



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest Service

June 25, 2009

Notice of Proposed Action

Opportunity to Comment

Carson Ranger District Rim to Reno Trail System Project

Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest
Washoe County, Nevada

Comments Welcome

The Carson Ranger District of the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest welcomes your comments on its proposed Rim to Reno Trail System Project (project) on National Forest System lands within the Humboldt-Toiyabe National forest. This project proposes to connect and enhance trails within and adjacent to the Mt. Rose Wilderness between southwest Reno and the Tahoe Rim Trail near Mt. Rose. The approximately 30-mile trail system is proposed using a combination of new trail construction, restoration of user-created routes, and improvements to existing authorized trails.

This proposal will be documented in an environmental assessment (EA). Written, facsimile, hand delivered, oral, and electronic comments concerning this proposal will be accepted for 30 calendar days following the publication of the 36 CFR 215 Notice of Proposed Action in the Reno Gazette Journal, published on June 26, 2009. For detailed information on how to provide comments please refer to the "Comment Process" section of this document.

Purpose and Need

The Rim to Reno Trail System project is located both within and adjacent to the Mt. Rose Wilderness. Already the highest recreation use area on the Carson Ranger District and northern Nevada, the Mt. Rose Wilderness is experiencing increasing public use from residents and visitors to the Lake Tahoe and Reno metropolitan areas. Improperly located, designed, constructed, and maintained trails are not adequately protecting sensitive biological resources, preserving unique cultural resources, maintaining water quality, or responding to increasing recreational demand. In many instances, users have created unnecessary or unsustainable trails.

The purpose and need for action reflects the difference between the existing condition and desired conditions. Direction or guidance on desired condition for these National Forest System lands is provided primarily by the Wilderness Act of 1964 as amended (for lands

within the Mt. Rose Wilderness Area); the Toiyabe Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan), including the Sierra Nevada Forest Plan Amendment (SNFPA); and the Forest Service Manual (FSM - 2320) and Forest Service Handbook (FSH).

The following defines the purpose of this project:

- Create a sustainable trail system linking existing trails and trailhead access points that prevents resource damage due to increasing recreational use both within and outside the Mt. Rose Wilderness. Protect sensitive biological resources and preserve unique cultural resources by coordinating and integrating trail design with biological and cultural resource assessments. Minimize soil erosion and compaction from improperly located, designed, and constructed or maintained trails to prevent significant impacts on water quality.
- Address existing user-created route impacts through decommissioning (closing and restoration) unnecessary and unsustainable routes. The project includes trail construction, decommissioning, improved management and maintenance of trails, and sustainable trail design to minimize impacts on natural and cultural resources.
- Develop a trail system that meets Forest Service design standards, reduces maintenance needs, takes advantage of natural features such as vistas or interesting areas to provide quality recreation opportunities, and prevents users from creating new routes off the designated trail system. Achieve sustainability through the design of trails for durability, erosion control, and the use of sustainable and renewable materials for trail construction.
- Determine recreation uses permitted on each trail segment that reduces or minimizes user conflict and impacts to wildlife and other resources. This process will be driven by resource sustainability and protection.
- For those lands within the Mt. Rose Wilderness, establish Wilderness Opportunity Classes (WOC) designations. Develop recreation use and resource monitoring that employs Limits of Acceptable Change (LAC).
- Provide improved access and recreational opportunities on Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest System lands outside the Mt. Rose Wilderness.

This proposed action responds to the goals and objectives and moves towards the desired conditions outlined in the Toiyabe National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (USFS 1986).

Decision Framework

Based on the environmental analysis documented in the EA, the District Ranger will decide to 1) select the Proposed Action as proposed or modified, or as described in an alternative; 2) determine monitoring required.

The Proposed Action

The Carson Ranger District of the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest is proposing the construction of a trail system that would connect the Reno metropolitan area with the existing Tahoe Rim Trail near Mt. Rose. The Proposed Action would build new trail segments connected to existing trails to create an interconnected trail system, including loops and connector trails, to provide quality recreation opportunities while minimizing

impacts and reducing the potential for use conflicts. The trail system would disperse increasing recreation use on National Forest system lands by reducing trail users in high use and sensitive areas.

The proposed trail system is shown in Figure 1. There are seven components of the proposed trail system:

1. Rim to Reno Trail (17 miles) – Main trail between the Mt. Rose Summit Trail and the Hunter Creek Trail in southwest Reno through the Mt. Rose Wilderness.
2. Hunter Creek Trail (3 miles) – Provides access to the intersection with the main Rim to Reno Trail from the Michael D. Thompson Trailhead in Reno.
3. Big Meadows Connector Trail (0.3 miles) – Small spur trail connecting Rim to Reno Trail to Big Meadows.
4. Thomas Creek Connector Trail (5 miles) extensions – Connects the existing Thomas Creek Trail to the main Rim to Reno Trail. This trail will consist of two segments in the Mt. Rose Wilderness, one connecting the existing Thomas Creek Trail to the main Rim to Reno Trail at Davis Meadow, the other connecting at Big Meadows. This trail will provide loop trail opportunities in the Mt. Rose Wilderness from the Thomas Creek Trailhead.
5. Mt. Houghton Ridge Trail (1 miles) – Connects the existing Tahoe Rim Trail in the vicinity of Relay Peak to the Rim to Reno Trail.
6. Mt. Houghton Summit Trail (0.6 miles) – Provides access to the summit of Mt. Houghton from the Mt. Houghton Ridge Trail.
7. New Tahoe Rim Trail single track segment (2 miles) – Connects the Tahoe Rim Trail near Relay Peak to the Mt. Rose Summit Trail near Mt. Rose meadows. This will create a new single track trail by moving the existing trail off a dirt road. The new trail will provide loop trail opportunities from the Mt. Rose Summit Trailhead and the Tahoe Rim Trail.

The Proposed Action offers new recreational trail opportunities for hikers and equestrians.

Hikers and hikers with dogs under control would be allowed on all of the above Rim to Reno Trail segments. Equestrians would be welcome on the Rim to Reno Trail 7-mile segment from Big Meadows north to Hunter Creek Trail, including the Big Meadows Connector Trail. Equestrians would also be welcome on the Thomas Creek Trail (North), Thomas Creek Trail (West) and Reno to Rim Trail segment that connects these Thomas Creek trails to create a loop opportunity.

See Figure 3 for proposed allowable uses under the Proposed Action.

Alternatives to Proposed Action

In addition to the Proposed Action, the Forest anticipates considering the effects of one alternative in the Environmental Assessment (EA):

- Alternative Trail System (Alternative 1, as shown in Figure 2).
 1. Include construction of trail segments 2,4,5,6, and 7 from Proposed Action.

2. Rim to Reno Trail (7 miles) would end at the Thomas Creek Connector Trail (North). It would also eliminate the Big Meadow Trailhead, the Big Meadow Connector Trail, and not continue north to the Hunter Creek Trail in the Mt. Rose Wilderness.
3. Belli Front Loop Trails (10 miles) - creates a loop trail system connecting the Michael D. Thompson and Leventina Canyon trailheads outside the Mt. Rose Wilderness.
4. Balardini Ranch Trail (4 miles) - connects existing Thomas Creek Trailhead north to Washoe County's Balardini Ranch trail system and trailhead.

This Alternative offers new recreation trail opportunities for hikers, mountain bikers, and equestrians.

Hikers and hikers with dogs under control would be allowed on all of the above Rim to Reno Trail segments. Dogs would be required to be on leashes and their waste would be required to be removed on the new trail loop downstream (along Hunter Creek from the Washoe County's Michael D. Thompson Trailhead) to and continuing along the Steamboat Ditch portion of the Belli Front Loop Trail System. Dogs are already required to be on leashes on Washoe County Park lands at the Thompson Trailhead.

Equestrians would be welcome on the new Belli Front Loop Trails except on the same Forest Service trails where dogs are required to be on leashes.

Equestrians would continue to be welcome on the Hunter Creek Trail from the Michael D. Thompson Trailhead (horses required to stay on Hunter Creek Trail through the Thompson Trailhead heading south towards Mt. Rose Wilderness) to the southern end of the Hunter Creek Trail in the Mt. Rose Wilderness.

Equestrians would also be welcome on the Thomas Creek Trail (North), Thomas Creek Trail (West) and Reno to Rim Trail segment that connects these Thomas Creek trails to create a loop opportunity.

Mountain bikes would be welcome on the Belli Front Loop Trail System except on the short Forest Service portion of the loop trail alongside Hunter Creek connecting from the Hunter Creek Trail downstream to the Steamboat Ditch.

Mountain bikes and equestrians would be welcome on the new Balardini Ranch Trail connecting south to the Whites-Thomas Loop Trail system at the Thomas Creek Trailhead.

See Figure 4 for proposed allowable uses under Alternative 1.

Summary of Proposed Action Impacts

The following table summarizes the potential impacts of the Proposed Action by the affected resources. In the EA, these impacts will be compared to those resulting from the alternative to the Proposed Action.

Affected Resource	Summary of Impact
Air Quality	It is expected that the Proposed Action would not result in any adverse impacts to air quality. The proposed action involves short-term construction activities associated with trail decommissioning and construction. Trails within the Mt. Rose Wilderness would be constructed entirely with hand tools. No mechanized or motorized equipment would be used. Trail construction outside the Mt. Rose Wilderness may utilize mechanized or motorized equipment. These activities would generate minor amounts of air emissions comprised of small construction vehicle and equipment exhaust and fugitive dust. However, design features pertaining to air quality would be implemented to avoid or minimize effects on air quality and all state and federal regulations in regards to air quality would be followed.
Watersheds	Surface and vegetation disturbance from the Proposed Action has the potential to increase soil erosion and impacts to the watershed. With the inclusion of Best Management Practices, this impact is not anticipated to be significant. Also, restoration of user-created routes will eliminate sources of erosion.
Vegetation	Disturbances to vegetation resulting from trail construction would be minimal and limited to the trail prism. Some small diameter trees and dead trees could be felled or have branches removed. The project would not significantly contribute to changes in vegetation composition or stand structure. Restoration of user-created routes will benefit vegetative communities.
Noxious and Invasive Weeds	Potential adverse impacts include the possibility of noxious and invasive weeds spreading. Field surveys show that populations of cheatgrass and other noxious weeds were observed within some locations of the project area and in adjacent areas. However, measures to control the introduction and spread of noxious weeds in the project area would be implemented during construction activities.
Wildlife (including special status wildlife species, MIS, aquatic species, and neo-tropical migratory birds)	Biological surveys have been conducted and habitat for several special status wildlife species was documented, including habitat for northern goshawk, flammulated owl, white-headed woodpecker, and Sierra Nevada willow flycatcher. The results of these surveys were used in making adjustments to the trail alignments to avoid or minimize impacts. However, there is the potential for short and long term impacts to wildlife. These will be analyzed in the Biological Evaluation/Biological Assessment and specialist report.
Special Status Plant Species	Biological surveys have been conducted and populations of two special status plant species were documented. The results of these surveys were used in making adjustments to the trail alignments to avoid or minimize impacts to special status plant species. Potential impacts to special status plant species will be analyzed in the Biological Evaluation/Biological Assessment and specialist report.

Affected Resource	Summary of Impact
Heritage Resources	Surveys for heritage resources resulted in the identification of several potentially significant sites. Survey crews recorded a total of sixteen sites and five isolated artifacts. Of the sixteen sites, two are prehistoric and fourteen date to the historic period. Four sites are recommended as ineligible for the National Register of Historic Places; the other twelve remain unevaluated. The forest will consult with the Nevada State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) to determine whether or not the sites meet the eligibility criteria and to determine potential impacts. Trails will be rerouted to avoid or minimize impacts to eligible sites.
Native American Religious Concerns	Consultation with the Washoe Tribe of Nevada and California has and will continue. It is expected that there will be no adverse impacts to Native American Religious Concerns.
Socioeconomic	It is expected that there will be no adverse socioeconomic impacts.
Visual Resources	It is expected that there will be no adverse impacts to visual resources. At a landscape scale, the Proposed Action would not be visually evident. At a closer scale, the new trail construction and decommissioning associated with the Proposed Action would be consistent with the surrounding landscape, which includes trails.
Motorized Recreation	It is expected that there will be no impacts to motorized recreation. No trails that are currently open to motorized use would be closed under the Proposed Action. None of the proposed trails would be open to motorized use.
Non-motorized Recreation	The Proposed Action would result in beneficial impacts to non-motorized recreation. One of the purposes of the Proposed Action is to provide quality recreation opportunities. The Proposed Action would build new trail segments connected to existing trails to create an interconnected trail system, including loops and connector trails, to provide quality recreation opportunities while minimizing impacts and reducing the potential for use conflicts. The trail system would disperse increasing recreation use on National Forest system lands by reducing trail users in high use and sensitive areas.
Wilderness Area	The Proposed Action traverses the Mt. Rose Wilderness and a component of the national Wilderness Preservation System under the Wilderness Act of 1964, as amended. The project will designate Wilderness Opportunity Classes (WOC) for the project area. These opportunity classes will provide limits on use to reduce human impacts on the wilderness resource and protect the wilderness environment. This project will utilize the Limits of Acceptable Change (LAC) system. This is a framework for establishing acceptable and appropriate resource and social conditions in recreation settings.
Environmental Justice	No known potential exists for anticipated disproportional effects on minorities or economically disadvantaged populations within the project area from the Proposed Action.
Grazing Management	It is expected that there will be no adverse grazing management impacts.

Comment Process

The Forest Service encourages your comments on this Proposed Action, along with supporting reasons, that the responsible official should consider in reaching a decision.

Your comments will help us prepare an environmental assessment (EA). The EA will be used to determine whether to prepare an environmental impact statement or a Finding of No Significant Impact. If there is no potential for significant impacts, that finding, along with the environmental assessment and a proposed decision, will be sent to those who commented. If the EA concludes that there is the potential for significant impacts, then an environmental impact statement would be prepared.

Written, facsimile, hand-delivered, oral, and electronic comments concerning this Proposed Action will be accepted for 30 calendar days following the publication of this notice in the Reno Gazette Journal.

Comments must be submitted to: District Ranger, Carson Ranger District, 1536 South Carson Street, Carson City, NV 89701 or fax 775-884-8199. The office business hours for those submitting comments in person are: 8:00 am to 4:30 pm Monday through Friday, excluding holidays.

Electronic comments must be submitted in a format such as an email message, plain text (.txt), rich text format (.rtf), and Word (.doc) to comments-intermtn-humboldt-toiyabe-carson.@fs.fed.us. Comments must have an identifiable name attached or verification of identity will be required. A scanned signature may serve as verification on electronic comments.

It is the responsibility of persons providing comments to submit them by the close of the comment period. Those who provide comments during this comment period are eligible to appeal the decision under the regulations. Individuals and organizations wishing to be eligible to appeal must provide the information identified in 36 CFR 215, including:

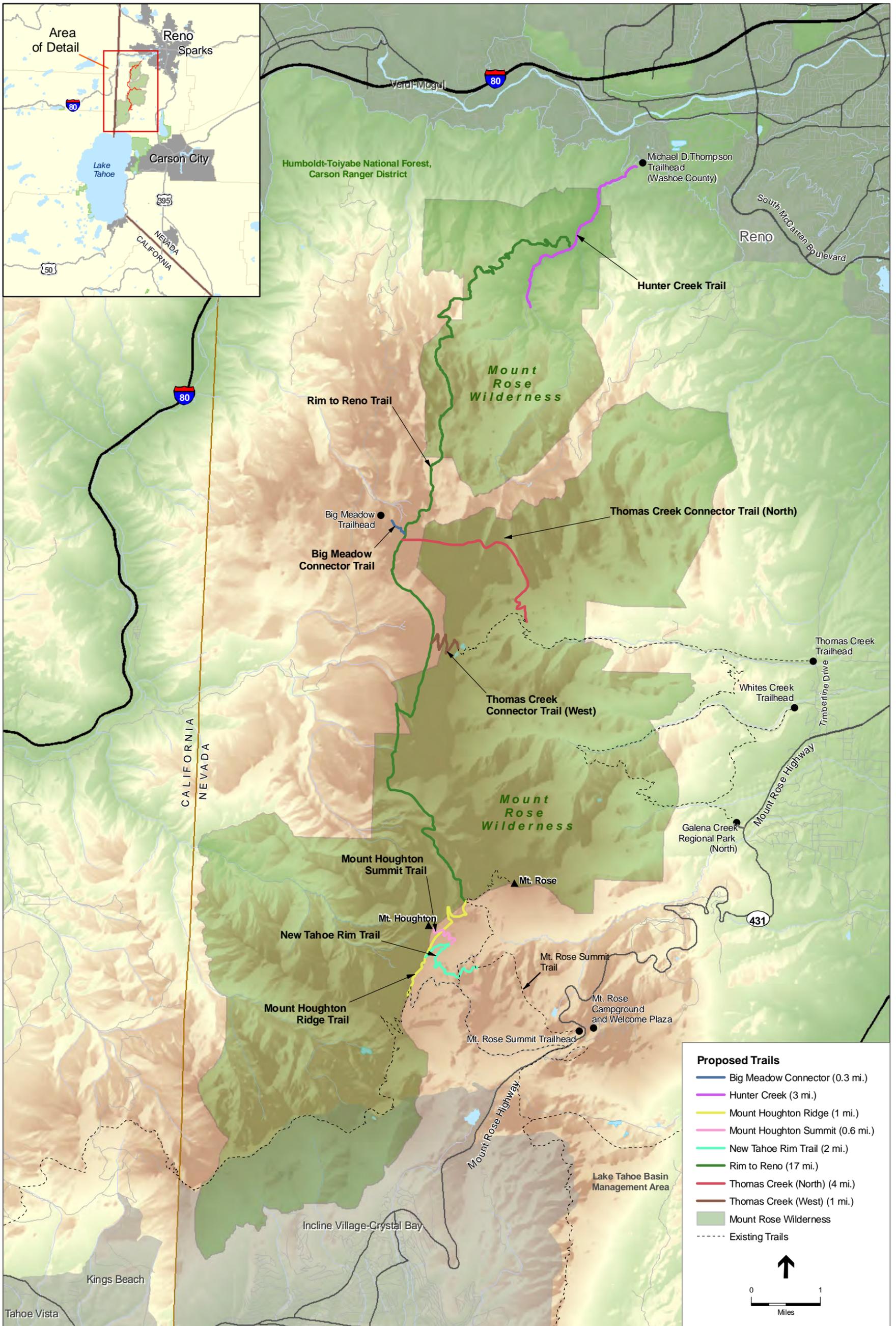
- Name and Address;
- Title of the proposed action;
- Specific comments (36 CFR 215.2) on the proposed action, along with supporting reasons that the Responsible Official should consider in reaching a decision;
- Signature or other verification of identity upon request; identification of the individual or organization who authored the comments(s) is necessary for appeal eligibility;
- For multiple names or multiple organizations, a signature must be provided for the individual authorized to represent each organization, or for each individual that wishes to have appeal eligibility, and
- Individual members of organizations must submit their own substantive comments to meet the requirements of appeal eligibility as an individual, comments received on behalf of an organization are considered as those of the organization only.

Comments received in response to this solicitation, including names and addresses of those who comment, will be considered part of the public record for this project and will be available for public inspection and will be released if requested under the Freedom of Information Act.

For further information contact Steve Hale, Project Manager at 775-882-2766.

Rim to Reno Trail System Project Proposed Action

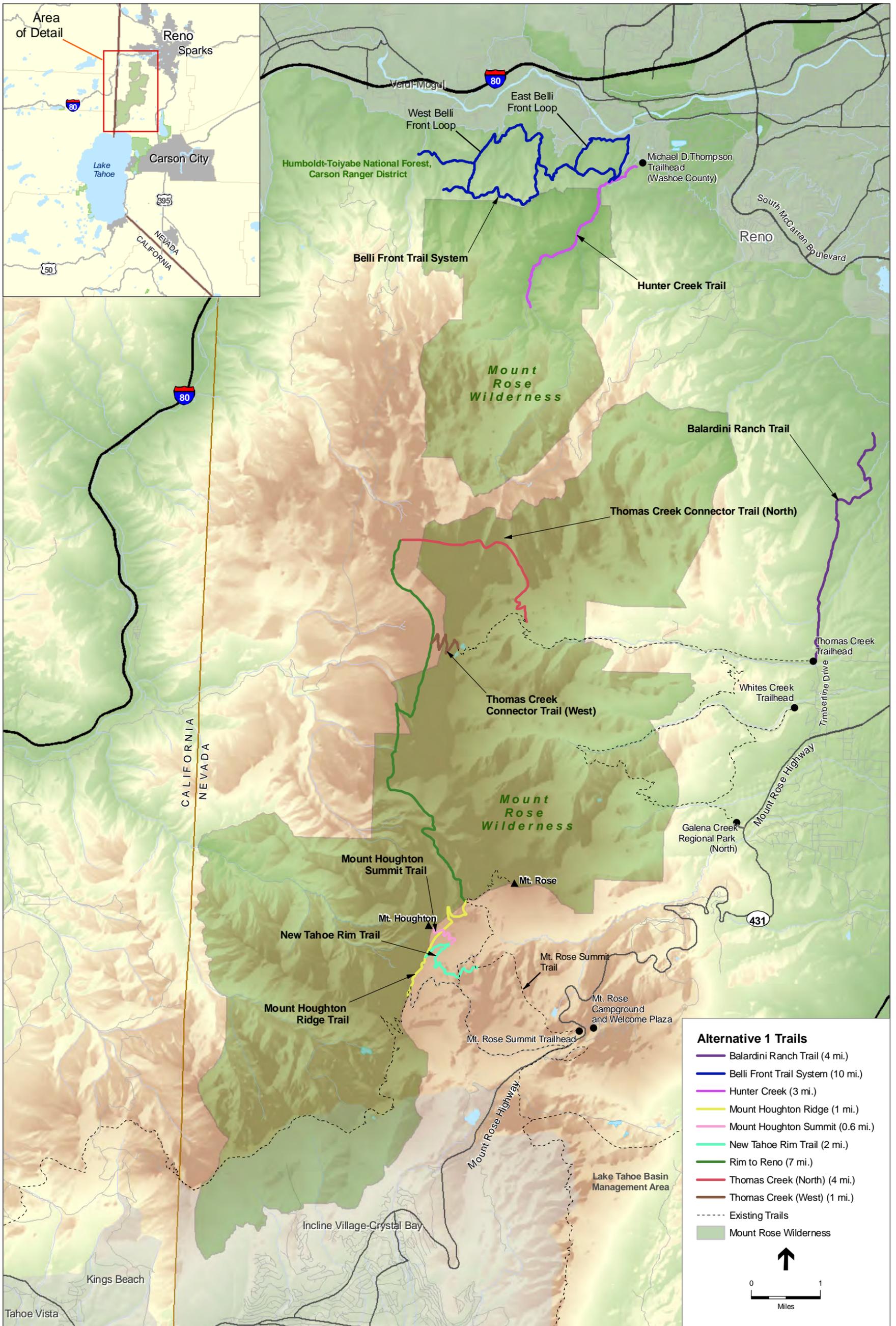
Figure 1



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Rim to Reno Trail System Project Alternative 1

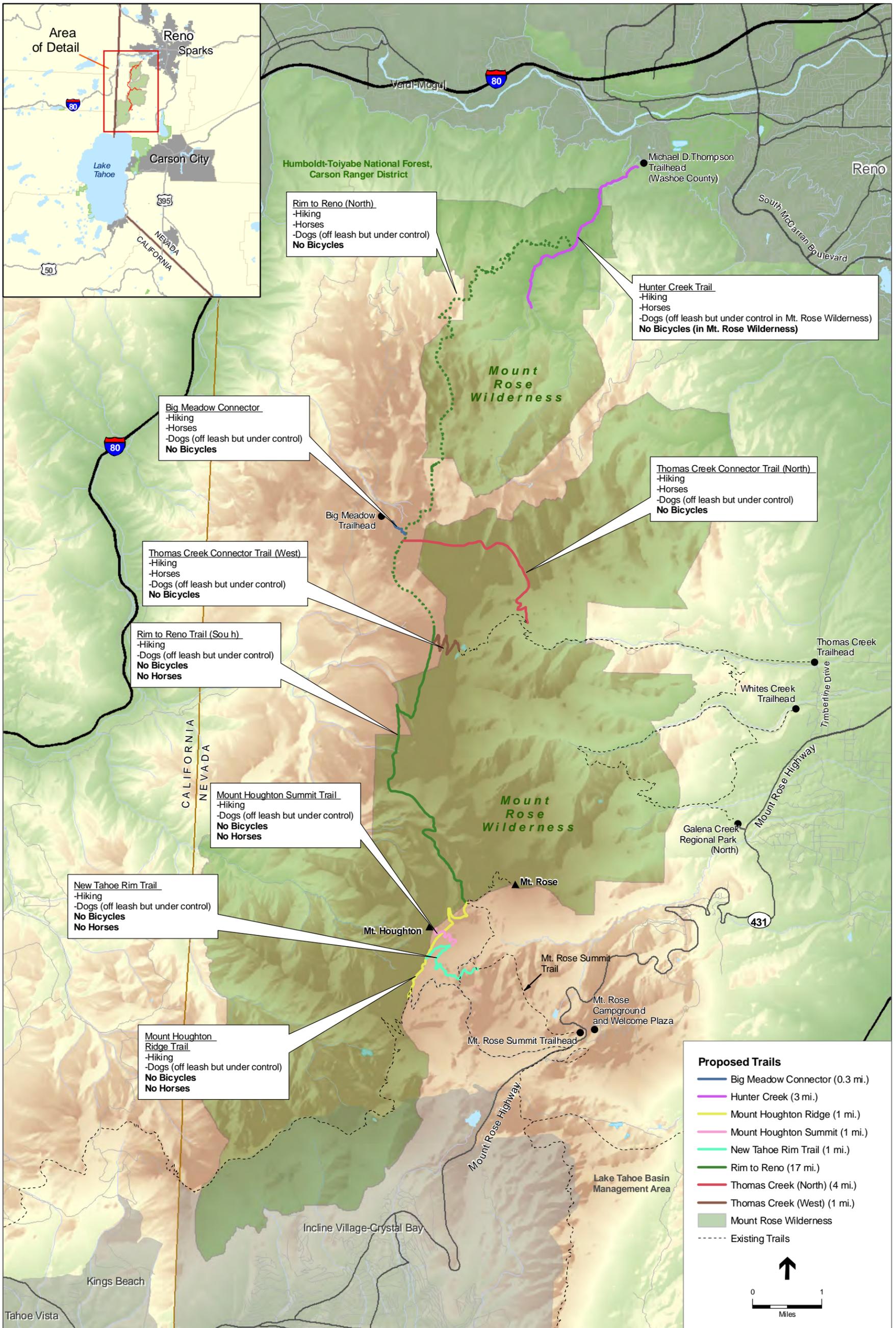
Figure 2



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Rim to Reno Trail System Project Allowable Uses - Proposed Action

Figure 3



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Rim to Reno Trail System Project Allowable Uses - Alternative 1

Figure 4

