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# AMERICAN TRAILS

Building a network to ensure trails for the future

June 16, 2006

Steve Anderson, Field Manager  
USDI Bureau of Land Management  
Redding Field Office  
355 Hemsted Drive  
Redding, CA 96002

Re: Salmon Creek Resources Land Exchange –  
Environmental Assessment - EA Number CA-360-RE-2004-15

Dear Mr. Anderson,

American Trails is a national nonprofit organization pursuing a nationwide infrastructure of trails and greenways that serves a full range of activities **within 15 minutes of every American home or workplace**. American Trails' national headquarters is based out of Redding, California. We greatly appreciate all the work BLM has done to serve the local trails community to date.

We would like to encourage BLM to take another look at the Salmon Creek Resources Land Exchange. The trails in Area-51 have been used by the trails public for over 20 years. This parcel serves as a hub, surrounded by several trail systems and provides connectivity to the other trails. Area-51 trails are much-loved and well-used by the trails community, and all trail organizations in the area are in favor of keeping this trails system in the public domain. These trails are primarily on historic irrigation ditches, so they are fairly level and friendly to families and children. Mountain bicyclists love these trails. This is a lovely area with important fishery resources.

Of course, the ideal solution that would best serve the trails community would be to maintain the trails system as is. However, if BLM feels moving forward with the exchange is still the best decision, it seems like a reasonable solution to serve the desires and needs of the community, would be to require a connecting trail, via a trail easement, through the parcel up for exchange.

There are many benefits of trails and greenways that make our communities more liveable; improve the economy through tourism and civic improvement; preserve and restore open space; and provide opportunities for physical activity to improve fitness and mental health.

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Studies have shown time and time again, that trails add value to subdivisions. Developers throughout the country are understanding this and recognizing trails as being infrastructure – as important as roadways and utilities. They are realizing that including trails **is good for business!**

**Including trails in developments make them more marketable.** An April 2000 survey of 2000 recent homebuyers (National Association of Homebuilders and National Association of Realtors) indicated walking/jogging and bike trails second from the top of the "important to very important" amenity list-- behind highway access. According to Gopal Ahluwalia, NAHB Director of Research, trails consistently rank in the top five important amenities in making purchase decisions.

A 1994 survey by *American Lives, Inc.* conducted for a group of large volume homebuilders showed that 77.7% of consumers surveyed ranked significant natural open space as a "must-deliver" category, 2nd behind low traffic and quiet. Plenty of walking and biking paths ranked next highest. Buyers also said they would pay extra for "wilderness areas with the flora and fauna that existed prior to the development." --*Denver Post 1/10/95*

Another aspect has to do with how trails affect property values and the general attractiveness of an area. Studies have shown that 70% of landowners felt that overall, an adjacent trail was a good "neighbor," with positive impacts including 1) getting in touch with nature (64%), 2) recreational opportunity (53%), and 3) health benefits (24%).

Furthermore, 70% of real estate agents use trails as a selling feature when selling homes near trails. 80.5% of them feel the trail would make it easier to sell. In Minnesota, 87% of homeowners believe trails either increased the value of their homes or had no impact. Additionally, the U.S. National Park Service notes that increases in property values range from 5 to 32% when adjacent to trails and greenways.

**Trails can help increase the number of lot sales while conserving resources.** *Redfeather Ridge by Midfirst*, in Glenwood Springs, CO increased the number of sellable lots by conserving open space, providing trails and by clustering housing. Number of lots increased from 64 to 149. There are countless other examples nationwide.

**Trails promote physical activity, fitness, and health.** Studies in association with The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention indicate that 64% of the U.S. population is clinically overweight with over 31% obese. This condition is directly tied to lack of physical activity resulting in increased heart disease, cancer, diabetes, anxiety, depression and other costly health problems.

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Providing nearby trails and walkways offers a significant option for regular physical activity that can lower rates of obesity and health care costs. This strengthens the market for communities and business centers with such amenities with an anticipated growing demand by both homebuyers and employers who want to reduce health care costs. --USA Today 10/9/02

Increased participation in moderate physical activity by the 88 million inactive Americans could reduce medical costs by \$76 Billion --Pratt et al, 2000

The **2002 BLM National Mountain Bicycling Strategic Plan** (page 17) addresses the rural/urban interface issue:

**“Issue 2: What might the public need, expect, or desire in the way of mountain bicycling opportunities on public lands in the future?”**

*Rationale: Population and demographic changes in the West are influencing the way the public views lands administered by the BLM. Demand for recreational opportunities of all types will increase. Rural/urban population interface issues will escalate, and high-risk recreation activities will continue to gain popularity. **As urbanization absorbs the front country, some BLM-managed lands may be well-suited for "urban trail parks," or trails that compress a lot of miles into a relatively small space. Demand is increasing for high-quality trail opportunities that are reasonably close to home. (American Trails has the goal of providing recreational trail opportunities within 15 minutes of every residence.)***

**Management Goal:** Provide a variety of experiences and opportunities, ranging from rural/urban interface areas to back country.

Please consider taking the additional step of requiring a trail easement to protect trail access through Area-51. This should not be a hardship to the purchaser, rather an amenity to him.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this option.

Best regards,



Pam Gluck, Executive Director  
American Trails

cc: Kathleen Clarke, Director, BLM  
Mike Poole, State Director, BLM  
Bob Ratcliffe, National Recreation Program Manager, BLM