



# United States Department of the Interior



## BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

Mother Lode Field Office  
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El Dorado Hills, CA 95762  
[www.blm.gov/ca/folsom](http://www.blm.gov/ca/folsom)

### South Fork American River Trail Reroute (CA-180-09-43) Decision Record August 2009

## 1.0 Introduction and Background

In May 2009 I decided to build phase II of the South Fork American River Trail, as described in EA # CA-180-09-34. The trail would be placed mainly on existing roads/fuel breaks. It would extend from land administered by the Mother Lode Field Office (BLM) to the Skunk Hollow parking area on land administered by State Parks/Bureau of Reclamation near Salmon Falls. I placed no time restriction on implementing the project on BLM-administered land, though construction of the trail on State Parks/Bureau of Reclamation-administered land was contingent on approval by these agencies.

Shortly after I made the decision to build phase II of the trail, the BLM recreation planner recommended that we reroute less than 0.2 mile of the trail on the ridge on the east side of Skunk Canyon/Acorn Creek, near the Skunk Hollow parking area (see attached map). The proposed reroute is logical in his view because it would create an easier, more enjoyable grade for trail users. This decision record addresses the proposed trail reroute.

## 2.0 Decision

### 2.1 Alternatives Considered but not Selected

Not rerouting the trail would create a less enjoyable experience for trail users. The environmental impacts would not be significant, as concluded in EA # CA-180-09-34 and associated Finding of No Significant Impact dated June 2009.

### 2.2 Decision and Rationale

Rerouting the trail, as proposed by the BLM recreation planner, would create an easier, more enjoyable grade for trail users. Based on recommendations from the BLM archaeologist and BLM botanist (see attached documentation), I believe that the environmental effects of building the proposed reroute on water, soil, vegetation, wildlife, cultural, and visual resources would not differ from those effects anticipated in EA # CA-180-09-34, and I have not asked the BLM staff to prepare a new EA addressing the reroute. Instead, the BLM staff has prepared a determination of NEPA adequacy (DNA # CA-180-09-43) to analyze the proposed reroute. Importantly, the recommendations of the BLM archaeologist and botanist (attached) indicate that allowing the proposed reroute would not affect special status plants—such as those associated with the nearby Pine Hill Preserve ACEC—and is very unlikely to affect significant cultural resources. The reroute would be compliant with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, Endangered Species Act, and other authorities, and would not have a significant impact on the quality of the human environment. I am also aware of strong public support for building the trail. Therefore, I have decided to allow the proposed trail to be rerouted in accordance with the recommendation by the BLM recreation planner.

### **3.0 Consultation and Coordination**

No special status animal or plant species (or their habitat) were found; therefore, consultation with US Fish and Wildlife Service is not necessary.

### **4.0 Public Involvement**

The EA was posted on the Mother Lode Field Office's webpage and made available for a formal 15-day public comment period in May 2009. No comment letters were received. There is strong public support for this project, as evidenced by public comments during the development of the South Fork American River Management Plan

### **5.0 Plan Consistency**

Based on information in the EA, the project record, and recommendations from BLM specialists, I conclude that this decision is consistent with the Sierra Resource Management Plan Record of Decision, approved in February 2008, and the South Fork American River Management Plan, approved in July 2004.

### **6.0 Administrative Remedies**

Administrative remedies may be available to those who believe they will be adversely affected by this decision. Appeals may be made to the Office of Hearings and Appeals, Office of the Secretary, U.S. Department of Interior, Board of Land Appeals (Board) in strict compliance with the regulations in 43 CFR Part 4. Notices of appeal must be filed in this office within 30 days after publication of this decision. If a notice of appeal does not include a statement of reasons, such statement must be filed with this office and the Board within 30 days after the notice of appeal is filed. The notice of appeal and any statement of reasons, written arguments, or briefs must also be served upon the Regional Solicitor, Pacific Southwest Region, U.S. Department of Interior, 2800 Cottage Way, E-1712, Sacramento, CA 95825.

The effective date of this decision (and the date initiating the appeal period) will be the date this notice of decision is posted on BLM Mother Lode Field Office's internet website.

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William S. Haigh  
Field Manager, Mother Lode Field Office

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Date

# ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT COVER SHEET

**EA Roster Number:** CA-180-09-34

Tiered to EA# CA-180-03-025 and CA-180-05-12

## **TYPE OF EA**

Application(s) (Non-BLM)

Standard

BLM Proposal(s)

Programmatic

### **Type of Application(s) or Proposals(s):**

Trail Construction, South Fork American River

### **Assessment Title:**

South Fork American River Trail Phase 2

### **Name of Applicant(s):**

Folsom Field office, Bureau of Land Management.

### **Legal Description:**

MDM, T11 N, R 9 E, Sections 30, 29, 28, 21, and 16  
T11 N, R 8 E, Section 25

### **County:**

El Dorado, County CA.

### **Planning Unit and Management Area:**

South Fork American River, Cronan Ranch, Norton Ravine Planning Unit, and Pine Hill Preserve-Salmon Falls Planning Unit

### **Prepared by:**

Jeff Horn, Folsom Field Office.

# ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

## South Fork American River Trail Phase 2

### FOLSOM FIELD OFFICE

**EA Number:** CA-180-09-34

**Proposed Action:** Construction of a multi-use trail along the South Fork American River.

**Location:** T 11 N, R 8 E Section 25, T 11 N, R 9 E, Sections 30, 29, 28, 21, and 16, MDM, El Dorado County, California (See the attached map)

**Applicant:** Folsom Field Office

#### 1.0 Introduction

The proposed action is to construct a multi-use recreational trail along the South Fork of the American River. The trail would be called the South Fork American River Trail (SFART) and it would be a proposed multiple-use trail that would parallel the South Fork of the American River on the north side of the river from Cronan Ranch to the Skunk Hollow parking area at Folsom Lake within the state recreation area. The trail would be for non-motorized use only.

The goals of the proposed action are to provide visitors with the added recreational opportunity of a long-distance trail, minimize construction and use of unauthorized trails through the Pine Hill Preserve and adjacent lands, and protect lands from environmental degradation caused by unauthorized trail construction and use. The trail would be routed on existing roads and fire breaks where possible and practical.

This action is consistent with BLM's South Fork American River Management Plan approved in 2004. It is part of a larger vision to build a multi-use trail that would connect the town of Coloma with the Folsom Lake Recreation Area, and potentially the Sacramento metropolitan area. The potential of connecting the historic gold discovery site at Sutter's Mill in Coloma with Sutter's Fort in Sacramento has obvious appeal, but many challenges. For the purposes of this Environmental Assessment the focus is narrowed to new trail construction on public lands from Cronan Ranch to Skunk Hollow. This is Phase 2 of the project. Phase 1 of the SFART has already been completed (see EA # CA-180-05-12) on BLM-administered land near Greenwood Creek and on the Cronan Ranch. Recreation opportunities allowed on BLM-administered land associated with Phase 1 of the SFART include hiking, horseback riding, mountain biking, hunting, and rafting/kayaking.

The Cronan Ranch is approximately 1418 acres of rolling grass lands and oak savannah, and was

grazed heavily until it was recently brought into public ownership. This area was a cattle ranch for 150 years and was acquired by BLM through donations, grants, and land acquisitions. There are many old dirt ranch roads throughout this large parcel and some of these roads are now part of the larger SFART project. The trails connect to BLM-administered land near Greenwood Creek (now called Magnolia Ranch) which consists of both public domain and acquired lands with a total of approximately 732 acres located approximately 3 miles downriver from the town of Coloma. This area receives heavy use by recreationists, mostly river rafters. The SFART was completed in the Cronan Ranch and Greenwood Creek areas in 2006 as part of Phase I.

Phase 2 of the SFART would be routed through the Norton Ravine parcel which consists of approximately 939 acres of public land. The geology changes here as the river cuts through fault zones of amphibolite and chert. This area is an exceptionally rich and scenic mix of habitats that include riparian, mixed chaparral, grassland, blue oak woodland and montane hardwood. The SFART would also be routed through the northern portion of the Salmon Falls unit of the Pine Hill Preserve.

The relevant lands requiring environmental analysis are under the jurisdiction of the Bureau of Land Management-Folsom Field Office (BLM), Bureau of Reclamation (BOR), and California State Parks. BLM has agreed to be the lead agency for NEPA compliance on the project described in this EA. For clarity, BOR does not own or manage public lands. BOR owns and manages Reclamation project lands. This area is part of project lands owned by BOR as part of the Folsom Dam and Reservoir Project.

The trail would be routed through two small parcels of land, the Bolder Glen (40 acres) and the Klein property (45 acres), both of which are currently privately owned. The American River Conservancy has acquired the Klein property with the intent of donating it to the BLM for the purposes of constructing and completing the SFART. The American River Conservancy currently has acquired an easement through the Bolder Glen parcel (SW1/4 of NW1/4, Section 30 T 11 N R 9 E) for the construction of the proposed trail (see the attached letter dated 4/29/2009).

## **1.1 Purpose and Need**

Phase 2 of SFART is needed because a long-distance trail does not exist along the South Fork between Cronan Ranch and Folsom Lake. Both areas have extensive recreational trails managed by BLM and California State Parks respectively. The lack of a connector trail limits recreational opportunities for hikers, horseback riders, and mountain bikers. The SFART would fulfill the need for a long- distance, multiple-use trail system that serves a diverse group of recreationist. It also takes a step forward in realizing the vision of a trail that connects Sutter's Fort in Sacramento with the site of Sutter's Mill in Coloma.

Demand for the SFART has been demonstrated by the extensive public involvement in and support for BLM's South Fork American River Management Plan approved in 2004. The SFART is considered a high-priority action in the plan. This community-based plan was the culmination of over 40 public meetings. The BLM held two public meetings to discuss the potential of a trail, as described in the introduction. Over 200 people attended and the public's

response was overwhelmingly in favor of this action. The demand for a long-distance multi-use trail has been clearly demonstrated. The availability of funding to pursue planning efforts has also prompted BLM to address the issue at this time.

The goal of this EA is to guide planning and decision-making for Phase 2 of SFART between Cronan Ranch and Folsom Lake. To achieve this goal, two alternatives have been proposed and BLM decision-makers have been provided with the potential environmental consequences of each alternative.

## **1.2 Conformance with Applicable Land Use Plan**

The proposed action is consistent with the Sierra Recourse Management Plan Record of Decision (ROD), approved in February 2008. On page 29 of the ROD it states under Management Actions, that BLM will expand trail networks. The proposed action is also consistent with the South Fork American River Management Plan, approved in 2004.

## **2.0 Proposed Action and Alternatives**

The proposed action alternative (2.1) is to build Phase 2 of the SFART as described below in 2.1. This would allow for quality recreation opportunities for the public, and facilitate construction of later phases of the SFART. No Action Alternative (2.3) is to not build the trail. This would deny a quality trail experience to thousands of recreationists.

### **2.1 Description of the Proposed Action**

The proposed action is to construct a non-motorized, multi-use trail on lands managed by BLM, the Bureau of Reclamation (BOR), California State Parks, and private land currently owned by a private landowner and the American River Conservancy. The trail would be for non-motorized use only. The trail would be built along the South Fork American River, from Cronan Ranch (through the Norton Ravine parcel and the Pine Hill Preserve) to the Skunk Hollow parking area. Land in this area is within a Bureau of Reclamation (BOR) owned and managed Reclamation project. The area is also within the Folsom Lake Recreation Area managed by California State Parks. Phase 1 was completed in 2006 and is described in EA-CA-180-05-12, which the present environmental assessment is tiered to.

The new trail would be constructed using a combination of mechanized equipment and hand labor. A Sweco Trail building machine (a small dozer with backhoe attachments) would be used to rough grade much of the trail, with hand labor used to accomplish the more detailed aspects of the trails construction.

The grade has been set to not exceed 8% where possible. New trail construction would be 2.6 miles in length. The trail route makes use of existing roads and fire breaks wherever possible, especially in the Pine Hill Preserve. Some of these existing roads and fire breaks have grades that may at times exceed 8%, but during construction some can be adjusted to meet this goal. Where this is not possible, the trail would be routed in areas already disturbed and compacted.

Brush removal and chipping would occur on the proposed route as needed to accomplish construction. The trail tread would be approximately four feet in width with a 15-foot brush clearance horizontally and 10-foot vertically. Trees larger than 10 inches DBH would not be removed and every effort would be made to minimize the removal of trees along the trail route.

The proposed trail route would cross several drainages. Most are along existing roads. Culverts and other drainage features have been built at the crossings to allow the drainages to function normally. There would be some newly constructed drainage crossings. The most substantial of the crossings would be at Norton Ravine and Skunk Canyon creeks. These crossings would need to be bridged, but in the short term they would remain wet crossings/fords built by hand by repositioning rocks in the creeks of the bed. Heavy equipment would not be allowed to operate in these creeks. No new fill material would be placed in the creeks. The fords would not obstruct or change the circulation or flow of water. The creeks are dry or nearly dry during the summer and early fall months so it is not expected to present a problem to users. During the spring and winter months, the creeks can be crossed safely by trail users, but in the long term bridges would need to be placed at the crossings.

The construction of bridges would be handled in a separate NEPA document. BLM would be the lead agency on the bridge projects. BLM would work with its partners to raise the funds to build the bridges. BLM would handle the environmental review, including the preparation of a NEPA document that assesses the impacts of building each bridge. Bridges on BOR project lands/State Parks-managed lands would meet all BOR and State Parks requirements. The bridge construction and use would not obstruct or change the circulation or flow of water in the creeks.

Upon completion of the trail, signs would be placed directing users along the trail that inform them of the use restrictions. Trail head kiosks, gates, and some fencing would be necessary to inform and protect trail users and environmental resources. BLM and its partners would be responsible for raising the funds for the trailhead kiosks, gates, and fencing. Any work that occurs on BOR project lands/State Parks-managed lands would meet all BOR and State Parks requirements.

Eventually, permanent toilet facilities would be installed on BLM-administered land, but portable toilets would be utilized until funding becomes available. The installation of these facilities would be covered in a separate NEPA document. BLM and its partners would have the responsibility of raising the funds to build these facilities. BLM would also be responsible for the environmental review and preparation of the NEPA document.

BLM believes that, even without bridges and permanent toilet facilities, the proposed trail is viable. These would be extra amenities that would improve the trail.

BLM would develop an agreement with BOR and State Parks for management of the trail segment on BOR project lands/State Parks-managed lands. The agreement would stipulate that BLM and its partners would, in perpetuity, provide funding and work for trails maintenance for the entire trail, including the segment on the BOR project lands.

The agreement would also stipulate that should events occur which prevent BOR from continuing to contract with State Parks as the manager of recreation for the Folsom Dam and Reservoir Project lands, BOR would have no responsibility to mitigate for any loss of the trail or its use due to change in project lands management regime or budgetary constraints.

## 2.2 Project Design Features

Water quality and soils: During construction and grading heavy equipment would stay 30 feet away from Norton Ravine and Skunk Canyon creeks to prevent siltation and damage to riparian vegetation and aquatic life. Fill material would not be placed in these creeks. Best management practices would be followed at all new drainage crossings to minimize erosion and siltation. Drainage crossings on existing roads are adequate and would be maintained.

Botanical/Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) values: A portion of the proposed trail would be routed through the northern portion of the Pine Hill Preserve's Salmon Falls unit. Similar to the other portions of the Preserve, the ACEC values here are rare plants and soils. This segment of the proposed trail would be 4-foot wide and approximately 0.75 miles long. To minimize impacts to the Pine Hill Preserve ACEC, the proposed trail would either follow an existing 8-foot wide dirt road/fuel break or be constructed using areas with < 8% slope. It is estimated that the trail would overlap for at least 0.5 miles with the existing dirt road and that construction of new trail sections would not exceed 0.25 miles in length.

At least 0.5 miles of the proposed trail would overlap with the existing 10-foot wide road and no adverse effects on special status plants would occur as a consequence of the trail. In areas where the trail would be constructed and existing habitat would be removed, the layout of the trail would be designed to avoid the special status plant populations and, therefore, no adverse effects on special status plants are expected. Because the special status plants at the Pine Hill Preserve may benefit from some type of disturbance, such as removal of shrubs, there is a possibility that some of the plants may colonize open spaces that were not available before the construction activities.

A known population of Layne's Butterweed (*Packera layneae*), a federally threatened species, occurs on a dirt road near Norton Ravine that would be used as part of the trail. Also, a population of elderberry occurs in Skunk Canyon. Elderberry is potential habitat for the Valley Elderberry Longhorn Beetle, also a special status species.

To minimize the potential impacts on special status species as a consequence of implementing the proposed action, the BLM proposes the following measures:

1. The design of the trail would be adjusted, as needed, to avoid special status plants.
2. During construction activities, individual rare plants (if present) would be flagged and avoided.
3. People participating in the construction of the trail would be given a biological orientation before commencing work to recognize and avoid the rare plants.
4. In areas where rare plants are present only hand crews would be used for the trail construction activities.
5. All construction equipment used within Preserve lands and vehicles entering Preserve lands

should be cleaned and extra precautions should be taken to prevent the introduction and spread of non-native plants within Preserve boundaries.

6. All miscellaneous items associated with construction would be removed from the site immediately after construction activities.

7. At the conclusion of construction, a program of yearly monitoring along the trail to detect and remediate infestations by non-native plants would be established and implemented.

8. In the Skunk Hollow area, where the trail is currently expected to terminate, there is a small population of elderberry. The trail has been aligned to avoid this plant population by 30 feet. Only hand construction would occur in this area, and construction would be timed to avoid impacts to the Valley Elderberry Longhorn Beetle.

**Cultural Resources:** If any cultural resources are unearthed during trail construction, work would cease until, depending on the jurisdiction, a BLM or State Parks archaeologist inspects the discovery and makes management recommendations. Compliance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act/CEQA may continue at this point. If the cultural resources are significant, the trail work would not proceed until appropriate measures to avoid, minimize, or mitigate potential adverse effects are taken.

**Fuels/Fire Management:** To minimize the risk of wildfire ignition, earth-moving equipment used during this project would be equipped with spark arresters. Other motorized vehicles used on this project would not be parked where vegetation may come in contact with exhaust systems and catalytic converters.

**Noxious Invasive Weeds:** A major concern, regarding opening habitat to construct the trail, and the consequent public use of the trail, is the potential introduction and spread of non-native plants, such as yellow star thistle and Mediterranean grasses, into Pine Hill Preserve lands and other public lands.

The dozer and other equipment used on the project would be cleaned to help prevent spread of noxious invasive weeds before and after the project. For the long-term, a plan for controlling the spread of weeds has been discussed with BLM partners on this project. For the oak woodland and chaparral portions of the trail, a “weed free zone” would be established extending a minimum of five feet from center line of the trail tread. This zone would be monitored and cleared of weeds on a regular basis to prevent trail users from picking up weed seed and transporting it to new locations. A scotch broom occurrence in close proximity to the Layne’s butterweed population along the trail would be pulled and this area would be monitored in the future as part of the overall weed control effort. Most of the grassland portions of the trail run through fields heavily infested with medusahead and yellow starthistle. Mowing and other measures would be used to minimize weed spread. However, creating a true weed free zone in these grassland areas does not seem possible at this time. Interpretive signs would be placed at trailheads to inform the public of the noxious weed problem, and what they can do to prevent weed spread.

**General:** An “Adopt-A-Trail” program, along with a citizen trail patrol, has been established to monitor trail use and facilitate regular maintenance. Weed control would be part of trail maintenance. These citizen groups meet regularly to foster community acceptance of this project,

and inform BLM of public use, trail problems, parking issues, etc.

### **2.3 Description of the No Action Alternative**

Under this alternative, construction of Phase 2 of the SFART would not occur. Continued use of the lands in the area, including BLM-administered public lands, would likely lead to unauthorized trail use and construction. These trails could have negative effects on water quality, biological resources, and public safety. The public's desire for a long-distance trail would be ignored, potentially denying a quality trail experience for thousands of recreationists.

The no action alternative is counter to the management objectives and goals of BLM's South Fork American River Management Plan and the desires of hundreds of participants in this community-based planning effort. This alternative is not in the public interest.

### **2.4 Alternatives Considered but Eliminated from Detailed Analysis**

The "single-use trails" alternative would allow for the creation of three single-use trails (one for mountain biking, hiking, and equestrian use). The trails would run from Cronan Ranch to Skunk Hollow. Having multi-trails would minimize conflicts among users and would allow for variations on trail design specific to the user group. However, three trails would affect a much larger area of public land, causing more negative impacts on the environment. Also, the regulation of users is more difficult. The multi-trail design would call for much more funding which might delay the trail construction indefinitely. This alternative is inconsistent with BLM policy. This alternative was considered but eliminated from detailed analysis.

### **3.0 Affected Environment**

The area from Norton Ravine to the Pine Hill Preserve contains considerable areas of blue oak/interior live oak woodland/savannah with gray pine, California buckeye, toyon, California coffeeberry, mountain mahogany, poison oak, silver lupine, and pipe vine. Woodland including canyon live oak, ponderosa pine, black oak, interior live oak, white leaf manzanita, toyon, storax, and scotch broom are found on north- and northeast-facing slopes north of the river and north of the serpentine band. Riparian areas along the river include white alder, valley oak, Oregon ash, sand bar willow, dusky willow, Himalayan blackberry, California wild grape, mugwort, and poison hemlock. Gabbro substrate in the Pine Hill Preserve supports chamise and gray pine chaparral plant community with two endemic plant species and one nearly endemic plant species.

Several species of animals use these habitats, and are typical of the western Sierra Nevada foothills. Mammals that use these habitats include mule deer, coyote, grey fox, bobcat, striped skunk, black-tailed jackrabbit, grey squirrel, deer mice and woodrat. Bird species include turkey vulture, red-tailed hawk, California brown towhee, spotted towhee, California quail, wild turkey, acorn woodpecker, northern flicker, Anna's hummingbird, Bewick's wren, plain titmouse, common bushtit, ash-throated flycatcher, house finch, lesser goldfinch, and several sparrow species. Amphibian and reptiles species that commonly occur include Pacific treefrog, western fence lizard, Gilbert's skink, western whiptail, and gopher snake. This list of animals is not intended to be comprehensive, but is a list of species that are commonly seen and/or evidence of

these species is commonly encountered.

Cultural resources commonly found in the area include tailings, ditches, and mined areas associated with historic-era placer gold mining, as well as roads, stock ponds, and other resources associated with ranching from the historic-era to recently.

Suburban sprawl emanating from Sacramento has pushed residential development into the general area over the last 10 years. Private properties containing large family homes with river-front views commonly adjoin public lands in the area. Ranching and farming have taken a back seat to automobile tourism and river-rafting tours which currently drive the area's economy.

### **3.1 Environmental Impacts**

The following critical elements have been considered for this environmental assessment, and unless specifically mention later in this document, have been determined to be unaffected by the proposal: air quality, prime/unique farmlands, floodplains, wilderness, and environmental justice.

### **3.2 Impacts of the Proposed Action**

**Water quality:** The route of the proposed trail has been selected to maximize the use of existing roads and fire breaks. This would help to limit new trail construction and vegetative removal to a 2.6-mile-long 15 foot swath. Most stream crossing are along existing roads that have properly designed culverts and other drainage features. New stream crossings would be designed following best management practices to prevent or minimize erosion. The two most substantial waterways to be crossed are Norton Ravine and Skunk Canyon creeks. The fords would be built by hand to avoid impacts to the creeks. There would be no heavy equipment use within the beds of these creeks. For the long term, BLM would work with its partners to raise the funds to build bridges across the creeks. BLM would conduct the environmental review including the preparation of the NEPA document addressing bridge construction. The bridges would be constructed in a way that minimizes disturbances to the beds of the two creeks. The bridges would not obstruct the flow of the creeks or be considered fill.

If necessary, BLM would seek approval from the US Army Corps of Engineers before building the fords and bridges. At present, this approval does not seem necessary. The Army Corps enforces Section 404 of the Clean Water Act among other water-related authorities. Section 404 requires approval before discharging dredge or fill into waters of the United States. Typical activities requiring Section 404 permits are depositing of fill or dredged material in waters of the U.S. or adjacent wetlands; site development fill for residential, commercial, or recreational developments; construction of revetments, groins, breakwaters, levees, dams, dikes, and weirs; and placement of riprap and road fills. BLM proposes to do none of these activities. Construction of the fords would require a minor repositioning of existing creek boulders and rocks to make a safe pedestrian crossing. BLM would not be discharging dredge or fill material into the creeks. The work would be done by hand and would not obstruct or change the flow or circulation of the creeks. The construction of bridges, later on, would not obstruct or change the flow or circulation of the creeks, also.

Other drainages potentially affected by new trail construction and use are either ephemeral or inactive. BLM's best management practices would be followed to minimize disturbance to these drainages and ensure that erosion is negligible. BLM would not discharge dredge or fill material into the drainages.

**Soils:** A unique soil formation—the Pine Hill gabbro formation—exists in the project area. This formation has been featured in several scientific publications. Soils derived from the weathering of gabbro bedrock are different from the surrounding area. They support plant communities that could not exist without them. The Pine Hill Preserve ACEC was designated to help preserve the soil formation and associated plant communities. Soil disturbance would be minimal. BLM's best management practices would be followed to minimize dust during construction. The proposed trail would be routed on existing roads and fuel break wherever possible in the Pine Hill Preserve ACEC.

**Cultural/Native American issues:** See the Section 106 compliance study attached completed by the BLM archaeologist, with assistance from the State Parks archaeologist. Three cultural resources were identified within and near the area of potential effects. Two are located on BLM-administered land. One is a ditch and other is an earthen dam. The segment of the ditch would be negatively affected. However, BLM has determined that the ditch is not eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. The earthen dam is located outside of the project area and would not be affected by trail construction and use. The third cultural resource in the project area is a small segment of ditch located near the boundary of private property and BOR project lands/State Parks-managed lands along Skunk Canyon creek. This ditch would be avoided. The project would not cause adverse effects on significant cultural resources. Native Americans were contacted to determine whether they would like to comment on the project. To date, they have not responded. No Native American issues have been identified. No Native American places of traditional and cultural importance have been found within the project area. The project is not expected to affect such places.

**Botany/ACEC values:** See the Biological Resource Inventory Report attached. The proposed action would affect a small portion of the Pine Hill Preserve ACEC. The ACEC values include Ceanothus (*Ceanothus Roderickii*), Brisbee Peak rush-rose (*Helianthemum Suffrutescens*), Stebbins' Morning-glory (*Calystegia Stebbinsii*), El dorado Mule-ears (*Wyethia Reticulata*), El dorado Bed straw (*Galium Californicum ssp. Sierrae*), Pine Hill Flannel Bush (*Fremontodendron Californicum ssp. Decumbens*), Red Hill Soap root (*Chlorogalum Grandiflorum*), and Layne's Butterweed (*Packera Layneae*). However, the area of potential effects has been analyzed by the Preserve Manager and project activities are not anticipated to impact ACEC values in any manner,

A small population of Layne's Butterweed (*Packera Layneae*) was found by the BLM botanist in the project area (outside of the Pine Hill Preserve) on a post-1962 dirt road in the Norton Ravine area. Also, elderberry was found by the BLM biologist within the project area at Skunk Canyon on land managed by the Bureau of Reclamation and California State Parks. Elderberry is potential habitat for Valley Elderberry Longhorn Beetle, which is another special status species.

The BLM botanist has reviewed the proposed action and believes that it can move forward in

compliance with the Endangered Species Act and other federal and state requirements. Stipulations and guidelines (see 2.2 Project Design Features) set up to preserve these two species would be strictly enforced. BLM formally consulted with US Fish and Wildlife Service pursuant to Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act. BLM will follow the US Fish and Wildlife Service recommendations in the biological opinion (attached).

BLM proposes to route the trail to avoid the elderberry population by 30 feet. Only hand construction would occur in this area and construction would be timed to avoid negative impacts to elderberry /Valley Elderberry Longhorn Beetle habitat. BLM would incorporate several conservation measures into the design of the proposed action to avoid negative effects to the Layne's Butterweed population in the Norton Ravine area. Refer to the biological opinion (attached).

Noxious Invasive Weeds: The spread of noxious invasive weeds is a major concern. Several invasive species are located on public lands associated with the project area including Scotch broom, yellow star thistle, and medusahead. Every effort would be made at the trailheads to inform the public of this problem and what they can do to minimize the spread. During and after construction of the trail, measures would be taken to minimize the spread (see 2.2 Project Design Features).

Wildlife and Fisheries: Refer to the discussion on the elderberry in the botanical section above. If the project design features (2.2) are implemented, the Valley Elderberry Longhorn Beetle habitat should not be negatively affected. Therefore, the project would not affect special status animal species or their habitats. The area of disturbance is very small and there would be negligible short-term impacts to common wildlife species.

Recreation: Over the long term, the proposed action would greatly benefit recreation. In the short term, during construction, the action would have temporary negligible impacts to recreation. The noise associated with construction, dust and soil disturbance and temporary visual disturbance. Temporary displacements of recreational users may occur, but are not anticipated. The proposed action could result in possible conflicts between different uses (i.e., mountain biker users, and, horseback riders). While this issue was considered, it was decided that potential conflicts arising from increased recreation use could be sufficiently addressed and managed according to BLM's South Fork American River Management Plan. None of these impacts would be long term or permanent. This project would have great long-term benefits on the public's enjoyment and use of public lands in this area. Some parking problems can be anticipated. Holiday weekends may overwhelm the existing parking. This would be monitored. Sanitation issues would also be addressed by the installation of temporary sanitation facilities, and permanent ones as funding is available. Litter and trash may increase, but this occurs generally at the trailheads and by roads. It is hoped that the formation of citizen patrols would keep this problem under control (as described in 2.2 Project Design Features).

Visual Resources: The trail project would have some short-term visual impacts: vegetation disturbances, fresh soil cuts, tread marks left by the trail machine, but these would be temporary, and would not violate BLM's VRM Class II management goals for this area.

Fires/Fuels: This project would have some benefits to fire management because the trail would act as a maintained fire break. The impacts to vegetation would be limited to the 4-foot wide trail tread and a 15-foot brushing swath. No large trees would be cut. The surrounding project area would be unaffected. However, wildfire ignition is always a concern when the public has increased access to backcountry areas. This threat is mitigated somewhat by the trail being between the river and Highway 49. In times of high fire danger, no smoking signs would be placed at the trail heads. In extreme fire danger the trail may be closed temporarily. Trail use is expected to be much lower during extreme fire danger (warm weather periods).

Socioeconomics: Recreation visitors from out of the area are an important component of the local economy. Their purchases help contribute to local incomes and provide incentive for investment. The proposed action may provide additional income for local residents to the extent recreation visitors purchase gas, supplies, lodging, and other services. This contributes to overall economic stability of the area. As more recreation opportunities become available in the area it becomes more attractive to the public. This could result in an increase in local income and economic growth. However, an economic increase cannot be quantified specifically in relation to the proposed action.

### **3.3 Impacts of the No Action Alternative**

Water quality: Continued use and construction of unauthorized trails would likely lead to increased erosion, which could degrade water quality in streams like Norton Ravine.

Soils: Soil disturbance would not occur due to construction. However, there would be continued use and construction of unauthorized trails, which would likely lead to erosion and soil impacts caused by improperly built trails.

Cultural/Native American issues: No impacts

Botany: Continued use and construction of unauthorized trails would likely lead to impacts to botanical resources. The small population of Layne's Butterweed may be impacted by the unmanaged recreational use of the dirt road in the Norton Ravine parcel where the population occurs.

Noxious, Invasive Weeds: No impacts

Wildlife and fisheries: No impacts

Recreation: The public's desire for a long-distance trail connecting public lands at Cronan Ranch with Folsom Lake would be ignored and would create a negative management situation and deny a quality trail experience to thousands of recreationists. The use of the public land would lead to unauthorized trail construction and use and trespass on adjoining private lands. These trails could have negative effects on water quality, vegetation, and public safety. This alternative is counter to the management objectives and goals of BLM's South Fork American River Management Plan, and the desires of hundreds of participants in this community-based planning effort.

Visual Resources: No impacts

Fires/Fuels: The proposed action would have some benefits to fire management because the trail would act as a maintained fire break. With this alternative there would be no benefit. Of course, this benefit might be negated by the increased risk of a fire caused inadvertently by trail users.

Socioeconomics: Recreation visitors from out of the area are an important component of the economic base for local communities. Their purchases help contribute to local incomes and provide incentive for investment. This alternative may hinder the potential for additional income for local residents to the extent recreation visitors purchase gas, supplies, lodging, and other services.

#### **4.0 Cumulative Impacts**

The proposed action is not expected to have negative cumulative impacts at the watershed scale. Impacts resulting from this project would be negligible. Perhaps the biggest issue with respect to cumulative impacts is preservation of the El Dorado County gabbro soils formation that occurs within the Pine Hill Preserve and supports several rare plant species. BLM would do everything possible to avoid impacts to Pine Hill Preserve special status plants/gabbro soils/ACEC values. The trail would be routed on existing roads/fuel breaks within the Preserve.

One small population of Layne's Butterweed and elderberry found outside of the ACEC could be affected by the proposed action. BLM formally consulted with the US Fish and Wildlife Service pursuant to Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act. In their biological opinion (see attached), the US Fish and Wildlife Service concluded that the proposed action is not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of these species. Their conclusion was based on the following reasons: the spatial extent of the anticipated effects is small in conjunction to the species' current distribution; adverse effects are considered relatively minor; and/or conservation measures incorporated into the project design avoid or minimize adverse effects on the species.

#### 4.1 Persons and Agencies Consulted

Consulted with Al Franklin, BLM Botanist  
Graciela Hinshaw Pine hill Preserve Manager  
James Barnes, BLM Archeologist, NEPA coordinator  
Jeff Babcock, BLM Engineering Tech.  
Dan Lusby, BLM Heavy Equipment Operator  
The American River Conservancy  
County of El Dorado  
US Fish and Wildlife  
California State Parks  
Bureau of Reclamation

EA Prepared by:

Date:

*/s/ Jeff Horn*

*5/4/09*

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Jeff Horn, Outdoor Recreation Planner

#### 4.2 BLM Interdisciplinary Team

Reviewers:

*/s/ James Barnes*

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NEPA Coordinator/Cultural Resources

*/s/ Jeff Horn*

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Recreation

*/s/ Albert Franklin*

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Botany

*/s/ Peggy Cranston*

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Wildlife

*/s/ Graciela Hinshaw*

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Pine Hill Preserve Manager

### **4.3 Availability of Document and Comment Procedures**

The EA, posted on the Mother Lode Field Office's website ([www.ca.blm.gov/motherlode](http://www.ca.blm.gov/motherlode)) under NEPA Documents (or available upon request), would be available for a 15-day public review period. Comments should be sent to the BLM at Mother Lode Field Office, attention Jeff Horn, 5152 Hillside Circle, El Dorado Hills, CA 95762 or emailed to us at: [ca180@blm.gov](mailto:ca180@blm.gov).