

Great Redwood Trail Agency

419 Talmage Road, Suite M

Ukiah, CA 95482

(707) 463-3280

NOTICE OF PREPARATION and ANNOUNCEMENT OF A SCOPING MEETING

Great Redwood Trail Program Environmental Impact Report

Release Date: May 1, 2024

To: State Clearinghouse, Responsible Agencies, Trustee Agencies, Other Public Agencies, and Interested Individuals and Organizations

Subject: Notice of Preparation of a Program Environmental Impact Report for the Great Redwood Trail

Lead Agency: Great Redwood Trail Agency
419 Talmage Road, Suite M
Ukiah, CA 95482
Contact: Elaine Hogan, Executive Director
Phone: (707) 463-3280
PEIR@greatredwoodtrailplan.org

Consistent with California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) requirements, the Great Redwood Trail Agency (GRTA) is the lead agency under CEQA for the preparation of a program environmental impact report (PEIR) for the northern portion of the Great Redwood Trail that remains within GRTA's operational control (within Humboldt, Trinity, and Mendocino counties). GRTA prepared this Notice of Preparation (NOP) pursuant to Section 15082 of the State CEQA Guidelines.

This NOP is intended to inform responsible, trustee, and other affected or interested agencies and the public that a PEIR will be prepared to address potential impacts resulting from implementation of the proposed Great Redwood Trail. Agencies should comment on the elements of potential environmental effects that are relevant to their statutory responsibilities in connection with the implementation of the proposed project.

A paper copy of the NOP is available at GRTA's office (address listed below). An appointment to view the NOP at GRTA offices can be made by calling 707.463.3280. The NOP is also available for public viewing online at: <https://greatredwoodtrailplan.org/>.

RESPONSES TO THIS NOP

Due to the time limits mandated by state law, responses to the NOP must be sent at the earliest possible date, but no later than May 31, 2024. Please send your written responses, including the name of a contact person, to:

Great Redwood Trail Agency
419 Talmage Road, Suite M
Ukiah, CA 95482

Contact: Elaine Hogan, Executive Director
Phone: (707) 463-3280

Written responses may also be emailed to: PEIR@greatredwoodtrailplan.org. Comments provided by email should include "Great Redwood Trail NOP Scoping Comment" in the subject line, and the name and physical address of the commenter in the body of the email. If you are from an agency that will need to consider the PEIR when deciding whether to issue permits or other approvals for the proposed project, please provide the name of a contact person.

All comments on environmental issues received during the scoping period will be considered and addressed in the Draft PEIR, which is anticipated to be available for public review in late 2024.

Focus of Input

GRTA relies on responsible and trustee agencies to provide information relevant to the analysis of resources falling within their jurisdiction. GRTA encourages responses to this NOP, with a focus on the following topics:

- ▶ Scope of Environmental Analysis. Guidance on the scope of analysis for the PEIR, including identification of specific issues that would require close study due to the location, scale, and character of the proposed project;
- ▶ Mitigation Measures. Ideas for feasible mitigation, including mitigation that could potentially be imposed by GRTA that would avoid, eliminate, or reduce potentially significant or significant impacts;
- ▶ Alternatives. Suggestions for alternatives to the proposed project that could potentially reduce or avoid potentially significant or significant impacts; and
- ▶ Interested Parties. Identification of public agencies, public and private groups, and individuals that GRTA should notice regarding the proposed project and PEIR.

PUBLIC SCOPING MEETING

GRTA will conduct a virtual public scoping meeting via Zoom teleconference to inform interested parties, public agencies, tribal governments, and the public about the proposed project and offer an opportunity to provide comments on the scope and content of the PEIR. The public scoping meeting is scheduled for the following time and location:

May 14, 2024; 6:00 p.m.
Zoom Webinar

To participate via the Zoom teleconference online meeting platform, please register at the following link: <https://greatredwoodtrailplan.org>.

At the scoping meeting, any person may present oral statements. Participants will be given instructions on how to provide oral comment once they have joined the virtual scoping meeting. The scoping meeting will proceed on the date noted above until all oral comments are heard. Commenters are also encouraged to submit comments in writing via mail or email.

PROJECT LOCATION

The project area (hereinafter, alignment or corridor) is composed of 231 miles of former North Coast Railroad Authority (NCRA) right-of-way in Humboldt, Trinity, and Mendocino counties (Figure 1) for the proposed trail, and adjacent public land for construction outside the right-of-way for associated public access facilities. The proposed trail alignment travels through ancestral and near current tribal lands, as well as multiple cities and unincorporated communities, including Hopland, Ukiah, Redwood Valley, Willits, Alderpoint, Rio Dell, Fortuna, Eureka, Arcata, and Blue Lake (Figure 1). The trail corridor traverses urban areas with public and private land ownership, as well as expansive rural and backcountry areas adjacent to the Wild and Scenic Eel River, conservation lands, and privately owned agricultural, rangeland, and timberland.

As shown in Figure 1, short segments of the trail have previously been constructed. The PEIR will evaluate new construction of the proposed trail segments that would complete the Great Redwood Trail within Mendocino, Trinity, and Humboldt counties. Environmental analysis of visitation, operations, and maintenance of the trail will consider the alignment shown in Figure 1, including the previously constructed trail segments. Future Great Redwood Trail segments will also be planned, constructed, and operated as separate projects by Sonoma-Marín Area Rail Transit (SMART) in Sonoma and Marin counties. These segments are not within GRTA's operational control. These segments are being planned by SMART and would have independent utility as part of the SMART rail corridor; their construction and operations/maintenance will not be evaluated in the PEIR.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

GRTA proposes to adopt a Master Plan for a 231-mile, multi-use trail from the Mendocino County/Sonoma County line north to Humboldt County on former NCRA right-of-way and adjacent public lands. This is the portion of former NCRA right-of-way that remains in the GRTA's operational control. The proposed trail would connect to the SMART rail trail in Marin and Sonoma counties to establish an interregional trail corridor between the North Bay communities of the San Francisco Bay Area and the Arcata/Eureka communities around Humboldt Bay. It would be designed and managed to protect and enhance the surrounding natural environment, respect neighboring properties, and offer safe and equitable access for a wide range of users, including hikers, equestrians, cyclists, runners, wheelchair users, and others. As the right-of-way was formerly used for rail purposes, it consists of a gentle grade with railroad tracks, passes over many rail bridges and trestles, and through tunnels. Once completed, the proposed project would result in the longest rail trail in the nation, providing a continuous regional trail corridor as well as key trail connections to local and regional destinations.

GRTA prepared a draft Master Plan document which will be the basis for the proposed project evaluated in the PEIR. The draft Master Plan document includes preliminary details on proposed trail use, trail typologies, design options, and operations and maintenance. As described in the draft Master Plan, the trail would consist of a variety of trail surface types over its 231 miles, including paved multi-use, crushed-stone multi-use, and backcountry trails. Paved multi-use trails would consist of concrete or asphalt and would be located near cities, towns, and areas with high use. Safety features would be installed where at-grade road crossings are needed, including striped crosswalks, median refuge islands, raised crosswalks, rectangular rapid flashing beacons, and curb extensions. Crushed stone multi-use trail segments would consist of compacted crushed stone and would be located in suburban and rural areas and would serve as a transition between paved and backcountry trails. Backcountry segments of the trail would be established using natural earthen material and be located in the most rural sections of the trail, including the Eel River Canyon. Amenities along the trail would include trailheads, parking areas, parks, rest areas, restrooms, potable water, river/water access, campgrounds, public art, and wayfinding signage. Where major physical barriers exist, including landslides, rail infrastructure failures, sensitive habitat areas, or sensitive cultural sites, the proposed project would re-route the trail within GRTA right-of-way, provide a loop trail or parallel route on public lands, reconstruct failed infrastructure, structurally reinforce the trail (for major washouts or landslides, if practical), or install context-specific design solutions (such as a boardwalk through sensitive areas). The approach to navigate each major barrier would be selected based on the barrier type, location, and other site-specific circumstances.

Under GRTA's supervision, the trail may be managed and maintained by a variety of regional and local public agencies and recreation-oriented non-profits. A prioritization process would rank the order and priority for constructing the trail. This trail prioritization would be informed by community and agency priorities, anticipated trail demand, and the feasibility and cost of each segment. Operations and maintenance activities for the trail would include regular inspections and structure management (e.g., annual inspections of bridges, trestles, and tunnels), routine maintenance of the trail (e.g., sweeping/clearing, patching, and sealing), drainage infrastructure maintenance, vegetation maintenance, litter/dumped material removal, and routine upkeep of trail amenities (e.g., restrooms, wayfinding signage, campgrounds). Project implementation would also involve re-vegetating areas with a native seed mix; installing drainage features (e.g., rolling dips, drainage ditches, culverts); installing vegetative screening, fences, and/or natural barriers; and removing abandoned rail equipment and hazardous materials.

The proposed project would be planned, designed, constructed, and operated to create multiple and overlapping community benefits, including:

- ▶ Creating a world-class recreational experience that accommodates many different user groups (hikers, bikers, equestrians, rafting, and more);
- ▶ providing non-automobile access to State Parks and other public land;
- ▶ expanding wildfire resilience, vegetation management, and fire-fighting access;
- ▶ protecting tribal cultural resources and other cultural resources;
- ▶ protecting known sensitive plant and animal species and aquatic resources;
- ▶ restoring habitat for wildlife and enhancing native landscaping;
- ▶ implementing watershed restoration and fish passage improvements;
- ▶ creating and helping to facilitate economic development opportunities (trail amenities, guide services, and accommodations);
- ▶ expanding green infrastructure and sustainable transportation networks; and
- ▶ cleaning up hazardous materials and other railroad-related waste.

POTENTIAL ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS

As required by CEQA, the PEIR will describe existing conditions and evaluate the potential environmental effects of the proposed project and a reasonable range of alternatives, including the no-project alternative. It will address reasonably foreseeable direct, indirect, and cumulative effects. The PEIR will identify feasible mitigation measures, if available, to reduce potentially significant impacts. The potential environmental effects that are anticipated to be addressed in the PEIR include impacts on the following resource areas:

- ▶ Aesthetics;
- ▶ Air Quality;
- ▶ Biological Resources;
- ▶ Cultural Resources;
- ▶ Geology, Soils, and Seismicity;
- ▶ Greenhouse Gas Emissions and Climate Change;
- ▶ Hazards and Hazardous Materials;
- ▶ Hydrology and Water Quality;
- ▶ Land Use and Planning;
- ▶ Noise;
- ▶ Recreation;
- ▶ Public Services and Utilities;
- ▶ Transportation;
- ▶ Tribal Cultural Resources; and
- ▶ Wildfire.

ALTERNATIVES TO BE EVALUATED IN THE PEIR

In accordance with the State CEQA Guidelines (14 CCR Section 15126.6), the PEIR will evaluate a range of reasonable alternatives to the proposed project that are capable of meeting most of the objectives and would avoid or substantially lessen one or more significant effects of the project. The PEIR will also identify any alternatives that were considered but rejected by the lead agency as infeasible and briefly explain the reasons why. The PEIR will provide an analysis of the no-project alternative and will also identify the environmentally superior alternative.

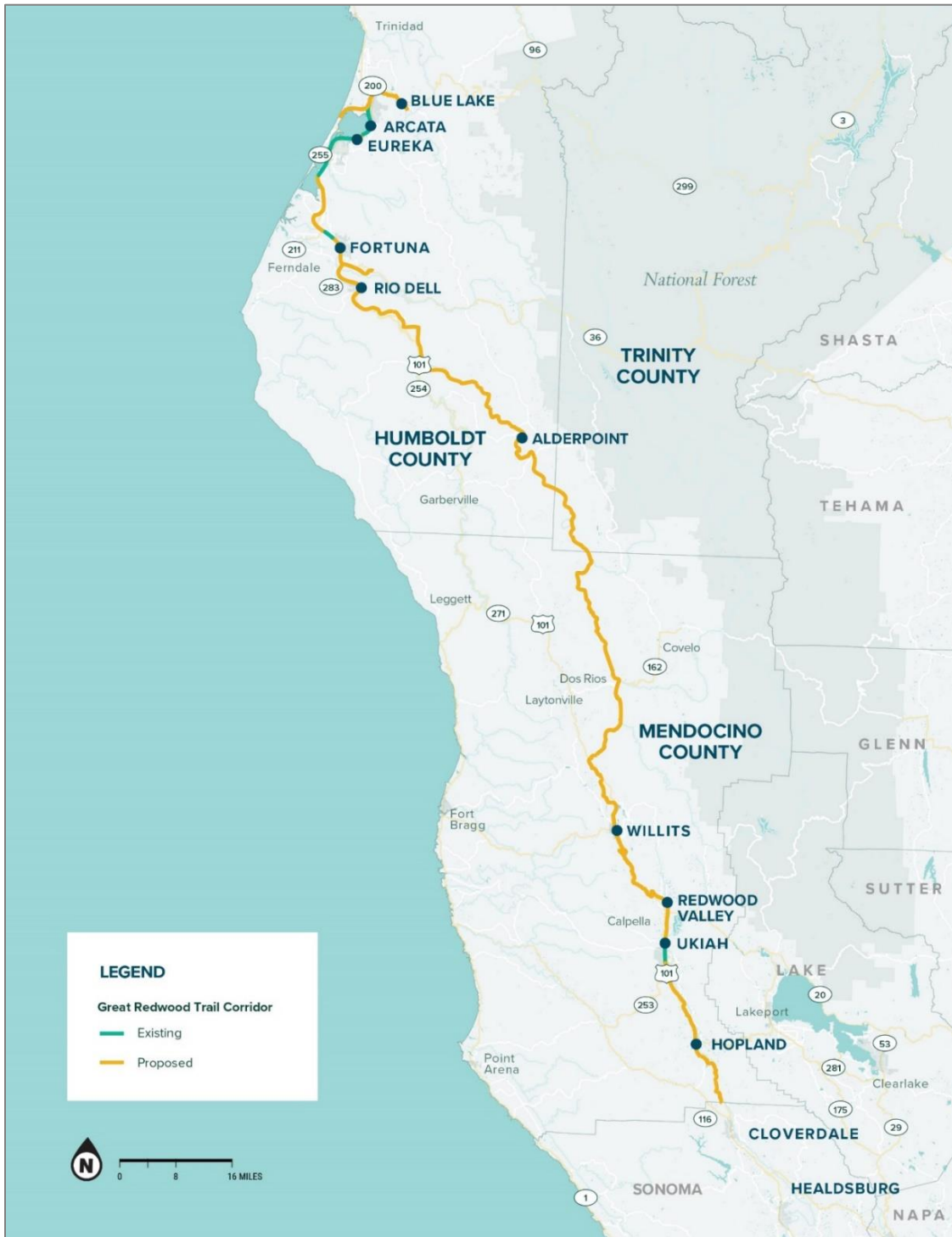


Figure 1 Great Redwood Trail