the integrity of the sites would be threatened. The soil and vegetative component would be displaced, resulting in loss of forage production and water storage capacity.

Continued motor vehicle use in areas where perennial water flow occurs would impede and in some cases prevent the streamside riparian vegetation to become fully established. This would result in bank de-stabilization. As the amount and diversity of riparian vegetation decreases, the duration and amount of flow also decreases. Those areas that currently have only intermittent flow would continue in this manner.

Wildlife Habitat

Continuing current management would result in additional habitat fragmentation and animal harassment, perhaps to the point where some individual animals or local populations may be extirpated. Many vertebrate wildlife species would be affected, especially in the spring when motor vehicle use is common. This would be most noticeable in the riparian habitats, particularly the meadows and the aspen/cottonwood stringers. Meadows would continue to deteriorate in quality and quantity,

with a resulting decreased ability to support such species as mule deer, sage grouse, and mountain quail.

Threatened and Endangered Species

Wintering bald eagles would not be affected since they are winter visitors only and the Carson River area at the north end of the Pine Nuts is comparatively stable, with regard to roads and OHV's.

Pine Nut Ivesia plants would continue to be threatened or destroyed by OHV's in the meadows near Mt. Siegel. Sage grouse would continue to suffer harassment on those same meadows. The meadows themselves would continue to slowly degrade in their ability to support the grouse.

Wild Horses and Habitat

The continuation of current management practices would adversely affect wild horses. The potential for harassment would increase as the amount of motorized vehicle uses increases. Pressure from motorized vehicles could push wild horses out of their historical grazing areas and into areas of less desirable habitat.

Continuing to allow road access to riparian areas by not realigning roads around these areas would not benefit wild horses. The continued degradation of riparian areas by vehicle traffic through these areas would not allow the improvement of water quality and quantity. Continued traffic through these areas of key habitat would continue harassment and possible stress to the wild horses.

Land Use

Recreation. Under this alternative motorized recreation opportunities would increase while nonmotorized recreation opportunities would be degraded.

Motorized vehicle access would increase in the majority of the Pine Nuts. Motorized vehicle use would expand into historically nonmotorized areas, negatively impacting nonmotorized activities. Motorized access to the limited Pine Nut Crest area would remain the same.

An increase in vehicle access roads near the urban interface could create additional conflict between home owners, nonmotorized recreationists and motorized vehicles.

Potential conflicts between large race events and casual use activities could increase. The number of permitted races could increase.

OHV users would have increased opportunities for challenging, free form types of activities. OHV user perceptions of freedom and challenge may be positively impacted. Conflicts between nonmotorized recreationists and OHV users could increase.

Livestock Grazing. The cumulative effects of continuing with the existing situation would adversely affect livestock grazing. The potential for harassment would increase as the amount of pressure in the planning unit increases. More vegetation and soil disturbance would occur over a larger area by allowing cross country travel to continue. Pressure by livestock on areas not affected by these activities would increase. The permittee's ability to adjust management would be limited.

Mining. Little or no impacts to mineral exploration or development is anticipated since there would be no changes in current vehicle management and the United States mining laws provide for reasonable access to conduct prospecting, locating, and mining on public lands open to mineral entry. Such activity must be in accordance with 43 CFR 3809, the BLM's surface management regulations.

Cultural Resources

Continuation of current management may allow further degradation of cultural resources through the addition of new trails. New trails may cause impacts to cultural resources or indirect damage by creating erosional problems. Increasing or creating access into new areas may increase the potential for illegal collection and vandalism of cultural resources.

Visual Resources

Negative impacts to visual resources would increase in the area currently designated open. The most significant new impacts would occur on the western slopes as challenge/play activity would create additional trails on slopes visible from the residential areas and main travel routes.

Over a period of several years, competitive race activities on the trail system would tend to create a more used and developed visual appearance on a portion of the trail system in the western foothills.

Social Economic Conditions

This alternative would have little effect on existing economic conditions, however the quality of life of homeowners near intensive OHV play areas would continue to decline.

CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION

Public scoping for this plan amendment was initiated with the publication of a Federal Register Notice of Intent (Vol. 60, No. 57, page 15580). News articles were published in western Nevada newspapers. With this notification, a scoping letter was sent to 170 individuals and organizations. The letter requested help in identifying issues for the impact analysis and suggestions on how motorized vehicles should be managed. The letter also requested information regarding the management of woodlands and visual resources. However, those issues are now being addressed in other planning efforts.

A total of 58 comments were received during the 45 day scoping period. These comments are on file at the Carson City District Office and are available for public review. Many of these comments were in reaction to misinformation printed in local newspapers that stated BLM was considering closing the Pine Nut Mountain to all vehicle use. These comments opposed such a plan. Other comments reflected a variety of positions. Horseback riders and other non-motorized recreationists support severe restrictions on motor vehicle use, while motorized recreationists generally supported some additional controls, particularly in urban interface areas, but wanted the majority of existing roads and trails to remain open.

Consultation with Native Americans has taken place in conformance to the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act, American Indian Religious Freedom Act and the Environmental Justice Executive Order.

PREPARERS/REVIEWERS

Qualifications of Preparers/Reviewers

Name	Responsibility	Education	Experience
David Loomis	Co Project Manager/Social Economics	M.S. Land Use Planning B.A. Economics	20 years
Arthur Callan	Co-Project Manager/Recreation	B.S. Natural Resources Mgmt.	4 years
Tom Abbett	Recreation/Visual	B.A. Forestry /Recreation	28 years
Rick Brigham	Wildlife	B.S. Wildlife Mgmt.	30 years
Robert Mead	Vegetation/Livestock/Weeds/Riparian	B.S. Range/Wildlife Ecology	18 years
Richard Jacobsen	Wild Horses	B.S. Range Management	21 years
Carla James	Mining	B.S. Geology	6 years
Randy Trujillo	Wildlife	B.S. Wildlife Mgmt.	19 years
Peggy Waski	Cultural Resources	B.A. Anthropology	13 years
Cynthia Pinto	Native American Consultation	M.A. Anthropology B.A. Anthropology	9 years
Fran Hull	Recreation	B.S. Physical Education	8 years
Jim DeLaureal	Soils	B.S. Agronomy	20 years

DRAFT FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

As outlined in the attached environmental assessment, the objectives of the Proposed Pine Nut Mountains Plan Amendment are to reduce conflicts associated with motorized vehicle recreation; provide outstanding opportunities for motorized and nonmotorized recreation in a unstructured, casual use setting; and protect natural resources.

Implementation of proposed management prescriptions to achieve these measures would result in decreased potential for future adverse environmental impacts. Specifically, limiting motorized vehicle use to existing roads and trails would decrease the potential for future surface disturbance created by new roads and trails; limiting commercial and competitive events to designated roads and trails would minimize the potential for wildlife habitat disturbance and conflicts with other recreationists; and limiting the urban interface areas to designated routes would minimize the potential for future conflicts with adjacent homeowners. Consequently, the proposed amendment would have no significant impact and an environmental impact statement is not necessary.

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