

**TESTIMONY ON RESOURCE MANAGEMENT ACTIVITIES
ON THE
CARSON RANGER DISTRICT
HUMBOLDT-TOIYABE NATIONAL FOREST
FOR THE
LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC LANDS**

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8/27/2004

INTRODUCTION

Thank you Mr. Chairman and committee members for providing this opportunity to speak before the Legislative Committee on Public Lands. My name is Gary Schiff, District Ranger for the Carson Ranger District on the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest. My testimony today will update the committee on management actions currently being implemented on the Carson Ranger District for fiscal year 2004 and outline some of the higher priority issues that the District is currently facing. I will provide some background on the District and then address our 2004 program of work outlined below in more detail. I will conclude with information concerning our anticipated fiscal year 2005 priority work.

BACKGROUND

The Carson Ranger District includes approximately 400,000 acres, spanning two states and eight counties along a 100 mile stretch of the Sierra Front from Hallelujah Junction to Topaz Lake. In Nevada, most of the Ranger District is in Washoe, Carson and Douglas Counties. In Washoe County it includes the Peavine and Mount Rose areas among others. Peavine Mountain lies just north of downtown Reno and is surrounded by subdivisions. It's a fire prone area that's popular

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for riding motorcycles, jeeping, hiking, and mountain biking. The Mount Rose area includes Nevada's largest ski area, one of the largest communications sites in the nation on National Forest land at Slide Mountain, and one of the more urban Wilderness areas in the nation. It's a heavily timbered, fire prone area adjacent to rapidly growing subdivisions. In the I80 corridor west of Reno, some 11,000 new homes are slated for development adjacent to the National Forest. The Ranger District also forms the western scenic backdrop for Carson and Douglas Counties. Here, wildfire is a pervasive threat as well. There is growing demand for public access in this area as more and more subdivisions are established on the Forest boundary.

The following are some of our emphasis areas for this year:

Fire Suppression and Safety:

The Sierra Front Wildfire Cooperators is a model interagency fire organization. Led by the Forest Service, BLM, and Nevada Division of Forestry, it supports a first class interagency dispatch center in Minden and includes local fire departments along the Sierra Front in California and Nevada. The Carson Ranger District provides 15 wildland fire engines and the nationally recognized Black Mountain Hot Shot wildland fire fighters to this extensive team effort. Total Forest Service staffing during the peak season is 83 fire fighters.

The flip side of fire suppression is prevention. This includes hazardous fuels reduction projects. The shining example of how effective this work can be is the recently completed Lakeview fuels reduction program we discussed before this committee last year. This project, completed this last spring, was completed with extensive coordination with our local government partners, homeowners and the Nevada Division of Forestry. This fuels reduction program, and the resulting fuels break is being credited for giving firefighters the ability to save the Lakeview Subdivision.

Other important aspects of prevention include patrolling, issuing fire restrictions and better defining the recreation experience.

Customer Service and Looking Sharp:

Our goal is excellent customer service and a well maintained forest setting. Specifically,

- Trash & vandalism is addressed promptly.
- Quality visitor services and web site provides accurate information.
- Appropriate fire facilities are developed.
- We have on the ground professional presence/contacts.
- Summer OHV impacts are addressed via travel management .

Galena Recreation Facility:

The U.S. Forest Service continues to work closely with Washoe County on the proposed jointly funded recreation facility on the north side of the Mt. Rose Highway. We anticipate a decision towards the end of September. Concerns of residents and the County are being incorporated in decision.

North Washoe Valley Wildfire Risk Reduction

Another hazardous fuels reduction project but on a much larger scale is currently in the public scoping stage – This 5,000 acre project is being called the North Washoe Valley Wildfire Risk Reduction Project. It is located along the base of Slide Mountain from the Little Valley fire to the Joy Lake subdivision, the project fuels reduction work will tie in with work that the Nevada Division of Forestry has completed in the Joy Lake area. The project includes about 2,100 acres of commercial and personal fuel wood, and some merchantable timber harvest. We've been working closely with NDOT, Washoe County, local residents, the environmental community and the Nevada Division of Forestry to ensure the success of this project.

Douglas County Trails Plan:

We continue to work in close cooperation with Douglas County to create a system of trails that would connect the communities of Minden and Gardnerville to the Lake Tahoe Rim Trail as well as a foothill trail in partnership with the Carson Valley Trails Association. By creating these trails, we will be creating increased access for the public to their National Forest and improving the quality of life in Douglas County. This year's focus is on a loop trail (being developed in coordination with the BLM) that begins at the Faye-Luther trailhead.

Long Valley Aspen Enhancement:

(Sierra County) Completing a plan that will maintain stands of aspen and reduce wildfire risk in an area just northwest of Reno (Peavine). Wildlife and species diversity will benefit greatly when these stands are once again allowed to become strong healthy stands. The conifer trees removed in this process may have some commercial or personal fuel wood potential.

Clear Creek Analysis:

The purpose of the strategy is to work with the public and local governments to develop recommendations for future projects to enhance the management of the Clear Creek and Kings Canyon Drainages. Some of the recommendations that have been identified to date include

- Reduce hazardous fuels in strategic areas by mechanical treatments and prescribed fire to help reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire. Hazardous fuels reduction program is of high importance to both Douglas and Carson County Officials.
- Construct needed trails, trailheads and a day use area. Eliminate traditional party areas and increase law enforcement and fire patrol presence.
- Develop a travel management plan, including keeping Kings Canyon road from deteriorating, while maintaining its high-clearance character.
- Improve mule deer winter range through reseeding of burned areas with sagebrush and bitterbrush.

This strategy is the first step in identifying future projects to address issues that have been identified by the City of Carson, the U.S Forest Service and the public. Since this strategy was released, the Waterfall Fire occurred. Nevertheless much of the direction in the document remains valid and we will begin implementing this plan.

Completing last years projects:*Peavine Mountain Strategy:*

To address arising issues of conflicts between homeowners, motorized and non-motorized enthusiasts we worked with the City of Reno and Washoe County to develop the Peavine Mountain Strategy. We worked closely with homeowners, jeepers, hikers, and mountain bikers and began implementation two years ago with the construction of a new trail head for dirt bikers

and jeepers and the establishment of a new recreation area for mountain bikers and hikers. We are now moving into our next phase, which includes establishing fire suppression roads, recreation challenge roads and non-motorized trails while eliminating roads that are in sensitive areas or that duplicate destinations. The City of Reno and Washoe County are also participating in the implementation, by funding new trailhead development for hikers and increasing law enforcement patrols. We believe this project can serve as a model for urban interface recreation planning and intergovernmental cooperation.

Whites and Thomas Creek Trail Heads/Fuels Work: The two new trailheads that were completed in partnership with and funded by Washoe County and with additional funds from Nevada Recreation Trails Grants. These trails are providing the much needed access to the National Forest close to the Reno Metropolitan area. We are also continuing with our hazardous fuels work in this area. It is generating personal use firewood for the public.

Mt. Rose Summit Trail Head: This includes a Welcome Center and Trailhead located on the Mount Rose Highway between Reno and Lake Tahoe. This project was funded with an NDOT TEA-21 Grant and funds from Washoe County. The ribbon cutting for this much needed addition is set for September 21, 2004. The hike to Mt. Rose may be the most popular hike in Washoe County. We are also adding a shorter loop trail with stunning views. Safe parking and restroom facilities are basics needed to enjoy the National Forest along this busy stretch of highway.

Mt. Rose Ski Area expansion: We worked closely with the ski area, Washoe County, and interest groups to develop a plan that had broad support. This was one of the few ski area expansions in the nation to complete the permitting process without an administrative appeal or legal challenge. On an inspection trip this last week, our Recreation Staff Officer reported back that the new ski lift towers are in and should be operational by this ski season as well as snowmaking in the East Bowl. The visual and environmental impact has also been kept to a minimum.

Other 2004 accomplishments: Martis – I80 Corridor (National Forest south of Boomtown – west side of Mt. Rose Wilderness) Strategy, Paiute Cutthroat Trout Recovery Analysis, Urban

Interface Fuels projects, new campground facilities/restrooms; e.g., Spooner Summit, launching Sierra Front Recreation Coalition, etc.

State and Private Forestry Grants:

In addition to our Ranger Districts Program of work, the U.S. Forest Service through its State and Private Forestry program awarded over eight Rural Community Assistance (RCA) grants this year in Nevada totaling \$69,500. The RCA grants help rural communities improve living conditions, develop sustainable local economies, enrich their cultures, and enhance their natural resource environments. Some of these grants include: the Farmers Market Stage in Fallon (\$9,500); the walking tour historical building markers in Douglas County (\$9,800); the Heritage park Community Pavilion in Minden (\$10K); community entrance signs in Minden (\$2,500); and the Sierra Front Recreation Coalition grant of (\$10K) to fund grant to launch a major outreach and fundraising program to build a trail system that will expand and enrich recreational opportunities, resource stewardship, and economic opportunities in communities along the Sierra Front in both Nevada and California.

Three US Forest Service National Fire Plan grants have been made in partnership with the Nevada Commission on Economic Development and the Nevada Fire Safe Council. A \$50,000 study was completed on the availability of biomass within a 50 mile radius of Carson City. A \$30,000 grant was given to Carson City to develop a staging area adjacent to the landfill. A new business is now located in that staging area that has the capacity to utilize 100,000 tons of biomass per year from our national forests, public and private lands and landfills in Western Nevada to produce full pellets. The third grant was issued to Carson City for \$179,000 as part of a million plus project to bring water to the landfill for fire and dust suppression and for further business development.

In addition to these grants, and although it is not part of the Carson Ranger District, a check was presented in Ely on Wednesday by US Forest Service Regional Forester Jack Troyer and Nevada State Forester Pete Anderson for \$340,000 to install a new biomass boiler system into a White Pine County School District elementary school.

Fiscal Year 2005 Anticipated Program of Work:

We have identified the following as potential projects for fiscal year 2005 and are requesting funding.

- Define recreation experiences in Kings Canyon/Clear Creek for the public post Waterfall Fire, with specific travel management and defined trailheads and day use areas. Similar work planned for Douglas County.
- Develop an access management plan for the sixty-eight isolated parcels on the Mt. Rose Bench in conjunction with Washoe County.
- Hazardous Fuels Projects- Continued effort to reduce hazardous fuels in the wildland urban interface as funding allows.
- Rehabilitate Waterfall fire area.

Waterfall Fire:

During the Waterfall Fire, the professionalism and coordination of the Sierra Front Wildfire Coordinators was exemplary. The fuels reduction work as well as their extensive pre-planning with table-top exercises, helped us significantly in fighting this fire.

Burned Area Emergency Response

After the fire, the work of emergency rehabilitation and long-term rehabilitation begins. This monumental task fell on what is known as a Burned Area Emergency Response (BAER) Team. This Waterfall BAER Team led by Genny Wilson, created a top-notch team of professionals from many different cooperating agencies to compete this task. The BAER program deals only truly emergency rehabilitation work. The team issued their report and it is now being implemented. We expect to begin seeding and mulching in less than two weeks. Other work is ongoing.

Post BAER Planning

Beginning October 1, in coordination with NDF and Carson City we will begin to develop the "post-BAER" plan. The plan will be completed by mid-winter with a goal of implementation next spring. The plan will analyze: salvaging trees killed by fire, reforestation and planting brush species.

CONCLUSION

Thank you, Mr. Chairman and committee members for providing this opportunity to appear before you. The progress the Carson Ranger District has made in the past few years is largely the result of the cooperation between State of Nevada, other federal and local government partners. I would be happy to answer any questions that you may have regarding the Carson Ranger District.



The Elite Eight

Carson Ranger District

Priority Work For FY 2004

Suppression and Safety

- Review planning and preparedness with our Sierra Front partners
- When the fire bell rings we all respond
- Safety emphasis: Driving

Customer Service/Looking Sharp

- Trash & vandalism addressed promptly.
- Develop a quality visitor services presence in Reno & deliver exceptional service throughout the Sierra Front
- Accomplish District Public Affairs Strategic Plan
- Complete landscaping, paint and a new plan for FS vehicle parking on Carson campus
- Fire facilities, Green engines
- On the ground professional presence/contacts in all resource areas
- Addressing summer OHV impacts



Galena/Thomas Creek Recreation Proposal

- Provide the public with access to National Forest System Lands
- Quality of life for the citizens of Washoe County
- Provide a quality recreational experience through expanded facilities
- Close Thomas Creek to overnight camping
- Expand hazardous fuels removal in area beyond existing projects
- Eliminate less than desirable activities in area by increasing presence

North Washoe Fuels Project

- Hazardous fuels work to protect Wildland Urban Interface (WUI)
- Improve forest health and decrease risk of catastrophic fire
- Improve wildlife habitat
- Work with local homeowners to increase WUI protection
- Completing NEPA by October 2004



Douglas County Trails

- Quality of life for Douglas County citizens
- Work with County and private land owners to increase access to Forest
- Working with trails groups identify connector trail to the Tahoe Rim Trail
- Complete NEPA for 1st project by October 2004



Long valley Aspen Enhancement

- Enhance stands to increase species diversity
- Improve wildlife habitat and cover
- Complete NEPA and begin implementation by October 2004

Clear Creek Analysis

- Complete a meaningful analysis which describes project development for FY 2005
- Incorporate local government and public input during scoping process

Putting a bow on the Sweet Seven

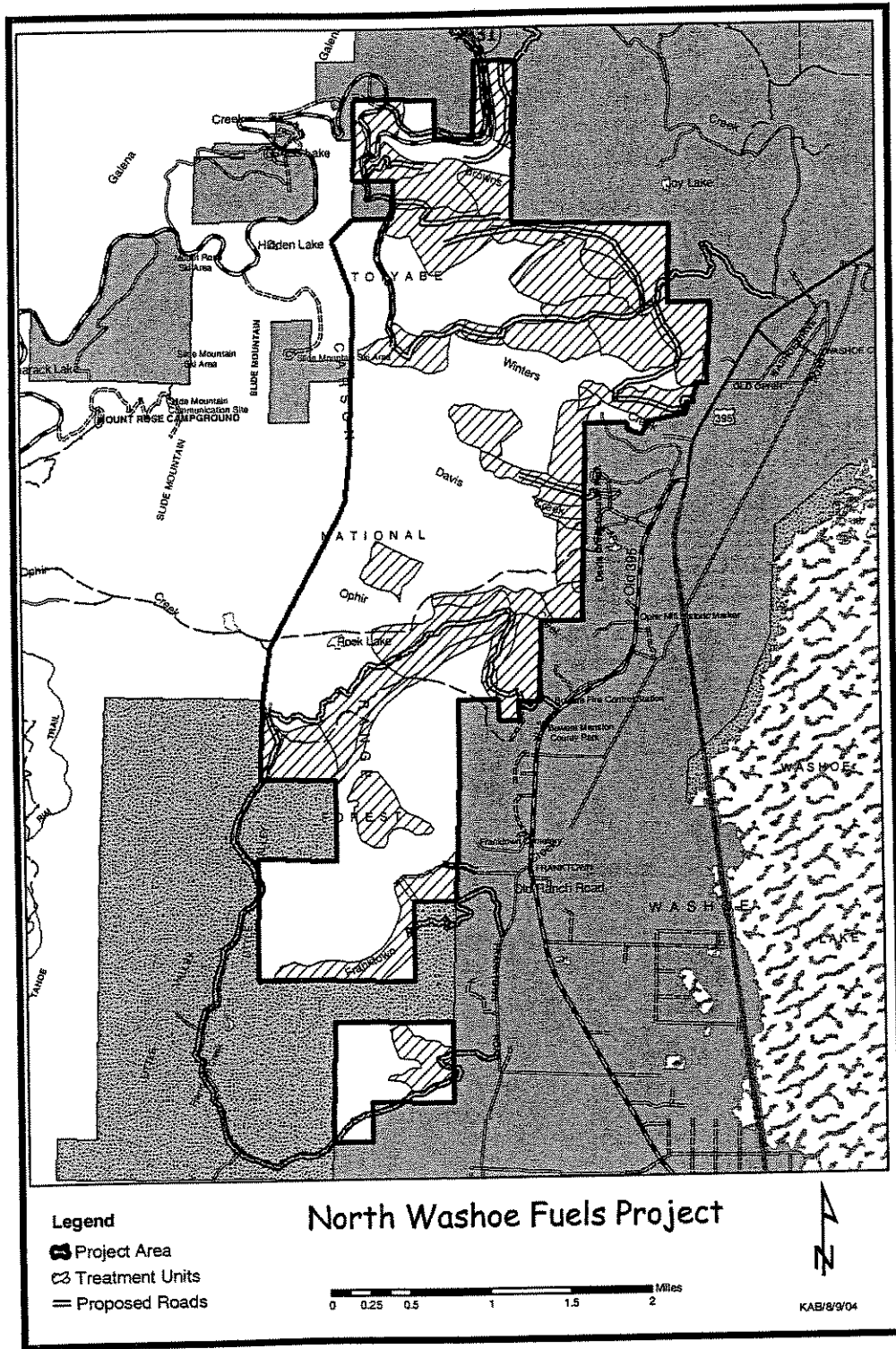
- Complete Paiute Cutthroat Trout EA & implement project September
- Build Mt. Rose Summit Welcome Center and loop trail
- Implement Mt. Rose Ski Area MDP
- Complete White's Creek fuels work phase III
- Peavine phase II Red Roads and Keystone non-motorized plan in place and implementation begun



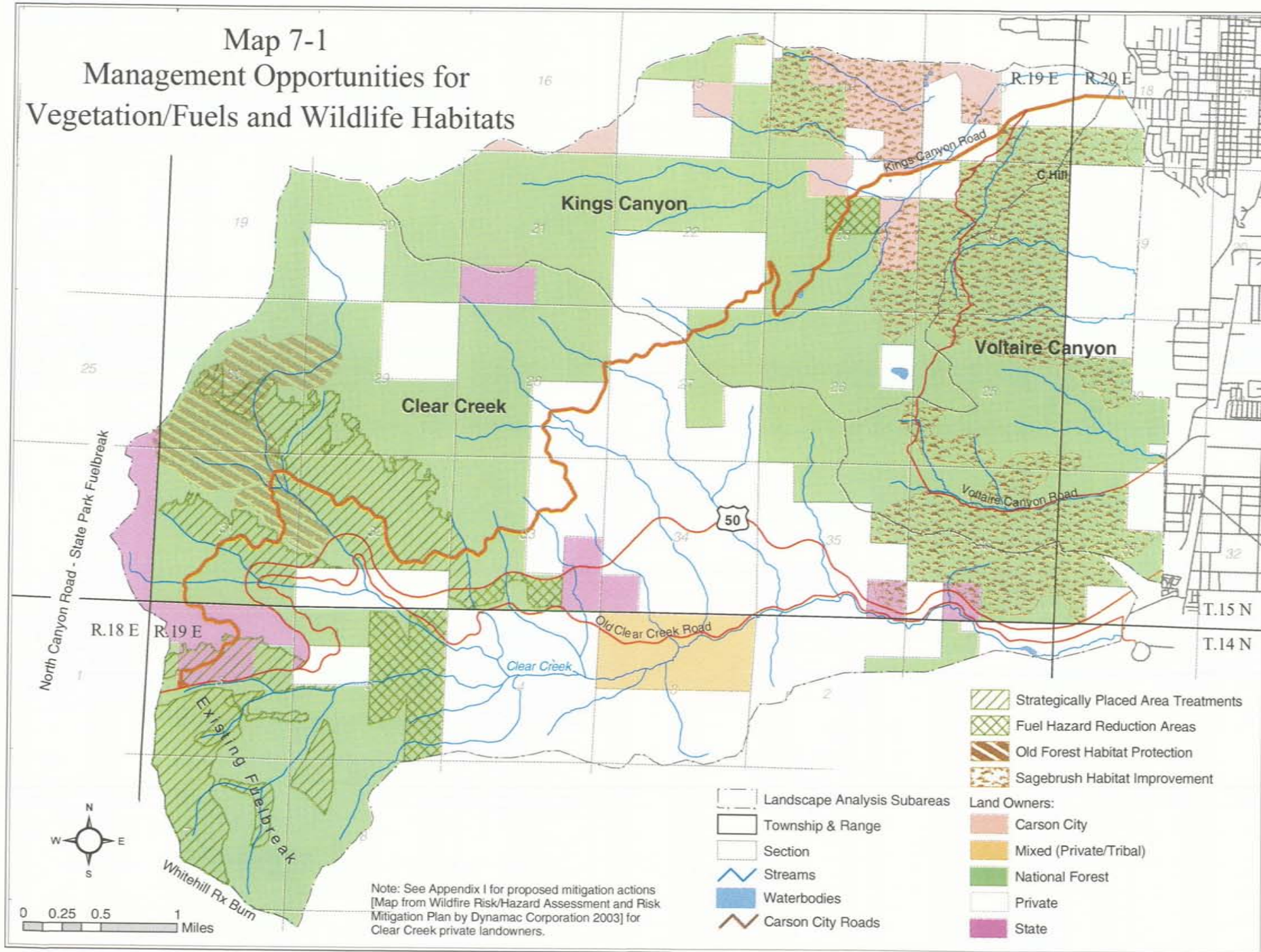
When scheduling time and emphasis, the Elite Eight come first. 8 ½ is everything else, admittedly much of which is important—the fuels planning and implementation package, support to our Resource Advisory Councils, SNPLMA acquisition work, Martis/I-80 Strategic Plan, Scenic Byway coordination, Dumont irrigation, Martis tree planting, OHV grant work, Firewood and Christmas tree program, Forestdale Lawsuit resolution, etc.

Nevertheless, Accountability for the District Leadership Team rests with the Elite Eight.

NORTH WASHOE FUELS PROJECT OVERVIEW



Map 7-1 Management Opportunities for Vegetation/Fuels and Wildlife Habitats



Map 7-2
Management Opportunities for
Recreation, Access and Watershed

