This decision memo provides documentation, pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), related to the Arnold Rim Trail Cedar Center Connection Bikeway (ART Connection) project. The proposed project is located in the community of Arnold, Calaveras County, California, within the boundary of Stanislaus National Forest, Calaveras Ranger District (Sec 9 T5N R15E; MDBM).

The need for a trail connecting the Arnold Rim Trail to Oak Court and Pine Drive through the Stanislaus National Forest increased in recent years. Unauthorized paths to the Arnold Rim Trail from Oak Court are currently adjacent to private land, increasing the potential for trespass and social conflicts. Thus, there is a need to designate one trail to access the Arnold Rim Trail that is not adjacent to private land. Likewise, Calaveras County proposes to construct a paved path on county lands adjacent to the Stanislaus National Forest (Figure 1). Since people can travel across the county parcels to access the Stanislaus National Forest, Calaveras County proposals are not considered connected to the Forest Service proposed action detailed below. However, the analysis for this project considers the cumulative effects of actions proposed on county lands.

**Proposed Action**

The proposed action would construct about 500 feet of paved trail on the Stanislaus National Forest, between Calaveras County lands on Oak Court and Pine Drive, and about 1,200 feet of native surface trail connecting to the Arnold Rim Trail (Figure 1). Construction is anticipated to begin in December 2012 and be completed by April 2013.

The 8-foot wide paved trail would meander as necessary to avoid tree cutting. The paved trail would disturb (e.g., subgrades and cut/fill for trail grades and cross slope) about 0.20 acres (maximum of 1,000 cubic yards) on National Forest. The 6-feet wide native surface trail would meet Forest Service trail design standards. No significant grade changes or addition of any surface treatments are intended for the native surface trail which would utilize existing skid trails to avoid tree removal. The native surface trail may be lightly graded, less than 1 foot deep to clear and grub vegetation (maximum volume of 44 cubic yards). Outsloping to follow the existing ground contours may be implemented as part of the trail design. The amount of disturbance would be limited to the trail itself, or roughly 0.17 acres. Erosion control measures (such as fiber rolls and silt fencing) would be implemented. Hazard trees may be felled on National Forest land. Areas disturbed during trail construction, including vehicular paths, would be blocked to avoid future unauthorized use.

**Project Design Features**

1. **Sensitive Plants:** trail alignment will avoid areas flagged for Humboldt lily subspecies.
2. **Invasive Species/Noxious Weeds:** erosion control measures for this project would be designed to prevent the spread of invasive plant species.
   a. All erosion control straw/hay would be certified weed free. Only native species found in this region would be included in seed and plant mixtures. Seed purity would be certified by a planting seed labeled under the California Food and Agricultural Code, or that has been tested within a year by a seed laboratory certified by the Association of Official Seed Analysts or by a seed technologist certified by the Society of Commercial Seed Technologists. Seed would contain at
most 1.0 percent total weed seed by weight. Any landscaping designs for the project would not contain invasive and or noxious weed species in the plant selections or seed mixtures.

b. Prior to arrival on National Forest land and prior to leaving the project site, all construction equipment would be inspected and cleaned of mud and other debris that may contain invasive plants and/or seeds and inspected to reduce the potential spreading of noxious weeds.

c. Invasive or noxious species encountered during project implementation would be hand pulled, bagged, and burned at an approved site.

3. Communities:
   a. Trail construction and vegetation management work may occur from 7am to 7pm.
   b. All trash would be kept in wildlife-proof receptacles. Any non-natural food and/or water sources should not be left unattended for the duration of the project construction.

**Decision**

My decision is to implement the proposed action as described above including the project design features. This action falls within a category of actions that are excluded from documentation in an Environmental Assessment (EA) or Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and no extraordinary circumstances would preclude use of the category “Construction and reconstruction of trails” [36 CFR 220.6(e)(1)]. The proposed action fits this category because it involves the construction and improvement of a trail. Appendix A includes a “Review of Extraordinary Circumstances” supporting my determination that no extraordinary circumstances exist.

Resource specialists provided input regarding hydrology, threatened, endangered, and sensitive species, wildlife and aquatic habitat, heritage resources and recreation (project record). They considered actions proposed on adjacent Calaveras County lands in their analyses. I considered their recommendations in making this decision.

I made this decision to construct the ART Connection because the trail construction will provide a connection from the Cedar Center to the Arnold Rim Trail, enhancing recreation opportunities and decreasing the likelihood of trespass.

**Public Involvement**

The Forest Service first listed the ART Connection project in the October 2011 issue of the Stanislaus National Forest Schedule of Proposed Actions (SOPA). The Forest distributes the SOPA to about 160 parties and it is available on the internet [http://www.fs.fed.us/sopa/forest-level.php?110516]. The project was presented at a public meeting on August 5, 2011 which was attended by 8 members of the public and at a meeting on January 17, 2012, attended by 6 members of the public. There were two comments received at the public meetings. A third meeting was held on March 9, 2012 to update the community on project details and give members of the public an opportunity to provide comments on the project design. The Forest Service received one comment letter in June 2012 in reference to the CEQA analysis. Also, a notice detailing the proposed project was provided in the Spring/Summer 2012 Meadowmont Homeowners Association newsletter.

Local historic groups and Native American tribes were consulted as part of the proposed project (Appendix A). Pursuant to PRC Section 21091 and Guidelines Section of California Environmental

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1 The mere presence of one or more of these resource conditions does not preclude use of a categorical exclusion (CE). It is the existence of a cause-effect relationship between a proposed action and the potential effect on these resource conditions and if such a relationship exists, the degree of the potential effect of a proposed action on these resource conditions that determine whether extraordinary circumstances exist. (36 CFR 220.6(b))
Quality Act the Initial Study with Proposed Mitigated Negative Declaration for the proposed project was made available to the public from May 22, 2012 to June 21, 2012.

A legal notice, announcing the 30-day Opportunity to Comment on the draft decision memo appeared in the Union Democrat on September 4, 2012. The comment period, provided pursuant to the March 19, 2012 U.S. District Court order (1:11-CV-00679-LJO-DLB), allows an opportunity for interested or affected parties to make their concerns known before the Responsible Official makes a final decision. The 30-day comment period ended on October 4, 2012. On September 4, 2012 the Forest sent a letter to 41 individuals, organizations and agencies interested in this project. The letter requested comments on the draft decision memo during the 30-day comment period. No comments were submitted during the comment period.

**Findings Required by Other Laws**
This action is consistent with the Forest Plan; the National Historic Preservation Act; and, all other applicable laws and regulations (Appendix A).

**Implementation Date**
Implementation of the decision may begin immediately following the publication date of the legal notice of this decision in the Union Democrat (36 CFR 215.9(c)).

**Administrative Review or Appeal Opportunities**
Since no comments or only supportive comments were received during the 30-day comment period (36 CFR 215.6), this decision is not subject to appeal (36 CFR 215.12).

**Contact Person**
For additional information about this project, contact Patty Clarey; Calaveras Ranger District; PO Box 500; Hathaway Pines, CA 95233; or call (209) 795-1381 ext. 315.

**Signature and Date**

![Signature](signature.png)

SUSAN SKALSKI  
Forest Supervisor  
Stanislaus National Forest

October 31, 2012  
Date
Arnold Rim Trail
Cedar Center Connection

Stanislaus National Forest

6 ft wide, Native Surface Path

8 ft wide, Paved Path

Calaveras County Land,
6 ft wide Paved Path
Cumulative Effect

Calaveras County Land,
8 ft wide Paved Path
Cumulative Effect

Oak Court

Private or County Land

Figure 1: Proposed Action
APPENDIX A
Review of Extraordinary Circumstances

In accordance with FSH 1909.15 Section 30.3(2), the Responsible Official considered the following resource conditions in determining whether extraordinary circumstances related to the proposed action would warrant further analysis and documentation in an Environmental Assessment (EA) or an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).

1. **Federally listed threatened or endangered species or designated critical habitat, species proposed for Federal listing or proposed critical habitat, or Forest Service sensitive species.**

   No federally listed threatened or endangered species, proposed species, or designated critical habitat exist in or near the project area (Biological Assessment). The project may affect Forest Service sensitive species, but is not likely to contribute to the need for federal listing or result in loss of viability in the planning area (Biological Evaluation).

2. **Floodplains, wetlands or municipal watersheds.**

   **Floodplains:** Executive Order 11988 defines floodplains as, “. . . the lowland and relatively flat areas adjoining inland and coastal waters including flood prone areas of offshore islands, including at a minimum, that area subject to a one percent [100-year recurrence] or greater chance of flooding in any one year.”
   - No floodplains exist within or adjacent to the project area on National Forest System (NFS) lands.

   **Wetlands:** Executive Order 11990 defines wetlands as, “. . . areas inundated by surface or ground water with a frequency sufficient to support and under normal circumstances does or would support a prevalence of vegetative or aquatic life that requires saturated or seasonally saturated soil conditions for growth and reproduction. Wetlands generally include swamps, marshes, bogs, and similar areas such as sloughs, potholes, wet meadows, river overflows, mud flats, and natural ponds.”
   - No wetlands exist within or adjacent to the project area on NFS lands.

   **Municipal Watersheds:** FSM 2542.05 defines municipal watersheds as: “A watershed that serves a public water system as defined in the Safe Drinking Water Act of 1974, as amended (42 U.S.C. §§ 300f, et seq.); or as defined in state safe drinking water statutes or regulations.”
   - No municipal watersheds exist within or adjacent to the project area.

3. **Congressionally designated areas such as wilderness, wild and scenic rivers, or national recreation areas.**

   No congressionally designated Wilderness, Wild and Scenic Rivers or National Recreation Areas exist within the project area or nearby.

4. **Inventoried Roadless Areas.**

   No Inventoried Roadless Areas (IRAs) exist within or adjacent to the project area.

5. **Research Natural Areas.**

   No existing or proposed Research Natural Areas (RNAs) exist within or adjacent to the project area.

6. **American Indians and Alaska Native religious or cultural sites.**

   No cultural resources were located within the project’s Area of Potential Effects (Project Compliance Letter: BBalen, 05-16-2278).

7. **Archaeological sites, or historic properties or areas.**

   No archaeological or historic resources were located within the project’s Area of Potential Effects (Project Compliance Letter: BBalen, 05-16-2278).