



File Code: 1950

Date: August 20, 2021

Dear Interested Citizen,

The Bend-Fort Rock Ranger District on the Deschutes National Forest is initiating an environmental analysis for two projects. The projects include a Nordic Trails Proposal and a Mt. Bachelor Improvement Proposal.

### ***Nordic Trails Proposal***

This project has been developed in collaboration with the Central Oregon Nordic Club (CONC). CONC helps maintain ungroomed ski trails and snowshoe trails along the Cascade Lakes Highway. The legal descriptions are Township 18S, Range 9E, Section 17; Township 18S, Range 10E, Section 30 and Township 19S, Range 9E, Section 11.

### **Management Direction**

The Deschutes National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) as amended by the Northwest Forest Plan guides all management activities on the Forest.

Forest Plan management areas:

- Scenic Views Management Area (MA-9)
- Intensive Recreation Management Area (MA-11)
- Dispersed Recreation Management Area (MA-12)
- Winter Recreation Management Area (MA-13)
- Old Growth Management Area (MA-15)

Northwest Forest Plan management areas:

- Matrix
- Administratively Withdrawn

### **Purpose and Need**

The current mileage of winter non-motorized ski trails along the Cascade Lakes Highway corridor is comparable to the mileage that existed 30 years ago. The population of Central Oregon has increased

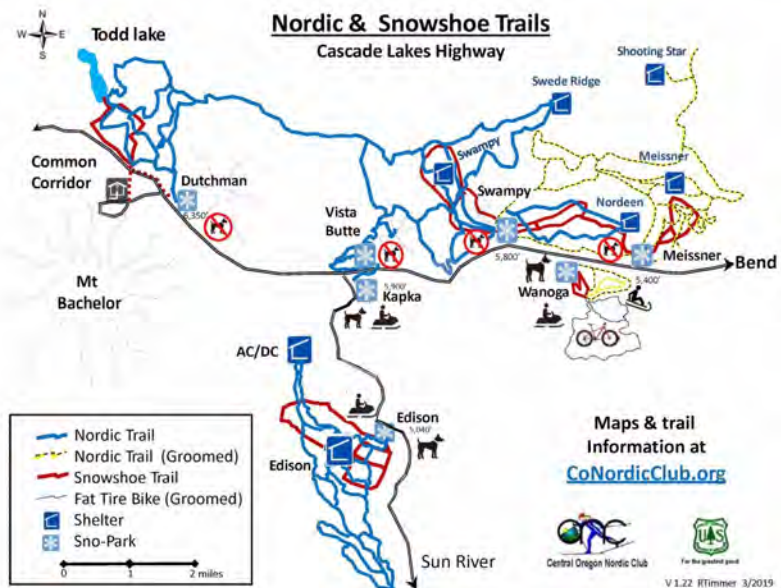


Figure 1 – Cascade Lakes Highway Winter Recreation Sites



since then and winter recreational visitors have increased substantially. The purpose of this project is to modify and modernize the current trail system in a manner that:

- Redirects visitors to allow for greater trail capacity
- Improves visitor safety
- Is more inclusive to a wider range of skill levels
- Is within the maintenance capacity of CONC and the Forest Service
- Addresses safety concerns of lower elevation trails during years with less snowfall

## **Proposed Action**

Construction of new trail segments, reroutes, and trail decommissioning are proposed in several areas listed below to meet the purpose and need of this project.

### ***Dutchman Area***

Water Tower Tie Decommissioning: This segment of trail unintentionally encourages people to ski on the snowmobile road. This trail has already been removed from more recent versions of the Nordic Map. It is proposed to officially decommission the Water Tower Tie trail between junctions 80 and 81 (Figure 2).

Water Tower Reroute: Reroute 400 feet of trail through the meadow near junction 84, this would eliminate the need for a replacement bridge. The current bridge poses a safety concern in deep snow conditions. The current bridge would be decommissioned and disposed (Figure 1).

Pete's Way Reroute: Reroute a short segment of the Pete's Way trail to bring the trail up and away from a stream bed to make the area safer during late spring conditions (Figure 2).

Big Meadow Trail Reroute: Reroute a portion of the Big Meadow trail where the trail cuts across the snowmobile area. The trail is seasonally marked by blue poles. By moving the trail to follow the tree line of the meadow on the northern edge, the trail would be moved away from the area of heaviest snowmobile use, and markers could be placed on trees. This would require fewer blue poles to pull up and reset during ski season, and fewer to store in the caches during the off season. This is an open forest, minor limbing and sapling removal would be needed to establish this trail.

Flagline to Big Meadow Connector: Create 200 feet of new trail to provide a connection between Flagline Access and Big Meadow trail. The Flagline Access and Big Meadow trails come within 200 feet of each other at this point, and it is already a commonly used crossover point between the two trails. The presence of a well-worn track at this spot would reduce confusion for those who are unfamiliar with the trail. No brushing or sapling removal would be needed to establish this trail (Figure 1).

Flagline Trail at Dutchman Sno-Park: Reroute of the first couple hundred feet of the ski trail from Dutchman Sno-Park to junction 71. Turn this first segment of the existing trail into part of the snowshoe route and move the ski trail to the west. The remainder of the ski trail would stay the same. Minor limbing and sapling removal would be needed (Figure 2).

Common Corridor Snowshoe Trail: Dutchman is a scenic and flat area ideal for novices, but there are no marked snowshoe trails from the Sno-Park. Currently, snowshoers seeking to visit Todd Lake must either

snowshoe a portion of the highway corridor that is shared with snowmobilers or share a Nordic ski trail. Providing a snowshoe trail connection to the Todd Lake Snowshoe trail would reduce conflicts in this popular location (Figure 2).

### ***Swampy Area***

Swampy Beginners Loop: In order to make this trail more beginner friendly two section would be moved to make the grade less steep and the trail more open. Re-routing the stretch between junctions 50 and 63 would also move the trail to an area with less tree drip and sun exposure and therefore make it less icy in warmer conditions. This area was thinned in 2016, and most of the reroute would be over old skid roads (Figure 3).

South Swede Nordic Loop Reroute: Lengthen a short segment to eliminate a sharp turn and dip in the trail, a location where falls commonly occur. Many skiers already use this alternate route. (Figure 4).

North Swede Nordic Loop: Reroute the last 3 miles on the west end of the trail to put the junction at the east end of the Shelter Tie at junction 58. This would help to bring the junction out of an often muddy spot as well as reduce the confusion of having two junctions so closely spaced (Figure 3).

Meissner to Nordeen Tie Trail Reroute: The Meissner to Nordeen Shelter Tie trail has a short, 450 foot segment with a slope exceeding 30 degrees which exceeds design standards. The proposed reroute would provide for a safer, more gradual grade (Figure 3).

Junction 62 to 55 Connector: Create a new trail, approximately 1/2 mile in length, that connects junctions 62 and 55. The main route to the Swampy Shelter is very popular, so by adding this segment, it would provide an alternate loop for access to the shelter and distribute skier traffic on the trails. This trail would be on an old lava flow in an open lodgepole forest. A minor amount of limbing and sapling removal would be needed to establish this trail (Figure 3).

Flagline to Swampy Connector: Create a new trail approximately 2/3 mile in length. The southern terminus of the trail would be on the proposed junction 62 to 55 Connector. This proposed trail crosses a stream and traverses open forest and would require few to no trees to be cut. This would provide a less challenging option for downhill Flagline skiers. It would also provide alternate loop options for skiers out of the Swampy Sno-Park (Figure 3).

Vista Butte Snowshoe: The summit of Vista Butte is already a popular snowshoe destination, and snowshoers typically go directly up the ridge behind the Sno-Park rather than following the marked ski route that takes a significantly longer time. Making this a marked trail would improve safety and reduce the number of confusing snowshoe tracks (Figure 3).

### ***Edison Butte Area***

Tesla Short Loop Snowshoe Tie: Approximately 5/8 mile new trail would be created to provide a shorter route to Edison Shelter and to create a loop option (Figure 4).

Tesla Snowshoe Extension to AC/DC shelter: Edison Sno-Park is the only location with longer snowshoe trails where dogs are allowed. Establishing a dedicated snowshoe trail connection to the AC/DC shelter would reduce conflicts between skiers and snowshoers (Figure 4).

Alternating Current Reroute: Reroute approximately  $\frac{1}{3}$  mile at the north end of the ski trail to avoid a sensitive wildlife (Figure 4).

Light Bulb Reroute: Reroute approximately  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile of the ski trail to avoid a sensitive wildlife area near Edison cave (Figure 4).

Long Loop Reroute: Reroute approximately  $\frac{5}{8}$ th mile of the Long Loop snowshoe trail to avoid a sensitive wildlife area near Edison cave (Figure 4).

Edison Trail Decommissioning: Eliminate the southernmost trails in the Edison system. These trails are at a low elevation and rarely have sufficient snow coverage for skiing. With the elimination of the parking lot at the south end, these trails are now so remote that they get very little use, even in good snow conditions. This would eliminate about 7 of the 20 miles of ungroomed ski trails at Edison (Figure 5).

## ***Mt. Bachelor Improvements Proposal***

Mt. Bachelor is located entirely within the Deschutes National Forest and operates under a Special Use Permit issued by the U.S. Forest Service (USFS). Projects on Mt. Bachelor are subject to the NEPA process for that reason. The legal location of Mt. Bachelor is Township 18S, Range 9E, Section 28.

### **Management Direction**

Mt. Bachelor is located within the Forest Plan management area Intensive Recreation (MA-11).

### **Proposed Actions**

#### ***Summit Loop Trail***

The purpose of this project is to connect existing trails on Mt. Bachelor to create a loop that reaches the summit (Figure 6). There is a need to provide more high elevation, summit hiking opportunities along the Cascade Lakes Highway. This loop trail would provide an alternative to the South Sister Summit hike which will have fewer people as a result of the wilderness limited entry permit system. Mt Bachelor has the parking capacity and the facilities or services to accommodate increased hiker use. The trail would provide an option to access it from the top of Pine Marten lift as well for those seeking a shorter hike.

This section is very rocky and has been laid out with a lot of attention to make trail construction possible given the terrain. Below are specifics of the proposal.

- Top elevation: 9,050 feet
- Elevation at intersection with Rope Tow trail on West Ridge 8,180 feet
- Length of new trail: 4,900 feet
- Tread type: volcanic soil and lava rock.

- Tread width: 2-3 feet with use of rock retaining walls where required

### ***West Village Get-back Trail***

The purpose of this project is to widen a section of winter trail. There is a need to improve the safety of the trail which can be congested by making it wider and decreasing the grade. The current trail is narrow, less than two groomer widths, which causes congestion for skiers. To improve the safety of this trail, the trail would be widened on the north side of the trail to about 50 feet with some additional slope disturbance uphill and downhill from the trail. About 10-15 large hemlock trees would need to be removed. The grade of the trail would also be reduced making it less steep. Heavy equipment would be used to widen the trail. Equipment would access the area on Little Pine, an existing summer access road.

### ***Biomass Facility***

A biomass processing facility was included in the Mt. Bachelor Master Development Plan. The proposed location of the biomass facility has changed since the adoption of the Master Development Plan. See Figure 5 and 6 for a map and design of the building. The purpose of this project is to approve the location and design of the facility. The facility would provide a method for the disposal of wood waste (slash) from forest management actions while also providing a renewable fuel source for electricity and heat for ski area operations. The proposed location of the biomass facility has changed since the adoption of the Master Development Plan. See Figure 7 and 8 for a map and design of the building.

### ***Public Involvement and How to Provide Comments***

It would be most helpful to received input by September 23, 2021. Submit comments by email to: [comments-pacificnorthwest-deschutes-bend-ftrock@usda.gov](mailto:comments-pacificnorthwest-deschutes-bend-ftrock@usda.gov) and list "Nordic Trails Project" or "Mt. Bachelor Projects" in the subject line. Comments must be submitted as part of an actual email message, or as an attachment in Microsoft Word, rich text format (rtf), or portable document format (pdf) only. Comments submitted to other email addresses, in any other format, or that contain viruses will be rejected.

Electronic submissions are strongly encouraged. However, if necessary, comments may be submitted by post mail to: Michelle King, District Ranger, Bend-Fort Rock Ranger District, 63095 Deschutes Market Road, Bend, OR 97701. Hand delivered comments are discouraged at this time.

This project falls within a category of action that may be excluded from documentation in an environmental assessment or environmental impact statement. For more information, please contact Alicia Underhill, Environmental Coordinator, at 541-383-4012 or [alicia.underhill@usda.gov](mailto:alicia.underhill@usda.gov).

NOTICE: Documents associated with this project, including public comments, are part of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process 40 CFR parts 1500 – 1508 and may be released under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) 5 U.S.C. 552. Comments received in response to this solicitation, including names and addresses of those who comment, will become part of the public record for this proposed action. Comments submitted anonymously will be accepted and considered; however, anonymous comments will not provide the agency with the ability to provide the respondent with subsequent environmental documents or the eligibility to object.

Sincerely,

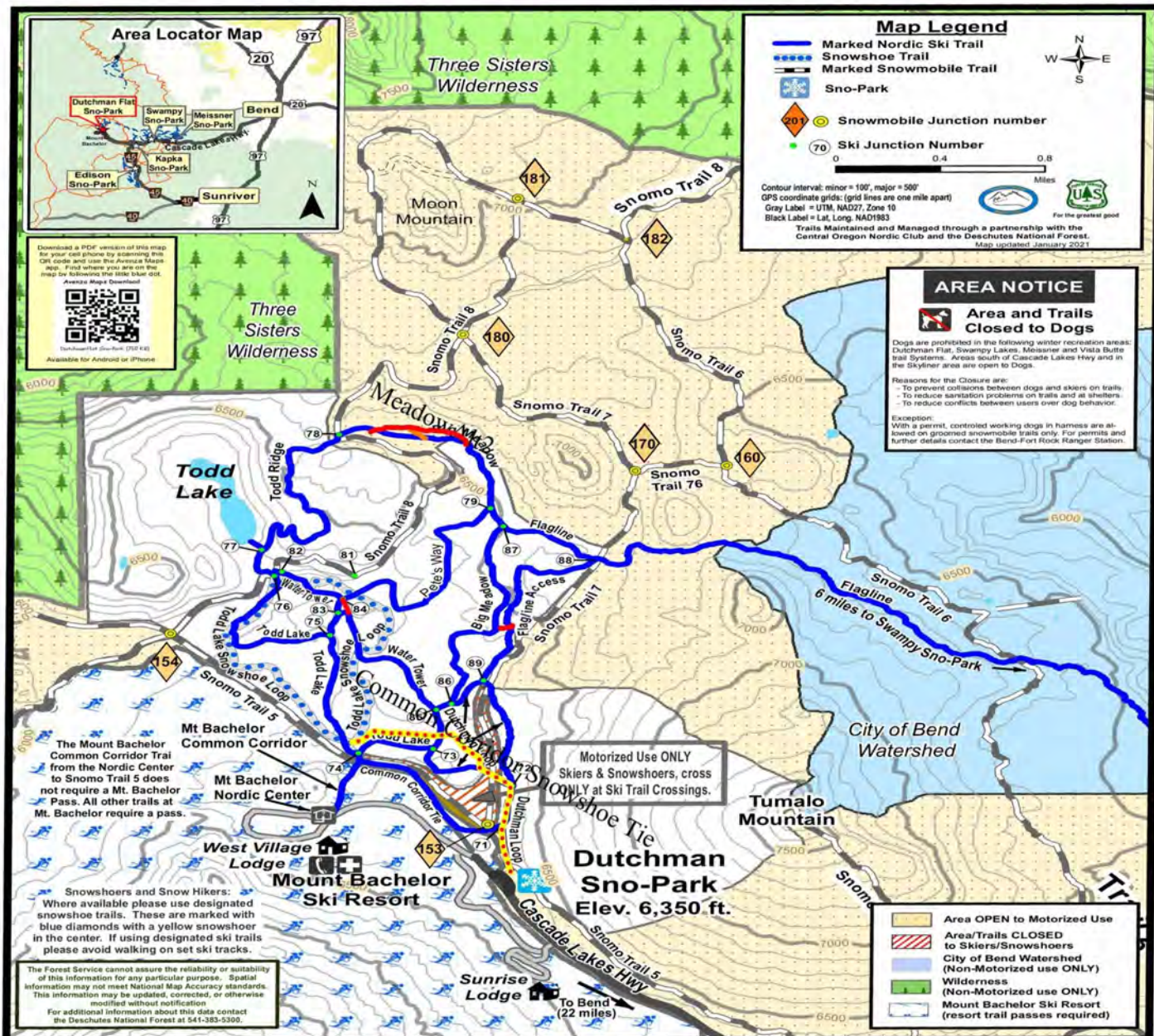
/s/ Michelle King

MICHELLE KING

District Ranger

**Enclosed:**

## Dutchman Flat Sno-Park Ski/Snowshoe Trails



### Figure 2 - Dutchman Sno-Park

## Swampy Sno-Park Ski/Snowshoe Trails

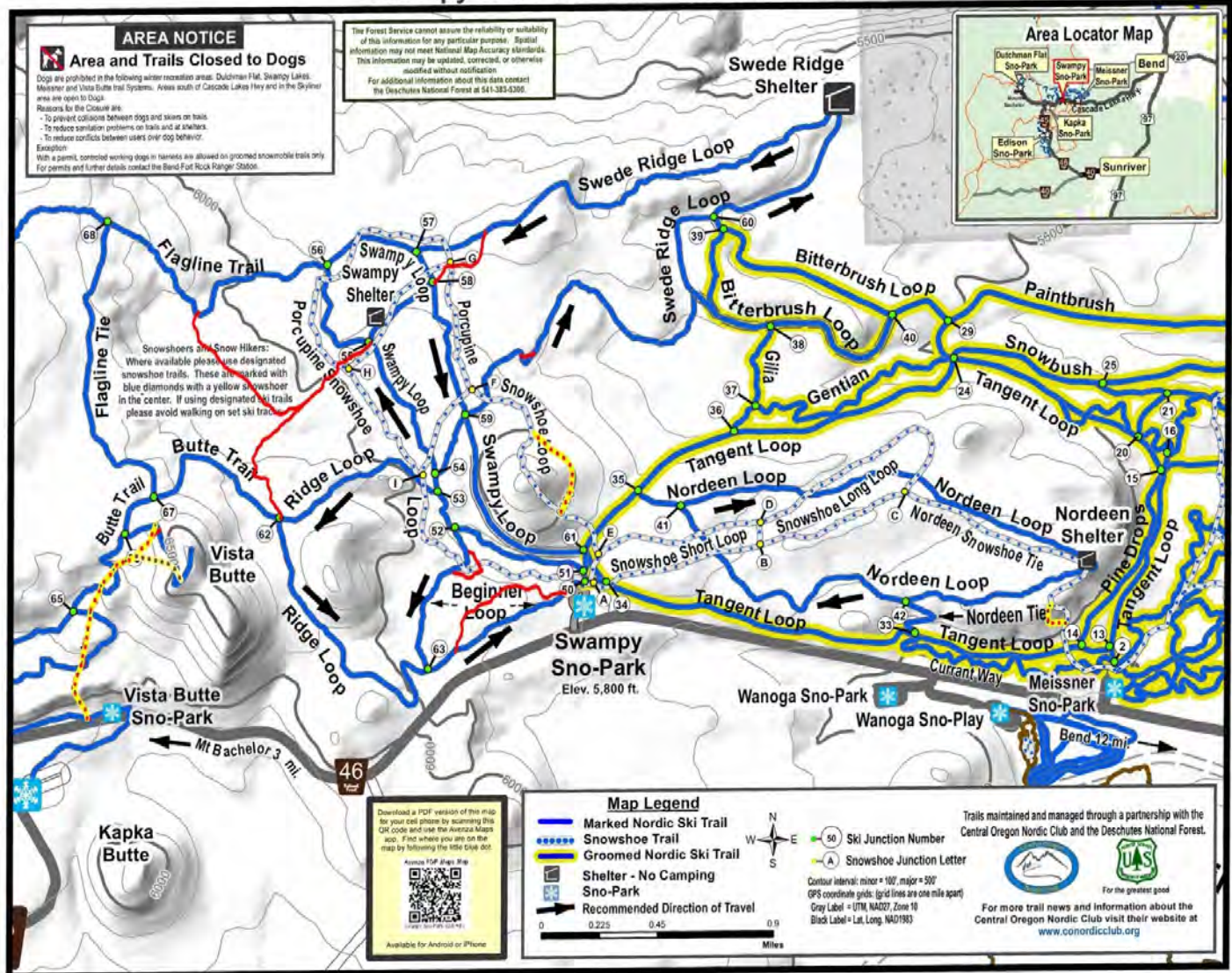
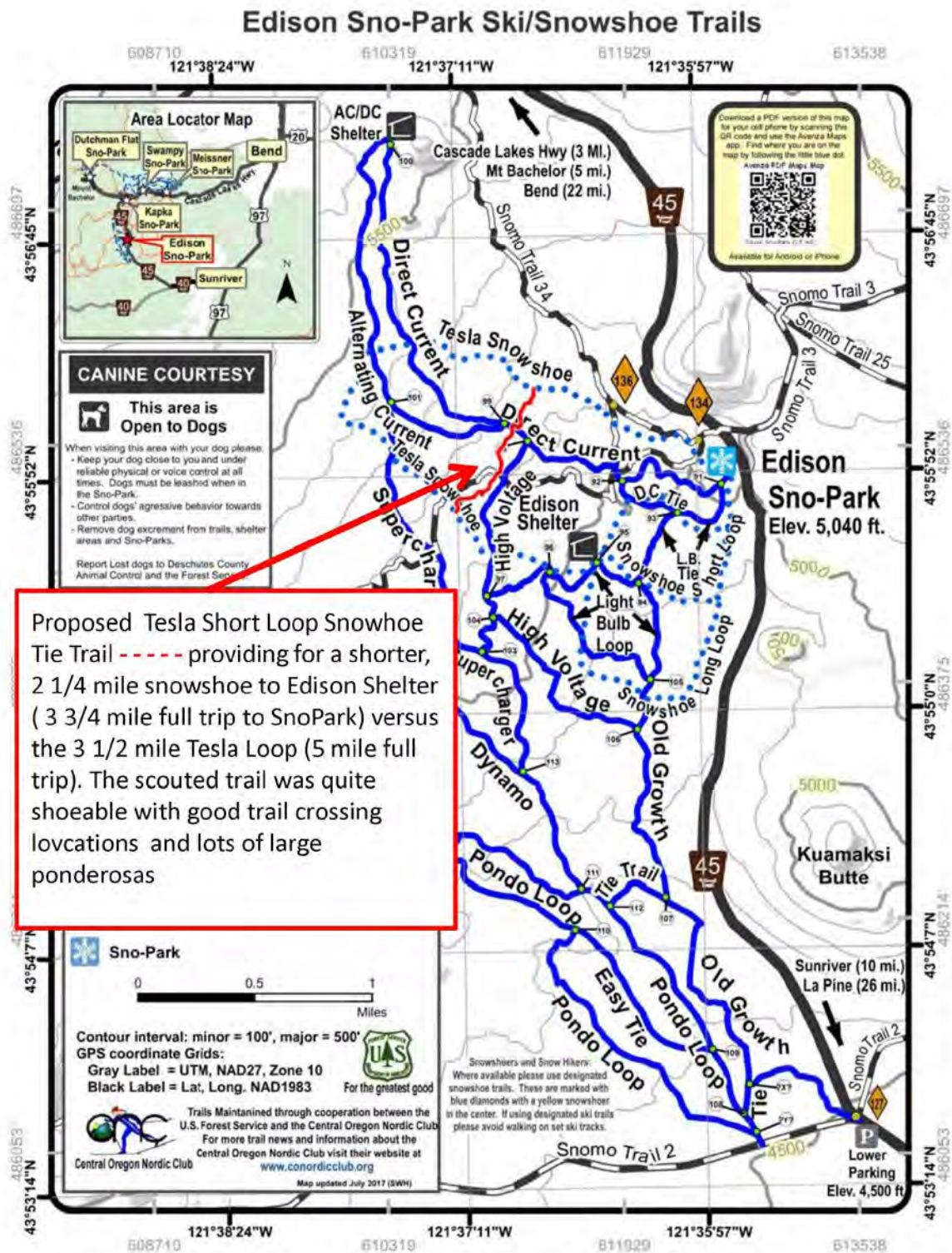


Figure 3 - Swampy Sno-Park



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Figure 4 - Edison Sno-Park

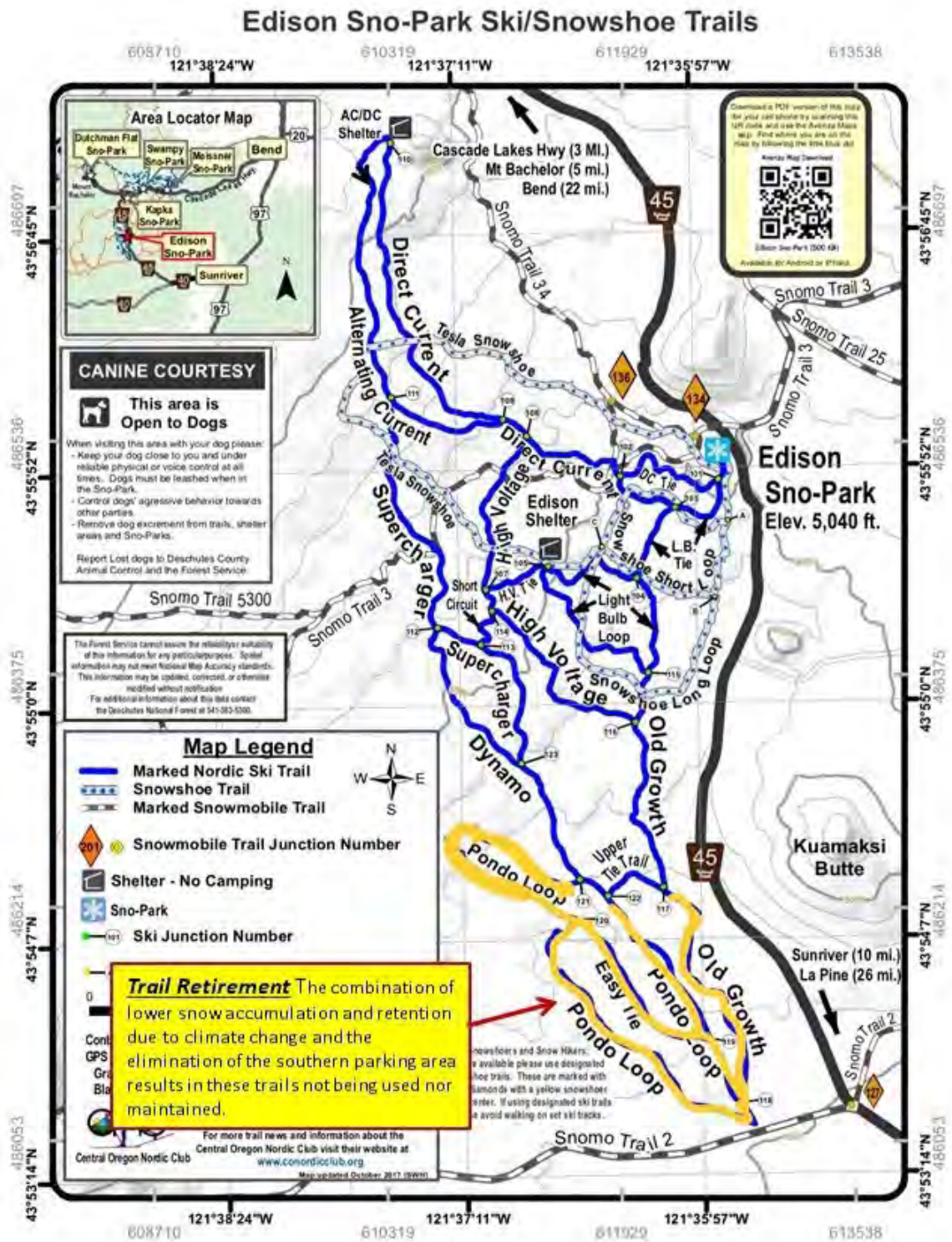


Figure 5 - Edison Butte Trail Retirement

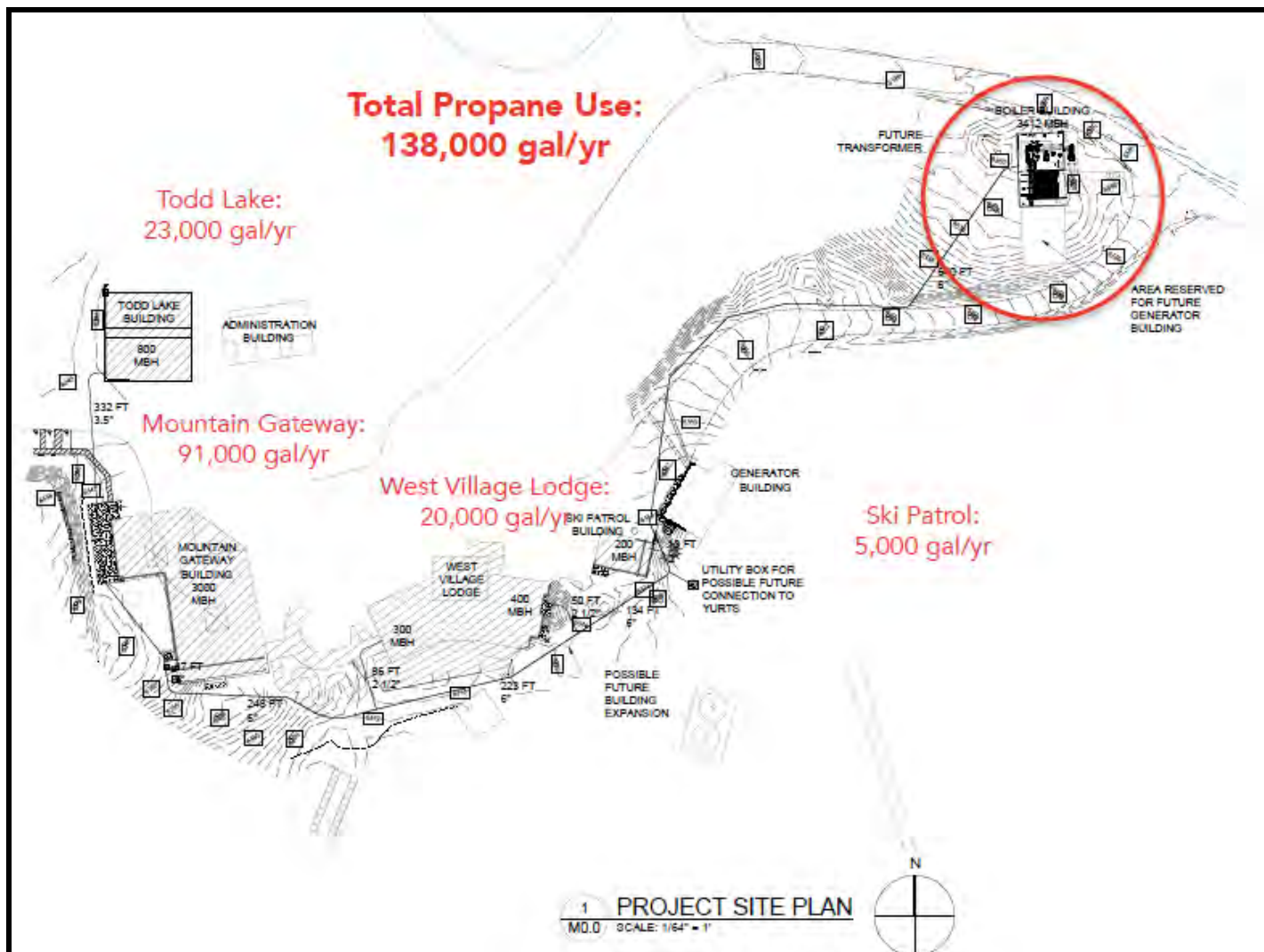


Figure 6. Map and Site Plan for Mt. Bachelor Biomass Facility



**Figure 7. Proposed Design of Mt. Bachelor Biomass Facility**