

**Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail
Highway 49 to the A-Tree
Optimal Location Review**



Deer Lake with the Sierra Buttes in the background

Tahoe National Forest
Yuba River Ranger District
June 2011

Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail Sierra Buttes Optimal Location Review

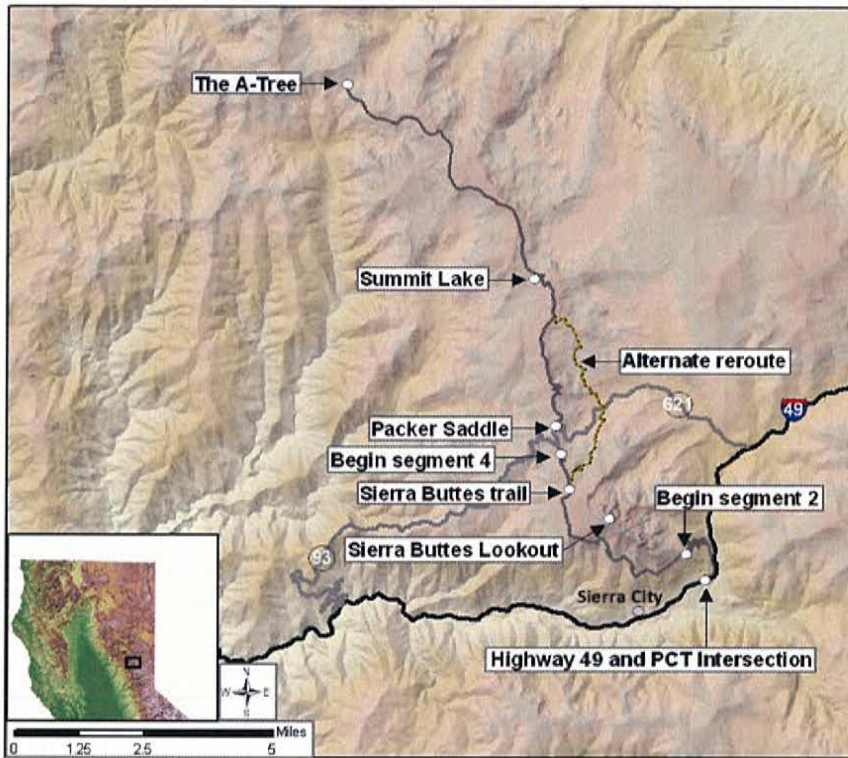
This Optimal Location Review studies an approximate 16-mile segment of the Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail (PCT), managed by the Tahoe National Forest (TNF), United States Forest Service (USFS), located in northern California. The trail relocation review developed for the PCT is referred to as an Optimal Location Review (OLR). The OLR can recommend a combination of land acquisitions, conservation easements and/or trail relocations in order to preserve the purposes for which the trail was established, or simply confirm that the PCT is optimally located and adequately protected. The decision for the optimal trail location is based upon the desired PCT experience and follows the criteria outlined in the PCT Comprehensive Plan. The National Trails System Act of 1968 authorizes the USFS to relocate segments of the PCT where: (1) such a relocation is necessary to preserve the purposes for which the trail was established, or (2) the relocation is necessary to promote a sound land management program in accordance with established multiple-use principles.

All Federal Actions, whether located on federal or non-federal land, are subject to compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). A proposed action to relocate a section of a congressionally designated area, such as the Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail, is an important decision that requires further analysis and documentation to comply with NEPA. If relocating a segment of the PCT is recommended, the OLR process functions as the analysis that establishes the purpose and need to begin a NEPA analysis. The OLR is neither a substitute for NEPA compliance nor the legal requirements for publishing major shifts for the location of the PCT in the Federal Register. The final OLR report and NEPA documentation sets the stage for publishing a notice in the Federal Register that describes the trail relocation. If the PCT is in its optimal location and acquisition of land or interest in lands are required to protect the PCT in this location, these processes may move forward without additional analysis or NEPA compliance.

Description of the Current Route (from south to north):

This OLR studies a 16-mile segment of the PCT in Sierra County, near Sierra City, California. The trail segment under consideration is administered by the Tahoe National Forest, Yuba River Ranger District; the main office is located in Camptonville, CA. The segment begins at the intersection with Highway 49 in T20N, R12E, Section 27 Mountain Diablo Base Meridian (MDM) and ends at the A-Tree in T21N, R11E, Section 4 MDM. For the purposes of this document, the description of the current route has been divided into six sections sharing common characteristics, covering a total length of 16 miles (see Map 1). In this OLR process Segments 1, 2 and 6 have been found to be already located in the optimal location, therefore this OLR analysis will focus on the remaining portions (Segments 3, 4, and 5) where the optimal location is still to be defined.

Map 1. Overview of PCT route segments and alternate reroute



Segment 1 of the existing PCT crosses over State Highway 49 approximately 1.3 miles northeast of Sierra City at an elevation of 4,580 feet. A good source of untreated water can be obtained where the trail bridges the North Yuba River just south of the Highway 49 crossing. After crossing the highway, the PCT climbs 3.5 miles in a series of switchbacks and reaches an elevation of 6,090 feet on the eastern slopes of the Sierra Buttes. This segment begins in a shady, forested environment, but gradually opens up to a drier, hotter one on the southern slopes of the Sierra Buttes, with a vegetation type dominated by shrubs and bushes. Segment 1 does not cross through private land. Through this PCTOLR process, Segment 1 has been found to be sited in the optimal location.

Along Segment 2, the trail traverses 3.8 miles across the southern then western slopes of the Sierra Buttes climbing to the ridge at an elevation of 7,400 feet. High quality views of the North Yuba River canyon and southern slopes of the Sierra Buttes are visible as the trail nears the crest. At the north end of Segment 2 the view expands west towards the Central Valley and east into the Lakes Basin. 0.9 miles of Segment 2 are located across private land. The United States holds a recorded easement on this segment of the PCT. Through this PCTOLR process, Segment 2 has been found to be sited in the optimal location.

Segment 3 begins at the intersection of the PCT and the Sierra Buttes trail and ends 0.6 miles later at the junction with Forest Road 93-2. Over the length of this segment the trail tread and user experience transitions from singletrack to one located on an old roadbed. Trail user volume increases sharply here, especially on summer weekends, as this section of the PCT is utilized as

the primary access to the Sierra Buttes Lookout. While the southbound visual quality becomes somewhat obstructed as the trail user drops into the trees, southbound users enjoy high quality views of the northern slopes of the Sierra Buttes. The northern half of Segment 3 (0.3 miles) is located across private land. The United States holds a recorded easement on this segment of the PCT.

Segment 4 begins at the Sierra Buttes Trailhead (an approximate 10-car parking area) along Forest Road 93-2, the primary trailhead for most hikers headed to the Lookout (see Photo 2). For the next 0.2 miles the PCT shares the tread with gravel-surfaced Forest Road 93-2, with moderate traffic volumes. The PCT then passes the large Sunrise parking area utilized primarily by the downhill mountain bikers and a commercial shuttle operation to access the steep, rocky, technical Downieville trail system (see Photo 3). Segment 4 continues for another 0.4 miles sharing the tread with Forest Road 93, until it reaches Packer Saddle (see Photo 4). This segment of paved 1 1/2-lane road receives high volumes of vehicular traffic as it serves as a major public access for numerous hiking, mountain bike and motorized trails, and miles of graveled USFS roads. The combination of high volumes of traffic, on a paved road with short sight distances, and no shoulder, leaves the PCT trail user with a degraded recreational experience and a potential safety situation. This 0.6-mile segment is located almost entirely across private land. The United States holds a recorded easement on this segment of the PCT.



Photo 2. PCT (Segment 4), Forest Road 93-2 at the Sierra Buttes parking area.



Photo 3. PCT (Segment 4), Forest Road 93 at the Sunrise parking area during a permitted mountain bike race.



Photo 4. PCT (Segment 4), Forest Road 93.

Segment 5 extends north for 3.6 miles from Packer Saddle to Summit Lake. For the first 2.2 miles, Segment 5 is located immediately adjacent to the Lots-A-Lakes OHV 4X4 trail (see

Photos 5 and 6), and crosses it twice (see Photo 7). As this segment of the Lots-A-Lakes trail is travelable by stock pickups with 4-wheel drive, this section of OHV trail is experiencing an increase in the volume of OHV traffic. The close proximity of the PCT and the Lots-A-Lakes OHV 4X4 trail in this area results in the PCT trail user being in sight and/or within sound of the adjacent motorized route. As the PCT passes west of Deer Lake, opportunities for high quality scenery include views of the Sierra Buttes, Deer Lake, Upper Salmon Lake, and extensive views of the Lakes Basin (Photo 8). An extremely limited number of PCT users may drop down (a steep 400 vertical feet) to Deer Lake for water or camping, typically utilizing the Deer Lake OHV 4X4 trail. 0.1 miles of Segment 5 are located across private land. The United States holds a recorded easement on this segment of the PCT. Currently mountain bikers are consistently (and illegally) riding this segment of the PCT.



Photo 5. Lots-of-Lakes OHV trail from the PCT (Segment 5).



Photo 6. Lots-of-Lakes OHV trail and the PCT (Segment 5) above Deer Lake.



Photo 7. PCT (Segment 5) crossing Lots-of-Lakes OHV trail.



Photo 8. View of Deer Lake from the PCT (Segment 5).

Segment 6 of the PCT continues north from Summit Lake to A-tree, a distance of 6.4 miles. This segment of the PCT is intermittently located adjacent to lightly-used, technically-difficult sections of the Lots-of-Lakes OHV 4X4 trail. This segment of trail offers extensive views of both the Spencer and Gold Lakes Basins, and of Mt. Elwell and Mt. Washington. An extremely limited number of PCT users may drop down to nearby Little Deer Lake, Snake Lake, Hawley Lake, or the Spencer Lakes for water or camping but will potentially be encountering motorized and mechanized users accessing these lakes via the Lots-of-Lakes 4X4 trail. Segment 6 does not

pass through private land. Currently a limited number of mountain bikers are illegally riding this segment of the PCT. Through this PCTOLR process, Segment 6 has been found to be sited in the optimal location.

The Packsaddle Campground (Packsaddle CG) is the final element of the existing condition to describe. While the Packsaddle CG is not located along the existing PCT alignment, it currently serves as a critical recreation resource in the Packer Saddle area, and is proposed to remain an important feature in the future. Currently the Packsaddle CG is designed with two primary loops including 17 individual campsites, 2 equestrian-centric campsites, a single horse corral facility broken into four, individual corrals, a two-riser toilet building, and a hand-pumped water well. Parking for approximately 25 individual vehicles (sedans, SUVs, pickups) and 10 extended-length vehicles (e.g. pickups with horse trailers, or large recreational vehicles (RVs)) is also provided in the initial loop of the Packsaddle CG. Currently this parking area primarily serves trail users heading up the Deer Lake trail (pedestrians, equestrians, and a limited number of mountain bikers). A few visitors may also park in the Packsaddle CG to access the Tamarack Lakes area, utilizing a primitive, user-created trail connecting the two.

Background and Statement of the Problem:

The field review for this OLR was conducted by the Tahoe National Forest during 2009. This 16 mile segment of the PCT is currently located on the “published trail route” as indicated by the original legislation. There are several issues with the current PCT alignment including potential safety issues, lack of access to good water and camping opportunities, and a degraded recreational experience due to conflicts with concurrent or adjacent uses. The primary potential safety situation occurs in Segment 4, where PCT trail users are required to traverse 0.4 miles of high volume paved road (Forest Road 93), 0.2 miles of moderate volume gravel road (Forest Road 93-2), and three major parking areas (Sierra Buttes, Sunrise, and Packer Saddle). Current conditions are resulting in a direct mixing of pedestrian, equestrian, bicycle, off-highway and highway traffic on a narrow 1 1/2-lane paved road with short sight distances and no shoulders. The second potential safety issue concerns the illegal use of the PCT by mountain bikers, and their interactions with equestrians, especially in Segment 5 north of Packer Saddle. While all mountain bike/equestrian encounters may include some accident potential, that risk is heightened on the PCT because some equestrians choose the PCT explicitly due to the motorized, mechanized prohibitions. Hence equestrians on the PCT are more likely to be riding young, moderately-trained, bicycle-sensitive horses, and the chance of an accident-resulting encounter with illegal mountain bikers is increased. Lastly, from the Sierra Buttes trailhead to the junction with the Deer Lake OHV 4X4 trail (3.4 miles), the existing PCT is located immediately on top of or closely paralleling a motorized route. The immediacy of the motorized route, combined with the isolated nature of the northern portions of this segment of trail may increase the likelihood that individuals or small groups of PCT users could be harassed in this area, with a low probability of being discovered.

The current alignment of the PCT lacks easy access to good water and camping opportunities. From the crossing with State Highway 49 to Summit Lake (12.0 miles), no sources of water are found within easy access of the current trail location. Water can be obtained from Deer Lake, which is approximately 0.3 miles and 400 vertical feet below the current PCT location, or Summit Lake itself, which is typically stagnant after early June. Opportunities for high quality

dispersed camping are minimal along this portion of the PCT. Due to the relatively heavy amount of motorized use in the area, preferred campsites (flat, with appropriate tree canopy and wind protection) are often filled with car campers, or the sites have been degraded by such users. When PCT users do drop off the ridge to find better camping they are most likely to follow the Deer Lake OHV 4X4 trail down to the west side of Deer Lake to camp, where the impacts of motorized use are more likely to affect the non-motorized experience the PCT is managed for. Finally, for equestrian campers who are typically more sensitive to motorized use, and require larger areas of flat terrain, the situation is even more challenging.

The final major concern regarding segments 4 and 5 of the existing PCT is the degraded recreational experience due to concurrent or adjacent motorized uses, and illegal mountain bike use. From the Sierra Buttes trailhead to Packer Saddle (Segment 4), the PCT is located on top of gravel then paved road, negatively impacting the non-motorized, non-mechanized recreational experience for which the PCT is managed. Most of Segment 5 (3.6 miles) is located immediately adjacent to the Lots-of-Lakes OHV 4X4 trail, which also conflicts with the outcomes for which the PCT is managed. In regard to mechanized use, especially during the summer months, mountain bikers are illegally riding this segment of the PCT (whose entire length is limited to pedestrians and equestrians) to access legal mountain bike trails including Big Boulder, Gold Valley, and Lavezzola, and destinations including Deer Lake, the Gold Lakes Basin, and A-Tree. Legal access to these recreation resources is currently provided via the Lots-A-Lakes OHV 4X4 trail, or Forest Road 507/506 on the Plumas National Forest (PNF). Those breaking the law are believed to prefer the PCT because it provides faster access without the climbing required on the Lots-A-Lakes OHV 4X4 trail, because those users prefer a single-track trail experience, or because access from the PNF would require additional travel and/or shuttle time and expense.

Trail Objectives:

The objectives for this Optimal Location Review are as follows:

1. Locate and maintain the trail corridor in the safest, least-developed location while connecting trail users to high-valued recreation resources.
2. Protect and enhance the “trail experience” by locating the trail corridor where it is most compatible with the surrounding uses, while highlighting the scenic value of the area.
3. Maintain federal ownership of the trail.
4. Build and maintain high public support of the PCT.

Routes considered but dropped:

A route paralleling, but to the west and below the existing PCT trail was considered but dropped. As this route would have typically been well below the tree canopy, it would not have provided any high quality visual opportunities. In addition, long-term management might have been more difficult because of conflicts with the timber management objectives of the surrounding area. Because this route had no advantages over the proposed alternate, it was dropped from consideration.

A route paralleling, but to the east and below the existing PCT was also considered but dropped. Potentially located between the existing PCT and Deer Lake trails, this route would have

provided many of the benefits identified in the alternate route, but the steep sidehill and rocky shelves traversed along this alignment were of concern. After an intensive field search, Forest Service and PCTA staff concluded the technical challenges of constructing a trail in this area would be prohibitively difficult, nor was the terrain conducive to building a sustainable trail, so this route was dropped from further consideration.

Alternate PCT Route Considered:

An alternative alignment has been proposed to address the known issues of segments 3, 4 and 5 of the current PCT alignment including potential safety issues, lack of access to good water and camping opportunities, and a degraded recreational experience. In addition to addressing the aforementioned issues, the proposed alternate route would also improve overall visual quality, and reduce the distance spent crossing private land, resulting in greater public support of the PCT. An alternate route for the PCT would begin at the intersection with the Sierra Buttes trail. The alternate route would descend to the northeast, passing by and weaving through the Tamarack Lakes, running parallel but out of sight and sound of the Tamarack Lakes OHV 4X4 trail, dropping a total of 1,300 feet in elevation to the Packsaddle campground (Packsaddle CG, see Figure 1, and Map 2). From the Packsaddle CG the alternate route would climb back up to the ridgetop, roughly following the existing Deer Lake trail, meeting back up with the current PCT alignment north of the junction with the Deer Lake OHV 4X4 trail, but south of Summit Lake (see Map 3). The alternate route would stretch approximately 6.0 miles and use about 1.7 miles of existing non-motorized trail (mostly the Deer Lake trail), requiring approximately 4.3 miles of new trail construction. During the summer of 2010 resource surveys were completed along the alternate route including a review by recreation staff, an archaeologist, a botanist, a wildlife biologist, and a soils/hydrology specialist. The results from this interdisciplinary review failed to expose any significant issues associated with the proposed alternate route. A detailed breakdown of the pros and cons of the alternate route are discussed below.

Pros:

1. The alternate route would locate and maintain the trail corridor in a safer, less-developed location.

In regard to safety, the alternate route would remove the PCT completely off of Forest Roads 93 and 93-2. While the alternate route would still require PCT trail users to cross Packer Lake Road (which becomes Forest Service Road 93 above Packer lake) at one location, the risk of a PCT user involved in an accident with highway vehicle traffic would be greatly reduced. For equestrians, the alternate route would dramatically decrease the likelihood of an accident-resulting encounter with an illegal mountain biker by removing most of the incentive for mountain bikers to utilize the PCT to access mountain bike resources north or west of Packer Saddle. By reducing the mileage where the PCT is located immediately on top of or adjacent to motorized routes, the alternate route location would also reduce the chance of predatory stalking along this section of the PCT.

2. The alternate route would connect trail users to high-valued recreation resources.

The alternate route would better connect PCT trail users to high-valued resources including quality water sources and camping opportunities, especially for equestrians. The alternate route

would run proximate to three major water sources which are currently difficult to access from the existing route. Those sources include the Upper and Lower Tamarack Lakes, Deer Lake (without the 400 vertical foot loss/gain) and potable water accessed via a hand-pumped well located at the Packsaddle Campground (outflows from the Tamarack, Packer and Deer Lakes might also be available seasonally). The alternate route would also provide increased access to high quality camping opportunities. The areas around the Upper and Lower and Tamarack Lakes, and Deer Lake provide some of the highest quality dispersed camping found in TNF. For those PCT users searching for a more developed camping experience, the alternate route leads immediately past the Packsaddle Campground (with potable water). Packsaddle is especially attractive to equestrian users as it provides large parking and turning areas, and corral facilities. During peak times, if Packsaddle is filled to capacity, the Berger Campground is only ¼ of a mile down Packer Lake Road, and the Diablo campground is just a ¼ mile beyond Berger (topography allows for easy, safe travel along this section of the Packer Lake Road). For PCT pedestrians searching for a more luxurious experience, the alternate route would bring the PCT closer to 3 overnight lodges namely the Packer Lake Lodge, the Salmon Lake Lodge, and the Sardine Lake Lodge which could be easily reached via the Packer Lake, Salmon Lake, and Tamarack connection trails respectively.

3. The alternate route would protect and enhance the trail experience by locating the trail corridor where it is most compatible with the surrounding uses, while highlighting the scenic value of the area.

Foremost, the alternate route would move the PCT off of, and away from most adjacent motorized routes, namely Forest Road 93, 93-2, and the Lots of Lakes 4X4 trail. By reducing the duration the PCT is located on or in the immediate vicinity of roads and motorized trails, this action would enhance the non-motorized, non-mechanized experience for which the PCT is managed. From a broader perspective, a majority of the area visitors currently recreating between Sierra Buttes and Deer Lake do so by foot, or on horse. The alternate route would complement and enhance those existing pedestrian/equestrian uses, and provide additional separation from adjacent mechanized/motorized uses.

The alternate route could also eliminate the existing conflict with mountain bikers riding the PCT illegally between Packer Saddle and Summit Lake. If the PCT relocation were to occur, the existing alignment could be converted to a multiple-use trail, providing improved access to mountain bike and motorcycle destinations to the west. In addition, a link could be constructed from the then-multiple-use trail to the nearby Gold Valley trail, providing additional recreational opportunities, including other single-track trail opportunities.

The alternate route would have minimal or no impact to Forest visual resources from outside the trail corridor, while the relocation would enhance the scenic quality and recreation experience from inside the corridor. The Forest Service's scenery management system requires an examination of the impact of visual resources from significant viewing opportunities that have been identified in the TNF Land Management Plan. A review of visual impacts indicated likely significant viewpoints would include Highway 49, and the Sierra Buttes Lookout. From Highway 49, neither the existing nor alternate routes are, or would be, visible to the casual Forest viewer. From the Sierra Buttes Lookout, both the existing PCT, and the existing Tamarac Trail (which approximates the southern portion of the alternate route) are visible, but do not dominate

the landscape. Under the alternate route, this visual impact would be essentially unchanged. The existing PCT could be converted to a multiple use trail, with no corresponding change in visual impact. The existing Tamarac and Deer Lake trails would be improved (largely flattening them out to bring down the grade of the trail tread) to become the new PCT with minimal visual impact. New trail would be constructed between the Tamarac Lakes and the Packsaddle Campground, but this section would largely be located in a mature forest, where the trail would be hidden from the Lookout viewer, resulting in un-noticed visual impacts.

The visual analysis also examined the perspective of PCT trail users, who would enjoy improved scenery if the alternate route was adopted. Traveling northward, the alternate route would locate the PCT physically closer to the Sierra Buttes, and run the Trail down the northern shoulder of the Buttes, where the outstanding views of the mountain from the north and east could be better appreciated. The Sierra Buttes are one of the most impressive geologic features in the Northern Sierras. The alternate route would bring PCT users in closer contact with the Sierra Buttes and incorporates the feature more prominently as a part of the PCT experience. The alternate route would also move the PCT immediately adjacent to, and provide improved access to the beautiful Tamarack, Packer, Deer, Horse, and Salmon lakes. Perhaps most importantly, the alternate route would move the PCT off gravel and paved roads, and away from parking areas and OHV routes, providing more undeveloped, natural, visual opportunities for PCT trail users.

4. The alternate route would better maintain federal ownership of the trail by reducing the distance the PCT is located across private land.

The alternate route would reduce the distance the PCT is located across private land by approximately 0.9 miles. Currently Segments 3 and 4 are located across 0.3 and 0.6 miles of private land, respectively; while the alternate route would relocate these two segments of the PCT completely onto US Forest Service system lands. Both the existing Tamarack/Sierra Buttes trails and the proposed alternate PCT are located across Parcel ID H (see Map 2, Table 3) for approximately 0.2 miles. Currently, while there is no formal easement for the existing Tamarack/Sierra Buttes trails, the landowners have been contacted and are supportive of the alternate PCT alignment, and of issuing the Forest Service an easement for the PCT across this property. The replacement of the Tamarack/Sierra Buttes trails with the PCT is preferable because the trail alignment would be moved to the very edge of the private parcel. In addition, compared to the existing trails, the alternate route would be constructed at a reduced grade to minimize existing trail erosion issues, which would in turn lower the overall resource impacts to the associated piece of private property, and reduce the need for trail maintenance.

5. To best accommodate the alternate PCT alignment, modifications to the Packsaddle CG would also be required. Generally speaking, the alternate alignment would require an increase in parking capacity at the Packsaddle CG because the PCT would no longer pass by the existing Sierra Buttes, Sunrise, and Packer Saddle parking areas. Based on existing and projected future use of the PCT in this area, pedestrians visiting for the day, and all equestrians (both daytime and overnight visitors) are the two primary user types predicted to need additional parking capacity. Finally, demand for large recreational vehicle (RV) parking and camping along the Packer Lake Road corridor is growing, and additional capacity for those vehicles could also be accommodated. Reconstructed portions of the Packsaddle CG (and the enclosed day use parking

area) would be redesigned to meet current Forest Service standards, including accessibility standards. Depending upon the final development plans, additional toilet facilities within the Packsaddle CG may be appropriate.

To accommodate additional parking for pedestrians (primarily day users, but overnight backpackers would also park here), existing Packsaddle CG campsites 1, 2, and 14 would be eliminated, and converted to parking for individual vehicles (sedans, SUVs, and pickups). With minor grading, tree removal, and defining of parking spaces, parking capacity would be roughly doubled from approximately 25 to 50 vehicles. Additional signing, better defining parking for PCT trail users (opposed to those camping in the campground) would also be required. Finally, additional parking located immediately across Packer Lake Road from the Packsaddle CG was also considered as part of this PCTOLR process, but neither the need for additional parking capacity, nor the funds to construct such a facility, were identified at this time.

To accommodate additional parking for equestrians and operators of large RVs, existing Packsaddle CG campsites 3 and 4 would be improved to accommodate long vehicles (pickups/SUVs pulling horse trailers, pickups/SUVs pulling camp trailers, and large RVs over 25' in length). As these sites are envisioned to primarily accommodate equestrians who are likely to want to tie their horses to both sides of their trailer, these sites would be provide at least 10' of cleared space on either side of the graveled parking area. At these sites, the picnic table and firering would be placed in the very back of the campsite, and equestrian users would be expected to park head-in, creating distance between the horse and human "living areas".

At the same time, the existing equestrian corrals and two associated campsites (corral campsites 1 and 2) would also be redesigned. The existing four-in-one corral facilities would be broken apart and distributed to four separate campsites. Each corral is assumed to be able to accommodate up to 2 horses (that know and like each other). Corrals would be located at each of the two existing corral sites, and at existing campsites 3 and 4 (identified to become equestrian/RV campsites in the paragraph above).

And finally two additional, equestrian/large RV campsites would be identified and designated out of the large, flat graveled areas located adjacent to the existing restroom building. These two pull-through campsites would be designed to accommodate the largest of equestrian/RV vehicles, would provide a picnic table and firering, but would not include any corral facilities. As these two sites would include minimal visual screening, these sites are expected to be some of the last sites selected by overnight campers in the Packsaddle CG. However, since many large equestrian horse trailers and RVs are designed with living spaces built into these vehicles, the somewhat reduced experience provided by the Forest Service is not expected to be of major concern.

The alternate route would enhance public support of the PCT by increasing safety, providing additional access to high-valued recreation resources, by highlighting the scenic values of the area, by locating the Trail where it is most compatible with the surrounding uses, by reducing the distance the PCT crosses private land, and by reducing existing trail erosion issues and improving recreational opportunities.

Cons:

1) The alternate route would increase the vertical drop of the current PCT alignment by about 900 vertical feet, and would increase the vertical climbing by about 600 vertical feet.

The alternate route would include a substantial drop and corresponding climb the current alignment does not (see Figure 1). From the junction of the existing PCT (Segment 3) and Tamarack/Sierra Buttes trails, the alternate route would descend approximately 1300 vertical feet to the Packsaddle campground. The route would then climb back approximately 1100 vertical feet to the ridge. However, two substitutes would likely be available for those trail users focused on high mileage days, namely the existing PCT alignment, and the Lots-of-Lakes OHV trail. If the alternate route was adopted, the existing PCT would likely be converted to a multi-use trail available to pedestrians, equestrians, mountain bikers and motorcyclists, maintaining a singletrack, multi-use opportunity. So while sharing the trail with mountain bike and motorized users is typically not the preferred experience sought after by PCT users, it would be available for those long distance trail users who are looking to avoid the vertical relief identified in the alternate route.

2) Doesn't the Pacific Crest Trail get its name from being located on the Pacific Crest, including the backbone of the Sierra Nevada mountains? How can you move the PCT off the Pacific Crest?

Historically, planners locating the 3,000-mile long PCT considered numerous factors when locating the trail, including the physical highpoint of the Pacific Crest. In fact, the current ridge the PCT follows throughout the involved 16-mile section is not the true Pacific Crest. As the existing PCT was already detached from the Pacific Crest, this was not identified as a significant issue.

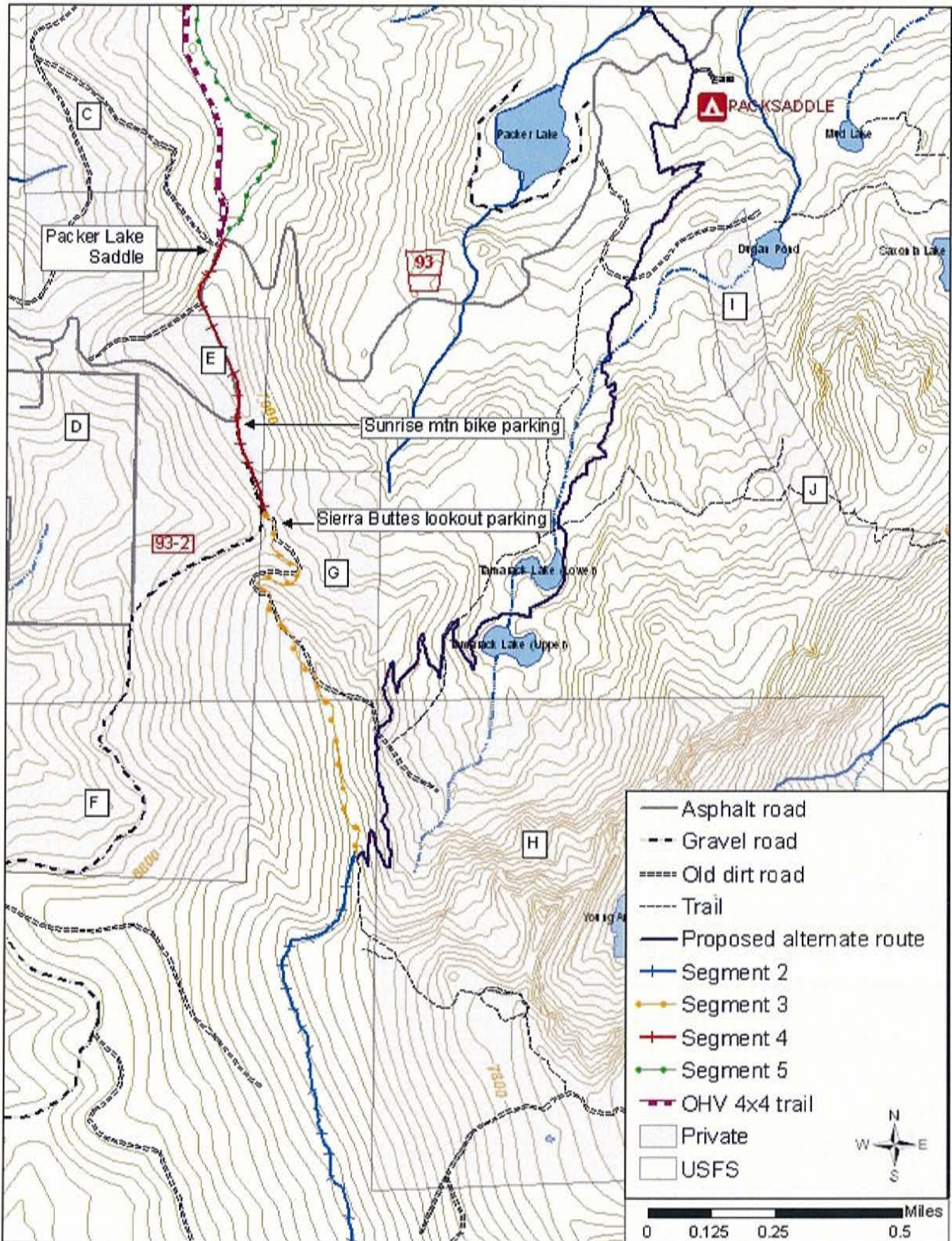
Public participation

The Tahoe National Forest has met with and discussed this OLR with area interest groups, primarily the Pacific Crest Trail Association (PCTA) and local hiking, mountain bike, and motorcycle trails groups. PCTA staff have covered most of the alternate route on foot with Forest Service staff, they understand the management issues, and are supportive of the new trail alignment as it will improve PCT recreational experiences on the TNF. A local hiking group (Skiing and Hiking Outdoor Enthusiasts (SHOE)) was very supportive of the proposed alternative alignment. A local mountain bike group (Sierra Buttes Trail Stewardship (SBTS)) and local motorcycle groups reported they would favor being able to use the old PCT alignment from Pack Saddle north to Deer Lake if the PCT trail was rerouted. However, SBTS reported that mountain bike interests would not support the loss of the ability to ride mountain bikes on what is now the Deer Lake Trail and a portion of the Tamarack Connector Trail if they were to become part of the new PCT alignment. From the SBTS perspective, the alternate route would provide an overall loss of riding opportunity and reported that this potential trade held little value to their group's membership. SBTS advocated for the Forest Service to focus on developing other mountain bike opportunities in the same area.

Route obliteration

If the alternate route is adopted, at least two sections of trail are expected to be obliterated. The first section is an approximate 0.2 miles of the existing Tamarack Lakes/Sierra Buttes trail as it crosses private property at an overly-steep grade (identified on Map 2 as property H). As most of this section of trail is located on private land, communication and support from the involved private land owners would be a prerequisite. The second section is an approximate 0.25 miles of the existing PCT, between the Deer Lake OHV 4X4 trail, and the alternate route as it reconnects back with the PCT (see Map 3). This second section of trail obliteration would be critical to maintain an appropriate separation of uses (pedestrian and equestrian on the PCT, all users could utilize the Lots-of-Lakes OHV 4X4 trail). In this situation, route obliteration would include decompacting the soil, restoring the hydrologic function, re-establishing vegetative cover (through planting and/or native recruitment), installation of barriers to ensure compliance, and monitoring for effectiveness.

Map 2. PCT segments 2 through 5 and the proposed alternate reroute



Map 3. PCT segments 5 and 6, and the proposed alternate reroute

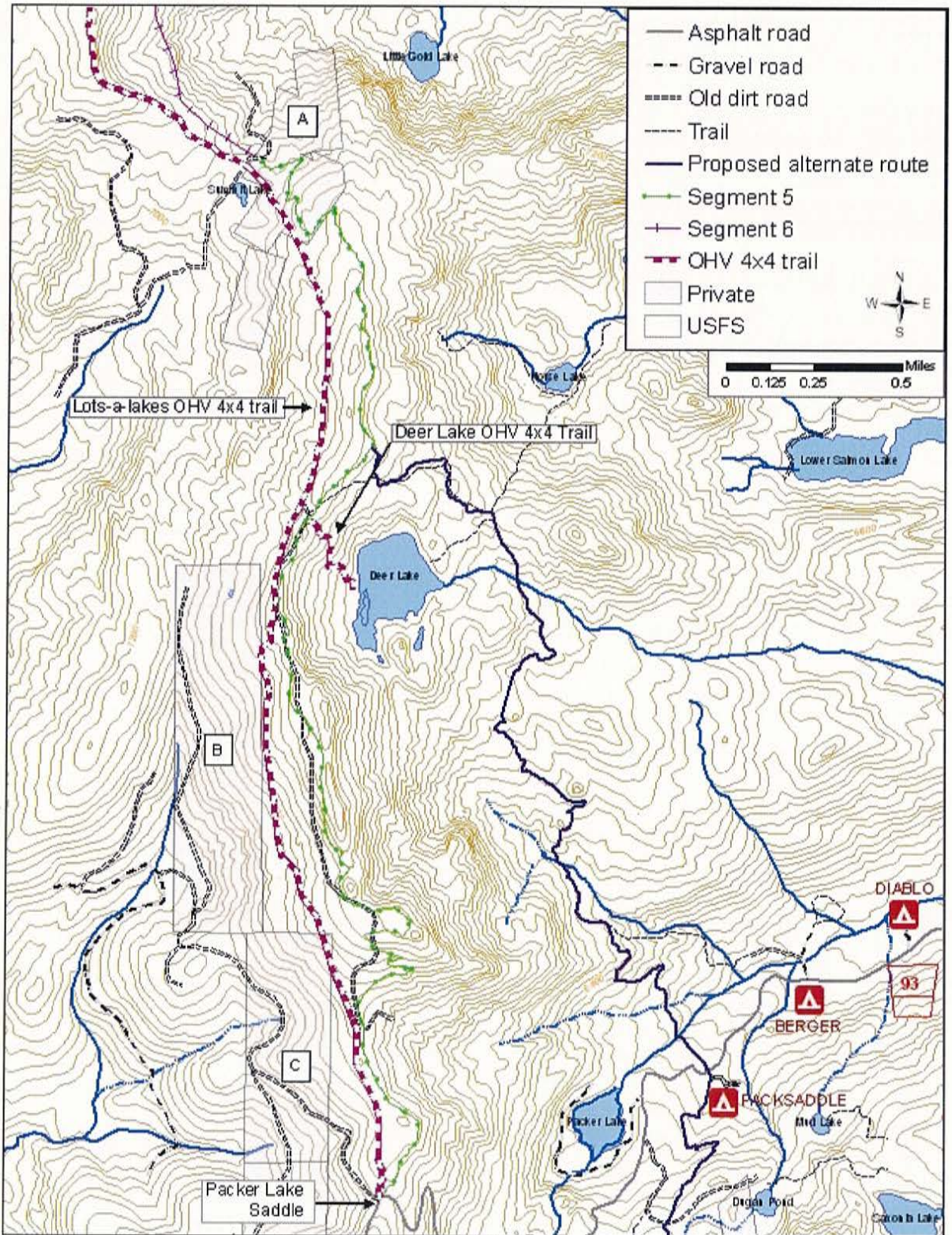
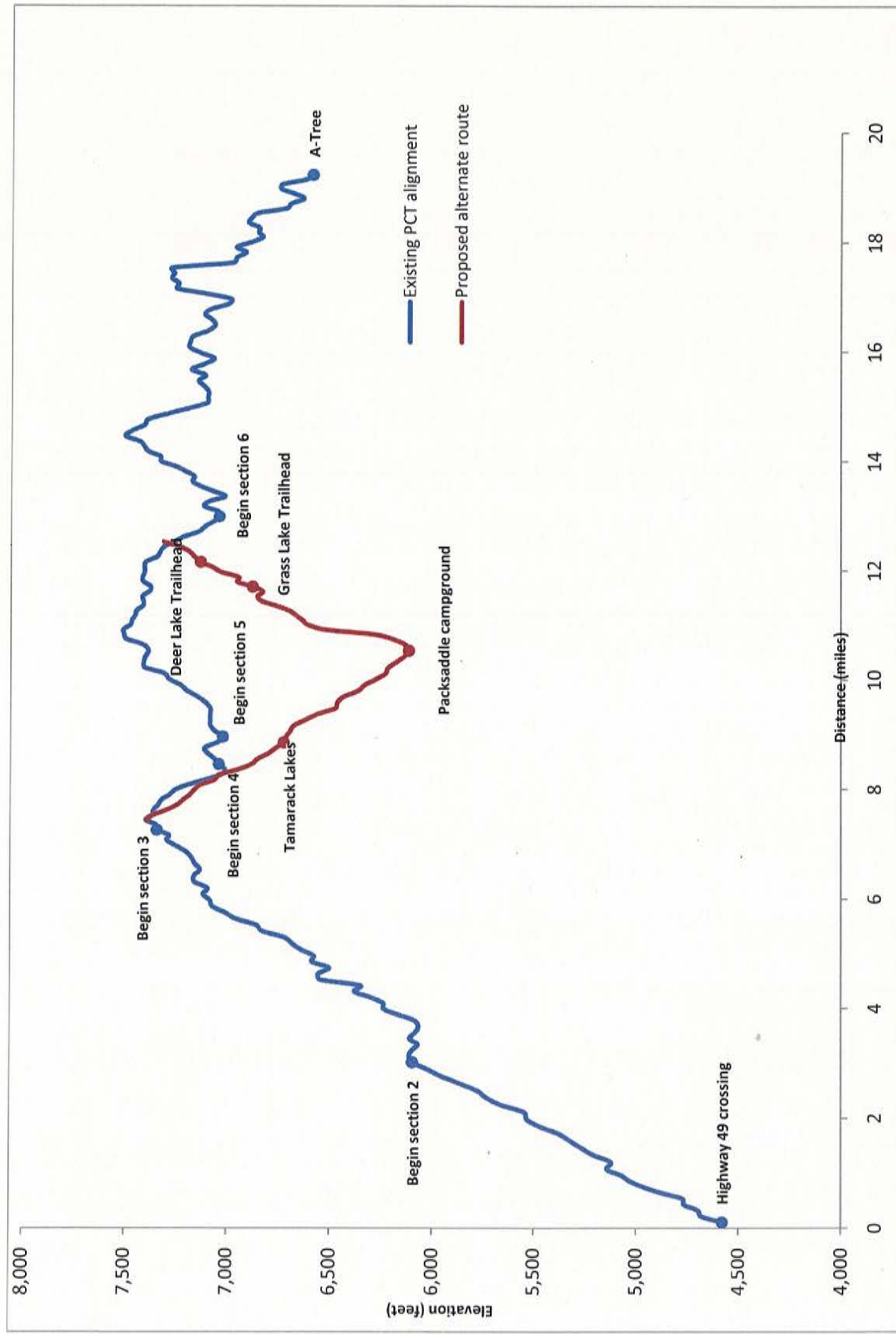


Figure 1. Profile of existing PCT and proposed alternate route



Trail Acquisition Corridor

The PCT trail corridor shown on the attached maps (Map 2 and 3) identifies both public and private lands along the PCT, and the alternate route. GIS technology was used to create the trail’s corridor by developing a viewshed of what can be “seen” from the optimal trail location. Where the viewshed is greater than ½ mile and the trail is located adjacent to or within a developed community, highway, or flat fallow land; the trail corridor is a maximum distance of 300’. In all other locations where the viewshed is greater than ½ mile, the trail corridor is a maximum distance of ½ mile.

Any private lands which the Pacific Crest Trail passes through are identified as “Priority 1 Lands to Acquire”. Private lands the trail does not cross, but falls within the trail’s corridor are identified as “Priority 2 Lands to Acquire”. Table 1 displays private property crossed by the existing PCT, and Table 2 outline the parcels of private land along the existing PCT which fall within the trail corridor. Table 3 displays private property that would be crossed by the alternate route, and Table 4 outline the parcels of private land along the alternate route which would fall within the trail corridor.

Table 1. Priority 1 Lands to Acquire along the existing PCT orientation

Parcel ID	Legal Description	Assessor's Parcel Number (APN)	Parcel Acres	Land Owner
A	S 19 & 30, T21N, R12E	007-090-009 and 007-110-001	90.1	Lowell G. Robinson
E	S 7, T20N, R12E	008-070-027	204.1	Sierra County Land Trust
G	S 7, T20N, R12E	008-070-008	55.4	John W. Harris

Table 2. Priority 2 Lands to Acquire along the existing PCT orientation

Parcel ID	Legal Description	Assessor's Parcel Number (APN)	Parcel Acres	Land Owner
A	S 19 & 30, T21N, R12E	007-090-009 and 007-110-001	90.1	Lowell G. Robinson
B	S 31, T21N, R12E	007-110-008	160	Robert Eshleman
C	S 6, T20N, R12E	008-070-002	138	Josh C. Finn
D	S 7, T20N, R12E	008-070-022	120	Joe D. Smailes Forestry, Inc.
E	S 7, T20N, R12E	008-070-027	204.1	Sierra County Land Trust
F	S 18, T20N, R12E	008-070-024	95.89	Steven E. Hayes
G	S 7, T20N, R12E	008-070-008	55.4	John W. Harris
H	S 17, T20N, R12E	008-100-002	580	John W. Harris

Table 3. Priority 1 Lands to Acquire along the alternative PCT route

Parcel ID	Legal Description	Assessor's Parcel Number (APN)	Parcel Acres	Land Owner
H	S 17, T20N, R12E	008-100-002	580	John W. Harris

Table 4. Priority 2 Lands to Acquire along the alternate PCT route

Parcel ID	Legal Description	Assessor's Parcel Number (APN)	Parcel Acres	Land Owner
E	S 7, T20N, R12E	008-070-027	204.1	Sierra County Land Trust
F	S 18, T20N, R12E	008-070-024	95.89	Steven E. Hayes
G	S 7, T20N, R12E	008-070-008	55.4	John W. Harris
H	S 17, T20N, R12E	008-100-002	580	John W. Harris
I	S 8, T20N, R12E	008-070-010	17.2	Central 4 Wheel Drive Inc
J	S 8, T20N, R12E	008-070-028 and 008-070-029	34.4	Dennis E Giuffre

Decisions being made in this PCTOLR process

Signing this Optimal Location Review document indicates concurrence that:

- Of the total 16 miles of the PCT reviewed in this OLR, approximately 10 of those 16 miles are already located in the optimal location.
- The alternate route, approximately 6 miles in length, locates the remaining portions of the larger 16-mile section of the PCT in the desired optimal location, requiring 4.3 miles of new trail construction.
- The recommendations in this Optimal Location Review document preserve the purposes for which the Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail was established, and promote a sound land management program in accordance with established multiple-use principles.
- The recommendations in this Optimal Location Review document do not override the Tahoe National Forest’s adopted Land Management Plan objectives.
- Acquisition and/or conservation easements placed on the private parcels depicted in Tables 3 & 4 will develop a “trail corridor” along the optimal route option for the Pacific Crest Trail and will provide protection of the trail experience.

Prepared by:

Keith M. Brown 6/20/11

Keith Brown
Forest Recreation Planner
Tahoe National Forest

Date

Recommended by:

Beth Boyst 6-23-11

Beth Boyst
Pacific Crest Trail Program Manager
USDA Forest Service
Pacific SW Region

Date

Recommended by:

Liz Bergeron 6/24/11

Liz Bergeron
Executive Director
Pacific Crest Trail Association

Date

Recommended by:

Genice Froehlich 6/30/11

Genice Froehlich
District Ranger
Yuba River Ranger District
Tahoe National Forest

Date

Recommended by:

Deb Bumpus 6-27-11

Deb Bumpus
District Ranger
Beckwourth Ranger District
Plumas National Forest

Date

Approved by:

Tom Quinn 7/18/11

Tom Quinn
Forest Supervisor
Tahoe National Forest

Date

Approved by:

Alice Carlton 6/27/11

Alice Carlton
Forest Supervisor
Plumas National Forest

Date