

### 3.14 RECREATION/WILDERNESS

This section describes recreational opportunities in the project area and provides a discussion of the relevant recreation plans and policies. The federal, state, county, and private recreational opportunities within 50 miles of the project area are shown in Figure 3.14-1. Wilderness Areas and Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs) in the project area are also shown in Figure 3.14-1.

#### 3.14.1 ANALYSIS AREA AND METHODOLOGY

The analysis area for recreation/wilderness resources includes all federal, state, local, and private recreational areas within 50 miles of the project route alternatives. This includes recreational opportunities on federal lands managed by the BLM, USFS (including WSAs), and the USFWS. This analysis included a review of available existing recreation information in the project area, including information from the BLM Elko, Ely, and Battle Mountain Field Offices.

#### 3.14.2 AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

##### RECREATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES ON FEDERAL LANDS

###### Bureau of Land Management

The BLM provides a wide variety of dispersed outdoor recreational opportunities within the study area including fishing, hunting, camping, picnicking, hiking, river floating, and wildlife and wild horse viewing. Other activities include photography, nature study, rock climbing, mountain biking, horseback riding, cross-country skiing, snowmobiling, motorcycle, off-road vehicle (ORV) riding, and scenic driving. The BLM also offers a number of developed recreational sites within the project area. Table 3.14-1 identifies the developed recreational areas managed by the three BLM Field Offices within 50 miles of the route alternative segments. Developed recreational areas are described below.

**TABLE 3.14-1: DEVELOPED BLM RECREATION SITES WITHIN 50 MILES OF THE PROJECT**

Recreational Areas	BLM Field Office	Recreational Opportunities	Annual Visitation*	Approximate Size (acres)
Hickison Petroglyph Recreation Area	Battle Mountain	Geological sightseeing, camping, mountain biking	9,000	160
Mill Creek Recreation Area	Battle Mountain	Geological sightseeing, hiking, mountain biking, and camping	12,250	40
Illipah Reservoir	Ely	Boating/rafting, hiking, camping	41,000	200
Garnet Hill	Ely	Fishing, wildlife observation, hiking, mineral collecting	10,200	1,280
Cleve Creek Campground	Ely	Fishing, hiking, mountain biking, camping, and cross-country skiing	4,000	40
Egan Crest Trailhead	Ely	Hiking, picnicking	N/A	N/A
Zunino Reservoir	Elko	Wildlife observation, hiking, camping, fishing, boating, picnicking	9,000	200

\*Visitation figures were provided by Jack Tribble, BLM Ely Field Office, 11/2/00, and Julia Wingard, BLM Elko Field Office, 11/3/00. Visitation figures for the Battle Mountain Field Office were also gathered from the Recreation Management Information System at <http://rmis.arso.ar.gov/blm.gov/scripts/webobjects.exe/Rmis3-a.wva>. No figures for the Egan Crest Trailhead are available, as this site has not yet opened to the public (opening Spring 2001).  
Source: (BLM 1999)

### **Hickison Petroglyph Recreation Area**

Recreational opportunities at the Hickison Petroglyph Recreation Area include viewing prehistoric petroglyphs in the sandstone rocks. Hiking, historic points of interest, and wildlife viewing opportunities are also available. Other facilities include a day use area with 16 campsites, fire rings/barbecues, restrooms, and recreational vehicle (RV) parking. The recreation area is accessed from Highway 50, approximately 27 miles west of Eureka.

### **Mill Creek Recreation Area**

Mill Creek was the site of a 1930s Civilian Conservation Corps work camp. The recreational area is located 20 miles south of Battle Mountain on State Route (SR) 305. Recreational opportunities at Mill Creek include camping, fishing, mountain biking, wildlife viewing, hiking, and geological sightseeing. The campground offers 11 tent sites, picnic tables, fire rings, and accessible vault-type restrooms. Recreational vehicle sites are also available.

### **Illipah Reservoir**

Illipah Reservoir is a 200-acre reservoir at the base of the White Pine Mountain Range, approximately 37 miles west of Ely via Highway 50. Trout fishing, boating, hiking, and camping are popular activities at this site.

### **Garnet Hill**

Garnet Hill is located at the 7,000-foot elevation Garnet Hill approximately 9.5 miles north of Ely via Highway 50. This recreation area provides picnicking opportunities, as well as rock collecting activities at the Garnet Rockhounding Area (BLM 1994).

### **Cleve Creek Campground**

Fishing, hiking, mountain biking, and cross-country skiing are available at the Cleve Creek Campground, approximately 10 miles northeast of Ely. Camping and a group barbecue area are available at the Cleve Creek Campground.

### **Egan Crest Trailhead**

The newly developed Egan Crest Trailhead has two picnic tables, two grills, a graveled parking lot, an informational kiosk, and a developed trail system. The trailhead is accessed on the north side of Hwy 50, approximately 8 miles west of Ely. The trail system has three loops, heads in a northerly direction from the trail head, and will be open in spring 2001 (personal communication, Jack Tribble, BLM Ely Field Office, November 6, 2000).

### **Zunino Reservoir**

Zunino Reservoir is located immediately east of the Ruby Mountains and 30 miles south-southeast of Elko via SR 227 and SR 228. Opportunities for open camping are located on the north and south shores. Other recreational opportunities include fishing, boating, picnicking, hiking, and wildlife observation.

### **USDA Forest Service**

The Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest provides recreation opportunities in the analysis area. The USFS also manages designated Wilderness Areas and Wilderness Study Areas.

### **Humboldt National Forest**

The Humboldt National Forest is part of the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest. This 2.5-million-acre National Forest is composed of nine separate divisions and is the largest National Forest outside of Alaska. Recreational opportunities include hiking, camping, hunting, wildlife viewing, fishing, snowmobiling, cross-country skiing, helicopter skiing, and other activities. The Forest has 20 developed camp and picnic grounds, as well as 900 miles of trails for backpacking and hiking (USFS 2000).

**FIGURE 3.14-1: DEVELOPED RECREATION SITES**

Portions of the project would be located near, but outside of, two divisions of the Humboldt National Forest. One part of the forest within the Ruby Mountains is located approximately 2 miles from the project. This area is primarily accessed from Highway 228. Another division of the forest is located approximately 4 miles east of Ely. This portion of the forest is accessed primarily by Highways 50 and 93.

### **Toiyabe National Forest**

The Toiyabe National Forest is part of the combined Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest. The Forest offers a variety of recreational opportunities, including camping, hiking, fishing, hunting, skiing, canoeing, horseback riding, and sightseeing. There are 35 developed public campgrounds on the Forest, with a total of approximately 900 family and group sites. Other developed recreational opportunities include 8 picnic grounds, observation sites, trailheads, snow play areas, cross-country skiing, and 2 ski resorts (USFS 2000). The Toiyabe provides over 1,100 miles of trails for hiking, backpacking, and horseback riding. The Forest also offers over 1,600 miles of recreation roads for travel and viewing scenery. Some of the many trails crossing the Toiyabe include the Pacific Crest National Recreational Scenic Trail, the Toiyabe Crest Trail, Mount Charleston National Recreational Trails, and the soon to be completed Tahoe Rim Trail (USFS 2000). The nearest section of the Toiyabe National Forest to the project area is located approximately 24 miles southeast of the town of Eureka, accessed primarily by Highway 50.

### **Designated Wilderness Areas**

The Wilderness Act of 1964 established the National Wilderness Preservation System, which is comprised of public and other federal lands designated by Congress as wilderness. Wilderness areas are defined as areas where "...the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain." A Wilderness Area is further defined to mean "... an area of undeveloped federal land retaining its primeval character and influence, without permanent improvements or human habitation, which is protected and managed as to preserve its natural conditions." Designated Wilderness Areas in the project area are all within the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest and include the following:

- Ruby Mountains Wilderness (Elko County) 90,000 acres
- East Humboldt Wilderness (Elko County) 36,900 acres
- Jarbidge Wilderness Additions (Elko County) 48,500 acres
- Mount Moriah Wilderness (White Pine County) 82,000 acres
- Currant Mountain Wilderness (White Pine, Nye Counties) 36,000 acres
- Quinn Canyon Wilderness (Nye County) 27,000 acres

A portion of the project would be located approximately 28 miles southwest of the Ruby Mountain Wilderness Area and approximately 30 miles from the Currant Mountain Wilderness Area.

### **Wilderness Study Areas**

A WSA is a unit of BLM-administered land whose characteristics meet criteria set forth by Congress for wilderness. Some of these characteristics would include a size greater than 5,000 acres, free from man-made improvements such as roads, and offering outstanding opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation. The BLM's Interim Management Policy for Lands Under Wilderness Review guides management and decisions for specific areas of public lands under wilderness review by Congress. The policy applies to the following:

- Wilderness study areas (WSAs) identified by the wilderness review required by Section 603 of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLMPA);
- WSAs established by Congress; and

- WSAs identifies through the land use and planning process in Section 202 of the FLPMA.

The purpose of the policy is to prevent impairment of wilderness values of WSAs under the BLM's jurisdiction until such time Congress either designates the area as wilderness, or releases it from the wilderness review process through legislation. Congress has recommended a number of WSAs in Nevada for consideration. Each of these areas is roadless, natural in condition, and possesses outstanding opportunities for solitude or primitive unconfined recreation. There are four WSAs within 50 miles of the project area. These WSAs include the following:

- **Roberts Mountain WSA** is located approximately 40 miles northeast of the town of Eureka and approximately 6 miles west from the closest route alternative segment. The WSA consists of 15,090 acres of the rugged Roberts Mountains and its three prominent peaks. Vegetation in this WSA includes willow, cottonwood, aspen, birch, and dogwood trees in deep, narrow canyons. Mountain mahogany trees and limber pine are found in isolated stands on the barren rock ridges.
- **Simpson Park WSA** is located within the Simpson Park mountain range on the Eureka/Lander County border. This WSA is approximately 49,670 acres in size and located approximately 17 miles from the closest route alternative segment. This area offers a variety of wildlife, vegetation, and topography, with three mountain peaks.
- **Red Springs WSA** is located east of the northernmost section of the Humboldt National Forest in Elko County. This WSA is approximately 7,847 acres in size and located approximately 20 miles from the closest route alternative segment. The core of this WSA is an east-tilted block of limestone. The remainder of the area is comprised of sedimentary rocks forming rounded weathered hills and eroded drainages.
- **Cedar Ridge WSA** is located just south of the Red Springs WSA in Elko County. This WSA is approximately 10,000 acres in size and located approximately 15 miles from the closest route alternative segment. This WSA is a densely covered ridge of pinyon pine-juniper, with Hilton Peak as its highest point.

### **U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service**

#### **Ruby Lake National Wildlife Refuge**

The Ruby Lake National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) was established by the USFWS in 1939, and lies to the east of the Humboldt National Forest in the southern end of Ruby Valley. It is located approximately 65 miles southeast of Elko and 8 miles northeast from the nearest route alternative segment. The refuge consists of approximately 17,000 acres of marsh and is bordered by meadows, grasslands, seasonal alkali wetlands, and shrub-steppe uplands. The marsh is remnant of an ancient, 200-foot-deep lake and is supplied with water from over 150 springs emerging from the base of the Ruby Mountains. Over 200 bird species, including 25 species of waterfowl, use the refuge during migration and for nesting and feeding. Recreational opportunities at Ruby Lake NWR include kayaking, fishing, waterfowl hunting, bird watching, and nature viewing. Campgrounds and a visitor's center are also available at the South Ruby Campground. Public use has been as high as 70,000 visitors per year, most of which were anglers (Audubon 2000).

### **National Historic Trails**

#### **California and Pony Express National Historic Trails**

The California National Historic Trail and Pony Express National Historic Trail were established as National Historic Trails by Congress in 1992. Nearly 200,000 Americans traversed the California National Historic Trail between 1841 and 1860 to settle in California and establish farms or seek gold during the Gold Rush. Approximately 1,136 miles of trails exist in Nevada alone. The Pony Express National Historic Trail was established in 1860 to transport mail from Missouri to California and

demonstrated the viability of an overland mail route to the west. Approximately 400 miles of this trail lie within Nevada. Both trails symbolize American's rapid expansion to the Pacific (NPS 1999). The California National Historic Trail runs through the project area near the southern base of the Ruby Mountains Division of the Humboldt National Forest, and roughly parallels Interstate 80 through the BLM Elko District in the project area. The Pony Express National Historic Trail runs roughly east-west through the BLM Battle Mountain and Ely Districts in the project area. The trails are administered by the Long Distance Trails Office of the National Park Service in Salt Lake City, Utah, but responsibility for the management of the trails lies in the hands of current trail managers at the federal, state, local, and private levels. The California National Historic Trail is located on a patchwork of private and BLM-managed lands in the project area, while the Pony Express Trail is located almost entirely on BLM-managed lands in the project area.

Recreational use of the trails include hiking, biking, horseback riding, and historic reenactments of the trail experience. Usage of the trails is increasing due to heritage tourism (i.e., people rediscovering their past), commemorative activities, and media interest (NPS 1999). Each June, as many as 600 members of the National Pony Express Association reenact the historic ride (GORP 2000). Others reenact the westward trek along the California Trail by covered wagon and on foot.

## **RECREATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES ON STATE LANDS**

### **Cave Lake State Park**

Cave Lake State Park is located approximately 15 miles southeast of Ely via Highway 486. The 32-acre reservoir at Cave Lake State Park is popular for trout fishing, boating, picnicking, and camping. The park is located in the Schell Creek Range at an elevation of 7,300 feet, offering scenic views and opportunities for nature study and photography. Facilities include campgrounds, picnic areas, hiking trails, and a boat launch. Winter sports such as ice fishing, cross-country skiing, and ice-skating are also available. Weather permitting, Cave Lake is open all year (NSP 2000).

### **Ward Charcoal Ovens State Historic Park**

Ward Charcoal Ovens State Historic Park is located approximately 18 miles south of Ely via Highways 50/6/93 and is known for its six historic charcoal ovens. These beehive-shaped ovens were used in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century to generate charcoal for use in the mines of nearby Ward. Today, the park offers limited facilities for picnicking and camping. Other features include forested woodlands, riparian areas, and views of the Steptoe Valley and surrounding mountains.

### **South Fork State Recreational Area**

South Fork State Recreational Area, also known as South Fork Reservoir, is located approximately 16 miles south of Elko on State Route 228. The reservoir covers 1,650 acres and is surrounded by 2,200 acres of meadowlands and rolling hills. It is popular for hunting, camping, boating, picnicking, winter sports, and wildlife viewing. The reservoir is best known for its trophy-class trout and bass fishery. Facilities include a boat launch, campground, trailer dump, station, and picnic area (NSP 2000).

## **RECREATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES ON COUNTY LANDS**

### **Eureka County**

Recreational opportunities owned and operated by Eureka County are primarily located in the Town of Eureka. These include the Eureka County Rodeo Grounds and Fair Building, a community indoor swimming pool, two ball fields, and a small county park in the center of town. The Eureka County School District maintains an indoor gymnasium, a running track, and a football field complex in the Town of Eureka. The Town of Crescent Valley, in the northern portion of the county, also offers a

rodeo arena and a town park (Eureka County 1997). None of these community recreation facilities are located near the route alternatives.

### **White Pine County**

Recreational opportunities owned and operated by White Pine County include a golf course, tennis courts, numerous ball parks, six town parks, neighborhood parks, a shooting range, and playgrounds (White Pine County 1998). These facilities are located in the City of Ely and the town of McGill. The county also operates the White Pine County Rodeo Grounds and Fairgrounds facility north of the City of Ely. Additionally, the City of Ely owns and operates the Ghost Train. Other recreational opportunities within White Pine County are similar to those within the BLM Ely Field Office due to the overlap of BLM and county land in this area. The varied outdoor recreational opportunities include camping, hiking, fishing, backpacking, horseback riding, ATVs, mountain biking, cross-country skiing, snowmobiling, nature photography, wildlife viewing, and hunting.

### **Lander County**

In Lander County, the primary recreational opportunities are concentrated in the communities of Austin, Battle Mountain, and Kingston. No community recreation facilities are near the route alternatives. The main recreational opportunities outside of these communities are primarily dispersed outdoor recreational activities, such as hunting, hiking, fishing, camping, and ORV use similar to those available within the BLM Battle Mountain Field Office due to the overlap in these areas.

### **Elko County**

Similar to the other counties in the region, the primary recreational opportunities in Elko County are concentrated in the urbanized areas of Elko, Wells, and Carlin. The Elko County parks and recreation sites identified in the Elko County Master Plan (1996) include the Lamoille Canyon Camp Ground, the Wildhorse Reservoir, the “Snow Bowl,” and the Elko County Fairgrounds. None of these recreational facilities are located near the route alternatives. Recreational opportunities in the rural portions of Elko County include hunting, fishing, camping, sightseeing, and rock collecting (Elko County 1996).

## **PRIVATE RECREATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES**

The only private recreational facility near the project area is located near the City of Ely. A privately run KOA Campground is located 3 miles south of the City on State Route 6/50/93. The KOA Campground offers year-round camping on numerous grass tent sites and RV parking areas (KOA 2000).

## **RECREATION MANAGEMENT PLANS AND POLICIES**

A number of land management plans and policies exist within the project area. These include BLM Resource Management Plans, the Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP), and county master and/or land use plans. These plans and policies as they relate to recreation opportunities and WSAs are described further below.

### **BLM Resource Management Plans**

Three field offices of the BLM manage various resource topics within the project area. The Elko Field Office of the BLM manages the Elko resource area, the Battle Mountain Field Office manages the Shoshone-Eureka resource area, and the Ely Field Office manages the Egan resource area. The RMPs for each of these areas contain a number of planning objectives and management actions related to recreation and WSAs.

**Shoshone-Eureka RMP**

The Shoshone-Eureka Resource Area contains 4.4 million acres of public land in north-central Nevada administered by the Battle Mountain District BLM (BLM 1984a) and encompasses most of Lander and Eureka counties and a portion of Nye County. The RMP provides land use and management objectives related to recreation and wilderness designations. A summary of these is provided below.

***Recreation Designation***

- Develop the recreational potential of the public lands to a level sufficient to meet the growing demands of recreationists using public lands.
- Encourage recreation use on public lands.
- Ensure protection of the environment and aesthetic qualities within the resource area.
- Improve the opportunities for recreational uses of wildlife and wild horses.

***Wilderness Designation***

- Recommend wilderness designation for those WSAs where the values of wilderness designation are capable of balancing the other resource values and uses, which would be foregone due to wilderness designation.
- Recommend wilderness designation only for those WSAs that can be effectively managed as wilderness over the long term.

**Elko Resource Area RMP**

The Elko District RMP is a long-range plan to manage public lands within the Elko Planning Area of north-central Nevada (BLM 1986). The Elko Resource Area consists of three planning units, the North Fork, Buckhorn, and Tuscarora, consisting of approximately 5.9 million acres in the western half of Elko County and northern portion of Lander and Eureka counties. Over 3.1 million acres are public lands administered by the BLM. The RMP provides land use management objectives related to recreation, as summarized below.

- Provide for a wide range of recreation opportunities by maintaining the three existing Special Recreation Management Areas (SRMAs) in the planning area, designating the South Fork of the Humboldt River as an area for water-based recreation uses, designating the Wildhorse SRMA for camping and water-based recreation, and managing the remainder of the planning area for dispersed recreation activities, including ORV use.
- Manage as wilderness those portions of the WSAs that are manageable as wilderness and where wilderness values are capable of balancing other resource values and uses that would be foregone. The RMP contains two management actions related to WSAs: (1) recommend the Rough Hills WSA (6,685 acres) and a portion of the Little Humboldt River (29,775 acres) as preliminary land suitable for wilderness designation; and (2) recommend the Cedar Ridge and Red Springs WSAs and a portion of the Little Humboldt River WSA, totaling 30,294 acres, as non-suitable for wilderness designation.

**Egan Resource Area RMP**

The Egan RMP is a 20-year plan to manage 3.8 million acres of public land in east-central Nevada, managed by the Ely District of the BLM (BLM 1984b). The majority of the resource area is located in White Pine County, although portions are also located in Nye and Lincoln counties. The RMP focuses on three resource issues: rangeland management, realty actions, and WSAs, but does not contain guidelines related to recreation. A summary of the management objectives for WSAs is provided below.

- Recommend portions of three WSAs as suitable for possible wilderness designation, including Goshute Canyon, Park Range, Riordan’s Well, and South Egan Range.
- Designate portions of Riordan’s Well and South Egan Range WSAs as “limited” to ORVs. The remainder of the resource area would be designated “open.”
- Continue to protect all Wilderness Areas under the BLM’s Interim Management Policy and Guidelines for Lands Under Wilderness Review, until recommended by Congress to become a National Wilderness Area.

### **National Park Service Historic Trails Management Plan**

The Long Distance Trail Office of the National Park Service completed a Comprehensive Management and Use Plan and Final EIS in 1999 for the California National Historic Trail and the Pony Express National Historic Trail. The document focuses on the trails’ purpose and significance, issues, and concerns related to current conditions along the trails, resource protection, visitor experience and use, and long-term administrative and management objectives.

The plan identifies high-potential route segments and sites. High-potential segments are “Those portions of (either) trail which would afford a high quality recreation experience in a portion of the route having greater-than-average scenic values or affording an opportunity to vicariously share in the experience of the original users of the historic route.” High-potential sites are “Those historic sites related to the route which provide opportunity to interpret the historic significance of the trail during the period of its major use” (NPS 1999). In the project area, the NPS identifies the Gravelly Ford site of the California National Historic Trail as a high-potential site, and the Overland Canyon to Simpson Park Station segment of the Pony Express National Historic Trail as a high-potential segment.

### **State Plans and Policies**

The Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP), prepared by the Nevada Division of State Parks in 1992, provides an assessment of Nevada’s characteristics, people, resources, and recreational activities and critical recreation issues facing the state. The SCORP identifies the major recreation sites in Nevada, including the following in the project area:

- Mill Creek (BLM)
- Zunino Reservoir (BLM)
- Cold Creek Reservoir (BLM)
- Garnet Hill (BLM)
- Hickson Petroglyph (BLM)
- Ward Mountain (USFS)

According to the plan, the outdoor recreational activity with the highest actual participation rate in Nevada (90% of a telephone survey respondents) was defined as “relaxing outdoors.” Hiking, walking, picnicking, and pleasure driving were also popular, with about 75% of all respondents participating in these activities (Nevada Division of State Parks 1992).

Areas with high potential for recreational use were also identified. The plan identifies various dispersed areas in the project area with high potential for tent camping, ORV and motorcycle riding, and picnicking/vehicle camping. For example, the southeastern edge of the Humboldt National Forest and the base of Buck Mountain are identified as areas with essential characteristics for tent camping. These characteristics include slopes less than 25%, forest cover, water features, wildlife, moderate temperatures, and suitable soils. This area is in the vicinity of one of the route alternative segments.

The SCORP also identifies future recreation issues and actions for the state as a whole. One of the issues applicable to the project is the protection of Nevada’s scenic resources, including “undisturbed mountainous areas that are not impaired by development (including roads, open mines, transmission

towers, etc).” The actions to protect these resources are to: (1) prepare resource protection plans in parks with substantial natural, cultural, or scenic resources; (2) identify all areas which are environmentally sensitive; and (3) encourage other public landowners to utilize their properties as parkland and preserve sensitive areas for their scenic resources.

Another applicable issue identified in the plan is the protection of public access to public lands. Areas of specific concern within the project area include the Ruby Mountains and the East Humboldt Range. The actions to address this issue include: (1) land exchanges, easements, rights-of-way, purchases, or cooperative agreements; and (2) acquisition of ROWs to public lands that are blocked by private lands and of inholdings to solidify public land parcels.

A final applicable issue identified in the plan is the need to provide recreational, multiple-use trails in “wildland-urban interface” areas. The actions to address this issue include: (1) encourage trails on existing public and quasi-public lands, and (2) encourage area-wide trail planning to develop master trail systems and connectors.

### **County Plans and Policies**

#### **Eureka County Master Plan (1997)**

The Eureka County Master Plan provides general recommendations related to parks and recreation in Eureka County. The county recommends that they determine the number of acres of park land, estimate how often parks are used and by how many people, and determine further needs based on the level of service standard of 100 acres per 1,000 people.

#### **White Pine County Land Use Plan (1998)**

The White Pine County Land Use Plan encourages development of county-wide recreation areas and support activities by participating in county-wide youth programs and activities, enhancing and preserving existing recreational facilities, and supporting new recreation facilities in the county. The White Pine County Public Land Use Plan, a coordinated land use planning effort among the county, the BLM, and the USFS, encourages dispersed recreational opportunities.

#### **Lander County Master Plan (1997a)**

The goals for recreation in Lander County are: (1) to provide adequate recreational facilities for the residents of Lander County; and (2) to develop, maintain, and improve access to outdoor recreational resources.

#### **Elko County Master Plan (1996)**

Goals for recreation in Elko County include identifying, prioritizing, reserving, acquiring, developing, and maintaining a system of recreation areas and programs. Recreation policies include developing and enhancing park use for all age groups, supporting development of new specialty facilities at the Elko County Fairgrounds, and providing accessible recreation opportunities for the disabled.

### **Statewide Visitation Trends**

Visitation of developed and dispersed recreational sites in Nevada, including those in the project area, has been steadily increasing over the past 15 years. Visitation will likely continue to increase proportionately with the growing statewide population (personal communication, Jack Tribble, Recreation Specialist, BLM Ely Field Office, November 2, 2000).

## **3.14.3 ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES**

This section describes the effects of the Falcon to Gonder project on recreation and wilderness resources.

## **SIGNIFICANCE CRITERIA**

The project would be considered to have a significant adverse impact to recreational resources and wilderness if it would:

- Directly disturb federal, state, local, or private recreational sites;
- Restrict access to federal, state, local, or private recreational sites or restrict access to public land; or
- Substantially reduce the scenic values of undeveloped federal, state, local, or private recreational sites or wilderness areas or WSAs.

## **ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS – COMPARISON OF ALTERNATIVES**

### **Impacts Common to all Route Alternatives**

There are a number of potential effects to recreation/wilderness common to all route alternatives that could occur as a result of the project. These effects include: (1) potential recreational conflicts with construction-related truck traffic, (2) potential conflicts with recreational plans or policies, (3) potential effects of access roads on recreational resources, and (4) potentially restricted access and reduced visitation. None of these effects would have a substantial adverse effect to these resources, as described below.

### **Potential Conflicts with Construction-Related Truck Traffic**

Construction-related truck traffic may have a temporary effect on local roadways by delaying access to recreational areas in the project area due to the slow-moving nature of trucks hauling materials to construction sites. This potential effect would be common to all route alternatives. Given the dispersed nature of the recreational opportunities in the region, the relatively light traffic in the area, and the temporary nature of construction-related travel on local roadways, these potential effects are considered minor and not considered significant.

### **Potential Conflicts with Recreational Plans or Policies**

The BLM recreation goals and policies as described in the three applicable RMPs are primarily related to WSAs or general enhancements to dispersed recreation on an area-wide basis. The project would avoid all WSAs, and no specific BLM recreational goals or policies are directed toward the areas proposed for the route alternatives. Therefore, the project would not conflict with BLM recreational plans or policies.

Recreational goals and policies contained in the four counties' land use or master plans are primarily concerned with improving recreational opportunities within the more urbanized portions of the county where county-run recreational resources are located. No specific recreational policies are directed toward the areas proposed for the transmission line routes. As the project would largely avoid populated areas, there would be no conflict between the project and county recreation plans and policies.

### **Access Road Impacts**

As part of the project, many miles of existing dirt roads would be improved for enhanced access, and a few new spur roads would be constructed. These improved or new roads leading from state highways to the project area may increase accessibility into areas that were previously inaccessible. Currently impassable two-track dirt roads may be accessible by 2- or 4-wheel drive (4WD) vehicles. Since these access road improvements would primarily occur on federal lands and such activities as dispersed recreation and general sightseeing/nature viewing are allowed on federal lands in most locations, there would be no adverse effect to recreational resources. These access roads would not traverse or restrict access to existing developed recreation sites, as none exist in the immediate project area. Improved

access roads may have a slightly beneficial effect by providing increased opportunities for dispersed recreational 4WD use or general sight seeing.

### **Impacts to Recreational Access and Visitation**

Project transmission lines would traverse a number of roadways, providing access to the developed and dispersed recreational resources in the project area. Visitation to these sites is largely dependent on automobile access via local highways. Since no alterations to local roads are anticipated as a result of the project and the transmission lines would span these routes allowing unrestricted access beneath them, the project would have little or no effect on recreational access or visitation rates. During transmission line stringing operations, it may be necessary to close some smaller, dirt roads for the duration of this activity. Some of these road closures may temporarily restrict access to dispersed recreational areas. These areas would likely be accessible via route alternatives, and the road closures would be temporary in nature. As a result, the project would not have a significant adverse effect on dispersed recreational resources.

#### ***Segment A***

Segment A is common to all route alternatives and would be located approximately 25 miles east from Mill Creek at its nearest point, and would traverse Interstate 80. The Mill Creek Recreation Area is located 20 miles south of Battle Mountain on State Route 305, which is accessed via Interstate 80. Project transmission lines would span I-80, providing unrestricted access along this freeway. In addition, access to recreational areas along State Route 305 would not be impeded. As a result, Segment A would cause no substantial adverse effect to recreational access to the Mill Creek Recreation Area.

Segment A would cross a portion of the California National Historic Trail near the I-80 crossing but would not impede access for recreational users along the trail. Project archaeologists were unable to locate intact segments of the trail during the cultural resources inventory. The trail segment would not be considered historically significant due to the existing modern elements that have diminished the historic-visual context of this area. For these reasons, the project would not have a significant adverse visual effect on the recreational qualities of the trail. (See Section 3.16, Cultural Resources and Section 3.9, Visual Resources, for further detail.)

#### ***Segment J***

A number of BLM recreational areas are located near (from 4.5 to 8 miles) Segment J, which is common to all route alternatives. These areas include: (1) Egan Crest Trailhead approximately 4.5 miles south of Segment J<sup>1</sup>; (2) Garnet Hill, approximately 5 miles south of Segment J near Ely; (3) Cleve Creek Campground, approximately 17 miles west of the Gonder substation; and (4) Illipah Reservoir, approximately 8 miles south of Segment J at the base of the White Pine Mountains. US Highways 50 and 93 are used to access these recreational areas. Segment J would span three highways and, therefore, would cross US Highway 50 twice and Interstate 93 once, but would not impede access to these recreation areas. Therefore, Segment J would not cause an adverse effect to recreational access of these recreational areas.

Also located approximately 4 miles to the east of the Gonder substation is the eastern section of the Humboldt National Forest. Dispersed recreational activities occur here, including hiking, camping, picnicking, wildlife viewing, and other activities. This area would be accessed from State Highway 486, via US Highway 50/93. Segment J would cross Highways 50 and 93; however, no changes to these routes are planned as part of the project. Segment J would therefore have no effect on recreational access to this area.

Segment J would be located approximately 30 miles north of the Currant Mountain Wilderness Area, within the Humboldt National Forest. Segment J would not be visible from the upper elevations of this

---

<sup>1</sup> The trail system, developed as part of the Egan Crest Trailhead, would end approximately 0.5 mile south of Segment J.

wilderness area due to the distance and the intervening mountains. For these reasons, Segment J would have no substantial adverse visual effect on the Currant Mountain Wilderness Area. This area is accessed by U.S. Highway 6 from Ely. Segment J would have no effect to U.S. Highway 6, and would therefore have no effect on recreational access to this designated wilderness area.

Two Nevada State Parks are located relatively near (12 to 21 miles) Segment J. These include: (1) Cave Lake State Park, approximately 12 miles southwest of the Gonder substation near Ely; and (2) The Ward Charcoal Ovens State Historic Park, approximately 21 miles southwest of the Gonder substation. Both of these areas are accessed via Highways 50/6/93. Segment J would cross Highways 50 and 93; however, no alterations or access restrictions to these roadways are anticipated as a result of this project. For these reasons, Segment J would have no substantial adverse effect on state recreational areas.

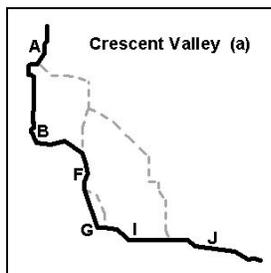
The only White Pine County recreational facility closest to Segment J is the County Fairgrounds, approximately 5 miles to the south of the Gonder substation. Due to the distance between the substation and the fairgrounds, there would be no effect to this county recreational resource.

Finally, Segment J would be located approximately 10 miles north from the privately run KOA Campground. There would be no discernable effects to this private recreation resource.

### **Alternative-Specific Impacts**

None of the transmission line route alternatives would traverse BLM recreation areas, National Forest lands, designated Wilderness Areas or Wilderness Study Areas, or state or private recreation areas. As the route alternatives are differentiated by segment, this discussion of potential impacts by route alternative is presented below by segment. Some proposed transmission line segments would pass within 50 miles of a number of recreation areas, and would traverse roadways that provide access to these areas. These areas, and the project's potential effects to them, are described below by route alternative and segment.

#### **Crescent Valley (a) Route Alternative**



The Crescent Valley (a) route alternative is comprised of Segments A, B, F, G, I, and J. In addition to the impacts common to all route alternatives discussed above (including Segments A and J), specific impacts for the Crescent Valley (a) route alternative are described below.

#### ***Segment B***

Segment B would be located approximately 22 miles east of the Mill Creek Recreation Area and would traverse State Route 305. Transmission towers would span this and other roadways, allowing unrestricted access to recreational opportunities. Since most users access Mill Creek from SR 305, Segment B would cause no substantial adverse effects to recreational access to the recreation area.

***Segment F***

A portion of Segment F would pass within 4 miles of the Roberts Mountain WSA<sup>2</sup>. This segment may be visible from the upper elevations of Roberts Mountain. The area between the WSA and Segment F has a BLM visual resources management (VRM) rating of Class III, which indicates that moderate changes to the characteristic landscape are acceptable. While this segment may have some degree of visual intrusion on the WSA, due to the relatively far distance of the project and the Class III rating of the area, the visual intrusion would be minor. As a result, Segment F would have no substantial adverse visual effect on the Roberts Mountain WSA. For additional information, please refer to Section 3.9, Visual Resources.

***Segment G***

Segment G would be located approximately 17 miles northeast of the Toiyabe National Forest. This forest is accessed primarily by Highway 50, which would be traversed by Segment G east of Eureka. Transmission lines would span Highway 50, providing unrestricted access along this highway. As a result, Segment G would cause no substantial adverse effect to recreational access to the Toiyabe National Forest.

Segment G would cross the historic Pony Express National Historic Trail near the southeastern base of the Roberts Mountains. The NPS identifies this segment of the trail (Overland Canyon to Simpson Park Station) as a “high-potential segment” with high scenic resource values (NPS 1999). The BLM, however, designates this location near the trail as a Class IV visual resource. The project would span the trail and would allow unrestricted recreational access along this segment of the trail. In addition, this area is heavily wooded, which would minimize the projects visual effects on the trail. For further information on this potential effect, please see Section 3.9, Visual Resources, and Section 3.17, Cultural Resources.

Segment G would also be located approximately 35 miles east of the BLM-managed Hickison Petroglyph Recreation Area. The recreation area is accessed from Highway 50, approximately 27 miles west of the town of Eureka. Segment G would traverse Highway 50 north of Eureka. Transmission lines would span Highway 50, providing unrestricted access along this roadway. Travel along this roadway would continue beneath the transmission lines, and access to recreational areas along Highway 50 would not be impeded. As a result, Segment G would cause no substantial adverse effect to recreational access to Hickison Petroglyph Recreation Area.

Finally, Segment G would be located approximately 17 miles from the Simpson Park WSAs. Due to the distance from this area, the project would have no discernable effects to this WSAs.

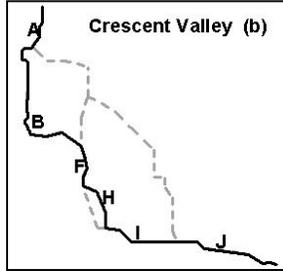
***Segment I***

No federal, state, local, or private recreational areas are located within or near the study area of Segment I.

In summary, there would be no significant recreation impacts associated with the Crescent Valley (a) route alternative.

<sup>2</sup> Other segments, including Segments B, D, G, and H, would also be within 50 miles from the Roberts Mountain WSA. However, these segments would be located at greater distances than Segment F, and would be even less visible, further reducing their potential effect on this WSA.

### Crescent Valley (b) Route Alternative



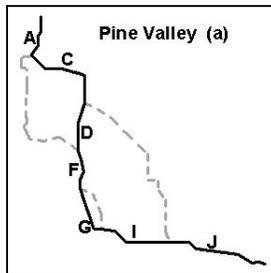
The Crescent Valley (b) route alternative is comprised of Segments A, B, F, H, I, and J. It follows a similar alignment to the Crescent Valley (a) route, except that it uses Segment H instead of Segment G. Potential impacts to Segments A, B, F, I, and J are described above.

#### ***Segment H***

Segment H would also cross the Pony Express National Historic Trail. The NPS identifies this segment of the trail (Overland Canyon to Simpson Park Station) as a “high-potential segment” with high scenic resource values (NPS 1999). The BLM, however, designates this location near the trail as a Class IV visual resource. The project would span the trail and would allow unrestricted recreational access along this segment. However, the project would be clearly visible from the trail, diminishing its historic setting and feeling. For further information on this potential effect, please see Section 3.9, Visual Resources, and Section 3.17, Cultural Resources.

In summary, there would be no significant recreation impacts associated with the Crescent Valley (b) route alternative.

### Pine Valley (a) Route Alternative



The Pine Valley (a) route alternative is comprised of Segments A, C, D, F, G, I, and J. It follows a similar alignment to the Crescent Valley (a) route, except that it uses Segments C and D instead of Segment B. Potential impacts to Segments A, F, G, I, and J are described above.

#### ***Segment C***

Segment C would be located approximately 25 miles west of the South Fork State Recreation Area (South Fork Reservoir). The segment would not cross any primary access routes to this reservoir. Due to the distance from this recreational resource, the project would have no discernable effects to this area.

Segment C would also be located approximately 6 miles south from the Gravelly Ford site of the California National Historic Trail, which the NPS identifies as a “high-potential site” for its historic/interpretive value. An historic marker currently marks this spot. Due to the distance from the project, however, there would be no substantial effect to the historic setting and feeling of this site.

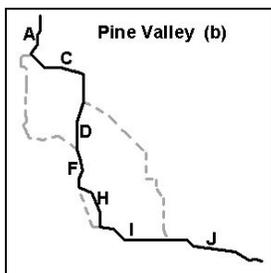
Finally, Segment C would be located approximately 20 miles and 15 miles, respectively, from the Red Springs and Cedar Ridge WSAs. Due to the distance from these areas, the project would have no discernable effects to these WSAs.

#### ***Segment D***

No federal, state, local, or private recreational areas are located within or near the study area of Segment D.

In summary, there would be no significant recreation impacts associated with the Pine Valley (a) route alternative.

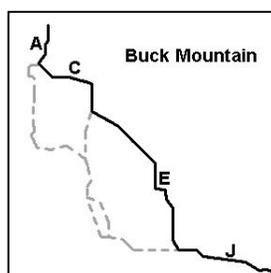
### Pine Valley (b) Route Alternative



The Pine Valley (b) route alternative is comprised of Segments A, C, D, F, H, I, and J. It follows a nearly identical alignment with the Pine Valley (a) route, except that Pine Valley (b) uses Segment H rather than Segment G, traversing the eastern side of Whistler Mountain rather than the west.

As described above, there would be no significant recreation impacts associated with any of these segments.

### Buck Mountain Route Alternative



The Buck Mountain route alternative is comprised of Segments A, C, E, and J. As described above, there would be no significant recreation impacts associated with Segments A, C, or J; Segment E, unique to the Buck Mountain Alternative, is described below.

#### Segment E

The Zunino Reservoir is located immediately east of the Ruby Mountains and 30 miles south-southeast of Elko via SR 227 and SR 228. Segment E of the Buck Mountain route alternative would be located approximately 24 miles southwest of the Zunino Reservoir, and would traverse State Route 278. The transmission line would span this roadway, providing unrestricted access along this route. As a result, Segment E would have no substantial adverse impact to access to the Zunino Reservoir.

Segment E would also be located approximately 1.5 miles southeast of the Ruby Mountains Division of the Humboldt National Forest. Recreational users of the Ruby Mountains division access this area via State Route 46 from Eureka or State Highways 227 and 228 from Elko. Segment E would cross State Highway 46; however, transmission lines would span this roadway, providing unrestricted access along this route. Travel along State Route 46 would continue to occur beneath the transmission lines, and access to recreational areas would not be impeded. This route would have no substantial adverse impact to access to this portion of the Humboldt National Forest.

Portions of Segment E may be visible from certain areas of the Ruby Mountains Division of the Humboldt National Forest. However, at upper elevations within the forest and at a distance greater than 2 miles, the transmission lines would be nearly invisible against a backdrop of vegetation and would constitute no adverse effect. At the lowest elevations from within the forest at a distance of 2 miles, the transmission line and towers would be minimally visible against the sky. The existence of the transmission line would not substantially diminish the recreational experience from within Humboldt National Forest. As a result, Segment E would have no substantial adverse impact to this recreational area.

Segment E would be located approximately 28 miles southwest from the Ruby Mountains Wilderness Area, also located in the Humboldt National Forest. It is unlikely that Segment E would be visible at this

distance, even from the upper elevations of this wilderness area due to the intervening mountains. For these reasons, Segment E would have no substantial adverse visual effect on the Ruby Mountains Wilderness Area.

Segment E would also be located approximately 9.5 miles southeast of the USFWS-managed Ruby Lake National Wildlife Refuge on the east of the Ruby Mountain portion of the Humboldt National Forest. Recreational users of the refuge would access this area via State Routes 46 and 227. As described above, no access restrictions to this roadway are anticipated as a result of the project. At 9.5 miles away, Segment E would be minimally visible, if at all, from the refuge. As a result, Segment E would have no substantial adverse impact to this recreational area.

Segment E would cross the Pony Express National Historic Trail near the southern base of the Ruby Mountain Division of the Humboldt National Forest. The NPS identifies this segment of the trail (Overland Canyon to Simpson Park Station) as a “high-potential segment” with high scenic resource values (NPS 1999). The project would span the trail but would not restrict recreational access along this segment of the trail. However, the project could visually intrude upon the trail and diminish its historic setting and feeling. In addition, the BLM has classified this stretch of the trail as a Class II visual resource. As a result, the project would have a significant unavoidable visual impact on the trail. For further information on this potential effect, please see Section 3.9, Visual Resources, and Section 3.16, Cultural Resources.

Segment E would also be located approximately 1 mile southwest of the California National Historic Trail near the southern base of the Ruby Mountains Division of the Humboldt National Forest, and would parallel the trail for approximately 8 miles. This area is not considered by the NPS as a high-potential segment, and the project would likely have a minor visual intrusion on this trail segment due to distance.

The SCORP identifies various dispersed areas in the project area with high potential for tent camping, ORV and motorcycle riding, and picnicking/vehicle camping. Specifically, the southeastern edge of the Humboldt National Forest at the base of Buck Mountain is identified as an area with essential characteristics for tent camping. It appears that Segment E of the Buck Mountain route alternative would traverse this area, potentially conflicting with the state’s plans for future tent camping in this area. This area would likely be precluded from tent camping if a transmission line were present in the immediate vicinity. The state plan, however, also identifies a number of other areas in Nevada that would be similarly suited for additional tent camping, and there is no apparent weighting or priority given to any one area over another. For these reasons, the selection of Segment E of the Buck Mountain route alternative would not be considered a significant conflict with the state recreational plan.

### **Summary Comparison of Route Alternatives**

As described above, Segments E and J would be proximate to the greatest number of recreational resources in the project area. Segment E is associated solely with the Buck Mountain route alternative, while Segment J is associated with all five route alternatives. The only significant adverse effects to recreation resources are associated with the Buck Mountain route alternative (along Segment E), as described above. These impacts are associated with the Pony Express National Historic Trail and are addressed in Section 3.16, Cultural Resources. All other potential effects to recreation, along the route alternative segments are considered minor and no mitigation measures are required.

### **RESIDUAL IMPACTS**

No adverse effects to recreation/wilderness resources were identified on a project-wide basis, or for any of the project segments. Therefore, no mitigation measures would be necessary. As a result, the project would have no residual impacts to recreation/wilderness.

### **NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE**

Under the No Action Alternative, recreation-related impacts could occur in other areas as SPPC and the Nevada PUC would begin emergency planning efforts to pursue other transmission and/or generation projects to meet the projected energy load capacity shortfall.

This Page Intentionally Left Blank