“. . . except as necessary to meet minimum requirements for the administration of the area for the purpose of this Act...”

– the Wilderness Act, 1964

Stone Ridge Trail

Please refer to the accompanying MRDG Instructions for filling out this guide.
The spaces in the worksheets will expand as necessary as you enter your response.

**Step 1:** Determine if any administrative action is necessary.

**Description:** Briefly describe the situation that may prompt action.

A 177-foot section of the Stone Ridge Trail near Goat Camp has a maximum grade of 55%, an average grade of approximately 35%, and is on loose, gravelly soil, making it unsafe for foot traffic. A trail section this steep fails to meet the design grade guidelines in the Forest Service Trails Management Handbook (FSH 2309.18) for any class of trail. The affected trail section is located in the NW ¼ of Section 3, T.22S, R.4E, Mt. Diablo Meridian and lies entirely within both the Ventana Wilderness and the Cone Peak Gradient Research Natural Area. The unit responsible for its administration is the Monterey Ranger District of the Los Padres National Forest.

To determine if administrative action is necessary, answer the questions listed in A - F on the following pages.
A. Describe Options Outside of Wilderness

Is action necessary within wilderness?

Yes: ☒ No: ☐

**Explain:** There are no options outside of wilderness. The affected trail section is located within the Ventana Wilderness, thus any action taken must take place within wilderness.

B. Describe Valid Existing Rights or Special Provisions of Wilderness Legislation

Is action necessary to satisfy valid existing rights or a special provision in wilderness legislation (the Wilderness Act of 1964 or subsequent wilderness laws) that allows consideration of the Section 4(c) prohibited uses? Cite law and section.

Yes: ☐ No: ☒ Not Applicable: ☐

**Explain:** There are no applicable existing rights or special provisions.

C. Describe Requirements of Other Legislation

Is action necessary to meet the requirements of other laws?

Yes: ☐ No: ☒ Not Applicable: ☐

**Explain:** There are no other laws that are known to be pertinent to this assessment.

D. Describe Other Guidance

Is action necessary to conform to direction contained in agency policy, unit and wilderness management plans, species recovery plans, or agreements with tribal, state and local governments or other federal agencies?

Yes: ☒ No: ☐ Not Applicable: ☐

**Explain:** See below for pertinent direction from the Forest Service Manual, the Los Padres Forest Land Management Plan, and the Establishment Record for the Cone Peak Gradient Research Natural Area.

**Forest Service Manual**

**CHAPTER 2320 – WILDERNESS MANAGEMENT**

2320.2 - Objectives

4. Protect and perpetuate wilderness character and public values including, but not limited to, opportunities for scientific study, education, solitude, physical and mental challenge and stimulation, inspiration, and primitive recreation experiences.

2323.12 - Policy

3. Manage for recreation activities that are dependent on the wilderness environment so that a minimum of adaptations within wilderness are necessary to accommodate recreation.
2323.13f - Transportation System

Design, construct, and maintain the transportation system in wilderness to provide access to and within a wilderness that meets the wilderness objectives described in the forest plan.

1. Trails. Trails are an acceptable improvement. Construct and maintain trails to standards described in FSH 2309.18, Trails Management Handbook. […]
   a. Design and locate trails so that nonmotorized and nonmechanical equipment can be used for construction and management.
   b. Design and locate trails to fit into the natural landscape as unobtrusively as possible.
   c. Maintain trails by nonmotorized methods except for situations described in section 2326.

2326.02 - Objectives

1. Accomplish management activities with nonmotorized equipment and nonmechanical transport of supplies and personnel.

2. Exclude the sight, sound, and other tangible evidence of motorized equipment or mechanical transport within wilderness except where they are needed and justified.

2326.03 - Policy

1. Ensure that Forest Service employees acquire and maintain necessary skills for primitive travel by foot, horse, canoe, or other nonmechanical means and the use of hand tools.

2. Do not approve the use of motorized equipment or mechanical transport unless justified as described in 2326.1.

2326.1 - Conditions Under Which Use May Be Approved

Allow the use of motorized equipment or mechanical transport only for:

5. To meet minimum needs for protection and administration of the area as wilderness, only as follows:
   a. A delivery or application problem necessary to meet wilderness objectives cannot be resolved within reason through the use of nonmotorized methods.
   b. An essential activity is impossible to accomplish by nonmotorized means because of such factors as time or season limitations, safety, or other material restrictions.

CHAPTER 4060 – RESEARCH FACILITIES AND AREAS

4063 – RESEARCH NATURAL AREAS

4063.3 - Protection and Management Standards

Standards for protection and management of a Research Natural Area must support and promote the basic objectives and purposes of establishing the area. Ensure that the establishment record clearly states the objectives for establishing the area and identifies the special values for which the area is being recognized (FSM 4063.41). In addition, comply with the standards described in paragraphs 1-7.

5. Recreational Use. Recreational use should be restricted or prohibited if such use threatens or interferes with the objectives or purposes for which the Research Natural Area is established.

7. Roads, Trails, Fences, Signs, or Buildings. Do not permit new roads, trails, fences, or signs on an established Research Natural Area unless they contribute to the objectives or to the protection of the area. Boundary fencing is permitted for protection against livestock or excessive
human use. Buildings are not permitted. In rare instances, temporary gauging stations and instrument shelters may be desirable. Follow procedures set forth at FSM 4063.31 for authorizing temporary physical improvements.

4063.33 – Scientific and Educational Use

Encourage the use of Research Natural Areas by responsible scientists and educators. Do not authorize educational use of the Research Natural Area if it is probable that such use will cause unacceptable impact on the values for which the Research Natural Area was established.

Land Management Plan
Part 2 Los Padres National Forest Strategy

Trans 3 - Improve Trails
Construct and maintain the trail network to levels commensurate with area objectives, sustainable resource conditions, and the type and level of use.

SD 1 – Wilderness
Protect and manage wilderness to improve the capability to sustain a desired range of benefits and values, and so that changes in ecosystems are primarily a consequence of natural forces.

SD 3 - Research Natural Areas
Protect and manage research natural areas to maintain unmodified conditions and natural processes. Identify a sufficient range of opportunities to meet research needs. Compatible uses and management activities are allowed.

Establishment Record for the Cone Peak Gradient Research Natural Area
Appendix 1. Management Area Prescription Gradient for Research Natural Areas on the Los Padres National Forest
1979 Region 5 Trails Handbook Supplement
[ this excerpt provides the definitions of “level 1” and “level 2” as used in the RNA establishment record ]

Level 1

Objective: Resource protection and to inform the trail user of conditions. Level applies to primitive experience level trails, trails that need to be reconstructed or relocated to alleviate safety or resource problems, or short-term trails that will be obliterated or left to revert back naturally to the resource base. Trail is maintained for foot travel only. Volume of traffic is light.

Frequency of Performance: Condition survey made every 3-5 years to check for resource damage. If no major resource damage is occurring, no further action is taken. Signs posted at the beginning of the trail or at intersections are checked periodically for condition.

Maintenance activities performed: Drainage is maintained to prevent damage to adjacent resources. Signs are maintained that inform users of the conditions that exist. Regulatory signs are maintained.

Level 2

Objective: Resource protection, preservation of the trail investment, user safety and to perpetuate and use the pathway in its present location. Work is not deferred to the point of creating a backlog of reconstruction work. Trail maintained for foot travel only. Volume of traffic is light to medium.

Frequency of Performance: Condition surveys made once every 2-3 years to check for resource and trail damage. Unsafe conditions are searched for annually. Necessary logging out is performed annually.

Maintenance Activities Performed:

a. Brushing to delineate pathway and remove logs that cannot be stepped over.

b. Tread maintenance to keep drainage functioning. Includes berm and slough removal.

c. Slide removal and slump repair for safe foot travel.

d. All drainage structures such as waterbars, culverts, ditches, gully crossings, drainage dips and bridges are maintained.

e. Regulatory signs, directional signs and route markers are provided and maintained to a level necessary for the safety of the user.
E. Wilderness Character
Is action necessary to preserve one or more of the qualities of wilderness character including: untrammeled, undeveloped, natural, outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation, or unique components that reflect the character of this wilderness area?

Untrammeled: Yes: ☐ No: ☒ Not Applicable: ☐

**Explain:** Taking action to repair or reconstruct the affected section of trail is not necessary to preserve the untrammeled character of the wilderness.

Undeveloped: Yes: ☒ No: ☐ Not Applicable: ☐

**Explain:** Taking action to repair or reconstruct the affected section of trail is not necessary to preserve the undeveloped character of the wilderness.

Natural: Yes: ☐ No: ☒ Not Applicable: ☐

**Explain:** Taking action to repair or reconstruct the affected section of trail is not necessary to preserve the natural character of the wilderness.

Outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation:

Yes: ☒ No: ☐ Not Applicable: ☐

**Explain:** Trails are an acceptable improvement in wilderness when necessary to provide access to the wilderness in order to meet wilderness objectives. Agency policy directs that wilderness trails be constructed and maintained to the standards described in FSH 2309.18, Trails Management Handbook. Taking action to repair or reconstruct the affected section of trail is necessary to provide opportunities for solitude and primitive and unconfined recreation experiences in the manner directed by agency policy. Preservation of this essential aspect of wilderness character takes precedence over agency direction to discourage recreational activities in research natural areas because the congressional designation (wilderness) takes precedence over the administrative designation (research natural area).

Other unique components that reflect the character of this wilderness:

Yes: ☐ No: ☐ Not Applicable: ☒

**Explain:** None known to be pertinent to this assessment.
F. Describe Effects to the Public Purposes of Wilderness

Is action necessary to support one or more of the public purposes for wilderness (as stated in Section 4(b) of the Wilderness Act) of recreation, scenic, scientific, education, conservation, and historical use?

Recreation: Yes: ☒ No: ☐ Not Applicable: ☐

Explain: Taking action to repair or reconstruct the affected section of trail is necessary to provide a means for recreational users of the Ventana Wilderness to travel safely to Goat Camp and nearby areas.

Scenic: Yes: ☐ No: ☐ Not Applicable: ☒

Explain:

Scientific: Yes: ☒ No: ☐ Not Applicable: ☐

Explain: Taking action to repair or reconstruct the affected section of trail is necessary to provide a means for scientific users of the Cone Peak Gradient Research Natural Area of the Ventana Wilderness to travel safely to Goat Camp and nearby areas.

Education: Yes: ☒ No: ☐ Not Applicable: ☐

Explain: Taking action to repair or reconstruct the affected section of trail is necessary to provide a means for educational users of the Cone Peak Gradient Research Natural Area of the Ventana Wilderness to travel safely to Goat Camp and nearby areas.

Conservation: Yes: ☐ No: ☐ Not Applicable: ☒

Explain:

Historical use: Yes: ☐ No: ☐ Not Applicable: ☒

Explain:

Step 1 Decision: Is any administrative action necessary in wilderness?

Yes: ☒ No: ☐ More information needed: ☐

Explain: Taking action to repair or reconstruct the affected section of trail is necessary to preserve wilderness character, to support the public purposes of wilderness, and to comply with agency policy.

If action is necessary, proceed to Step 2 to determine the minimum activity.
Step 2: Determine the minimum activity.

Please refer to the accompanying MRDG Instructions for an explanation of the effects criteria displayed below.

Description of Alternatives

For each alternative, describe what methods and techniques will be used, when the activity will take place, where the activity will take place, what mitigation measures are necessary, and the general effects to the wilderness resource and character.

Alternative A: Reroute the affected section of trail

Description: Using traditional tools, construct a short trail reroute (see Map 1 and Map 2 below) to replace the affected section. The replacement section (not including old trail to be restored) would be approximately 366 feet long, would have a maximum grade of no more than 30%, an average grade of approximately 20%, and would deviate from the existing route by approximately 175 feet to the west. This action would bring the trail section into compliance with the design grade guidelines in FSH 2309.18 for Class 2 hiker/pedestrian trails, which is consistent with the management direction in Appendix 1 of the Cone Peak Gradient RNA establishment record ("trails are maintained at level 1 or level 2"). The endpoints of the existing section of trail would be disguised, and its surface would be scarified and allowed to revegetate naturally. Additional erosion control measures are not necessary since it has been in place since at least 1994 and does not show significant signs of erosion. The job would be scheduled for completion during the fall 2012 field season.

Effects:

Wilderness Character

“Untrammeled”
Rerouting a section of an existing trail would have no effect on wilderness being unhindered or unmanipulated and therefore would not affect the untrammeled character of the wilderness.

“Undeveloped”
Rerouting a section of an existing trail and decommissioning the section to be replaced would not add to or subtract from the number of permanent improvements. The reroute would add to the net length of the trail, but this is not a significant impact on the level of development. Therefore the action would not affect the undeveloped character of the wilderness.

“Natural”
Rerouting a section of an existing trail would not interfere with natural ecological or evolutionary processes and therefore would not affect the natural character of the wilderness.

“Outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation”
Trails are an acceptable improvement in wilderness when necessary to provide access to the wilderness in order to meet wilderness objectives. Agency policy directs that wilderness trails be constructed and maintained to the standards described in FSH 2309.18, Trails Management Handbook. This alternative would enhance the opportunities for solitude and primitive and unconfined recreation experiences by bringing the trail section up to standard.
Other unique components that reflect the character of this wilderness

**Heritage and Cultural Resources**
All activities performed would be in compliance with the Forest protocol for Heritage and Cultural compliance. The Zone Archaeologist has reviewed the proposed reroute and has determined that there are no documented archaeological sites nearby and that the steep topography the rugged topography suggests low sensitivity for cultural resources. The crew would be instructed to stop work and inform the archaeologist if any cultural resources were found.

**Maintaining Traditional Skills**
The proposed reroute would be constructed entirely with traditional tools.

**Special Provisions**
N/A

**Economic, Time, and Other Constraints**
It is estimated that a six-person trail crew working a standard eight-day hitch would suffice to implement this alternative. No direct cost would be imposed on the District since a non-profit partner would fund the job.

**Additional Wilderness-specific Comparison Criteria**
N/A

**Safety of Visitors, Personnel, and Contractors**
This alternative would remove the risk of injury to visitors, personnel, and contractors that would arise from traversing the existing unsafe section of trail.

The District and its partners use standard safety practices and protocols to mitigate the risks to visitors and crews associated with backcountry trail maintenance and reconstruction activities. The trail reconstruction activities associated with this alternative would therefore have no negative impact on safety of visitors, personnel, and contractors.

---

**Alternative B: Repair the affected section of trail**

**Description:** Using traditional tools, repair the existing section of trail (labeled “Current use route” and “Old trail to be restored” in Map 1 and Map 2 below). Minor changes to the alignment would be made straighten out the wiggles but no work would be done outside the existing trail prism (note that the portion labeled “Old trail to be restored” is within 10’ of the portion labeled “Current use route” and so lies within the existing trail prism). Check steps would be installed in the steep section to improve footing and thereby reduce the risk of falls. The repaired trail would be useable for foot travel only, which is consistent with the management direction in Appendix 1 of the Cone Peak Gradient RNA establishment record (“trails are maintained at level 1 or level 2”), but because the excessively steep grade would not be removed, this action would bring the trail section into compliance with the design grade guidelines in FSH 2309.18 for any class of trail. The job would be scheduled for completion during the fall 2012 field season.

**Effects:**

**Wilderness Character**

“Untrammeled”
Repairing a section of an existing trail would have no effect on wilderness being unhindered or unmanipulated and therefore would not affect the untrammeled character of the wilderness.
“Undeveloped”
Because of the steepness, a large number of closely spaced check steps would be needed. The result would closely resemble a staircase, thereby degrading the undeveloped character of the wilderness.

“Natural”
Repairing a section of an existing trail would not interfere with natural ecological or evolutionary processes and therefore would not affect the natural character of the wilderness.

“Outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation”
Trails are an acceptable improvement in wilderness when necessary to provide access to the wilderness in order to meet wilderness objectives. Agency policy directs that wilderness trails be constructed and maintained to the standards described in FSH 2309.18, Trails Management Handbook. This alternative would somewhat enhance the opportunities for solitude and primitive and unconfined recreation experiences by improving the safety of the trail relative to the existing situation, but it would not bring the trail section up to standard.

Other unique components that reflect the character of this wilderness

Heritage and Cultural Resources
All activities performed would be in compliance with the Forest protocol for Heritage and Cultural compliance.

Maintaining Traditional Skills
The proposed reroute would be constructed entirely with traditional tools.

Special Provisions
N/A

Economic, Time, and Other Constraints
It is estimated that a six-person trail crew working a standard eight-day hitch would suffice to implement this alternative. No direct cost would be imposed on the District since a non-profit partner would fund the job.

Additional Wilderness-specific Comparison Criteria
N/A

Safety of Visitors, Personnel, and Contractors
This alternative would reduce, but not remove, the risk of injury to visitors, personnel, and contractors that would arise from traversing the existing unsafe section of trail.

The District and its partners use standard safety practices and protocols to mitigate the risks to visitors and crews associated with backcountry trail maintenance and reconstruction activities. The trail maintenance activities associated with this alternative would therefore have no negative impact on safety of visitors, personnel, and contractors.

Alternative C: No-action Alternative

Description: No action would be taken. The existing section (labeled “Current use route” in Map 1 and Map 2) would remain in use.

Effects:

Wilderness Character

“Untrammeled”
Taking no action would have no effect on the untrammeled character of the wilderness.
“Undeveloped”
Taking no action would have no effect on the undeveloped character of the wilderness.

“Natural”
Taking no action would have no effect on the natural character of the wilderness.

“Outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation”
Taking no action would result in a substandard section of trail remaining in use, leaving opportunities for solitude and primitive and unconfined recreation experiences in a degraded state.

Other unique components that reflect the character of this wilderness

Heritage and Cultural Resources
Taking no action would have no effect on heritage and cultural resources.

Maintaining Traditional Skills
Taking no action would foreclose an opportunity for the maintenance of traditional skills.

Special Provisions
N/A

Economic, Time, and Other Constraints
Taking no action would require no resources.

Additional Wilderness-specific Comparison Criteria
N/A

Safety of Visitors, Personnel, and Contractors
Taking no action would remove none of the risk of injury to visitors and trail crew members from traversing the existing excessively steep alignment.

Comparison of Alternatives

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<th>Alternative A</th>
<th>Alternative B</th>
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<tr>
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<td>Undeveloped</td>
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<td>Natural</td>
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<tr>
<td>Solitude or Primitive Recreation</td>
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NA = Not Applicable    NE = No Effect
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NA = Not Applicable  NE = No Effect

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NA = Not Applicable  NE = No Effect

**Safety Criterion**

If safety issues override impacts to wilderness character or other criteria, provide documentation that the use of motorized equipment or other prohibited uses is necessary because to do otherwise would cause increased risks to workers or visitors that cannot be satisfactorily mitigated through training, use of personal protective equipment (PPE), or other requirements to alleviate the safety risk. (This documentation can take the form of agency accident-rate data tracking occurrences and severity; a project-specific job hazard analysis; research literature; or other specific agency guidelines.)

Documentation: n/a

**Step 2 Decision: What is the Minimum Activity?**

**Selected Alternative:** Alternative A, Reroute the affected section of trail.

**Rationale for selecting this alternative (including documentation of safety criterion, if appropriate):**

The 1964 Wilderness Act devoted wilderness areas to several public purposes, including recreational use. It directed that wilderness “be administered for the use and enjoyment of the American people in such a manner as will leave them unimpaired for future use and enjoyment as wilderness, and so as to provide protection for these areas, the preservation of their wilderness character, and for the gathering and dissemination of information regarding their use and enjoyment as wilderness.”

Chapter 2320 (Wilderness Management) of the Forest Service Manual directs the Forest Service to, “Design, construct, and maintain the transportation system in wilderness to provide access to and within a wilderness that meets the wilderness objectives described in the forest plan,” and to, “Construct and maintain trails to standards described in FSH 2309.18, Trails Management Handbook.” The selected alternative accomplishes these objectives. The other alternatives do not.
Check any Wilderness Act Section 4(c) uses approved in this alternative:

- [] mechanical transport
- [] motorized equipment
- [] motor vehicles
- [] motorboats
- [] landing of aircraft
- [] temporary road
- [] structure or installation

No Wilderness Act Section 4(c) will be used in this alternative.

<table>
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<th>Name</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Date</th>
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<tr>
<td>Prepared by:</td>
<td>Mike Heard</td>
<td></td>
<td>Volunteer</td>
<td>7 Dec 2012</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reviewed by:</td>
<td>Tom Murphey</td>
<td></td>
<td>Assistant Recreation Officer</td>
<td>3 Dec 2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reviewed by:</td>
<td>Timothy J. Short</td>
<td></td>
<td>District Ranger</td>
<td>5 Dec 2012</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Map 1

Stone Ridge Trail Reroute Overview

Legend

- Existing trail under rework
- Reworked trail as of 4/04/2012
- Current use route
- Old trail to be restored
- Proposed reroute

Feet

0 500 1,000
Map 2

Stone Ridge Trail Reroute Detail

Legend
- Yellow: Existing trail under network
- Green: Rerouted trail as of 4/04/2012
- Pink: Current use route
- Blue: Old trail to be restored
- Proposed reroute

Imagery Date: 5/13/1994