

TOWN COUNCIL STAFF REPORT

Title: Inyo National Forest Off Highway Vehicle (OHV) Grant Engagement & Public Comment.

Meeting Date: May 1, 2024

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RECOMMENDATION:

Provide direction and general comments on the Inyo National Forest and Bureau of Land Management, Bishop Field Office (as applicable) OHV Grants. See specific OOR recommendations below.

BACKGROUND:

Annually, the Inyo National Forest and the Bureau of Land Management, Bishop Field Office apply for Off Highway Vehicle (OHV) Grants with the State. As a part of the grant process, the agencies are seeking public comment related to the OHV program.

ANALYSIS:

The Office of Outdoor Recreation reviewed the USFS & BLM Grants and recommends the following actions:

LAUREL LAKES ROAD REHABILITATION

Safety

- In its current condition and design, the road can be quite hazardous. Rains make the safety situation even worse. People have died on this road in the past and of course users travel at their own risk, like any road. But, due to the factors I mention below, this road is very highly sought after.

Resource Degradation

- Being that the road follows the fall line in many places, it washes out regularly with the summer rains. This can cause sedimentation of surrounding Laurel Creek. But due to the popularity and uniqueness of this route, folks seek to bypass washouts by creating new routes through the surrounding vegetation.
- A more sustainable and safe road design would allow both the Inyo and its partners to better manage Laurel Lakes, which currently receives little to no management in terms of dispersed camping impacts (fires, human waste, etc.) or impacts from activities such as fishing (mono-filament fishing line) and general use (litter, etc.).

Unique Resource

- To my knowledge, there is no other road on the Inyo that leads to a resource such as Laurel Lakes. A challenging, steep dirt road into the Sierra proper to a high-country lake beloved by campers and fisher-people alike, where dispersed camping

is allowed. As such, this road is much sought after and is immediately adjacent to the Town of Mammoth Lakes, making it even more accessible than perhaps some of the more obscure areas of the forest.

Multi-Use Benefits

- Any improvements to Laurel Lakes road would benefit multiple user groups. This differs from perhaps some other roads/road work that do not lead to destinations and are only used by OHV enthusiasts. Laurel Lakes is enjoyed by campers, OHV users, fisher-people, hikers, leaf-peepers, horseback riders, and wilderness users who use Laurel as a jumping off point into Convict Canyon.

OTHER POTENTIAL COMMENTS

- Development of new OHV Campgrounds to accommodate rising use?
- Restoration of existing dispersed sites in high use areas?
- Additional signing of illegal dispersed campground sites?
- Expansion of motorized single track system? Currently, the Mammoth Ranger District contains 12.2 miles of Motorized single-track.

Mammoth Trails Committee (MTC) Recommendations from 4/11/2024 Meeting

- MTC supports expansion of the Motorized Single-Track system to increase current connectivity with existing Motorized Single Track.
- Shady Rest Inyo Craters (SRIC) was referenced by MTC as a “pre-baked” plan to increase motorized single track opportunity.
- MTC recommended to not change the character of Laurel Lakes Road (IE it should remain a difficult trail to not necessarily be passable by all vehicles).
- Monitor roads during first winter snows and spring melt to effectively limit vehicles from accessing them to prevent resource damage.