



Mammoth Lakes Trails and Public Access

Action Plan

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PO Box 100 PMB# 432
Mammoth Lakes, CA 93546
760 934 3154
mltpa.org

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Jeff Olson (consultant)
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Mike Schlafmann
Kim Stravers
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Participants in the MLTPA Strategic Conference, November 2006.



1. Overview

Mammoth Lakes, California, is a unique destination-resort community located in the Eastern Sierra region of Central California. As the community grows, residents, visitors, and businesses are concerned with maintaining the region's high quality of life. A central issue is ensuring access to the public lands that are among the region's most significant assets. In many ways, the future of Mammoth Lakes depends on developing a system of trails and public access that will properly integrate the community and its surrounding natural environment. To date, there is no government agency, non-profit entity, business or citizens' group specifically charged with the realities of this integration process, and, as a result, critical points of public access are at risk and public lands surrounding the town do not benefit from the generous stewardship this community could provide.

In November 2006, a Strategic Conference was held to develop an Action Plan for Trails and Public Access in Mammoth Lakes. For two days, citizens, planners, local officials, businesses, and other participants from the public, private, and non-profit sectors worked together to share their vision for Mammoth Lakes and the surrounding region. This Action Plan is a result of the Strategic Conference, and it will serve as a guide for the development of a trails and public-access system in Mammoth Lakes. The plan is presented in two key sections: Organization and Projects. The

Organization section presents the steps needed to establish a public-private partnership to support the community's vision. The Projects section identifies potential efforts that will help create a connected system of trails and public access.

The purpose of this Action Plan is to establish a vision for a comprehensive system of trails and public access for Mammoth Lakes and the surrounding region. The vision is based on the goals identified in the Mammoth Lakes General Plan, as shown in the text on the upper right side of this page. Trails and public access directly relate to each of these goals, and are an important part of the future for Mammoth Lakes. The recent University of California Santa Barbara Economic Forecast Report for the community supports this vision, as shown in the quote below from the report's recommendations.

General Plan Goals

Town of Mammoth Lakes
1992 Vision Statement Update

- A desirable place to live and visit
- A healthy natural environment
- A high quality, full service recreation resort and community available to all economic sectors
- A vital year-round community
- Housing, employment, public facilities and services for all segments of the community
- A comprehensive circulation system de-emphasizing the automobile and promoting pedestrian, bicycling and transit options.
- A consistent, attractive appearance and image which reflects the town's Alpine setting

"The ideal positioning strategy for Mammoth Lakes will be one that encompasses all it has to offer, now and in the near future. It should build off of Mammoth's currently perceived strengths, as well as appeal to the key demographic groups that can provide the town with economic sustainability. For example, Mammoth could be presented as "California's Playground". This positioning approach allows Mammoth to build off its existing strengths of skiing and camping/ hiking. Under the "California's Playground" umbrella, Mammoth Lakes could easily market other active outdoor pursuits, as well as offer leisure options and activities. To illustrate, Mammoth Lakes could consider doing all of the following: Develop a strong presence in mountain biking, possibly working to be identified as the mountain biking capital of California..."

Report to the Town of Mammoth Lakes by the UCSB Economic Forecast Project, 2006

The Town of Mammoth Lakes includes three defining land-use boundaries: the Urban Growth Boundary, the Town Boundary, and the Planning Area as represented in the 1987 General Plan. What is unique about the proposed trails and public-access system is that it creates a vision for integrating the human and natural environments across these three jurisdictions. The idea of “trails and public access” as it applies to Mammoth Lakes must be clearly defined throughout the entire effort of MLTPA. This core concept is described in the following principles:

- 1) The town of Mammoth Lakes includes a system of trails within its Urban Growth Boundary (a land area of 4.5 square miles).
- 2) The Town of Mammoth Lakes includes trails and outdoor recreation amenities within the Town Planning Area on U.S. Forest Service public lands, including Mammoth Mountain Ski Area (a land area of 150+ square miles).
- 3) MLTPA’s objective will be the seamless and jurisdiction-free integration of trails, trail systems, and outdoor recreation amenities through a regional planning effort and a porous Urban Growth Boundary guaranteed by secure public access.

This vision is summarized by the simple phrase “1 + 2 = 3.” All three of the principles described above must be seen as working together to create a region whose whole is greater than the sum of its parts. The synergies created by this concept will develop a new relationship between the human and natural landscape in the Mammoth Lakes region. These principles form the foundation of the organization and project concepts presented in the following sections of this Action Plan.

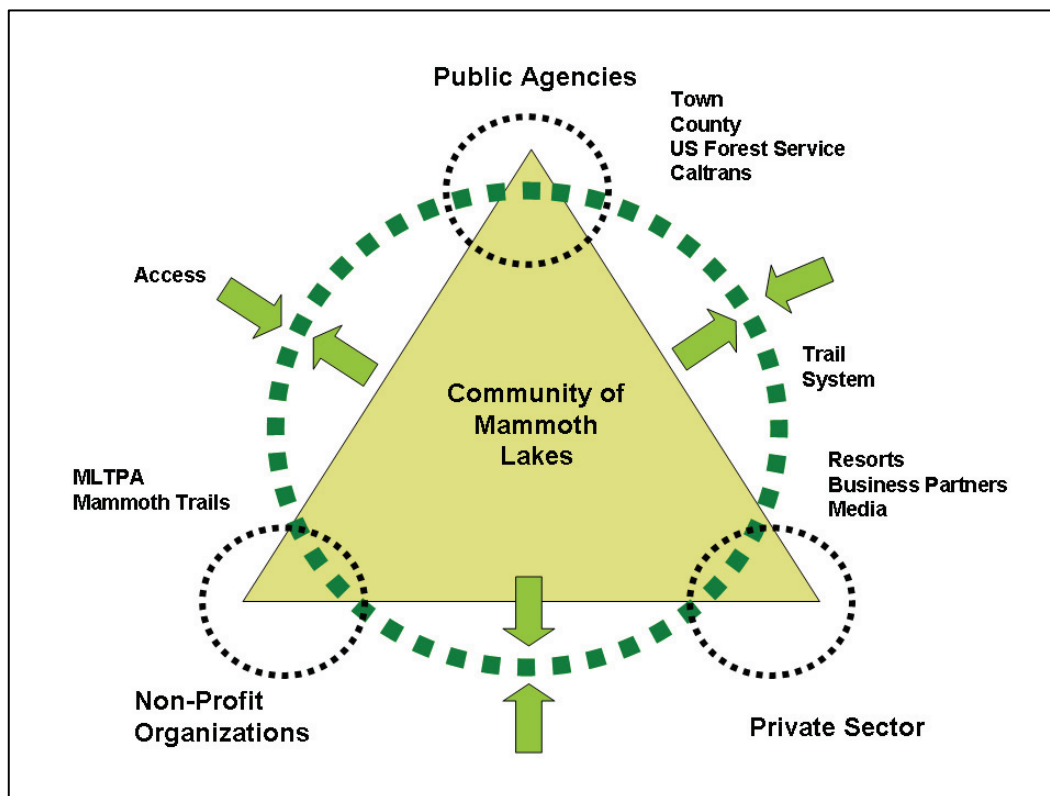


Mountain biking in Mammoth Lakes. Photo by Christian Pondella

2. Organization

The first step in developing a trails and public-access system for Mammoth Lakes is organization. The multi-jurisdictional challenge for MLTPA is unique. No other existing group or organization has stepped forward to successfully address the community's trails and public-access issues. This is why MLTPA is an essential part of the future of Mammoth Lakes. The roots of MLTPA extend back to the winter of 2005–'06 and a dispute over a private gate on a public road and egress from a key outdoor recreation amenity. In July 2006, MLTPA presented a "Mobility Plan Resources Report" to a joint meeting of the town Planning, Public Arts, and Tourism and Recreation commissions. That presentation led to MLTPA working under contract with the Town to develop a GIS inventory of public access locations. MLTPA subsequently organized the Strategic Conference and related public events in November 2006.

In communities with successful trail programs, a non-profit organization (such as MLTPA) is part of a "partnership triangle" representing the relationships between the public, private, and non-profit sectors. For Mammoth Lakes, this potential partnership is illustrated in the organization chart below:



This "partnership triangle" shows the relationships between public, private, and non-profit organizations, and the concept of a trails and public-access system for the community of Mammoth Lakes and the surrounding region.

The strategic conference participants identified the need for getting MLTPA established as a sustainable non-profit organization. An Interim Working Group (IWG) was identified, and these volunteers will help to identify candidates for a Board of Directors and act as an interim sounding board as MLTPA is structured and incorporated. Individuals, businesses, and organizations will participate as “friends” of MLTPA, but there will not be a voting membership structure. MLTPA will have formally adopted bylaws and legal status as a non-profit organization registered in the State of California. Partnership agreements will be established between MLTPA and the region’s land managers, including the U.S. Forest Service, the Town of Mammoth Lakes, Mono County, resort properties, and others. As a key part of its mission, MLTPA will serve as a coordinating entity for Mammoth Trails, an alliance of trail user groups representing all of the region’s trail interests. This alliance will serve as a forum for cooperation among motorized and non-motorized trail organizations, and will facilitate a web-based portal for public information on trails, public access, and outdoor recreation amenities. Mammoth Trails will eventually have a representative on the MLTPA Board of Directors.

The following draft mission statement was developed for MLTPA at the Strategic Conference to summarize the relationship between the public, private, and non-profit sectors in working together to achieve a common vision:

“MLTPA will plan, steward, interpret, promote, and sustain a system of four-season trails and public access to natural areas in Mammoth Lakes and the Eastern Sierra region, while protecting its natural resources. We do this by collaboratively engaging government agencies, nonprofit organizations, businesses, and concerned citizens, and creating a forum for all trail users to be involved, connecting people and nature.”

The formal organization process for MLTPA is envisioned in three phases, as follows:

PHASE 1 - INTERIM PHASE: “Forming”

The next phase of MLTPA involves capitalizing on the successful efforts of the past year and the Strategic Conference. The Interim Working Group (IWG) will guide MLTPA through these steps. The Sierra Fund will serve as an “incubator” organization to support MLTPA during this transition period.

SHORT-TERM ACTIONS: November 2006 to February 2007

The following actions describe the next steps for moving MLTPA forward as an organization:

- 1.1 Update the MLTPA website with materials from the Public Meeting and Strategic Conference.
- 1.2 Incorporate as a 501(c)3 non-profit organization registered in the State of California, and develop interim bylaws.

- 1.3 File for non-profit status with the IRS.
- 1.4 Circulate the draft Action Plan to the IWG with “*Master Planning of Trails and Public Access within the Town of Mammoth Lakes Planning Area, Town Boundary, and Urban Growth Limit*” as the primary strategic objective. Convene an IWG meeting in December.
- 1.5 Identify and recruit potential members of the MLTPA Board.
- 1.6 Prepare a first-year operations budget for MLTPA (including overhead and staff costs) and a draft business plan, with a detailed financial strategy, priorities, and benchmarks.
- 1.7 Convene the first meeting of the MLTPA Board of Directors in the first weeks of January 2007.
- 1.8 Develop MLTPA’s “Proposal to the Community.” This will be a proposal to integrate the community of Mammoth Lakes with its surrounding public lands through a trails and public access master-planning process, subsequent adoption and approval of the proposed Master Plan, and implementation of the Master Plan. The proposal will include the following sections:
 - The objective of the effort
 - The partners who will be involved in the process
 - The specific steps necessary to proceed
 - The benefits to the community
 - The cost to the community
 - The agency agreements, planning process, and timelines
- 1.9 Develop a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for MLTPA’s partnership with the USFS:
 - During the planning process
 - For approval of the plan
 - During implementation
- 1.10 Develop a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for MLTPA’s partnership with the Town:
 - During the planning process
 - For approval of the plan
 - During implementation
- 1.11 Develop a methodology for MLTPA’s funding and operations:
 - As an organization
 - During the planning process
 - During implementation
 - For the long term, including consideration of creating an MLTPA Endowment that will generate sustainable funding
 - Define MLTPA’s relationships with the private sector and the community, including potential creation of an MLTPA Advisory Board
 - Define the MLTPA partnership with Mammoth Trails
- 1.12. Continue ongoing communications with the Strategic Conference participants to develop support for the Proposal to the Community.

1.13 Work with the local media to communicate the Action Plan.

1.14 Secure a contracted, financed commitment from the town by March 1, 2007, to undertake the trails and public access master-planning effort.

PHASE 2 - ESTABLISHING MLTPA: “Storming”

The second phase will build on the base created during the forming phase. These activities will involve MLTPA as a leadership organization for making positive changes for trails and public access in the Mammoth Lakes community. These steps are essential to support the work of other public- and private-sector partners within the partnership triangle developed at the Strategic Conference. The term “storming” refers to taking actions that turn the organization’s goals into reality.

MID-TERM ACTIONS: March 2007 to December 2007

These actions will be distinguished by two separate areas of endeavor: 1) the actions and process of the MLTPA organization; and 2) the Trails and Public Access Master Plan process.

2.1. Develop the Mammoth Lakes Trails and Public Access Master Plan. This task is the cornerstone of all of MLTPA’s future efforts, and is the organization’s top priority.

2.2 Continue developing the means for community outreach and education as part of the planning process, and identify outdoor recreation groups and existing organizations as partners in development of the Trails and Public Access Master Plan. Make good use of the GIS data gathered by MLTPA under contract with the Town.

2.3 Integrate trails and public access as priorities into the Mammoth Lakes General Plan Update. The Trails and Public Access Master Plan can be referenced by the updated Mammoth Lakes General Plan.

PHASE 3 - MAMMOTH TRAILS: “Norming”

Once MLTPA is formally established and the Master Plan has been generated and adopted, the organization can move forward with “living the mission statement” and implementing projects in the community and region. Actions at this level will need to remain strategic in nature, so that the organization’s resources are used efficiently. The term “norming” refers to integrating MLTPA throughout the Mammoth Lakes community so that trails and public access become cornerstones of the region’s identity.

LONG-TERM ACTIONS: January 2008 and beyond

- 3.1 Integrate the Trails and Public Access Master Plan recommendations into Mammoth Lakes mobility planning and U.S. Forest Service planning projects.
- 3.2 Convene the Mammoth Trails user group alliance, and initiate a format for ongoing cooperation.
- 3.3 Coordinate the Mammoth Trails website with trail information, maps, and other resources.
- 3.4 Develop an MLTPA Endowment fund for long-term financial sustainability.
- 3.5 Assist partner organizations in advocacy for the support of trails and public access at the regional, state, and national levels.

3. Projects

With MLTPA's leadership and a plan for trails and public access, the community and local partners can create new projects and initiatives. Pieces of the future trails and public-access system are in place within the town and the surrounding landscape, but these pieces are not well connected, signed, or managed. The Strategic Conference participants confirmed that there is consensus for creating a connected system of trails and public access in Mammoth Lakes.

In 1991, the Town of Mammoth Lakes developed a trails plan that included a paved loop bike path around the center of town and connecting trails to the surrounding public lands. Sections of the loop trail have been built, and new sections are in progress. For example, the Mammoth Creek Trail includes three grade-separated tunnel sections. They are a significant investment in the community's trail infrastructure. The Lake Mary Road bike path has been designed and is scheduled to commence construction in 2007, and other "missing links" of the in-town trail loop are being planned. These are essential next steps for residents and visitors who can enjoy a trail experience within the town center.

A fundamental concept for the Mammoth Lakes trails and public-access system is the vision of a regional trails system connected with a "porous" perimeter. The in-town trails within the Mammoth Lakes Urban Growth Boundary can be connected to access points around the edges of town, and this perimeter can, in turn, be connected to frontcountry and backcountry trails in the surrounding region. The combination of a world-class system of trails, a porous town perimeter, and access into a regional network will make Mammoth Lakes a world-class trail community.

A connected system of trails and public access will provide a rare combination of in-town and backcountry experiences within the Mammoth Lakes region.



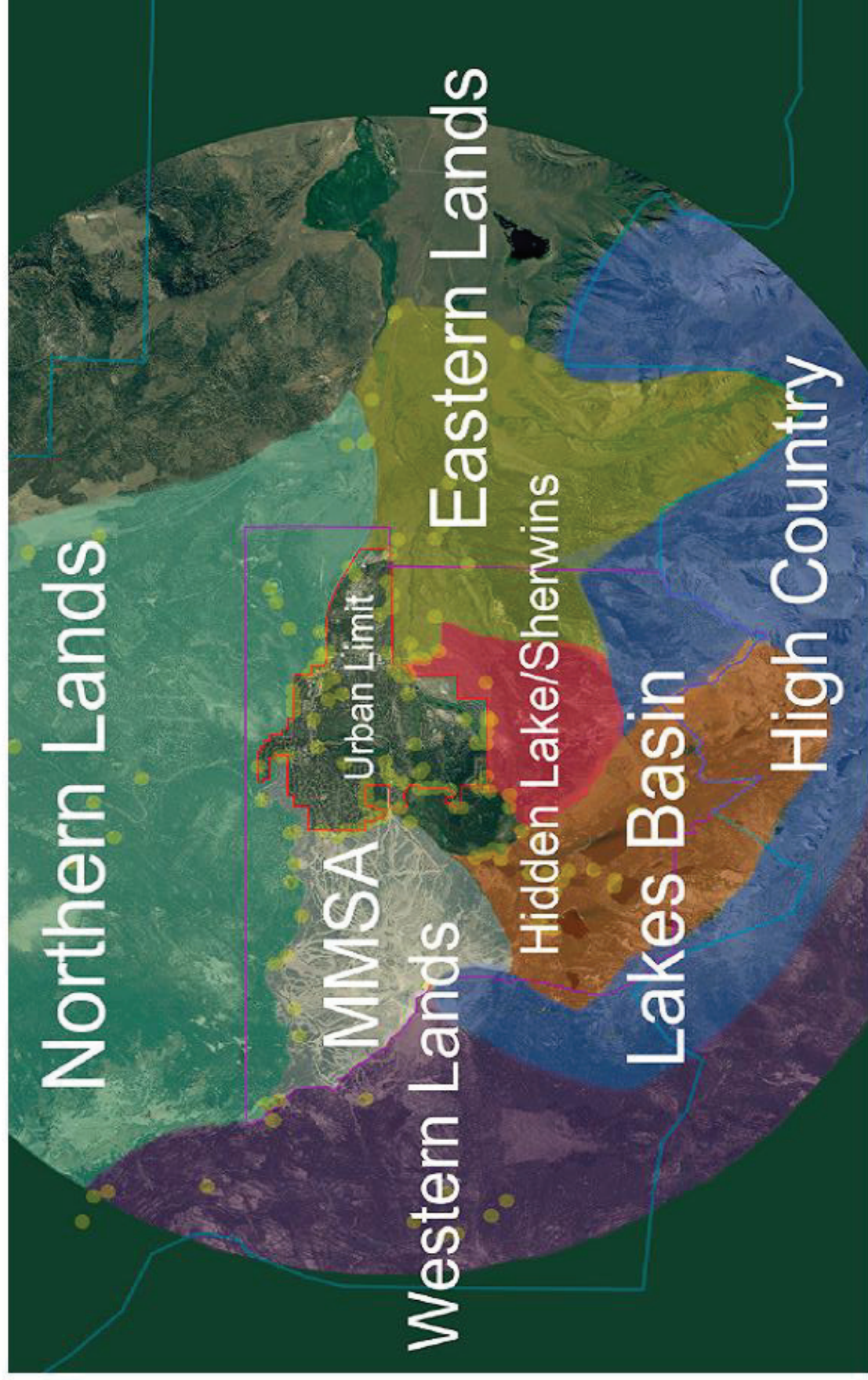
While it is possible to imagine specific projects for the future Mammoth Lakes trail system, it is important at this time for MLTPA to maintain its focus on the goal of developing a Trails and Public Access Master Plan, and not propose specific trail ideas or solutions outside of the planning process. MLTPA is committed to not compounding the challenges for trails and public access. Attempting to find incremental solutions to difficult access issues outside of the context of a Master Plan is not in the organization's best interest at this time. Unless it is a critical issue of public access that requires immediate action, MLTPA should not engage its resources for projects that are not part of a Trails and Public Access Master Plan.

With this strategic approach in mind, it is still important to frame a vision of the future and to capture the ideas expressed at the Strategic Conference. The maps on the following pages show the public land areas and potential trail uses within the Mammoth Lakes region, and a conceptual graphic of the potential trails and public-access system. The land areas surrounding the community each have a distinct character and landscape. These areas are described as the Northern Lands, Western Lands, Lakes Basin, Hidden Lake/Sherwins, Eastern Lands, High Country, Within the Urban Limit, and Mammoth Mountain Ski Area. Through careful planning and public involvement, these sub-regions can be connected into a system that makes it possible for residents and visitors to have access to a diverse range of outdoor experiences—all within walking distance from the center of town. It is possible to imagine getting on a trail in Mammoth Lakes and having easy access to desert, forest, alpine, and riparian zones within the same day—a rare experience anywhere on Earth.

Achieving this vision will require the creation of a connected trails infrastructure, including shared-use paths, singletrack trails, trailheads, on-street improvements, safe crossings, transit connections, signage, wayfinding, operations and maintenance programs, and policies that support the system. The trail system will serve a wide spectrum of trail users, from children going to school to adventure travelers accessing the backcountry of the Sierra. The creation of this system is an excellent opportunity to involve a broad cross-section of community partners, including education, public health, businesses, tourism, public works, parks, land managers, developers, resorts, transportation agencies, and others.



Skiing in Mammoth Lakes. Photo by Christian Pondella



Mammoth Lakes Trails and Public Access

Public Land Areas

Public Land Areas: Amenities

Northern Lands

Winter

- Backcountry Skiing/Snowboard
- Dog Sledding
- Kicker Zone
- Nordic Skiing
- OSV
- Pet Play
- Snowplay
- Snowshoeing
- Vistas

Summer

- Birding
- Bow Hunting
- Camping
- Climbing
- Disc Golf
- Equestrian
- Hiking/Walking
- Mountain Biking
- OHV
- Pet Play
- Road Biking
- Trail Running
- Vistas

Eastern Lands

Winter

- Backcountry Skiing/Snowboarding
- Ice Climbing
- Nordic Skiing
- OSV
- Vistas

Summer

- Boulderling
- Caving
- Climbing
- Equestrian
- Fishing
- Fall Color Viewing
- Hiking/Walking
- Mountain Biking
- OHV
- Pet Play
- Trail Running
- Wildflowers

MMSA

Winter

- Backcountry Skiing/Snowboarding
- Dog Sledding
- Vistas

Summer

- Climbing
- Hiking/Walking
- Mountain Biking
- Trail Running
- Vistas

Lakes Basin

Winter

- Backcountry Skiing/Snowboarding
- Ice Fishing
- Ice Skating
- Nordic Skiing
- OSV
- Snowshoeing
- Winter Camping
- Winter Hiking/Walking
- Vistas

Summer

- Boating
- Boulderling
- Camping
- Climbing
- Equestrian
- Fall Color Viewing
- Fishing
- Hiking/Walking
- Mountain Biking
- Pet Play
- Road Biking
- Swimming
- Trail Running
- Vistas
- Wildflower Viewing

Western Lands

Winter

- Backcountry Skiing/Snowboarding (with OSV)
- OSV (on road)

Summer

- Birding
- Bouldering
- Camping
- Climbing
- Equestrian
- Fall Color Viewing
- Fishing
- Hiking/Walking
- Pet Play
- Road Biking
- Swimming
- Trail Running
- Vistas
- Wildflowers

High Country

Winter

- Backcountry Skiing/Snowboarding
- OSV
- Pet Play
- Snowshoeing
- Vistas
- Winter Camping

Summer

- Bouldering
- Camping
- Climbing
- Equestrian
- Fall Color Viewing
- Hiking/Walking
- Mountain Biking
- OHV
- Trail Running
- Vistas
- Wildflower Viewing

Sherwins/Hidden Lake

Winter

- Backcountry Skiing/Snowboarding
- Kicker Zone
- Nordic Skiing
- OSV
- Pet Play
- Snowshoeing
- Vistas

Summer

- Birding
- Equestrian
- Fall Color Viewing
- Hiking/Walking
- Mountain Biking
- Pet Play
- Trail Running
- Vistas
- Wildflower Viewing

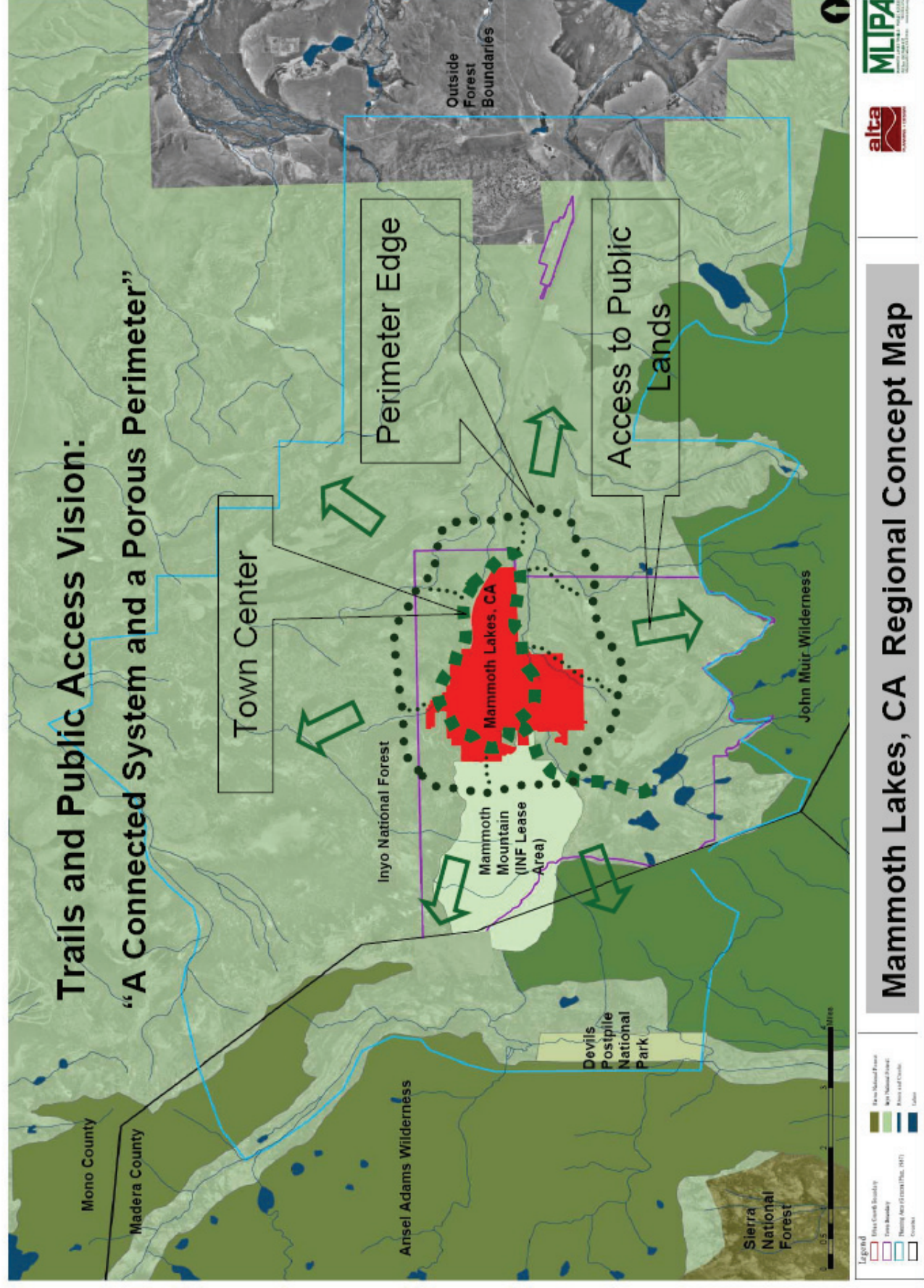
Within the Urban Limit

Winter

- Nordic Skiing
- Pet Play
- Snowplay
- Snowshoeing
- Vistas
- Winter Camping
- Winter Hiking/Walking
- Workforce

Summer

- Camping
- Cross-Country Running
- Equestrian



While it is too soon to recommend specific solutions, the Strategic Conference participants identified more than 100 ideas for potential trails and public-access projects. The following list is not intended to be final or comprehensive, but represents a range of ideas and the potential for trails and public access in the Mammoth Lakes region. The following is a selected list of projects identified as potential concepts for MLTPA to consider during the Trails and Public Access Master Plan process:

Lake Mary Road Bike Path Project: This project is already designed and funded, and is scheduled to start construction in 2007. It will provide trail access between the town loop trail and the Lakes Basin area. Support for this project is important as a connection between ongoing efforts initiated in the last decade and new initiatives for completing the missing links in the town loop trail.

Signage and Wayfinding Program: Consistent graphics, information, and communications are an important part of creating a high-quality trails system. Developing a signage and wayfinding program is an integral element of the Mammoth Lakes community's identity and public image.

Interpretation and Heritage Trails Information System: A Geographic Information System (GIS) can be used to create a database, user maps, and public information for interpretive and heritage elements of the trails system. The region's landscape has a significant natural and human history that can be told through the region's trails. Examples include the story of John Muir, the forces of geology, and the management of the Los Angeles water supply system.

Complete the In-Town Loop: The existing Mammoth Creek Trail and other sections of the paved paths within the town center represent important pieces that need to be connected into a complete loop trail. This loop will form the core of the trail system within the Urban Growth Boundary.

Develop a Perimeter Edge Trail: Mammoth Lakes has the unique potential to connect the Mammoth Rock Trail and other existing singletrack trails into a perimeter trail around the community's edge. This trail can help define the community's boundary with the adjacent Sierra frontcountry, and can serve as a gateway for access points to the backcountry.

Plan for All Trail Users: The Mammoth Lakes region has opportunities for all types of trail users, ranging from snowmobiles and ATVs to wilderness hiking, mountain biking, and Nordic and backcountry skiing. It is important for MLTPA to clearly state that all of these trail types are part of the planning process, and that, with the permission of land managers, these multiple uses can coexist in the region.

Ensure ADA Access: "Public Access" must include providing access for people with disabilities. While not all trails can be made accessible for everyone, the trail system must be planned to include the greatest range of accessibility possible, and trail information systems should be designed to communicate trail surfaces, grades, and other important information to people of all ages and abilities.

No Net Loss of Trails and Public Access: The GIS inventory conducted by MLTPA indicates more than 150 existing points of access to the region's public lands. This inventory can form a baseline to ensure that as the community grows, access is maintained to and from these lands. A flexible approach can be based on a concept of "no net loss," so that access is considered a part of the region's infrastructure planning. This approach is similar to the way that wetlands impacts are managed.

Funding Applications: The California Transportation Department currently has funding available from the State Bicycle Transportation Account (BTA) and Safe Routes to Schools (SR2S) programs. The Town of Mammoth Lakes currently has two sections of the in-town loop trail that qualify for these funding sources,

and is preparing the funding applications. In addition, the national Bikes Belong coalition provides grants to advocacy organizations like MLTPA.

Proposition 84 Funding Application: On Election Day, California voters approved Proposition 84, which will provide significant funding for Water Quality, Safety, and Supply, Flood Control, Natural Resource Protection, and Park Improvements. This will provide another opportunity for trails and public-access funding in the Mammoth Lakes region.

Trails and Transit: As the public transit system grows in Mammoth Lakes, there are opportunities to connect trailheads and transit stops to provide increased access and mobility for the community. Bike and ski racks can be provided on buses and trolleys, and the planning of trails and transit routes can be coordinated.

Art on the Trails: A great way to involve the community in trails is to develop art on the trails. This can include sculptures designed as “mile points,” custom-designed “hitching posts” for equestrians and bicyclists, and storytelling and music performed along the trails. These creative initiatives will reach segments of the community that might not otherwise get involved in trails, and can create a unique identity for the Mammoth Lakes trail system.

Four-Season Trails/Nordic System: The Mammoth Lakes trail system can help diversify the region’s economy by providing a wide range of four-season experiences. Examples include the new Nordic Trails initiative, which will create new cross-country skiing opportunities, the Mammoth Century road bicycling route, and the recent growth in the sport of trail running.

PROJECT ACTIONS:

- 1. Trails and Public Access Master Plan:** Develop the Mammoth Lakes Trails and Public Access Master Plan and have the plan adopted by the Town, County, and U.S. Forest Service.
- 2. Funding Applications:** Submit Caltrans BTA and SR2S funding applications. Develop an MLTPA grant application proposal for funding from the Bikes Belong coalition.
- 3. Signage and Wayfinding Program:** Develop a consistent, high-quality trails and public-access signage and wayfinding system, in cooperation with land management partners.
- 4. ADA Accessibility:** Conduct a public forum on accessibility in spring 2007, as a next step toward an ongoing public dialogue about trails and public-access issues.
- 5. Trail Map:** Produce a Mammoth Trails map that identifies the existing trails and public-access system, in cooperation with the Mammoth Trails alliance and other partners.

ACTION PLAN TIMELINE:

The Strategic Conference participants agreed that the momentum created by MLTPA represents a rare opportunity for action. With the tasks identified in this document as a guideline, the following timeline was developed for implementing the MLTPA Action Plan:

December 2006:	MLTPA Interim Working Group (IWG) meeting
January 2007:	Reconvene MLTPA Strategic Conference group; first MLTPA Board meeting
February 2007:	MLTPA Proposal to the Mammoth Lakes Community presentation
March 2007:	Approval of Trails and Access Master Plan funding
April to Dec. 2007:	Develop the Mammoth Lakes Trails and Public Access Master Plan

4. Next Steps

Mammoth Lakes has developed key pieces of its trails and public-access system, with a combination of singletrack trails, in-town shared-use paths, and access to the surrounding public lands. The existing trails form the foundation for an interconnected system that will allow residents and visitors to use trails for transportation, recreation, physical fitness, education, sport, and other purposes. Based on the ideas developed at the 2006 Strategic Conference, Mammoth Lakes will move forward with a new vision of trails and public access.

This document is the “trail map” for a world-class trails and public-access system. Organizing MLTPA as a sustainable non-profit organization, developing the community’s partnership triangle, creating a Trails and Public Access Master Plan, and integrating trails and public access into the General Plan Update, future mobility planning, and the plans being developed by both public- and private-sector partners are important next steps. By focusing on achievable actions in the short term, it will be possible to create success as the longer-term vision develops. With the enthusiasm, creativity, and leadership that developed this Action Plan, there is a great future for trails and public access in Mammoth Lakes.



These images of Mammoth Lakes from the week of the 2006 Strategic Conference highlight the diversity and potential of the region’s trails and public-access system.