



# United States Department of the Interior



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**EA Number:** CA-180-16-32

**Proposed Action:** Sky Ridge Trail Construction, South Fork American River Trail.

**Location:** T. 11 N., R. 9 E., within sections 9 and 10. New Trail would be located within the parcels labeled as the Cronan and Greenwood Creek parcels which are a part of the greater Cronan Ranch Recreation area, near the town of Coloma within El Dorado County, CA. (Please see attached project map)

## 1.0 Purpose of and Need for Action

### 1.1 Need for Action

The BLM manages thousands of acres of public lands along the South Fork American River, between Salmon Falls and Chili Bar, in El Dorado County. Some of these lands are original public domain lands; other lands have been acquired by the BLM through donation within the last 20 years as a result of the work of various partners, with an overarching vision to preserve the river corridor's outstanding environmental values and recreational potential.

Since 2008, the South Fork lands have been managed by the BLM as part of the South Fork American River Special Recreation Area (SRMA). The management goal for this area are to provide for high-quality recreation opportunities (including hiking, horseback riding, and whitewater boating and swimming access) while preserving the natural scenery, cultural resources, and the other significant environmental values of this area. The BLM has already built trails, trailhead/parking areas, and other recreation facilities to accommodate low-impact recreational use of these lands, especially the Greenwood Creek, Cronan Ranch, Norton Ravine, and Salmon Falls (Pine Hill Preserve ACEC) parcels (the South Fork of The American River Trail).

Additional recreation facilities and improvements are now needed to enhance visitor experience and protect sensitive environmental resources. The proposed action of building a 1.8 mile trail to be named the Sky Ridge Trail, would respond to the need for additional trail systems. The "Connector Trail" (which the proposed trail would connect with) currently connects the Magnolia Trailhead with the Cronan Ranch Trail system (see map).

The Cronan Ranch Trail system is very popular, with weekend use spikes that overwhelm the parking area. Limited parking at the Cronan Ranch Trail system has been a problem for users. Conversely, the Magnolia Ranch Trailhead has plenty of parking. The proposed action would give trail users two trails connecting the large and underutilized trailhead at Magnolia Ranch with the Cronan Ranch trail system. The proposed action would address the need to spread out weekend trail use and parking, and complete BLM's trail system in this area.

## **Conformance with Applicable Land Use Plans**

The proposed action is consistent with the Sierra Resource Management Plan, approved in February 2008 which states that a goal of the BLM's recreation program is to "Ensure the continued availability of outdoor recreational opportunities while protecting other resources and uses." Specific management actions for the South Fork American River SRMA (pages 28 and 19 of the Record of Decision) include managing this SRMA in accordance with the 2004 South Fork American River Management Plan and its amendments including the 2007 Cronan Ranch Plan; expand the trail network; increase public access; and develop facilities for interpretation and sanitation.

The proposed action is consistent with the South Fork American River Management Plan and Decision Record. Under this plan (page 29), the BLM decided to give management priority to protecting the natural and cultural values of the entire Greenwood Creek parcel while providing opportunities for high-quality outdoor recreation. Cultural sites are to be protected under this plan. The plan (page 31) also directs the BLM to construct multiple use trails within the Greenwood Creek parcel as appropriate to connect the Highway 49 parking area with the rest of the parcel. For the Salmon Falls parcel (which is also a unit of the Pine Hill Preserve), the plan (page 38) directs the BLM to plan and construct a trails system for hiking and the use of mountain bikes.

## **2.0 Proposed Action and Alternatives**

### **2.1 Proposed Action**

The proposed action involves the construction of a five foot wide, 1.8 mile trail on BLM-administered public lands within the Greenwood Creek parcel, and the Cronan Ranch parcel, between Highway 49 and the South Fork American River (see attached map). A significant portion (about .7 miles) of the proposed trail would use existing roads in its alignment. The BLM would build the majority of the trail using a SWECO trail-building machine, while some of the construction would be by hand. The proposed trail would use construction methods that would out-slope the trail tread by at least 5%, and the overall grade would not exceed 12%. This would help to shed water and reduce erosion.

This project is designed to enhance the public's enjoyment of these lands, while preserving the river corridor's outstanding environmental values. The proposed project will give the public access to the highest point on the Cronan Ranch. The panoramic view from the ridge top this proposed trail would traverse, gives the public a unique perspective of the Coloma Valley, Cronan Ranch, South Fork American River, and the High Sierra.

### **2.2 Project Design Features**

Air, water, and soils – During construction and grading, trail-building equipment will stay at least 30 feet away from Hastings Creek to prevent siltation and damage to riparian vegetation and aquatic life. Fill material will not be placed in Hastings Creek and its tributaries. The South Fork American River will not be affected. The Sky Ridge Trail will be built partially on an existing road. Some earth work will be required on this old road. Several reverse grade installments will be necessary to assist with drainage, and reduce overall grade. Several culverts will need to be installed to maintain drainage and prevent siltation in tributary drainages.

Vegetation/Invasive Weeds – No project design features are included to avoid weed spread within the Greenwood Creek and Cronan Ranch parcels because several weed species are so well distributed across these parcels, and make up such a large part of the vegetative cover, that such efforts would not be effective. Weed mapping of the entire parcel in 2010 showed the extent of this problem. BLM has an ongoing weed treatment program started in 2012 that hopes to address this problem. A major issue, regarding constructing the proposed Sky Ridge Trail at the Greenwood Creek Parcel and Cronan Ranch (and the subsequent public use of this trail over the long-term) is the potential reintroduction, and spread of noxious invasive weeds, such as yellow star thistle, into Pine Hill Preserve ACEC and other lands that still have ecological integrity. All equipment and tools used to build the Sky Ridge Trail will be cleaned of adhering soil or plant material prior to arrival within the project area, and after.

Wildlife –The proposed trail alignment will be routed to avoid elderberry bushes and clumps of bushes in this area by 20 feet, however no populations of elderberry bushes were found. If during construction elderberry is found, the above protocol will be followed and only hand construction will occur in this area. The trail alignment has been assessed by a BLM wildlife professional, and there were no concerns regarding long term adverse effects to wildlife.

Cultural Resources – If any cultural resources are found during implementation of the proposed action, work will cease until a qualified professional archaeologist examines the discovery and makes management recommendations. Compliance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act may continue at this point. If the cultural resources are significant, the proposed action will not proceed until appropriate measures to avoid, minimize, or mitigate potential adverse effects are taken.

Fuels/Fire Management – To minimize the risk of wildfire ignition, earth-moving equipment used to implement the proposed action will be equipped with spark arresters. Other motorized vehicles used will not be parked where vegetation may come in contact with exhaust systems and catalytic converters.

General – An “Adopt-A-Trail” program, along with a citizen trail patrol, will be established to monitor trail use and facilitate regular maintenance. Weed control will be part of trail maintenance. These citizen groups meet regularly to foster community acceptance of this project, and inform BLM of public use, trail problems, parking issues, etc.

### **2.3 No Action**

Under the no action alternative, the BLM would not construct or maintain the Sky Ridge Trail.

### **2.4 Alternatives Considered but Eliminated from Detailed Analysis**

BLM did not consider any other alternatives in detailed analysis.

## **3.0 Affected Environment**

The areas affected by the proposed action are located within west-central Sierra Nevada foothills. Specifically, the project areas are located within the BLM-administered Greenwood Creek and Cronan Ranch parcels. A detailed description of the BLM-administered parcels (including the project area) can be found in the notebook (BLM 2000) produced by the BLM for public meetings regarding the 2004 South

Fork American River Management Plan. A description can also be found in the 2007 Cronan Ranch Management Plan. (A detailed project map is attached)

The lands are located along the South Fork of the American River – the dominant feature of the area – and the river’s tributaries including intermittent Hastings Creek and Acorn Creek. The vegetation of the project area and the immediate surroundings has been inventoried by BLM botanists, most recently in June 2012. A mosaic of vegetation types are found within this area.

The Greenwood Creek parcel consists of approximately 732 acres. The parcel is bisected by the South Fork American River. The northern portion of the parcel includes segments of Greenwood and Hastings creeks. South-facing hill slopes are dominated by interior live oak woodland with black oak, California buckeye, toyon, buckbrush, white leaf manzanita, keckiella, California coffeeberry, poison oak, and pipe vine. A broad riparian habitat along the river includes sand bar willow, arroyo willow, shining willow, valley oak, Oregon ash, white alder, Fremont cottonwood, button willow, coyote bush, mock orange, California wild grape, deer grass, and scotch broom. Hastings Creek includes Douglas fir and incense cedar, as well as riparian species such as Oregon ash. Blue oak savannah grasslands composed largely of non-native annual species dominate the relatively flat portions of the parcel, between the two creeks, along Highway 49.

The 1400-acre Cronan Ranch parcel contains vegetation that includes blue oak savannah, foothill woodland, and riparian areas. There is a significant population of noxious weeds, especially yellow-star thistle and medusa head.

Several wildlife species use these habitats, and are typical of the west-central Sierra Nevada foothills. Mammals include mule deer, coyote, grey fox, bobcat, striped skunk, black-tailed jackrabbit, grey squirrel, deer mice and woodrat. Bird species include turkey vulture, red-tailed hawk, California brown towhee, spotted towhee, California quail, wild turkey, acorn woodpecker, northern flicker, Anna's hummingbird, Bewick's wren, plain titmouse, common bushtit, ash-throated flycatcher, house finch, lesser goldfinch, and several sparrow species. Amphibian and reptiles species include Pacific treefrog, western fence lizard, Gilbert's skink, western whiptail, and gopher snake. This list is not intended to be comprehensive, but is a list of species that are commonly seen and/or evidence of these species is commonly encountered.

Recreational use of BLM-administered land in the Greenwood Creek and Cronan Ranch parcels is extremely high. This is among the most popular recreational areas managed by the BLM. The BLM and its partners have built trails, trailheads/parking lots, and other visitor facilities to facilitate low-impact non-motorized recreational use (hiking, nature viewing, horseback riding, mountain biking, whitewater rafting) within these parcels. Within the Cronan Ranch parcel there are approximately 12 miles of trails. Beaches along the river are used by boaters as a lunch spots. The parcel has been the location for Hollywood movie productions. Since the BLM and its partners built the South Fork American River Trail in 2009 connecting the State Parks parking lot/trailhead at Salmon Falls and the network of trails within the Cronan Ranch/Greenwood Creek parcels, recreational use within the Salmon Falls parcel has also increased markedly.

Portions of the project area fall within areas with a special designation. Much of the project area is located within a Special Recreation Management Area (SRMA). Also, the BLM has recommended that the South Fork American River corridor, from Chili Bar to Salmon Falls, be incorporated into the national Wild and Scenic River system due, in part, to its outstandingly remarkable whitewater recreation and cultural resource values. The segment's classification is Recreational.

The BLM manages of the project area in accordance with class II visual resource management (VRM) standards. (Of note, there is a small area of BLM-administered land nearby within the Greenwood Creek-Clark Mountain parcel managed under class I standards.) The BLM's objective for class II is to retain the existing character of the landscape. The level of change to the characteristic landscape should be low. Management activities may be seen, but should not attract the attention of the casual observer. Any changes must repeat the basic elements of form, line, color, and texture found in the predominant natural features of the characteristic landscape.

#### **4.0 Environmental Effects**

The following critical elements have been considered in this EA, and unless specifically mentioned later in this EA, have been determined to be unaffected by the proposed action: areas of critical environmental concern, prime/unique farmlands, floodplains, wetlands, wilderness, and environmental justice.

#### **4.1 Impacts of the Proposed Action**

Air, water, and soils – The proposed action would not negatively affect air, water, or soil resources. Construction and use of the new recreational facilities, as proposed in this EA, might create some temporary dust but not enough to seriously affect air resources. Long-term use of these facilities would not affect air resources. The impact to air resources would be negligible to none. Likewise, the impact to water resources would be negligible to none. Rainwater runoff is causing erosion of sediment, but not enough to seriously affect water quality in Hastings Creek or the South Fork. Trail realignment and construction would neither benefit nor degrade water resources. During construction and grading, trail-building equipment would stay 30 feet away from Hastings Creek to prevent siltation and damage to riparian vegetation and aquatic life. Fill material would not be placed in Hastings Creek. The South Fork American River would not be affected. Drainage crossings on existing roads are adequate and would be maintained (please refer to the project design features in section 2.4).

Vegetation/invasive weeds – The BLM botanist analyzed the impacts of the proposed action on vegetation, particularly special status plants. The analysis is designed to help the BLM meet its obligations under the Endangered Species Act and meet other BLM policies with respect to special status species. The analysis included a background records search through the California National Diversity Database and other records, as well as rare plant surveys and inventory in June 2012. The BLM botanist determined that the proposed action would not directly negatively impact special status plants. Also, a potential issue is the introduction, reintroduction, and spread of noxious invasive weeds (which could be an indirect impact caused by the proposed action). The proposed action would be implemented in a way that avoids the introduction, reintroduction, and spread of weeds (please refer to the project design features in section 2.4).

Wildlife – The BLM wildlife biologist analyzed the impacts of the proposed action on wildlife, particularly on special status wildlife. Her analysis is designed to help the BLM meet its obligations under the Endangered Species Act and meet other BLM policies with respect to special status species. The proposed trail alignment would be routed to avoid elderberry bushes and clumps of bushes in this area by 20 feet. No elderberry populations have been found in the project area. If the proposed action is implemented in the ways outlined above and in the project design features in section 2.4, it would have no effect on the federally listed Valley Elderberry Longhorn Beetle or other special status wildlife.

Cultural resources/Native American issues – The BLM archaeologist is in the process of analyzing the impacts of the proposed action to determine whether significant cultural resources could be affected. The BLM archaeologist is conducting field inventories, background cultural resource data searches, tribal

consultations, and other reasonable-and-good-faith efforts to identify significant or potentially significant cultural resources that might be affected by the proposed action, as required under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act and other authorities. The BLM archaeologist has not identified any cultural resources that would be affected the construction of this proposed trail.

Recreation – Without question, the proposed action would be beneficial to the recreating public. The proposed action would enhance recreation within this Special Recreation Management Area over the long run. The proposed trail would provide an additional access for equestrian and other trail users, and hopefully reduce parking conflicts at Cronan Ranch. This proposed trail will improve the recreating public's experience by providing greater access to a very scenic area.

Visual resources – The proposed action would not negatively impact visual resources. BLM manages the area in accordance with VRM class II standards, and the proposed action is in line with the management objective for this class, which is to retain the existing character of the landscape.

Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) values – This proposed trail will connect with the South Fork American River Trail that also connects the Salmon Falls unit of the Pine Hill Preserve ACEC. The ACEC values here are rare soils and special status plants. The proposed trail would not negatively impact the ACEC values. However, a major issue is the introduction, reintroduction, and spread of noxious invasive weeds. As outlined the project design features in section 2.4, all trail-building equipment and tools used within and vehicles entering area would be cleaned prior to arrival in the project area, and extra precautions would be taken, to prevent the spread of non-native plants. At the conclusion of trail construction, annual monitoring along the trail to detect and eradicate weed infestations would be established and implemented by the BLM's staff and volunteers. If the proposed action is implemented in this way and in accordance with the project design features in section 2.4 of this EA, it would not negatively affect the ACEC values.

Wild and Scenic River outstandingly remarkable values (ORVs) – The two alternatives would not negatively impact any of the ORVs identified by the BLM for the proposed South Fork American Wild and Scenic River. In fact, the proposed action would help to enhance recreation and cultural resources which are considered ORVs. The proposed action would not affect the river's classification as Recreational.

#### **4.2 Impacts of No Action**

Air, water, and soils – The no action alternative would not impact air, water, or soil resources.

Vegetation/invasive weeds – The no action alternative would not impact vegetation resources.

Wildlife – The no action alternative would not impact wildlife.

Cultural resources/Native American issues – The no action alternative would not impact cultural resources or Native American issues.

Recreation – Recreation would be negatively impacted if the proposed action is not implemented. The BLM would miss opportunities to follow the recreation management goals and objectives of its land-use plans; the BLM would miss opportunities to expand the trail network; increase public access; and develop facilities for interpretation.

Visual resources – The no action alternative would not impact visual resources.

Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) values – The no action alternative would not impact ACEC values.

Wild and Scenic River outstandingly remarkable values – The no action alternative would not impact wild and scenic ORVs or the river’s classification as Recreational.

#### **4.3 Cumulative Impacts**

Negative cumulative impacts are not anticipated. The proposed action would not negatively impact air, water, soil, biological, cultural, visual, wild and scenic, or ACEC values. The proposed action is, however, expected to have long-term beneficial cumulative impacts on recreation along the lower South Fork.

#### **5.0 Agencies and Persons Consulted**

##### **5.1 Author**

Jeff Horn, BLM Outdoor recreation planner

## 5.2 BLM Interdisciplinary Team/Reviewers:

<i>/s/ Alden Neel</i>	<i>4/27/2016</i>
Alden Neel Archaeologist	Date
<i>/s/ Jeff Horn</i>	<i>4/27/16</i>
Jeff Horn Outdoor recreation planner/VRM specialist	Date
<i>/s/ Beth Brenneman</i>	<i>4/26/16</i>
Beth Brenneman Botanist	Date
<i>/s/ Peggy Cranston</i>	<i>4/26/16</i>
Peggy Cranston Wildlife biologist	Date
<i>/s/ Heather Daniels</i>	<i>4/28/2016</i>
Heather Daniels NEPA Coordinator	Date

## 5.3 Availability of Document and Comment Procedures

This EA, posted on Mother Lode Field Office's website ([www.blm.gov/ca/motherlode](http://www.blm.gov/ca/motherlode)) under Information, NEPA (or available upon request), will be available for a 15-day public review period. Comments should be sent to the Mother Lode Field Office, 5152 Hillside Circle, El Dorado Hills, CA 95762 or emailed to [hdaniels@blm.gov](mailto:hdaniels@blm.gov)

## 5.4 References Cited

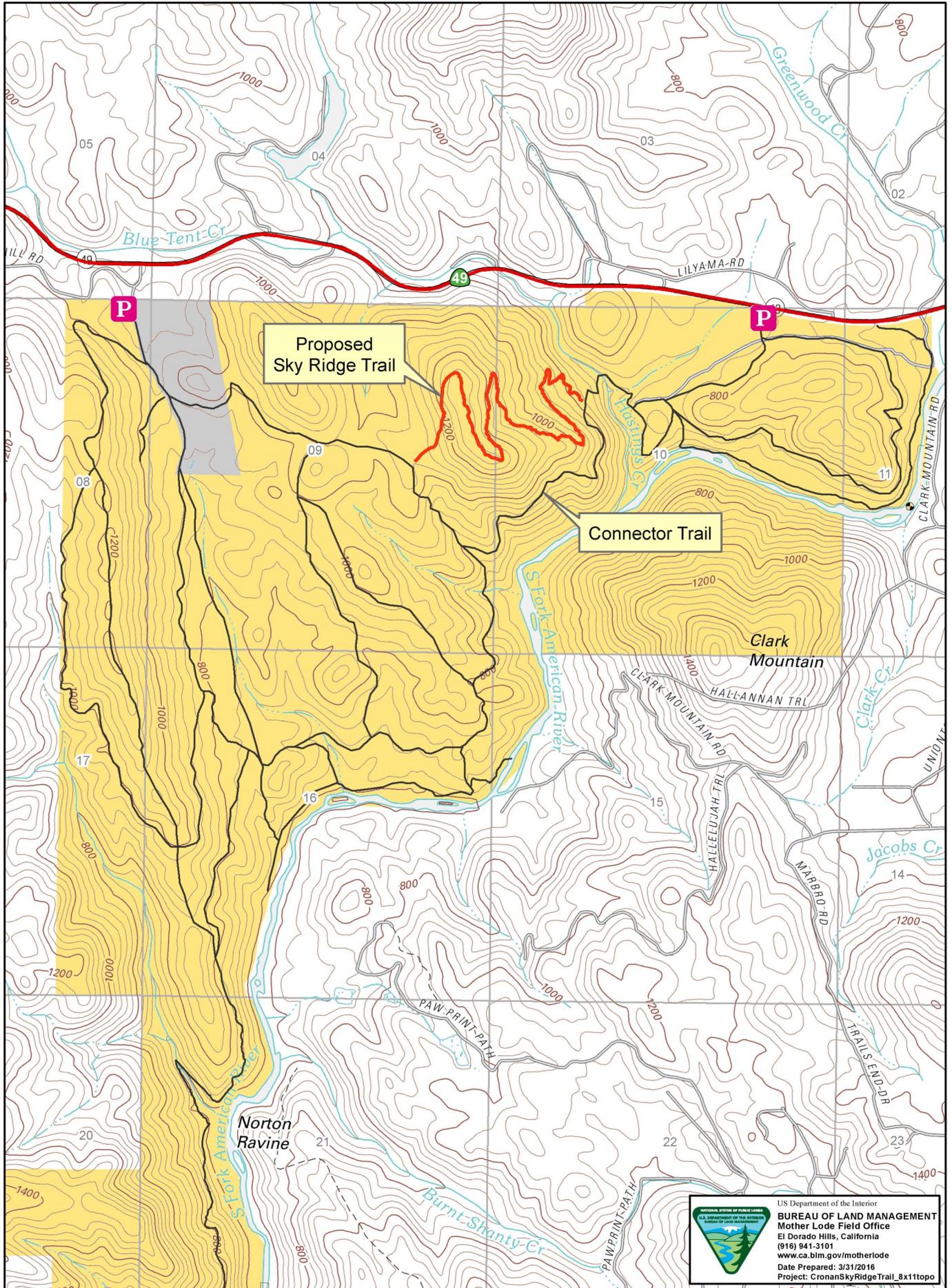
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 Date Prepared: 3/31/2016  
 Project: CronanSkyRidgeTrail\_8x11topo

1 inch = 2,000 feet

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