

California Forest Highway 177, Beckwourth to Clover Valley

INTRODUCTION



Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), Central Federal Lands Highway Division (CFLHD), in cooperation with the United States Department of Agriculture Forest Service (FS), the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans), and Plumas County, is proposing to improve a portion of California Forest Highway (FH) 177 (Plumas County Road 111) in Plumas County, California. Forest Highway 177 begins at its intersection with California State Route 70 in Beckwourth, California and proceeds 21.45 miles to its

intersection with California FH 176 and Primary Forest Route 70. Primary Forest Route 70 ends at its intersection with U.S. Highway 395 two miles east of Milford, California. The proposed action would rehabilitate, restore, resurface, and reconstruct a 9.6-mile section of FH 177 from Beckwourth north to an intersection at Clover Valley where Plumas County Road 111 continues northwesterly to Genesee, California and FH 177 continues northeasterly to FH 176. With implementation of the proposed project, the entire length of FH 177 (21.45 miles) would be paved (see Figures 1 and 2).

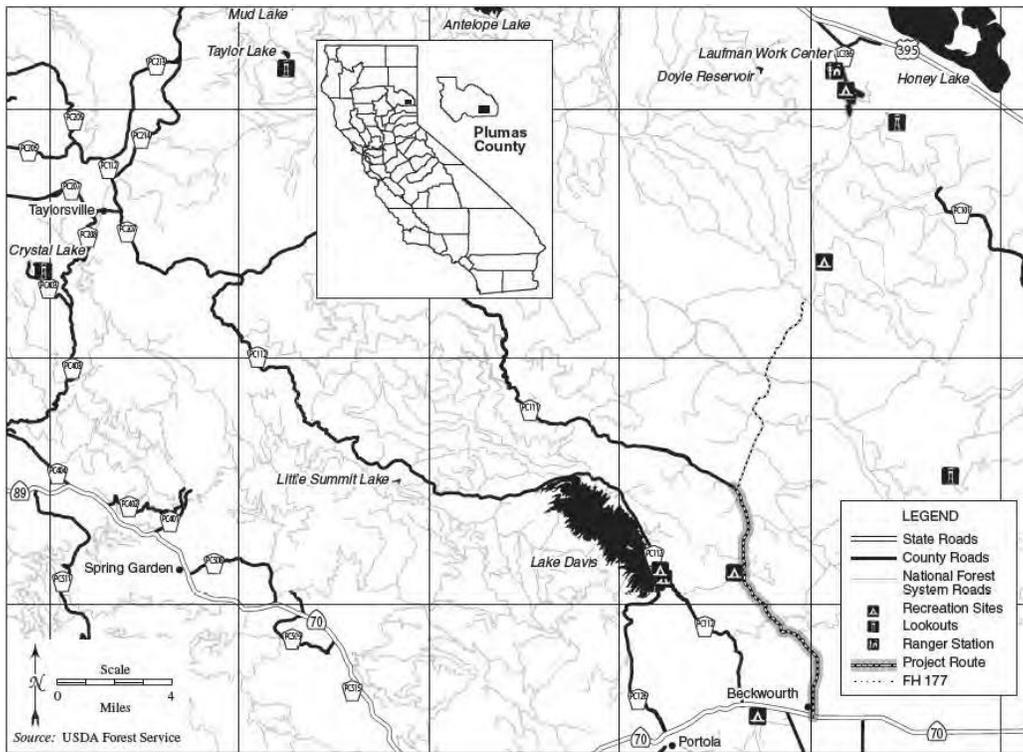


Figure 1 – Project Vicinity Map

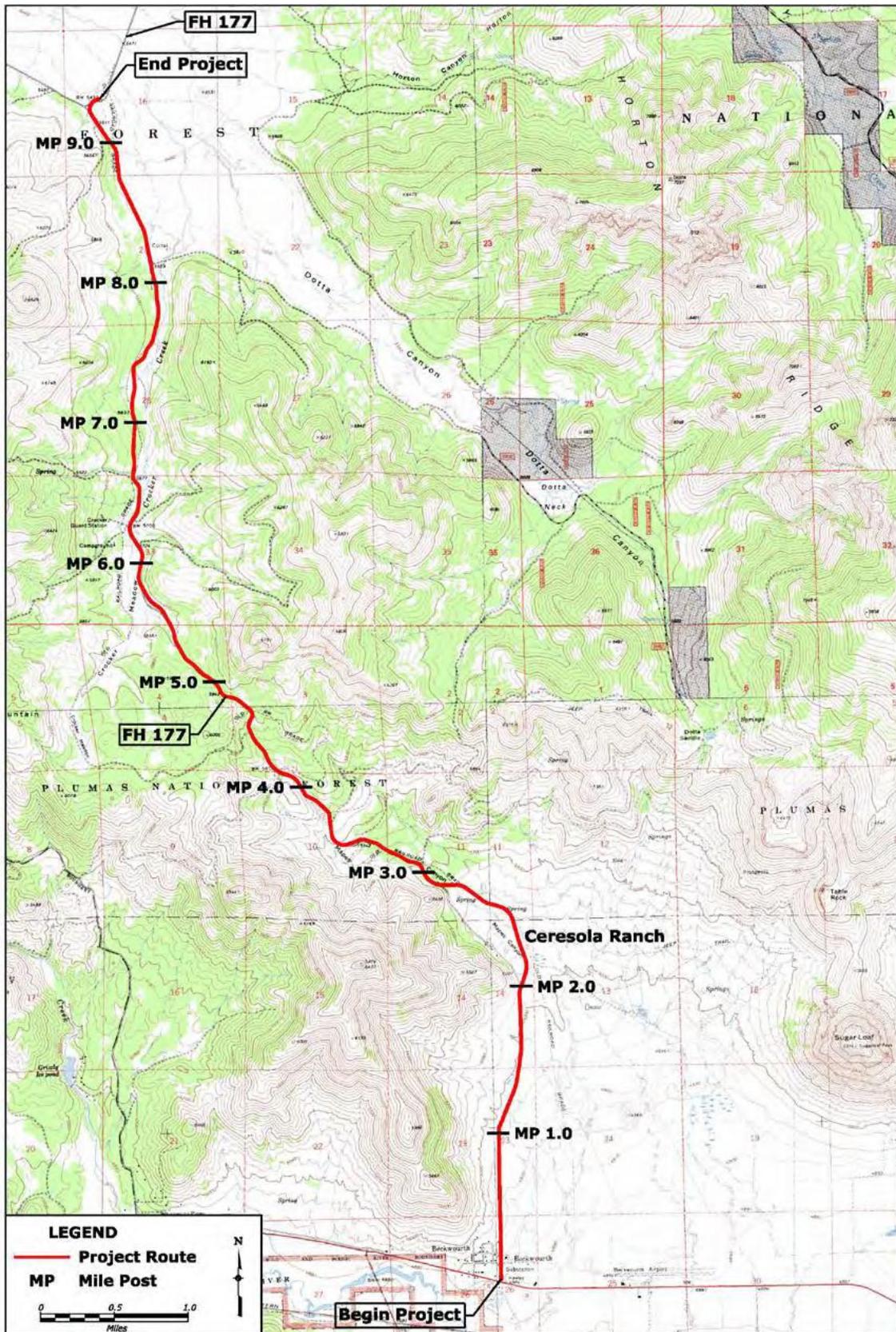


Figure 2. Project Location Map

The Public Lands Highway Program

Over the years, Congress has established a number of programs to fund highway improvements on Federal lands. The Public Lands Highway (PLH) Program provides Forest Highway funding for selected transportation projects providing access to, within, or adjacent to National Forests. The FHWA administers the Forest Highway portion of the California PLH program in cooperation with the Forest Service and Caltrans. Plumas County, which is represented at the Program level by Caltrans, currently maintains the roads and will continue to maintain the road after any improvements are made.

The tri-agency group (FHWA, Forest Service, and the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans)) serves as a committee to maintain a continuing PLH program of Forest Highway projects in California. Highways designated for improvements under this program are selected at an annual Program Agency Meeting. The routes selected are those which serve both the national forests and the State (or counties where appropriate) and have the greatest need for improvement. Improvements to Forest Highway 177 (Beckwourth-Genesee Road) have been identified by the Program Agencies as a high priority, and the route has been included in the Program.

Need for the Project

The problems or needs for this project were identified through the scoping process, with input from the SEE Team representatives, as well as agency and public input. The needs helped to formulate the purpose of the project, and are described below under each corresponding project objective.

Correct Roadway Deficiencies

The majority of the 9.6-mile stretch this project is evaluating is in degraded condition and does not meet current design standards. The roadway surface along much of the route is deteriorating and is most noticeable with extensive pavement cracking and rutting between MP 2.5 and 5.1(see Figure 3) and poor gravel surface between MP 5.1 and 9.6. The insufficient or outdated drainage along the route is exacerbating this problem. Numerous existing culverts along FH 177 are inadequate to accommodate runoff due to silting in of the inlets. The roadway varies in width from 16 to 28 feet and has numerous sharp curves (substandard roadway geometry); these are difficult conditions that make the roadway more challenging to drive. In several locations, the roadway is too narrow to safely accommodate two-way traffic, and the poor sight distances presents even greater safety concerns.



Figure 3. Narrow Roadway Pavement Cracking and Inadequate Drainage

From MP 1.8 to 2.5, the road traverses through a private ranch where several structures are located immediately adjacent to both sides of the road (see Figure 4). In addition to these structures, the road narrows and has two sharp turns through the ranch that contribute to poor sight distance and result in a hazard for vehicles traveling along FH 177 as well as pedestrians intent on crossing from the residences on the west of FH 177, to the ranch outbuildings located on the east side of FH 177. At MP 6.6 there is a narrow 15-foot wide structural concrete stream crossing, with a substandard 8-inch channel iron guard rail, that impedes the



flow of two-way traffic (see Figure 5). The small structure also impedes flow in Crocker Creek as the poor hydraulic performance under storm flow conditions does not meet current design requirements. The intersection at MP 9.6, the end terminus of the project, has inadequate sight distance and is inadequate for right angle turning movements (see Figure 6) (FHWA 2004).

Figure 4. Structures Adjacent to FH 177 at Ceresola Ranch



Figure 5. Substandard Structural Concrete Stream Crossing at Crocker Creek MP 6.6



Figure 6. Substandard Intersection at MP 9.6 (CR 111 on Left, FH 177 on Right)

In summary, the following roadway conditions and design deficiencies affect the existing operational condition of FH 177 and were considered essential needs when developing the project purpose:

- Substandard sight distances and roadside hazards
- Poor surface drainage and erosion
- Substandard roadway geometry (sharp curves)
- Substandard stream crossing at Crocker Creek
- Poor pavement condition/gravel surface
- Insufficient roadway width
- Pedestrian hazard at the Ceresola Ranch
- Substandard intersection at MP 9.6

Improve Operational Safety

A number of existing roadway deficiencies, as described above, contribute to potential safety risks to the traveling public and residents along FH 177. These deficiencies include substandard sight distances, roadside hazards (such as buildings, railings, and other structures), sharp curves, insufficient roadway widths, pedestrian hazards, dust on the unpaved section of the road that severely restricts visibility, and poor sight distance at the intersection of County Road 111 and FH 177 at MP 9.6. A consistent-width roadway section that meets current design standards is needed to make the route more conducive to safe and efficient recreational, residential, and forest commercial traffic.

Support the Management Plan for the Plumas National Forest

In addition to providing important local access for recreation, emergency response, school bus traffic, and ranching activities, FH 177 is relied upon by the FS for the administration of its activities occurring on the PNF including fire suppression, mining, grazing, logging, recreation site maintenance, and watershed projects. During the scoping process for this project, and through continued coordination efforts with the FS, it is clear that any proposed improvements to FH 177 should be consistent with, and thus support the FS management of the PNF. Therefore, the need to support the Management Plan for the PNF was added as a primary objective of the proposed project.

Reduce Maintenance Needs

This 9.6-mile section of FH 177 requires an excessive amount of maintenance. Maintenance problems include:

- A deteriorating asphalt surface that is difficult to maintain;
- A narrow roadway that makes maintenance operations difficult;
- A gravel surface requiring continuous grading;
- Deficient culvert and ditch capacity; and
- Poor roadway surface drainage.

With the deteriorating condition of the road, the maintenance effort and costs are expected to increase substantially in the future. A narrow roadway poses challenges to maintenance workers and their use of equipment, and makes the conveyance of public traffic around maintenance operations difficult. Plumas County currently spends approximately \$20,000 per year on repairs to the bituminous and gravel sections of the roadway. The underlying problems that contribute to the high maintenance costs need to be addressed to increase the roadway service life, thereby reducing the short-term and long-term maintenance costs. Reducing the costs associated with FH 177 would allow Plumas County to redirect some of their maintenance resources and efforts to other county roads.

Proposed Future Condition

The proposed action, referred to as Alternative E, involves improvements to approximately 9.6 miles of FH 177 from Beckwourth to Clover Valley. The existing roadway is a combination of paved and unpaved surfaces, with a roadway width that varies from 16 to 28 feet. To improve safety of the roadway and driver expectancy, the roadway would be paved to a standard 24-foot width to provide a minimum of two, 10-foot lanes with 2-foot paved shoulders. The project would improve the operational and design deficiencies of the roadway that are described in Section 1.5. FH 177 would be constructed to be consistent with current design standards. With these design improvements, Alternative E is not anticipated to have a noticeable impact on traffic volumes, vehicle mix, or vehicle speed on FH 177. The proposed action can be best described in three functional segments:

Segment 1 (MP 0.0 to 1.7): This segment presently consists of a 22-foot paved roadway that is in fair condition. Work in this section would involve 3R improvements to restore, resurface, and rehabilitate the existing roadway surface, as well as minor drainage improvements in the roadway shoulder. The existing posted speed limit is 25 mph. See Figure 8 below for a figure depicting the proposed typical section.

Segment 2 (MP 1.7 to 2.5): This segment is a currently paved section of roadway that passes through the Ceresola Ranch with several structures located immediately adjacent to both sides of the road. There is currently no posted speed limit. The road narrows and has two sharp turns that contribute to poor visibility and pedestrian hazards. For this segment, it is proposed to realign the roadway away from the built ranch structures to the east in order to accommodate a roadway that meets current design standards. Several design variations were initially considered in this segment, and reasons for their dismissal are described below in Section 2.3. Avoidance and minimization efforts were also applied to reduce the impacts on environmental resources, whenever practicable.

The Action Alternative analyzed in this EA is named Alternative E and is a derivation of an earlier Alternative B-3 (also referred to as Alternative C), except that it includes a minor alignment shift in Segment 2 for the purposes of impact minimization to the Crocker Meadows Wildlife Area and Clover Valley Lumber Company Railroad grade. Alternative E, as well as the other initially considered options, is depicted in Figure 7.

The realigned roadway in Segment 2 would be constructed to include a consistent 24-foot-wide asphalt surface consisting of a minimum of two, 10-foot travel lanes with 2-foot paved shoulders, and a design speed of 30 mph. The design typical section for Segment 2 is similar to that for Segment 3. The existing FH 177 through this segment would be abandoned after the new alignment is constructed and the easement transferred back to the property owner.

Segment 3 (MP 2.5 to 9.6): This segment is approximately from where the realignment rejoins existing FH 177 to MP 9.6, at the junction with Primary Forest Routes 70 and 176. This section of roadway varies in width from 16 to 28 feet. Between MP 2.5 and MP 5.1 the road consists of a 16 to 18-foot wide asphalt surface that has extensive cracking and rutting, and between MP 5.1 and 9.6, the road consists of a 22 to 28-foot wide unpaved, gravel surface. There is currently no posted speed limit. The proposed improvements would include rehabilitation, restoration, resurfacing, and reconstruction (4R). Reconstruction of this segment would include minor realignments, curve widening, drainage improvements, and replacement of a structural concrete stream crossing at MP 6.6. The reconstructed roadway would include a typical section similar to that described for Segment 2, that is a consistent 24-foot wide asphalt surface with a minimum of two, 10-foot travel lanes with 2-foot paved shoulders and a design speed of 30 mph. The existing inadequate culverts would be replaced, and the substandard stream crossing across Crocker Creek at MP 6.6 would be replaced with either a large box culvert or small bridge structure. Furthermore, the intersection at MP 9.6, the end terminus of the project, would be reconfigured to address the existing inadequate configuration that currently does not provide for good sight distance and or adequate right-angle turning movements (FHWA 2004).

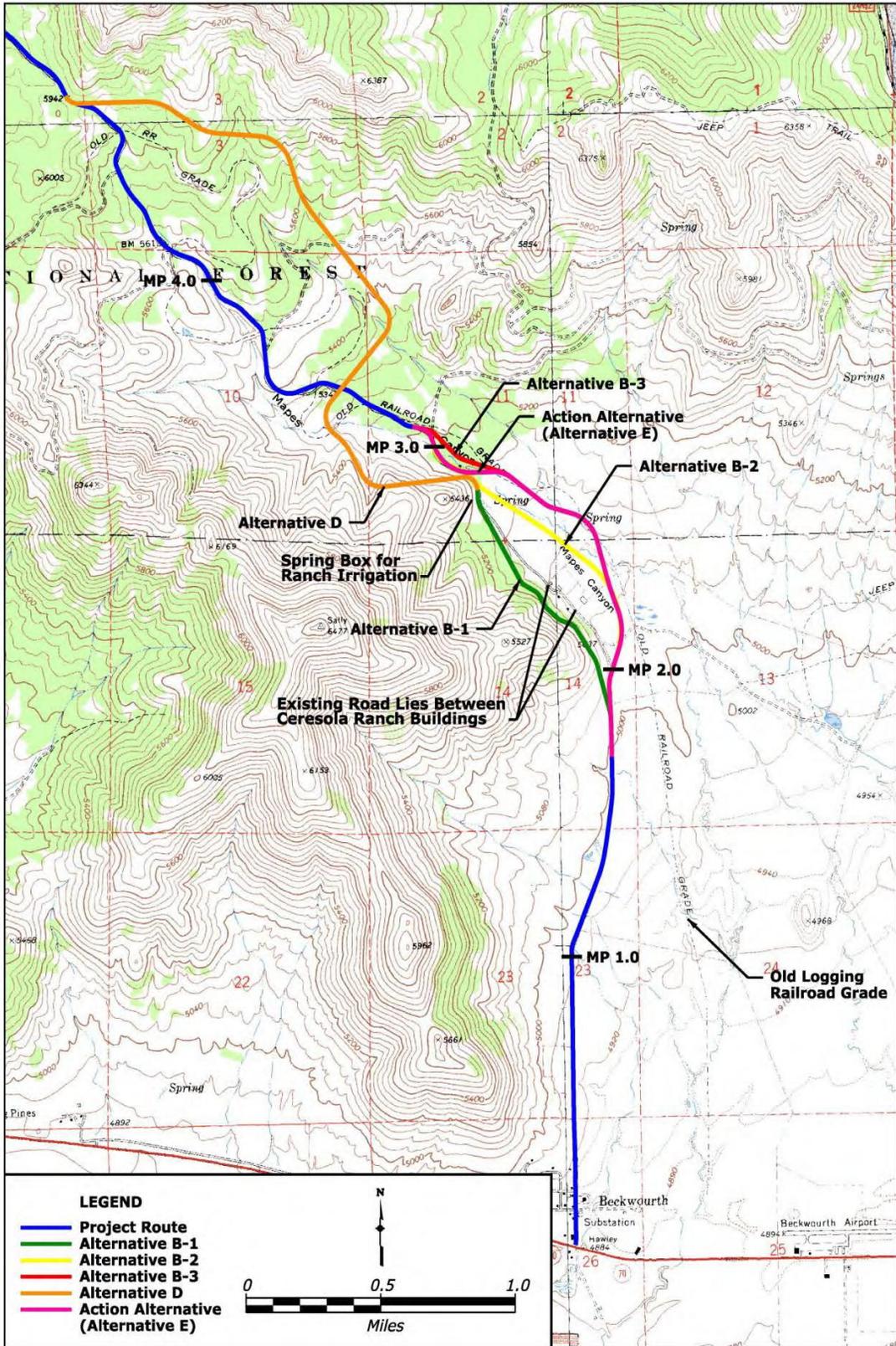


Figure 7. Realignment Options Considered

Other Elements Related to the Action Alternative:

The Action Alternative would involve clearing and grubbing of vegetation adjacent the roadway within the construction limits to allow for construction of the new roadway and associated clear zone. A total of approximately 56 acres of vegetated areas would be cleared, approximately 30 acres of this is within PNF. This action would involve cutting and removal of large trees, some of which is comprised of merchantable timber. Different mechanisms for the PNF and CDFG to be reimbursed for the value of timber removed will be pursued and are unknown at this time.

Treatment of the existing roadway in sections that are realigned, mainly through the Ceresola property, will be negotiated during the right-of-way process with each respective property owner. The roadway easement on the Ceresola Property would be transferred back to the property owner. The specific treatment of the roadway (such as if it is obliterated, left as-is, rehabilitated to natural conditions, etc. is unknown at this time and will be determined in final design).

Standard construction equipment, such as pulverizers, pavers, rollers, loaders, excavators, graders, compactors, dump trucks, and pickup trucks, would be used to construct the project.

Additional equipment for tree removal may also be used and these generally include the following: mechanical faller (such as a feller buncher or hotsaw), chainsaw, skidder, stroke delimeter, chipper, shovel loader, and a chip van or log truck.

Short-term closures of the road may occur at specific construction milestones, such as replacement of the Crocker Creek crossing. Advanced notification would be provided to the traveling public prior to any temporary closures. Emergency access would be maintained throughout construction. The proposed action includes all the road reconstruction and rehabilitation activities described above. Operation and maintenance of the road are the responsibility of Plumas County up until the end of the project, and then the PNF maintains the roadway past the end of the project.

Several management practices and mitigation measures would be implemented prior to and during the implementation of the Action Alternative to prevent or minimize the potential for impacts to the natural and social environment. These measures are described under each respective environmental resource in the following chapter, and are also summarized in Chapter 4 of this EA.

Environmental Documents

FHWA-CFLHD has prepared an Environmental Assessment (EA) for the proposed improvements. Attached to this email is a copy of the EA. Additional copies of the EA are also available for review online at www.cflhd.gov/beckwourth and also at the following locations:

Plumas County Library (Quincy Main Branch and Portola Branch)
Plumas County Department of Public Works (134 E. Main St., Quincy)

A public hearing will be held to provide an opportunity for citizens to learn more about the environmental process and findings. The public hearing will be held at the **Portola Branch Library, 34 Third Avenue, Portola, CA, 96122 on February 22, 2012 from 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.** The meeting will begin at 6:00 pm with an open house, then a formal presentation and question/answer period beginning at 6:30 pm. After the presentation, the open house will continue so feel free to arrive any time you are able.