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Little Molas Lake Recreation Facilities

Columbine Ranger District, San Juan National Forest
San Juan County, Colorado

T40N R8W Sections 11,12,13, 14



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INTRODUCTION

DOCUMENT STRUCTURE

The Forest Service has prepared and revised this Environmental Assessment in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and other relevant federal and state laws and regulations. This Environmental Assessment discloses the direct, indirect, and cumulative environmental impacts that would result from the proposed action and alternatives. The document is organized into five parts:

- *Introduction:* The section includes information on the history of the project proposal, the purpose of and need for the project, and the agency's proposal for achieving that purpose and need. This section also details how the Forest Service informed the public of the proposal and how the public responded.
- *Comparison of Alternatives, Including the Proposed Action:* This section is a more detailed description of the agency's proposed action as well as alternative methods for achieving the stated purpose. These alternatives were developed based on significant issues raised by the public, internal agency personnel, and other agencies. This discussion also includes possible mitigation measures. Finally, this section contains a summary table of the environmental consequences associated with each alternative.
- *Environmental Consequences:* This section describes the environmental effects of implementing the proposed action and other alternatives. This analysis is organized by resource type, such as soils, wildlife, and hydrology. Within each section, the affected environment is described first, followed by the effects of the No Action Alternative that is a baseline for evaluation and comparison of the other alternatives that follow.
- *Agencies and Persons Consulted:* This section is a list of preparers and agencies consulted during the development of the environmental assessment.
- *Appendices:* The appendices contain more detailed information to support the analyses presented in the environmental assessment.

This EA is not a decision document. It discloses the environmental consequences of implementing the proposed action or alternatives to the proposed action. By using the analyses contained within this document, a decision will be made by the responsible official and documented in the Decision Notice.

Impacts that may occur on lands next to the National Forest, and that may occur in surrounding communities, also are described in this document so that other landowners and decision makers may be aware of the implications of this Forest Service project. Other federal, state, and local jurisdictions have assisted in the analysis and disclosure of these environmental consequences and in the development of alternatives to the proposed action.

Additional documentation, including more detailed analyses of project-area resources, may be found in the project planning record located at the Columbine Ranger District office. Numbers referenced in brackets [#] throughout this document relate to documents in the project record (refer to Appendix A).

BACKGROUND

The Little Molas Lake Recreation Facilities project is located off of US Highway 550 on the Columbine Ranger District, San Juan National Forest, in San Juan County, about 31 miles north of Durango, Colorado, and 4 miles south of Silverton, Colorado (see map, next page). This project would occur within portions of Sections 11, 12, 13, and 14 in Township 40N and Range 08W, N.M.P.M. and covers 10 acres. Little Molas Lake sits at 10,905 feet elevation in scattered spruce-fir surrounded by open terrain. The area typically receives an abundance of snow and the summer season is short.

The existing Little Molas Lake area is very heavily used for camping, fishing, horseback riding, hiking and mountain biking during the summer months and cross country skiing, snowmobiling and snow shoeing during the winter. It is also a popular access point to the backcountry for hunters. The region of the state in which Little Molas Lake is situated is a highly used recreational corridor, as evidenced by several distinctive characteristics.

The San Juan Skyway Scenic Byway is a nationally popular 232-mile drive connecting the historic towns of Durango, Silverton, Ouray, Ridgeway, Telluride, Rico, Dolores, and Cortez. Little Molas Lake Recreation area is located along the Skyway. The Skyway traverses some of the most spectacular, rugged, and primitive landscapes in America. The area is rich in cultural resources, ranging from pre-historic habitations, to the colorful mining era of the San Juan Mountains in the 1800s, including the development of the narrow-gauge railways through the area. The Forest Service designated the Skyway as a National Scenic Byway in 1988. The State of Colorado also designated it as a State Scenic and Historic Byway in 1989. Both were the first such designations in the state.

Along with the Scenic Byway designations, the Forest Service enhanced the area between Durango and Silverton during the last decade by constructing two new interpretive areas (Molas Pass and Coal Bank Pass), improving roadside parking for scenic views, and reconstructing and upgrading the Andrews Lake area. These improvements and the outstanding scenery and history have attracted use along the Skyway and Little Molas Lake area.

Another unique feature of the area is the Colorado Trail, a 468-mile long trail that stretches from Denver to Durango. Its spectacular landscapes comprise eight mountain ranges, seven National Forests, six wilderness areas and five river systems. The trail is highly used, and a portion of it passes near Little Molas Lake, which is also a starting point for many users.

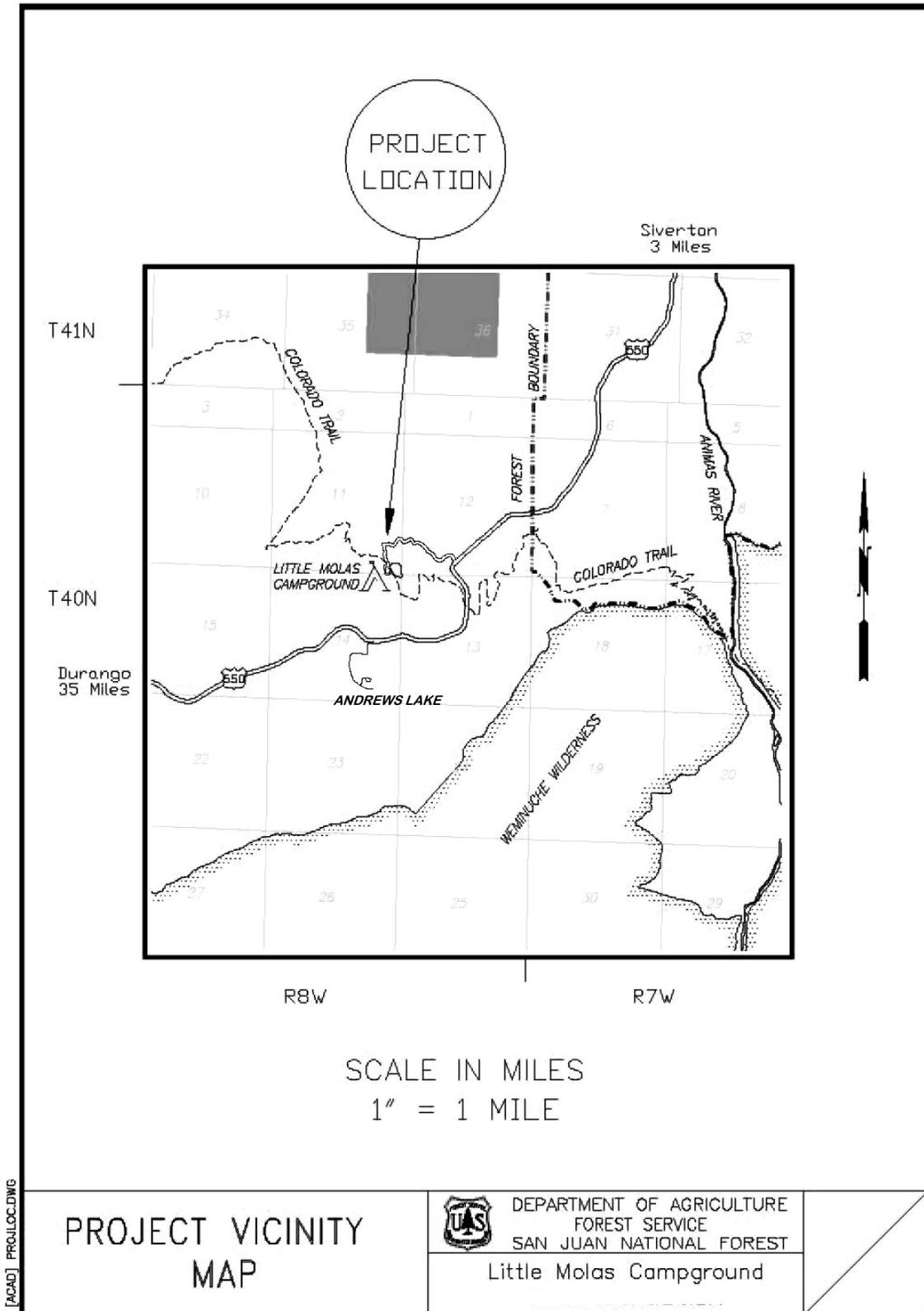


Figure 1. Project Vicinity Map

PURPOSE AND NEED FOR ACTION

The purpose of this proposal is to reduce the existing impacts to the soil, vegetation, and watershed at Little Molas Lake Recreation Site, and to prevent an expansion of the affected area, while providing an opportunity for a quality, minimally developed recreation experience.

Uncontrolled summer/fall dispersed use, in the form of driving, parking and camping on the fragile soils and vegetation, has damaged riparian areas, eroded and compacted the soil, impacted the watershed, and reduced vegetation. There are currently no designated or developed facilities (other than a vault toilet), no designated parking areas or vehicle barriers, no designated campsites, and no designated trailhead - all of which have led to resource damage. Without defined campsites and parking areas, users tend to create their own and are currently driving progressively further off road, damaging vegetation and soils, to get to these sites.

Trends show that recreational use will continue to increase into the future. Increasing use, especially when uncontrolled, will result in escalating damage to the resources.

The existing access road is in poor condition, with ruts, holes, and no gravel. With use increasing, it continues to deteriorate. This leads not only to unpleasant and unsafe conditions for visitors, but also to erosion and sedimentation. The road is not designed for and cannot be safely navigated by recreational vehicles, including trailers. The turnoff from the camping area to the lake access is so sharp that even passenger-size vehicles need to maneuver carefully to make the turn. Horseback riders frequently use the Colorado Trail, but there is insufficient parking for horse trailers.

Lack of an obvious or designated trailhead has led to frequent use of the campground area for trail-use parking, resulting in trail-users occupying campsites. This not only decreases the opportunities for campers, but also detracts from privacy and tranquility in the camping area.

The fishing quality at the lake has reportedly declined over the years. This could be due to a number of factors, including sediment accumulation in the lake. Additionally, without vehicular access to the lake for fish stocking, CDOW cannot stock fish larger than fingerlings.

There is a lack of minimally developed opportunities for camping along the Highway 550 corridor between Durango and Silverton. There are several moderately developed campgrounds, several day-use areas that do not allow camping, and many opportunities for wilderness and dispersed camping, but no designated recreation sites that provide some basic amenities yet retain their more natural character.

Consistency with Other Plans

This proposed action and the alternatives are consistent with and tiered to the overall management direction provided within the *Final Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement* for the *San Juan National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan* (hereafter referred to as the Forest Plan) approved in April 1992 [3], and the *San Juan Skyway Plan* of 1991 [2]. The Forest Plan is being implemented as required by the Forest and Rangeland Renewable Resources Planning Act of 1974 (RPA, P.L. 93-378) and the National Forest Management Act of 1976 (NFMA, P.L. 94-588). The Forest Plan provides the framework for the action proposed here, and we are undertaking the action as one step in implementing the Forest Plan. The proposed action meets the Forest Plan Goal(s) for developed recreation sites. These goals are listed in the Forest Plan in Chapter III, pages 3–4.

The environmental analysis documented in this Environmental Assessment is tiered to Sections III and IV of the Forest Plan [3]. This action responds to the Goals and Objectives outlined in the Forest Plan, and helps move the project area towards desired conditions described in that plan. The Forest Plan classifies the Little Molas Lake area as 2B, or “rural and roaded-natural.” This proposed action is consistent with the guidelines for the 2B class prescription. This class emphasizes “motorized and non-motorized recreation activities such as; driving for pleasure, viewing scenery, picnicking, fishing, snowmobiling, and cross-country skiing. Conventional use of highway-type vehicles is provided for in design and construction of facilities. Motorized travel may be prohibited or restricted to designated routes, to protect physical and biological resources.” Amendment Number 8 to the Forest Plan, signed in 1990, designates the Little Molas Lake Campground as a recreation site.

The proposed action is not connected to or dependent on any other action in this same area. It does not establish a precedent for other actions that may result in significant environmental effects. While the Molas Pass Winter Recreation EA of 2001 [9] discussed the need for winter parking at the junction of Highway 550 and Little Molas Lake Road, that document did not analyze constructing a parking lot at that location. This EA has an Alternative that would provide for that winter parking need.

A “Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) Class” of “Rural, and Roaded-Natural” and a “Recreation Experience Level” of “3” or “4” are the existing standard for this area. The Forest Service *Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) User Guide* of August 1982 [1] defines the activities, setting, and experiences that can be found in each classification:

Activities in Roaded Natural and Rural areas include: viewing scenery, vehicle use, hiking and walking, horseback riding, camping, picnicking, hunting, boating, fishing, snowcraft use, cross-country skiing and snowshoeing. The setting characterized for Roaded Natural is a natural appearing environment with low to moderate interaction between users. Experience in a Roaded Natural area would be an equal opportunity for group interaction and isolation with opportunities for both motorized and non-motorized forms of recreation. The setting for Rural areas is a substantially modified natural environment with moderate to high interaction between users. The experience in a Rural setting is for a high probability of interaction with other users. The convenience of sites and opportunities is important.

This proposal would coincide with the ROS standards.

PROPOSED ACTION

The action proposed by the Forest Service to meet the purpose and need is to rehabilitate the area and prevent re-occurring and additional resource damage. The proposed action would also meet the purpose and need by limiting the level of development, yet improving some aspects of the facilities to provide for a quality experience.

This would consist of:

- Rehabilitating damaged areas,
- Controlling vehicle use and parking,
- Improving access roads,
- Upgrading toilet facilities,
- Providing a defined trailhead,
- Focusing camping impacts to hardened areas,
- Providing better access for fish stocking.

The Proposed Action is Alternative 3, as described in detail below.

DECISION FRAMEWORK

Given the purpose and need, the deciding official reviews the proposed action and the other alternatives in order to make the following examples of decisions:

- How will resource damage be mitigated?
- How will the site be managed into the future to prevent re-occurrence of damage?
- Are new toilets to be installed? If so, how many?
- Are fees going to be charged? Will a campground host site be built?
- Where and what kind of parking will be provided?
- Will a water system, be provided? If so, how many hydrants will be provided?
- Will campsites be designated? If so, how many and with what amenities?
- Will horse camping be provided or prohibited in the main campground?
- To what extent will the road be improved?

The deciding official may chose an alternative exactly as described below, or may pick elements out of different alternatives, and may also add mitigation measures.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

The Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) defines scoping as “...an early and open process for determining the scope of issues to be addressed and for identifying the significant issues related to a proposed action (40 CFR 1501.7).” Among other things, the scoping process is used to invite public participation, to help identify public issues, and to obtain public comment at various stages of the environmental analysis process. Although scoping is to begin early, it is really an iterative process that continues until a decision is made.

In addition to the following specific activities, the Little Molas Lake Recreation Facilities improvement proposal has been listed on the San Juan National Forest *Schedule of Proposed Actions* (SOPA) since December 2000 [numerous references]. Information has also been on the San Juan National Forest’s Web site – <http://www.fs.fed.us/r2/sanjuan> - select “Projects and Plans”. To date, the public has been invited to participate in the project in the following ways:

1st Scoping Period

The Forest Service published a news release announcing the proposal in the *Durango Herald* and the *Silverton Mountain Journal* in early February 2002, and invited comment or discussion on it [18].

During the scoping period, there were 10 written responses to the project proposal. Contacts and site visits were made with Colorado Division of Wildlife and Colorado Department of Transportation [19,47]. Many of the comments were concerned that the campground would be “over-developed” and the character of the area would be compromised. There were also many comments concerning the resource damage that is occurring. There were some specific suggestions made about how and where to improve certain elements of the campground area. A summary of the comments can be found in the project record [20].

Three phone calls were received during the public scoping period. All three were concerned with general issues of resource damage occurring, user conflicts, and proposed level of development [20].

Comment Period on Original EA

The 36 CFR 215 appeal regulations for the Forest Service require a 30-day notice and comment period for environment assessments before a decision can be made. The comment period commenced once a legal notice of availability of this EA was published in the *Durango Herald* on 4/28/03 [37,42].

The Forest Service identified members of the public, organizations, and state and local agencies who could be affected by the proposed project, or who might have an interest in the decisions to be made, including any who commented during scoping. These people and organizations were notified by letter in April 2003 of what was proposed for the Little Molas Lake Recreation Facilities and that the EA was available for review. They were asked to comment on the proposed project, as described in the EA. A list of all those that were notified of the proposed project and invited to comment on it may be found in the project file [34].

In addition to direct mailings and the legal notice, a newspaper article was published describing the proposal and inviting comment [40]. At the request of some members of the public, the comment period was extended an extra two weeks, and a public field trip to the site was held.

Forest Service response to comments received during the extended comment period became an Appendix to the EA after the comment period was over and a decision was made. There were several recurring themes in the comments: opposition to fees, opposition to the proposed parking lot by the highway, maintaining undeveloped camping, and requests to extend the comment period [50].

Appeal Period

A Decision was made in July 2003, followed by a 45-day appeal period. The Regional Forester received an appeal protesting the Decision, as well as comments from 42 “interested parties” [A1,B3]. After preliminary discussions with the appellants and re-consideration of the Decision, the Forest Service withdrew the Decision in Sept. 2003 so that public input could be more thoroughly evaluated, and issues surrounding the proposal could be more fully understood [C1].

2nd Scoping Period

The Forest Service opened a second period of scoping via a public mailing and press releases in November 2003 [E1]. Two public meetings were held in December, one in Silverton and one in Durango. Because of the high public interest, the Fort Lewis College Office of Community Services held a series of Working Group meetings throughout the winter for interested publics to participate in a collaborative process to discuss issues and problem-solve. About 20 citizens participated in six Working Group meetings. There were also several newspaper articles about the project published during this timeframe. The second scoping period generated responses from 64 individuals or organizations, plus two final reports from the Working Group [G37, G38]. Many other sources contributed a wide range of opinions, ideas, and issues [H1]. A major theme of the input related to retaining the primitive character of the area. Many other of the commentors were opposed to user fees and concessionaire-type operations, as was originally proposed.

Comment Period on Revised EA

After re-evaluating the proposed action in response to the input received throughout the planning process, the Forest Service revised the EA (to the version presented in this document), including a revised purpose and need, revised proposed action, and revised alternatives. A public letter, press release, and legal notice announced the opening of a second comment period in Oct. 2004 [J1, J2, J4]. Forest Service response to this second round of comments will be included in the project file.

ISSUES

Using the comments received from the public, other agencies, and internally, the interdisciplinary team developed a list of issues to address. The Forest Service separated the issues into two groups: significant and non-significant issues.

Significant issues were defined as those directly or indirectly caused by implementing the proposed action. Non-significant issues were identified as those: 1) outside the scope of the proposed action; 2) already decided by law, regulation, Forest Plan, or other higher level decision; 3) irrelevant to the decision to be made; or 4) conjectural and not supported by scientific or factual evidence. The Council for Environmental Quality (CEQ) NEPA regulations require this delineation in Sec. 1501.7, "...identify and eliminate from detailed study the issues which are not significant or which have been covered by prior environmental review (Sec. 1506.3)..." A list of non-significant issues and reasons regarding their categorization as non-significant may be found in the project record [20, H1].

The Forest Service identified four significant issues raised during scoping. These issues are:

Issue #1: Conflicting Uses. Several users groups use the project area, and their uses are sometimes conflicting. Separate the conflicting uses.

This generated parts of Alternative Two: locate trailer parking (horses and snowmobiles) down by the highway, route the Colorado Trail away from the parking area (spur connect only), designate fishing area parking and day use only at the lake, provide some walk-in sites, and install signing to direct usage.

Issue #2: Level of development. Improvement may change the character of the campground. The present atmosphere at this campground is perceived as quiet, serene, and undeveloped. Users enjoy the primitive nature of the area. If fully developed, the Forest Service may be competing with the private sector camping areas located near Molas Lake.

The Ranger District goal is to present the forest user with a range, or spectrum, of developed recreation facilities throughout the District, that are geared to satisfy a diverse set of user expectations. Alternative Two provides a level of development that is lower than those provided at nearby private and public campgrounds, and ranks on the lower end of the scale for developed recreation sites on the forest. Alternative Three addresses this issue even further by leaving the area a dispersed-use area with undesignated sites and even fewer amenities.

Issue #3: Resource damage. There is erosion, soil compaction, and vegetative damage occurring because sites and parking areas are not designated, so people drive and camp wherever they want. Vehicle control needs to be established and user-generated trails need to be reclaimed. A more formalized system of roads and parking would eliminate much of the problem.

This issue is addressed in both Alternatives Two and Three.

Issue #4: Fees. Charging fees would eliminate an opportunity for free, dispersed-style camping along the Highway 550 corridor. There are not many places with vehicle access available for this kind of camping, especially with a scenic lake. Fees would drive away some users who cannot afford or do not want to pay.

Alternative Three addresses this issue by leaving the site a dispersed camping area with minimal amenities. This type of camping would not incur fees.

ALTERNATIVES, INCLUDING THE PROPOSED ACTION

This chapter describes and compares the alternatives considered for the Little Molas Lake Recreation Facilities project. It includes a description and maps showing relevant features of alternatives. This section also presents the alternatives in comparative form, sharply defining the differences between each alternative and providing a clear basis for choice among options by the decision maker. Some of the information used to compare the alternatives is based upon the physical design of the alternative (i.e., dispersed versus designated campsites) and some of the information is based upon the environmental, social and economic effects of implementing each alternative (i.e., the amount of erosion generated or the cost to build designated campsites versus unregulated dispersed camping).

National Environmental Policy Act procedural regulations require the Forest Service to study the No Action Alternative in detail, and to use it as a baseline for comparing the effects of the other alternatives (40 CFR 1502.14(d), Forest Service Handbook 1909.15, 23.1).

ALTERNATIVES

Alternative 1: No Action

Under the No Action alternative, current management plans would continue to guide management of the project area. There are about 20 dispersed-camping sites; these would remain as they are.

There would be no resource rehabilitation conducted. There would be no closing of user-made trails or 2-track roads, and no scarification or reseeding. Vehicle barriers would not be installed and no vehicle restriction measures taken.

Under this alternative, there would be no improvements of the facilities. There would be no upgrade of the roads, no new parking area or trailhead, and no separation of user groups. Camping amenities such as table, fire grates, and barrier-free sites would not be added. The vault toilet would not be replaced and no additional toilets would be added. A potable water system would not be installed. Picnic sites and fish-stocking access would not be provided.

Figure 2 shows the existing layout of the area.

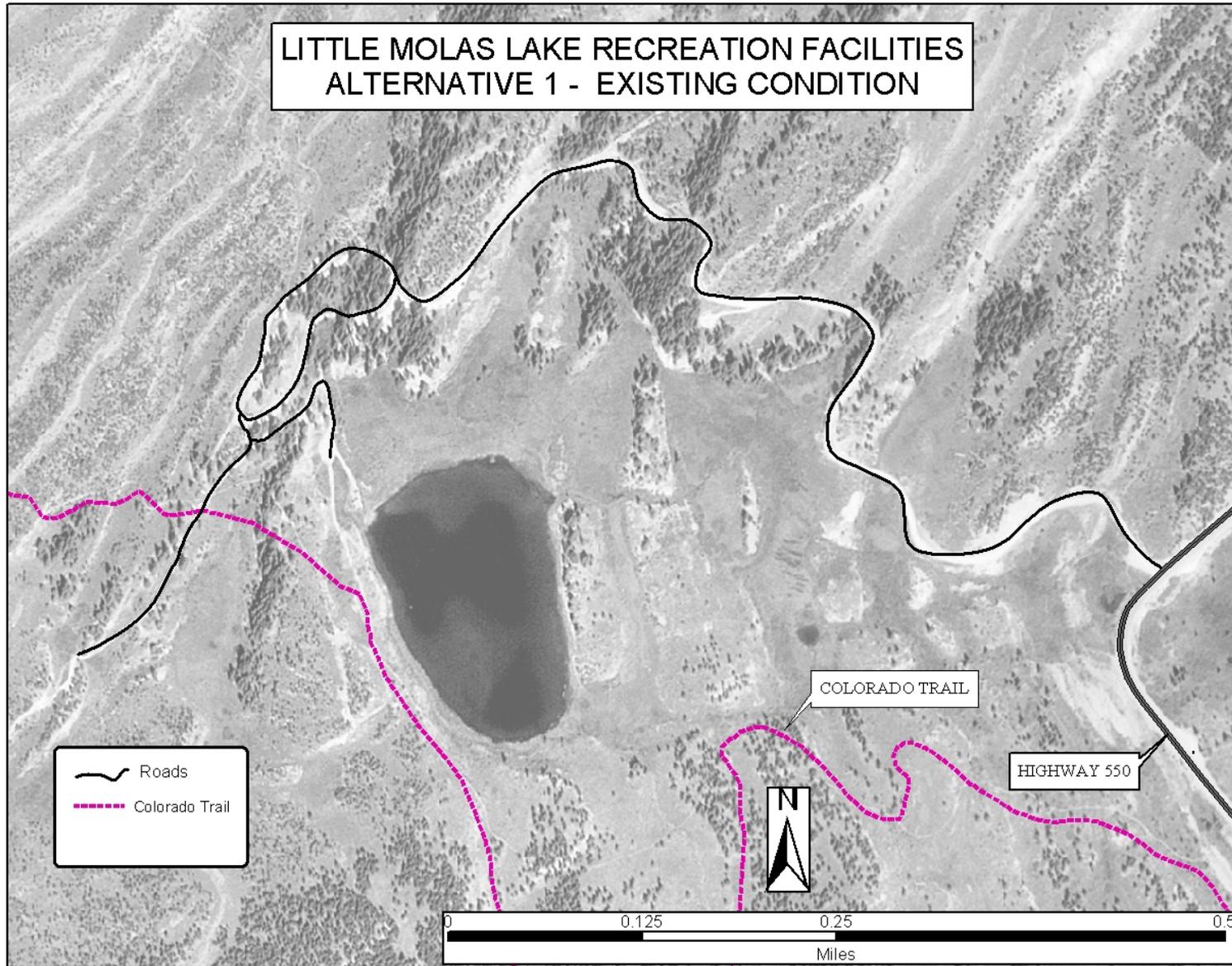


Figure 2. Alternative 1 - Existing Conditions.

Alternative 2: Resource Protection and Improvement of Recreation Facilities.

This alternative would reduce conflicts between user groups. It would also upgrade the area to a minimally developed campground, which would provide for administrative tools to manage and oversee the site into the future. The proposal would also offer resource protection and rehabilitation measures. The following actions would be included:

- Close and rehabilitate some areas where soil compaction and vegetative damage are occurring, such as redundant user-made trails, unneeded roads, vehicle-caused damage, and some de-vegetated camping areas. This will involve rehabilitating several acres of impacted land by scarification and seeding with a mix of native, certified weed-free seed, and/or by planting with native shrubs [26]. Other treatment methods could include the use of revegetation matting or mulch. Treat noxious weeds as necessary after rehabilitation.
- Correct other erosion problems along the roadways and shoreline through soil stabilization, planting and seeding projects.
- Restrict vehicle access to acceptable areas using mostly natural material barriers such as boulders and logs.
- Improve signing at the Highway 550 turnoff into Little Molas Lake.
- Construct a trailhead parking lot adjacent to Highway 550 for trail users, including horses, hikers, and bikers, and winter recreation skiers, snowmobilers, and snowshoers. A toilet would be added to this area.
- Create a spur connect to the Colorado Trail from the new trailhead parking at the highway to connect with the existing trail where it crosses Highway 550 below the Molas Pass Interpretive Site.
- Improve roads by grading, gravelling, and draining.
- Construct a scenic pullout with interpretive signing at the lake overlook area near the campground.
- Build an information/fee collection kiosk at the campground entrance.
- Install signing throughout the recreation site to direct users to appropriate areas.
- Install a potable water system.
- Replace and relocate the existing toilet with a minimum odor, barrier-free model.
- Designate approximately 20 campsites with designated parking, picnic tables, and fire grates.
- Construct a minimum of four handicapped accessible sites with a hardened surface (such as gravel), tables, fire grates, and access to the toilet.
- Provide two separate designated campsites for horse campers and approximately seven sites for tents.
- Restrict horse camping in the main campground loop to hunting season only, until more horse camping areas can be built in the future.
- No large “RV” sites will be constructed.
- Designate one site for a campground host, including installation of water hookup and septic tank.
- Implement fee collection.
- Reroute and reconstruct the road accesses to the trailhead and lake area to eliminate the safety concerns of negotiating the existing sharp corner.
- Provide designated barrier-free parking spaces, tables, and toilet for fishermen near the lakeshore.
- Provide Colorado Division Of Wildlife with truck access to the inlet area of the lake for fish stocking.
- Monitor resource conditions through such methods as photo points, vegetation surveys, water quality evaluations, and tracking of violations in order to determine if the Purpose and Need is being met.

Figures 3 and 4 depict the layout of Alternative 2.

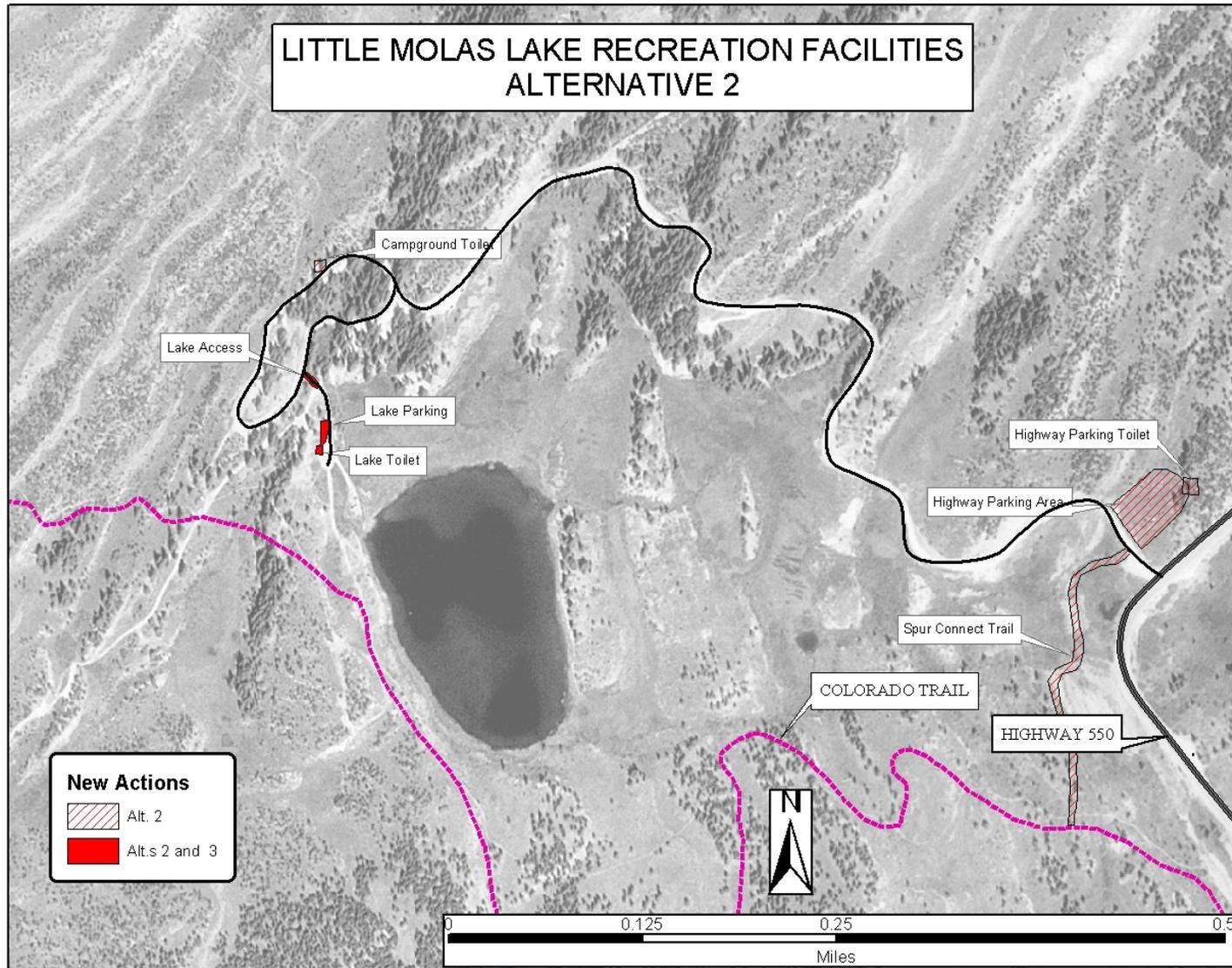


Figure 3. Alternative 2 - New Disturbance.

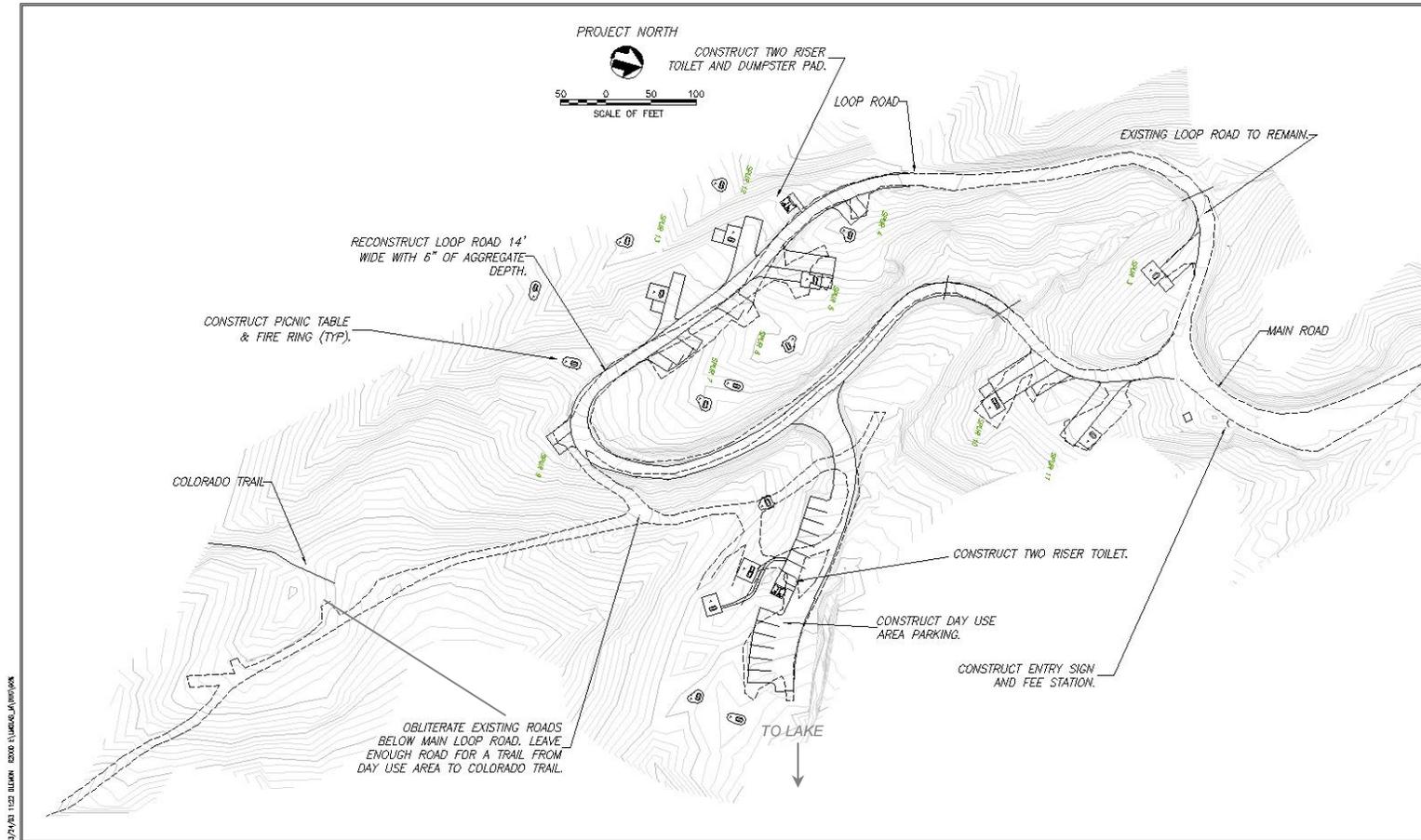


Figure 4. Alternative 2 - Campground Loop Drawing.

Alternative 3: (Proposed Action) Resource Protection

Alternative Three would primarily deal with the issue of resource protection and rehabilitation. This alternative would also address the concerns about implementing fees, over-development of the area, and would maintain more of the natural character of the area. Actions would include:

- Close and rehabilitate some areas where soil compaction and vegetative damage are occurring, such as redundant user-made trails, unneeded roads, vehicle-caused damage, and some de-vegetated camping areas. This will involve rehabilitating several acres of impacted land by scarification and seeding with a mix of native, certified weed-free seed, and/or by planting with native shrubs [26]. Other treatment methods could include the use of revegetation matting or mulch. Treat noxious weeds as necessary after rehabilitation.
- Correct other erosion problems along the roadways, trails, and shoreline through soil stabilization, planting and seeding projects.
- Restrict vehicle access to acceptable areas using mostly natural material barriers such as boulders and logs.
- Improve roads by grading, gravelling, and draining only at problem areas with resource damage or safety concerns.
- Install a gate at the intersection of the access road and the highway for optional closure to prevent road damage during seasonally soft conditions (late fall and early spring).
- Install an informational/educational sign and site map at the lake overlook area and trailhead, but limit other signing throughout the area to directional and other essential signage.
- Replace and re-locate the existing toilet with a minimum odor, barrier-free model.
- Install a second toilet near the trailhead, and possibly a third near the lake when funding becomes available.
- Do not designate or limit campsites.
- Construct a minimum of four handicapped accessible sites with a hardened surface (such as gravel), tables, fire grates, and access to the toilet.
- Provide several larger sites that are appropriate for horse camping.
- Provide walk-in tent camping area along the existing two-track road (which will be closed to vehicles and obliterated beyond the existing trailhead location).
- Install in-ground fire-rings only at heavily used campsites.
- Gravel around key use areas in heavily used campsites, but not in all areas.
- Increase parking at the trailhead location where the existing two-track road meets the Colorado Trail; close and obliterate the two-track beyond the trailhead to motorized vehicles.
- Reroute and reconstruct the road accesses to the trailhead and lake area to eliminate the safety concerns of negotiating the existing sharp corner.
- Better define the parking area at the lake.
- Provide Colorado Division of Wildlife with truck access to the inlet area of the lake for fish stocking.
- Encourage and support volunteers to educate and inform site users of “Leave No Trace” practices, perform site stewardship, maintain an on-site presence, report resource violations, etc.
- Monitor resource conditions through such methods as photo points, vegetation surveys, water quality evaluations, and tracking of violations in order to determine if the Purpose and Need is being met.

A scenic/interpretive overlook would not be built, nor would the spur connection trail and parking area adjacent to Hwy 550. Tables would not be added (except for barrier-free sites). A water system would not be provided. A parking lot adjacent to Highway 550 would not be built.

Figures 5 and 6 depict the layout for Alternative 3.

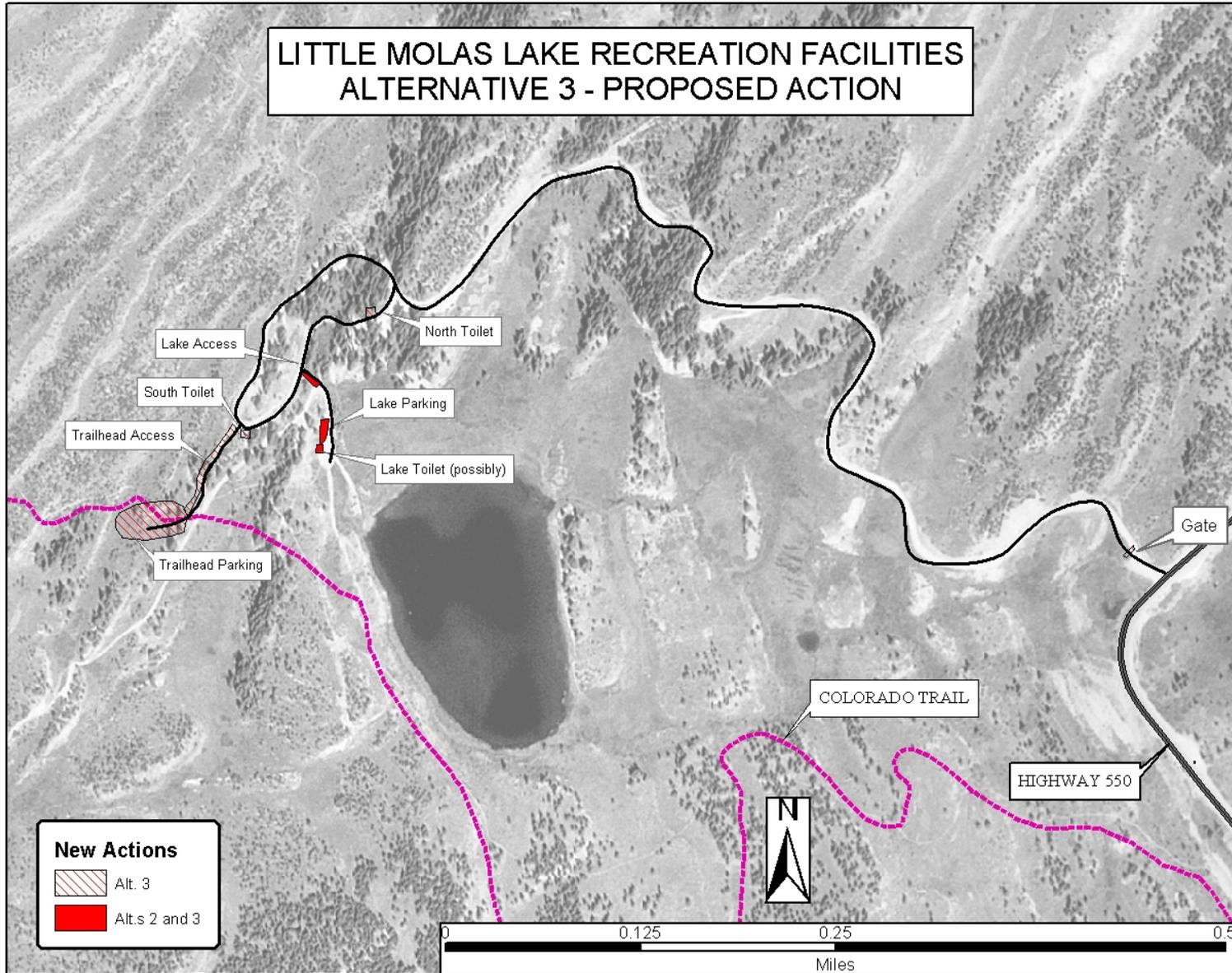


Figure 5. Alternative 3 – Proposed Action New Disturbance.

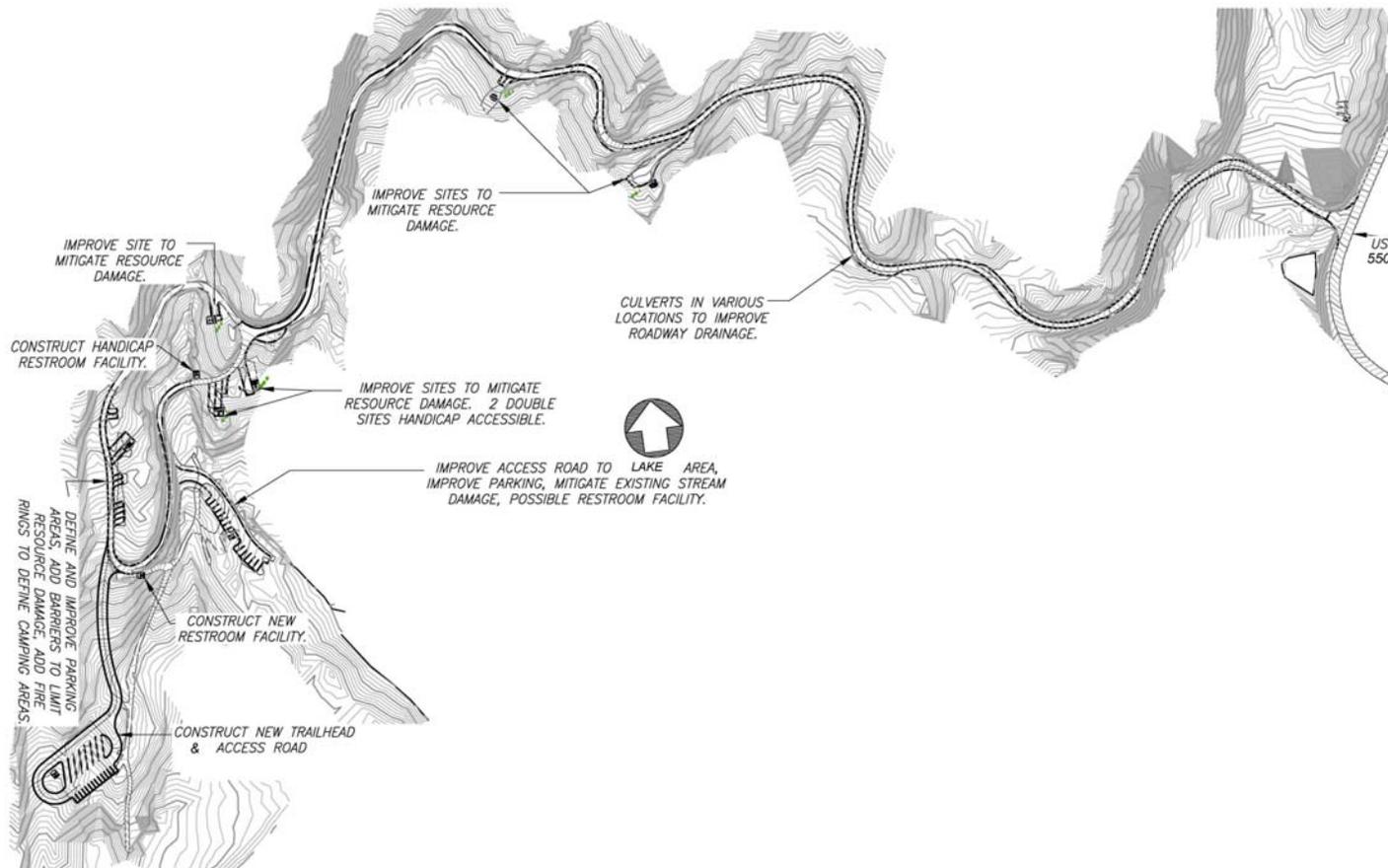


Figure 6. Alternative 3 –Proposed Action Drawing

Alternatives not Analyzed in Detail

Two other alternatives were considered but not analyzed in detail. One of these was closing the Little Molas Lake area to overnight camping. This alternative was not analyzed in detail because of the recognized the need for camping in the area due to its present use.

The second alternative dropped from detailed analysis was a full remodel and upgrade of the Little Molas Lake area. This could have included paving the road; fully developed RV size campsites; a boat ramp; an extensive water system; three new restrooms; trash service; and a developed horse camping area, and operation with a concessionaire charging fees. The majority of public commentors did not want to see the area developed to a higher level, as was done at Haviland Lake Campground. The majority of public commentors felt there were a sufficient number of campsites in the vicinity providing those types of amenities.

MITIGATION COMMON TO ALL ACTION ALTERNATIVES

“Mitigating measures” are actions taken to avoid, minimize, reduce, or eliminate adverse effects as a result of implementing an alternative. Such measures would be used for all but the "No Action" alternative.

- Correct any construction damage immediately after each construction phase, to offset the impacts of the construction itself.
- Implement Best Management Practices for silt control as determined necessary to protect riparian areas.
- Restrict equipment use off-road when soils are saturated. If ruts 4 inches or deeper for 10 feet or longer are created by equipment or vehicles, operations should cease until the ground dries out or freezes.
- Any construction or reconstruction work done on the road leading down to the lake should not cause the road to encroach on the stream any more than it currently does, with the exception of stabilizing the two areas where the stream bank is eroding into the road. Riparian vegetation should not be disturbed.
- Reduce impacts on recreationists as much as possible by implementing construction measures such as: working only during daylight hours, not working on major weekends, phased construction, warning of construction in progress to allow for turnaround space, etc. However, if visitor safety is a concern, all or part of the area may need to be closed during construction.
- Cut as few mature trees and snags as possible, while considering the need for camper safety and road design.

MONITORING COMMON TO ALL ACTION ALTERNATIVES

Monitoring after construction would consist of keeping, to the extent possible, a record of numbers of users, operations-and-maintenance costs, required staffing to operate the site, and any unplanned, large costs, such as major equipment facilities failures.

Photo points would be established and informal monitoring would be conducted. This would include monitoring the rehabilitation work to see if seeded areas are revegetating and if vehicle barriers are working. It would also include monitoring of bare ground, sedimentation, and erosion to determine if the objectives of resource protection are being met. Incidents of if vehicle violations would also be tracked. Additionally, if Alternative 2 were chosen, the Forest Service would monitor whether different groups are using their appropriate areas, and whether fees are being paid.

COMPARISON OF ALTERNATIVES

This section summarizes the effects of implementing each alternative. Information in the table is focused on activities and effects where different levels of effects or outputs can be distinguished quantitatively or qualitatively among alternatives.

Table 1. Comparison of Alternatives

	Alternative 1: No Action	Alternative 2: Resource Protection & Facility Improvement	Alternative 3:(Proposed Action) Resource Protection
Campsites	About 20 dispersed, not regulated. Overcrowding. No tables, few existing fire grates. No barrier-free sites.	20 designated with tables and grates. Horse and tent sites. 3-4 barrier-free sites.	15-20 dispersed. Approx 15 fire grates. Tables only at 4 barrier-free sites. Some overcrowding remains.
Lake Area	Camping occurring. Shoreline damage by vehicles.	Day-use only picnic sites. Vehicle barriers. New toilet.	Camping allowed. Vehicle barriers. New toilet (dependent on funding).
Toilets	One existing vault	Replace with barrier-free toilet. 1-2 new barrier-free toilets.	Replace with barrier-free toilet. 1-2 new barrier-free toilets.
Resource Damage	Remains. Uncontrolled sedimentation.	2-3 acres rehabilitated and reseeded. Most reduction of sediment.	2-3 acres rehabilitated and reseeded. Some reduction of sediment.
Water system	None	Potable water system added.	None
Roads	Unsafe road conditions. Ruts, holes, muddy. Bad corner to lake.	Graveled roads. Install culverts. Redesign sharp corner. Decommission 2-track.	Spot-fix with gravel and culverts. Redesign sharp corner. Decommission 2-track beyond trailhead.
Parking Situation	No designated parking. No vehicle barriers. User group parking conflicts.	Designated campsite, trail, and day-use parking areas. Parking lot at 550. (approx. 1 acre) Vehicle barriers. Horse trailer parking provided.	Controlled vehicle parking with barriers. Trailhead parking south of campground. (approx. 0.6 acres) User group conflicts remain.
Colorado Trail	No defined parking area. Unclear where trail is. Existing vehicle access to trail is through campground.	New spur connect trail to 550-trailhead parking lot. Vehicle access to trail not through campground.	Trailhead provided south of campground. Vehicle access to trail through campground remains.
Signing	Directional sign on highway. Inadequate.	Interpretive pullout with signs at overlook. New signs at highway, new parking lot, and throughout area. Resource-protection signing.	Directional and educational signing at overlook and trailhead. Limited signs throughout area. Resource protection signing.
CDOW Access	Existing, must hand carry fish.	Provide vehicle access for stocking.	Provide vehicle access for stocking.
Camping Fees/ Campground Host	No	Yes: \$ 10 -12	No
Day-Use Fees	No	Yes: \$ 5 - 6	No
Trees removed	No, only hazard trees normally removed in campgrounds.	Yes, a few for upgrade of road, parking area at highway, and designated-campsite construction. Normal hazard tree removal.	Yes, a few for trailhead construction. Normal hazard tree removal.
Cost to implement	None	Approx. \$ (being calculated)	Approx. \$ (being calculated)

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

This section summarizes the physical, biological, social, and economic environments of the affected project area and the potential changes to those environments due to implementation of the alternatives. It also presents the scientific and analytical basis for the comparison of alternatives presented in the preceding chart.

SOILS

The area is a complex of shallow and moderately deep, well-drained soils with moderate permeability. Runoff is medium and the hazard of water erosion is moderate. This soil type is suited to recreational development, with limitations of depth to bedrock and proper drainage for roads and trails. The topography of the area limits locations suitable for camping sites and requires diligence in the construction of roads and trails, to minimize potential erosion [12].

Alternative 1: No Action

Current conditions present a number of erosion problems, due to the unimproved roadways and multiple trail-access points. Erosion problems will continue to worsen under the “No Action” alternative.

Alternative 2: Resource Protection and Improvement of Recreation Facilities

This alternative provides for construction of a developed campground, day-use area, and parking areas, as well as improvement of roadways and parking areas. Total area of new ground disturbance would be approximately 2 acres, and includes 3 new toilets, new highway parking area, new spur connect trail, and new access to the lake area. These new features would be designed to control erosion by use of gravel, water bars, slope design, etc.

Approximately 2-3 acres of existing soil compaction and vegetative loss will be rehabilitated and blocked off to prevent further damage. This would include user-made trails, some areas within the campground, and the 2-track road south of the campground. Soil stabilization measures will be implemented to prevent or reduce soil movement. Planting and seeding will provide for soil and slope stabilization and filtration of run-off.

Alternative 3: Resource Protection

This alternative will provide improved roadways and parking areas, and will minimize occurrences of erosion. Total area of new ground disturbance would be approximately 1.15 acres, including 3 new toilets, trailhead and access, and new access to the lake area. The difference in acreage between the two action alternatives mainly reflects the difference in size between the smaller trailhead (Alt. 3) and the highway parking lot (Alt. 2). This alternative will also block off and rehabilitate areas of soil compaction and vegetation loss, to prevent further erosion. These new features would be designed to control erosion by use of gravel, water bars, slope design, etc.

Approximately 2-3 acres of existing user made trails, some areas within the campground, and most of the 2-track will be blocked off and rehabilitated. Just as in Alternative 2, soil stabilization measures will be implemented to prevent or reduce soil movement. Planting and seeding will provide for soil and slope stabilization and filtration of run-off. Because on-the-ground administrative presence would be less than under Alternative 2, there is a potential for camping, driving, and hiking use to continue to expand into currently undisturbed or revegetated areas.

Cumulative Impacts

The combined and prolonged use of the immediate, surrounding area by campers, hikers, and horseback riders has had some cumulative impacts on soils, such as compaction and erosion.

HYDROLOGY

Little Molas Lake is an alpine lake that has been increased from its original size due to the construction of an impoundment on the east side of the lake. The creek feeding Little Molas Lake is a perennial, spring-fed drainage.

There is excessive erosion and sedimentation into Little Molas Lake due to dispersed camping, hiking and vehicle use near the lake. The loss of vegetation and ground cover and compaction of the soils has resulted in reduced infiltration, increased runoff, and increased erosion. Many of the disturbed areas drain into the perennial stream that feeds Little Molas Lake. The road to the lake parking area encroaches on the stream and the banks are failing in two places. One campsite is located immediately adjacent to the stream. As a result of disturbed riparian vegetation and increased sediment loads, portions of this stream are wider and shallower than they should be. Where the stream enters Little Molas Lake, a large sediment delta has formed. The lake is a sediment sink so sediment originating from the camping area probably does not pass through the lake and impact the stream downstream of the lake [I4].

The outlet from Little Molas lake is a small, perennial stream that drains into Molas Creek on the east side of Highway 550. The stream feeds a small wet area before crossing the highway through a culvert. There is some evidence that placing soil berms on the west side of the highway may have created the wet area. Since these berms remain dry, they are being used as informal trails to cross the wetland [11].

Alternative 1: No Action

Long-term erosion and sedimentation will increase with this alternative as uncontrolled use of the area continues, resulting in vegetation loss, soil compaction, erosion, and sedimentation into Little Molas Lake.

Alternative 2: Resource Protection and Improvement of Recreation Facilities

Ground disturbance would occur as a result of the construction and reconstruction of the complex and associated roads. Total area of new ground disturbance would be approximately 2 acres. However, impacts to streams and Little Molas Lake would be insignificant due to the implementation of best management practices. Any short-term impacts would be offset by rehabilitation and revegetation of currently disturbed areas. Barriers and the presence of a campground host, which would reduce the chance of additional trampling and ground disturbance occurring outside of the designated campsites and parking areas, would control future use of the area. The combination of controlling use and rehabilitating disturbed areas would result in long-term benefits.

Alternative 3: Resource Protection

Less construction and reconstruction would occur under Alternative 3 than Alternative 2, resulting in less ground disturbance. Total area of new ground disturbance for this alternative would be approximately 1.15 acres. Impacts to streams and Little Molas Lake as a result of the ground disturbance would be insignificant due to the implementation of best management practices. Any short-term impacts would be offset by rehabilitation and revegetation of currently disturbed areas. Future use of the area would be controlled to some degree by barriers and revegetated areas. Because on-the-ground administrative presence would be less than under Alternative 2, there is a potential for camping, driving, and hiking use

to continue to expand into currently undisturbed or revegetated areas. The combination of controlling use and rehabilitating disturbed areas would result in long-term benefits.

Cumulative Impacts

The combined and prolonged use of the immediate surrounding area by fishermen, campers, hikers, and horseback riders has had some cumulative impacts on water resources, such as erosion and sedimentation. The proposed action would help to mitigate this cumulative impact.

FISHERIES

The Colorado Division of Wildlife stocks Little Molas Lake with rainbow trout by hand-carrying them down to the lake. The lake has a history of almost total annual winterkill of its fish population. In 1988 and 1989, the Forest Service undertook mitigating measures to help alleviate the winterkill, by channeling the inlet stream to increase the oxygen level. The south branch of Molas Creek is too shallow to support a fish population.

Alternative 1: No Action

Erosion and sedimentation would increase with this alternative, as use of the area and consequent soil damage increase. This could lead to negative impacts on the fisheries habitat.

Alternatives 2 and 3: Resource Protection and Improvement of Recreation Facilities; Resource Protection

There is potential for short-term negative impacts on the fisheries habitat, due to construction and reconstruction of the complex and associated roads. The negative impacts would, however, be offset by an aggressive rehabilitation and/or revegetation program. Long-term benefits would be realized.

Providing vehicle access for fish stocking directly to the lake will benefit the put-and-take fishery by allowing larger fish to be stocked.

Cumulative Impacts

There have been no other activities in the area that would contribute to cumulative impacts on fisheries.

WILD AND SCENIC RIVERS

No Wild and Scenic Rivers exist or are proposed within the project-effect area.

AIR QUALITY

An air quality monitoring station has been in operation near Molas Pass and the Weminuche Wilderness from 1988 to 1992 and from 1996 to the present. This monitoring station is part of a national network called IMPROVE (Interagency Monitoring of Protected Visual Environments). Monitoring measures very fine, airborne particles called aerosols. From the aerosol data, impacts on visibility can also be determined.

Air quality in the Little Molas Lake area is very good. The primary pollutants affecting air quality are sulfate, organics, and soot aerosols. Of the 42 IMPROVE sites monitored, the Weminuche Wilderness site ranks as the eleventh cleanest site nationally (Copeland and Savig, 2001) [28].

Alternative 1: No Action.

There would be no effects on the air quality from the No Action Alternative, beyond those that exist now.

Alternatives 2 and 3: Resource Protection and Improvement of Recreation Facilities; Resource Protection

The impacts on air quality from these two alternatives would be similar. A direct impact is that fugitive dust may be generated during ground-disturbing construction activities. Elevated levels of dust (above the existing conditions) would be short term for the duration of construction and are not expected to be chronic or long term. Because of the very high-elevation, mountainous location of this site and frequent summer rains, extremely dry, dusty conditions would not be expected.

In the unlikely event that dust were to become a problem during any phase of construction, dust abatement measures would be required for roads and construction sites. The water source used would be subject to Endangered Species Act consultation in relation to water depletions from the San Juan River basin.

There are no expected indirect impacts to air quality.

Cumulative Impacts

Because the impacts, if any, are expected to be localized and short term, and the air quality is very good in the area, cumulative impacts on overall air quality would be considered very small to insignificant.

FORESTS AND GRASSLANDS

The general area surrounding Little Molas Lake was burned in the Lime Creek Fire of 1879; an intense, stand-destroying burn. To this day, there is little or no tree cover in burned areas that were not successfully planted, although large, standing and downed stems indicate that substantial forests existed, especially on the benches. The area occupied by the campground, however, was not destroyed, and residual spruce-fir still occupies much of the campground. The oldest residual trees are estimated to be at least 200 years old. In the 1940s and '50s, lodgepole pine, which is not native to the area, was planted near the campground and surrounding hillsides, along with a smaller amount of Engelmann spruce. The planted trees are about 20 feet tall now [12].

Forbs include those that are native to that elevation: yarrow, paintbrush, bluebell, marsh marigold, ovens, pentagon, and bistort: Willow can be found in the wet areas around the lake. Grasses native to the area include bluegrass, Thurber fescue, and sedge.

There is no habitat in the project area for federally threatened, endangered, or proposed plant species, or for Forest Service sensitive plant species [46].

Alternative 1: No Action

Vegetation, including trees, would continue to be damaged with this alternative by uncontrolled vehicle use.

Alternative 2: Resource Protection and Improvement of Recreation Facilities

There would be effects associated with new construction/reconstruction, in the form of ground disturbance and a minimum amount of trees cut. Approximately 2 acres of new vegetation disturbance would be created by construction of new features such as the parking areas and new toilets. To offset that

new disturbance, about 2-3 acres of existing impacted ground would be revegetated. A few lodgepole pine trees would be cleared for construction of the highway parking lot, in addition to some hazardous trees in the campground that would be cut for safety. Noxious weeds could be introduced during construction, but would be treated for several years following implementation.

Alternative 3: Resource Protection

About 1.15 acres of new vegetation disturbance would occur under this alternative, by construction of the trailhead, toilets, and lake access. On the other hand, there would be beneficial effects associated with rehabilitation under this alternative that would primarily occur in disturbed grassland: approximately 2–3 acres of vegetation damage would be repaired. A few trees, primarily lodgepole, would be cut for construction of the trailhead, in addition to felling of hazard trees. Noxious weeds that might be introduced during construction would be treated.

Unhardened areas could continue to be impacted or affected areas could expand because there would be no restriction on where people could camp. If this occurs to an unacceptable degree, further resource protection measures as described in the proposed action could be implemented, such as more vehicle barriers or hardening more sites.

Cumulative Impacts

The Lime Creek Fire and planting of lodgepole afterward have had the biggest impact on the vegetation in the area. The cumulative effects of cutting a few hazard trees in the campground would be negligible.

CULTURAL RESOURCES

The cultural resource potential for this area is low, and the historical-value potential is moderate. Three new isolated finds of artifacts and one new archeological site were located and recorded during a series of intensive cultural resource surveys that covered the entire project area. None of them are considered eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. No historic, traditional cultural properties, Native American religious sites, or traditional use areas are known to be present in the project area [25, 31, 48, I6].

Alternatives 1, 2, and 3

None of the alternatives would affect known historic or traditional cultural properties.

Cumulative Impacts

There have been no other activities in the area that would contribute to cumulative impacts on cultural resources.

WILDLIFE

The habitat surrounding the project is primarily an open, alpine environment. There are stands of spruce-fir and non-native lodgepole pine. There are riparian and aquatic habitats related to Little Molas Lake and the creek exiting from the lake. Common wildlife found in the area includes coyotes, black bears, elk, mule deer, snowshoe hares, chipmunks, and squirrels. Bird populations consist mainly of Stellar's jays, mountain bluebirds, several hummingbird species, juncos, western tanager, blue grouse, red-tailed hawks, and an occasional golden eagle.

Alternative 1: No Action

There would be no direct impacts on any wildlife species if the project were not implemented. By not rehabilitating damaged areas and not controlling dispersed vehicle use, however, erosion would continue to be a problem, and riparian and aquatic species would continue to be impacted.

Alternatives 2 and 3: Resource Protection and Improvement of Recreation Facilities; Resource Protection***Federally Threatened, Endangered, and Proposed Species***

A biological analysis was conducted to determine the effects of the project on Threatened and Endangered species, and those proposed for listing. Canada lynx, a threatened species, is the only listed species with habitat in the area. There could be inconsequential effects on lynx habitat when a few trees are felled in the campground area. There would not be a substantial increase in overall use of the campground due to the project. The campground and access road would remain unplowed during winter. The biological analysis determined that there could be an effect on lynx, but it would not likely affect the species adversely as a whole [5, 36, I5].

There is also the potential for boreal toad, a species proposed for listing, to occur at the lake. There could be a short-term increase in sediment deposits in riparian areas during construction activities. This would be mitigated by installation of silt fences, if necessary. In the long term, rehabilitation of damaged ground vegetation, as well as control of vehicle use, would benefit riparian areas and water quality.

Forest Service Sensitive Species

The biological analysis also examined the impacts of the project on Forest Service Region 2 Sensitive Species. The report determined that the proposed action would have no impact on the American marten, North American wolverine, boreal owl, northern goshawk, or willow ptarmigan.

The biological analysis also determined that the proposed action would have a beneficial impact on the northern leopard frog and boreal toad. These species use riparian and aquatic habitats. By establishing parking areas and limiting vehicle travel around the lake, riparian and shoreline habitat would be better protected, and there would be a long-term benefit. There may be a slight, short-term increase in sediment during construction.

The olive-sided flycatcher and three-toed woodpecker may be impacted when a few snags and/or trees with cavities may be removed in the campground; such a minimal loss of habitat would not, however, result in a loss of viability in the planning area, nor cause a trend to federal listing or a loss of species viability rangewide. [36, I5]

Management Indicator Species

The biological analysis also analyzed the impacts of the project on species identified in the Forest Plan as Management Indicator Species (MIS). There are two MIS that were analyzed for this project with habitat in the project area that would not be impacted by the project: elk and mule deer. These are species that either would use the lake or areas next to the campground, but there would be no direct impacts from the project on these habitats. Human use at the campground would not substantially increase due to the project; therefore, disturbance would not increase.

Some MIS animals may be individually impacted by the project, but the species' population as a whole would not be impacted. Hairy woodpeckers and mountain bluebirds that use snags and mature trees adjacent to forest openings may be impacted by the removal of a few trees within the campground during

construction. These species are common on the SJNF and there is no evidence to suggest a declining trend. [36, I5]

Cumulative Impacts

Cumulative impacts on wildlife in the project area would probably be limited to disturbance from humans using the campground and trails. There have recently been no other activities in the immediate campground area that have altered habitat, and none are planned.

WILDFIRE

As noted in the Forest and Grasslands section, the Lime Creek Fire, an intense, stand-destroying event, took place in 1879. Presently, there are non-native lodgepole pine, planted after the fire, and some residual spruce-fir that were not destroyed in the fire.

Alternative 1: No Action

There would be no effects from this alternative.

Alternative 2: Resource Protection and Improvement of Recreation Facilities

This alternative would reduce the risk of wildfire. Metal fire rings would be installed in the complex, and fires would be permitted only in these. In addition, a campground host would be present, asking visitors to put out their fires when leaving and also to extinguish fires left unattended. In additions, the host would inform visitors about and monitor any fire bans that may be in place.

Alternatives 3: Resource Protection

This alternative would reduce the risk of wildfire over the present situation, but not as much as under Alternative 2. Metal fire rings would be installed at the heavily used sites, but would not be available at all places where dispersed camping would occur. There would not be a host on-site to educate campers about safe campfire techniques or fire restrictions.

Cumulative Impacts

The cumulative impacts on wildfire risk would be the long-term effects from the Lime Creek Fire mentioned above. Because of the now-open nature of the vegetation, there is little risk of a large fire.

VISUAL RESOURCES

The scenery in the area is spectacular, with views of the Grenadiers and Snowden Peak to the east, Engineer Mountain to the south, and Whitehead and Kendall Peaks to the northeast. The Highway 550 corridor is both a state and federal Scenic Byway.

Forest Service direction concerning these resources is that management activities should not be evident, should remain visually subordinate, or may be dominant, but harmonize and blend with the natural setting. Landscape rehabilitation is used to restore landscapes to a desirable visual quality. Direction is also to use “enhancement aimed at increasing positive elements of the landscape, to improve visual variety.”

Alternative 1: No Action

The effects of this alternative would remain the same as they are now: there would be some degradation of the visual resource from uncontrolled parking, dust, and development of user-made trails from the camping area to the lakeshore in a haphazard fashion.

Alternative 2: Resource Protection and Improvement of Recreation Facilities

The higher development level of Alternative 2 over Alternative 3 would have the potential for a greater amount of short-term disturbance. The design of the facilities, colors of the materials used, timing of the construction, and size and amount of machinery used would all have the potential to impact the visual resource. Facilities installed would use as many natural materials as possible and colors that would blend with the natural environment.

The new parking lot by the highway and the spur connect trail would be visible for a few seconds for vehicles traveling north along Highway 550.

Interpretive signing would evoke a mixed reaction from visitors as to its impacts on visuals – it would enhance the experience for some visitors, but would degrade it for others.

Alternative 3 – Resource Protection

This alternative would improve visual quality somewhat. Some areas incurring soil compaction, loss of vegetation, and erosion would be blocked off and rehabilitated. Because on-the-ground administrative presence would be less than under Alternative 2, there is a potential for camping, driving, and hiking use to continue to expand into currently undisturbed or revegetated areas, resulting in visual impact. Facilities installed would use as many natural materials as possible and colors that would blend with the natural environment.

Cumulative Impacts

Other activities have impacted the visual resources in the area, such as the existing highway corridor, the gradual increasing use of the campground, and the Lime Creek Fire. When these other, major impacts are considered, the upgrade of the campground would be a negligible visual change.

RECREATION RESOURCES

Recreationists access the area by vehicle, mountain bike, hiking, or horseback riding along the Colorado Trail or from Highway 550. A variety of recreational activities is available in the area. These include hiking, fishing, camping, photography, bird watching, mountain biking, non-motorized boating, picnicking, hunting, and general sightseeing during the spring, summer, and early fall. During the winter, cross-country skiing, snowmobiling, and snowshoeing are popular here. Presently, there are also five outfitter-guides operating in the area.

Alternative 1: No Action

Ongoing uncontrolled, unmanaged use would continue to degrade the area and the quality of the user's recreation experience. Safety concerns with the roads would not be addressed.

Alternative 2: Resource Protection and Improvement of Recreation Facilities

The recreational facilities would be upgraded with the addition of barrier-free facilities, toilets, campsites, picnic tables, and potable water. Separating user groups would also lessen conflicts. Additional winter

parking next to Highway 550 would be safer parking and facilitate access. New toilets would create healthier conditions for the users. Improvements of the road would increase the safety of vehicles and pedestrians. Restriction of horses to the main campground (except during hunting season) would address conflicting uses and sanitation issues, but could be an inconvenience for horse campers.

Conversely, creating a developed campground and implementation of fees would prevent some recreationists from using the area. Development of the campground would provide a different recreational experience than the current one. There would be fewer options along the 550 corridor for free, dispersed camping.

Alternative 3: Resource Protection

Replacement of the toilet and addition of one or two more would improve the recreation quality. Barrier-free facilities would provide opportunities that previously did not exist. Creation of a defined trailhead for the Colorado Trail would decrease some confusion by trail-users and decrease conflicts in the camping area. Re-routing of the road access to the lake and trailhead, and spot-fixes on the entrance road would increase safety.

Rehabilitation work would help to provide a quality experience by resulting in a more scenic, naturally appearing landscape.

Cumulative Impacts

There have been some other recreation facility upgrades in the area recently that cumulatively impact the recreation opportunities. Work between Durango and Silverton included the additional of 2 interpretive areas, roadside parking for scenic views were improved, Andrews Lake Area was reconstructed and new toilets were added. These improvements and the outstanding scenery and history have increased use along the Skyway and Little Molas Lake Area.

CUMULATIVE EFFECTS

In most cases, the environmental effects of the alternatives extend beyond the project site. The affected environment generally is limited to the surrounding National Forest System land within a three-mile radius of Little Molas Lake area. The effects of the two action alternatives would be most evident within the first 1–2 years, but may continue to be evident for 1–2 years more, depending on rehabilitation/revegetation success.

It is sometimes the case that the combined environmental effects of several projects are both more substantial than those of individual actions, and of a qualitatively different nature. This proposed project is in response to long-term resource damage at Little Molas Lake and increased use of the area due to Highway 550 being designated a National Scenic Byway. Other facilities in the area have been upgraded, including the Coal Bank Pass rest stop, the Molas Pass interpretive area, and the Andrews Lake fishing, picnicking, and trailhead facility. Therefore, it is important that decisions made regarding this project be based on an understanding of the cumulative effects of other projects along the Byway.

Current recreational activities in the area include hiking, horseback riding, fishing, camping, picnicking, sightseeing, and mountain biking. These activities, combined over a long period, have caused the present resource damage. Winter activities include cross-country skiing, snowmobiling, snowshoeing, snow play, and snow cat skiing. These activities have grown in popularity in recent years. They have the potential to

cause increased noise and air pollution, and damage to some vegetation not covered by snow. Other activities occurring in or planned for the area are livestock grazing, outfitting, firewood gathering, improvements at the Town of Silverton Big Molas Lake Recreation Area, a new ski area outside Silverton, and future improvements at Durango Mountain Resort.

Present recreation activities will continue to increase as the local population increases. New development is occurring along Hwy 550 between Durango and Silverton, and the Durango Mountain Resort is planning a 1,649 dwelling-unit expansion. These should increase use of the Little Molas Lake area.

CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION

The Forest Service consulted the following individuals; federal, state, and local agencies; tribes; and non-Forest Service people during the development of this environmental assessment:

ID TEAM MEMBERS

Mena Showman – Team Leader, Developed Recreation Program Leader, Columbine RD/FO
Pauline Ellis – District Ranger, Columbine RD/FO
Bruce Bourcy – Archeologist, Columbine RD/FO
Dave Crawford – Silviculturalist, Columbine RD/FO
Cam Hooley – NEPA Coordinator/Wildlife Biologist, Columbine RD/FO
Allan McCaw – Facilities Engineer, San Juan Public Lands Center
Robert Lange – Hydrologist, SJPLC
Brad Morrison – Wildlife Biologist/Range Conservationist, Columbine RD/FO
Richard Ostergaard – Forest Landscape Architect, SJPLC
Rebecca Smith – Zone Hydrologist, Pagosa & Columbine RD/FO
Richard Speegle – Recreation/Lands & Minerals, Columbine RD/FO
Jeff Redders – Ecologist, SJPLC

FEDERAL, STATE, AND LOCAL AGENCIES

US Fish and Wildlife Service
Colorado Division of Wildlife
Colorado Dept. of Transportation
Forest Pathologist, Gunnison Service Center
San Juan County
Town of Silverton

TRIBES

The project has undergone tribal consultation, with no issues raised [35].

OTHERS

Refer to the project record for scoping and comment-period mailing lists and specialists input.

APPENDIX A - PROJECT RECORD INDEX

Table 2. Project Record Index Volume I

Arranged chronologically by document.

Doc. #	Document Title	Author	Location	Date
1.	ROS Users Guide	USDA FS	Columbine RD	8/1982
2.	San Juan Skyway Scenic Byway Plan	SJNF	Columbine RD	1991
3.	SJNF Land & Resource Management Plan	SJNF	Columbine RD, Public Lands Center	4/1992
4.	Demographic Characteristics	US Census Bureau	Project Record File, www.census.gov	Census 2000
5.	SJNF Canada Lynx Review	Brad Morrison	Project Record File	5/18/2000
6.	IDT Meeting Notes	Mike Johnson, Mena Showman	Project Record File	7/24/2000
7.	NEPA Project Update	SJNF	Columbine RD	12/2000
8.	NEPA Project Update	SJNF	Columbine RD	3/2001
9.	Molas Pass Winter Recreation Mngmt. EA	SJNF	Columbine RD	6/2001
10.	NEPA Project Update	SJNF	Columbine RD	6/2001
11.	ID Team Site Visit Notes	Bob Lange, Richard Speegle	Project Record File	6/19/2001
12.	Forest Condition Survey	James Worell	Project Record File	9/17/2001
13.	NEPA Project Update	SJNF	Columbine RD	9/2001
14.	NEPA Project Update	SJNF	Columbine RD	12/2001
15.	ID Team Meeting Notes	SJNF	Project Record File	12/14/2001
16.	Request for Clearance - Threatened, Endangered, and Sensitive Species	Brad Morrison	Project Record File	1/10/2002
17.	ID Team Meeting Notes	SJNF	Project Record File	1/14/2002
18.	News Releases	SJNF, Durango Herald, Silverton Mt. Journal	Project Record File, newspaper records rooms	2/2002
19.	Letter to CDOT	Pauline Ellis	Project Record File	2/5/2002

Doc. #	Document Title	Author	Location	Date
20.	Scoping Responses & Summary	Various	Project Record File	2-7/2002
21.	NEPA Project Update	SJNF	Columbine RD	3/2002
22.	SOPA	SJNF	Columbine RD	6/2002
23.	SOPA	SJNF	Columbine RD	9/2002
24.	IDT Meeting Notes	SJNF	Project Record File	10/11/2002
25.	Cultural Resources Compliance Doc.	Bruce Bourcy	Project Record File	11/3/2002
26.	Little Molas Lake Reveg. Seed Mix	Jeff Redders	Project Record File	11/14/2002
27.	SOPA	SJNF	Columbine RD	12/2002
28.	Air Quality Input	Kelly Shanahan	Project Record File	12/5/2002
29.	Seed Mix Costs	Jeff Redders	Project Record File	1/8/2003
30.	Lynx Consultation Memo	Cam Hooley	Project Record File	2/12/2003
31.	Determination of Undertaking (Cultural Clearance)	Bruce Bourcy	Project Record File	2/25/2003
32.	SOPA	SJNF	Columbine RD	3/2003
33.	Cost Estimates	Mena Showman	Project Record File	3/4/2003
34.	Pre-Decisional EA, Letter on Notice of EA Availability, & Mailing List	Pauline Ellis	Project Record File, mailing addressees	4/11/2003
35.	Tribal Consultation Letter	SJ Public Lands Center	Project Record File	4/18/2003
36.	Biological Assessment/ Biological Evaluation	Cam Hooley	Project Record File	4/25/2003
37.	Legal Notice of Comment Period and Corrected Notice	Durango Herald, Silverton Standard	Project Record File, newspaper record rooms	4/28/2003
38.	Web Page Reading Room site	SJNF	Project Record File, http://www.fs.fed.us/r2/sanjuan/reading_room/planning_and_nepa/nepa1.htm	4/21/2003
39.	Water depletion consultation initiation	SJNF, Mike Znerold	Project Record File, USFWS files	4/30/2003
40.	Article "Public Comment...Sought"	Silverton Standard	Project Record File, newspaper records room	5/9/2003
41.	SOPA	SJNF	Columbine RD	6/2003

Doc. #	Document Title	Author	Location	Date
42.	Legal Notice Extended Comment Period	Durango Herald, Silverton Standard	Project Record File, newspaper record rooms	6/7/2003
43.	Comments Received	Various	Project Record File	6/2/2003-6/13/2003
44.	Articles "Little Molas" & "Little Molas Proposal Draws Local Fire"	Silverton Standard	Project Record File, newspaper records room	6/13/2003
45.	ESA Section 7 water depletion consultation response	USFWS, Allan Pfister	Project Record File, USFWS files	6/19/2003
46.	BE for plants	Jeff Redders	Project Record File	7/17/2003
47.	CDOT Site Visit notes	Richard Speegle	Project Record File	7/17/2003
48.	Addendum to Cultural Res. Compliance Doc.	Bruce Bourcy	Project Record File	7/21/2003
49.	Wetlands Report	Jeff Redders	Project Record File	7/2003
50.	Final EA w/Response to Comments (App.B)	SJNF	Project Record File	7/30/2003
51.	Decision Notice, with cover letter and mailing list	Pauline Ellis	Project Record File	7/30/2003
52.	News Release	SJNF, Durango Herald	Project Record File, newspaper records rooms	8/2003
53.	Web Page Reading Room site	SJNF	Project Record File, http://www.fs.fed.us/r2/sanjuan/reading_room/planning_and_nepa/nepa1.htm	8/4/2003
54.	Legal Notice of Decision	Durango Herald, Silverton Standard	Project Record File, newspaper record rooms	8/8/2003
55.	News Articles	Durango Herald, Silverton Standard	newspaper record rooms	8/15-9/24/2003
56.	SOPA	SJNF	Columbine RD	9/2003

Table 3. Project Record Index Volume II

Arranged by topic, then chronologically within topic

Tab	Doc. #	Document Title	Author	Addressee or Location	Date
A-Appeal	A1	Notice of Appeal	Benzar, et.al.	Rick Cables	9/2/03
	A2	Briefing Paper to RO	SJPLC	Project File	9/9/03
	A3	Administrative Determination of Appeal	Richard Stem	DeWitz	9/30/03
B-Interested Party Comments	B1	Summary of Comments Received	Showman	Project File	
	B2	Petition	DeWitz/various	Project File	9/03
	B3	Comments Received	Various	Various	Decision thru Decision Withdrawal
C-Decision Withdrawn	C1	Decision Withdrawal Letter	Ellis	Project File	9/24/03
	C2	News Release/Talking Points/Q&A's	SJPLC	News organizations	9/24/03
	C3	Letter to Nighthorse-Campbell	Stiles	Senator Nighthorse Campbell	9/25/03
	C4	Legal Notice of Withdrawal	SJPLC	Durango Herald	9/26/03
	C5	Reading Room Web Pages	SJPLC	http://www.fs.fed.us/r2/sanjuan/reading_room/planning_and_nepa/nepa1.htm	
	C6	Benzar Letter of Thanks	Benzar	Ellis	9/29/03
	C7	News Articles regarding withdrawn decision	Various	Newspaper record rooms	Various
D- Field Trip	D1	News Release "Public Invited.."	SJPLC	News organizations	10/29/03
	D2	News Articles regarding field trip	Various	Newspaper record rooms	Various
	D3	DRAFT public field trip handout	SJPLC	Project File	11/6/03
	D4	News Release "Field Trip...Cancelled"	SJPLC	News organizations	11/4/03
	D5	News Article "...Tour is cancelled"	Durango Herald	Newspaper record rooms	11/5/03

Tab	Doc. #	Document Title	Author	Addressee or Location	Date
E- ReScoping Outreach	E1	Re-Scoping Letter & Mailing List	Ellis	Mailing List	11/25/03
	E2	Reading Room Web Pages	SJPLC	http://www.fs.fed.us/r2/sanjuan/projects/projects.shtml	12/9/03, 2/27/04, 6/1/04
	E3	Planning Process Update Letter & Mailing d List	SJPLC	Mailing List	12/1/04
	E4	Public Working Group Mting; e-mail	Ann Bond	Various	1/22/04
	E5	RO Briefing Paper	SJPLC	Regional Office	3/2/04
	E6	SOPA's	SJPLC	Project File	12/03+
F- Public Mtgs.					
	F1	News Release “..Community Meeting”	Office of Community Services (OCS), FLC	News organizations	11/20/03
	F2	Flyer “Community Meeting”	Francis, OCS	Posted in Silverton	11/20/03
	F3	Silverton Mtg. Agenda	Francis, OCS	Project File	12/4/03
	F4	Power Point Presentation	SJPLC	Both public meetings	12/4/03 & 12/15/03
	F5	Silverton Mtg. Sign-In Sheet		Project File	12/4/03
	F6	Silverton Mtg. Public Input Notes	OCS/SJPLC	Project File	12/4/03
	F7	News Release “..Durango Meeting”	Francis, OCS	News Organizations	12/8/03
	F8	Durango Mtg. Agenda	Francis, OCS	Project File	12/15/03
	F9	Durango Mtg. Sign-In Sheet		Project File	12/15/03
	F10	Durango Mtg. Public Input Notes	OCS/SJPLC	Project File	12/15/03
	F11	News Articles	Silverton Standard, Durango Herald	Newspaper record rooms	Various
G- Working Group					
	G1	Working Group Sign-up Sheets		Project File	12/16/03
	G2	Meeting Schedule	Francis, OCS	Working Group members	12/19/03
	G3	Meeting Reminder for 1/21/04; e-mail	Francis, OCS	Working Group members	1/13/04

Tab	Doc. #	Document Title	Author	Addressee or Location	Date
G – Working Group (cont'd)	G4	News Release “Working Group to Meet...”	Francis, OCS	News Organizations	01/13/04
	G5	Meeting Notes for 1/21/04	Francis, OCS	Project File	1/21/04
	G6	Process Steps; Handout	Francis, OCS	Working Group	1/21/04
	G7	Meeting Reminder for 2/4/02; e-mail	Francis, OCS	Working Group	1/30/04
	G8	News Release for 2/4/04 meeting	Francis, OCS	News Organization	1/30/04
	G9	Meeting Notes for 2/4/04	Francis, OCS	Project File	2/4/04
	G10	Public Meeting Notes; e-mail	Francis, OCS	Working Group	2/5/04
	G11	..Some Thoughts; e-mail	Tom Harman	Francis, OCS	2/5/04
	G12	Public Meeting Notes; e-mail	Jim Fuge	Francis, OCS	2/5/04
	G13	Fee Criteria; e-mail	Jim Fuge/ Kitty Benzar	Working Group	2/8/04
	G14	Open Letter to the Working Group	Ron DeWitz	Working Group	2/16/04
	G15	Review of E-mails and Meeting; e-mail series	Francis, OCS	Jim Fuge	2/18/04
	G16	Meeting Reminder for 2/18/04; e-mail	Francis, OCS	Working Group	2/13/04
	G17	Meeting Notes for 2/18/04	Francis, OCS	Project File	2/18/04
	G18	Process Steps (revised); handout	Francis, OCS	Working Group	2/18/04
	G19	Revegetation; e-mail series	Bill Simon	Benzar	2/20/04
	G20	Little Molas Lake; e-mail	Jim Fuge	Working Group	2/21/04
	G21	News Release for 3/3/04 meeting	Francis, OCS	News Organizations	2/26/04
	G22	Meeting Notes for 3/3/04	Francis, OCS	Project File	3/3/04
	G23	Ed Zink comments; e-mail series	Various	Various	3/11/04
	G24	Meeting Reminder for 3/17/04	Francis, OCS	Working Group	3/12/04
	G25	News Release for 3/17/04 meeting	Francis, OCS	News Organizations	3/12/04

Tab	Doc. #	Document Title	Author	Addressee or Location	Date
G – Working Group (cont'd)	G26	Meeting Notes for 3/17/04	Francis, OCS	Project File	3/17/04
	G27	Small Group Exercise; handout	Francis, OCS	Working Group	3/17/04
	G28	Background Info. ; handout	Showman	Working Group	3/17/04
	G29	News Release for 4/7/04 meeting	Francis, OCS	News Organizations	4/2/04
	G30	Meeting Agenda; e-mail	Francis, OCS	Ellis	4/7/04
	G31	Meeting Notes for 4/7/04	Francis, OCS	Project File	4/7/04
	G32	Components for Voting; handout	Francis, OCS	Working Group	4/7/04
	G33	Evaluations of Process	Working Group	Francis, OCS	4/7/04
	G34	Clarifying next steps; e-mail	Francis, OCS	Francis, OCS	4/8/04
	G35	Draft of Final Report; e-mail series	Various	Various	4/17/04
	G36	Letter the Working Group	Eileen Fjerstad	Working Group	5/7/04
	G37	Working Group Final Report	Working Group	Ellis	5/12/04
	G38	Meeting Notes/Final Report for 4/7/04	Francis, OCS	Project File	5/14/04
	G39	Thank You WG Participants; e-mail	Working Group	Bill Simon	5/25/04
	G40	LML press; e-mail	Hooley	Fjerstad	6/3/04
	G41	Dear Working Group Member; letter	Ellis	Working Group	8/18/04
	G42	News Articles	Various	Newspaper record rooms	Various

Table 4. Project Record Index Volume III

Arranged by topic, then chronologically within topic

Tab	Doc. #	Document Title	Author	Addressee or Location	Date
H- Re-Scoping Comments	H1	Summary of Scoping Comments (2 nd Round)	SJPLC	Project File	9/17/04
	H2	Comments Received	Various	Various	Post-Decision Withdrawal
I- Internal Documents	I1	IDT Meeting Notes	SJPLC	Project File	7/1/04 & 7/9/04
	I2	NEPA Process Questions Matrix	SJPLC	Project File	7/27/04
	I3	Action Plan	SJPLC	Project File	9/15/04
	I4	Hydrology Report	Becca Smith	Project File	9/17/04
	I5	Fish and WL Clearance	Cam Hooley	Project File	9/28/04
	I6	Cultural Resources Compliance Doc.	Bruce Bourcy	Project File	9/29/04
J – Comment Period	J1	2 nd Comment Period Letter & Mailing List	Ellis	Mailing List	10/5/04
	J2	News Release “Proposal ...Revised”	SJPLC	Newspaper Record Rooms	10/13/04
	J3	Talking Points	SJPLC	Project File	
	J4	Legal Notice of 2 nd Comment Period	SJPLC	Durango Herald, Silverton Standard	10/15/04
	J5	Reading Room Web Page	SJPLC	http://www.fs.fed.us/r2/sanjuan/projects/projects.shtml	10/13/04
	J5	SOPA’s	SJPLC	Project File	10/04+
SUPPORTING INFO					