

**Colby Mountain Recreation Project**  
**Almanor Ranger District, Lassen National Forest**  
**Butte, Plumas, and Tehama Counties, California**  
**July 18, 2023**

**Background**

The Colby Mountain Recreation Project is a collaborative effort conducted by the Lassen National Forest, Butte County Resource Conservation District, Northern California Regional Land Trust, Sierra Buttes Trail Stewardship, and Chico Velo to enhance and expand trail-based recreation near the community of Jonesville in the Lassen National Forest. With the support of the U.S.D.A. Forest Service, the Project has developed over months of stakeholder engagement and incorporates forest health demonstration sites, environmental education facilities, day-use and emergency response amenities, and an extensive network of multi-use trails.

The Project is located on the Almanor Ranger District of the Lassen National Forest in Butte, Plumas, and Tehama Counties, California. The project area is within Township (T) 26 North (N), Range (R) 4 East (E), Sections 1-4, 9-14; T26N, R5E, Sections 26-28, 33-36; T27N R5E Sections 31 and 32 and T26N, R5E, Sections 5-7 and 18; Mount Diablo meridian.

**Purpose and Need**

The purpose of the Project is to expand and enhance recreational opportunities in the Lassen National Forest for multiple user groups by providing long-term, sustainable trails built in a safe and resource sensitive manner. The trail system would support community recovery of Jonesville following the 2018 Camp Fire by increasing the quality of life for existing or displaced area residents and would build a sustainable tourism revenue base for a county facing increasing burdens on infrastructure during the disaster recovery process. The Project would serve several disadvantaged communities, lowering the barrier to nature access for school classrooms and residents of all ages, while reducing adverse water quality and ecological impacts associated with public access.

Desired conditions are as follows:

- A safe network of system trails offering a variety of distance and terrain options for multiple user groups (bikers, hikers, and equestrians)
- Mitigated recreational user conflicts with improved connectivity and signage for existing trails in the Project vicinity.
- Access to novel environments for outdoor education opportunities for all ages.
- Upgraded infrastructure at the Jonesville Snow Park parking lot supporting recreational and emergency use and sustainable stormwater management.
- Economic revitalization in the Jonesville community following the 2018 Camp Fire

## **Proposed Actions**

The Almanor Ranger District is proposing the following actions:

### **New Single-track Trails and Trailheads**

The Almanor Ranger District is proposing to construct approximately 36 miles of new single-track trails out of Jonesville Snow Park (see Appendix A - Colby Mountain Recreation Project map). The trail system would offer a variety of distance and terrain options for multiple user groups including 0.92 miles of pedestrian-only use trails and 34.77 miles of non-motorized multi-use trails. Table 1 provides a list of the proposed trails and their estimated distances, trail classes, and proposed uses.

There would be two methods of trail construction used: full professional build and hybrid build. The full professional build method would be used for trails that are complex or specialized. Those trails would use mechanized equipment (mini excavator or trail-specific dozer) followed by a professional hand crew. The full professional build method would be used for Colby Drop trail, Willow Creek trail, Humboldt Drop trail, Robbers Roost Connector trail, and the Meadow trail. For the hybrid build method, professional trail builders would pioneer the trail corridor and excavate the trail prism with a single excavator and volunteers would rake and compact the trail tread. The hybrid build method would integrate with the full professional build method on some segments of the trails. The hybrid build method would be used for the Home trail, Escape trail, Lookout trail, Yana Rim trail, and Yana Rim Alt Loop trail.

The Project would also include four trailheads. The main trailhead for the trail system would be located at the Jonesville Snow Park parking lot and would connect the Meadow Loop trail, Home trail, and Willow Creek trail. The Project would rebuild the existing parking lot and expand it eastward, adding one well, helipad, and a comprehensive trail information kiosk. The parking lot expansion would also include a bioswale, a vegetated low-lying area that would use plant materials and specialized soil mixes to treat, absorb, and convey stormwater runoff.

The Humboldt Summit trailhead would provide direct access to Colby Drop trail, Willow Creek trail, and Humboldt Drop trail. The Humboldt Summit trailhead would serve as a shuttle drop location for visitors seeking a downhill mountain bike experience. The Project improvements at the Humboldt Summit trailhead would include a designated parking lot, one vault-style toilet, a separate kiosk for the Pacific Crest trail (PCT) and Colby Mountain trail, equestrian trailer parking, picnic tables, and hitching posts.

The Hub trailhead would be located at the junction of National Forest System (NFS) roads 27N06 and 27N36 near the northern edge of the trail system and would serve as a central “hub” linking the Lookout, Escape, Colby Drop, Home, and Yana Rim trails. The Hub would be accessed via the NFS 27N06 road, a well-maintained and surfaced road. The Project improvements at the Hub would include one vault-style toilet, parking, hitching posts, and picnic tables.

The Colby Mountain Lookout trailhead would offer connections to the Colby Drop trail and Escape trail and access to the Hub trailhead via the Lookout trail. NFS road 27N36 could also be used to shuttle between the Colby Mountain Lookout and the Hub trailheads.

Table 2 summarizes the proposed trailhead improvements and Appendix B – Trail Class Matrix describes trail classes and management standards.

**Table 1 Proposed Trail Summary**

<b>Trail Name</b>	<b>Estimated Distance (mile)</b>	<b>Trail Class<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>Uses</b>
Escape	8.35	Class 3	non-motorized bikes, equestrians, hikers
Colby Drop	1.38	Class 4	non-motorized bikes, hikers
Home	4.35	Class 3	non-motorized bikes, equestrians, hikers
Lookout	2.11	Class 3	non-motorized bikes, equestrians, hikers
Meadow Trail	0.92	Class 4	hikers
Yana Rim	9.64	Class 2	non-motorized bikes, equestrians, hikers
Yana Rim Alt Loop	0.44	Class 2	non-motorized bikes, equestrians, hikers
Willow Creek	4.76	Class 3	non-motorized bikes, hikers
Humboldt Drop	3.4	Class 3	non-motorized bikes, hikers
Robbers Roost Connector	0.34	Class 3	non-motorized bikes, hikers
<b>TOTAL MILEAGE</b>	<b>35.69</b>		

<sup>1</sup> Trail Class Matrix (FSH 2353, Section 14.2, Exhibit 01) see Appendix B Trail Class Matrix

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<sup>1</sup> Trail Classes are general categories reflecting trail development scale, arranged along a continuum. The Trail Class identified for a National Forest System (NFS) trail prescribes its development scale, representing its intended design and management standards. **Trail Class 1** = Minimally Developed. **Trail Class 2** = Moderately Developed. **Trail Class 3** = Developed. **Trail Class 4** = Highly Developed. **Trail Class 5** = Fully Developed. See the attached Appendix B Trail Class Matrix document.

**Table 2. Trailhead Improvements**

<b>Trailhead</b>	<b>Existing/New</b>	<b>Improvements</b>
Jonesville Snow Park	Existing trailhead, with proposed improvements	rebuild and expand existing parking lot, bioswale, trail information kiosk, a drinking water well, helipad
Humboldt Summit	Existing trailhead, with proposed improvements	vault toilet, designated parking, hitching posts, separate kiosk for PCT and Colby Mountain, equestrian trailer parking, picnic tables
Hub (27N06 and 27N36)	New trailhead construction	vault toilet, parking, hitching posts, picnic tables

### **Bridge, Wet Crossings, and Exclusionary Fencing**

One 15-foot bridge is proposed along the southern portion of the Home trail that would cross an unnamed drainage. One wet crossing would also be constructed along the northern portion of the Home trail and one on the Willow Creek trail. The wet crossings would be constructed with hardened entrances to minimize the stream banks' impacts and limit sediment inputs. There would also be exclusionary fencing placed for 20 feet along a section of Home Trail to bar access to a sensitive fen area and installation of an information sign.

### **Tree Removal**

For the Colby Mountain Recreation Project trail construction, vegetation removal would be in accordance with the trail class as detailed in the Trail Class Matrix (Appendix B) and summarized in Table 1. Trees may be cut during the construction or maintenance of the trails' eight-foot-wide corridor, however, as many trees as possible would be retained, and removal of a tree 10-inch diameter at breast height (DBH) and larger would be uncommon. Only in cases where the trail could not be routed around a tree that is 10-inches DBH or larger would it be removed, such as in areas where tree density is high. Best efforts would be made to avoid sugar pine (*Pinus lambertiana*), western white pine (*P. monticola*), Jeffery pine (*P. jeffreyi*), and ponderosa pine (*P. ponderosa*) trees when possible.

Trees that are less than 10-inches DBH and shrubs that are cut would be lopped and scattered to a depth not to exceed 12 to 18 inches. For trees 10-inch DBH to less than 30-inch DBH, once the tree has been cut down, tree branches and tops of trees to a 6-inch diameter would be cut from the bole of the trees and lopped and scattered. Larger bole material would be left on site.

During construction of the Jonesville Snow Park parking lot expansion, trees would be mechanically cut and removed, possibly through a small timber sale, and slash would be piled and burned. Brush would be removed for improvements to the Humboldt Summit trailhead and the construction of the Hub trailhead, but no tree removal would occur at these locations.

## Decision to be Made

The decision to be made is whether to implement this project as proposed, as modified to address public concerns, or not at all.

## Integrated Design Features

The following Integrated Design Features (IDFs) are resource protection measures that are developed by specialists and incorporated as part of the proposed action for this Project. They are project specific and in addition to Best Management Practices (BMPs) and standards and guidelines from the Lassen National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (LRMP), as amended. These IDFs are also included for implementation parameters that would be incorporated into treatments, contracts, or used to guide Forest Service personnel in conducting implementation.

### Botany

Threatened, Endangered and Sensitive Plant Species:

1. Rare plant surveys would be completed prior to Project implementation and any occurrences of TES or SI plant species discovered would be protected through flag-and-avoid methods and with incorporation of any additional protection measures recommended by Forest Botany personnel.
2. All occurrences of *Meesia triquetra* (three-ranked humpmoss) and their associated springs, meadows and fens would be flagged and avoided from all ground disturbing activities and protected with a fence from potential impacts.
3. All ground-disturbing activities would be excluded from within 50 feet of occurrences of *Botrychium* species. Locations would be displayed as control areas on all contract maps.
4. All ground-disturbing activities would be excluded from within 25 feet of occurrences of *Piperia colemanii* species.

Invasive Plant Species:

5. All off-road equipment would be weed-free prior to entering the Forest. Staging of equipment would be done in weed free areas.
6. Known noxious weed infestations would be identified, flagged where possible, and mapped for this Project. Locations would be displayed on contract maps. Identified invasive plant species' sites within or adjacent to the Project area would be evaluated by forest personnel and treated by forest botany staff prior to Project implementation and the sites avoided. Any larger or un-pullable infestations would be avoided by harvesting equipment or equipment used would be washed on site before leaving the infested area and entering un-infested areas to prevent spreading invasive plants across the Project area.
7. New small infestations identified during Project implementation would be evaluated and treated according to the species present and Project constraints and avoided by Project activities

8. Post Project monitoring for implementation and effectiveness of treatments and control of new infestations would be conducted as soon as possible and for a period of two years after completion of the Project.
9. If Project implementation calls for mulches or fill, they would be certified weed-free. Seed mixes used for re-vegetation of disturbed sites would consist of locally-adapted native plant materials.

## Cultural Resources

Cultural Resources are managed and protected through the Programmatic Agreement (PA) among the USDA Forest Service, Pacific Southwest Region (Region 5), California State Historic Preservation Officer, Nevada State Historic Preservation Officer, and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation Regarding the Processes for Compliance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act for Management of Historic Properties by the National Forests of the Pacific Southwest Region (2018; PA).

10. Prior to implementation of each proposed activity, the Area of Potential Effect (APE) will be examined by Cultural Resources staff. The cultural resources present in the APE and the specific Approved Standard Protection Measures (Region 5 PA, Appendix E) that will be used to protect those resources will be documented and implemented.

## Silviculture

### 11. Borate Treatment

In the proposed Jonesville Snow Park parking lot expansion area, live conifer trees with a 14-inch and larger stump diameter would be treated with an Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)-approved borate compound which is registered in California for the prevention of annosus root disease. No EPA-approved borate would be applied within 25 feet of known Sensitive and Special Interest (SI) plants or within 25 feet of live streams and meadow/wetlands.

### 12. Sugar Pine Trees

All sugar pine trees identified as rust resistant or as a candidate for rust resistance would be protected. A \$20,000 fine would be imposed for each rust-resistant or candidate tree damaged during operations.

Healthy sugar pine trees showing no observable signs of blister rust would be favorably retained.

## Wildlife

### 13. Implement limited operating periods for sensitive wildlife species

Limited operating periods (LOPs) would be implemented around nests, dens, roost sites, and other areas of concentrated use of these species if found during project implementation. An LOP consists of a period during which project activities would not occur. Implementation requirements such as the timing, potential lifting, and location of LOPs for certain species would be determined by the District Wildlife Biologist.

- a. **California spotted owl:** A California spotted owl LOP from March 1st to August 15th would apply to stands within ¼ mile of all spotted owl protected activity centers (PACs) unless surveys confirm that spotted owls are not nesting. The LOP may be lifted after surveys if no nesting spotted owls are confirmed.
- b. **Northern goshawk:** A northern goshawk LOP from February 15th to September 15th would be applied within ¼ mile of all goshawk PACs or within ¼ mile of a nest if a nest is confirmed. The LOP may be lifted if it is determined that the PAC is not occupied.
- c. **Pacific marten:** If a marten den site is identified, a 100-acre area consisting of the highest quality habitat in a compact arrangement would be placed around the den site. The den site area would be protected from vegetation treatments with a LOP from February 15th through July 31st as long as habitat remains suitable or until another Regionally approved management strategy is implemented. If a marten rest site (female or male) is found within a treatment unit, the rest site structure, (e.g., log, snag, tree) would be protected from being damaged during Project implementation.
- d. **Pacific fisher:** If a fisher den site is identified, a 700-acre area consisting of the highest quality habitat in a compact arrangement would be placed around the den site. The den site area would be protected from vegetation treatments with a LOP from March 1st through June 30th as long as habitat remains suitable or until another Regionally approved management strategy is implemented. If a fisher rest site (female or male) is found within a treatment unit, the rest site structure, (e.g., log, snag, tree) would be protected from being damaged during Project implementation.

14. Avoid or minimize impacts on Forest Service sensitive wildlife and plant species:

Any detection of sensitive wildlife or plant species, nests, dens, roost sites, and other areas of concentrated use of these species, before or during implementation of the proposed actions, would be reported to the District Wildlife Biologist or District Botanist. Areas of concentrated wildlife use, particularly those that are important for reproductive activities (e.g., nest or den sites), would be protected in accordance with the LRMP as amended.

15. Known Amphibian Populations:

There are not currently any known populations of Threatened, Endangered and Sensitive Species (TES) amphibians in the project area. If populations of TES amphibians are discovered in the project area, direction from the 2004 SNFPA ROD and 2014 USFWS Programmatic Biological Opinion would be applied.

16. Trees in PACs:

Within California spotted owl and northern goshawk PACs, the maximum size tree to be cut would be 6-inch DBH. Trees larger than 6-inch DBH would only be cut if approved by a Forest Service Wildlife Biologist. If any trees greater than 6-inch DBH

are cut in PACs, they would be left in place, although they may be moved off trail alignment.

17. Nest Trees and Wildlife Habitation:

All trees with nest structures in them or showing signs of current wildlife habitation shall be retained, regardless of the diameter.

18. Snags and Coarse Woody Debris:

a. In accordance with the LRMP (USDA-FS 1992 p. 4-37), coarse woody debris (CWD, large logs and snags  $\geq$  15-inch DBH) already on the ground would be retained and protected to the greatest extent possible from disturbance during treatment.

b. Snags 15-inches DBH and larger would be retained, where possible.

19. Riparian and hardwood species (aspen, cottonwood, alder, willow, dogwood, etc.) would not be cut or removed.