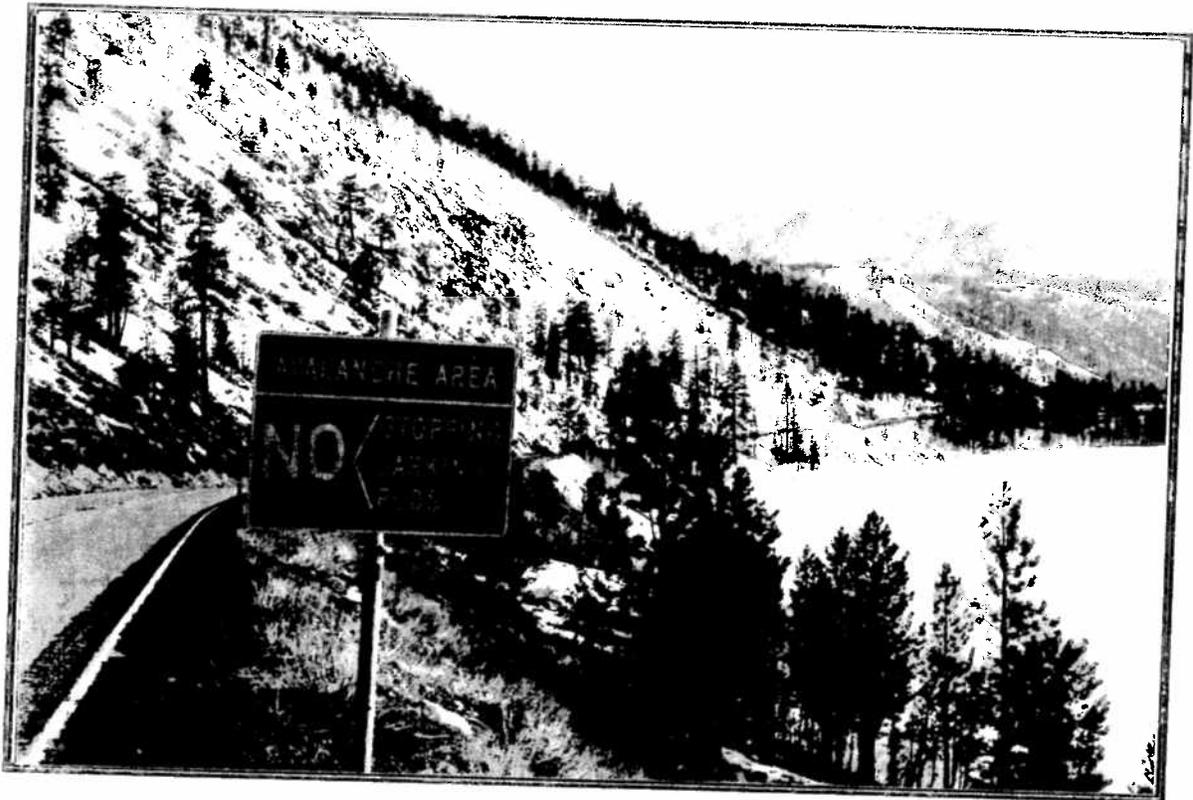


**FINAL**

**JUNE LAKE AVALANCHE BY-PASS ROAD  
ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT/  
ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT**



**Mono County Planning Department  
Inyo National Forest  
Federal Highway Administration  
California Department of Transportation**

**Adopted  
September 1995**



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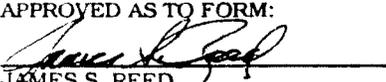
- 4) Finds that the mitigation measures contained in the **June Lake Avalanche By-pass Road Environmental Impact Report/Environmental Assessment (Final EIR)** plus project design changes mitigate potential environmental impacts identified in the Final EIR to a level of less than significant;
- 5) Adopts the written findings contained in Attachment 1 for each significant environmental effect related to the project;
- 6) Adopts the mitigation monitoring program contained in Attachment 2;
- 7) Certifies the Final EIR; and
- 8) Directs the Public Works Director to continue working on the June Lake Avalanche By-pass Road project.

PASSED AND ADOPTED this 19th day of September 1995 by the following vote:

AYES: Supervisors Alpers, Farnetti, Lawrence, Reid and Rowan.  
NOES: None.  
ABSENT: None.  
ABSTAIN: None.

  
TIM ALPERS, CHAIR  
MONO COUNTY BOARD OF  
SUPERVISORS

ATTEST:  
  
Nancy Wells  
Clerk to the Board

APPROVED AS TO FORM:  
  
JAMES S. REED  
COUNTY COUNSEL

DATED: September 19, 1995

/  
/  
/

**JUNE LAKE AVALANCHE BY-PASS ROAD  
ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT/  
ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT**

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## I. INTRODUCTION

### A. PURPOSE OF THE EIR/EA

The June Lake Avalanche By-pass Road **Draft Environmental Impact Report/Environmental Assessment (EIR/EA)** will conform to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). Mono County will act as the lead agency in preparing the environmental documentation. The United States Forest Service (USFS) and Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) are cooperating agencies for consistency with NEPA and will issue separate Notices of Decision for the project. The County will construct the proposed access road project on a combination of National Forest lands and private lands. FHWA *along with the State of California (Caltrans)*<sup>1</sup> will fund the project.

The purposes of the California Environmental Quality Act and the National Environmental Policy Act are similar in that each Act requires an analysis of the potential impacts that a project may have on the environment, the identification of measures to minimize identified environmental impacts, and also feasible alternatives to the proposed project. Both Acts also provide for public review and comment of the environmental document. Further, CEQA calls for public agencies to avoid or mitigate a project's significant environmental effects whenever feasible.

### B. TIERING

The California Environmental Quality Act provides for tiering of environmental documents. Section 21083.3, 21093 and 21094 of the Public Resources Code (PRC) provides for the use of a certified EIR for subsequent development when the proposed development is consistent with an adopted community plan. For such projects, subsequent environmental review need only address effects on the environment that are peculiar to the project. The proposed June Lake Avalanche By-pass Road is consistent with the **June Lake Area Plan** (Circulation Element, Obj. A, Policy 2, Action 2.2, P. III-108), and the **June Lake Area Plan Final EIR**; therefore, the use of a Tiered EIR is contemplated for this project.

The National Environmental Policy Act also provides for tiering or the use of prior environmental documents to eliminate redundancy and to concentrate on issues specific to the proposed project. Section 1508.28.a of the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) allows for tiering in cases where the sequence of environmental documents is from broad plan or policy documents (June Lake Area Plan) to site specific documents (Project Document). Management direction for actions on National Forest lands is provided by the 1988 **Inyo National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan**. In accordance with the National Forest Management Act, all site specific projects must be consistent with this plan.

### **Prior Environmental Review**

The Mono County Board of Supervisors adopted/certified the **June Lake Area Plan and EIR** in 1991. The Plan provided for future infrastructure needs, in addition to establishing land use designations for all the private property in June Lake. The June Lake Avalanche By-pass Road was a project proposed in the Plan's Circulation Element. The Plan's EIR analyzes the potential impacts of future development allowed under the Plan and includes mitigation

---

<sup>1</sup> Additions to the Draft document are shown in the ***bold and italicized*** type and deletions are shown in the ~~strickethru~~ font.

measures to reduce those impacts. The objectives, policies and actions contained in the June Lake Plan are identified in the EIR as mitigation measures.

Prior to adopting the Area Plan and certifying the Area Plan EIR, the Mono County Board of Supervisors' adopted findings of overriding considerations for the following unavoidable significant environmental effects:

- 1) Conversion of vegetation to impermeable surfaces and related secondary water quality impacts (i.e., additional stormwater runoff and erosion and sedimentation);
- 2) Visual impacts along the backshore of Gull Lake, along S.R. 158 bordering the Rodeo Grounds and the Down Canyon areas and in the conditionally developable Pine Cliff area;
- 3) An increase in traffic along S.R. 158 and other surface streets;
- 4) Increase the number of people exposed to avalanches and to severe volcanic episodes; and
- 5) A reduction of the Loop's wildlife habitat.

The by-pass road project is not anticipated to cause environmental impacts more significant than those identified in the Area Plan EIR.

Copies of the **June Lake Area Plan and EIR** are available for review at the Mono County Planning Offices in Bridgeport (Courthouse Annex I) and Mammoth Lakes (Minaret Village Mall, Suite P). Copies are also available at the following community libraries: Coleville (Learning Center), Bridgeport (Courthouse Complex), Lee Vining (High School), June Lake (Community Building), Mammoth Lakes (Community Center), and Benton (Edna Beaman Elementary School).

#### **Effects Peculiar to the Parcel**

This Draft Environmental Impact Report/Environmental Assessment examines the project specific environmental impacts related to the June Lake Avalanche By-pass Road. The **June Lake Area Plan EIR** adequately assessed potentially significant environmental impacts for future development allowed in the Area Plan. Other required EIR contents such as development alternatives (i.e., less intensive/more intensive development scenarios), growth inducing impacts, and cumulative impacts were also discussed in the Area Plan's EIR. Further review or the re-evaluation of these issues is not necessary, particularly since there is no substantial new information to show that previously identified effects will be more significant than previously described.

#### **C. DETERMINATION**

Based on this evaluation, Mono County and the Forest Service has determined that under §21083.3, §21093 and §21094 (PRC) and §1508.28.a (CFR) use of the prior June Lake Area Plan EIR along with future project specific environmental analysis is appropriate. Additional project specific review will focus on the potential environmental impacts identified in the following sections.

#### **D. SCOPING AND ISSUE IDENTIFICATION**

Public involvement was conducted to inform potentially interested parties of the proposed action, and to find out any concerns regarding the proposal. A Notice of Preparation/Intent (SCH# 93122075) was prepared to officially announce the project in December of 1993. This notice along with a project description was sent to local, state and federal agencies as well as to

potential affected public utilities. Publicly noticed townhall or scoping meetings were held on March 16, 1994 and February 22, 1995 to discuss the access road and to provide the opportunity for public comment.

Additionally, the Avalanche By-pass road proposal has been listed in the **Schedule of Proposed Environmental Actions** document, prepared and distributed four times a year by the Inyo National Forest to approximately 225 interested persons, organizations, and agencies. The project has appeared in this quarterly since the November of 1993 edition.

The overall scoping process resulted in the identification of the following significant issues warranting detailed study. These issues are used in the EIR/EA to formulate alternatives, to identify environmental consequences, and to develop mitigation measures.

1. Wildlife. How will the project affect the Casa Diablo mule deer herd, and federal and state listed special status wildlife and their habitats?
2. Botanic Resources. How will the proposal affect special status plants and sensitive habitat types along the route?
3. Cultural Resources. There is concern that the proposal complies with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, in that significant cultural resource sites are identified and protected.
4. Erosion and Sedimentation. There is the concern that the project could create additional erosion and sedimentation into June and Gull Lakes.
5. Visual Resources. There is the concern that the proposal may degrade the scenic character of the June Lake area.
6. Transportation. There is the need for uninterrupted wintertime access into and out of the June Lake Community. There is also the concern that additional traffic could be routed through the June Lake Village.
7. Noise. How will noise generated by the project impact sensitive receptors such as the Oh! Ridge and Pine Cliff Campgrounds?
8. Recreation. How will the proposal affect recreational activities in the June Lake area?

#### **E. FOREST SERVICE DECISION TO BE MADE**

As the responsible official for actions on National Forest lands, the Inyo Forest Supervisor will decide whether to allow the June Lake Avalanche By-pass Road to be located on forest lands. If allowed, the decision will address road location, associated mitigation measures, and the type of written instrument that will allow such occupancy and use of National Forest lands.

## II. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The project is located in the June Lake Loop, Mono County, California, in portions of Sections 2, 3, 10, 11, and 15 of Township 2 South, Range 26 East. The June Lake Avalanche By-pass Road project proposes to construct a 3.3 mile long two-lane paved roadway on the northern side of June Lake (Figures 1 and 2). The proposed road would begin north-west of the Pine Cliff Resort, run in a south-westerly direction across National Forest Lands north of June Lake, continue through private land in the West Village and Rodeo Grounds areas, and end across the street from the June Mountain Ski Area parking lot. Project construction would occur in two phases. Phase I includes the northern segment from the Pine Cliff Resort area to Leonard Avenue in West Village. This phase would also include realigning of the existing Oh! Ridge Road and improvements along Leonard Avenue. Phase II includes the segment from the West Village area to the June Mountain Ski Area parking lot. The proposed road includes two 12' wide travel lanes, two four-foot wide bicycle paths, and two three-foot wide shoulders in a 60' wide right-of-way plus drainage and slope easements (Figure 3). Scenic turnouts with interpretive displays may be constructed along the road in areas which could minimize potential environmental impacts.

Several design criteria were used in developing the road. These included maintaining a grade of 7% or less, minimizing construction impacts (i.e. wildlife habitat disturbance) and roadway costs by selecting the shortest feasible alternative, minimizing cut and fill slopes by conforming with the natural topography; routing the road around established recreation areas to avoid noise impacts; and minimizing potential environmental impacts by designing around sensitive resource areas such as wetlands, significant cultural resource sites, mature trees and lakeshore areas. Also, the project, were feasible, minimizes potential visual impacts on June Lake's backshore by using topography, vegetation and rock outcroppings to screen visible roadway sections.

***Road construction also may require relocating up to eight Southern California Edison Company (SCE) 115 Kilovolt (Kv) transmission line towers located near the proposed roadway. At this time, the preliminary road alignment calls for relocating three SCE towers between five and thirty feet to avoid the by-pass road. California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) General Order 131D requires a discussion of the potential environmental impacts associated with the proposed transmission line relocation. Further, the CPUC exempts from further environmental review those projects which "have under gone environmental review pursuant to CEQA as part of a larger project, and for which the final CEQA document finds no significant unavoidable environmental impacts caused by the power line". This document analyzes the potential environmental of the powerline relocation.***

Project alternatives examined in the EIR/EA include a no project (no action) alternative, the proposed two-lane roadway alternative, the proposed two-lane roadway with seasonal closures, and a two-lane roadway alternative alignment. The seasonal closure alternative entails using the road as a winter alternative access road and a summer recreational facility. During the summer, the road could be closed to automobile travel and used exclusively for pedestrians or bicyclists, or automobile traffic could be limited to one lane into the June Lake Loop and pedestrians or bicyclists could then use the closed lane for travel in either direction.

## III. PURPOSE AND NEED FOR THE PROJECT

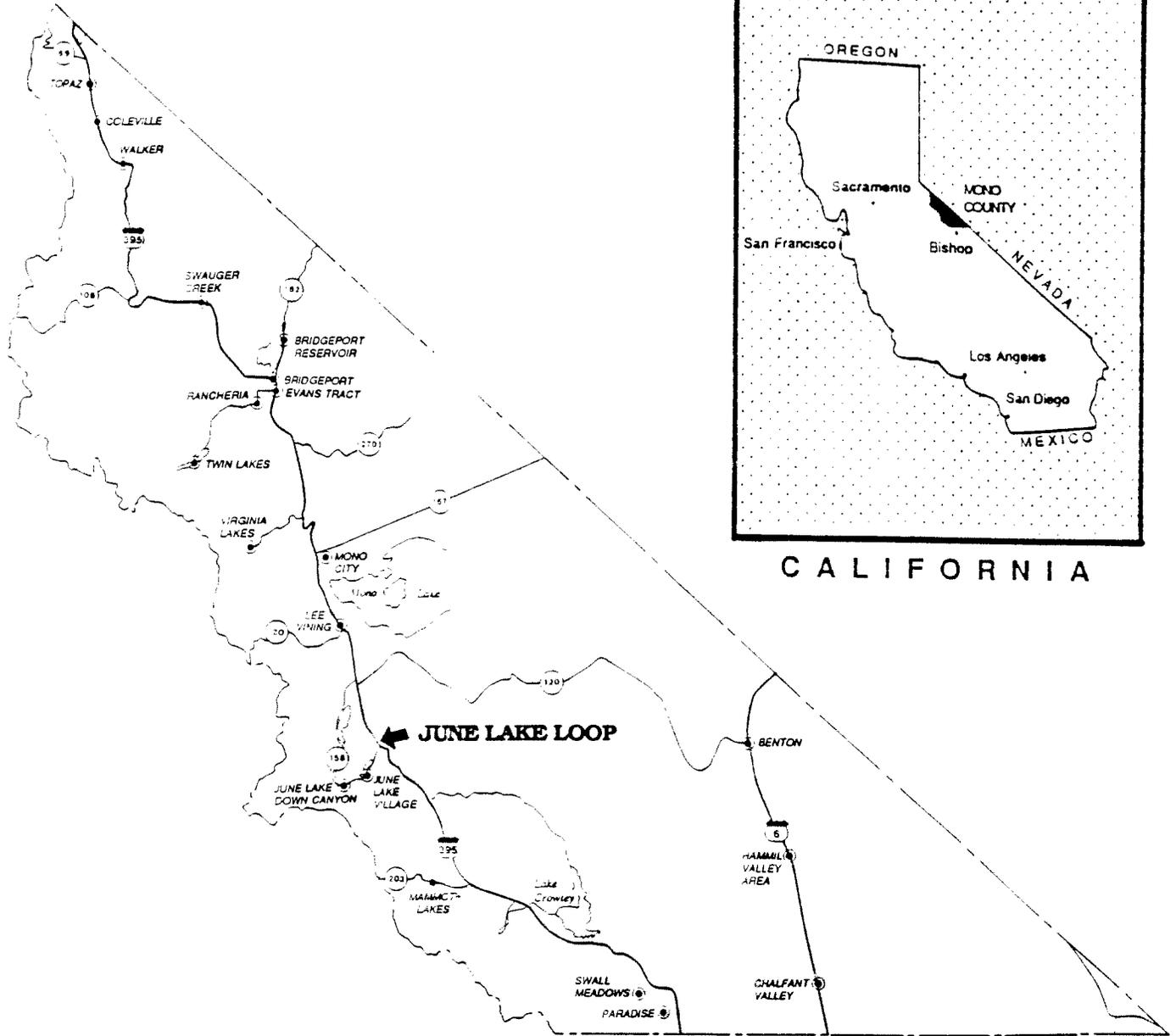
The June Lake Area Plan and many other planning documents, including two Caltrans Route Concept Reports in 1984 and 1986, have called for an alternative access roadway north-west of June Lake to provide entry to the community under adverse winter weather conditions and

after rock slide events. Highway 158, a 16 mile-long loop roadway, provides access to the June Lake community. During the winter, the northern portion of Highway 158, near the Southern California Edison (SCE) Rush Creek Substation, is closed due to avalanche hazards, leaving the section running along the south-east shore of June Lake as the only access into the community. This section of highway adjacent to June Lake is subject to periodic avalanches.

Caltrans installed a Gaz.Ex system along portions of S.R. 158 subject to avalanches in 1994. The system triggers minor avalanches using propane and oxygen exploders installed in avalanche starting zones. Caltrans crews close the road, fire the Gaz.Ex system, and then clean-up triggered avalanches. This system provides greater control over avalanches and has reduced road closures to approximately 40 minutes under most conditions. However, heavy snows and subsequent avalanches in March of 1995, forced the closure of S.R. 158 for nearly two days. Avalanches starting from zones outside of the Gaz.Ex control area also have temporarily closed the road.

In addition to winter avalanche problems, S.R. 158 is anticipated to exceed its traffic design capacity. The 1986 Caltrans Route Concept Report indicates that a 1.4 mile stretch of S.R. 158 (Post mile [PM] .8 to 2.2; the section along June Lake) will exceed threshold capacity in 1995 and all of Segment I, from the south June Lake Junction to the SCE power plant, will reach threshold capacity by 2005. The avalanche by-pass road would help to alleviate traffic capacity concerns in a portion of Segment I as well as providing reliable winter access.

Lastly, the by-pass road would enhance available recreational opportunities in June Lake by improving scenic viewing opportunities, bicycling and walking opportunities along the road's bicycle lanes and paved shoulders, and providing additional access to June Lake's north-west shore.



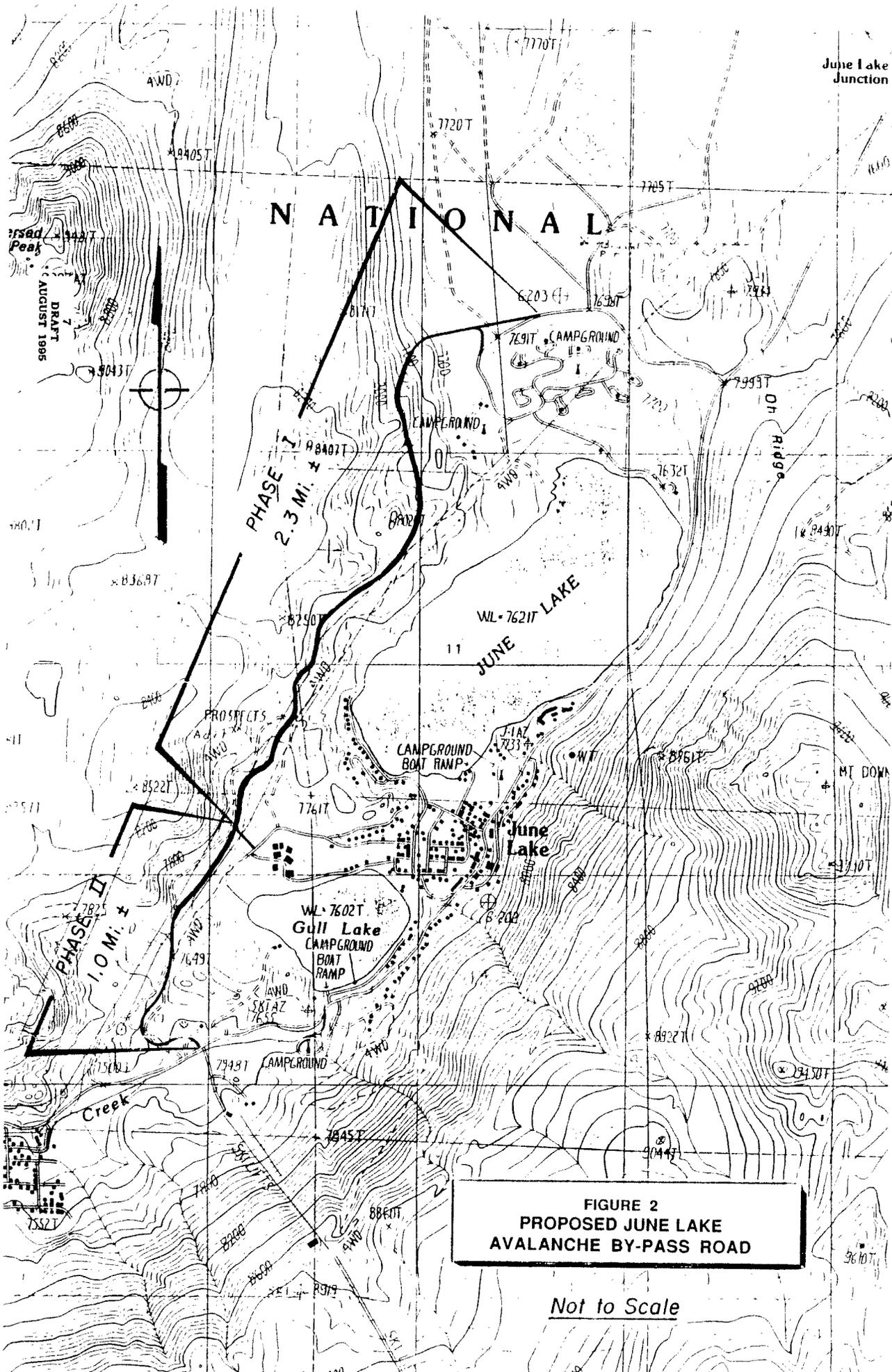
# MONO COUNTY



**FIGURE 1**  
VICINITY MAP



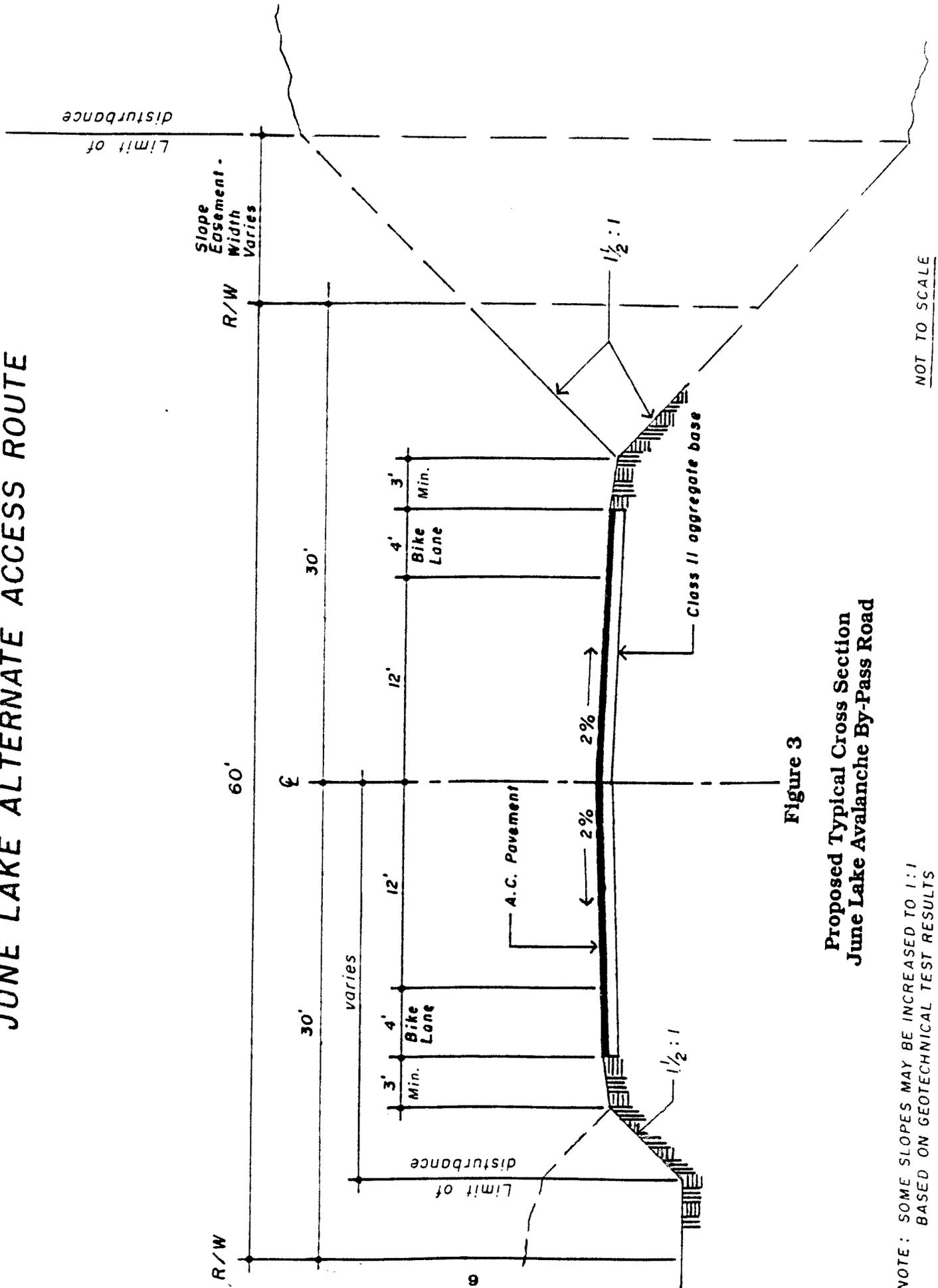
June Lake Junction



**FIGURE 2  
PROPOSED JUNE LAKE  
AVALANCHE BY-PASS ROAD**

*Not to Scale*

# PROPOSED TYPICAL ROSS SECTION JUNE LAKE ALTERNATE ACCESS ROUTE



NOT TO SCALE

**Figure 3**  
Proposed Typical Cross Section  
June Lake Avalanche By-Pass Road

NOTE: SOME SLOPES MAY BE INCREASED TO 1:1  
BASED ON GEOTECHNICAL TEST RESULTS

#### **IV. ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING, POTENTIAL ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES**

The roadway project would pass through undeveloped national forest land and private land in the West Village and Rodeo Grounds areas. It would require large amounts of earthwork to pass through the mountainous and rocky terrain on the northside of June Lake. Potential project impacts would include:

- 1) Adverse impacts on wildlife species and wildlife habitat by converting existing wildlife habitat into paved roadway and by introducing additional human presence into the area.
- 2) Disturbance and replacement of native vegetation due to road construction.
- 3) Disturbance of cultural resources.
- 4) Minor erosion and the transportation of sediments into June Lake and Gull Lake related to earthwork and roadway paving.
- 5) Visual impacts created by roadway cuts and fills and the disturbance of existing natural vegetation.
- 6) An increase in traffic along Oh! Ridge Road and June Lake Village streets including Leonard Avenue, Bruce Street, Gull Lake Road and Knoll Avenue.
- 7) An increase in the ambient noise level in the area adjacent to the roadway by increasing automobile traffic in the area and the level of human activity.
- 8) An increase in recreational use of June Lake's northshore and the area adjoining the access road.

The Environmental Impact Report/Environmental Assessment will rely on project specific technical studies such as a Wildlife Study, a Botanic Survey, a Biological Evaluation/Assessment, and a Cultural Resource Study, as well as existing information to discuss the identified potential impacts and mitigation measures designed to minimize potential project impacts.

## WILDLIFE

### I. INTRODUCTION

This section summarizes the **June Lake Alternative Access Route Wildlife Study** (Appendix 1) and the **Biological Evaluation/Assessment** (Appendix 2). Both studies were conducted during the summer and fall of 1993 to assess the project area's importance to special status species, mule deer and other wildlife. Specifically, the Wildlife Study was designed to: 1) describe and quantify the specific locations of resident and migratory mule deer; 2) determine the relative abundance and habitats of Federal candidate, proposed or listed threatened or endangered species, state-listed species, and locally sensitive species; 3) assess and quantify direct, indirect, and cumulative potential project-related impacts on wildlife and associated sensitive habitats; and 4) provide a specific mitigation plan to offset potential project-related impacts. The Biological Evaluation/Assessment, which conforms to the Endangered Species Act, examines the potential effects of the avalanche road on species listed as threatened or endangered or proposed for listing by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and species designated as sensitive by the Regional Forester. Wildlife information was collected using a combination of direct field surveys, previous wildlife studies in the area, unpublished data, and information from statewide wildlife data bases.

### II. SETTING

#### A. MULE DEER

##### Seasonal Movements

The annual life-cycle of deer from the Casa Diablo herd consists of four periods: spring migration, summer, fall migration, and winter. The spring migration begins in early April when deer leave the winter range and move in a westerly direction, along the base of the southern escarpment of the Glass Mountains to a large spring holding area located on the upper Owens River (Figure 4). Holding areas are bulbous expansions of the migration corridor located at intermediate elevations where deer congregate for 2 to 6 weeks during the spring and fall migrations. These areas are typical of migratory mule deer, and are recognized for their importance in providing nutritional spring forage for does in their third trimester of pregnancy. Deer arrive on the summer range in May and June, produce fawns in July, and begin fall migration back to the winter range in October. Fall migration is more rapid than spring and is usually triggered by the first heavy, fall snow storm. Deer arrive on the winter range in November and December, breed in December and January, and begin the annual life-cycle again.

A 1988 Department of Fish and Game radio-telemetry study indicated that a portion of the Casa Diablo herd uses the June Lake Loop area for summer range. According to the study, of 27 deer captured on the Casa Diablo winter range, 13 (48%) summered on the east slope of the Sierra in the vicinity of the June Lake Loop.

##### Herd Characteristics and Management

The Casa Diablo deer herd has experienced generally poor fawn recruitment rates over recent years. Since 1986, spring fawn/doe ratios have averaged 22 fawns per 100 does. Casa Diablo deer herd reproductive studies conducted in 1987 and 1988 suggest that poor fawn recruitment may be related to high neonatal losses on the summer range. Buck to doe ratios have fluctuated over the years, and are currently low due to low recruitment. From 1985 to 1992, post season buck ratios averaged 9.3 bucks per 100 does. The most recent population estimate for the Casa

Diablo herd is about 1,500 animals. According to DFG's Casa Diablo deer herd management plan, the optimal spring population is 2,245 deer based upon the range's carrying capacity. Other plan objectives are to maintain spring fawn ratios at 50 fawns per 100 does during cycles when the herd population is lower than usual, and to attain and maintain post season buck ratios of 20 bucks per 100 does.

Track Count Surveys

Track count surveys were conducted to determine the timing and specific locations of deer use in the project area during the summer and fall of 1993. A track count survey route was established on dirt roads beginning at the junction of S.R. 158 and the Rodeo Grounds, and continuing north for approximately 3 miles to the Pine Cliff Resort (Figure 5). Weekly track counts were conducted on foot and the number and direction of all tracks observed was recorded. The location of tracks was identified by recording all tracks observed in 20 segments established along the survey route. The direction of travel in which tracks were headed was recorded as north, south, east, or west. A track headed down the survey route was followed until it turned off and the direction where it turned was recorded as its direction of travel.

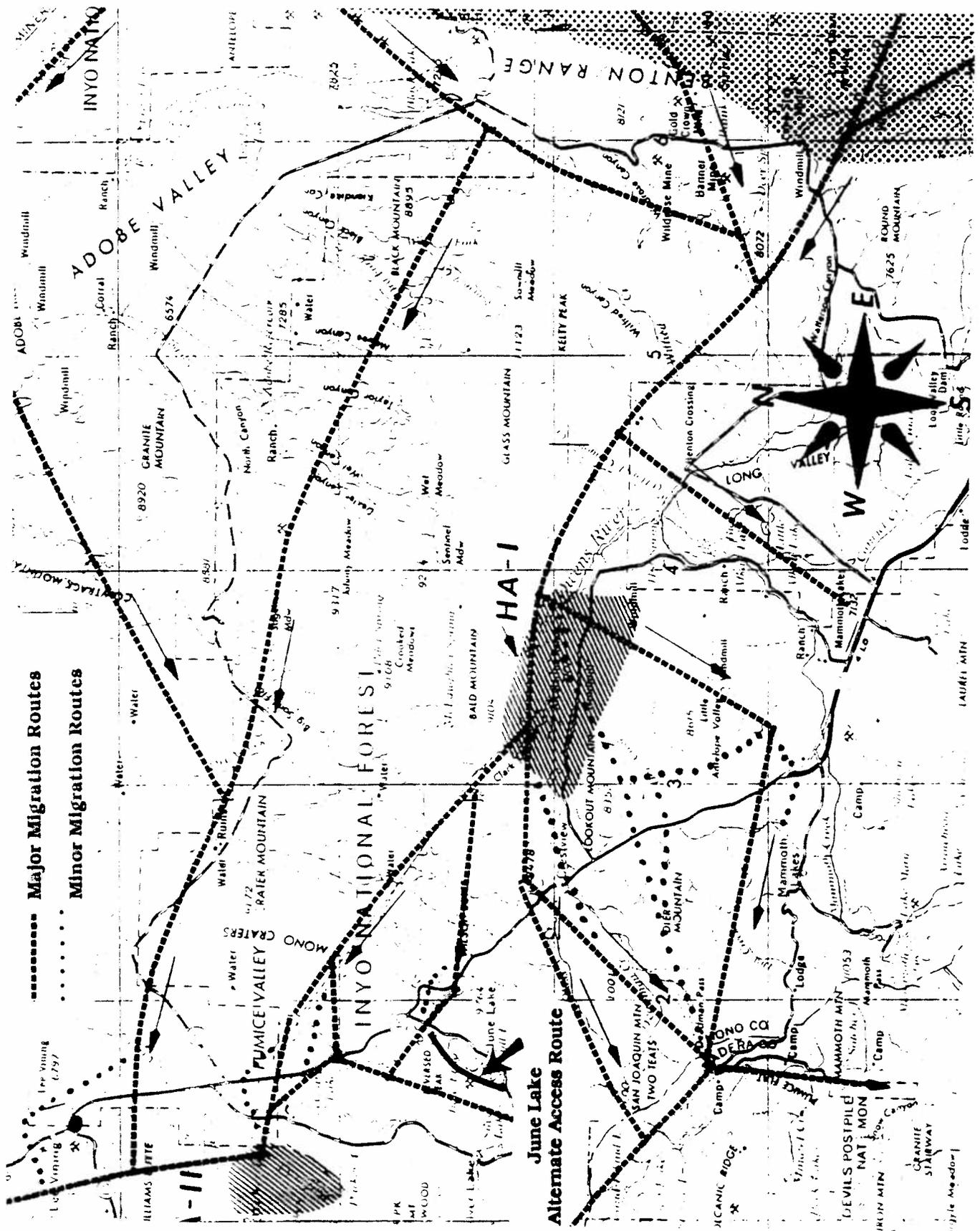


Figure 4. Regional Map showing the location of the June Lake Alternate Access Route project area in relation to Casa Diablo deer herd wintering areas, holding areas, and migration routes in Mono County, California.

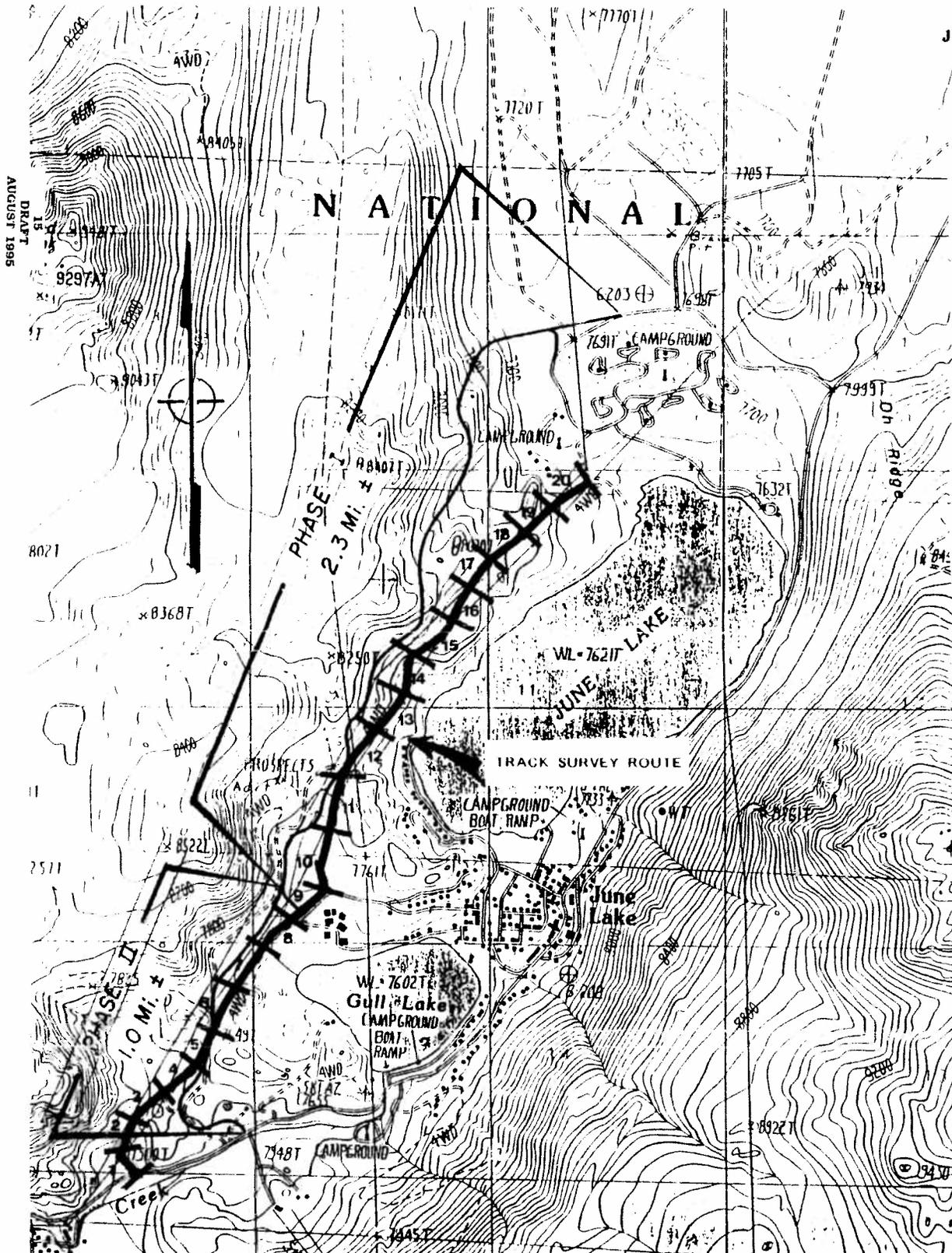


Figure 5  
LOCATION OF TRACK SURVEY ROUTE

### Ground Surveys

Ground surveys of the entire project area were conducted weekly to identify and map particularly important deer travel routes and feeding or resting areas. Deer trails were defined as distinct paths in the ground caused by repeated deer use. Sets of tracks apart from trails were not mapped.

### Track Count Studies

Seventeen track count surveys were conducted between August 12 and November 26, 1993 to determine the locations of deer movement corridors in the project area. Based on track count surveys, deer use of the project area lasted until approximately November 20, and peak deer activity occurred between August 31 and October 7 (Figure 6). Most deer had moved through the project area by the end of October; relatively few deer tracks were observed in November.

### Locations of Deer Use

A total of 685 deer tracks were counted crossing the track survey route during the survey period. Approximately 47% of all tracks were recorded crossing the survey route between segments 15 and 20 at the northern end of the project area (Figure 7). Approximately 34% of all tracks occurred in segments 6-11 in the middle portion of the project area and 12% of all tracks were counted between segments 1-5 at the southern end of the project area. The least amount of deer activity was recorded in segments 1-2 and segments 12-14, where approximately 1% and 7% of all tracks, respectively, were recorded. The low number of tracks recorded in segments 1 and 2 and segments 12-14 may be the result of hard, rocky substrates which precluded track registration. Additionally, tracks may have been missed in these and other segments because they were obliterated by weather, vehicles, and by humans afoot. The locations of deer activity identified from track counts generally agrees with the locations of 19 deer (1 male, 17 females, 1 fawn) observed during the survey period. Fourteen deer were observed in segment 18, 3 in segment 19, and 2 in segment 16. Additionally, 7 deer were observed just north of June Lake Beach road, approximately 100 yards west of S.R. 158.

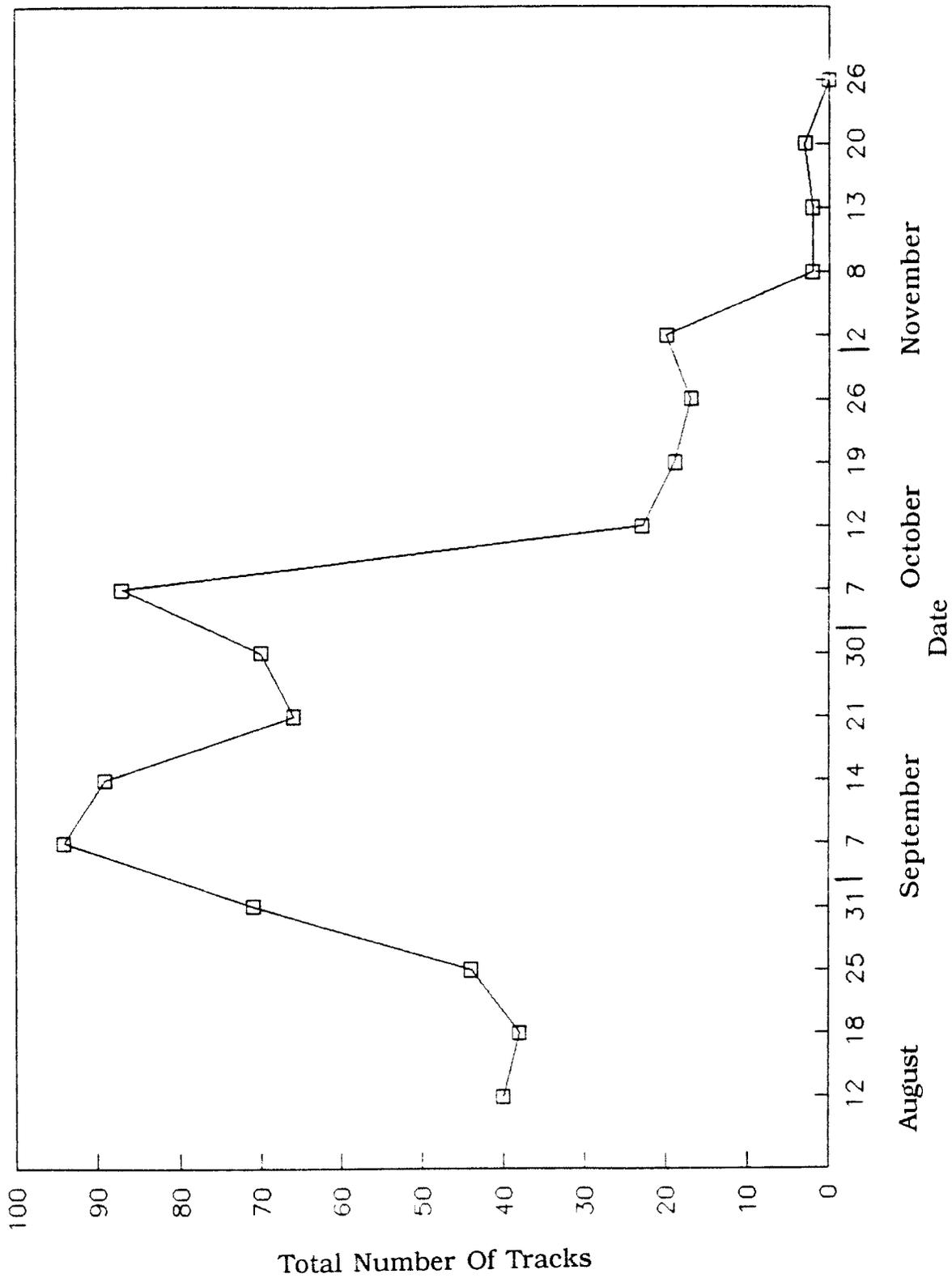
### Habitats Associated with Deer Activity

Approximately 78% of all deer crossings occurred between segments 5-6 and 9-20 in montane chaparral and Jeffrey pine habitats<sup>2</sup> (Figure 8). Approximately 12% of deer tracks were counted in segments 7 and 8 located adjacent to wet meadow habitat bordering the western perimeter of Gull Lake. About 10% of tracks were observed immediately adjacent to the Rodeo Meadows in segments 1-4. The higher frequency of crossings observed in montane chaparral and Jeffrey pine habitats may be related to the abundance of forage and cover that these habitat types provide and their proximity to permanent water.

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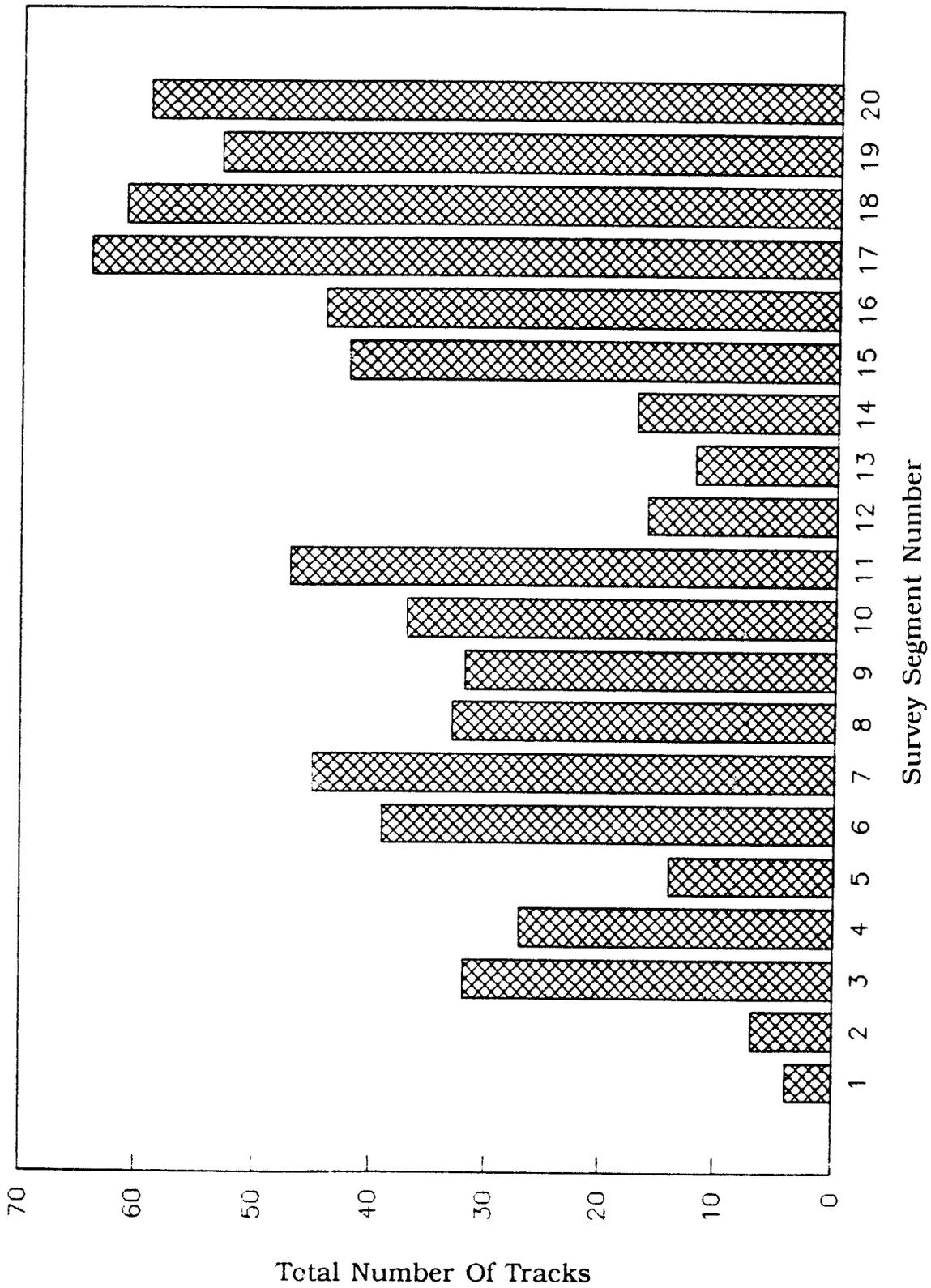
<sup>2</sup> Plant communities occurring within the project area were classified according to the Wildlife Habitat Relationships (WHR) System (Mayer and Laudenslayer 1988) where habitats are grouped according to vegetative dominance. Major plant communities in the project area include montane chaparral, low sagebrush, wet meadow, and Jeffrey pine forest.

**TOTAL NUMBER OF TRACKS PER SURVEY**



**Figure 6**

**DEER TRACK DISTRIBUTION**



**Figure 8**

### Security and Thermal Cover

In the project area, montane chaparral habitat is dominated by curleaf mountain mahogany which grows in dense stands with individual plants ranging from 6-10 feet tall. The density and height of these mountain mahogany stands provides hiding and thermal cover for deer. Hiding cover is a feature of habitat that provides an animal security or a means to escape predators or harassment.

### Forage

In addition to hiding cover, curleaf mountain mahogany and other species associated with montane chaparral habitat [e.g., bitterbrush (Purshia tridentata), snowberry (Symphoricarpos vaccinoides), and (Ceanothus velutinus)], are recognized as important mule deer forages. The Jeffrey pine habitat type also provides a habitat edge where it contacts the low sagebrush habitat in the flats north and east of Pine Cliff resort park. An abrupt ecotone such as this likely furnishes deer with a greater variety of food and cover along the contact zone.

### Water

Summer resident deer use of the montane chaparral and Jeffrey pine habitats in the project area is dependent on permanent, free water available from Gull and June Lakes. Approximately 71% of all tracks counted during the survey period were headed in either an east or west direction across the survey route. Deer which crossed the survey route in an east-west direction were likely moving between permanent water sources located in the canyon bottom and forage and cover located in the uplands. The number of deer tracks counted per survey in the project area increased approximately 62% between August 31 and September 7. This sudden increase in deer use may be related to the declining moisture content of local forages and the resultant need for deer to consume greater quantities of free water. Deer consuming succulent plant growth, which is high in moisture content, typically require less free water. However, when herbaceous plants and other forages become dry and fibrous, the amount of forage water available to deer declines. As a result, deer, especially lactating does which have significantly increased water requirements, must consume greater quantities of free water. Additionally, water requirements by deer appear to be related to dry matter intake, indicating that water consumption may be greatest during spring, summer and fall when forage consumption is greatest.

The moisture content of current annual growth clipped from big sagebrush (Artemisia tridentata) plants sampled approximately 10 miles south of the project area was measured by the U.S. Forest Service during May-September. The big sagebrush moisture content was highest in late-June at 172.5%, and then rapidly declined through mid-September to 78.1%. Forage moisture levels dropped below 100% of dry weight around mid-August, which approximately coincides with the increase in the number of deer tracks observed in the project area. This indicates that as forage water levels declined, resident deer use of permanent water adjacent to the project area increased.

### Topographic Features

Numerous deer trails were identified in the project area during the course of regular field work (Figure 9). Only well-defined trails made by repeated deer use were mapped. The majority of these trails bisected the proposed access route in an eastwest direction, and were used by deer on their way to permanent water located in June and Gull Lakes. Deer trails often occurred in areas where topography and habitat configuration determined deer distribution, such as on steep slopes, in ravines, and along drainage corridors.

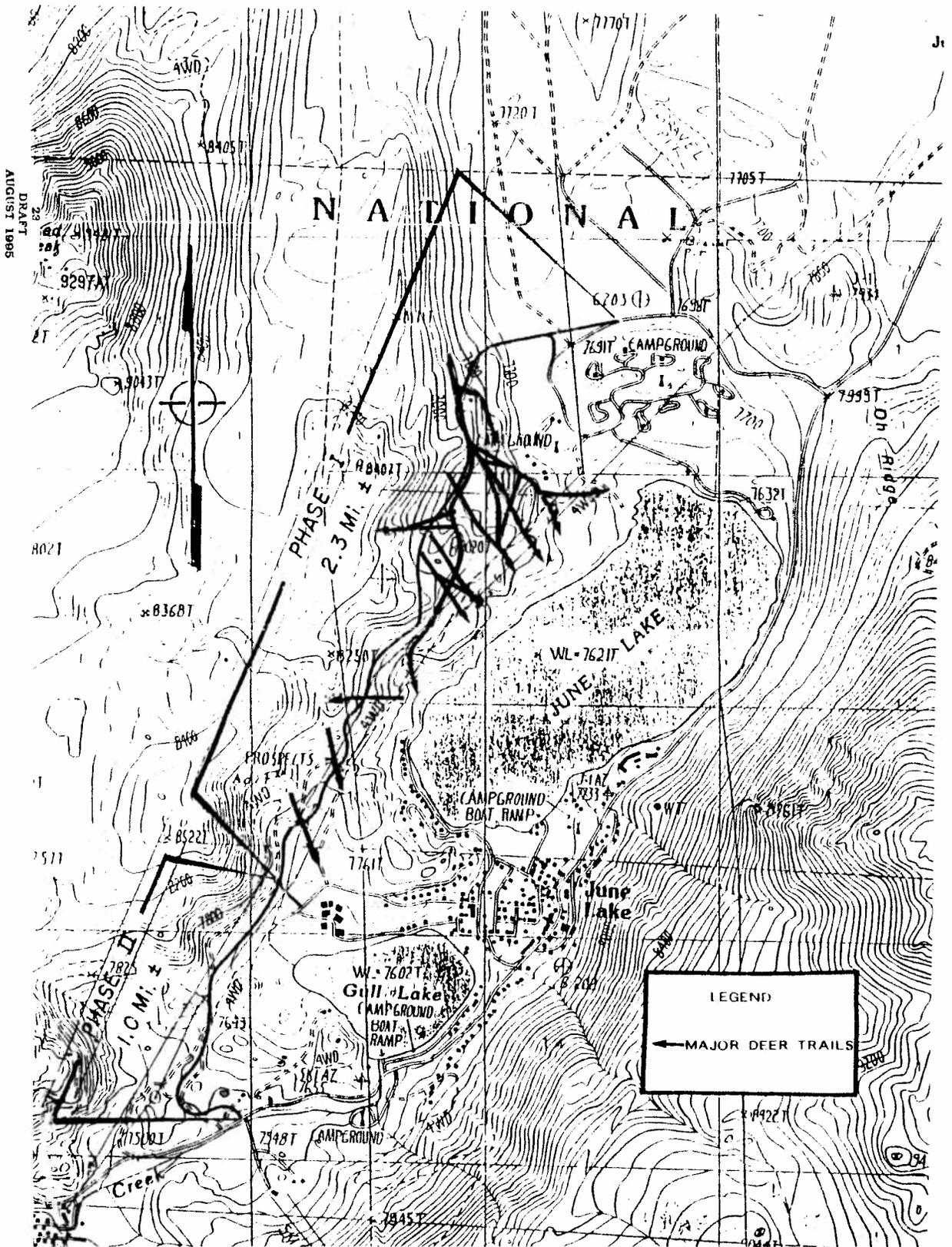


Figure 9

LOCATION OF MAJOR DEER MOVEMENT ROUTES



## **B. SPECIAL STATUS WILDLIFE**

A list of special-status wildlife potentially occurring in the area was compiled before starting field surveys. Species were listed if their geographical ranges and preferred habitats coincided with the project area. Information sources used to compile the special status species list included the California Natural Diversity Data Base and discussions with USFS Wildlife Biologists Richard Perloff, Margie Palchak and Ginelle O'Connor, and DFG Wildlife Biologists Ron Thomas.

### **Special Status Raptors**

The presence of raptors was determined by weekly foot surveys of potential raptor habitat. These potential habitats were examined as thoroughly as possible for adult raptors or signs of raptors such as plucking posts, nest and roost trees, and whitewash on cliffs. Potential nest sites including trees, power poles or telephone poles, and cliffs, located in or immediately adjacent to the proposed alignment were examined for the presence of nests, or for signs of nesting attempts. The presence of all raptors was noted, species and numbers determined, and the location and activity (e.g., feeding, perching, roosting, and nesting) was identified. All potential raptor habitat and observations of birds and signs was plotted on U.S. Geological Survey 7.5 minute series topographic maps. The presence of bald eagles (Haliaeetus leucocephalus) was determined during the course of 4 field days spent in late November and early December by examining on foot those areas of potential eagle habitat. Potential habitats were examined as thoroughly as possible during the evening hours for the presence of night roosts. All observations of birds or sign was recorded and plotted on 7.5 minute series topographic maps of the area.

Special status raptors (Order Falconiformes) of concern to the present project include:

**Bald eagle (Haliaeetus leucocephalus).** Status: California listed Endangered and Federal Endangered. The preferred habitats commonly used by wintering bald eagles in the eastern Sierra are those closely associated with open water such as lakes, reservoirs, wetlands and river systems. In the eastern Sierra, eagles are also known to concentrate in areas that support large populations of black-tailed jackrabbits. Black-tailed jackrabbits, carrion in the form of winter or road-kill mammals, and sick or wounded waterfowl, are all important food items for bald eagles. The largest threat to bald eagles appears to be habitat loss as a result of logging, mineral exploration and other human related activities. These activities, no matter how small or insignificant they may seem, may have a significant, cumulative effect on the total population.

Bald eagles have been observed in the project vicinity, but are not known to nest in or near the project area. June Lake appears to be an adequate foraging area for wintering bald eagles, providing the preferred habitat and food requirements necessary for survival. The project area's proximity to permanent water and mature Jeffrey pine trees provide suitable night roosts for bald eagles (Figure 10). Bald eagles typically roost in mature coniferous trees because they normally afford the greatest protection from inclement weather.

**Golden eagle (Aquila chrysaetos).** Status: DFG species of Special Concern. Golden eagles inhabit the entire length of the Sierra Nevada wherever undisturbed nesting sites, open terrain for foraging and stable food supplies are to be found. The species nests on cliffs, and in scattered large conifers.



No golden eagles were observed in the project area during the course of field work. Mature Jeffrey pine trees in the project area are potential nest sites for golden eagles. However, most of the project area is too near to human disturbance and too limited in its open sagebrush habitat to attract nesting golden eagles or to be an important forging site.

**Cooper's hawk (*Acciptier cooperii*).** Status: California Species of Special Concern. Cooper's hawks breed in dense canopied trees from foothill pine-oak woodlands at 4,500 feet in elevation up to conifer pockets at 10,000 feet. The nesting territory is often located in a small patch of trees that may be less than 200 feet at the widest point. Nests are most often built in the largest available trees and are usually situated about 25 feet above ground. Cooper's hawks forage in woodlands, forests, and edge habitats.

Montane chaparral and associated Jeffrey pine forest habitats within and adjacent to the project area provide suitable nesting and foraging habitat for this species. While no Cooper's hawks or evidence of nesting attempts was observed, the possibility of this species occurring on the site still exists. Particularly, since a nesting pair of Cooper's hawks in a white fir (*Abies concolor*) grove located approximately 100 yards east of the parking lot of the June Mountain ski area was reported in 1987.

**Northern Goshawk (*Accipter gentillis*).** Status: California Species of Special Concern. The goshawk is circumpolar in its distribution with nesting activity in North America restricted primarily to the western and northern United States, Canada, and Alaska. The goshawk is classified as a rare nesting species in the eastern Sierra. They typically nest in aspen stringers along small perennial streams between approximately 7,400-7,800 feet in elevation. The majority of nests are located within 100 feet of water and typically constructed in a mature tree, 35-50 feet tall. Nests are usually positioned in an upper crotch of a tree near the trunk and below the canopy top. In the nesting territory, there are usually numerous nests that have been constructed in previous years. These alternate nest sites are reconstructed and used again. Goshawks forage in forest areas and prey on a variety of small mammals and birds.

No goshawks or evidence of goshawk nesting activity (e.g., nests, plucking post, calling adults or young) was observed during the survey period. In the project vicinity, suitable goshawk nesting and foraging habitat occurs in Rodeo Meadows, where a mature aspen grove and a small perennial stream are present (10).

**Prairie falcon (*Falco mexicanus*).** Status: California Species of Special Concern. The prairie falcon prefers to nest near riparian and wetland habitat when suitable cliffs are available. Prairie falcons have a high fidelity for a particular nesting territory and continue to return to the same site each year. Nest sites are typically located in a pothole or on a protected ledge on the largest or most suitable, perpendicular cliff within the nesting territory. Food preference is largely dictated by availability of prey, however they prefer to hunt smaller mammals and a variety of birds.

No prairie falcons or evidence of nesting prairie falcons (e.g., whitewash on cliffs, calling adults or young) was observed during the survey period. One potential prairie falcon nest site does occur on a cliff located immediately adjacent to the proposed alignment (Figure 10). With the exception of the sagebrush flats at the northern end of the project area, the site lacks suitable foraging grounds for this species.

Other Avian Species

The red-tailed hawk (Buteo jamaicensis) was the only diurnal raptor species observed in the project area. This common raptor was most often observed foraging in the vicinity of Rodeo Meadows and in sagebrush habitat north of Pine Cliff. No red-tailed hawk nest sites were found in the project area. However, mature Jeffrey pine trees in the project area provide potential nesting habitat for red-tailed hawks. Other avian species of management interest observed in the project area include great horned owls (Bubo virginianus) and great blue herons (Ardea herodias). Great horned owls were observed on two separate occasions in the Jeffrey Pine forest located at the northern end of the project area. Great blue herons were frequently observed roosting in mature Jeffrey pine trees.

Special Status Mammals

Special status mammals of concern to the present project include:

**Sierra Nevada Red Fox (Vulpes vulpes necator)**. Status: state listed threatened, Category 2 candidate species, federal sensitive species. The Sierra Nevada red fox, one of 12 subspecies of vulpes vulpes, is a relatively secretive animal that occupies a variety of habitats in the alpine and subalpine zones of the Cascade and Sierra Nevada Mountains of California. Because of its secretive nature, little is known about the habitat and ecology of this subspecies. It has been documented at elevations ranging from 5,000 to 11,000 feet and appears to prefer red fir (Abies magnifica) and lodgepole pine (Pinus contorta) forests in alpine and subalpine zones. The red fox may hunt forest openings, meadows, and barren rocky areas associated with these high elevation habitats. It uses rock piles as denning sites and places to rear their young.

The Sierra Nevada red fox was not detected in the project area. The red fox is known to prefer forested alpine habitats, especially red fir (Abies magnifica) and lodgepole pine (Pinus contorta). Since none of these habitats occur in the project area, the proposed access route does not appear to threaten this species.

**Pine Marten (Martes americana)**. Status: no state status; federal sensitive species. Pine marten occupy areas of elevations ranging between 4,000' to 13,100'. Areas of dense (60% to 100%) canopy closures, multi-storied, multi-species climax coniferous forests with a high number of large (greater than 24 inches Diameter at Breast Height [DBH]) snags and down logs provide the preferred habitat. High quality habitat also includes dense riparian corridors used as travelways, and an interspersed of small (less than one acre) openings with good ground cover used for foraging. The absence of roads is also preferred.

One documented sighting of a pine marten in the immediate vicinity of the proposed project occurred in 1980. However, the project area does not contain suitable denning habitat for the pine marten because it lacks the large snags and down logs associated with dense coniferous forests. The area also lacks dense riparian corridors.

Large Carnivores

Large carnivores detected in the project area include: black bears (Ursus americanus), mountain lions (Felis concolor) and coyotes (Canis latrans). Tracks, scat and beds of black bears were commonly observed in the project area. Tracks of black bears were observed crossing the track survey route on 11 separate occasions and probably involved animals moving between feeding and resting areas. Black bear beds detected in the project area were usually oval shaped and scraped out in the duff on the uphill side of a Jeffrey pine or juniper

tree in areas with dense tree or shrub overstory (e.g. mountain mahogany) and little ground level vegetation. Tracks of a mountain lion were observed north of the ball field on November 8 and evidence of a lion killed deer was observed in the Jeffrey pine forest at the northern end of the project area. Tracks and scat of coyotes were frequently observed in the project area, which provides suitable denning habitat for this species.

### III. IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES

This section discusses potential environmental impacts and mitigation measures to reduce potential impacts. Both potential direct (primary) and indirect (secondary) effects to mule deer and other wildlife resulting from human intrusion, habitat removal, habitat alteration, and direct mortality will be discussed. For clarity, direct or primary impacts are environmental effects resulting from development due to construction and operation activities (e.g., increased road-kills, loss of deer foraging and fawning habitat). Indirect (secondary) environmental effects typically occur outside the project area and do not readily show a cause-effect relationship. Examples of indirect effect impacts include increased physiological stress and lowered productivity in migratory and resident deer, and permanent decreased use or temporary desertion of traditional habitat due to human intrusion.

#### A. GENERAL WILDLIFE IMPACTS

##### Potential Impact 1

The project will eliminate and alter wildlife habitat.

Developing the proposed access road, *including relocating SCE transmission towers*, will result in a direct loss of wildlife habitat. Additionally, the operation of heavy equipment may degrade surrounding natural habitat. The loss of vegetation, however, is a less than significant impact due to the abundance of montane chaparral and Jeffrey pine habitat types on a local scale. The project may also result in removing large conifers along the route reducing the number of potential night roosts for bald eagles and nest sites for Cooper's hawks and goshawks.

Severe climate and poor soils will hinder natural plant revegetation in disturbed areas. A mixture of herbaceous species (grasses and forbs) and weeds would dominate secondary succession in disturbed areas. It is anticipated that shrub species would eventually reestablish on these areas provided that soil resources were left intact. The disturbance of native vegetation would encourage the spread of non-native species, which could inhibit the regrowth of native vegetation and alter the availability of food sources. The loss of native vegetation could increase the potential for erosion and sedimentation.

##### Mitigation Measures

- 1) Limit road construction activities to the general area identified on the road construction plans and confine vegetative disturbance to designated areas. A qualified wildlife biologist, retained by the County, shall review the road construction plans for consistency with the adopted mitigation measures.
- 2) ~~Whenever possible,~~ Locate vehicle parking and equipment storage areas (staging areas) in previously disturbed sites as far as practical from sensitive wildlife habitats to avoid unnecessary disturbance to wildlife and existing native vegetation.

- 3) ~~Whenever possible, utilize existing dirt roads for construction access.~~ Avoid unnecessary disturbance to existing native vegetation **by confining work to the road prism.**
- 4) ~~Whenever possible,~~ Revegetate disturbed areas (~~i.e., cut banks~~ **such as earthen cut and fill slopes**) immediately following construction in order to prevent erosion and reduce weed species invasion.
- 5) ~~Whenever possible,~~ Discourage the spread of weeds by covering stockpiled topsoil, using weed seed-free mulches, and revegetating exposed areas as soon as possible.
- 6) ~~Whenever possible,~~ Avoid removing mature conifers in order to promote regeneration and preserve potential raptor nesting and roost sites (**See also Potential Impact 4, Mitigation Measures 2 and 3**).

Implementing these measures will reduce to less than significant levels elimination and alteration of wildlife habitat impacts.

### **Potential Impact 2**

Increased human intrusion could discourage wildlife use of natural areas adjacent to the road.

Human intrusion renders undisturbed habitat immediately adjacent to the project area unsuitable for wildlife without physically impacting habitat. Human intrusion could result from construction and maintenance activities, visual stimulus, noise and lights, domestic dogs, increased human activity, increased OHV use, and increased traffic associated with increased access.

Human intrusion causes wildlife to desert preferred habitat, either temporarily or permanently, and increase the use of marginal habitats; increase energy expenditure and stress; alter migration routes and daily use patterns; over-utilize adjacent habitat resulting in excessive crowding and increased resource competition; and reduce reproductive potential among wildlife species temporarily displaced by the proposed project.

### **Mitigation Measures**

- 1) Locate snow play areas used for cross-country skiing, snowmobiling, sledding, and other wintertime recreational activities away from potential bald eagle habitat areas.
- 2) The USFS should discourage OHV use and other human activities in critical wildlife areas (e.g., fawning and fawn rearing habitats) located adjacent to the project area through road closures and appropriate signing.
- 3) **Avoid the construction of scenic turnout/parking areas in the road segment between the Pine Cliff Resort and the June Lake Ballfield. Where necessary for motorist safety, construct roadside turnout areas and sign these areas for emergency stopping only.**
- 4) **Where the avalanche by-pass road crosses existing SCE dirt maintenance roads, install gates on the existing dirt roads to prevent day use parking and dispersed camping.**

Implementing these measures will reduce to less than significant levels those impacts resulting from human intrusion.

**Potential Impact 3**

Construction activities may disrupt wildlife movements and reproductive activities.

Construction activities would directly impact wildlife. Noise generated during construction is a form of human intrusion that can adversely effect wildlife behavior. Many animals respond to frequent noise disturbance by moving away from the source, resulting in increased use of marginal habitats, lower wildlife diversity and abundance, increased stress and energy expenditure, and crowding of adjacent natural areas. Some less mobile species (e.g. small mammals) cannot vacate an area subjected to frequent noise disturbance. This results in lower foraging efficiencies and declining reproductive rates. Night lighting accompanying construction can inhibit nocturnal use of the project area by some species (e.g. mule deer, owls).

**Mitigation Measures**

- 1) Limit construction activities to daytime hours to reduce disturbance to nocturnal wildlife species.
- 2) Prohibit free roaming dogs in the project area during the construction period.
- 3) Minimize noise levels by muffling construction equipment such as engines and generators.
- 4) Minimize disturbance by completing site clearing and large tree removal in as short a time as possible during daytime hours when wildlife are least active.
- 5) Control of dust generated during site clearing and movement of heavy machinery through watering or other acceptable measures.

Implementing these measures will reduce to less than significant levels those impacts resulting from construction activities.

**Potential Impact 4**

Direct mortality of wildlife due to construction activities and increased wildlife-vehicle collisions.

Grading and construction of the proposed access route would eliminate invertebrates, small burrowing mammals, fledgling birds and their nests, and other relatively immobile wildlife species. This could decrease wildlife numbers and the prey base for predators. Year-round access could result in road kills, especially during the spring, summer and fall when wildlife are most active.

**Mitigation Measures**

- 1) Establish a maximum 35 mile per hour (mph) speed limit along the proposed access route to reduce the risk of wildlife vehicle collisions.

- 2) The County shall retain a qualified wildlife biologist to examine any mature trees slated for removal for the presence of raptor nests, prior to removal. Use bright colored flagging and/or paint to mark any trees containing raptor nests.
- 3) In the event an active raptor nest is located in or immediately adjacent to the proposed alignment, develop mitigation measures in consultation with the USFS and other interested parties to minimize impacts to the occupants.

These measures will reduce direct mortality impacts on wildlife to less than significant levels.

## **B. MULE DEER IMPACTS**

This investigation identified the project area and vicinity as critical summer range for the Casa Diablo herd mule deer. The project area provides mule deer with high quality forage and cover in proximity to permanent water. The proposed site also provides suitable fawning and fawn rearing habitat.

Impacts to mule deer resulting from the road would be considerable, unless mitigation is adopted. Under the proposed project, construction activities, human intrusion, and direct mortality could pose the greatest potential threat to resident and migratory mule deer.

Anticipated direct impacts to mule deer could adversely effect summer resident and migratory deer which use the project area and vicinity. Indirect impacts, including dog harassment and increased OHV use, could adversely effect the Casa Diablo herd which migrates through and summers adjacent to the project area. Potential significant adverse impacts to this herd segment could have adverse effects on overall Casa Diablo deer herd productivity by contributing to the already poor recruitment rates.

### **Potential Impact 1**

The project would remove or alter approximately 24 acres of wildlife habitat, assuming a 60' wide disturbance corridor and a 3.3 mile long route.

### **Mitigation Measures**

Mitigation measures designed to reduce habitat removal and alteration related impacts to mule deer are the same as for other wildlife species. Additional measures designed specifically for mule deer include:

- 1) ~~Whenever possible, prevent~~ **Limit** barriers (e.g., excessive slash accumulations, log decks, excessive openings, cutbanks and fill slopes, guardrails) to deer movement where the proposed route overlaps or bisects deer movement corridors identified in the wildlife study. Minimize impediments to deer movements such as spoil piles, open ditches, and excessive cut-fill slopes, to the greatest extent possible. For example, avoid leaving ditches or trenches open at night or for prolonged periods of time because they can be hazardous to deer and other wildlife.

Implementing this measure along with the other mitigation measures designed to reduce habitat removal and alteration will reduce to less than significant levels those impacts resulting from habitat removal and alteration.

### **Potential Impact 2**

Increased human intrusion could discourage mule deer use of adjacent natural areas and disrupt daily and seasonal use patterns.

Similar potential human intrusion impacts on mule deer and other wildlife species would occur. See potential impact 2 of the previous section for a more thorough discussion.

### **Mitigation Measures**

Mitigation measures designed to reduce human intrusion related impacts to mule deer are the same as for other wildlife species. Implementing these measures will reduce human intrusion impacts to less than significant levels.

### **Potential Impact 3**

Construction activities may disrupt daily and seasonal mule deer use patterns.

The project's construction phase has the potential to directly impact the daily and seasonal use patterns of mule deer. Additional noise, lights, traffic, and human activity could result from construction activities. Human intrusion resulting from construction could cause impacts that extend beyond the actual boundaries of development. Potential impacts to mule deer resulting from construction related activities include: desertion of preferred habitat and over utilization of adjacent habitat; increased use of marginal habitats; increased energy expenditure and stress; alteration/interference of migration routes and daily use patterns; and adverse physiological effects and reduced reproductive potential.

### **Mitigation Measures**

Mitigation measures designed to reduce construction related impacts to mule deer are the same as for other wildlife species. Additional measures designed specifically for mule deer include:

- 1) Prior to beginning road construction, install a maximum of ~~two~~ **four** artificial drinking sites or "guzzlers"<sup>3</sup> to the west of the project area. A qualified wildlife biologist, retained by the County, in coordination with CDFG and USFS Forest Service biologists shall determine the number and locations of guzzlers.

This measure will reduce human intrusion impacts to mule deer resulting from construction activities to a level of insignificance.

### **Potential Impact 4**

The project could increase direct mortality of mule deer from deer-vehicle collisions.

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<sup>3</sup> Locating guzzlers to the west of the project area will provide resident deer with additional sources of free water. Moreover, guzzlers will reduce the need for animals to cross the proposed access route during construction and operation activities. Guzzlers installed under similar circumstances in Oregon succeeded in reducing traffic mortality by more than two-thirds by the second summer after installation.

Increasing vehicular traffic in the project area, particularly during the spring, summer and fall when deer are in the area, has the potential to decrease deer numbers and decrease the prey base for predators such as mountain lions and coyotes.

**Mitigation Measures**

Mitigation measures specifically designed to reduce the risk of deer vehicle collisions include:

- 1) Establish a maximum 35 mph speed limit along the proposed access route in conjunction with installing universal deer crossing warning signs. Along the entire length of the proposed route, locate deer crossing signs at a maximum of one mile intervals in both north and south-bound lanes or at potential "hot spot" areas identified by a wildlife biologist.
- 2) Clear brush away from the road shoulder at regularly scheduled intervals during the life of the project to provide greater visibility for motorists and decreased cover for deer approaching the roadway.
- 3) ~~Whenever possible, exclude~~ **Minimize** fill slopes, cutbanks, and guardrails in high-use crossing areas because they may funnel deer along the right-of-way, increasing the risk of deer-vehicle collisions.
- 4) Prohibit the use of standard 3-strand, barbed wire fencing along the right-of-way on National Forest land. If fencing is required on private lands, the use of 3-strand fencing with the following specifications: two smooth wire strands located at least 18" off the ground and one barded wire strand on top. At least 18" should separate the strands. ~~Where feasible, install fencing only on flat terrain.~~
- 5) ~~Whenever possible,~~ **Revegetate** disturbed areas using native seed or native plant clippings obtained from local stock.
- 6) Use native species that are not preferred mule deer forages in revegetating disturbed areas adjacent to the roadway. Examples include rabbitbrush (Chrysothamnus) and sagebrush (Artemisia).
- 7) Curves and grades inherent in the project design will help to encourage slower vehicle speeds in the project area.

These measures will reduce impacts to mule deer resulting from direct mortality to less than significant levels.

**C. CUMULATIVE IMPACTS TO MULE DEER**

Cumulative impacts refer to environmental impacts that may not be significant when reviewed in the perspective of just the proposed project, but may have significant impacts when examined in conjunction with other proposed projects in the area.

There are several reasonably foreseeable projects proposed on Casa Diablo deer herd migration routes and seasonal ranges, which could have cumulative impacts on the Casa Diablo deer herd. These projects include:

The Arcularius Ranch, located on the upper Owens River holding area, is planning an expansion of the 1,080 acre guest ranch facility. The upper Owens River holding area is used

by approximately 70% of the Casa Diablo deer herd during annual spring and fall migrations. For this reason, the holding area appears to be an extremely important component of the Casa Diablo deer herd's year-round range and likely plays an integral role in the productivity of this herd. Habitat degradation and human intrusion in the holding area could contribute to declining recruitment rates by lowering the ability of deer to overcome nutritional stress acquired over the winter.

The California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) has started widening U.S. 395 from 2 lanes to 4 lanes in the vicinity of Sandhouse Hill, located between the south June Lake Junction and approximately two miles south of Lee Vining. Telemetry data and track count data indicates that between 50% and 66% of the Casa Diablo herd crosses this section of highway during annual spring and fall migrations. Therefore, the proposed highway expansion could increase deer-vehicle collisions and cause additional direct deer mortality.

Mammoth Mountain Ski Area has proposed development of the Hartley Springs, White Wing Mountain and San Joaquin Ridge areas for alpine skiing. These areas provide important migration and summer range habitat for the Casa Diablo herd.

The Mono County Board of Supervisors recently approved the Tioga Inn Specific Plan, a resort project located on 70 acres of mule deer summer range near Lee Vining, California.

Another consideration regarding migratory mule deer is that the Casa Diablo deer herd is currently experiencing low recruitment rates primarily as a result of the recent drought.

Although the project has the potential to cause potential impacts on the Casa Diablo mule deer herd, implementing the previous wildlife mitigation measures would minimize potential cumulative impacts to a less than significant level.

#### **D. SPECIAL STATUS WILDLIFE**

##### **Bald Eagles**

##### **Potential Impact 1**

The project may have direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts on wintering bald eagles resulting from human intrusion, direct mortality, and habitat removal and alteration.

Considered in conjunction with the Gaz.Ex project and other ongoing and reasonably foreseeable projects in June Lake Loop vicinity, the Avalanche By-pass Road may affect wintering bald eagles, but is not likely to adversely bald eagles at the population level. Temporary displacement from winter foraging and roosting sites, resulting in increased energy expenditure and a decreased energy intake caused by shortened foraging and feeding times would be the most common effects. The road would also permanently convert potential bald eagle habitat.

##### **Mitigation Measures**

The following mitigation measures, which were developed through the informal consultation process with the USFWS, specifically reduce bald eagle impacts.

- 1) Participate in the USFS's 2-year bald eagle monitoring program which will determine bald eagle home range and activity areas, and identify factors that influence variable use

of these areas. Should the monitoring program determine that human disturbance resulting from winter activities is impacting bald eagles, support the establishment of a buffer zone around June Lake.

- 2) Discourage by-pass road users from stopping and exiting their vehicles in areas of eagle habitat. Use signing or other methods to discourage motorists from parking between ~~April and November~~ **November and April**.
- 3) Avoid removing mature conifers to promote regeneration and preserve potential raptor roost sites. During the final staking process, work with the USFS Wildlife Biologist to realign or redesign the road to avoid large, mature conifers which could provide potential bald eagle habitat.
- 4) The County shall retain a qualified wildlife biologist to examine any mature trees slated for removal for the presence of raptor nests, prior to removal. Use bright colored flagging and/or paint to mark any trees containing raptor nests.
- 5) In the event an active raptor nest is located in or immediately adjacent to the proposed alignment, develop mitigation measures in consultation with the USFS and other interested parties to minimize impacts to the occupants.

#### **Sierra Nevada Red Fox and Pine Marten**

##### **Potential Impact 1**

The project may cause adverse impacts on red fox and pine marten resulting from human intrusion, habitat removal and alteration, construction related activities, and direct mortality.

##### **Mitigation Measures**

In addition to the previously discussed General Wildlife Mitigation Measures, the following mitigation measures are designed to specifically reduce impacts on red fox and pine marten.

- 1) ~~Where possible,~~ **Minimize the disturbance of denning, resting and foraging areas by preserve rock piles and dense pockets of vegetation.** ~~to prevent the destruction of denning, resting and foraging areas.~~
- 2) Screen night lighting which could illuminate adjacent wildlife movement corridors, feeding, resting, and breeding areas.

## **BOTANIC RESOURCES**

### **I. INTRODUCTION**

The **Botanical Survey for the Proposed June Lake Alternative Access Route** by Mark Bagley contains botanical information in and around the proposed route. This section briefly summarizes the findings of the report. The full report is contained in Appendix 3.

### **II. SETTING**

#### **A. BACKGROUND**

The Botanical Report concentrates on identifying plant species of concern and vegetation habitat types along the route. The report also identifies potential impacts and mitigation measures for the proposed project.

Researchers walking a 300 foot wide corridor along the entire length of the proposed alignment collected vegetation information. Figure 11 shows the route surveyed by researchers. Exceptions to the 300 foot wide survey corridor were made in four cases:

- Where the route follows the existing paved Oh Ridge road (Figure 11), a single 50 foot wide survey transect, measured outward from the edge of pavement, was walked on each side of the road.
- Where plant species of concern were found in the corridor, additional transects were walked, making a wider survey corridor (Figure 12).
- Where cliffs and very steep slopes occurred in the corridor, the survey corridor was narrowed to exclude these areas. The proposed road will avoid these very steep areas, which occur west of Gull Lake and west of June Lake's south end (Figures 13 and 14).
- Where meadow vegetation occurred in the corridor, the survey corridor was narrowed to exclude the meadow vegetation. The road will completely avoid these sensitive areas. Meadows occurred adjacent to the survey corridor in two places: at the south end of the proposed road near the June Mountain Ski Area, and near the final sharp curve near the south end (Figure 14).

All plant species encountered in the survey area were identified to at least genus and to the level necessary to ensure that they were not plant species of concern. A list of all plant species encountered was recorded and compiled by plant community type. Plant communities along the corridor were mapped and classified according to the California Natural Diversity Data Base system.

If plant species of concern were found in the study area, their locations were mapped, the extent and size of the populations determined by walking additional survey transects, and a California Natural Diversity Data Base field survey form was completed for each.



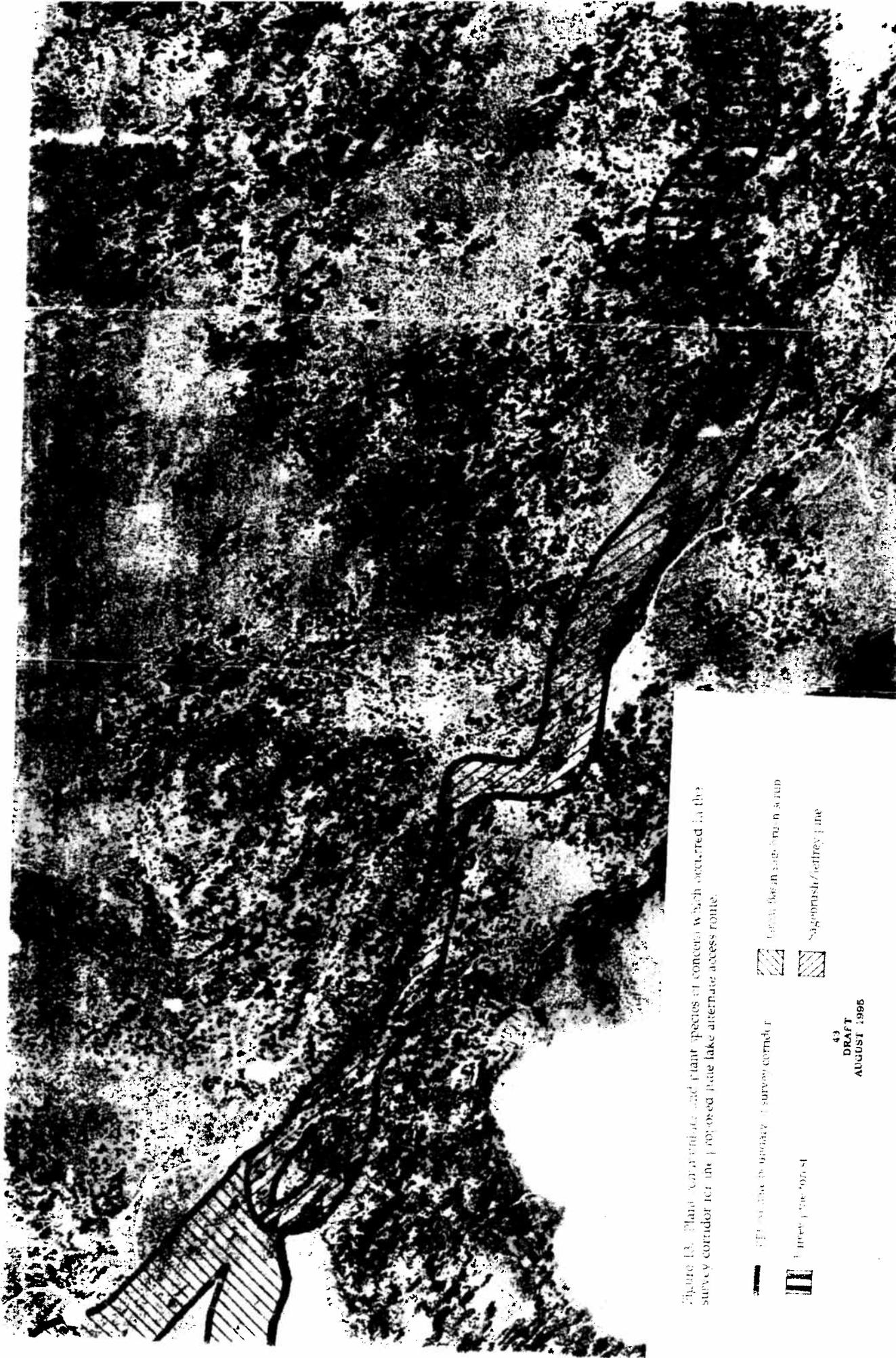


Figure 13. Plant community and plant species of concern which occurred in the survey corridor for the proposed pale lake alternate access route.

- 
 Creosote/bush/creosote
- 
 Grass
- 
 Creosote/bush/creosote
- 
 Sagebrush/creosote

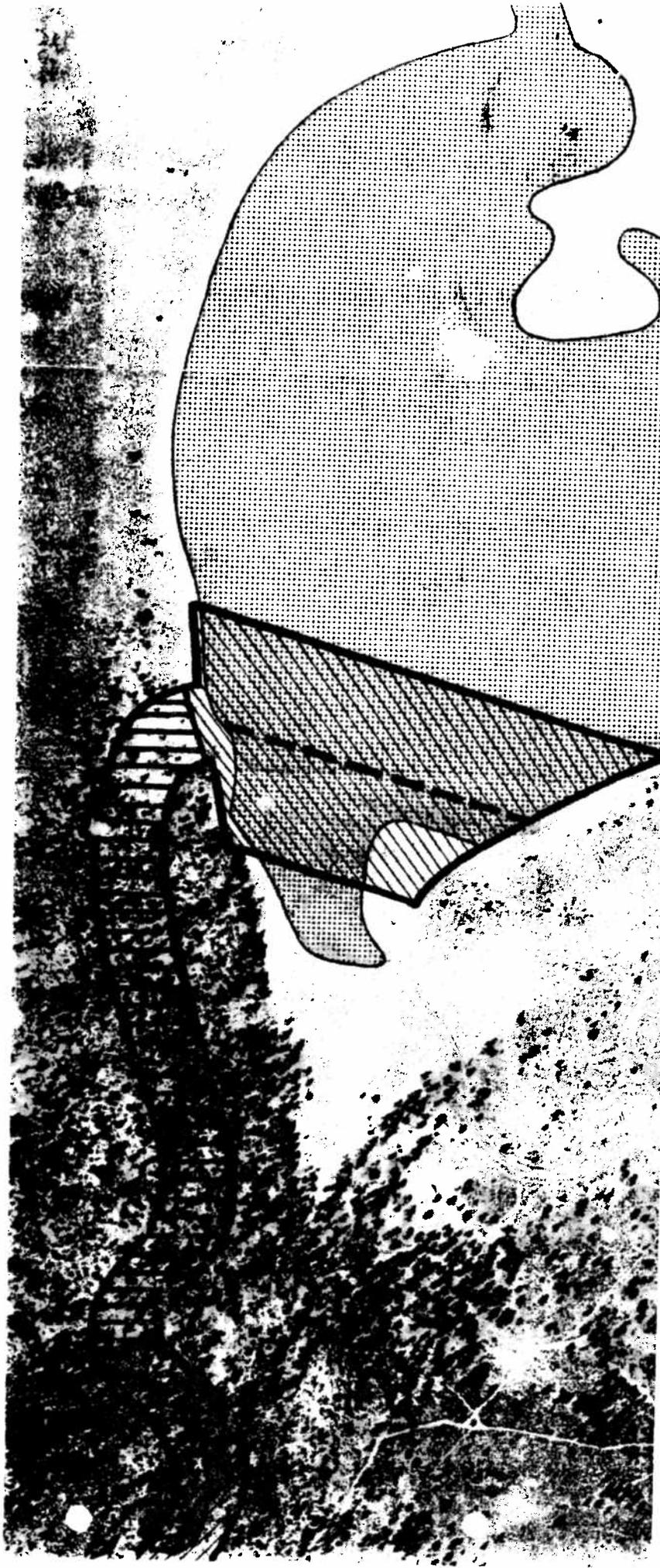


Figure 12. Plant communities and plant species of concern which occurred in the survey corridor for the proposed June Lake alternate access route.

- Approximate boundary of survey corridor
- ▨ Jeffrey pine forest
- ▤ Great Basin sagebrush scrub
- ▧ Sagebrush, Jeffrey pine
- ▩ Location within survey corridor and approximate limits of population
- ▨ Centerline of survey corridor within habitat in open population



Fig. 1. - Plant communities and plant species of concern which occur in the survey corridor on the proposed jubilee lake access route.

-  1. pres. and no. of survey corridor
-  2. al. Bush: Scaevola scrub
-  3. Scaevola/teffery pine
-  4. Montane meadow (excluded from survey, not affected by probe)
-  5. pres. and no. of survey corridor
-  6. al. Bush: Scaevola scrub
-  7. Scaevola/teffery pine
-  8. Montane meadow (excluded from survey, not affected by probe)

**B. PLANT SPECIES OF CONCERN**

A search list of plant species of concern was prepared using previous reports by Bagley and the United States Forest Service, and data from the California Natural Diversity Data Base (CNDDB) and the California Native Plant Society (CNPS). A plant was considered a species of concern if it was:

- 1) a federally or state listed or proposed as a rare, threatened, or endangered species;
- 2) a federal candidate for listing, Category 1 or 2;
- 3) a CNDDB special plant;
- 4) listed by the California Native Plant Society (CNPS) in their inventory of rare and endangered plants of California; or
- 5) listed as a sensitive or watch list plant by the Inyo National Forest.

A species was judged to have some potential for occurring in the study area if it was known to occur in a habitat type and at an elevation range in the project region. Four plant species of concern were determined to have some potential to occur in the study area (Table 1); these plants make up the plant species of concern search list used in planning and conducting the field surveys. For each species in Table 1, information was gathered on status, general distribution, location of nearby populations or populations previously reported within the study area, known elevational range, and habitat preferences.

No federal or state listed, proposed or candidate rare, threatened or endangered plant species were observed during the surveys of the proposed route. Only one plant species of concern, the Mono Lake lupine (Lupinus duranii), was found to occur along the route.

Mono Lake lupine occurred along the route only in the pumice flat west and north of the Oh! Ridge Campground, between the campground and the ridge to the west (Figure 12). The Forest Service manages this land. Mono Lake lupine is a Federal Candidate species for listing as Threatened or Endangered (Category 2) and listed by CNPS as rare or endangered in California and elsewhere (List 1B). It is on the Inyo National Forest Watch List and is proposed for upgrading to Forest Sensitive Plant status. As of April 1994, the Regional Forester had not acted on the proposal for upgrading the status of this species. However, it is Forest policy to treat Watch List plants like Forest Sensitive Plants. Forest management guidelines are to take actions which would assure the continued viability of populations of Sensitive Plants on the Forest.

Estimates, based upon initial field surveys, indicate approximately 9,000-14,000 Mono Lake lupine plants inhabit the 300 foot wide survey corridor on the pumice flat west of the Oh Ridge Campground. Subsequent surveys to estimate the total population of Mono Lake lupine in the area were conducted by walking 300 foot wide corridors adjacent to either side of the original corridor. The remainder of the population was surveyed by walking near the periphery and through the middle of the flat, and by observations made while driving on some of the dirt roads traversing the flat. In total about 25 acres were surveyed in the 900 foot wide survey corridor.

The survey revealed that more Mono Lake lupines occurred north of the road centerline (17,000-28,000 individuals) than on the south (3,000-4,300 individuals). The entire Mono Lake lupine population covered about 150 acres and extended over most of the flat (Figure 12). Over much of the flat, the lupine population density appeared to be similar to the northern portion of the 900 foot survey corridor. Based on that observation, the total number of individuals in the population was estimated to be between 120,000 and 190,000.

**Table 1 – Plant species of concern with some potential to occur on the proposed June Lake alternate access route.**

Scientific/Common Name (Plant Family)/Life Form	Rank or Status 1					General Distribution and Known Locations Elevational Range and Nearest To Project Area 2	Habitat Preferences
	FWS	DFG	CNDDDB	CNPS	INF		
<i>Astragalus monoensis</i> var. <i>monoensis</i> Mono milk-vetch (Fabaceae) herbaceous perennial	C2	R	S2.2	IB	S	SE from near Mono Craters to Mammoth Lakes and Benton Crossing, Mono Co. Nearest location near June Lake Junction.	7600-7900 ft Open, dry pumice flats of sand and gravel, and on road cuts. Sometimes with sagebrush scrub.
<i>Lupinus duranii</i> 2 Mono Lake lupine (Fabaceae) herbaceous perennial	C2	—	S2.2	IB	W2	Mono Basin, from near Lundy Lake to near Mammoth Lakes, Mono Co. Nearest location near June Lake Junction.	6500-8500 ft Open, dry pumice flats of sand and gravel. Sometimes with sagebrush scrub.
<i>Lupinus sublinatus</i> 3 Mono County lupine (Fabaceae) herbaceous perennial	—	—	—	—	—	Known from only one collection "between Mammoth and Earthquake Fault," Mono Co.	about 8000-8500 ft Jeffrey pine forest (other habitat data is unknown).
<i>Streptanthus oliganthus</i> C2 - S2.2 IB S Masonic Mountain jewelflower (Brassicaceae) herbaceous perennial	C2	—	S2.2	IB	S	Sweetwater Mts., Bodie Hills, east slope of Sierra Nevada, and White Mts., Mono and Inyo counties; adjacent west-central Nevada. Nearest location in Lundy Canyon.	7000-9200 ft Pinyon juniper woodland and red fir forest on rocky slopes. In andesite and hydrothermally altered rocks - limestone or travertine.

<sup>1</sup> Rank or status abbreviations:

FWS (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service 1993) listings under the Endangered Species Act: C2 - candidate species, vulnerable but not enough data to support listing at this time.

DFG (California Department of Fish and Game 1994) listings are: R - rare under the California Native Plant Protection Act and California Endangered Species Act.

CNDDDB (California Natural Diversity Data Base 1994) ranks are: S2- endangered. A more precise degree of threat is expressed by a decimal followed by a number. The possible range of values is 1-3 with 1 signifying the most threatened and 3 the least threatened. Example: A species ranked S2.1 is endangered and extremely threatened in California.

CNPS (California Native Plant Society, Skinner and Pavlik 1994) ranks are: IB - plants rare and endangered in California and elsewhere.

INF (Inyo National Forest, U.S. Forest Service 1989) ranks are: S - Forest Sensitive Plant, W2 - Watch List 2 Plant.

<sup>2</sup> The Inyo National Forest (1993) has recommended to the Regional Forester that *L. duranii* be upgraded to Forest Sensitive Plant status.

<sup>3</sup> The recent *Jepson Manual* (Hickman 1993) includes *L. sublinatus* within *L. argenteus* var. *argenteus*. CNPS and CNDDDB have followed this treatment and dropped *L. sublinatus* from consideration in their 1994 listings.

Mono Lake lupine was a major component of the big sagebrush scrub community on the pumice flat. This was a very open scrub, with widely spaced shrubs of big sagebrush (Artemisia tridentata) and bitterbrush (Purshia tridentata), scattered bunch grasses (Achnatherum nevadensis, Elymus elymoides), and patches of sedge (Carex douglasii). Mono milk-vetch (Astragalus monoensis), a sensitive plant which is sometimes associated with Mono Lake lupine in this type of habitat, was not observed.

### C. VEGETATION TYPES

Four vegetation types were mapped in the project survey corridor (Figures 12 to 14). These are described below. In addition, two areas of montane meadow were mapped adjacent to the survey corridor (Figure 14). The survey excluded these meadow areas because the County would design the proposed route around meadow areas.

**Big sagebrush scrub.** The most common vegetation in the survey corridor, big sagebrush scrub, is widely distributed in the eastern Sierra Nevada and throughout the Great Basin. This is an open, shrub dominated type with scattered grasses and herbs. It commonly occurred on dry flats and gentle slopes. Big sagebrush (Artemisia tridentata) was the dominant species in this type, sometimes with a strong mix of bitterbrush (Purshia tridentata). Other species commonly occurring in this type included sulphur flower (Eriogonum umbellatum), rabbitbrush (Chrysothamnus viscidiflorus), many perennial grasses (most commonly Achnatherum nevadensis, A. occidentale, Elymus elymoides, Hesperostipa comata, and Leymus triticoides), and sedges (Carex rossii, C. douglasii). Jeffrey pine (Pinus jeffreyi), western juniper (Juniperus occidentalis) and mountain mahogany (Cercocarpus ledifolius) occurred on small rocky areas within this type. Near the south end of the route a small patch of aspen (Populus tremuloides) occurred on a small slope otherwise dominated by big sagebrush.

**Jeffrey pine forest.** After big sagebrush scrub, the next most abundant vegetation type on the proposed route was Jeffrey pine forest, which occurs from southern Oregon to northern Baja California in the Sierra Nevada, Coast, Transverse and Peninsular Ranges. This forest type is best developed on the east side of the central Sierra Nevada in the Mono Basin and Long Valley areas. It commonly occurred along the survey corridor on dry, moderate to steep slopes and rocky areas. This was a tall, open forest dominated by Jeffrey pine, with a few western juniper and a sparse understory of species typical of sagebrush scrub. Common understory associates included big sagebrush, bitterbrush, mountain mahogany, snowberry (Symphoricarpos rotundifolius), perennial grasses (including Achnatherum nevadensis, Elymus elymoides, Hesperostipa comata, and Leymus cinereus), and sedge (Carex rossii).

**Sagebrush/Jeffrey pine.** On the slopes west of June Lake, the survey corridor was dominated by big sagebrush scrub with scattered Jeffrey pines and patches of very open Jeffrey pine forest. This formed a mosaic of the two types described above. This was mapped as a single type, called sagebrush/Jeffrey pine (Figure 13). Dominant plant species in this area included big sagebrush, mountain mahogany, bitterbrush, and Jeffrey pine and western juniper on the rockier areas.

**Sagebrush/meadow.** A very small part of the survey corridor, about the last 300 feet at the south end, contained a transitional vegetation type, called sagebrush/meadow, with a mix of species typical of both big sagebrush scrub and dry montane meadow. This area is transitional between the big sagebrush scrub on one side and montane meadow on the other (Figure 13). This type of transitional area is commonly found in the region where big sagebrush scrub and lower

elevation montane meadow types come in contact. The dominant species in this area were big sagebrush, creeping wildrye (Leymus triticoides), and slender wheatgrass (Elymus trachycaulus). Other common species included Basin wildrye (Leymus cinereus), wire rush (Juncus balticus), and diffuse gayophytum (Gayophytum diffusum).

### Flora

A species list of all plants encountered within the project study area was compiled (Appendix A). Noted on the species list is the occurrence of each taxon in the three main vegetation types found on the site; big sagebrush scrub, Jeffrey pine forest, and sagebrush/meadow. A total of 127 taxa, occurring in 28 plant families, were recorded along the route.

## III. IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES

### Potential Impact 1

The project would impact a population of Mono Lake lupine (Lupinus duranii), which was the only plant species of concern occurring in the survey corridor.

The project would affect a corridor approximately 50 feet<sup>4</sup> wide by 1,500 feet long or about 1.7 acres of the one Mono Lake lupine population on the route (Figure 12). The total area of this population was about 150 acres, so the project would affect approximately 1.1 % of the Mono Lake lupine habitat. Much of this area would be converted to the new roadway and lost as lupine habitat.

The estimated number of Mono Lake lupine plants affected by the project would range between 2,000 to 3,330 individuals (33.3% [50/150] of the plants in the northern 150 foot corridor times 6,000 to 10,000). This calculation is based upon a lupine population of 6,000 to 10,000 individuals in the northern 150' wide corridor of the 300' wide corridor surveyed and a 50' wide roadway. It should be noted that the lupine population in the southern portion of the survey corridor was much less at 2,600-4,000 individuals. Using the high end of the estimated Lupine population density (3,330 individuals), 1.8% to 2.8% of the total population on this pumice flat would be impacted (3,330 individuals divided by 190,000 and 120,000 total plants). Using the low population density estimate (2,000 plants), the project would affect about 1.1% to 1.7% of the total population (2,000 individuals divided by 190,000 and 120,000 total plants). Therefore, it is estimated that the project would affect between 1.1% and 2.8% of the Mono Lake lupine population on this pumice flat.

Adverse impacts on 1.1% of the habitat and between 1.1% and 2.8% of the plants in this large population would certainly not threaten the population's continued existence. The project would affect such a small part of this population that project impacts to plant species of concern would be considered less than significant. Additionally, any future development in the population would occur on National Forest lands managed by the Forest Service, which would manage the area for the continued existence of the Lupine population.

### Mitigation Measures

Even though the project would impact only a small part of the Mono Lake lupine population and would be considered less than significant, the following mitigation measures are proposed to further reduce the project's potential environmental impact:

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<sup>4</sup> The 38' wide road plus fill slopes would extend the road prism out to an average width of 50'.

- 1) The access road was moved south of the survey corridor into an area less densely populated by Mono Lake lupine. The modified alignment would impact less than 200 plants and would reduce the impact from the estimated 1500-2500 plants affected by the original route. Additionally, the modified design would enhance public safety by increasing site distances and separating traffic and turning movements.
- 2) Between station 102 and 122, all construction equipment and personnel will stay in a minimum width work corridor to minimize disturbance on the Mono Lake lupine population. No off-road travel and no equipment turn around areas shall be allowed outside of the minimum width work corridor. Prior to starting construction activities, the work corridor shall be staked and flagged so that the boundaries are clear to all personnel.
- 3) Where feasible, use native pumice soil on roadway fill areas between Station 102 to 122 and allow the vegetation to recolonize roadway fills. Prevent the use herbicides and do not reseed the roadway fill areas. The Mono Lake lupine is known to colonize dirt roads and road shoulders which cross a known population. In this case, there would be a large population nearby as a source for recolonizing the road shoulder.

### **Potential Impact 2**

The project has the potential to impact sensitive vegetation types, particularly nearby montane meadow areas.

Although sensitive montane meadow areas are located near portions of the proposed alignment, the roadway was designed to avoid meadow areas. With the proposed design, the alignment would not impact any sensitive vegetation types occurring in the area of the proposed route.

The route would convert .34 acres (50 feet wide by about 300 feet long) of sagebrush/meadow transitional type. This small impact to the sagebrush/meadow would be considered less than significant. The other vegetation types occurring along the route, big sagebrush scrub and Jeffrey pine forest along with the sagebrush/Jeffrey pine mosaic areas, are common and widespread types found throughout the eastern Sierra and beyond. These are not considered sensitive vegetation types. The project will result in creating an approximately 50 foot wide strip through these types of vegetation. This would affect only a small portion of these vegetation types occurring in the project vicinity and would result in a less than significant project impact. No mitigation is proposed.

### **Potential Impact 3**

The project could impact botanical resources located outside of the survey corridor due to changes in the roadway alignment since the botanical survey was conducted.

Most changes in the proposed alignment are fairly minor and would fall into the survey route, however three sections of the revised route would occur outside of the survey corridor (Figure 15). These sections occur on the fairly steep slopes west of June Lake. Based upon field surveys and aerial photos, the vegetation in these three sections appears to be the same widespread Jeffrey pine forest and sagebrush/Jeffrey pine vegetation as in the nearby survey corridor. Mono Lake lupine (Lupinus duranii) and Mono milk-vetch (Astragalus monoensis) would not be found in these habitats. Additionally, these areas appear to have a very low potential for any other plant species of concern. Therefore, the route changes are not expected to result in any additional impacts to botanical resources. No mitigation is proposed.

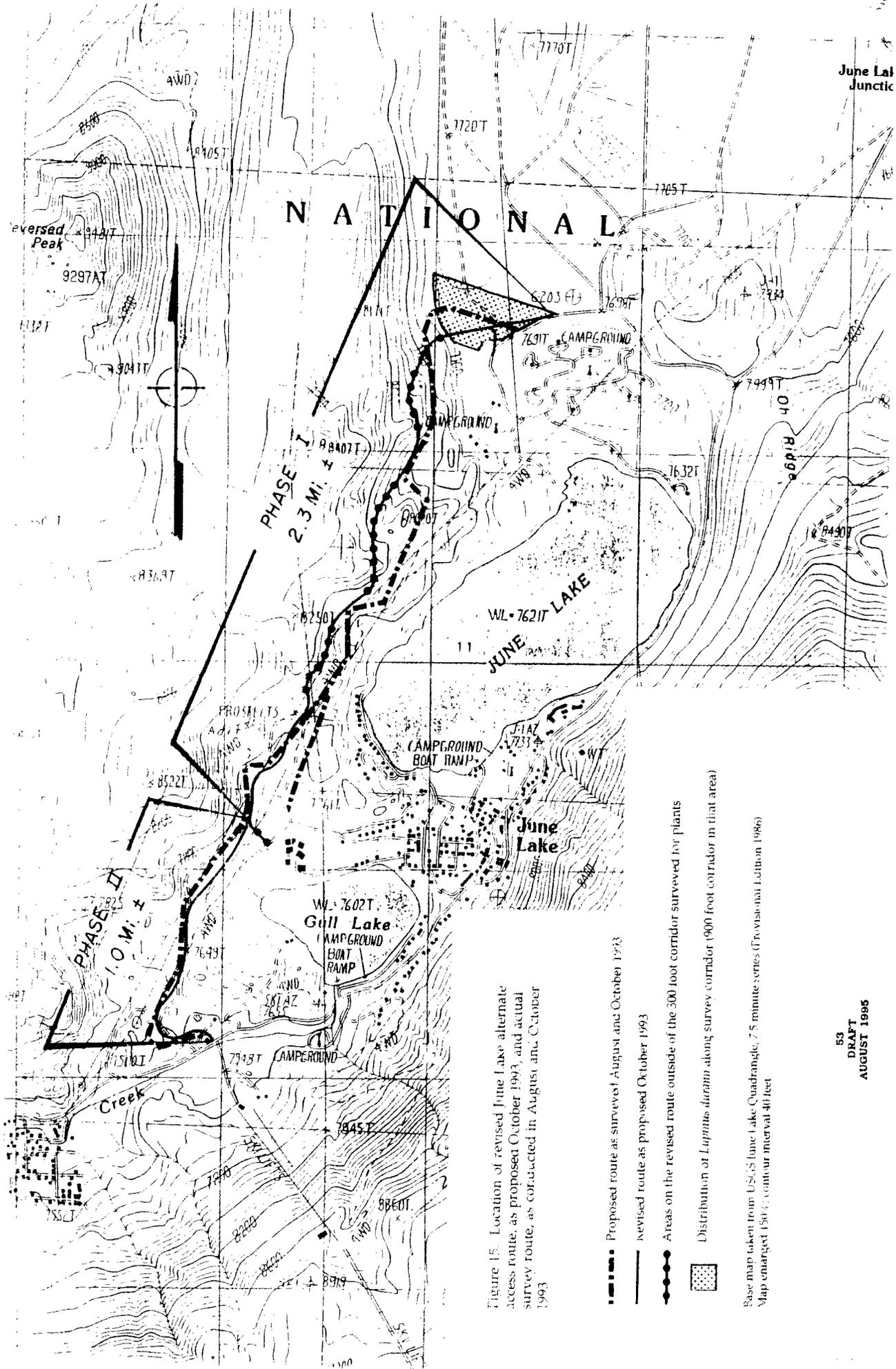


Figure 15. Location of revised June Lake alternate access route, as proposed October 1993, and actual survey route, as conducted in August and October 1993

- Proposed route as surveyed August and October 1993
- - - Revised route as proposed October 1993
- Areas on the revised route outside of the 300 foot corridor surveyed for plants
- Distribution of *Lupinus albus* along survey corridor (900 foot corridor in that area)

Base map taken from USGS June Lake Quadrangle, 7.5 minute series (Provisional Edition 1986)  
 Map enlarged 150%; contour interval 40 feet

## CULTURAL RESOURCES

### I. INTRODUCTION

Trans-Sierran Archaeological Research (TSAR) completed the Cultural Resources inventory for the June Lake Alternative Access Route. The report, **An Archaeological Survey of the June Lake Alternative Access Route Mono County, California** with appendices (Appendix 4), is on file with the Mono County Planning Department. The survey area included 190 acres

Prior to starting field work, the regional office of California Archaeological Inventory provided a complete records check for the study area. Field work for the alternate access route was completed in nine person days. The survey inventoried the complete project route and several alternative routes with Mono County and Forest Service personnel.

### II. SETTING

Paved access to June Lake is provided by State Highway 158, which is subject to avalanche closures during and after winter storms. The June Lake alternative access route would avoid avalanche hazards and provide year round access. The proposed route is located along the north side of June and Gull Lakes at elevations between 7,500 and 8,000 feet. The proposed route crosses mixed conifer and sagebrush scrub vegetation communities.

The cultural resources inventory identified eleven sites in the project area; seven newly recorded sites, and four previously recorded sites. Of the seven new sites, four isolates were located and recorded.<sup>5</sup> Two of the new sites were shovel tested, the four previous sites were revisited and one isolate was recorded.

#### A. NEW RECORDED SITES

June Lake Site 1 (CA-MNO-2786) covers 3,900 square meters of historic and prehistoric artifact scatter. The historic artifacts consist of 26 sanitary seal and condensed milk cans within the remains of a dump. The prehistoric artifacts include a unifacial slab metate, three retouched obsidian flakes, and a few unmodified obsidian flakes. Obsidian hydration testing suggests the site was used during the Newberry period, approximately 2,900 years B.P.

June Lake Site 2 (CA-MNO-2787) covers 175 square meters of dense lithic scatter artifacts consisting of two small biface fragments, a core fragment, numerous biface retouch flakes, several hundred unmodified obsidian flakes, and one basalt flake. Site occupation was during the Marana period, approximately 500 years B.P.

June Lake Site 3 (CA-MNO-2788) artifacts included a possible milling stick, a shallow bedrock mortar, a brown ware sherd, an obsidian drill, a core, two core fragments, some fire cracked rock, and several hundred obsidian, chert, and basalt flakes. Site use occurred during the Marana period, approximately 500 years B.P.

June Lake Site 4 (CA-MNO-2789) is a sparse lithic scatter. Analysis revealed ten black opaque obsidian flakes. Site use was in the Newberry period, approximately 2,100 years B.P.

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<sup>5</sup> Isolates, according to the California Archaeological Inventory criteria, are defined as less than 15 items per 100 square meters or not involving a feature.

June Lake Site 5 (CA-MNO-2790) contains a historic sheep corral measuring 100 by 100 feet with downed fencing. Tin cans, bottle glass, ceramics, and lumber are scattered at the site. Date of bottles indicate use of site around the 1950's.

June Lake Site 6 is a mine that consists of two rock adits, a rock dump, and associated artifacts. The larger adit contains 8 by 8 inch timbers, corrugated sheet metal, an embedded rock drill bit, metal and PVC pipe, and a metal bedspring. Below the rock dump are four tires, an aluminum switch board, and a steel drum.

June Lake Site 7 (CA-MNO-2791) is a 1,650 square meter lithic scatter. Two roughouts and hundreds of large primary and secondary obsidian flakes were found at the site. Several of the flakes were on top of 3 to 4 inches of pine duff. This could indicate recent site disturbance since the area is located near a dispersed campsite. Some of the scatter material indicates site use during the Haiwee period, approximately 1,300 years B.P.

### **B. PREVIOUSLY RECORDED SITES**

Site CA-MNO-145 consists of prehistoric lithic scatter covering 3,500 square meters. Hydration testing on five obsidian flakes and a biface tip suggests Newberry period site use, approximately 1,700 years B.P.

Site CA-MNO-338 was previously analyzed as a sparse lithic scatter covering 25,000 square meters. Artifacts from previous surveys included projectile points, bifaces, and hundreds of obsidian flakes. Site use occurred during the Newberry period, approximately 1,630 years B.P.

Site CA-MNO-1525 yielded six artifacts. The five obsidian flakes and one biface fragment suggest use during the early Newberry period, approximately 300 years B.P., and the Marana period, approximately 380 years B.P. Prior surveys revealed three bedrock mortars and several thousand obsidian flakes.

Site CA-MNO-2436 yielded five obsidian flakes for analysis. Results indicate use during the Little Lake and early Newberry period approximately 3,100 years B.P. Artifacts from previous surveys included two possible core fragments, and approximately 100 black opaque and black banded obsidian flakes.

### **C. SIGNIFICANT SITES**

The significance of a site depends on the ability "to provide information in history, prehistory, address important research questions, and or contribute to the study of important research problems." The Trans-Sierran Archaeological Research (TSAR) report identified six significant sites (Table 2). Of these six, the proposed alternative access route might impact four sites.

According to the Forest Service, sites CA-MNO-145 and CA-MNO-2436 are eligible for the National Register for their information potential (see section E. criterion D). June Lake Sites 2 (CA-MNO-2787), 3 (CA-MNO-2788), CA-MNO-338, and CA-MNO-1525 appear to be eligible for the National Register based on information potential as well.

June Lake Sites 2 (CA-MNO-2787) and 3 (CA-MNO-2788) could provide information on the late prehistoric (Marana) period.

CA-MNO-338 has a substantial subsurface deposit and diverse artifact assemblage. Information from this site could address questions concerning diachronic patterns of lithic technology, obsidian production and exchange, subsistence, regional chronology, and related issues.

CA-MNO-1525 "has two temporal components that could provide information on change or consistency of an ecological niche through time."

**D. POTENTIALLY SIGNIFICANT SITE**

The Cultural Resource Study concluded that the significance of June Lake Site 1 (CA-MNO-2786) cannot be determined with limited testing, and additional subsurface testing and chronometric analysis was recommended. Since the survey was completed, the road was realigned to pass through the site ***and additional subsurface testing, in accordance with guidelines in the California State Office of Historic Preservation's California Archaeological Resource Identification and Data Acquisition Program: Sparse Lithic Scatters, was conducted. Fifteen 50 cm by 50 cm test excavation pits uncovered one biface fragment and 27 flakes. The consulting archaeologist concluded that this site is especially sparse compared to other sites in the region and that the cultural material present likely represents only ephemeral or even one-time use, with artifacts likely dispersed by modern construction (three powerlines and a dirt road across the site) and natural pedoturbation processes. Further, the archeologist states that the site does not appear eligible for the National Register and no further research is recommended.***

~~—triggering additional analysis of the previously collected information.— The previously collected information was analyzed by both Jeffrey Burton, consulting archaeologist, and Wallace Woolfenden, USFS archaeologist. After further review, the consulting archaeologist concluded that further work at the site is not warranted for the following reasons:~~

- ~~1) The project will disturb only a small portion of the site and the area disturbed would be covered by fill material, which could allow for future excavation, if warranted; and~~
- ~~2) The recording and initial testing suggest both surface and subsurface materials are very sparse, and no features were encountered or indicated.~~

~~The USFS archaeologist, after examining the Archaeological Site Record contained in the Cultural Resources Appendix and consulting with Jeffrey Burton, concluded that the site contains a low density artifact concentration, which does not meet the National Register artifact density criteria for a significant site. Further, enough is known about the nature of the regional archaeology to not require additional review of the site.~~

**E. NATIONAL REGISTER EVALUATION CRITERIA**

The National Historic Preservation Act Title 36, Section 60.6 states:

The quality of significance in American history, architecture, archeology, and culture is present in districts, sites, building, structures, and objects that possess integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association, and:

- (A) that are associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history; or
- (B) that are associated with the lives of persons significant in our past; or
- (C) that embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or that represent the work of a master, or that possess high artistic

- values, or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction; or
- (D) that have yielded, or may be likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

All study sites were measured against criterion D.

**F. MANAGEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Cultural Resource Study recommends that three sites CA-MNO-2788 (June Lake Site 3), CA-MNO-1525, and CA-MNO-338 need further consideration in the alternate access road project. Table 2 summarizes and proposes management recommendations for new and existing sites surveyed for the alternate access road project.

<b>Table 2 -- Summary of Recorded Sites and Management Recommendations</b>					
<b>New Sites</b>		<b>Site Type</b>	<b>Significant</b>	<b>Impacts</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>
<b>Field</b>	<b>Permanent</b>				
June Lk 1	CA-MNO-2786	Artifact Scatter	No	Yes	0
June Lk 2	CA-MNO-2787	Lithic Scatter	Yes	None	0
June Lk 3	CA-MNO-2788	Artifact Scatter /BRM	Yes	Indirect	2
June Lk 4	CA-MNO-2789	Lithic Scatter	No	Yes	0
June Lk 5	CA-MNO-2790	Historic Corral	No	Possible	0
June Lk 6		Historic Mine	No	No	0
June Lk 7	CA-MNO-2791	Lithic Scatter	No	Possible	0
<b>Previous Sites</b>					
	CA-MNO-145	Lithic Scatter	Yes	No*	0
	CA-MNO-338	Lithic Scatter	Yes	No* <sup>1</sup>	2
	CA-MNO-1525	Lithic Scatter /BRM	Yes	Possible	2
	CA-MNO-2436	Lithic Scatter	Yes	No* <sup>1</sup>	0

BRM - bedrock milling feature  
 \* 1 - project route was modified to avoid these sites  
 \*Recommendations: 0 - no further work, 1- data recovery, and 2 - avoidance or limited data recovery.

**III. IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES**

**Potential Impact 1**

The proposed project has the potential to directly impact sites CA-MNO-338 and CA-MNO-1525, which are located adjacent to the proposed alignment.

The current road alignment passes on the north-west side of CA-MNO-338. Without precautionary measures such as realigning the road at least 100 feet from the site and limiting work activities to approved construction areas, road construction could impact this site. With the project changes, no impacts are anticipated.

Site CA-MNO-1525 exists approximately 120 feet downslope of the proposed road alignment. Road construction would not bury the site since extensive earthwork is not proposed in this road section.

### **Potential Impact 2**

The project could result in indirect impacts on site CA-MNO-2788 related to surface collection from motorists pulling off of the road at this location.

The proposed road alignment runs at least 90 feet upslope of this site. At this location, the road would lie five to nine feet above the adjacent grade. This difference in elevation from the road to the adjacent grade as well as the 90 foot change in elevation between the road and the site, should discourage motorist from parking along the access road and visiting the site. No mitigation is proposed.

### **Mitigation Measures**

~~With the exception of site CA-MNO-2786,~~ The proposed avalanche by-pass road avoids significant cultural resource sites. However, should future changes in project design occur during the final engineering and design stage, the following mitigation measures are proposed:

- 1) If the avoidance of significant cultural resource sites proves infeasible, ~~particularly at site CA-MNO-2786,~~ conduct data recovery in accordance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, as required by the State Historic Preservation Office.
- 2) Design the project to avoid increasing human intrusion and surface collecting near significant cultural resource sites (site CA-MNO-2788). Design measures would include aligning the road further away from sites and preventing roadside parking near significant sites.
- 3) Establish a 100 foot setback from cultural resource sites (sites CA-MNO-338 and CA-MNO-1525) and ensure that road construction or construction activities does not occur in identified areas.

## EROSION AND SEDIMENTATION

### I. INTRODUCTION

June and Gull Lakes not only enhance the scenic qualities of the June Lake Loop, they provide water based recreational opportunities, primarily trout fishing. The proposed roadway is located in the watersheds of June and Gull Lakes on the north-west side of the lakes. Disturbance of existing native vegetation and the addition of impervious surfaces in the area could increase stormwater runoff and increase sedimentation into the lakes. This section was prepared by the Mono County Planning and Public Works Departments.

### II. SETTING

#### A. BACKGROUND

The 3.3 mile long access road is proposed north-west of June and Gull Lakes. Phase I of the project starts north-west of the Pine Cliff Resort and proceeds south-east along the mountainous and rocky bench overlooking June Lake. At its closest point, approximately 450 feet separates the road from June Lake. After dropping down into the West Village area, the roadway winds along the base of the cliff above the June Lake Ballfield. Phase II begins south-west of the ballfield and the proposed Leonard Avenue extension. The road continues along the base of the hill before cutting through a small rocky saddle separating the West Village from the Rodeo Grounds. This section of road is located approximately 550 feet from Gull Lake at its nearest point. Once over the saddle, the road drops down and skirts the Rodeo Meadows, before winding over and down a small hill to connect with S.R. 158 across from the June Mountain Ski Area's eastern driveway.

A combination of loose pumice soils overlying bedrock and solid bedrock will underlie the proposed road. The road will be constructed through mountainous and rolling terrain which, requires blasting through solid bedrock or using fill to flatten out roadway grades. Along the road's centerline line, preliminary engineering shows roadway cuts of up to 36 feet deep, and fills of up to 24 feet in depth. Where topography and geomorphology will allow, the project will feature 1 to 1 or 1.5 to 1 (horizontal to vertical) roadway cuts. Using the proposed ratios at the deep cut locations, the roadway cut slopes would be between 36 feet and 54 feet high, measured at the road's centerline. Fill slopes would use 1.5 to 1 or 2 to 1 horizontal to vertical slope ratios. In the worst cases, fill slopes could extend up to 48 feet out from the start of the fill slope. The potential cut and fill slopes at the outer edges of the roadway could exceed the anticipated fill and cut slopes measured at the centerline.

#### B. SOUTH LAHONTAN BASIN PLAN

The Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board's (LRWQCB) **South Lahontan Basin Water Quality Control Plan** (Basin Plan) 1975 establishes water quality standards and water quality control measures. These control measures and standards include discharge prohibitions, and numerical and narrative water quality objectives to protect designated beneficial surface water uses. The beneficial uses for June and Gull Lake are contained in Table 3.

<b>Table 3 – LRWQCB Beneficial Uses</b>		
<b>Beneficial Uses</b>	<b>June Lake</b>	<b>Gull Lake</b>
Municipal and Domestic Water Use	X	
Water Contact Recreation	X	X
Nonwater Contact Recreation	X	X
Cold freshwater Habitat	X	X
Wildlife Habitat	X	X

The LRWQCB maintains beneficial uses by enforcing Basin Plan policies and the issuing waste discharge permits. Since the proposed project will result in greater than five acres of disturbance, the project requires a National Pollution Discharge Elimination System General Stormwater Permit from Lahontan. The purpose of the permit is to reduce both short-term and long term erosion and sedimentation impacts resulting from the project.

**C. JUNE LAKE AREA PLAN POLICIES**

The Open Space and Conservation Element of the June Lake Area Plan contains policies to minimize potential impacts to surface waters by limiting erosion and controlling stormwater discharges. Objective C, Action 1.1 calls for incorporating erosion control measures that create a zero off-site net increase in runoff into project designs and Action 1.3 calls for working with the LRWQCB to ensure that erosion and drainage control measures are adequate to protect water resources.

**D. FOREST SERVICE BEST MANAGEMENT PRACTICES**

The Inyo National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan calls for implementing Best Management Practices (BMPs) to meet water quality objectives, and to maintain and improve the quality of surface water on the Forest (p. 95). The Handbook, entitled **Water Quality Management for National Forest System Lands in California**, contains the Forest Service's BMPs.

**III. IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES**

**Potential Impact 1**

The cut and fill slopes, along with the road's pavement, could cause additional erosion and sedimentation into June and Gull Lakes and tributaries.

The project will disturb and replace natural areas with pavement, and cut and fill slopes. Replacing vegetation would also decrease absorption rates, alter drainage patterns and rates, and increase the amount of surface water runoff. Adhering to Mono County's Grading permit requirements, the Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board's Discharge permit requirements, and Forest Service BMPs will minimize the project's impacts. The Grading permit and Lahontan permit as well as the Forest Service BMPs require both short-term and long-term erosion control measures. Short-term measures may include placing straw bales along down slope edges of the project; temporary ground coverings; watering of exposed surfaces; grading during an approved construction period; and bonds or sureties to guarantee

site stabilization. Long-term measures may include revegetating exposed surfaces and constructing drainage facilities. Other potential mitigation measures would be using stem or crib walls in strategic locations along the road to minimize cut and fill slopes, reduce cut and fill slopes through project design and minimizing the extent of surface disturbance.

**Mitigation Measure**

- 1) Roadway grading and construction shall conform to the County's Grading and Drainage Ordinance, LRWQCB General Stormwater Permit Requirements, and Forest Service BMPs. Prior to starting construction, the County shall obtain a County Grading Permit, a LRWQCB General Stormwater Permit, and Forest Service approval. The two permits and Forest Service approval requires specific mitigation measures to control drainage and erosion. Permit measures may include minimizing the project's disturbance through roadway designs, restricting vegetation disturbance to areas identified on approved construction plans, restricting the disposal of cut and fill material to designated disposal areas, keeping construction equipment in designated construction areas, using short-term and long-term erosion and sedimentation control measures, and revegetating disturbed areas as soon as possible following construction.

Obtaining necessary permits from the Mono County Public Works Department and the LRWQCB, as well as complying with the Forest Service BMPs will reduce erosion and sedimentation impacts to less than significant levels.

**Potential Impact 2**

*The avalanche by-pass road could create additional runoff and alter existing drainage patterns, particularly for land uses adjoining the road.*

**Mitigation Measure**

- 1) *The Mono County Public Works Department, in designing the road's drainage system, shall not concentrate additional runoff from the road onto surrounding properties such as the Pine Cliff Resort or private parcels in the West Village and Rodeo Grounds.*

## VISUAL RESOURCES

### I. INTRODUCTION

The June Lake area greatly benefits from the undisturbed landscape on the north-west side of June Lake and the partially disturbed landscape west of Gull Lake. The primary views of the area are available from S.R. 158, June Lake, Gull Lake, and the June Lake Village. The following section analyzes the visual character of the area and the proposed project's potential visual impacts. The analysis concentrates on views from vantage points along the Oh! Ridge Road, S.R. 158, and activity areas on June Lake and Gull Lake such as lakeside resorts, day use areas, campgrounds, and boat marinas. The Mono County Planning Department and the USFS prepared this section.

### II. SETTING

#### A. VISUAL MANAGEMENT SYSTEM -- NATIONAL FOREST LAND

The United States Forest Service manages the visual resources of the June Lake Loop's National Forest lands according to the Visual Management System. This system establishes Visual Quality Inventory based upon a combination of scenic quality (Variety Class), the viewer's concern for scenic quality (Sensitivity Level), and the distance from the view point to the object (Distance Zones<sup>6</sup>). The inventory, based upon a combination of the above factors, describes the levels of acceptable alterations that can occur without harming the resource. These levels are defined as follows:

Preservation (P) - Allows only ecological changes on the land and would restrict uses to only very low visual impact recreational facilities.

Retention (R) - Allows management activities which repeat characteristics already found in the natural landscape.

Partial Retention (PR) - Allows management activities which repeat characteristics already found in the natural landscape and other changes provided that the visual impact is dominated by the natural environment.

Modification (M) - Allows management activities that may visually dominate the natural characteristics of environment but also borrow some of its features.

The inventory levels are then applied as assigned Visual Quality Objectives to the various landscapes through the Forest Land and Resource Management Plan. These objectives are applied forest-wide standards and guidelines, management prescriptions, and specific management area direction. The following direction, from the **Inyo National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan**, applies to the project area:

#### Forest Wide Standards and Guidelines -- Visual Resources

- Obtain the Forest Supervisor's approval through the environmental analysis process for any deviations from Visual Quality Objectives (VQOs) assigned in Prescriptions.

<sup>6</sup> Distance Zone categories. Foreground -- distances of less than 1/2 mile between the view point and the object; Middleground -- distances between 1/2 mile to 5 miles; and Background -- distances beyond 5 miles.

- Maintain foregrounds and middlegrounds of the scenic corridors of the following travel routes to Retention and/or Partial Retention VQOs as inventoried, but not less than Partial Retention:
  1. Highways officially designated by the state as California State and County Scenic Highways (S.R. 158).
- Meet the Retention VQO in all foreground zones, of other Sensitivity Level 1 roads and trails, recreation sites, and within all concentrated recreation areas.

**Management Prescriptions -- Concentrated Recreation Area (#12)**

- Meet the Retention VQO for all new, non-recreation-oriented facilities and the Partial Retention VQO for all other facilities, including recreation sites.

**Management Area Direction -- June Lake Loop**

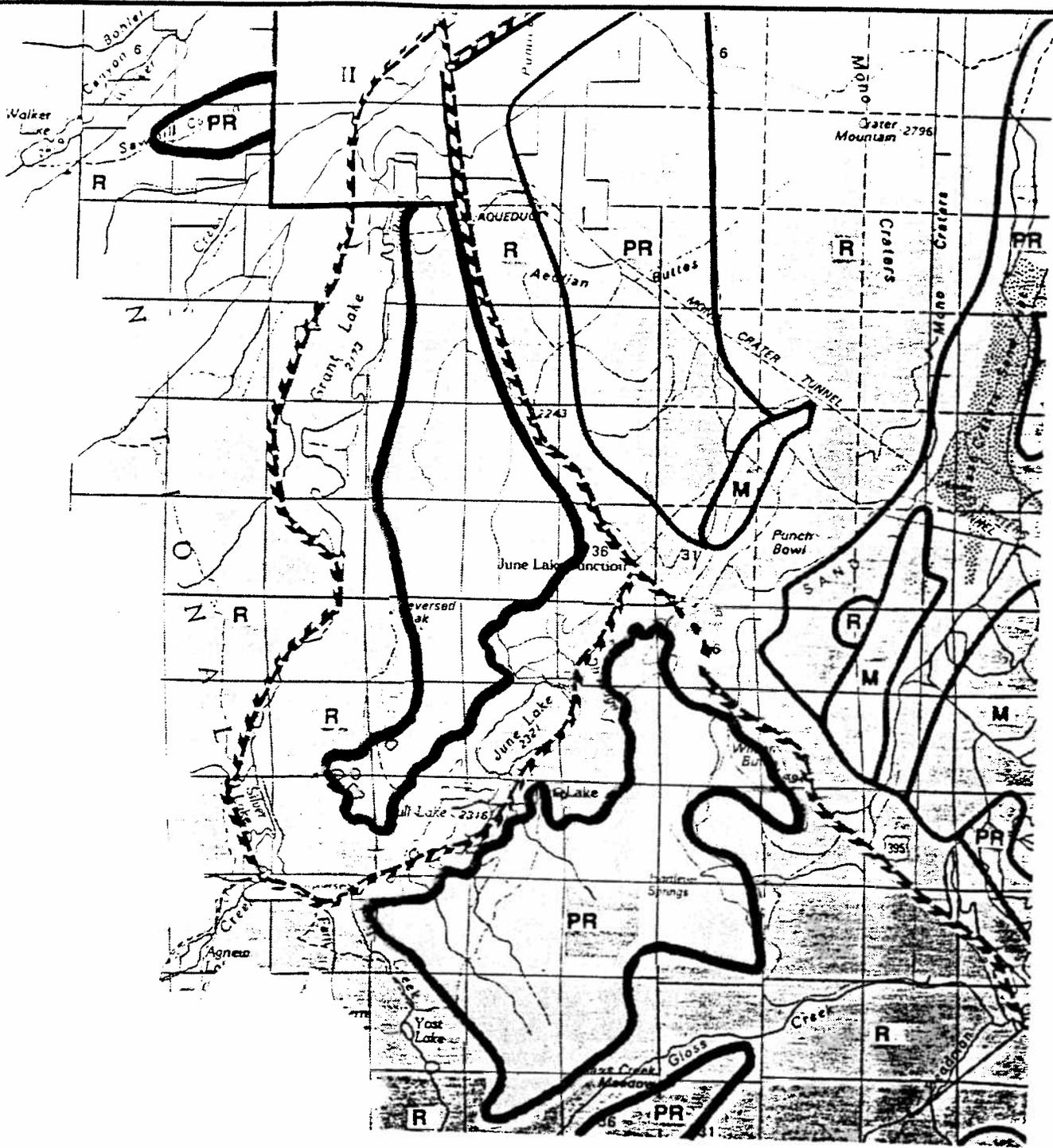
- Minimize the visual impacts of transmission lines, power plants, and private land developments.
- Encourage and work with the community of June Lake and Mono County to develop scenic resource element guidelines and mitigation measures as a part of any local planning effort.

Figure 16 shows the visual quality objectives for National Forest lands in the project area. In general, the Retention VQO applies to most of the June Lake Loop's floor and lower Canyon Walls, while the Partial Retention VQO applies to the Upper canyon walls. Most of the roadway alignment on public lands falls into the Retention VQO. Private lands in the West Village and Rodeo Grounds do not fall under the USFS's visual quality objectives.

Another important characteristic in evaluating a project's potential visual impact, is the Visual Absorption Capacity (VAC), the project area's ability to absorb modification while retaining its visual character. The slope, the distance zone, and the screening ability of on-site vegetation contribute to an area's VAC. Low VAC areas include the steep, sagebrush covered slopes located between rock outcroppings on the northshore of June Lake, the private lands north of Gull Lake, and the west end of the alignment where it connects with S.R. 158. The road could be highly visible in these areas. High VAC areas are flat, bench areas, located behind rock outcroppings and other topographic features, where the roadway is not visible from viewpoints around June Lake. Much of the alignment is located in High VAC areas.

**B. JUNE LAKE AREA PLAN POLICIES**

Objective F, in the June Lake Area Plan Circulation Element, calls for developing a circulation system which adequately provides for the needs of residents and visitors, while maintaining and protecting the June Lake Loop's natural and scenic resources. The actions following this objective, call for using natural features to screen roadway projects and discouraging road alignments that require large cut and fill activities in scenic areas and along hillslopes (p. III-116 & 117). The proposed road to the extent possible uses natural features such as topography, rock outcroppings, trees and other vegetation to screen the proposed roadway as much as possible. In some areas north of June Lake, the topography prevents alternative alignments outside of the June Lake viewshed.



**Figure 16**  
**Visual Quality Objectives**



SOURCE: Environmental Science Associates, 1989.

**LEGEND**

USFS VQOs		BLM VRMs	
P	Preservation	I	Very High
R	Retention	II	High
PR	Partial Retention	III	Moderate
M	Modification	IV	Low
- - - - -		Eligible State Scenic Highway	
- · - · -		County Adopted Scenic Highway	

### C. VISUAL ANALYSIS

The following section contains a base map and series of photographs taken from vantage points where the roadway project was anticipated to be most visible. Figure 17 shows the vantage points and the area's potentially visible; the heavy lines and numbers on the map correspond to a series of panoramic pictures showing views available from different vantage points. The numbers along the proposed alignment delineate survey stations; each station represents a 100' long segment along the road. The panoramic pictures show areas potentially impacted by road construction. The approximate area potentially disturbed and the stations along the roadway are identified on the figure. Vantage points were selected from areas of high recreational use, primarily on National Forest lands. The pictures selected show the most visible road segments. Topography and vegetation screen the roadway project from many vantage points; these pictures are not included in the analysis.

The proposed project appears mostly in foreground views with short sections seen in middleground views. Key viewpoints include the Oh! Ridge Overlook, the Oh! Ridge Campground, the June Lake Beach, S.R. 158 along the southeast sides of June and Gull Lakes, the June Lake Campground, the June Lake Village, the Gull Lake Campground, Gull Lake boating sites, and boating surfaces of June and Gull Lakes. Much of the visible alignment would appear in foreground views, the most critical viewing distance.

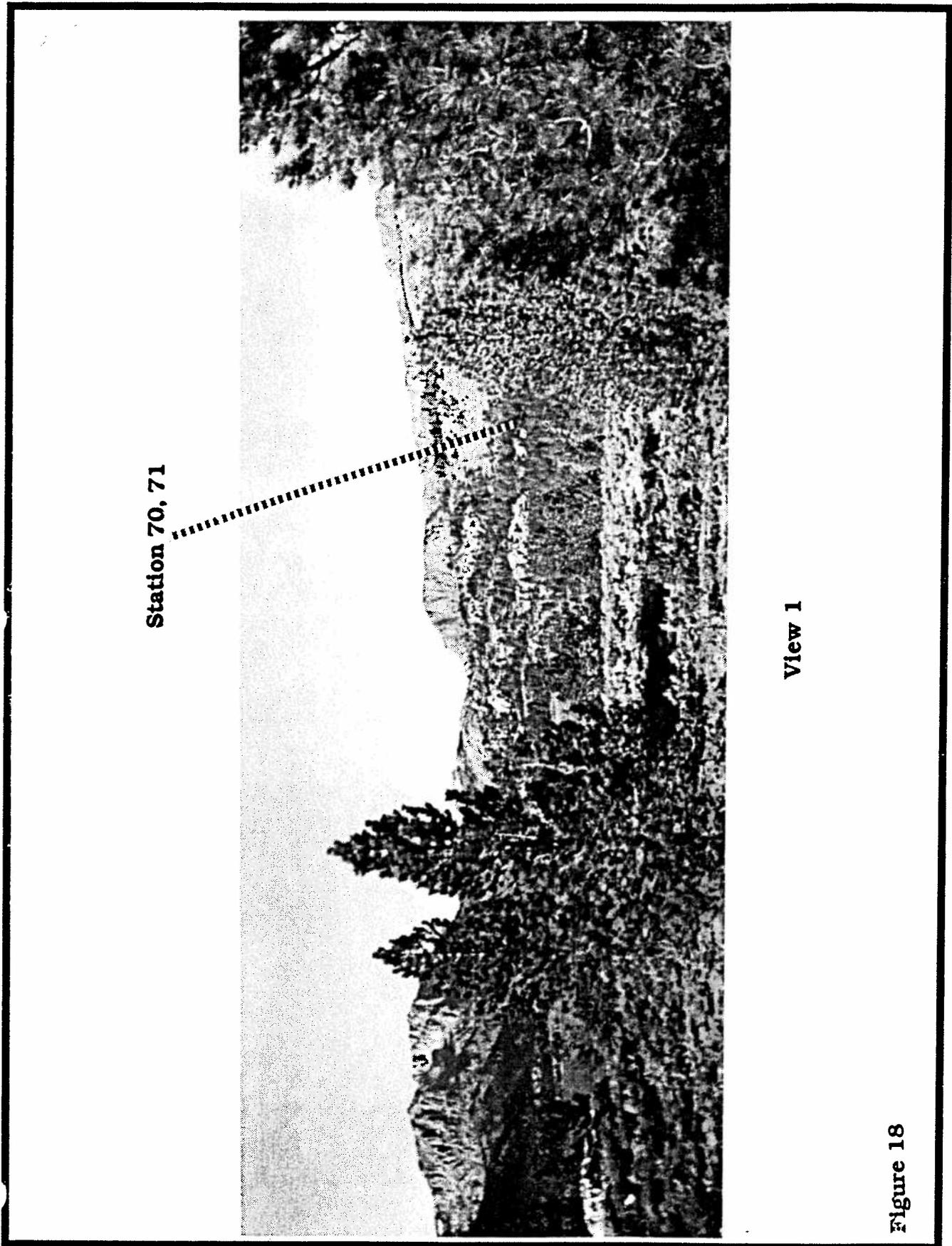
#### View 1

This photograph was taken from the observation tower located at the intersection of the Oh! Ridge Road and S.R. 158. The photograph looks south-east down the northshore of June Lake. Approximately 5,000 feet separates the vantage point from the roadway. About 200 feet of roadway (Station 70 and 71) would be visible from this vantage point.

#### View 2

Taken from the June Lake Beach parking lot, this photograph looks north-west toward the Oh! Ridge Campground and the Pine Cliff Resort. Approximately 3,600 feet separates the vantage point from the roadway. About 200 feet of roadway (Station 70 and 71) would be visible from this vantage point.



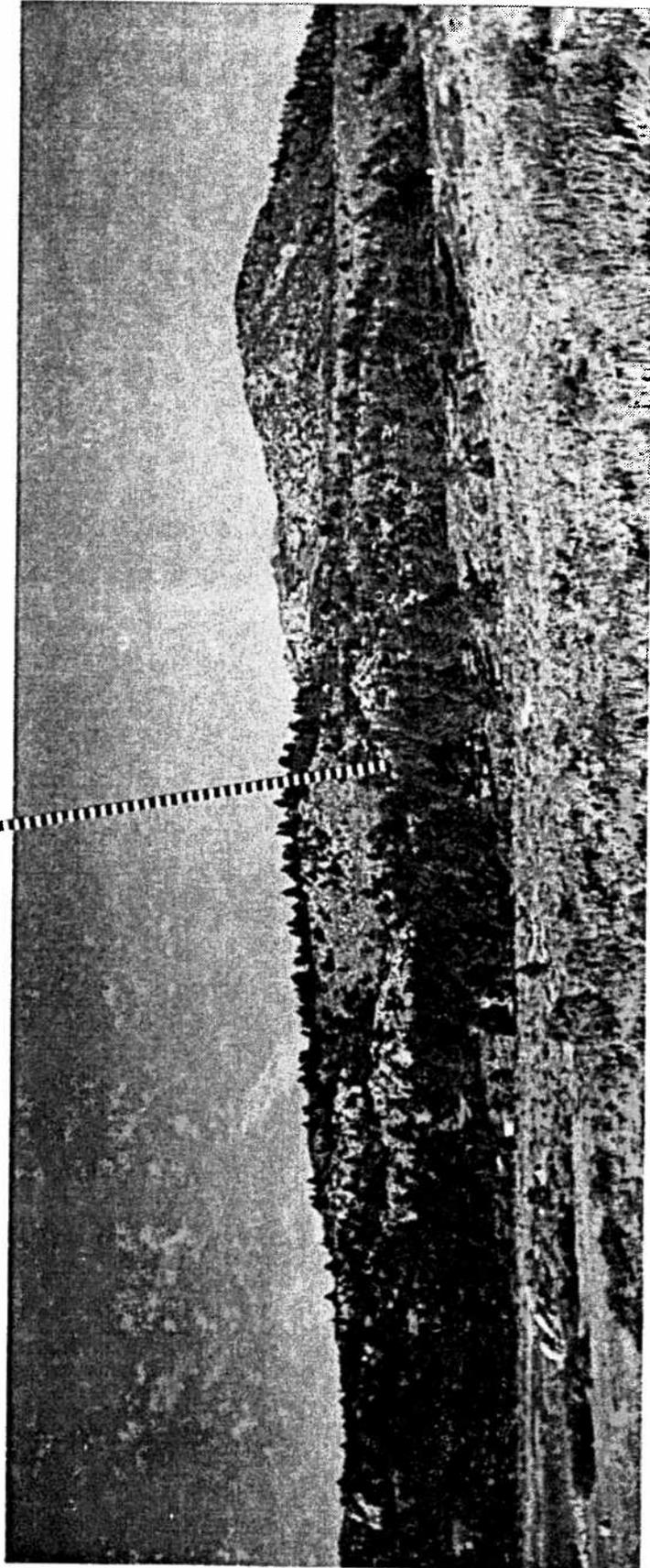


Station 70, 71

View 1

Figure 18

Station 70, 71



View 2

Figure 19

View 3

This photograph shows the future intersection of the access road and the Oh! Ridge Road. The proposed road heads west across the sagebrush flat before turning south (left) and heading up the hill. Once off of the flats, the Jeffrey pine forest would screen the road from the Oh! Ridge Road, the June Lake Campground and the Pine Cliff Resort. This picture shows roadway stations 122 (intersection) to 103 (1st trees). The trees are located approximately 1,300 feet from the intersection.

View 4

This photograph was taken from a roadside turnout/parking area located along the south-east shore of June Lake on S.R. 158. The picture looks north-west across the lake at access road station 71, where the road passes over a rocky knoll, to station 56. In this segment, rock outcroppings and groves of trees would screen most of the road; stations 71 and 70, and stations 64 and 58 would be visible. The stations are located approximately 4,100 feet from the vantage point.

View 5

Taken at the eastern shore of June Lake below Boulder Lodge, this photograph looks north-west across June Lake at roadway stations 63 to 41. The road would be visible between stations 43 and 41. The topography, rock outcroppings, and stands of trees would screen the remainder of the road. Approximately 3,300 feet separates the road from the vantage points.

View 6

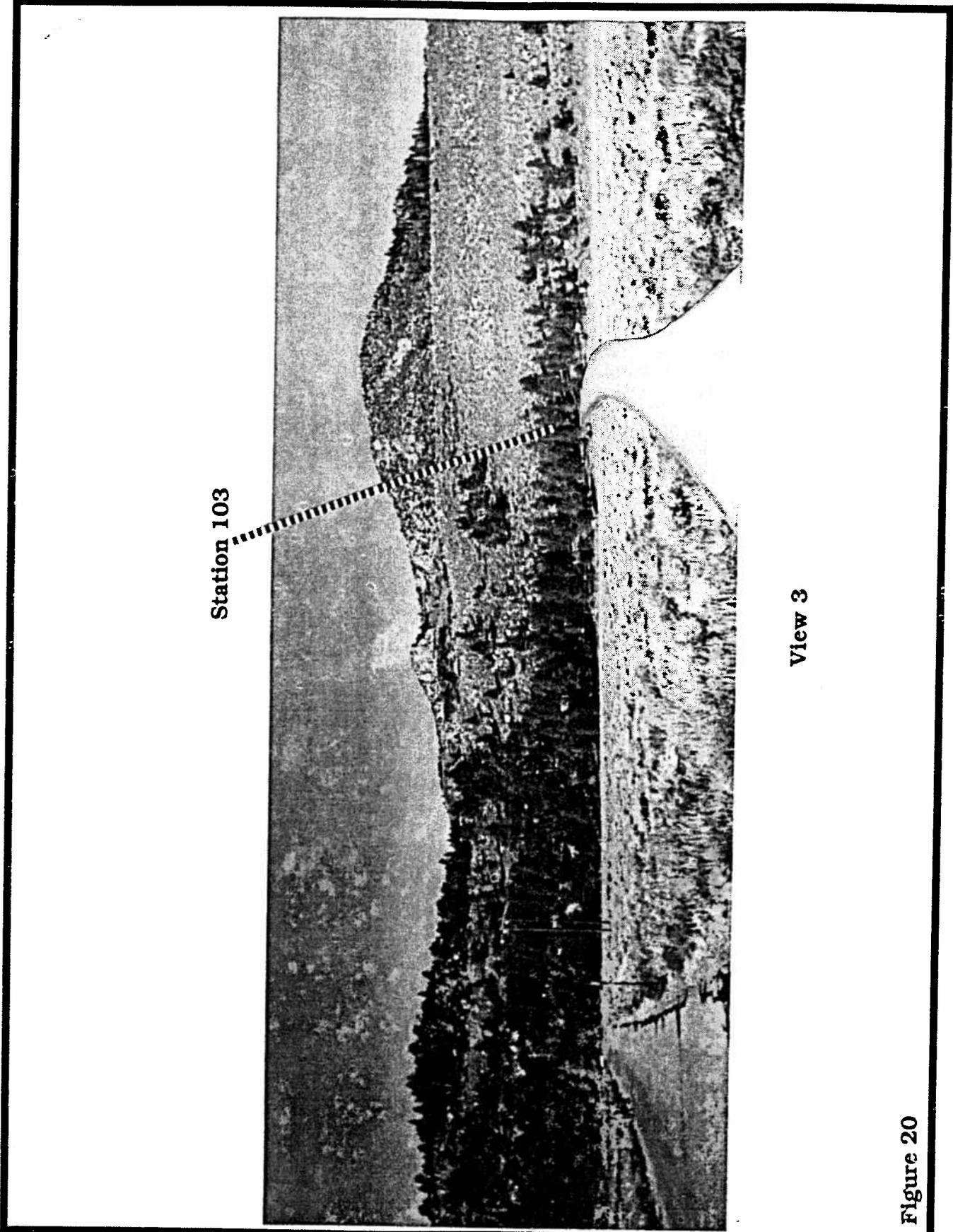
This photograph, looking north-west, was taken along June Lake's south-east shoreline at the Big Rock Marina. It shows the access road between stations 71 and 41. Stations 71 to 65 and 45 to 41 would be visible from this vantage point. The topography, rock outcroppings, and trees would screen the rest of the road. Station 66 and station 45 are located approximately 3,800 feet and 3,600 feet, respectively from the vantage point.

View 7

Taken from the south-east corner of June Lake at the June Lake Marina, this photograph looks north-west across June Lake toward stations 49 to 36. Between stations 48 and 43, the road would be visible. After station 43, the road disappears behind Jeffrey pine trees and rock outcroppings. The road does not reappear until it nears the June Lake Ballfield. Approximately 3,300 feet separates the road from the vantage point.

View 8

Taken from a private parcel located at the intersection of Gull Lake Road and S.R. 158, this photograph looks south-east across Gull Lake. The picture shows the last segment of Phase I (stations 8 to 0) and the start of Phase II (stations 40 to 35). The proposed access road crosses from National Forest lands behind the June Lake Ballfield to private lands located in the West Village. Approximately 1,100 feet of the roadway, between station 6 in Phase I to station 35 in Phase II, would be visible. Future private development in this area would screen this road segment. The vantage point is located approximately 3,300 feet from the road.



Station 103

View 3

Figure 20

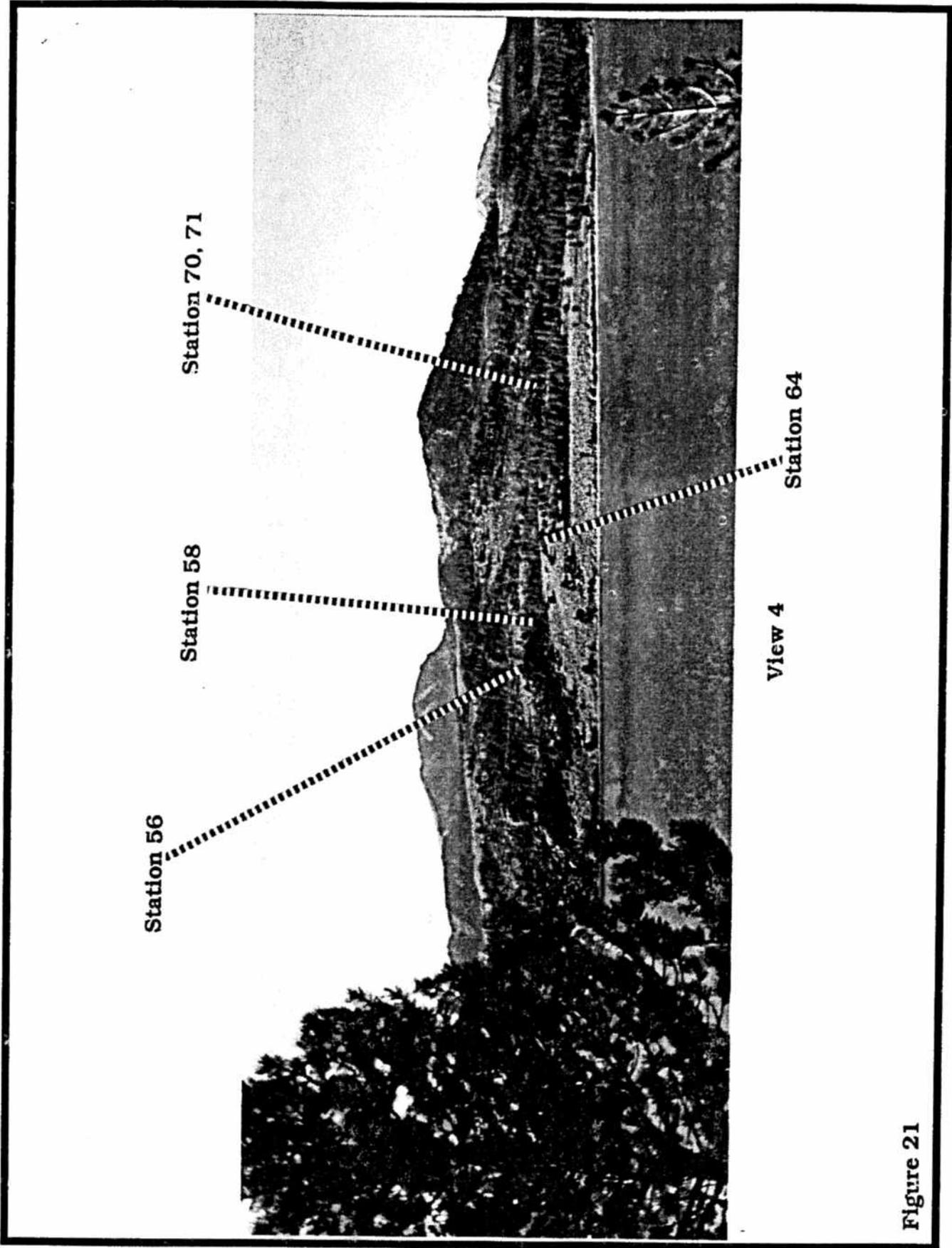


Figure 21

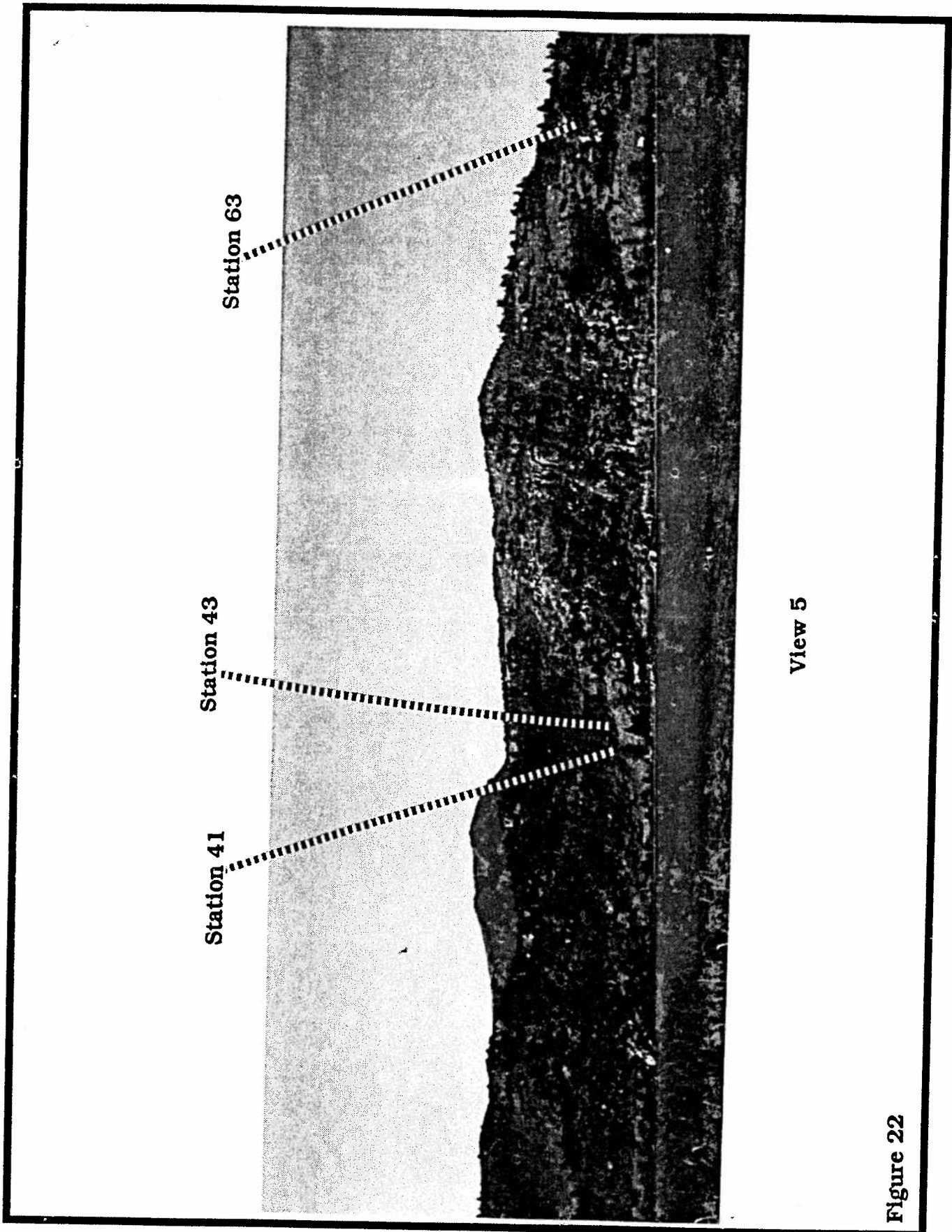
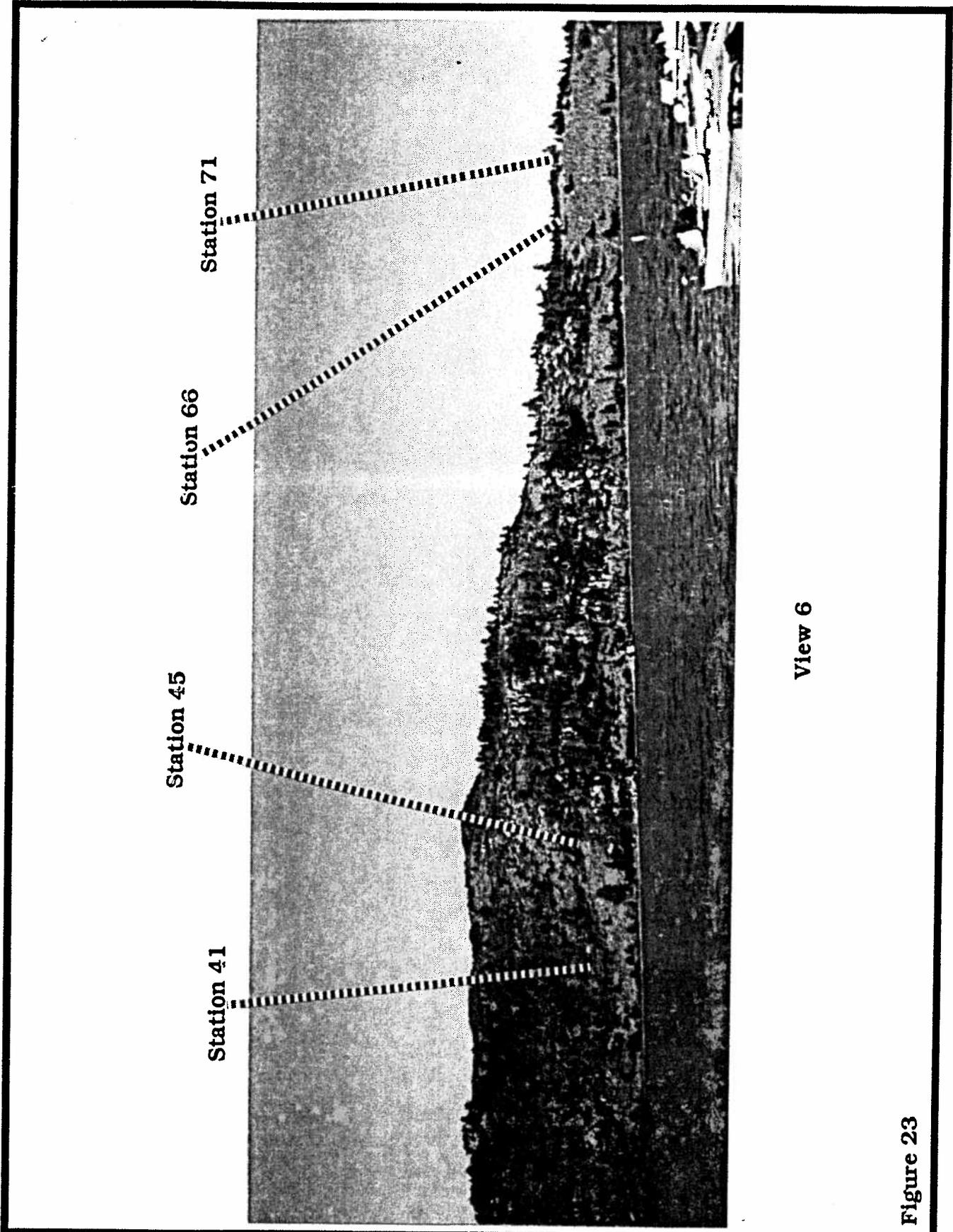
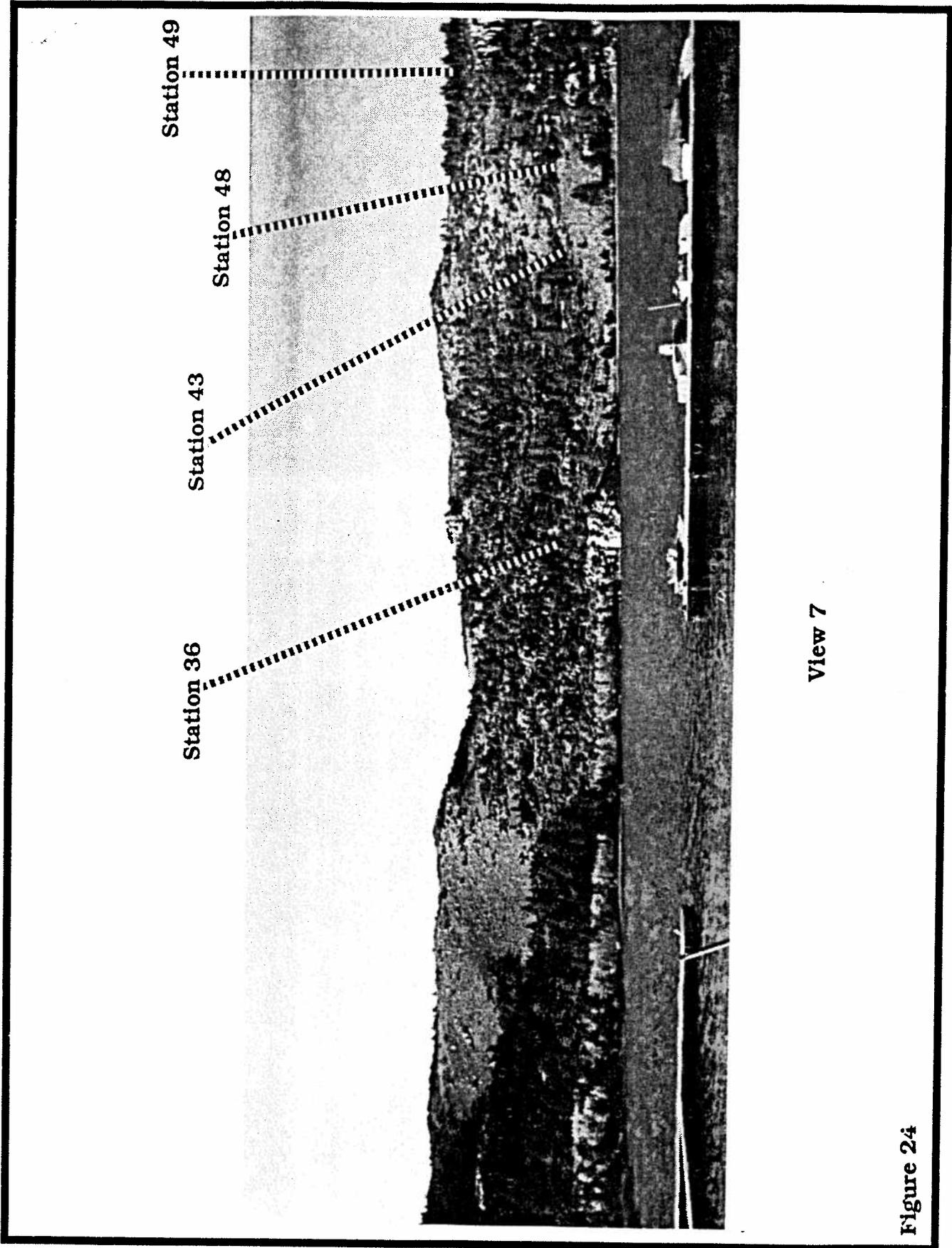


Figure 22



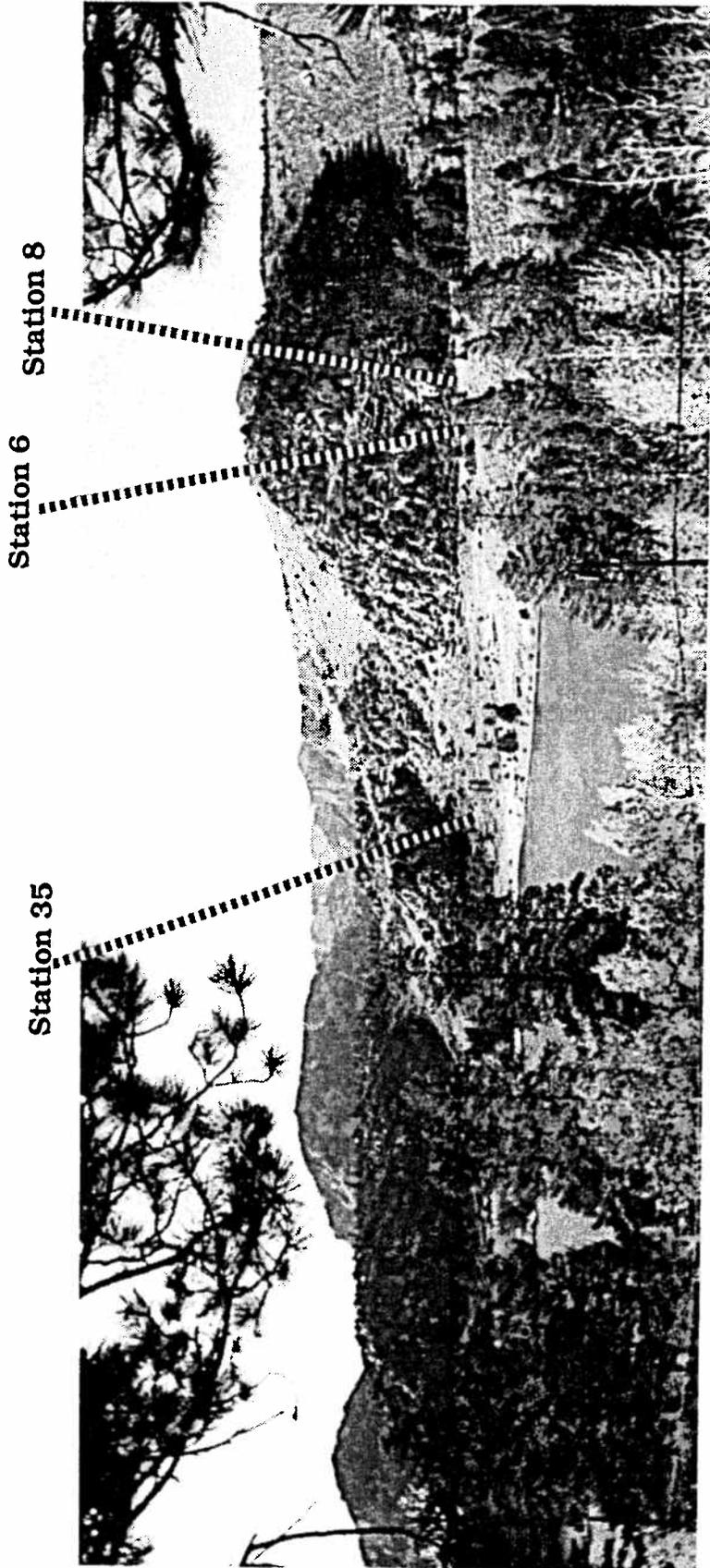
View 6

Figure 23



View 7

Figure 24



View 8

Figure 25

View 9

This photograph was taken from the boat ramp adjacent to the Gull Lake campground, located in the south-east corner of the lake. The photo shows the proposed road between station 16 of Phase I and station 39 of Phase II. Approximately 1,700 feet of the road would be visible from the vantage point located approximately 1,600 feet away. Future development of private lands in this area would eventually screen the proposed road. The 30' cut slope above the June Lake Ballfield is noticeable at Station 12. The roadway's proposed cuts and fills are anticipated to be less than eight feet.

View 10

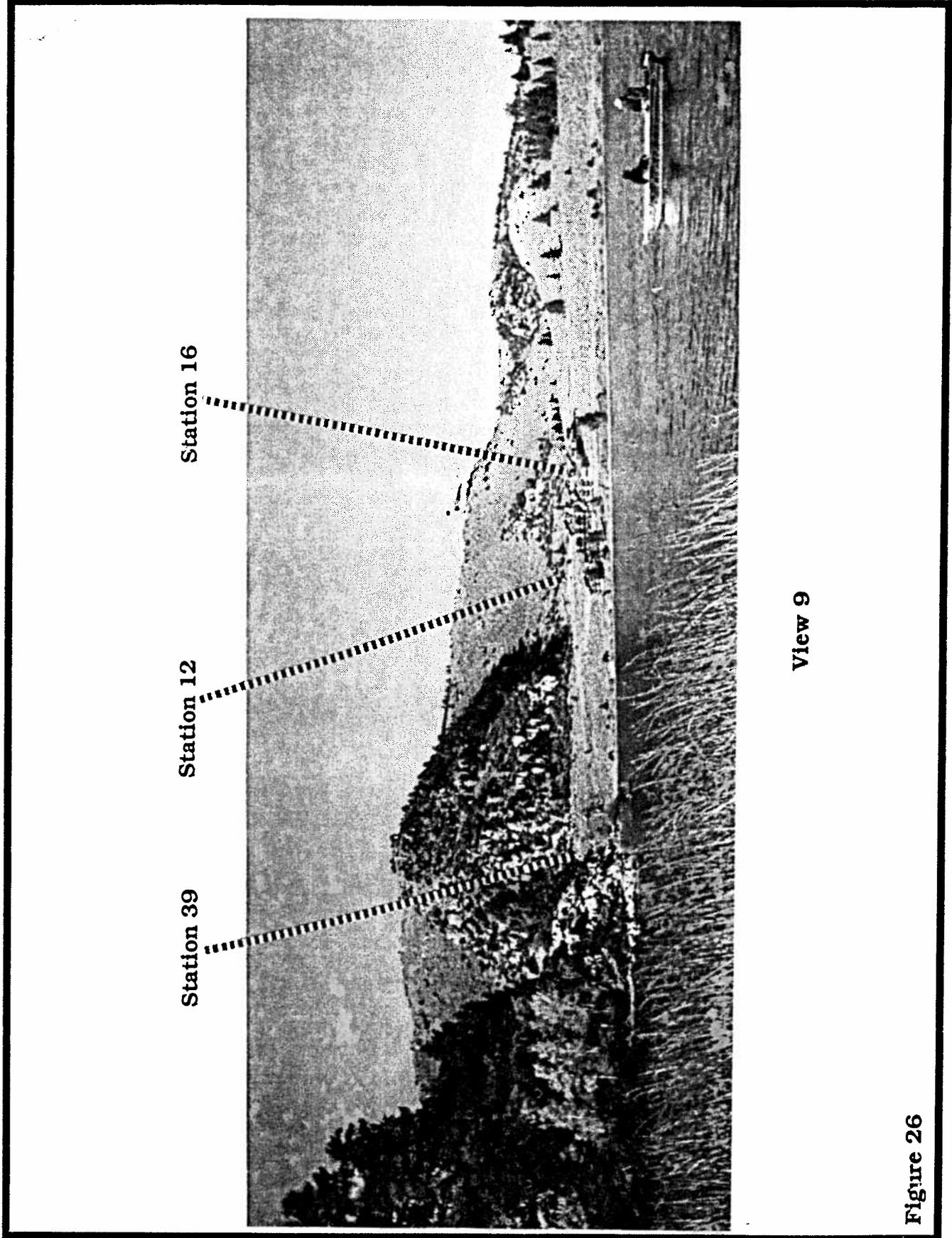
Taken from the access roadway into the Gull Meadows Day use area, located on the south shore of Gull Lake, this photo shows the roadway between station 9 of Phase I and station 30 of Phase II. The photograph shows a 1,900 foot segment of the access road. Ten foot high cut and fill areas are proposed along the road. Approximately 1,650 feet separates the access road from the vantage point.

View 11

This photograph was taken from the boat dock at the Gull Meadows day use area, located on the south shore of Gull Lake. This photo shows a 2,400 foot segment of the access road, between station 16 of Phase I and station 32 of Phase II. The 30' cut above the June Lake Ballfield is shown at station 12; the proposed roadway cuts and fills are anticipated to be less than 10'. Additionally, future private development between Gull Lake and the road would screen the from Gull Lake. The vantage point is 825 feet from the access road.

View 12

This photograph shows the end of Phase II at the intersection with S.R. 158 and the June Mountain Ski Area parking lot. The roadway proceeds straight into the property before turning to the left as it winds up the hill. In order to make acceptable grade, cuts of up to 36 feet are proposed in the roadway segment going over the hill. Road side vegetation would partially screen the road as it proceeds up the hill. In addition, this segment of the roadway is located on private land known as the Rodeo Grounds. Future development on the Rodeo Grounds parcel would screen cut slopes created by the road.



Station 16

Station 12

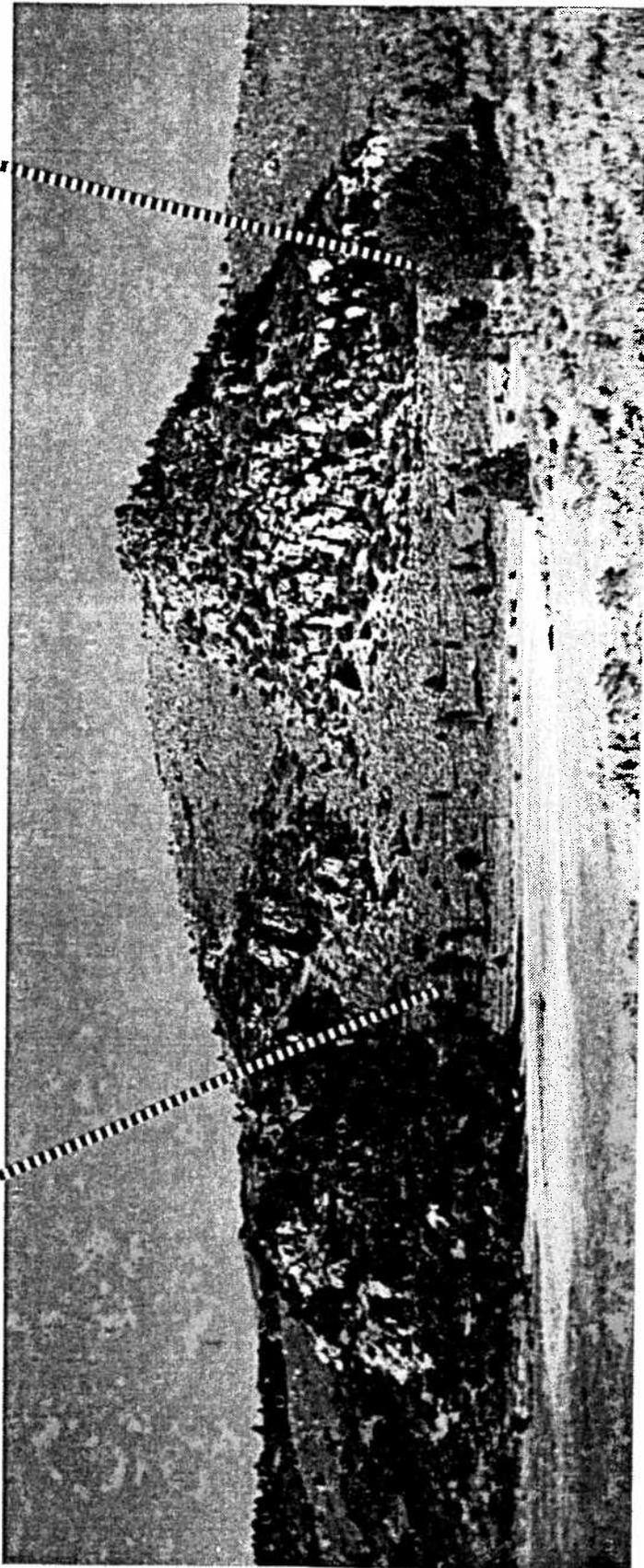
Station 39

View 9

Figure 26

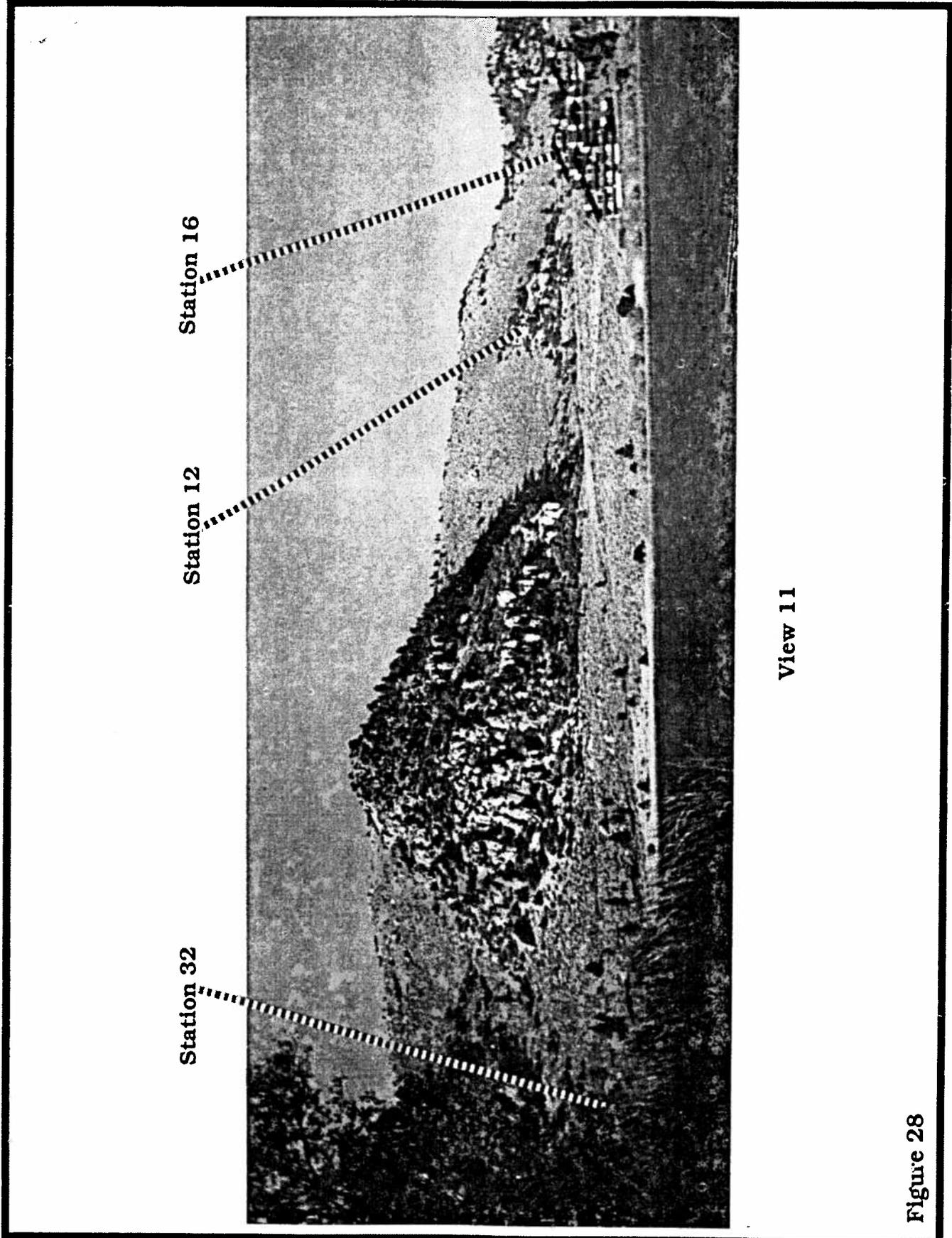
Station 9

Station 30



View 10

Figure 27



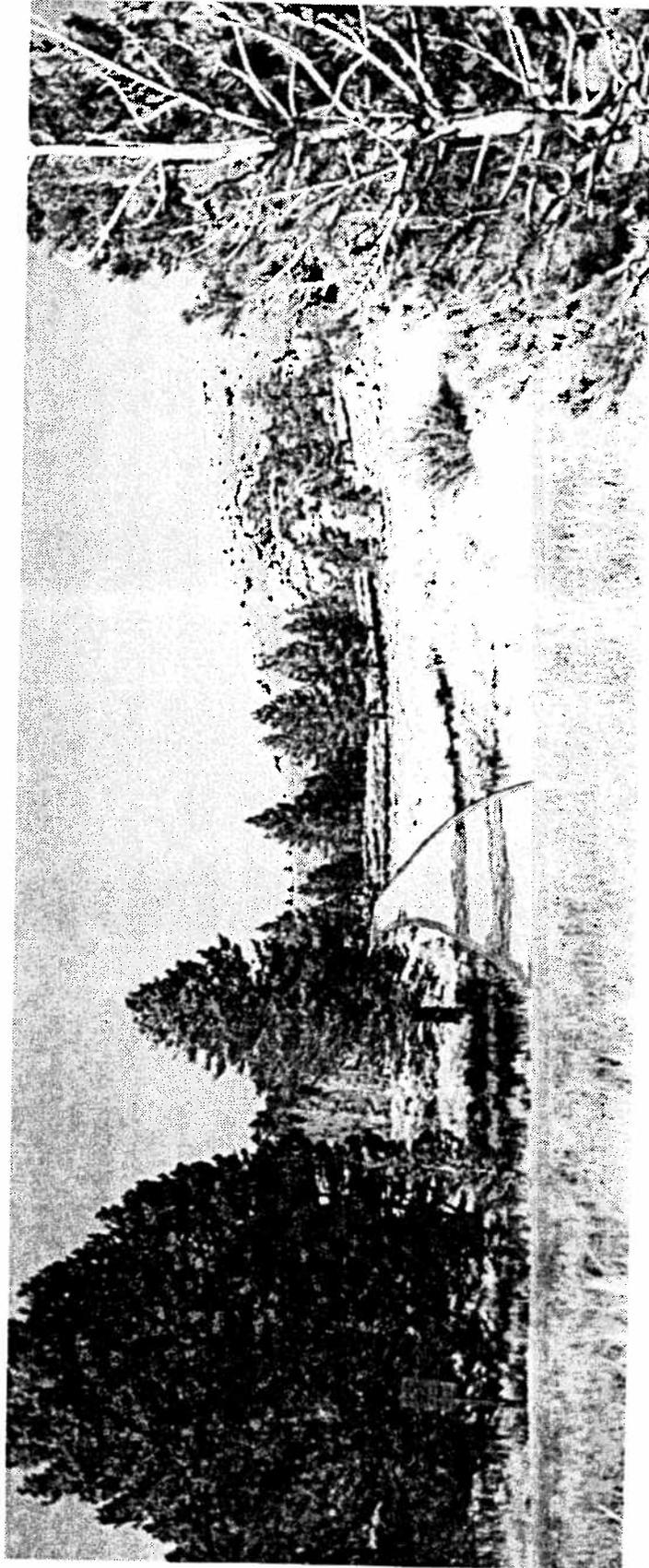
Station 16

Station 12

Station 32

View 11

Figure 28



View 12

Figure 29

### III. IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES

#### Potential Impact 1

The proposed project could significantly impact the visual quality of the backshore of June Lake. And visual impacts would also occur around the Oh! Ridge campground/Pine Cliff resort area.

Highly visible road segments would include stations 41 to 49 and 65 to 71, and moderately visible segments would include stations 35 to 38, 55 to 60, 63 to 67, 88 to 91, 100 to 121, and along the existing Oh! Ridge Road due to realignment. Existing vegetation, rocky land forms, and the rolling topography of June Lake's back shore would screen the rest of the road between the Oh! Ridge Road and S.R. 158 intersection to the saddle at the west end of June Lake (station 40) from key vantage points. The road will create a strong horizontal line through natural unmodified landscapes. Raw rock cut faces, color contrast of freshly exposed soils with the dark existing vegetation, and large cut and fill faces are possible in these locations. Much of the visible alignment is seen in the foreground view from some vantage points and from the middleground view from the rest. Color contrasts and the road's well defined horizontal line could make the road highly visible even when seen in middleground views. In the highly visible sections (stations 41 to 49 and 65 to 71) and in the section that starts at the Oh! Ridge Road (stations 100 to 121), meeting the Retention VQO, which allows for activities not visibly evident, will be difficult.

#### Potential Impact 2

The proposed project could significantly impact the visual quality of the backshore of Gull Lake.

Highly visible segments include stations 0 to 26 of Phase I and stations 30 to 40 of Phase II. The bowl shaped area behind Gull Lake is visually wide open with little vegetative screening. A strong horizontal line created by the roadway and associated cuts and fills will be visible. Color contrast will also increase visibility. The road will be seen in the middleground view from most view points, but will be in the immediate foreground view of the June Lake Ballfield and would cause a major visual impact for users of that facility.

Aside for the direct impacts on the June Lake Ballfield, the project's distance from developed recreation areas would minimize potential visual impacts. The most visible portion of the proposed access road is located about 550' from the lake shore and the distance to the closes vantage point is 825 feet. The distance from vantage points along with the following mitigation measures would reduce potential project impacts. Additionally, future development of the West Village private lands would eventually screen the roadway. The visual impacts along the backshore of Gull Lake resulting from development on private lands in the West Village, were identified as a significant unavoidable impact in the 1991 **June Lake Area Plan EIR** (p. IV-36). The roadway's anticipated impacts will not result in impacts greater than those previously identified.

#### Potential Impact 3

The proposed project could have a significant visual impact at the junction of the avalanche road and S.R. 158 across from the June Mountain Ski Area.

The design currently calls for a major cut through a small hill that will be highly visible and unnatural looking from the highway and from the June Mountain QMC. The cut would occur in the foreground view. The proposed cut would occur on private land in the Rodeo Grounds area. Eventually, development would occur and would soften the visual impact of the through cut.

### **Mitigation Measures**

The following mitigation measures are proposed to reduce the project's potential significant visual impacts to a level of non-significance.

- 1) During the project engineering and design phase, minimize potential visual impacts by working with the USFS. The objective shall be to reduce the project impacts to a level consistent with the Retention Visual Quality Objective. If this is not feasible, attain the Partial Retention Visual Quality Objective and obtain the Forest Supervisor's approval for deviations from VQOs. Potential design measures include: minor adjustments to the alignment; adjustments to horizontal and vertical curves; minimizing cut and fill slopes through the use of steeper vertical cuts or fills and the use of crib or stem walls in strategic locations; and using existing natural vegetation and topography to screen the project.
- 2) Reducing color contrasts by revegetating with native plant species that will eventually look natural; using colors on structural improvements and walls to blend with the natural coloration of the surrounding landscape; using coloring agents on freshly exposed rock faces and leaving rock outcroppings in fill and cut slopes wherever possible.
- 3) Restrict vegetation disturbance to only areas designated for construction. All waste material shall be removed from the project area and not disposed of over the side of the road. Rock material shall be either buried in the road prism or disposed of in a designated disposal area.
- 4) Revegetate cut slopes west of the June Lake Ballfield as soon as possible after completing construction. Also, if feasible, plant a buffer of trees, designed to visually screen the ballfield from the road and to reduce noise, between the June Lake Ballfield and the road.

## TRANSPORTATION

### I. INTRODUCTION

The southern portion of S.R. 158 provides the only winter access to the June Lake area. The northern portion of S.R. 158 is closed in the winter from the Rush Creek Powerhouse to U.S. 395. The southern portion of S.R. 158, from post mile 0.8 to post mile 2.2, experiences temporary closures and delays in winter due to avalanches. In 1985, S.R. 158 was closed for two days and over 2,000 people were stranded. Caltrans' Gaz.Ex system, which is designed to allow for more frequent controlled slides and to reduce the length of closures, currently provides avalanche control along S.R. 158. With the Gaz.Ex system, delays of forty minutes are common, while Caltrans crews clean-up snow from triggered avalanches. Even with the Gaz.Ex system, the June Lake Loop experiences extended roadway closures. During a heavy storm in March of 1995, S.R. 158 was closed for nearly ~~two~~ **three** days. In addition, avalanches starting in areas outside of the Gaz.Ex control area have caused unexpected road closures.

The proposed avalanche by-pass road around the north-west side of June and Gull Lakes will alleviate the winter avalanche closures on S.R. 158. S.R. 158 will continue providing primary access into June Lake. The avalanche by-pass road will complement S.R. 158 by providing uninterrupted access during winter avalanche closures of S.R. 158.

### II. SETTING

#### A. AVALANCHE BY-PASS ROAD

The avalanche by-pass road is designed for multi-modal transportation use. The 38 foot wide roadway includes 12 foot wide travel lanes, four foot wide bicycle lanes, and three foot wide shoulders. The proposed design speed limit is 35 miles per hour. The estimated capacity of the by-pass road is approximately 1,400 vehicles per hour or 33,600 vehicles in a 24 hour period. The road's capacity is affected by the grades, curves, winter conditions, and potential conflicts with sightseers, bicyclists, and pedestrians.

#### B. EXISTING TRAFFIC ON S.R. 158

Table 4 shows the current traffic counts on the southern portion of S.R. 158. Average Daily Traffic (ADT) from 1989 through 1993 on the first 2.82 miles of S.R. 158 (west of the June Lake Village) ranged between 1,500 to 1,860 vehicles per day. The vehicle use on S.R. 158 has remained constant over this five year period.

Milepost	Highway Segment	Average Daily Traffic <sup>1</sup>				
		1989	1990	1991	1992	1993
0.00	June Lake Junction	1,350	1,400	1,450	1,450	1,550
2.82	June Lake Village	1,550	1,800	1,860	1,850	1,500

Source: Caltrans District 9 "Annual Traffic Census".

<sup>1</sup> Average Daily Traffic (ADT) is the total traffic volume for the day averaged over 365 days.

The construction of the avalanche by-pass road could divert traffic from S.R. 158. Assuming the alternative road serves 30% of the existing traffic (average 1,440 ADT), than 432 trips per day are anticipated to occur on the new road. This traffic volume represents only 1 percent of the access overall road's design capacity (33,600 trips). However, a better traffic congestion indicator is the ratio of design capacity to peak traffic loads. Typically, peak hour trips represent approximately 15% of the total trips generated; in this case approximately 65 peak hour trips (432 trips x .15). This represents only 4.6% of the access road's design capacity (65/1,400 trips).

The potential for the by-pass road reducing traffic along S.R. 158 by more than 30% seems remote. Most likely, except during adverse weather conditions, S.R. 158 will still provide access to the June Lake Loop. The access road is longer than S.R. 158, will feature lower speed limits (35 mph vs. 55 mph), sharper curves, and steeper roadway grades.

**C. PROJECTED TRAFFIC ON ALTERNATE ACCESS ROUTE**

Projected avalanche by-pass road traffic depends on a number of different factors including the buildout of the West Village/Rodeo Grounds area and vehicle trips generated, ease of access, change in travel patterns, and occurrences that require S.R. 158 closure in winter due to avalanches. Another potential factor, not analyzed in this section, is the potential to increase winter time usage of the June Mountain Ski Area and increase traffic on both S.R. 158 and the avalanche by-pass road.

Tables 5 and 6 show the projected buildout and vehicle trips for the West Village/Rodeo Grounds. The proposed land uses and acreages are based upon the June Lake Area Plan's Community Development Element. The Institute of Transportation Engineers **Trip Generation Manual** 5th Edition provided trip generation ratios for total and peak hour vehicle trips. The peak hour trip projections provide a better indication of traffic and a highway's capacity than total trips because peak hour trips occur in a one hour time frame versus the 12 to 16 hour period for total trips.

<b>Table 5 - West Village Buildout and Projected Vehicle Trips</b>				
<b>Acres</b>	<b>Proposed Land Use</b>	<b>Units</b>	<b>Total Trips/ Dwelling</b>	<b>Peak Hour Trips/ Dwelling</b>
48	Single Family	192 <sup>1</sup>	1,650 <sup>2</sup>	196 <sup>3</sup>
7	Apts/Condos	70	410 <sup>4</sup>	38 <sup>5</sup>
<b>Totals</b>		<b>262</b>	<b>2,060</b>	<b>234</b>

<sup>1</sup> Number of units are based on 1/4 acre lot size (10,890 sf.)  
<sup>2</sup> Based on 9.55 trips/unit; 90% occupancy.  
<sup>3</sup> Based on 1.02 trips/unit; 90% occupancy.  
<sup>4</sup> Based on 5.86 trips/unit; 100% occupancy.  
<sup>5</sup> Based on .54 trips/unit; 100% occupancy.

Based on the potential land uses in Table 5, the West Village area could generate 1,650 trips for the 48 acres of single family uses and 410 trips from apartment or condominium uses. The West Village area in total would generate 2,060 total trips and 234 peak hour trips.

Future development in the Rodeo Grounds, based upon anticipated land uses in Table 6, could generate 6,770 total trips from 400 residential units (single family homes, condominiums/recreational homes, and employee housing), from a 200 room resort hotel, and from 50,000 square feet of commercial floor space. The projected peak hour trips are 786 trips.

<b>Table 6 – Rodeo Grounds Buildout and Projected Vehicle Trip</b>					
<b>Acres</b>	<b>Proposed Land Use</b>	<b>Gross Floor Area</b>	<b>Units</b>	<b>Total Trips</b>	<b>Peak Hour Trips</b>
50	Single Family		200 <sup>1</sup>	1,719 <sup>2</sup>	184 <sup>3</sup>
30	Mixed Use/	50,000 sf <sup>4</sup>		2,034 <sup>5</sup>	321 <sup>6</sup>
	Commercial		200	2,025 <sup>7</sup>	103 <sup>8</sup>
	Resort Hotel		150	427 <sup>9</sup>	99 <sup>10</sup>
	Recreational Homes/Condos		50 <sup>11</sup>	310	35
5	Employee Housing				
	Light Industrial	5 <sup>12</sup>		255 <sup>13</sup>	44 <sup>14</sup>
<b>Totals</b>				<b>6,770</b>	<b>786</b>

<sup>1</sup> Number of units are based on 1/4 acre lot size (10,890 sq. ft.).  
<sup>2</sup> Based on 9.55 trips/unit; 90% occupancy.  
<sup>3</sup> Based on 1.02 trips/unit; 90% occupancy.  
<sup>4</sup> This is only a small portion of the total allowable square footage that the 20 acres could provide (200,000 sq ft is 4.59 acres). It is not conceivable the whole 20 acres will be commercial (40.67 Total Trips/1,000 sq. ft.).  
<sup>5</sup> Based on 40.67 trips/1000 sq. ft. of Specialty Retail Area.  
<sup>6</sup> Based on 6.41 trips/1000 sq. ft. of Specialty Retail Area.  
<sup>7</sup> 11.25 Total trips/occupied rooms; : 90% occupancy.  
<sup>8</sup> Based on .67 trips/room; 90% occupancy.  
<sup>9</sup> Based on 3.16 trips/unit.  
<sup>10</sup> Based on .73 trips/unit.  
<sup>11</sup> Based on 6.2 trips/unit (information from Lodestar EIR).  
<sup>12</sup> 5 acres of developed Light Industrial.  
<sup>13</sup> Based on 51.8 total trips/acre.  
<sup>14</sup> Based on 8.77 trips/acre.

Future development in the West Village and Rodeo Grounds could generate 8,830 total vehicle trips and 1,020 peak hour trips. Assuming that 30% of the traffic generated uses the by-pass road and the remainder continues using S.R. 158, except during avalanche closures or under hazardous conditions, the average daily traffic on the access road and on S.R. 158 would be 3,081 (2,649 + 432) trips and 7,189 trips (6,181 + 1,008), respectively. Peak hour trips on the

by-pass road and S.R. 158 would equal 522 peak trips (306 + 216) and 1,350 peak trips (1,134 + 216), respectively assuming peak hour trips equal 15% of the existing total trips.

Comparing the number of trips generated and the capacities of the by-pass road and S.R. 158 provides an indication of the potential future traffic impacts. Assuming the by-pass has an estimated capacity of 1,400 vehicle trips per hour and 522 peak hour trips are projected, the peak hour traffic will use approximately 37% (522 trips/1,400) of the road's capacity. Approximately 42% (1,350 trips/3,200 [1,800 trips/lane]) of S.R. 158's capacity is anticipated to be used during peak hour periods assuming 1,350 peak hour trips and a road capacity of 1,800 vehicles per lane.

The 30% by-pass road and 70% S.R. 158 traffic split is based upon the assumption that S.R. 158 continues providing the primary access to the June Lake Community. A change in driving habits by residents located in close proximity to the by-pass road could occur depending on the convenience of the road, the road's design and travel speed, the traffic congestion in the Village, and winter conditions on S.R. 158.

**D. SCE ACCESS ROADS**

The Southern California Edison Company (SCE) maintains two 12 foot wide dirt roads which run through the avalanche by-pass road corridor. These dirt roads are used to maintain a 12 kilovolt (kv) distribution line and two 115 kv transmission lines. The dirt roads are also used in the summer by mountain bikers, pedestrians and OHV users, and in the winter by snowmobilers.

**III. IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES**

**Potential Impact 1**

Phase I of the avalanche by-pass road may temporarily increase traffic on Knoll Avenue, Bruce Street, Gull Lake Road and Leonard Avenue, particularly at the intersection of Bruce Street and Leonard Avenue.

Until Phase II of the avalanche by-pass road is constructed, traffic may temporarily increase on June Lake Village streets. Once Phase II is constructed, the avalanche by-pass road would provide access directly to the June Mountain Ski Area and would alleviate some of the increased traffic volumes along June Lake Village streets.

**Mitigation Measure**

- 1) Improve traffic circulation in the June Lake Village, particularly at the Bruce Street and Leonard Avenue intersection. Transportation improvements could include, but are not limited to the following: constructing a new travel lane between Leonard Avenue and Granite Avenue; improving drainage at the intersection of Leonard Avenue and Bruce Street; and adopting a June Lake Village one-way street program featuring Knoll Avenue, Bruce Street, and Gull Lake Road.

**Potential Impact 2**

The avalanche by-pass road route will encourage development and increase vehicle trips in the West Village/Rodeo Grounds.

Although the access road has the potential to increase growth and future traffic in undeveloped areas, new development in the West Village and Rodeo Grounds will take place under comprehensive Specific Plans. The Land Use and Circulation Elements of the June Lake Area Plan require the preparation of Specific Plans. Both elements call for new development to encourage visitors to leave their cars and use alternative modes of transportation. Policies also call for new development to locate housing close to recreational and commercial facilities and to provide pedestrian and bicycle/cross-country skiing trails, and if feasible direct ski lift access. All of these policies were designed to reduce vehicle trips and associated air quality and noise impacts. No mitigation beyond complying with the June Lake Area Plan is proposed.

**Potential Impact 3**

The avalanche by-pass road would cut off access to SCE facilities currently accessed by dirt roads.

The avalanche by-pass road follows the same alignment of the existing dirt roads. In these sections, the access road may require cuts and fills which would change the existing access points to the dirt roads and cut-off access to some of SCE's facilities.

**Mitigation Measure**

- 1) Ensure that SCE is provided with adequate access to their facilities. Where feasible, use existing dirt roadways to continue providing access to SCE facilities so that additional site disturbance, vegetation removal, wildlife impacts, and cultural resource impacts do not occur.

**Potential Impact 4**

*The avalanche by-pass road would increase traffic at the S.R. 158 and Oh! Ridge Road intersection and at the S.R. 158 and avalanche by-pass road intersection across from the June Mountain Ski Area.*

**Mitigation Measure**

- 1) *The County shall obtain encroachment permits from Caltrans prior to connecting the access road to the Oh! Ridge Road and S.R. 158, near the ski area. The encroachment permit process will ensure that the proposed connections will not create hazardous traffic conditions at the intersections.*

## NOISE

### I. INTRODUCTION

The human response to background noise is subjective and varies considerably. Environmental noise depends upon numerous factors including distance between the noise source and the receiver, the weather such as wind and humidity, and the duration.

### II. SETTING

The sensitive receptors along the Avalanche By-Pass Road include the Oh! Ridge and Pine Cliff Campgrounds. There are no hospitals or schools in the June Lake Area and most of the road winds through undeveloped National Forest land.

#### A. NOISE SOURCES

Automobile and truck traffic along S.R. 158 and residential streets generates the most noise in the June Lake area. Noise associated with traffic depends on weather, roadway surface, grade, speed limit, and time of day. Construction activities also generate noise but are short-term, seasonal sources. Boats and motorized vessels on June and Gull Lakes also contribute to background noise. Table 7 lists some common noise sources and related levels in decibels (dB).

Table 7- Average Noise Level Emitted in dB		
Source	Distance from Source	dB
Standard Sedan	50	64-76
Compact Car	50	70-80
Pick-up Truck	50	70-85
Motorcycle	50	74-95
Outboard Power Boat	50	65-90
Chainsaw	50	72-82

Source: CA Transportation Plan Issue Paper II, Part III-Noise, 7/76.

#### B. NOISE REDUCING POLICIES

The Noise Element in the Mono County General Plan addresses noise concerns primarily by separating noise emitting sources from sensitive receptors such as hospitals and schools. Objective A, Policy 2 of the Noise Element calls for confining "noise impacts from transportation facilities to the smallest feasible land areas and assure that development within or adjacent to those areas is compatible with the level of noise exposure." Action 2.1 calls for working with Caltrans and the Local Transportation Commission to design and manage transportation systems to produce the lowest feasible noise levels and impacts on noise sensitive land uses, and Action 2.3 calls for working with Caltrans and the Mono County Department of Public Works to select route alignments for new roadways ... to avoid or minimize noise impacts on noise sensitive land uses. Traditional noise sensitive land uses include schools, hospitals, and residential development. The USFS considers developed recreational facilities such as campgrounds or day use areas sensitive receptors also.

Mono County Code Section 10.16.090 limits the use of construction equipment to specific time periods. It also requires noise muffling equipment on exhaust and intake facilities.

According to the California General Plan Guidelines for Noise Elements, 60db is considered an acceptable ambient noise level<sup>7</sup> for residential and commercial uses. Assuming that the by-pass road generates noise levels similar to S.R. 158, than noise readings along S.R. 158 would be a good indicator of the potential noise generated along the avalanche by-pass road. The 60 dB contour parallels S.R. 158 in June Lake Village. On the west side of S.R. 158, the contour is located approximately 295 feet from S.R. 158's centerline and on the east side 120 feet. The difference in distance relates to the topography in the Village. The west side slopes away from S.R. 158 while the east side rises sharply above the Village. In the Down Canyon area of June Lake, the 60 db contour varies between 25 feet and 45 feet from the highway. Since the avalanche by-pass road features similar design criteria to S.R. 158 and would carry lower traffic volumes than S.R. 158, the noise generated from the new by-pass road would fall between the two sets of measurements previously discussed. The anticipated readings would be closer to the Down Canyon readings due to less conflicts with cross or merging traffic.

### III. IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES

#### Potential Impact 1

Vehicle use of the avalanche by-pass road will increase ambient noise levels along the proposed route, the Oh! Ridge Campground, and the Pine Cliff Resort, **and the USFS permittee cabins along the southshore of June Lake.**

Although the increase in vehicular traffic would increase the ambient noise levels along the proposed route, the increase in noise level would not be significant. If compared to S.R. 158, the road could generate up to 60 db of noise at a distance of up to 295'. The June Lake Village's down sloping topography contributes to the greater distance between the contour and the centerline of the road. Near the Oh! Ridge Campground, a distance of approximately 125' and a small hill separates the campground from the road. Approximately 400' and a rocky outcropping separates the Pine Cliff Resort from the access road. **The nearest cabin along Forest Knoll is located approximately 400' from the by-pass road. A rocky outcropping which rises 33 feet above the segment of road (7750' to 7783) will act as a sound barrier for the cabins.** The distances and the topographic features would separate the by-pass road from the two campgrounds **and the USFS permittee cabins.** The road's relatively low design speeds and lack of ingress and egress roads, which contribute to traffic conflicts and additional noise, also would help to reduce the amount of noise produced by the road.

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<sup>7</sup> Ambient Noise Level -- The background noise level at a given location. The ambient noise level constitutes the normal or existing level of environmental noise at a given location and is a composite of sounds from many sources. Isolated, identifiable noise sources, such as airplanes and heavy trucks, are not taken into account, nor is noise produced by an item or items of equipment at the location and approximate time at which a comparison with the equipment noise is to be made.

**Potential Impact 2**

Constructing the avalanche by-pass road will increase short-term construction noise levels in the project area.

Aside from potentially impacting the Oh! Ridge Campground and the Pine Cliff Resort, construction noise in Phase I would not create significant noise impacts because construction would take place in undeveloped areas on the north side of June Lake. The distance and the topography separating the road from the Oh! Ridge Campground and the Pine Cliff Resort would reduce potential noise impacts below hazardous or annoying levels. Additional construction noise could also increase the ambient noise level on June and Gull Lakes, but not to significant levels.

Phase II of the project runs primarily through undeveloped private lands in the West Village and Rodeo Grounds. Assuming future development does not take place prior to the construction of the by-pass road, construction noise would not significantly impact existing surrounding land uses.

Although the project is not expected to create significant noise impacts, the following mitigation measures are proposed to minimize potential construction noise impacts:

- 1) All construction activities shall adhere to Mono County Code Chapter 10.16.090, which limits hours of construction (7:00 am to 7:00 pm), regulates noise levels emitted from construction equipment, and requires exhaust and intake silencers.
- 2) Locating the construction equipment staging area as far as feasible from the Oh! Ridge Campground and the Pine Cliff Resort.
- 3) If feasible, limit construction activities to non-weekend periods (i.e., Monday through Thursday) to reduce impacts on weekend visitors.
- 4) Schedule the realignment of the Oh! Ridge Road in spring or fall to avoid peak usage periods of the Oh! Ridge Campground.

## RECREATION

### I. INTRODUCTION

The June Lake area receives extremely heavy recreational use, primarily during the summer months when trout fishing, camping, hiking and sightseeing are the primary activities. During the winter, downhill skiing on June Mountain, cross-country skiing and snow mobiling are popular activities.

Project area recreational use is limited to dispersed hiking, seasonal deer hunting and limited motor vehicle activities such as motor cycles and other off-highway vehicles during the summer, and over-the-snow mobiles during the winter. The nearest developed recreational facilities include the Pine Cliff Resort, the Oh! Ridge Campground and the June Lake Ballfield. The road passes within 400' of the Pine Cliff Resort, within 125' of the Oh! Ridge Campground, and within 100' of the June Lake Ballfield. The following discusses the characteristics of the individual developed sites, the existing types of recreational uses, and the number of people currently using the area.

### II. SETTING

#### A. NATIONAL FOREST LANDS

Phase I of the Avalanche By-pass Road passes through National Forest lands along the northshore of June Lake. Phase II of the road winds through a combination of private and National Forest lands. The **Inyo National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan** designates the project area for either concentrated recreation or mule deer habitat emphasis. Phase I of the project, west of the Pine Cliff Resort, falls in the mule deer habitat emphasis; the concentrated recreation emphasis applies to the remainder of the project. The mule deer emphasis calls for preserving or enhancing key mule deer habitat in order to maintain or increase existing population levels. Specifically, the emphasis protects key mule deer habitat, fawning areas, winter range, migration corridors and holding areas. The concentrated recreation prescription calls for maintaining or enhancing major recreational values and opportunities. It calls for providing a broad range of facilities and opportunities that will accommodate large numbers of people safely, conveniently, and with little resource damage.

#### B. PINE CLIFF RESORT AND OH! RIDGE CAMPGROUND

The Pine Cliff Resort, operated under Forest Service Special Use Permit, contains approximately 200 camping sites. The resort provides for both trailer spaces and tent sites in a flat area located in scattered Jeffrey Pine habitat at the base of a rock escarpment. The resort contains a general store, public showers, and laundry facilities.

A private concessionaire under contract with the USFS operates the Oh! Ridge Campground, which is adjacent to the Oh! Ridge Road on the southside of a small rolling hill. The proposed project ties into the Oh! Ridge Road north of the campground. This campground contains 144 spaces with a maximum overnight capacity of 720 users (5 persons per site). The campground ties into the June Lake Beach, which is a popular day-use area because of its swimming and fishing opportunities.

Peak usage of the campground and resort usually coincides with the opening of fishing season in April, Memorial Day weekend, the Fourth of July and Labor Day. Opening day of deer season and closing day (October 31) of fishing season are also periods when heavy usage occurs.

### **C. JUNE LAKE BALLFIELD**

The June Lake Ballfield is constructed on five acres of National Forest land under Special Use Permit to Mono County. The park consists of a regulation baseball field with a backstop, dugouts and bleachers. The park also contains portable restrooms, a gravel parking area and a gravel access road. The park is used primarily by little league teams from the community and for pick-up games. The County and the June Lake Community started construction on the park in 1993. Another baseball field or soccer field, picnic facilities and BBQ sites, landscaping, permanent restrooms, walking trails, biking trails, and a kiddy play area are proposed for the site. Scenic highway facilities such as interpretive displays are also envisioned for the park.

***Federal Highway Administration Section 4(f) Guidelines requires that the Secretary of Transportation not approve any project which requires the use of any publicly owned land from a public park, ..., of ... local significance as determined by local officials. The avalanche by-pass road is proposed approximately 100' north and west of the existing ballfield. As proposed, the road will wind around the park along the base of the existing hillslope. This area is not proposed for any future uses. Further, discussions with Ivor Evans, Mono County Parks Director, indicate that the use of the existing field will continue as it currently exists, even though the road will pass by the ballfield and could impact the "constructive uses" of the ballfield.***

### **D. SIGHTSEEING**

Sightseeing is a major recreational activity in the June Lake Loop. The avalanche by-pass road has the potential to become a major access road to the community and to provide spectacular viewpoints and scenic viewing opportunities, if designed properly. The landscape on June Lake's northern shore possess a high degree of variety and is attractive. If designed to provide pleasing views of the surrounding landscape and scenic features, the road has the potential to provide a recreational experience that enhances the total June Lake Loop recreational package.

### **E. OFF-HIGHWAY VEHICLES**

Motor cyclists during the summer and snow mobilers in the winter, use the dirt roads. Motor cycle use is heaviest near Pine Cliff and the Rodeo Grounds. Snow mobilers primarily use the access road to reach the flats north-west of Pine Cliff and the signed snow mobile trails to Lee Vining, Mammoth Lakes and the Devils Punch Bowl.

### **F. OTHER RECREATION**

Other dispersed recreational activities such as hiking, mountain biking, running, in season deer hunting occur along the access road. A few yearly running events also use portions of the dirt roads.

### III. POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES

#### Potential Impact 1

The roadway project could impact the recreational experiences provided at the Pine Cliff Resort and the June Lake Ballfield by routing vehicular traffic in close proximity.

The roadway would be constructed approximately 400 feet and at least 150 vertical feet from the western most campsites in the Pine Cliff Resort. The distance from the roadway, the relatively low travel speeds and the low traffic volumes anticipated along the road during the summer would minimize potential impacts on the Pine Cliff Resort.

The roadway would be constructed adjacent to the June Lake Ballfield and would create noise and traffic related impacts on the ballfield.

#### Mitigation Measure

- 1) The applicant shall revegetate cut slopes west of the June Lake Ballfield as soon as possible after completing construction. Also, a buffer of trees, designed to visually screen the ballfield from the road and to reduce noise shall be planted between the June Lake Ballfield and the road.

#### Potential Impact 2

The roadway project could increase access to the northshore of June Lake.

By increasing automobile traffic into the northshore area of June Lake, additional public access to the lake shore and potential disturbance to sensitive riparian vegetation could occur. Increase human presence in the area could disturb mule deer and other wildlife in the area as well as potentially increasing resource collection at significant cultural resource sites. Design measures incorporated into the project include limiting the availability of day use parking along the roadway in areas of critical wildlife habitat and significant cultural resource sites. Parking areas and trails down to the lake were discussed in the project's initial design phases but were dropped after environmental analysis revealed additional facilities could result in significant impacts.

#### Mitigation Measure

- 1) ***In Phase I of the proposed project, limit roadside parking areas to "emergency stopping only". Also, work with the USFS to locate emergency roadside parking areas away from cultural resource sites, important wildlife habitat areas and sensitive shoreline riparian vegetation areas. ~~Where feasible, connect roadside parking areas to lakeshore areas with improved trails to non-sensitive lakeshore areas.~~***

#### Potential Impact 3

The proposed road could reduce scenic viewing opportunities available from the new road, if improperly designed.

The Draft June Lake Multi-Modal Plan, an update to the 1991 June Lake Area Plan Circulation Element, identifies the Avalanche By-pass road as part of the June Lake Scenic By-

way/Highway system. The Multi-Modal Plan calls for enhancing sightseeing opportunities along the new road.

**Mitigation Measure**

- 1) Work with the USFS during the final engineering and design phase of the project to locate and design the road to maximize the driving pleasure and scenic enjoyment of the road user while maintaining acceptable grades and curve radii. Design considerations would include: minimizing long stretches of shallow through cuts to make more of the natural foreground visible to the user; minimizing long straight sections and using long gentle curves, where feasible; providing adequate scenic pullouts; controlling speed through road design rather than signs; and minimizing visual conflicts with the overhead electrical transmission lines and poles.

**Potential Impact 4**

The proposed project would impact existing recreational use along the dirt roads on the north-west side of June Lake, and the west side of Gull Lake.

Existing recreational uses along the dirt roads paralleling the access road include hiking, running, mountain biking, motorcycling, off-highway vehicle use, and snow mobiles during the winter. The access road would wind in and out of the existing dirt roads, limiting their continued use for recreational purposes. The primary purpose of the existing dirt roads is to provide access to SCE powerlines running through the area; recreational uses provided by the dirt roads are a secondary use. Additionally, most of the recreational use starts at the Rodeo Grounds. Once this private parcel is developed, the recreational use would be discontinued. No mitigation is proposed.

The avalanche by-pass road proposes 4' wide bicycle lanes in addition to 3' wide shoulders. Once completed, the road would add 3.3 miles of bicycle lanes and walking paths in June Lake. This would complement June Lake's numerous traditional recreational opportunities.

## **SCE TRANSMISSION LINES AND ELECTRIC AND MAGNETIC FIELDS**

### **I. INTRODUCTION**

*The June Lake Avalanche By-pass road, except for the northern segment near the Pine Cliff Resort, parallels existing SCE transmission lines and maintenance roads. The avalanche by-pass road will require moving up to eight transmission towers between five and 30 feet. The relocated towers would occur immediately adjacent to the road construction area. California Public Utility Commission (CPUC) General Order 131D requires the analysis of the potential environmental impacts related to relocating transmission lines. The project's impacts on wildlife, vegetation, and cultural resources, are discussed in other sections of this document. The same order requires a description of measures taken or proposed by the utility to reduce the potential exposure to electric and magnetic fields (EMF) generated by the proposed facilities. The following section describes the potential impacts on existing SCE facilities and of electric and magnetic fields.*

### **II. SETTING**

#### **A. INTRODUCTION TO EMF**

*Electric and magnetic fields are a natural consequence of using electricity. Whenever an electric charge is present, either natural or manmade, fields of electric and magnetic force occur. "EMF" is the expression commonly used when talking about power-frequency electric and magnetic fields.*

*Electric fields are created by the voltage on a conductor and rapidly decrease with distance from the source. The electric field can easily be shielded by trees, fences, buildings, and most other structures. The strength of the electric field is a function of the way a system is designed and the voltage level. Electric fields are measured in units of kilo Volts per meter (kV/m).*

*Magnetic Fields are created by the current on a conductor. The strength of both electric and magnetic fields diminish quickly as you move away from the source, just like the heat and light of a candle falls off with distance. The magnetic field is much more difficult to shield than electric fields. The strength of the magnetic field is a function of the way a system is designed and the magnitude of the current. Because independent magnetic fields interact with each other, design techniques can be used to reduce magnetic fields. Magnetic fields are measured in units called milliGauss(mG).*

*Questions have been raised about the possible health effects of power frequency EMF. Some childhood studies have reported a weak association between estimates of residential magnetic field exposure and certain types of childhood cancer. Studies of men who work close to energized equipment (electric utility workers) have not found a relation between EMF exposure and cancer. The medical and scientific communities have been unable to determine that EMF causes health effects. Scientific reviews, including those done by the US National Academy of Science, the Oak Ridge Associated Universities Panel, the UK National Radiological Protection Board, and the American Physical Society support this conclusion.*

## **B. SCIENCE, PUBLIC HEALTH AND POLICY**

*The combination of basic science, public health, and public policy are used to develop standards and policies that protect people from the hazards of any technology. Basic scientific research tries to understand and explain the way things work. Using a combination of observation, experimentation, and analytical thinking, scientific research can identify and help us to understand the mechanisms that cause disease.*

*Public health, on the other hand, uses information and insights from research to understand why and how disease happens in populations, and then, to try to prevent disease in human populations. Because disease prevention may involve setting standards that limit exposures or emissions, public health brings science into the policy arena. One of the most important principles of public health policy is to make sure that resources are spent where they will do the most good, rather than being wasted on a minor risk while major tasks go unaddressed.*

*Typically, when public health and policy makers set exposure standards, they first focus on the acute effects of high-level exposure. Setting standards for low-level exposures can be difficult and controversial, especially when the risks are uncertain and unproven, and the benefits are intangible. Setting standards to protect people from low-level exposures to EMFs is no exception. So far, research on EMF effects on human health has not found sufficient evidence to link EMF exposure to the risk of cancer or other disease. If even the highest risk estimates reported in some of the literature are real, the individual risk is likely to be small, particularly compared to other health risks and compared to the benefits we derive from electric power. As a result, public policies that address the EMF question will have to be extremely flexible and to offer a self-correcting interaction between scientific research and policy making.*

*Late in 1993, the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) voted to adopt many of the recommendations of an advisory body made up of private citizens, consumer groups, health and state officials, and labor and utility representatives. The CPUC interim decision includes using design guidelines for utilities to reduce EMF from new and upgraded facilities, developing public information and research programs directed by the California Department of Health Services (CDHS), and offering free measurement services for homes and business. Financial support for the \$65 million National EMF Research Program was also authorized.*

## **III. POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES**

### **Potential Impact 1**

*Exposure to EMF could increase the risk of cancer or other disease.*

*The scientific community and the federal and state regulatory agencies do not think that exposures limits for electric and magnetic fields are needed. While further research is being conducted into the EMF issue, Southern California Edison is following the CPUC's interim policy of taking low and no-cost steps to reduce magnetic fields from new and upgraded electrical facilities, when feasible. For the relocation of the 115 kV lines in question, there are no low or no cost measures that can be taken. Factors such as the rough terrain and long distances between H-frame supports will dictate the construction methods used for this proposed relocation.*

*Additionally, the 115 kV lines in question are in an area that is not typically occupied by people for sustained periods of time. The relocation of the 115kV poles of five to thirty feet will not place the lines significantly closer to where people congregate. The relocated lines will be constructed in a manner similar to the existing lines, and as a result, the electric and magnetic*

*fields in the vicinity of the relocated lines are expected to be similar to the field found near the existing lines. The EMF exposure to the public from the relocated lines is not expected to differ from the existing conditions. Therefore, no public health impact is expected from this relocation and no mitigation is proposed.*

**Potential Impact 2**

*The proposed avalanche by-pass road will require moving up to eight SCE existing transmission line towers.*

**Mitigation Measures**

- 1) The Mono County Public Works Department shall continue working with SCE staff to ensure that the by-pass road does not conflict with existing SCE transmission line facilities. During the final design stages, the County shall review detailed grading and route plans with SCE to ensure that proper setbacks are maintained from transmission line facilities.*

## **V. PROJECT ALTERNATIVES**

### **A. NO PROJECT**

This alternative consists of not constructing the June Lake Avalanche By-pass Road. This alternative avoids potential environmental impacts on wildlife, botanic resources, cultural resources, visual resources, transportation, erosion and sedimentation, recreation, and noise. The road would not provide additional recreational benefits such as paved bicycle trails and paved shoulders, additional sight-seeing opportunities, and improved access to June Lake's northern shore.

S.R. 158 would continue providing the only winter-time access to the June Lake community and avalanche closures would still occur on a regular basis. In the summer of 1994, Caltrans installed a Gaz.Ex system to provide more reliable avalanche control. The system triggers more frequent, smaller avalanches, which are manageable for Caltrans road crews. Delays of approximately 40 minutes are common. Longer delays of up to five or six hours have also occurred, but not at the same frequency as before the Gaz.Ex system. Road closures for even 40 minutes, however may deter winter visitors, particularly June Mountain Ski Area patrons, from visiting and recreating in June Lake. Closures may also prevent residents from moving to June Lake, particular if school-aged children must pass through the avalanche area on route to school in Lee Vining or Mammoth Lakes. Lastly, Caltrans expects traffic to increase along S.R. 158, reducing the road's level of service to below the road's engineered service level which could deter future development of the 145 acres in the West Village and Rodeo Grounds.

### **B. TWO LANE ROAD**

The proposed project consists of two travel lanes, bicycle paths and paved shoulders. The road would provide year-round, two-way 35 mph automobile access to the June Lake Community even under winter avalanche conditions. Additionally, the road would enhance traffic circulation in the June Lake Loop and provide for future transportation demands related to development in the West Village and Rodeo Grounds. The road would also provide additional recreational benefits such as paved bicycle trails and paved shoulders, additional sight-seeing opportunities, and improved access to June Lake's northern shore.

Potential environmental impacts on wildlife, botanic resources, cultural resources, visual resources, erosion and sedimentation, recreation, transportation and noise may occur from road construction. This document describes this alternative's potential environmental impacts. Table 7 compares the relative impacts, both positive and negative, of each alternative to this alternative.

### **C. TWO LANE ROAD WITH SEASONAL CLOSURES**

This alternative proposes constructing the proposed access road and limiting vehicle access along the road to winter months only, approximately November 1 to May 1. During the summer and fall months, the road would be open for non-motorized recreational uses such as bicycling, walking, running and skating.

This alignment would result in environmental impacts on wildlife, botanic resources, cultural resources, visual resources, erosion and sedimentation, recreation, transportation and noise. The reduction in the potential for animal/vehicle collisions and human intrusion impacts resulting from a decrease in human usage of the area would reduce potential wildlife impacts.

The closed access alternative reduces usage during the migration and breeding seasons, when animals are most sensitive to human presence. Restricting summer time vehicular access would also reduce traffic in the June Lake Village from the access road, and reduce increases in the ambient noise level during the summer recreational season when the Pine Cliff Resort and Oh! Ridge Campgrounds are most heavily used. This alternative could marginally reduce potential impacts on June Lake's backshore by restricting vehicular access for fisherman. Additionally, the closed road would not provide for additional sight-seeing opportunities on the backside of June Lake. Aside from wildlife, traffic, noise, and recreation impacts, this alternative would have similar environmental impacts to the proposed alternative.

#### **D. TWO LANE ROAD -- ALTERNATIVE ALIGNMENT**

This alternative proposes the same project as the proposed project, except that the roadway uses an alternative alignment on the north-west side of June Lake. The proposed road consists of two travel lanes, bicycle paths and paved shoulders, and would provide year-round, two-way, 35 mph automobile access to the June Lake Community even under winter avalanche conditions.

Several alternative alignments through the backshore area of June Lake were considered in developing the proposed alternative. The steep, rocky topography west of June Lake limits the number of potential alignments through the area. Primarily, large amounts of cut and fill and potential roadway grades of greater than 7%, resulted in dropping other alignments. Other factors considered in dropping other potential alternatives include higher construction costs related to additional earthwork and the lengthening of the proposed road.

An alternative alignment would result in similar environmental impacts as the proposed project. Any alignment constructed on the backshore of June Lake would result in environmental impacts on wildlife, botanic resources, recreation, and transportation. Locating the road further west of June Lake would result in lower impacts on visual resources and cultural resources along the backshore of June Lake, less potential for sedimentation into June Lake and reduced noise impacts on the Pine Cliff Resort. Similar impacts would occur from the June Lake Ballfield to the June Mountain Ski Area as topography and vegetation, particularly potential wetland habitat, dictates the potential road alignments.

**TABLE 8 - RELATIVE IMPACTS OF ALTERNATIVES**

IMPACTS	ALTERNATIVE 1 NO PROJECT	ALTERNATIVE 2 TWO LANE ROAD	ALTERNATIVE 3 TWO LANE WITH SEASONAL CLOSURES	ALTERNATIVE 4 TWO LANE ROAD -- ALT. ALIGNMENT
<b>WILDLIFE</b>	Significantly reduce impacts.	Baseline; all alternatives compared to this one.	Reduce impacts.	No change.
<b>VEGETATION</b>	Significantly reduce impacts.		No change.	Increase disturbance of vegetation.
<b>CULTURAL RESOURCES</b>	Reduce impacts.		Slightly reduce.	Reduce impacts.
<b>EROSION AND SEDIMENTATION</b>	Reduce impacts.		No change.	Reduce impacts. <sup>1</sup>
<b>VISUAL RESOURCES</b>	Significantly reduce impacts.		No change.	Reduce impacts. <sup>1</sup>
<b>TRAFFIC</b>	No improvement in existing conditions.		Improve winter access into the community.	Improve year-round access.
<b>NOISE</b>	Reduce short-term construction noise.		Increase winter traffic on June Lake Village streets.	Increase year-round traffic on June Lake Village streets.
<b>RECREATION</b>	Reduce year-round, traffic related noise.		Reduce summer traffic.	Reduce construction noise impacts.
	Decrease recreational opportunities for non-motorized activities.		No change in construction noise impacts.	Decrease noise impacts on Pine Cliff Resort.
	Reduce access to June Lake's backshore.		Reduce summer season noise impacts.	No change. Non-motorized activities could co-exist with vehicle use.
	Significantly reduce potential for sight-seeing.		Increase recreational opportunities for non-motorized activities (i.e., bicycling, walking, skating, etc.)	Reduce access to June Lake's backshore.
			Marginally reduce access to June Lake's backshore.	Reduce potential for sight-seeing.
			Reduce potential for sight-seeing during the summer and fall.	

1. Assuming the road is constructed to the north-west further from the lakeshore, the alignment would result in less sedimentation and less visual impact.

## VI. ORGANIZATIONS AND PERSONS CONSULTED

### **California Department of Transportation.**

Ken DeBoy and Robert Ruhnke -- Project Administration  
Michael Lahodny -- Rights-of-Way  
Chuck Carter and Richard Kaiser -- Project Funding and Administration  
David Grah -- Initial Project Design and Scheduling  
**Thomas Dayak -- Environmental Documentation**

### **Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board**

Tom Rheiner -- Erosion and Sedimentation Controls (NPDES requirements)

### **Mammoth Mountain/June Mountain Ski Area**

Dave McCoy and Candi McCoy -- Project Design and Rights-of-Way

### **Mono County Public Works Department**

Richard Boardman, John Beck, Lew Roberts, and Bruce Parker -- Project Design and Project Administration

### **Mono County Planning Department**

Scott Burns -- Project Administration and Environmental Documentation  
Keith Hartstrom, Gerry Le Francois, Gwen Plummer, and Ryan Murano -- Environmental Document Preparation.

### **Southern California Edison**

**John Robinson -- Project Administration**  
**Don Theall and Wendy Miller -- Environmental Documentation**  
**George Parker and Ed Goodyear -- Project Design**

### **Trans-Sierran Archaeological Research**

Jeffery Burton -- Cultural Resource Study.

### **United States Forest Service**

Richard Murray, Roger Porter and Bill Bramlette -- Project Administration  
Dan Tothoroh -- Initial Road Design  
Ted Rickford -- Visual Resource Inventory and Impact Analysis  
Margie Palchak, Ginelle O'Connor and Richard Perloff -- Wildlife and Vegetation Resources and Impact Analysis  
Wally Woolfenden and Nicholas Faust -- Cultural Resources  
John Schuyler -- Land and Management Planning

### **Independent Consultants**

Mark Bagley, Consulting Biologist -- Vegetation Survey

Tim Taylor, Consulting Biologist-- Wildlife Survey

## VII. REFERENCES

- Bagley, Mark. **Botanical Survey for the Proposed June Lake Alternative Access Route.** 1994.
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- California Department of Transportation (Caltrans). **District 9 Annual Traffic Census 1989-90-91-92-93 Average Daily Traffic.** 1994.
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United States Forest Service, Inyo National Forest. **Inyo National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan.** 1991.

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*Valberg PA. A public-health framework for addressing a layperson's' perception of EMF health risks. In: Electricity and Magnetism in Biology and Medicine, M. Blank (editor). San Francisco: San Francisco Press, 1993.*

## VIII. RESPONSE TO COMMENTS

### A. PUBLIC REVIEW

The Draft June Lake Avalanche By-pass Road Environmental Impact Report/Environmental Assessment was circulated for both public and agency review; the review period lasted for 50 days from May 16 to July 5, 1995. Notices announcing the availability of the documents were published in the local newspaper, posted in Mono County Offices and in the June Lake Community, and sent to interested individuals. Local and Federal agencies were mailed documents; the State Clearinghouse was used to circulate documents for State agency review. Documents were placed in local libraries in Bridgeport, June Lake, and Lee Vining. Mono County Planning Department offices in Mammoth Lakes and Bridgeport also had documents available for public review.

Prior to circulating the draft environmental document, Mono County held three public meetings in June Lake. These meetings were used to inform the residents and to provide the opportunity for public comment. Many of the issues addressed in the document arose as a result of the community meetings.

### B. RESPONSE TO COMMENTS

CEQA Guidelines Section 15088 requires a lead agency to evaluate comments on environmental issues received from persons reviewing the document. The lead agency is required to identify individual comments and respond to specific comments and suggestions. Responses to comments may modify the analysis in the Draft EIR, address new project alternatives, correct factual information, or explain why no response is warranted.

Comments were received from the following entities:

#### State Agencies

California Department of Fish and Game  
California Department of Transportation

#### Public Utilities

Southern California Edison Company

#### Local Groups

Heidelberg Inn, Debbie Moyer  
June Lake Villager Motel, Robert Lunbeck  
Pine Cliff Resort, Ron and Sandra Miller  
Marzano & Sons, Rob Morgan (2)  
June Lake Permittees Association, Edward Hoff  
Fern Creek Lodge, Carol Pasheilich

#### Individuals

Susan Balint (2 letters)  
Michael and Valerie Cohen  
Gary Johanson

Gary Burns  
Bruce Clark  
JoAnn O'Malley  
Charles and Joanne Hudson  
Jeff and Donna Ronci  
Art and Joann Ronci  
Joan Johnson

Comments discussed a variety of issues. Some strongly supported the proposed road in any form, while others generally opposed the road for environmental reasons. Other comments focused on the environmental document and provided ways to modify the proposed project to lessen potential environmental impacts. The content of the letters has been duplicated in this section. Comments are identified and responses to those comments follow in ***bold and italicized print***.

**DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME**

330 Golden Shore, Suite 50  
Long Beach, California 90802  
(310) 590-5113

June 23, 1995

Mr. Stephen Higa  
Mono County Planning Department  
P.O. Box 347  
Mammoth Lakes, California 93546

Dear Mr. Higa:

Draft Environmental Impact Report/Environmental Assessment  
June Lake Avalanche By-Pass Road  
Mono County

Thank you for the opportunity to review and comment on the Draft Environmental Impact Report/Environmental Assessment (EIR/EA) for the June Lake Avalanche By-Pass Road. This Tiered EIR/EA was prepared with Mono County as lead agency, and with the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) and the Federal Highway Administration as cooperating agencies.

The EIR/EA document examines four alternative project designs including: A) no project, B) proposed two-lane road, C) two-lane road with vehicle use limited to winter months, and D) a two-lane road with an alternate alignment. The Department of Fish and Game (Department) concurs with the document that, other than the no project alternative, Alternative C presents the least impacts to wildlife resources. Accordingly, the Department supports the selection of Alternative C and opposes the adoption of the proposed Alternative B.

The Department's understanding is that the project's purpose was primarily to provide an alternative access roadway along the north side of June Lake to provide entry into the community during adverse winter weather conditions and after rock slide events. However, the proposed project alternative selected now appears to require enhancing recreational values at the expense of wildlife resources. Although sightseeing and access to June Lake's north-west shore via automobile may be improved along the by-pass road under the proposed project, the increased year-round access can only serve to intensify both immediate and cumulative impacts to wildlife resources, especially during the identified peak mule deer activity in the area which occurs between August 31 and October 7. The Department does not believe that the mitigation presented concerning increased human intrusion in the project area, as identified under General Wildlife or Mule Deer Potential Impact 2, will or can reduce potential impacts to less than significant levels under the proposed year-round access alternative.

Further, the mitigation measures presented only address: 1) wintertime recreational activities, and 2) the possibility of the USFS limiting Off Highway Vehicle use and other human activities in critical wildlife areas. No specific, required or binding mitigation is presented concerning mule deer during the identified peak activity period which will reduce potential impacts to less than significant levels from human intrusion associated with increased traffic and access.

Mr. Stephen Higa  
June 23, 1995  
Page Two

***Human intrusion along June Lake's undeveloped northshore already occurs. The existing dirt access roads and informal fishermen trails along June Lake provide access to this area. Mountain bicyclists, motor cyclists, hikers, and hunters use the backshore of June Lake; the road will not be increasing human intrusion into a totally undisturbed area.***

***In addition to the mitigation measures identified, subsequent discussions with Tim Taylor, Wildlife Consultant, revealed that the proposed deer guzzlers on the uphill side of the road would lessen the number of deer trips across the road from the uplands to June Lake. Reducing the number of trips across the road has the potential to reduce human intrusion impacts related to vehicular traffic.***

***In response to identified concerns about human intrusion, the project will be redesigned to feature small roadside turnout areas along the road segment from the Pine Cliff area to the June Lake Ballfield area. These areas will be designed and signed for "emergency stopping" only; they will not be designed for parking. This segment of the project features steep grades and rock outcroppings which do not provide opportunities for roadside parking. The proposed turnout areas will be designed with road user safety in mind.***

However, the Department believes the specific impacts to wildlife could be reduced to less than significant levels by adopting Alternative C in association with strengthening the requirements of the listed mitigation measures. This alternative could further reduce the cost of the 60-foot-wide By-pass Road by eliminating the need for the two four-foot-wide bicycle paths. The By-pass Road itself could provide adequate bicycle and pedestrian access during summer months when fishing, camping, hiking and sightseeing are the primary activities as identified in the EIR/EA. Further, as indicated in the Notice of Preparation for this project, the road was only to be 44 feet and could be limited to one lane of automobile travel during times when alternative access is necessary due to rock slides, while still allowing bicycle and pedestrian travel in the closed lane. This would still provide for improved pedestrian sightseeing and access to the north-west shore. Therefore, other than the no project alternative, the Department believes Alternative C is clearly the environmentally superior alternative, provides the best compliance with the Inyo National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan, and should be selected as the proposed project.

***The Mono County Public Works Department contacted Caltrans on the issue of seasonal road closures. Caltrans states that the Federal Highway Administration will not fund road way projects if seasonal closures are proposed. Road construction will not occur without federal funds for the project.***

***The proposed by-pass road is still 44' in width, including two 12'-wide travel lanes, two 4' wide paved bicycle paths, and two 3'-wide unpaved shoulders. The 60' refers to the proposed average right-of-way, including slope and drainage easements. The actual width of disturbance may be greater than 60' in areas with steep surrounding slopes. In other relative flat areas, disturbance will be confined to the 44'-wide road.***

The Department has also reviewed the June Lake Alternative Access Route Wildlife Study (Appendix 1) and the Biological Evaluation/Assessment (Appendix 2) and believes these appendices provide accurate and detailed study data on the terrestrial natural resources of the project site and vicinity. The Department generally agrees with the impact assessments provided and supports those proposed mitigation measures included as part of these appendices. The EIR/EA incorporates many of the appropriate mitigation measures which are

Mr. Stephen Higa  
June 23, 1995  
Page Three

described in the Biological Evaluation/Assessment, and the Department supports those portions of the document, with the understanding they should be incorporated under Alternative C.

***See previous response to comment.***

Although the Department supports these measures, we find that the present language of the EIR/EA could allow substantial and cumulative impacts to wildlife resources due to vague and non-binding wording of numerous mitigation measures suggested.

A number of the most vital measures proposed to address the project's major impacts to wildlife habitat, impacts due to human disturbance and impacts to mule deer passage, are provided for only "*whenever possible*". Other mitigation measures simply state that an action "*should*" be implemented, or "*where possible*" may be implemented. This terminology is subject to various interpretations, some of which may result in no measure(s) being implemented. If these measures were not to be implemented, substantial impacts could follow, and yet the document still claims impacts will be reduced to less than significant levels. The EIR/EA does not identify a responsible party who will determine when "*whenever possible*" or "*where possible*" or "*should*" will occur, and no mitigation monitoring or reporting plan is provided to ensure the proposed mitigation will be completed. As such, the Department, as a Trustee Agency under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), does not believe the mitigation measures as described qualify as actual "*mitigation*" as defined under CEQA Guidelines §15370.

The Department believes the mitigation measures proposed could be adequate to reduce project impacts to less than significant levels if firm and specific mitigation language is incorporated to assure implementation and if combined with the adoption of Alternative C.

***The mitigation measures in the document's Wildlife Section have been revised to reflect your Department's concerns over the non-binding language contained in the document. The non-binding language has been removed and replaced with more concrete language.***

***A mitigation monitoring plan will be adopted by the Mono County Board of Supervisors in accordance with PRC Section 21081.6.a, which, incidentally, does not require lead agencies to circulate a mitigation monitoring plan for public review and comment.***

The Department requests the Lead Agency, Mono County Planning Department, provide notice to the Department of any decision or determination made concerning this EIR/EA or the proposed project. The Department requests the opportunity to review the Final EIR/EA and any Notice of Decision by the USFS prior to implementation of the proposed project. Notices may be sent to Mr. Bruce Kinney, Environmental Services, Department of Fish and Game, 407 West Line Street, Bishop, California 93514 Facsimile Number (615) 872-1284.

***Comment noted.***

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Draft Environmental Impact Report/Environmental Assessment for the June Lake Avalanche By-Pass Road. If you have any questions please contact Mr. Bruce Kinney, Environmental Specialist, at (619) 872-1129 or (619) 872-1171.

Mr. Stephen Higa  
June 23, 1995  
Page Four

Sincerely,

Patricia Wolf  
Acting Regional Manager  
Region 5

\*\*\*\*

cc: See attached list

Mr. Dennis Martin  
U.S. Forest Service, Inyo National Forest  
Bishop, California

Mr. Ron Thomas  
Department of Fish and Game  
Coleville, California

Mr. Bruce Kinney  
Department of Fish and Game  
Bishop, California

**DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION**

500 South Main Street  
BISHOP, CA 93514

(619) 872-0691

June 28, 1995

Mr. Stephen Higa, Senior Planner  
P.O. Box 347  
Mammoth Lakes, CA 93546

File: MNO-158-bypass  
SCH #95052039

Dear Mr. Higa;

Draft Environmental Impact Report/Environmental Assessment-June Lake Avalanche By-Pass Road

Thank you for the opportunity to review and comment on this proposed project. The project proposes to construct a 3.3 mile long two-lane paved roadway on the northern side of June Lake. We have the following comments to offer.

- Page 1 - "FHWA along with the State of California (Caltrans) will fund the project."

***Page 1 of the document was revised to include Caltrans.***

- The last statement on page 5 discusses enhancement of recreational opportunities and improving scenic viewing, bicycling and walking opportunities yet number 2, page 37, under Mitigation Measures, recommends discouraging users from stopping and exiting their vehicles in areas of eagle habitat. These seem to be incongruent statements.

***The proposed by-pass roadway would improve scenic viewing opportunities for motorists driving along the backshore of June Lake. However, due to the presence of bald eagles, which winter in the June Lake Loop (November to April), and also DFG concerns about additional human intrusion impacts, roadside parking areas for enhanced scenic viewing opportunities will not be provided. Emergency parking areas would be constructed and signed for "emergency stopping only" for motorist safety in the stretch of highway between Pine Cliff and the June Lake Ballfield.***

- Page 36, number 1, the placement of deer crossing signs at a maximum of one mile intervals both directions seems to be in conflict with the goal of minimal number of signs as mentioned on pages 109 and 110.

***The reference to minimizing signage refers to speed limit signage; it does not refer to deer crossing signs. The intent of the deer crossing signage program is to minimize the number of road kill deer, while at the same time trying to be sensitive to the visual characteristics and driving experience of motorists traveling along the by-pass road.***

- The intersection areas with State Route 158 and Oh! Ridge Road and the ski area should be evaluated for appropriate geometry and sight distances. Connections to State Route 158 are within the project study areas, and need to be addressed in the document.

*An additional mitigation measure requiring the County to obtain encroachment permits before connecting to Highway 158 across for the ski area and to the Oh! Ridge Road near the Pine Cliff Resort was added in the document's Transportation Section.*

- At the south end of Phase I it appears that the highway is right at the toe of a steep hill. Is this hill prone to avalanche? If so, could the alignment be shifted out away from the toe to provide a "buffer" zone?.

*According to Figure 16 of Final June Lake Area Plan Environmental Impact Report the proposed alignment exists outside of identified avalanche hazard zones. The information contained in the EIR is based upon a technical report entitled "June Lake Loop Avalanche Hazard Study".*

- This project is sponsored jointly by both the Federal and County agencies, therefore the document should reflect this. The title page should contain both of the co-lead agencies signature blocks.

*The document reviewed by Caltrans was circulated for review and comment under the County's established CEQA procedures and the Forest Service's established NEPA procedures. Once the environmental processing procedures for the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) are satisfied, a subsequent public review and comment period to satisfy FHWA requirements may occur. The document circulated at that time will have a title page containing the signatures of the Federal agencies.*

- Since a recreational area is identified on Page 45, i.e., a ballfield, there needs to be a 4(f) statement in the document. This needs to be backed up by a letter from the recreational authority.

*The document's Recreation Section was amended to include a 4(f) statement. A letter from the County's recreational authority is attached to this letter.*

Please call me at (619) 872-0691 if you have any questions regarding our comments.

Sincerely,

F.K. WALTON, Chief  
Transportation Planning &  
Public Transportation

cc: State Clearinghouse  
Attn: Dana Lidster

**COUNTY OF MONO  
BUILDING DEPARTMENT**

**IVOR EVANS  
BUILDING OFFICIAL**

June 1, 1995

Matthew T. Schmitz  
FHWA Transportation Engineer  
980 Ninth Street, Suite 400  
Sacramento, California 95814-2724

Dear Matthew:

After reviewing the June Lake Avalanche By-Pass Road project with Stephen Higa and the Federal Highway Administration's 4(f) Guidelines for potential impacts on parks, I offer the following comments. The Mono County Department of Parks, in conjunction with the June Lake community, developed the June Lake Ballfield on a 5 acre lease area on National Forest land. The Parks Department is responsible for maintaining developed County facilities.

The By-pass Road is proposed approximately 100' north and west of the existing ballfield on National Forest land. As proposed the road will wind around the park along the base of the existing hillslope. This area is not proposed for any future uses. Although the road will pass by the ballfield and could impact the "constructive uses" of the ballfield, use of the existing field will continue as it currently exists.

If you have any questions, please call me at (619) 932-5231.

Sincerely,

Ivor Evans  
Director of Parks and Facilities

IGE/sc

cc: Thomas Dayak, Caltrans  
Richard Boardman, Mono County Public Works Director  
Stephen Higa, Mono County Senior Planner

---

HCR 79 Box 224  
Mammoth Lakes, CA 93546

P.O. Box 637  
Bridgeport, CA. 93517



**Southern California Edison Company**

1190 DURFEE AVENUE SUITE 200

SOUTH EL MONTE CALIFORNIA 91733-4496

DON E. THEALL  
CONSULTANT  
GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS

TELEPHONE  
(818) 302-0253  
Fax (818) 302-0254

August 7, 1995

County of Mono  
Planning Department  
Stephen Higa, Planner  
P.O. Box 347  
Mammoth Lakes, Ca 93546

Dear Mr. Higa:

SUBJECT:           **June Lake Avalanche By-Pass Road  
Draft Environmental Impact Report**

Thank you for including the Southern California Edison Company in the review process for the above referenced document.

This is to advise you that Mono County is located within the service territory of the Southern California Edison Company. The relocation, reconstruction, extension, or undergrounding of Edison's electrical distribution system which may be necessitated by the proposed project area, will be performed by Edison in accordance with Edison's effective Tariff Schedules approved by and filed with the California Public Utilities Commission.

Edison's comments to subject document are as follows:

**RELOCATION OF EDISON FACILITIES**

After discussion with county staff representatives, Edison has identified a minimum of three, and a maximum of eight, wood H-frame poles that may need to be relocated as a result of the proposed by-pass road route.

In the discussion, it was identified that if the county made minor changes in the road alignment, certain pole reallocations could be reduced from a maximum of eight to a minimum of three. The poles would require relocation from five to thirty feet to avoid the by-pass road.

The exact number of reallocations, and distances, will be determined upon the presentation by the county of a revised detailed grading and route plan to Edison.

***The County will continue working with SCE to comply with minimum step backs from existing poles and to minimize the number of poles relocated during the final design stages.***

**Access Roads and Gates**

As a result of the proposed by-pass road, new gates for Edison's access roads may be required. Edison has no objection to the gates and is willing to meet with the county staff to further discuss gate requirements. It is understood that the cost of the new gates will be borne by the county.

**Electromagnetic Fields (EMF)**

California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) General Order 131D requires that "measures taken or proposed by the utility to reduce the potential exposure to electric and magnetic fields (EMF) generated by the proposed facilities" be described. Attached is a copy of the EMF study that was completed by Edison's EMF Specialist.

**Environmental Impacts**

California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) General Order 131D requires that potential environmental impacts associated with the proposed transmission line relocation be discussed. Further, the CPUC exempts from further environmental review those projects which "have undergone environmental review pursuant to CEQA as part of a larger project, and for which the final CEQA document finds no significant unavoidable environmental impacts caused by the power line".

The proposed minor relocation of three to eight poles will not cause any significant unavoidable environmental impacts. It is expected that the relocated pole locations will be in areas already disturbed by the County's proposed By-Pass Road, and that any further site disturbance will be minimal. Therefore, no impact to biological resources is anticipated. Potentially impacted cultural resource sites are identified in the Draft EIR and Edison will work with the County to ensure that impact to these sites is avoided.

Thank you for your assistance and please contact me if you should have any questions.

DON E. THEALL

DET/June Lake By-Pass Road

cc: Ed W. Goodyear (SCE)  
Wendy L. Miller (SCE)  
George H. Parker (SCE)  
John E. Robinson (SCE)

## Electric & Magnetic Fields

### Introduction to EMF

Electric and magnetic fields are a natural consequence of our use of electricity. Whenever an electric charge is present, either natural or manmade, fields of electric and magnetic force occur. "EMF" is the expression commonly used when talking about power-frequency electric and magnetic fields.

Electric fields are created by the voltage on a conductor and rapidly decrease with distance from the source. The electric field can easily be shielded by trees, fences, buildings, and most other structures. The strength of the electric field is a function of the way a system is designed and the voltage level. Electric fields are measured in units of kilo Volts per meter (kV/m).

Magnetic Fields are created by the current on a conductor. The strength of both electric and magnetic fields diminish quickly as you move away from the source, just like the heat and light of a candle falls off with distance. The magnetic field is much more difficult to shield than electric fields. The strength of the magnetic field is a function of the way a system is designed and the magnitude of the current. Because independent magnetic fields interact with each other, design techniques can be used to reduce magnetic fields. Magnetic fields are measured in units called milliGauss(mG).

Questions have been raised about the possible health effects of power frequency EMF. Some childhood studies have reported a weak association between estimates of residential magnetic field exposure and certain types of childhood cancer. Studies of men who work close to energized equipment (electric utility workers) have not found a relation between EMF exposure and cancer. The medical and scientific communities have been unable to determine that EMF causes health effects. Scientific reviews, including those done by the US National Academy of Science, the Oak Ridge Associated Universities Panel, the UK National Radiological Protection Board, and the American Physical Society support this conclusion.

### Science, Public Health and Policy

To develop standards and policies that protect people from the hazards of any technology, we need to combine the strengths of basic science, public health, and public policy. Basic scientific research tries to understand and explain the way things work. Using a combination of observation, experimentation, and analytical thinking, scientific research can identify and help us to understand the mechanisms that cause disease (1).

Public health, on the other hand, uses information and insights from research to understand why and how disease happens in populations, and then, to try to prevent disease in human populations (2). Because disease prevention may involve setting standards that limit exposures or emissions, public health brings science into the policy arena. One of the most important principles of public health policy is to make sure that resources are spent where they will do the most good, rather than being wasted on a minor risk while major tasks go unaddressed(3).

Typically, when public health and policy makers set exposure standards, they first focus on the acute effects of high-level exposure. Setting standards for low-level exposures can be difficult and controversial, especially when the risks are uncertain and unproven, and the benefits are intangible (4). Setting standards to protect people from low-level exposures to EMFs is no exception. So far, research on EMF effects on human health has not found sufficient evidence

to link EMF exposure to the risk of cancer or other disease. If even the highest risk estimates reported in some of the literature are real, the individual risk is likely to be small, particularly compared to other health risks and compared to the benefits we derive from electric power. As a result, public policies that address the EMF question will have to be extremely flexible and to offer a self-correcting interaction between scientific research and policy making.

Late in 1993, the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) voted to adopt many of the recommendations of an advisory body made up of private citizens, consumer groups, health and state officials, and labor and utility representatives. The CPUC interim decision (5) includes using design guidelines for utilities to reduce EMF from new and upgraded facilities, developing public information and research programs directed by the California Department of Health Services (CDHS), and offering free measurement services for homes and business. Financial support for the \$65 million National EMF Research Program was also authorized.

### Expected Impact of the 115kV Line Relocation

In summary, the scientific community and the federal and state regulatory agencies do not think that exposures limits for electric and magnetic fields are needed. While further research is being conducted into the EMF issue, Southern California Edison is following the CPUC's interim policy of taking low and no-cost steps to reduce magnetic fields from new and upgraded electrical facilities when feasible. For the relocation of the 115 kV lines in question, there are no low or no cost measures that can be taken. Factors such as the rough terrain and long distances between H-frame supports will dictate the construction methods used for this proposed relocation.

The 115 kV lines in question are in an area that is not typically occupied by people for sustained periods of time. In addition, the relocation of the 115kV poles of five to thirty feet will not place the lines significantly closer to where people congregate. The relocated lines will be constructed in a manner similar to the existing lines, and as a result, the electric and magnetic fields in the vicinity of the relocated lines are expected to be similar to the field found near the existing lines. The EMF exposure to the public from the relocated lines is not expected to differ much from the existing conditions. Therefore, no public health impact is expected from this relocation.

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### Footnotes

1 Sahl JK, Murdock BS, *Electric and Magnetic Fields and Human Health: A Review of the Issues and the Science*. Southern California Edison Company, 1995.

2 Valberg PA. A public-health framework for addressing a layperson's' perception of EMF health risks. In: *Electricity and Magnetism in Biology and Medicine*, M. Blank (editor). San Francisco: San Francisco Press, 1993.

3 Sahl JK, Murdock BS, *Electric and Magnetic Fields and Human Health: A Review of the Issues and the Science*. Southern California Edison Company, 1995.

4 California Public Utilities Commission, Order Instituting Investigation (OII) Decision 93-11-013, date November 2, 1993.

5 California Public Utilities Commission, Order Instituting Investigation (OII) Decision 93-11-013, date November 2, 1993.

# Heidelberg Inn

July 3, 1995

Mr. Steve Haga  
Mono County Public Works  
Mammoth Lakes, CA 93546

Dear Mr. Haga,

It is imperative to the community of June Lake that we have more than one access road. As you know Route 158, at present, is the only road in and out of June Lake and is subject to avalanches in the Winter.

When this occurs and the road is closed our guests are unable to get to the Heidelberg Inn. Once the guests are here they feel closed in and tend to panic.

We cannot stress enough the importance and seriousness of this situation. Your immediate consideration and help in getting another access road for the June Lake community is greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

Debbie Moyer  
Resort General Manager

***Your comments are noted. The proposed project is designed to provide reliable full-time access into the community.***

**JUNE LAKE VILLAGER MOTEL**

P.O. Box 127  
June Lake, Ca. 93529

July 6, 1995

Mr. Rick Murry  
USFS  
Lee Vining, Ca. 93541

Dear Rick:

As Cal Trans Supervisor for this area and coordinator for the Gas Ex Avalanche System, along with being the owner of the June Lake Villager Motel, I strongly support the Alternate Road Plan for June Lake.

There were occasions this last winter when the snow was so heavy and unstable, and the water content so high, that it was not safe to reopen State Hwy. 158, even after shooting the Gas Ex. The snow continued to slide and could not be stabilized. This created a closure at one time of three days, and So. Ca. Edison had to go around the back side of June Lake to enter the area when all power was out during that period.

There are times when the weather is so bad, helicopters cannot fly into June Lake for emergency pick-ups i.e. medical, and St. Hwy. 158 is closed due to avalanche hazards. A road on the backside of June Lake would greatly increase the safety of visitors and locals alike, and provide access for emergency services.

Sincerely yours,

Robert Lunbeck

cc: Higa

***Your comments are noted. The project, by circumventing the avalanche dangers along the east shores of June Lake, is proposed to provide full-time access to the June Lake Community, even under the most extreme avalanche conditions.***

Pine  
Cliff  
Resort

by the Shore of  
June Lake, CA  
P. O. Box 38-93529  
(619)648-7558

July 5, 1995

Steve Higa, Project Planner,  
Mono County Planning Dept.  
P.O. Box 347  
Mammoth Lakes, Ca. 93546

July 5, 1995

Dear Mr. Higa;

We are in receipt of the draft on the June Lake Avalanche By-Pass road and Environmental Impact and Assessment Reports. As a Forest Service Permittee, under a Special Use Permit for the past ten years, we are vitally concerned with the proposed access road that will be running adjacent to Pine Cliff Resort.

We have had the opportunity to have walked the proposed road alignment immediately above the boundaries of our permitted use area. We are concerned about the potential disturbance this road would cause to the recreating public. The traffic noise and close proximity to many of our camp spaces would be very undesirable. The public who frequents our camp ground does so to escape from the hustle and bustle of the metropolitan areas. The road in its present alignment would most definitely be a deterrent for public enjoyment.

We feel that the road should be moved further to the northwest beginning approximately at station 90 and relocated away from the near vicinity overlooking Pine Cliff Resort. Proceeding south from station 90, there appears to be room to relocate the center line of the road as it runs southward towards station 80. There is a relatively flat area that could be utilized to build the road further to the northeast, probably several hundred feet in distance from its present alignment towards the uphill side.

***After receiving this comment letter, the Mono County Department of Public Works realigned the proposed alignment at least 50' northwest of the alignment reviewed by the Pine Cliff Resort. The Department tried to move the road further northwest, however, the modified alignment, by pushing the road closer to rock outcroppings, would increase roadway grades,***

*areas of cut and fill, and construction costs. The alignment, moved further to the northwest, may also not meet the minimum curve radius of 350'.*

At stake number 83.14, the road edge is directly above a campsite use area. This would create an undesirable impact from traffic noise and the steep cut through the rock would be unsightly as well as dangerous should a traffic accident happen in this area. As the alignment goes to the south, it is still too close to the concentrated recreational use sites at Pine Cliff. Stations 79.64 to 78.60, should also be moved further to the northwest to avoid any potential disturbance to these heavily used camping sites. The present alignment down to station 76.50 appears to be moveable within the flat bench area to avoid being immediately visible from Pine Cliff Resort.

*At station 83, the proposed alignment was shifted approximately 50' to the northwest. Further, the station marker represents the centerline of the proposed road. At that station, the proposed road will require a cut of at least 15', measured at the centerline, below the existing ground surface. The existing rock outcropping located east of the station and the proposed cut would prevent the road from overlooking your current campsites.*

We request that you consider another alignment that would relocate the road as far northwest as possible from its current center line to protect the recreational uses at Pine Cliff. We are also concerned with the proposed road tying into the June Lake Beach Road. The tremendous increase in traffic would not only affect Pine Cliff, but would have a direct and severe impact on Oh! Ridge Campground. Many of their campsites would be located right on the road which certainly would not be a desirable camping area.

We feel that consideration should be given to constructing the road (which will be a permanent road and used forever), directly to Highway 395. True the cost would increase, but the long term advantages would far exceed and offset any additional costs.

*Constructing a road directly to U.S. 395 was not considered as part of this project due to the limited funding available for constructing a project through a known avalanche area. The segment of S.R. 158 between the Oh! Ridge Campground Road and the South Junction of U.S. 395 is not subject to avalanche closures and would not improve avalanche safety conditions. Additionally, extending the by-pass road to U.S. 395 would require additional construction through a large population of Mono Lake lupine, a plant species of concern. It is doubtful that the USFS, the land managing agency for the pumice flat area, would allow additional disturbance through the center of the Mono Lake lupine population.*

We are concerned about lost business revenue from the disturbance to over 60,000 campers that visit our park each year. We have invested a great deal of capital, not only in the purchase price, but in improving and upgrading the facilities at Pine Cliff. The current road alignment would adversely impact our Special Use Permit area and the recreating public.

*Your concerns are noted. In designing the road, Mono County is weighing all of the possible comments and trying to develop a project that provides reliable year-round access into the June Lake community. To the extent possible, the County is trying to accommodate your concerns, particularly the concern about moving the road further away from the Pine Cliff Resort.*

In addition to the visual, constant noise level and the road construction disturbances, possible relocation or abandonment of campsites would have to be considered. We have no additional areas to develop for campsites that would be in a wooded area. As a result, we would incur a great loss of revenue as a result of the current alignment.

*Discussions with the Forest Service indicate that the Forest Service will work with you to provide replacement sites in the event that the road substantially impacts your existing operation. Prior to replacing any sites, either permanently or temporarily, you will need to demonstrate to the Forest Service that the road renders the existing sites unusable.*

Due to the close proximity of the proposed road to Pine Cliff, we are also concerned about the impact snow removal in the winter months would have to our park. Directly below the proposed road, we not only have campsites, but permanent structures. The entire area would be affected by not only the snow buildup from pushing snow over the side, but by the excess run off in the spring. Most likely these areas which are heavily wooded would not be able to be used when we open the park in mid April, as there is a great likelihood that the snow would not even be melted, not to mention the possibility of damage to the permanent structures. Again, loss of revenue.

*The section of road near your establishment (Station 83) will be located approximate 400' northwest at its closes point. The road through this section will be constructed approximately 15' below the existing ground's surface. In order to impact camp sites in the Pine Cliff Resort, snow would have to be pushed up and over a 15' high cut slope for a distance of 400'.*

*Your concerns about additional drainage created from the road have been forwarded to the Mono County Public Works Department, which has agreed to design the road's drainage system near your operation to avoid increasing drainage into the campground. An additional condition requiring the Department of Public Works to design the road's drainage system to prevent additional drainage into the campground was added to the environmental document.*

We understand the need for an emergency access road, but do not want to see it constructed in its present location above, Pine Cliff. This entire area that you propose to encircle with the road, is a very well established recreation area. Pine Cliff, since 1955 and Oh! Ridge, since approximately 1974. It has brought a great deal of pleasure and camping experiences to the public at large. They are looking to get away from their forced atmosphere and be able to enjoy

the serenity and natural beauty of the surroundings that we have to offer. The proposed road is an area in which our guests as well as other tourists have taken to appreciate, as it is a natural hiking area. Also, in the spring and fall, our guests have come to enjoy the beauty of the wildlife this has to offer. The road would be a natural deterrent to the migrating deer who heavily frequent the campsites directly below the proposed road alignment and the campground in general from the area above.

We strongly support summer closure of the road to reduce impacts from traffic and noise disturbances. We feel that if the road is truly intended as an "Avalanche By-Pass" road it should be gated off in the summer months. In addition, if the road is intended to be used in the summer months, it would route traffic away from Highway 158 and all of the businesses in June Lake would suffer.

***The Mono County Public Works Department contacted Caltrans on the issue of seasonal road closures. Caltrans states that the Federal Highway Administration will not fund the project if seasonal closures are proposed. Road construction will not occur without federal funds for the project.***

***The road is not anticipated to be the main road into June Lake. Compared to S.R. 158, the road is longer, would feature steeper grades, and a lower design speed limit of 35 mph compared to 55 mph. Given these considerations, it seems unlikely that the by-pass route would divert traffic off of State Route 158 and away from June Lake Village businesses.***

We wish to thank you for considering our views and hope that an equitable solution can be reached in this matter.

Cordially,

Ron and Sandra Miller, Owners  
Pine Cliff Resort

**Marzano & Sons**  
**General Engineering Contractor**  
**P.O. Box 178**  
**June Lake Ca. 93529**

July 5, 1995

Mono County Planning Department  
P.O. Box 347  
Mammoth Lakes, Ca 93546

Attention: Stephen Higa, Project Planner

Dear Steve:

Following are my comments to the Draft EIR/EA for the June Lake Avalanche By-Pass Road.

The document thoroughly addresses all resource impacts and offers logical and concise mitigation. The visual impact of a newly developed road will in time become less as natural vegetation reestablishes itself. Further, the by-pass road will offer a rich visual experience to the recreational visitor using it. Because circulation in the June Lake Village is currently problematic during peak tourist times, the availability of an alternate route will help to disperse the traffic in the Village as well as the Loop.

As a property owner on Leonard Ave., I see the By-Pass Road as advantageous both at the completion of Phase I and Phase II. Improvements as defined in the document for Leonard, Knoll, Bruce and Guil Lake Road will mitigate the impacts of increased traffic flow during both winter and summer. Those people currently living on the village roads who express concern over noise and increased traffic flow should assess this By-Pass Road project with a more positive long range view. The eventual development of the acreage at the top of Leonard Ave will place traffic demands on the village roads that will far exceed their current capabilities. Year-round access via the By-Pass Road for those travelers heading into the newly developed area would be the greatest asset in eliminating the congestion and noise that these village residents currently fear. It will also aid in dispersing traffic heading down canyon at the completion of phase II during all seasons of the year. Further, people heading for the village but using the By-Pass Road will soon figure out that they are going out of their way to and from their destination and will return to traveling the most direct route except during unsafe periods. Therefore, the concerns voiced by those in the village meadow area are exaggerated at best.

Project Alternatives "A" and "C" are unacceptable. Because of the amount of time and money being invested in this project, it should be fully accessible year-round to all taxpayers, residents and visitors alike. The steepness of the terrain above the current Highway 158 makes it subject to closure not only during the winter due to avalanches, but also during the summer due to rock slides. The object of the road improvement is not only safety for the traveler but also minimizing inconvenience. It is inconceivable that a multi-million dollar investment for alternate access would be made to only end up as a discretionary part-time road.

Sincerely,

Rob Morgan Marzano & Sons

cc: Rick Murray, USFS

***Your comments are noted. The intent of the proposed project is to provide year-round access into the June Lake Community, even under avalanche hazard conditions.***

**Marzano & Sons**  
General Engineering Contractor  
P.O. Box 178  
June Lake Ca 93529

July 15, 1995

Dennis Martin  
Forest Supervisor  
Inyo National Forest  
Bishop, Calif

Dear Dennis:

It has come to my attention that you may be considering endorsing a seasonal closure for the proposed alternate June Lake By-Pass Road due to concerns expressed by the Fish and Game Representative. I have read her letter dated June 23 rd which serves as comment to the EIR/EA Draft Document for the project and would like to correct some misunderstandings.

She is accurate in her assumption that the purpose of a By-Pass road is to provide alternative access during adverse winter weather and after rock slide events, however, it was discussed and agreed long ago that these are unpredictable events which can not be calculated in their severity and threat to human life. It was debated at length in the public meetings and concluded by nearly all that safety to the public necessitated the alternate By-Pass to be open year-round. The unpredictable nature of avalanches does not need comment, but you need to be aware that road slides are probably the greatest threat on a daily basis to human life and they occur on the current Highway 158 June Lake corridor continuously throughout the Spring, Summer and Fall. Single rocks as well as groups of rocks are frequently in the road at all times of the day and night and nearly all the vehicular accidents which have occurred have happened during the non-winter months and involved single vehicles trying to avoid rocks which sluffed off the steep uphill terrain onto the road resulting in the cars swerving off the cliff, rolling over or hitting the uphill bank. Further, road kills to deer and coyote along that same steep stretch are more frequent due to the lack of motorists visibility to animals approaching the road either uphill from below or moving downhill from the steep uphill terrain. The recent human fatality of one of our residents on that stretch of highway was due directly to this problem of lack of side-road visibility, causing the vehicle to swerve to avoid a deer which suddenly appeared out of the drivers vision from the steep bank. The foremost consideration which justified the expenditure of Federal funds for this project was the need to protect human life and that can only be accomplished if the alternate road is available by choice year-round.

The EIA proposed Alternative B is the only alternative which secures safety for human life and at the same time provides more protection for wildlife. First, the By-Pass would disburse the heavier summer traffic between the two routes, reducing the traffic and risk to wildlife on the more heavily traveled traditional Highway 158. This would reduce the incidents of encounters between vehicles and rocks as well as vehicles and animals. Further, the By-Pass road provides a slower mandated speed limit of 35 mph in comparison to the 55 mph on the existing Highway 158. By dispersing the traffic over the two accesses you automatically reduce the number of vehicles traveling at higher speeds and reduce the incidents of wildlife/vehicle accidents. This results in a safer environment for humans traveling the corridor and for wildlife as well. Third, the By-Pass road is on terrain which provides clearer side vision to the motorist. It is more open. With the addition of a bicycle path, you have effectively created a buffer area of safety for animals and humans because there is more area available to not only see each other but to also avoid each other. If anything, the year-round By-Pass road will decrease animal fatalities as well as decrease the incidents of human injury and vehicle damage profoundly.

It has been a foregone conclusion of the community at large that this is a securely funded project for a year-round access road. The issue of revisiting seasonal closure is only in the EIR document because the EIR format necessitates its inclusion for consideration, not because it serves as a viable alternative. If anything it cuts short the safety which is really needed. There are few people who responded to the Draft EIR in writing because it was generally felt that there was no necessity to do so. Less than a handful of people oppose the project as a year-round access road. Nearly the entire population of 600+ favor it. The comment of Fish and Game that a road of necessity has turned into a recreational experience is a warp on the truth. If millions of dollars are being spent to create a unquestionably safer access into June Lake year-round, why would the lead agency not make it as esthetically pleasing and versatile as possible?

Historically, the number and severity of accidents along the Highway 158 corridor undeniably point to the need for the By-Pass to be available year-round to the public. There should be no interim period when the public is denied the right to use that road given what we know of accident history. If traffic patterns increase to unacceptable levels in particular areas due to the creation of the By-Pass road, the issue can be revisited and new consideration can be given to mitigation after it is documented as a problem, not before. It would also be wise to acknowledge that all agencies, would reduce their liability by having both roads open out of the South Junction due to the uncontrollable frequency of hazards year-round on the existing corridor. You would be giving, people choice thereby not restricting them to a particular dangerous roadway.

Please recognize the broader needs, of our community and the public at large by selecting Alternative B. The value of human life which needs protecting is undeniably a year-round issue.

Sincerely

Rob Morgan  
Marzano & Sons  
June Lake, Ca

cc: Roger Porter & Rick Murray  
Joann Ronci  
Steve Higa

***Your comments are noted. The Final EIR contains additional mitigation measures proposed by the Department of Fish and Game, such as limiting roadside turnouts for emergency use only, gating existing SCE access roads, and installing additional water guzzlers. DFG agreed to a year-round road with bicycle paths and shoulders in exchange for adding the above mitigation measures. Alternative B, with the above changes, will be taken to the Mono County Board of Supervisors for certification of the Final EIR and approval of the project.***

***Discussions with Caltrans indicate that the Federal Highway Administration will not fund a roadway project subject to seasonal road closures. Without federal funding for the project, the road will not be constructed in the near future.***

FERN CREEK LODGE  
RT. 3, BOX 7  
JUNE LAKE, CA 93529  
22 June 1995

Steve Hega  
Mono County Planning Commission  
Bridgeport, CA 93517

Dear Steve,

I want to be sure that you know how vitally important I feel the alternate road is to the safety and well being of the community of June Lake. I have been here through 5 winters, two of which were very heavy with a lot of snow and a lot of avalanche danger. This past winter with the heavy wet snow should have convinced any doubters of the importance of an alternate way to get in and out of June Lake.

This past winter CalTrans did an outstanding job of avalanche control on Rt. 158. But the fact remains that we were locked in for long periods of time. Had there been any kind of emergency or fire or any catastrophe, no one would have been able to get in or to get out.

There is always the fear of the uncontrolled avalanche. That perhaps in the most important reason for the alternate road. School buses would be able to get in out of the village with more peace of mind for all of us.

In addition to the safety concerns, there are the economic concerns. Our visitors do not feel comfortable being stuck here, and they do not like getting to the Junction and not being able to get in. After an experience like that, they ususally don't come back, and we need them.

You know all of the reasons and arguments for this road. It is very important to all of us. We can't stop now.

Sincerely,

Carol J. Pasheilich  
Owner/Partner

***Your comments are noted. The purpose of the avalanche by-pass road is to provide safe year-round access into the June Lake Community even under hazardous avalanche conditions.***

July 5, 1995

Mono County Planning Department  
P.O. Box 347  
Mammoth Lakes, Ca 93546

Attention: Steve Higa

Dear Steve:

Having read the draft document for the June Lake By-Pass Road, I would like to present these comments to you.

The document clearly details all aspects of the issue. Suggested mitigation for the potential impacts are well thought out. I would support either proposed alternatives "B" or "D", although I prefer "B". I believe alternative "B" provides a broader expansion of recreational opportunities for visitors and residence by opening up access to a greater degree to the back side of June Lake while still providing the necessary year-round By-Pass access for a prudent price. It provides an excellent way for both village and down-canyon travelers to access the beach either by car or other means. It provides for improvements in village meadow streets to help off-set traffic impacts and most importantly gives us the much needed alternative way in and out of the South Junction Area of June Lake during all 12 months of the year.

I am adamantly opposed to Proposed Alternative "C". I don't believe there should be any consideration given to closing the By-Pass Road during the summer season. It is a bad precedent to start, it is costing millions of tax-payers dollars to build and the right to use it belongs to cars, not bikes or hikers. As a down canyon resident, I want the right to by-pass town during the congested summer months as well as during winter months. If I am in the village in the summer months and want to drive to the beach, I want the right to travel the by-pass route rather than having to go through the village main section.

***Discussions with Caltrans indicate that the Federal Highway Administration will not fund a road which is subject to seasonal closures. Without federal funding, the construction of the avalanche by-pass road will not occur in the near future.***

The current June Lake corridor over June Lake is hazardous both during winter and summer months. In my knowledge of accidents on that particular stretch of Highway 158, there has been 1 fatality and 4 cars over the side of the hill, all occurring during the summer months. Alternative "C" is not acceptable. Neither is Alternative "A".

Sincerely

Susan Balint  
P.O. Box 326  
June Lake, Ca 93529

cc: Rick Murray, USFS

***Your comments are noted. The intent of the proposed project is to provide year-round access into the June Lake Community, even under avalanche hazard conditions.***

July 16, 1995

Dennis Martin  
Forest Supervisor  
Inyo National Forest  
873 North Main Street  
Bishop, Ca

Dear Dennis:

There is something very frightening about reading comments from a resource specialist who is giving input to a critical project which involves protecting human lives, who never writes even one sentence in their comments that pertains to the value of human life as it relates to their concerns for their resource. If you go back and read the 3 pages of comments from the Fish and Game specialist as they pertain to the June Lake By-Pass Road project, you will not find even one sentence that shows a glimmer of understanding of how lives are jeopardized on the current Highway 158. It is a known that avalanche danger is dramatic. Rocks rolling into the road continuously throughout the year is not. But it is the rocks that cause the accidents that have happened. And it is the deer that continue to jump out in front of cars from the hidden steep slopes that create the hazards that cause cars to veer off the side of the hill. There is no room for error or ill-fate on the Highway 158 corridor and there is a record of many accidents and a fatality to attest to this.

There are two reasons why a year-round By-Pass road is necessary. The first is so that the town has an alternate travel corridor where people can drive without fear of being caught in an avalanche slide. The second is so that people can minimize their risks to other adverse road conditions which exist during other times of the year. Highway 158 is dangerous during the busy summer months. Some people drive well past the posted 55 mph speed limit creating a hazard to other motorists. Some people drive too slow, causing others to pass unsafely. Amongst all of this are the hazards of rocks which all too frequently roll into the road or animals darting from the steep slopes into the path of cars. Every time I drive in or out of the Loop, I drive that particular corridor with apprehension. And my apprehension is shared by many other local people who have to travel in and out of the Loop on multiple trips daily. For our community, there has never been a question of the need for the alternate By-Pass Road to be open year-round.

Any resource specialist should have the vision to see a total picture which involves not only their resource, but others as well including the human resource. When someone suggests that a road which could protect people year round should only be open during the winter, how do you validate their logic? How do you equate the value of human life in a winter season over human life in the summer season? How do you say that a life lost in an avalanche in January is any more tragic than a life lost because a car swerved to miss a boulder in the month of August?

I know the terrain intimately that the By-Pass road will travel through. It will be a broader, safer travel route with far better vision to see and avoid rock and animal encounters. The bicycle paths on either side would add an even greater margin of safety. The slower speed of 35 miles would protect humans and animals alike because it provides both with more time to react. It would create the opportunity to reduce traffic on the current 55 mph Highway 158, and at the same time disburse traffic heading into the village which would make main street safer. It would create a safer way for cars to approach the Beach rather than traveling the narrow and unsafe Oh Ridge road.

Finally, if the perspective is that there is a walled in group of deer or other wildlife known as, "the animals that live and exist only behind June Lake", that perspective is incorrect. The wildlife, deer in particular, that move throughout the Loop, do just that. They move and live throughout the Loop. They range throughout the entire Reverse Peak area, which is extensive and isolated in the most part, and range far out in the flats behind Grant Lake.

They can do this because there is water everywhere. If anyone thinks that June Lake is the main watering hole that all the deer come to in the evening, then they don't have a complete understanding of how independent the deer and other animals are of any one particular water source. I am not trying to imply that there are no deer around June Lake, but merely trying to clarify that deer, if pressured by humans, have a multitude of other places to go to for water or safe haven which will not be human impacted.

This project is first and foremost a human safety issue. Not a 6 month human safety issue but a 12 month safety issue. I don't know how anyone could justify giving people a safer alternate route for half-a-year and then tell them to continue to play the odds the old way for the other 6 months. I don't know how anyone could argue that a wider more open travel corridor is anything but safer than a narrow, steep 55 mph corridor with virtually no shoulders and poor vision on either side.

I hope that you can see faces and lives impacted by the decision that you choose. We need the By-Pass route to be a year-round compliment to our community just as the alternate route into Mammoth is. If that road was funded and permitted as a year round alternate route in the unlikely event of a volcanic eruption, I would hope that the Forest Service would find as least as much merit for our alternate route to be open year-round to protect us from our own more immediate hazards.

Thank you

Susan Balint  
P.O. Box 326  
June Lake, Ca 93529

cc: Roger Porter  
Rick Murray  
Steve Higa  
Joann Ronci

***Your comments are noted. The Mono County Public Works Department is supporting the construction of the access road with either four-foot wide paved bicycle paths and three foot-wide unpaved shoulders or seven foot-wide unpaved shoulders. The extra area along the road is necessary for road maintenance and snow storage. The area also provides additional sight distance and maneuvering room for motorist to avoid obstacles or animals in the road.***

Michael P. Cohen  
Valerie P. Cohen  
P.O. Box 314  
June Lake, CA 93529  
June 30, 1995

Steven Higa  
Mono County Planning Department  
P.O. Box 347  
Mammoth, CA 93546

Dear Sir,

This is our response to the *Draft June Lake Avalanche By-Pass Road Environmental Impact Report / Environmental Assessment*. (Referred to hereafter as the *Bypass Road EIR / EA*)

First of all, with regard to the "Purpose and Need" for the project, we agree that every effort should be made to provide safe and effective transportation in and out of the June Lake area during all months. However, we do not agree that this project constitutes the best way to achieve that goal, or one that is consistent with extant management plans. This project presents a plan to build a road which will be damaging to the environmental values of the June Lake area and which we believe is unnecessary. We are disappointed that a more creative approach has not been taken to resolve this problem, one which will help improve the environmental values associated with the June Lake area.

***Please see the response to your comments on project alternatives.***

Further, we do not believe the project alternatives (p. 111-112) consider all possible methods of resolving this problem, nor do we find the "Relative Impacts of Alternatives" (p. 113) reasonable or fair, since they suggest that not building a road would constitute a reduction of recreational or sightseeing opportunities, which is not true. Not building the road would in fact leave intact the many opportunities already present. A complete and accurate assessment of the socioeconomic impact of the road will be necessary, as a minimum, if a reasonable range of alternatives are to be explored and considered objectively.

***The proposed project considered various avalanche by-pass road alternatives. The environmental document does not contain an analysis of how the roadway project compares to other potential avalanche control projects along S.R. 158. Since the early 1980s Caltrans has hired numerous avalanche control specialist to analyze feasible alternatives for controlling avalanches along S.R. 158. According to the Caltrans Gaz.Ex System Project Report in 1993, numerous avalanche control measures were considered and rejected in favor of the Gaz. Ex system. Even after Caltrans installed and operated this system in 1994, S.R. 158 still experienced road closures on a regular basis. Also see the discussion on project alternatives.***

Most important, we do not think it is wise or prudent to encircle June Lake with paved roads. No matter what mitigating measures are considered, the effect on wildlife, scenic values, noise, and other values of the region will be great and damaging.

**This Project Is Inconsistent With Extant Management Plans:**

California Transportation Plan (Discussion Draft June 1993) indicates that the goal of Caltrans is to "promote and enhance the environment" by maintaining the "state's natural environment." (Policy element section 6)

Mono County General Plan Update (May 1992) indicates that scenic resources should be saved for "low intensity uses." June Lake itself is identified as a "visually sensitive natural landmark." (June Lake Area Plan, p. II, 79) Public transportation is needed, according to this plan, to reduce traffic and pollution. (p. 24)

Draft EIS, Forest Land and Resource Management Plan, Inyo National Forest (May 1992) clearly states that "The Inyo National Forest has an extraordinary visual resource." (p. S-29) The by-pass road will have a significant negative impact on that resource, as well as on "outstanding vegetation types" such as the spectacular stands of Sierra Juniper on the west side of June Lake. This document also calls for protection of deer habitat. (See *By-Pass EIR / EA*, p. 107)

June Lake Area Plan (September 1990, Draft) indicates that June Lake Village will remain the commercial center, pedestrian travel will be promoted, and "visually sensitive landmarks" such as June Lake will be preserved, thus the *By-Pass EIR / EA* is not correct when it indicates that the new road would be consistent with the June Lake Area Plan.

*In designing the road, Mono County and the USFS have complied with all of the existing land use management documents. Both the County and Inyo National Forest documents contain policy language protecting scenic and other resources of the June Lake area. To the extent feasible, the road has been designed to minimize impacts and to mitigate potential impacts on all of the Loop's resources, including the visual impact along the northwest shore of June Lake. The document analyzes all of the applicable potential impacts and proposes either design changes or mitigation measures to reduce impacts.*

*Specifically, the document contains the following measures or design changes to reduce potential impacts:*

- 1) The County will be required to mitigate the road's visual impacts by meeting the USFS' partial retention visual quality objective. Proposed mitigation measures include steepening cut and fill slopes to reduce disturbed areas and treating rock faces to help the newly exposed surfaces blend into the surrounding undisturbed environment.*
- 2) Although public transportation is not proposed as part of this project, the June Lake Area Plan's Circulation Element addresses public transportation as a future need. The community's most pressing need is reliable, year-round access in and out of the June Lake Loop.*
- 3) After walking the proposed route with USFS personnel, the road alignment was shifted to avoid sierra juniper trees and large Jeffrey pine trees.*
- 4) The County retained a wildlife biologist to analyze the road project and to prepare mitigation measures to reduce impacts on the Casa Diablo mule deer herd. The County accepted all of the wildlife biologist's recommendations including a reduction in the project's proposed speed limits (35 mph) to reduce mule deer/vehicle collisions, the measure to limit roadside turnouts in the section of road between Pine Cliff and the June Lake Ballfield, and the measure to install drinking water guzzlers for deer to reduce movement across the road.*

**With Regard To Socio-Economic Impacts**, this section is missing from the *By-Pass EIR / EA*. It is essential to analyze these issues.

June Lake Area Plan (September 1990, Draft) indicates that June Lake Village will remain the commercial center and business development will occur there. But the *By-Pass EIR* expects a 30% traffic diversion. Surely such a drop in local business profits would create a serious impact.

*Under the 1991 June Lake Area Plan, the June Lake Village will remain the commercial center of June Lake. The avalanche by-pass road has the potential to divert traffic away from the June Lake Village, but this is highly unlikely given that the proposed road is longer than the existing highway, contains grades steeper than the existing highway and has a lower speed limit, 35 miles per hour verses 55 miles per hour along S.R. 158. Except for periods of avalanche danger, S.R. 158 will continue providing the primary access into the June Lake community.*

*The 30% traffic diversion figure was an assumption used to analyze the by-pass road's capacity verses the number of existing trips and potential trips generated by future development of the West Village and Rodeo Grounds. This figure is not an absolute figure related to the by-pass road. Design standards along the access road, which are lower than standards than along S.R. 158, the convenience of the road, and traffic congestion in the Village will all factor into a driver's decision to use the by-pass road or the state highway. Additionally, even if 30% of new vehicle trips related to future development in the West Village and Rodeo Grounds use the by-pass road, that would mean that 70% of the trips would go through the Village. This could generate additional revenues for businesses in the Village rather than reduce revenues as suggested.*

*Another factor to consider is that the 1991 June Lake Area Plan governs where future commercial development will take place. Assuming that development takes place consistent with the adopted Area Plan, future commercial development would be limited in the West*

*Village area and would be encouraged in the Rodeo Grounds area across from the Ski Area. The construction of a new access road without the development of new commercial uses will not automatically mean that business revenues in the June Lake Village will decline. Assuming that the avalanche by-pass road provides more reliable winter access, than it can be reasonably assumed that the number of winter visitors, primarily June Mountain patrons, would increase and could cause a corresponding increase in business revenues in the June Lake Village, the Loop's only existing commercial district.*

Also, the public is entitled to an accurate assessment of predicted costs, in terms of total costs for alternatives -- e.g. the cost of an enlarged or improved Gaz.Ex system, or the use of snowsheds, the cost of building and maintaining a new road. In order to be meaningful, this assessment should include total costs, costs per resident or residential family, cost per trip, especially if this project is conceived as a part time solution, and should also include a monetary assessment of the contribution this road will make specifically to June Lake Village and June Mountain Ski Area. All of these figures are necessary for an accurate picture of the project's socio - economic impact.

**Project Alternatives:**

If the By-Pass road is intended only to make winter travel safer, then more alternatives must be explored. For instance:

1. Improvement or expansion of the Gaz.Ex system by increasing the numbers of systems and extending them to include more of the sensitive slopes.

*The Gaz.Ex system worked to greatly reduce the number and extent of avalanche closures along S.R. 158. However, even an expanded Gaz.Ex system would result in road closures while clearing of avalanched snow takes place. Additionally, even after the Gaz.Ex system is exploded, not all of the snow susceptible to sliding comes down. This leads to road openings even in potentially dangerous conditions (Please see letter from Bob Lunbeck, June Lake Villager Motel)..*

2. Avalanche sheds between Oh! Ridge and June Lake Village.

*In the late 1980's Caltrans proposed constructing a 300' long avalanche shed over a portion of S.R. 158 between Oh! Ridge and the June Lake Village. The proposed \$4.5 million project would have protected the road from 2 or 3 avalanche chutes, while 14 to 20 chutes occur along that section of highway. Constructing avalanche sheds to protect the rest of the road would have costed in excess of \$10 million. Constructing the avalanche sheds would also have resulted in icing problems in the shed and significant visual impacts along the slope overlooking June Lake.*

3. Avalanche sheds in combination with Gaz.Ex.

*The costs of constructing avalanche sheds as well as the Gaz.Ex system would not be financially feasible nor would the project protect the entire stretch along June Lake from avalanches and road closures. The existing Gaz.Ex system costs approximately \$1.5 million. Phase I of the proposed by-pass road is projected to cost \$3.0 million. Assuming that the \$3.0 million for the by-pass road could be spent on an avalanche shed, an avalanche shed even smaller than the one proposed to control 2 or 3 chutes could be constructed. This would leave much of the stretch of highway along June Lake unprotected and subject continued avalanche closures.*

4. Winter travel across June Lake.

*June Lake is a relatively deep spring fed lake. The spring waters cool the lake during the summer and keep the water relatively warmer during the winter. The springs would contribute to rotten or thinner ice during the early winter months and during early spring. Thin or rotten ice would not support vehicular travel across the lake.*

5. Access to June Mountain Ski Area by means other than automotive.

*Patrons of the June Mountain Ski Area could be accommodated by other means than automobile. For example, buses from Mammoth Lakes could transport skiers to June Lake, however, the buses would still have to pass through the avalanche area and the road would still*

experience road closures. Another possible way to get skiers into June Lake would be to connect the June Mountain Ski Area with the Mammoth Mountain Ski Area. This would necessitate opening up new areas for skiing and the construction of new ski facilities between the two mountains. The end result may be more environmental disturbance than proposed by the roadway project. Also, this alternative would not assist residents of June Lake, which must frequently travel through the avalanche area.

6. Light Rail.

The financial costs of light rail would render this type of project infeasible. Additionally, the light rail alignment would have to be constructed around avalanche areas, probably along the same alignment as the proposed by-pass road. This would result in environmental impacts similar to those related to the access road.

7. Development of the Silver Lake - Grant Lake access.

The Silver Lake to Grant Lake section of S.R. 158 is closed due to avalanche dangers. Opening or clearing this roadway in the wintertime would create the same problems that currently exist along the section of S.R. 158 between Oh! Ridge and the June Lake Village.

We are so strenuous in our views because of the magnitude of unremediable impacts the project will create on the June Lake environment, impacts not fully addressed by the Bypass Road EIR / EA. we address them as follows:

**Damage to the Northwest shore of June Lake as a result of human intrusion.** The project describes scenic turnouts and interpretive displays along the proposed road. (p. 4) This is in direct contradiction to the "mitigating measure" of discouraging people from parking and getting out of their cars (pp. 37, 59, 109). However, a walk along the path of the proposed By - Pass route reveals serious and obviously disfiguring damage below the present highway 158 as people have eroded trails straight down to the lake shore. There is no reason to expect that this will not also happen on the proposed by-pass road, and in a more sensitive environment. This kind of damage, which it is reasonable to anticipate, is not addressed by the *Bypass Road EIR / EA*. It is significant.

**Phase I of the proposed project may feature a single scenic turnout located at the June Lake Ballfield.** Due to the sensitive nature of June Lake's backshore and the existence of wintering Bald Eagles, Phase I of the project will be redesigned to include roadside turnouts which will be signed for "emergency use" only. The turnouts will be provided for public safety reasons for emergency stopping only.

Although the potential for the by-pass road to increase pedestrian use along the backshore of June Lake exists, it is not a likely possibility. The by-pass road differs from the section of S.R. 158 along June Lake. Among the differences are that the by-pass road is located much further away from June Lake than S.R. 158, which directly overlooks the lake. Thick understory brush and vertical distance to the lake will also make it difficult to hike through the understory brush down to the lake. Additionally, the road will be constructed through mountainous terrain requiring cut and fill in most places along the alignment. Project designs using sections of cut and fill can be used to discourage motorists from pulling off the side of the road and parking. Lastly, the backshore of June Lake features thick expanses of tules that grow along the shoreline, effectively limiting the areas available for shore fishing.

The most accessible and shore fishable area exists in the northwest corner of the lake near the Pine Cliff Resort and the Oh! Ridge Campground. Numerous established dirt roads provide access to parking areas and trails along the lakeshore. Additionally, an existing utility line road already exists closer to June Lake than the proposed paved by-pass road. Shoreline fishing access is already provided by this road.

**Botanic Resources.** Sierra Juniper (*Juniperus occidentalis*) is not mentioned in the *Bypass Road EIR / EA*. Nevertheless, there are remarkably fine specimens of these trees along the proposed route. These trees, some of which may be over a thousand years old, are neither common nor widespread as the Jeffries and sage are said to be. (p. 51) Some people come to June Lake to see these trees in their natural surroundings. The report must address the damage to these trees, and the effect on these specimens by human intrusions.

*The Sierra Juniper (Juniperus occidentalis) is mentioned in the document under the common name Western Juniper (p. 49). As stated earlier, the road was realigned to avoid large junipers located on rocky outcroppings. The USFS biologists were concerned about the trees and requested that the County realign the road.*

**Cultural Resources.** We do not agree that "enough is known." (p. 57), especially since we do not agree the sites are only significant for information and research. Sites have values beyond this, for recreational and other human pleasures. Mitigation must address degradation by construction crews, and by later automotive populations.

*Since the preparation and circulation of the Draft EIR/EA, the County retained an archaeologists to further evaluate the significance of June Lake Site 1 (CA-MNO-2786). The subsequent shovel excavations revealed that the site does not meet the National Register Evaluation Criteria for significant sites. No further work or mitigation will be required.*

**Wildlife Environment.** Mule deer, black bears, mountain lions, and other species do use the north shore for forage, cover, and access to water, especially the areas furthest from the human encroachments at either end of the lake. Already the lake is blocked off on three sides. This report has failed to accurately assess project related mortalities.

*Project related mortalities are identified as a potential project impact on page 33 of the Draft EIR/EA. The primary mitigation measures for reducing project related mortalities is to reduce speed limits along the proposed by-pass road and to install artificial watering areas on the uphill side of the road to reduce animal trips and road crossings from the uplands to June Lake. Other mitigation measures include surveying trees slated for removal for the presence of raptor nests and, if a nest is located, develop mitigation measures.*

**Human Environment.** Humans also seek the relatively quiet and unchanged environment on the north shore of June Lake. They do this by walking, riding bicycles and motorcycles, and especially by fishing by boat and along the banks of the "unimproved" shore. In particular, the visual analysis neglects the perspective of these walkers, bicyclists, and especially of the fishermen in boats on June Lake, of permittees on docks along the south shore, and of permittees in cabins along the south shore.

**Visual Resources.**

The *Bypass road EIR/EA* states that the area "greatly benefits from the undisturbed landscape." (p. 63) the vantage point map allows for no "UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL" looking, such as drawing, bird watching, fishing, hunting, or other actual activities which constitute the real aesthetic experience of humans engaged in recreation. It turns visual resources into automotive snapshots.

None of the stated mitigating measures are convincing here.

For instance, the term "Retention (R)" suggest that the road and road-cuts might possibly "repeat characteristics already found in the natural landscape," yet also the document states that the road will be highly visible. How could a road have "high visibility absorption capacity" when it is "behind rock outcroppings." People walk on these rocks. It is not true that "most of the alignment" is in "high visibility absorption" areas. The photos show that the road is visible from everywhere: autos and trucks will make it more visible, as will its horizontal lines and cuts and fills, and the long term changes on vegetation which will result from its interruption of natural water flow, and erosion from increased human foot traffic.

*The visual impact analysis was prepared in accordance with adopted USFS procedures for analyzing visual impacts. The United States Forest Service uses the Visual Management System to manage the visual resources of National Forest lands. The proposed project would meet all of the Forest Service's Visual Management System policies.*

**Noise.** The "setting" section is incomplete because it omits residences along Leonard Street and Cabins along Forest Knoll, on the south shore of June Lake. Also the question of noise must be addressed to those who seek the undeveloped shore of June Lake for solitude. Impacts from the construction phase (heavy trucks and blasting) must be included here. It is our contention that construction noise will not only be significant and annoying (pp. 104, 106), but potentially damaging to the health and welfare of fishermen and dwellers in the vicinity.

*The document's noise section was modified to address potential noise impacts on June Lake Cabin owners along Forest Knoll Road. Although the potential for the road to increase the ambient noise level in the area exists, the topography surrounding the road and distance separating the road from the cabins would minimize changes in ambient noise levels. The nearest cabin along Forest Knoll is located approximately 400' from the by-pass road (Station 34). This segment of road is separated from the cabins by a rocky outcropping which rises 33 feet above the road (7750' to 7783). This rocky outcropping will act as a sound barrier for the cabins.*

*Adherence to Section 10.16.090 of the Mono County Noise Ordinance will mitigate construction related noise impacts. The noise ordinance limits hours of construction and regulates noise levels emitted from construction equipment.*

Finally, it is necessary to consider the possibility that there may be a long or even indefinite period between the completion of "Phase I" and "Phase II," when a great increase of traffic will ascend, and more important descend the very steep hill of Leonard Street, next to the city park, where a large number of pedestrians, especially young children, play. This will produce an extremely dangerous and probably fatal situation.

*The County may not have funding to complete Phase II of the project for at least another two or three years. Construction on Phase I of the road will start in June of 1996 and will end in October of 1998. During that time, the County will have the opportunity to secure funding to complete Phase II of the project.*

*Even if Phase II of the project is not completed, the avalanche by-pass road is not anticipated to greatly increase traffic near the park or down Leonard Avenue. State Highway 158 will continue serving as the primary access road into June Lake, aside from during hazardous avalanche conditions. Additionally, part of phase I of the project includes improving existing conditions at the intersection of Leonard Avenue and Bruce Street. These improvements will help to alleviate existing problems.*

Though by no means a complete listing of our concerns, I hope this letter explains why we are gravely concerned about the wisdom of this project.

Sincerely,

Michael P. Cohen

Valerie P. Cohen

c.c. Dennis Martin, Inyo Forest Supervisor

Edward J. Hoff, President  
June Lake Permittees Association  
P.O. Box 155, June Lake, CA 93529  
July 2, 1995

Steven Higa, Mono County Planning Department  
P.O. Box 347, Mammoth Lakes, CA 93546

Dear Sir,

As the President of the association of thirty three cabin owners along the shore of June Lake, I speak for our association which opposes any June Lake Avalanche Bypass Road. This is our response to the *Draft June Lake Avalanche By-Pass Road Environmental Impact Report/ Environmental Assessment*.

Though every effort should be made to provide safe and effective transportation in and out of the June Lake area during all months, this project is a poor way to achieve that goal, being damaging to environmental values of the area.

We do not believe the project alternatives consider all possible methods of resolving this problem, nor do we find the "Relative Impacts of Alternatives" reasonable or fair, since they suggest that not building a road would constitute a reduction of recreational or sightseeing opportunities, which is not true. Not building the road would in fact leave intact the many opportunities already present.

***The document's project alternatives section is not an exhaustive comparison of all feasible alternatives. Since the early 1980's, Caltrans has studied numerous avalanche control measures along S.R. 158, including a recoilless rifle system, avalanche control structures on the hillside overlooking June Lake, Gaz.Ex and snowsheds. Out of these systems, Caltrans selected Gaz.Ex as the most reliable, cost effect, and least environmentally damaging measure for avalanche control. In the summer of 1994, Caltrans installed a Gaz.Ex system above S.R. 158, however road closures for up to three days still occurred along S.R. 158. The avalanche by-pass road appears to be the only cost effective measure to provide continous access to the June Lake community.***

We do not approve of encircling June Lake with paved roads. The effect on wildlife, scenic values, solitude, silence, and other values of the region will be great and damaging. The Gaz.Ex system has been effective and can be improved, or the use of snowsheds might be considered.

***Please see previous comment. Snowsheds were studied and rejected as a potential alternative due to significant visual impacts, extreme costs, over \$10 million dollars, and potential icing problems.***

The project will degrade the shore of June Lake as a result of human intrusion, will result in damage to the flora, wildlife, human values along this shore. People walk, ride bicycles and motorcycles, and especially fish by boat and along the banks of the "unimproved" shore. In particular, the visual analysis neglects the perspective of these walkers, bicyclists, and especially of the fishermen in boats on June Lake, of Permittees on docks along the south shore, and of Permittees in cabins along the south shore.

***The visual impact analysis was prepared in accordance with adopted USFS procedures for analyzing visual impacts. The United States Forest Service uses the Visual Management System to manage the visual resources of National Forest lands. The proposed project would meet all of the Forest Service's Visual Management System policies. Additionally, the EIR contains measures to minimize potential visual impacts. Measures such as revegetation, minimizing cuts and fills, using the natural topography to screen the road from the lake, and***

*treating newly exposed rock to reduce color contrast, have been incorporated into the document. Even if the vantage points of the visual impact analysis changed, the potential impacts and mitigation measures would not.*

*After reviewing comments on potential visual impacts from June Lake's surface and from Forest Service permittee cabins along the southshore of June Lake, additional field work was conducted from a boat. Views from the southshore of June Lake would be screened by the large rock outcropping located immediately north of the last forest service cabin and by trees and other vegetation located on the hillslope beneath the proposed roadway. Views from the west lakeshore, looking upslope toward the road, would be screened by the existing slope side vegetation and also the angle of the hill slope. Because of the road's distance from the lake and location on the upper bench overlooking June Lake, higher vantage points such as from Highway 158, and vantage points located farther away from June Lake's westshore, provide a better perspective on the road's potential visual impacts.*

Sincerely

Edward J. Hoff, President  
June Lake Permittees Association

c.c. Dennis Martin, Inyo Forest Supervisor

Gary Johanson  
P.O. Box 273  
June Lake, CA 93529  
July 4, 1995

Dear Steve Higa,

*In this age of fiscal austerity and government cost-cutting, it is truly amazing that the proposed new road along the north side of June lake is being pushed along in the name of school bus safety.*

*It is my understanding that the new avalanche control system is very effective, but it needs to be enlarged to cover a greater area. This is a far better alternative than cutting an ugly swatch across prime wildlife habitat and an important deer corridor.*

**The existing Gaz.Ex system, even if expanded, would still result in road closures and travel through a potential hazardous area. During the winter of 1994, S.R. 158 was closed for three days, even after the Gaz.Ex system was fired. Sometimes snow conditions may not be completely stable and extended road closures would result.**

*The existing June Lake Road is sufficient to carry traffic in and out of June Lake all-year-round. Residents knew of the periodic avalanche closures when they moved here, and most accepted this as one of the trade-offs for living in an alpine setting. If this road is built, it will constitute a multi-million dollar gift of public funds to the construction industry and a few land developers, let's not pave paradise.*

**Your opinion is noted. According to the 1986 Caltrans Route Concept Report, a 1.4 mile stretch of S.R. 158 (post mile .8 to 2.2; the section along June Lake) will exceed threshold capacity in 1995 and all of Segment 1, from the south June Lake Junction to the SCE power plant, will reach threshold capacity by 2005. The avalanche by-pass road could help to alleviate traffic capacity problems along a segment of S.R. 158.**

Sincerely,

Gary D. Johanson

July 7, 1995

Mono County Planning Department Mammoth Lakes, Ca.

Attention: Steve Higa

Dear Mr. Higa:

As a resident of the June Lake area we want to express our support of the proposed alternate road in June Lake. We feel that the future of our community depends on the completion of this road.

The health and safety of all persons using the present corridor as ingress and egress is on the line. We cannot afford to try to out guess "Mother Nature." Time is of the essence and I feel a timely decision must be made.

I urge you to proceed and to use due diligence in expediting this road that is long overdue.

Sincerely,

Charles and Joanne Hudson

*Your comments are noted.*

July 7, 1995

Steve Higa Mono County Planning Department Mammoth Lakes, Ca.

Dear Mr. Higa:

I wish to express my opinions on the proposed alternate road coming into June Lake. As a full time resident and property owner I have great concerns about the current access that I must travel on almost a daily basis. As a manager of a very active business I have to travel this corridor almost on a daily basis for banking, business supplies and other related business activities.

My concern is not only for my own safety but for the safety of my family. Although I do not have school age children at this time I have grave concerns for the future travel of the school bus through this corridor in both the winter and summer months. Upon two occasions in the last two years I have knowledge of the school bus just barely making the time frame through before an avalanche occurred or just prior to one happening. I cannot comprehend that the State of California could take a chance with one life. I hope that we do not have to wait for another Oklahoma City disaster to occur before we take action. Now is the time to make the decision to move forward, mitigate our problems and quit tempting fate. The future and well being of the residents of June Lake will depend on the decisions we make in the next 30 days.

Sincerely,

Jeff and Donna Ronci

***Your comments are noted. The Mono County Board of Supervisors and the Inyo National Forest Supervisor will make a decision on the project in the next few months.***

July 8, 1995

Mono County Planning Department  
Mammoth Lakes, California

Attention: Steve Higa

Dear Mr. Higa:

Thank you for the opportunity to express my opinion on the alternate road into June Lake area. I am in full support of this road. The time and expense that all agencies have given to this project has been more than overwhelming in the concerns they have expressed for the health and safety of the residents and tourists using this beautiful area as a recreational experience.

I want to personally commend all of the agencies that have contributed to the planning and for including additional future plans for expanding on the recreational experience, i.e.: bike trails, view points, etc. A safe ingress and egress is of primary concern to the future of this community. I strongly urge that we get behind this project before we lose the funding that has been set aside, mitigate any problems and move forward with this project.

Sincerely,

Art and Joann Ronci

*Your comments are noted.*

July 7, 1995

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing in support of the June Lake By-Pass road. I commute daily to work in Mammoth Lakes. The danger on 158 is evident as the road is closed constantly on heavy snow days. I wait for the road to be cleared to leave for work or I am unable to return home for days at a time. I was unable to return to June Lake in March for three nights and four days (from Thursday until Sunday afternoon) due to avalanche conditions. I am thankful I didn't have children to try to return home to. It is an uncomfortable and uneasy feeling to drive 158 during heavy snow days and I am thankful each time I make it safely through. On the long four day period I was unable to get home to June Lake, I went to Von's market only to arrive when the Paramedics came to assist a June Lake resident who was unable to return to his home to get his insulin medicine and went into a coma.

This is truly an unsafe road to be the only access to June Lake.

Sincerely,

JoAnn O'Malley  
P.O. Box 174  
June Lake, CA 93529  
648-8501

***Your comments are noted.***

P. O. Box 602  
June Lake, CA 93529  
July 20, 1995

Mr. Dennis Martin, U. S. Forest Supervisor  
Inyo National Forest  
873 N. Main Street  
Bishop, CA 93514

Dear Mr. Martin,

It is my understanding that sometime in the near future, you will be holding a meeting to consider the Draft Environmental Impact Report Environmental Assessment (EIR/EA) for the June Lake By-Pass Road. Since I have been a home owner in the June Lake area for more than 30 years, I have experienced the difficulties of driving into and out of a community with a single access road, especially in winter when the northern part of the June Lake Loop Road is closed. However, there are also hazards during the summer when increased tourist traffic, increased deer crossings and various rock slides have produced unsafe traveling conditions, resulting in the loss of both human and wildlife lives.

Consequently, I am writing to support the adoption of Alternative B, the proposed two-lane road with two four foot wide bicycle paths, providing year-round access. This alternative accomplishes multiple purposes, the most important of which is an optional safety route into and out of the area in case of avalanches or rock slides. The two bicycle paths are an important addition to the area's recreational resources; in addition, they are an important safety factor, since cyclists would be able to ride safely on a designed bike path and not unsafely on the shoulders of Highway 158. The proposed design of the By-Pass Road provides increased vision to both the motorist and the wildlife, thus improving opportunities for avoidance and increasing the safety of the travel.

From a cost perspective, developing a road for safety purposes with no concern for recreational or aesthetic values makes very little sense and is not cost effective; thus I like the increased safety provided by the bike paths as well as the increased opportunities for sightseers to view the beauty of the area in a safe manner. Addressing all of these concerns in one project utilizes taxpayer funds appropriately and efficiently.

It is apparent that the By-Pass Road will impact both the environment and the wildlife resources of the area and I would encourage the Forest Service to do everything in its power to mitigate these adverse effects. Mandating a 35 mile per hour speed limit, restricting the access of off-road vehicles in both summer and winter, providing appropriate signage and specific monitoring of the mitigation efforts are essential to the success of the project. The June Lake By-Pass Road must provide year-round increased safety for both people and animals with minimal adverse effects in a cost effective manner. Therefore, I support wholeheartedly the adoption of Alternative B.

Thank you for your attention to these remarks and to your concern for the effective completion of this project. If you have questions or concerns about my comments in this letter, please feel free to contact me at the above address. I would be happy to discuss these issues with you more thoroughly in the future.

Sincerely,

Joan D. Johnson

*Your comments are noted. The project proposed for the Mono County Board of Supervisors' consideration includes year-round access and bicycle paths. The Final EIR under consideration by the Board will include additional mitigation measures proposed by the Department of Fish and Game to further minimize the potential impacts of year-round use and bicycle paths.*