

TOWN COUNCIL STAFF REPORT

Title: Office of Outdoor Recreation Staffing and Work Program Update.

Meeting Date: October 20, 2021

Prepared by: Daniel C. Holler, Town Manager

RECOMMENDATION:

This report provides an update on the Town's Office of Outdoor Recreation which was established as part of the FY21-22 Budget. Council may provide comments and staff direction.

BACKGROUND:

The Office of Outdoor Recreation (Office) was established to provide a more focused effort on the Town's work with federal land managers and projects on public lands, outside of municipal related programs and projects. The Office coordinates work across Town disciplines such as engineering, planning, parks and recreation, and general administration. The Office reports to the Town Manager. Staffing includes Outdoor Recreation Manager (Public Lands - vacant); Trails Manager, and Sustainable Outdoor Recreation Coordinator (previously joint position with Mono County - vacant). The previous joint position with Mono County is being reviewed and updated as a Town staff position. The final job description for the Outdoor Recreation Manager is attached. The Office is also supported by part-time trail crew members and oversees the trail/community host program. The Office coordinates work with Mammoth Lakes Recreation (MLR) and provides oversight of the Town's contract with MLR.

The Office is structured to work with federal, state, and local agencies, non-profits, and the private sector in the development and implementation of a wide scope of recreation related projects and services and sustainability of natural resources. The need for dedicated staff in this area of work was evident the past few years as demonstrated by the work of the Trails Manager, the success of the joint position with Mono County, which has transitioned to a full-time County position, and the growth of demands and expectations of the community as they enjoy our public lands. The need for more direct Town management engagement in efforts to coordinate planning and projects with the Forest Service (local districts and regional offices), Bureau of Land Management, Los Angeles Department of Water and Power, Mono County, State of California, National Park Service, and numerous private and non-profit entities has grown dramatically. The Office provides for a full-time management position with the requisite skills and knowledge to add value and productivity to our work program as approved by Council. The new Manager position provides overall program management and coordination with regional partners in the development and implementation of recreation projects and programs, enabling other staff to be focused on implementation and development of projects, programs, and services. The level of engagement in the areas of fuels management, private development, visitor experience, and

operational support for the Forest Service continues to increase. The primary focus is on public lands within the Town's boundary, with work often extending to the region as we work with the Inyo National Forest.

ANALYSIS:

Office of Outdoor Recreation Work Program

The economic viability and sustainability of the Town of Mammoth Lakes and the region is tied to our tourism economy. The Town of Mammoth Lakes and surrounding communities provide municipal infrastructure and businesses to support residents and visitors. This includes the labor force, lodging, goods and services, public safety and medical services, and other amenities. The goods, services, and amenities provided add value and support to residents and visitors. The overarching destination extends beyond any one community and into the natural landscape. This landscape is predominately managed by federal agencies (approximately 75% of land within the Town's Municipal Boundary is managed by the U.S. Forest Service). The private land within the Town's municipal boundary is small but the operation of local amenities by the Town and private individuals and businesses provides services necessary for our tourism economy that is largely linked to public lands. The ability to enhance the quality, capacity, and integration of recreational facilities managed by federal agencies with private enterprises and local government is a persistent and complex challenge.

The work program is broken down into four broad categories as discussed below. The work does overlap and is often interconnected with other Town processes and includes multiple partners.

Management of Use Permits / Leases / Operating Plans and Maintenance

Several of our municipal facilities are linked to federally managed public lands or other public agencies. This includes Shady Rest Park, the Disc Golf Course, the majority of the Town multi-use paths (MUPs) including the Lakes Basin Path, Whitmore Park and Pool (LADWP Lease), Mammoth Creek Park East, a portion of Mammoth Creek Park West, and the Mammoth Yosemite Airport. The Town's "Snow Pit" and related snow management efforts utilize Forest Service land. The Town supports a trail system (maintenance and construction) that extends from the core of Town well into the Inyo National Forest and connects to systems beyond the Town boundary.

These Town assets are managed under a variety of permits and leases with the appropriate federal agencies and these same outdoor recreation opportunities that compel visitation to Mammoth Lakes. This structure requires partnerships, permits, annual operating plans, and cooperation with federal, state, or other public agency land managers. All leases and permits have requirements for operating or management plans and requires coordination of maintenance work. Coordination on environmental work is ongoing for minor improvements or added amenities such as the Disc Golf Course at Shady Rest Park.

The Town is a service partner in keeping Forest Service restrooms clean and supplied (mainly in the Lakes Basin) and continues to coordinate snow removal and the opening

and closing of areas with interim restroom and trash support. The Town's community/trail host program has been a success and will continue and expand as resources are available to provide proactive engagement to enhance visitor experience. The Town maintains trails for both summer and winter use and designs and constructs trails. Informational signage is provided for summer and winter operations along with maps (paper and digital). The Town continues to leverage Measure R and Town funds to maintain and improve the Mammoth Lakes Trail System and construction of new trails. This includes support for programs such as the adopt a trail program, trash clean up, and other volunteer engagement.

New Amenities Implementation and Planning

The Town continues to leverage Measure R and U and Town funds to support recreational efforts within the Town and on the forest. A series of new funding opportunities from the State of California and the Federal Government are now available to support investments in our outdoor recreation assets. This includes California's Prop 68 Bond funds which will provide one-time per capita financing (planned for Municipal Projects) and ongoing opportunities for competitive grants. The Town with MLR is applying for a Parks grant for improvements at Whitmore Park. The Town received a T-Mobil Grant for a dog park which may be placed on Forest Service land under existing permits.

A planning grant under the green sticker program from the State focused on off highway vehicles and other motorized activities is being used for planning in the Shady Rest, Inyo Craters area. Staff will prepare documents for land managers to review as projects move through preliminary design. Planning efforts for the next phase of trails in the Sherwins area is underway and trailhead plans are in for approval. Other minor improvement projects are in process. One of the steps to enhance project planning and approval is to develop a strong team that can do the NEPA process. The use of "3rd Party" NEPA preparation in coordination with the Forest Service will reduce timelines for environmental work and allow Forest Service resources to be engaged in the final review and decision process, while limiting the amount of time necessary to complete all of the required studies and other documents associated with the NEPA process. The final decision is still a Forest Service action.

Longer-Range Planning and Coordination

The Federal government Great American Outdoors Act (GAOA) funding for the first round of improvement includes investments on the Inyo National Forest. The deferred maintenance program includes work that may "resolve directly related infrastructure deficiencies of the asset [primary deferred maintenance project] that would not by itself be classified as deferred maintenance." The Act also provides for the acceptance of "cash or in-kind donations that advance efforts..."

- (A) to reduce the deferred maintenance backlog; and
- (B) to encourage relevant public-private partnerships."

To take advantage of these new funding opportunities the Town needs to be prepared. This includes having "shovel ready" projects that complement federal deferred maintenance criteria in meeting visitor needs. Having projects that are pre-approved also assist in meeting grant funding criteria, increases the ability to raise matching funds, and allows for

direct investment of local funding sources. Shovel ready projects on federal public lands take a substantial amount of time and effort to process. Work programs must follow Forest Service or other agency protocols and be structured to result in a decision being issued by the appropriate land manager (district ranger, forest supervisor, or the regional forester). This not only requires the development of quality projects but meeting NEPA and CEQA standards as part of the environmental review process. Again, the use of 3rd Party NEPA preparation will assist in this process.

The State and Federal governments are allocating funds to address the threat and impact of wildfires. The Town has supported a few significant planning projects and actual fuels reduction programs that have received grant funds. Engagement on the fire front is critical to the Town for reducing the threat of catastrophic wildfire and smoke impacts. The Town is actively engaged in the design and location of a biomass facility that may be used to reduce the amount of smoke, carbon, and CO2 being released as part of fuels management projects. The need to address forest fuels management has never been greater than now as evidenced by disastrous fire seasons. There are several different projects moving forward to address fuels in the region. This includes Forest Service approved fuel reduction projects, non-profit funded projects (i.e., Fire Safe Council work in the Lakes Basin), and a significant SNC Prop 68 approved planning grant related to fuels management on 55,000+/- acres of land surrounding the Town. A grant to do fuels work on public property including areas in the Town was recently approved.

Proposed private development at Mammoth Mountain Ski Area will directly interface with public lands and includes proposed development on Forest Service land under permit. This project requires coordination with the Forest Service and the Town. Preliminary discussions with the Forest Service on a number of projects have included land tenure matters (i.e., Airport, snow pit, amenities, trails, and trailheads), housing development options, priorities for regional projects coming from the Sustainable Recreation and Tourism Initiative work, Town priority projects and new projects under the GAOA. Broader policy matters related to over snow vehicle planning (Sub Part C), the increased use of E-bikes, popularity of dispersed camping and related activities, fire threat and fuels management, off road vehicle recreation, and ongoing implementation of the forest management plan all require an enhanced level of Town engagement.

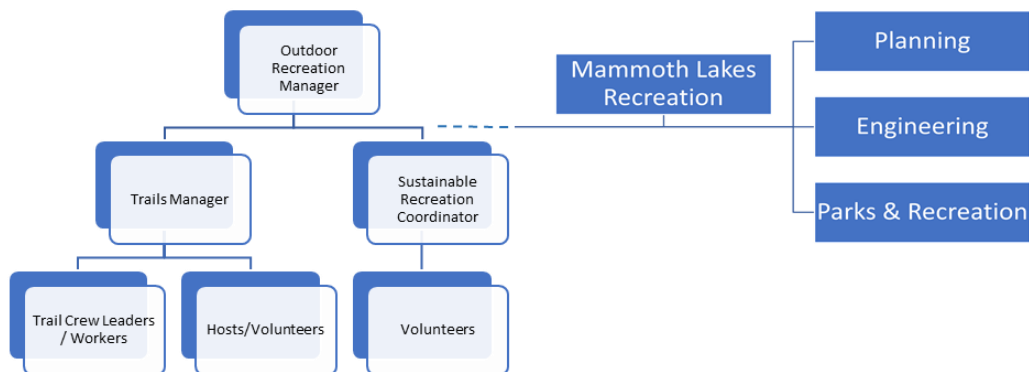
FINANCIAL AND STAFFING CONSIDERATIONS:

The Office of Outdoor Recreation currently adopted budget for FY21-22 is \$427,542, which includes a portion of the costs associated with the Measure R trails budget for staff allocations, with costs and funding transferred for this purpose. The Office is further funded from the General Fund, Measure R, and Measure U. Measure R funds continue to support the trails program, which is also supported by the General Fund. Measure U funds are allocated as previously used for the joint Sustainable Recreation Coordinator Position. The Town's share of the funding for the position was retained. The position is under review to be modified as a Town position.

With the timing of hiring employees, it is anticipated that no additional Measure R and U funds will be necessary for the Office of Outdoor Recreation, since for FY21-22 budget

savings are anticipated. Current operations are also supported under the Town’s contract with MLR and through a contract with Mammoth Lakes Trails and Public Access (MLTPA). Based on the staffing and work program, it is anticipated that some of the support/contract work may be reduced in the future as work is completed within the operating budget. The staffing plan and relationship with other Town Departments and MLR is as follows:

The Town’s dedicated funding and staff resources provided under Measures R and U, along with General Fund allocations support project development and implementation. As a discreet non-profit partner MLR is a partner in leveraging funding and community support for recreational projects and programs. This relationship provides a foundational structure for working with the Mammoth Trails Committee and coordination with recreational user groups and the public. The mix of funding provides direct benefits to Town residents under voter approved tax measures and the use of General Fund dollars allows for broader policy and regional efforts that are outside of the scope of the dedicated tax measures.



As noted above the Office of Outdoor Recreation is directly under the Town Manager’s Office. Work is coordinated with other Town departments and MLR. The Outdoor Recreation Manager and the Sustainable Recreation Coordinator positions are both vacant. The plan is to hire the Manager position first and work with them to fill the Coordinator position. Timing will depend on the success of the recruitments which will begin October 2021.

SUMMARY

The work program for Office of Outdoor Recreation is tied to the overall recreation and public lands management programs of federal, state, and local agencies and specific projects and services currently in place. The potential near term investment on the Inyo National Forest is substantial and the need for the Town to be proactive in setting our community up for generations to come is critical. The level of engagement with local and regional partners continue to increase. The current work program is demanding and the ability to effectively implement projects and programs requires dedicated resources through a fully staffed and funded Office of Outdoor Recreation. Staff is requesting

Council review, comment, confirmation, and provide other direction as we prepare to move forward with the program as presented.