

Chapter 5  
**Recreational Trails Element**

The Recreational Trails Program (RTP) is funded through a set-aside from the MAP-21 Transportation Alternatives Program. RTP funds come from the Federal Highway Trust Fund, and represent a portion of the motor fuel excise tax collected from non-highway recreational fuel use: fuel used for off-highway recreation by snowmobiles, all-terrain vehicles, off-highway motorcycles, and off-highway light trucks. RTP is an important funding source as the majority of transportation funding sources are only available for projects that are “utilitarian” in nature. A utilitarian project typically improves travel to work or school. The Recreational Trails Program funding can be used for other important projects which are not utilitarian such as construction or rehabilitation of trails/trailhead facilities for hiking, bicycling, in-line skating, equestrian use, cross-country skiing, snowmobiling, off-road motorcycling, all-terrain vehicle riding, four-wheel driving, or using other off-road motorized vehicles as well as easement acquisition and educational programs. Proposed projects compete statewide for RTP funds. Below outlines eligible projects and restrictions from the RTP Procedural Guide.

<b>Eligible Non-Motorized Projects</b>	<b>Eligible Motorized Projects</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Acquisition of easements and fee simple title to property for Recreational Trails or Recreational Trail corridors. (Must involve a willing seller.)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Acquisition of easements and fee simple title to property for Recreational Trails or Recreational Trail corridors. (Must involve a willing seller.)</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Development and Rehabilitation of trails, Trailside and Trailhead Facilities.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Development and Rehabilitation of trails, Trailside and Trailhead Facilities.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Construction of new trails (with the following restrictions for new trails on federal lands):               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Permissible under other law;</li> <li>○ Necessary and recommended by a statewide comprehensive outdoor recreation plan that is required by the Land and Water Conservation Fund Act of 1965 (16 U.S.C. 4601 4 et seq.) and that is in effect;</li> <li>○ Approved by each federal agency having jurisdiction over the affected lands.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Construction of new trails ← (with the restrictions noted at left.)</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Maintenance of existing trails.</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Purchase and lease of trail construction and Maintenance equipment.</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Assessment of trail conditions for accessibility and Maintenance.</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Development and dissemination of publications and operation of educational programs to promote safety and environmental protection related to trails (including supporting non-law enforcement trail safety and trail use monitoring patrol programs and providing trail-related training). <i>(Limited to 5% of CA’s apportionment.)</i></li> </ul>
Source: RTP Procedural Guide	

The RTP Match amount is based on the cost of the total RTP Project. The maximum amount of RTP funds allowed for each Project is 88%.

RTP projects should address the following factors:

- ◆ **Deficiency** in the existing trail network such as an incomplete trail network or a flaw in design/construction of existing trail network.
- ◆ **Connections** to regional, state, or national trail network
- ◆ **Linkages** between homes, schools, work places, campgrounds, and/or resorts; to parks, trails, greenways, scenic corridors; or natural, cultural, historical or recreation areas.

The need for new and improved recreational trails has been expressed through public input efforts as part of this ATP development as well as other planning efforts. Connectivity and linkage between trails and communities is particularly relevant in Inyo County with the abundance of public land and recreation opportunities.

### **Land Management Agencies**

In an effort to better understand RTP project needs, the land management agencies in Inyo County were contacted for input and potential projects. As shown in Appendix B, Death Valley National Park, Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and Inyo National Forest were sent via email or mail a project description and questions regarding potential recreational trails projects. To date, Death Valley National Park and the BLM have responded.

The Salt Creek boardwalk is a popular 0.8 mile loop in Death Valley National Park which provides viewing access to seasonal Salt Creek and the unique Salt Creek pupfish. The park identified the need to for the following improvements: roadway improvements, accessible parking, accessible boardwalk and restrooms.

The BLM manages a large area in both Inyo and Mono Counties, 750,000 acres, and caters to a wide variety of users such as hikers, climbers, OHV users, mountain bikers, campers, retired RV users and movie buffs. The BLM has their own set of policies and funding sources with which to plan and maintain new recreational facilities. The Bishop Field Office is interested in working with Inyo County on transportation related projects. Of specific interest is the Alabama Hills SNRA Interpretive Plan. Several projects identified in the plan would be eligible for RTP funding. These include upgrades to signage and construction of kiosks at the entrance to Alabama Hills off of Whitney Portal Road. The objective of the signage would be to educate users about environmental ethics and regulations.

The Inyo National Forest Whitney Portal Alternative Transportation Study was reviewed. The objective of the study was to evaluate the potential to alleviate parking pressures at the popular trailhead through mass transit. The study indicated that as visitation is limited through permits, visitation could not be increased through mass transit but the study recommended constructing trails to connect parking and recreation areas.

### **Lone Pine Heritage Trail**

The Lone Pine Economic Development Corporation has plans for a Southern Inyo Heritage Trail and Park System. The underlying objective of the trail is to improve bicycling and walking conditions in and around Lone Pine as well as to provide connectivity for non-motorized travel between Lone Pine and the outlying communities of Alabama Hills, Pangborn Lane, Foothill Trailer Park and the Lone Pine Reservation. The community of Lone Pine is the gateway to Mt. Whitney and other points of historical interest. As with most Inyo communities, US 395 acts as Main Street and the primary through corridor. However, traffic volumes on US 395 can be quite high, particularly during peak recreational seasons.

Improvements would occur in three phases. The first phase would be to improve bicycle and pedestrian safety along US 395. The second would be a proposed loop trail on the outskirts of town and the final phase would focus on non-motorized safety in Lone Pine. Phase 2 meets the goals of the Recreational Trail program by providing connectivity between outlying communities and Lone Pine. The vision is to develop a long-distance unimproved recreation loop through the use of trail markers and interpretive guides which would generally consist of the following:

- ◆ A path along the southern shoulder of Highway 136, east to Dolomite Loop Road
- ◆ The bluff along the eastern edge of Owens River, in concert with Lower Owens River recreational planning efforts, if authorized by Inyo County and City of Los Angeles Department of Water and Power, from Hwy 136 to Lone Pine Narrow Gauge Road
- ◆ Dolomite Loop Road, Hwy 136 to Owenyo Road
- ◆ Owenyo Road from Dolomite to Lone Pine Narrow Gauge Road
- ◆ Lone Pine Narrow Gauge Road
- ◆ Pangborn Lane and Lone Pine Avenue
- ◆ Existing, unnamed maintenance roads on the west side of town, excluding the Los Angeles Aqueduct (connecting the Lone Pine Indian Reservation, Alabama Hills Golf Course and Diaz Lake)
- ◆ Re-establish a historic trail from Lone Pine to Whitney Portal, via Alabama Hills.

### **Lower Owens River Project (LORP)**

The Lower Owens River Project (LORP) was identified in a 1991 EIR as mitigation for impacts related to groundwater pumping by LADWP from 1970 to 1990. The primary goal of the project was to release water to the lower Owens River and to restore the ecosystem while providing for sustainable recreation, livestock grazing, agriculture and other activities. The LORP area includes 77,656 acres near Lone Pine and Independence and includes nearly 62 miles of river. The return of water flow in the Lower Owens River has enhanced recreational opportunities for both residents and visitors. The Lower Owens River Project Recreation Use Plan was drafted to minimize conflicts between recreation users, resource conservationists, water providers, and ranchers. The plan identified the following five goals:

1. Strengthen the areas nature based tourist economy.
2. Create opportunities for low-impact exploration and wildlife observation – Designate low impact trails between communities and LORP so that users do not create their own higher impact trails
3. Design a system to improve area access and wayfinding
4. Improve river and lake access for fishing and canoeing
5. Inspire cultural and environmental education, learning and stewardship

Appendix E presents the proposed recreation enhancements map for the LORP area. As shown, the backbone of the project is the Lower Owens River Trail traveling roughly 60 miles along the Owens River through the project area for both motorized and non-motorized travel. Other enhancements include:

- ◆ Directional and gateway signage along US 395 and County Roads to better direct and inform users
- ◆ Trail markers along the Lower Owens River Trail
- ◆ Kiosks and staging area improvements
- ◆ Paddle trail and boating access
- ◆ Birding trail and bird blinds
- ◆ Marsh boardwalk at the delta

LORP projects and general cost estimates which meet the goals of the RTP program are displayed in the Recreational Trail Project list table below.

### **Bishop Paiute Conservation Open Space Area (COSA)**

The Bishop Paiute Tribe Reservation has begun work on a native pupfish refuge project. A 5,000 square foot pond for the Owens Valley pupfish was constructed along with walking trails in the Conservation Open Space Area (COSA). Additional ponds and trails to connect tribal members to the ponds are planned. Planned trail surface would be made with decomposed granite and treated with a polymer stabilizer to provide a more permanent and durable surface during the winter months. This provides lower construction and maintenance costs than asphalt paving.

### **Motorized Off-Highway Vehicle Needs**

Connectivity and signage are important needs for motorized off-highway vehicle (OHV) transportation. Inyo County has an extensive network of OHV trails around the various communities. A local OHV group, Adventure Trails System of the Eastern Sierra, has developed an adventure trail concept. The purpose would be to link the OHV network with supplies and services in the communities through establishing OHV legal roadways and implementing wayfinding signage.

### **Equestrian Needs**

Equestrians are important trail users in Inyo County, particularly as several pack outfits operate into the High Sierra in Inyo County. As such all new trail construction should consider equestrians as well as hikers or bikers. Additionally, numerous homeowners in Bishop own horses and would benefit from better connections between trails and town.

### **Proposed Recreational Trails Projects**

Tables 15 and 16 summarize potential recreational trails projects discussed above based on input with stakeholders and a review of relevant recreational plans. The Inyo County Collaborative Bikeways Plan 2008 included a series of tables listing needs and potential improvements to recreational routes. These projects also meet the goals of the RTP program and therefore are included as Appendix F.