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Draft Environmental Assessment

MEDICINE LAKE HIGHLANDS ROADS CLOSURE ORDER

Doublehead Ranger District, Modoc National Forest
Siskiyou County, California

Draft Medicine Lake Highlands Road Closure Order

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INTRODUCTION

Affected Environment

The Medicine Lake Management Area is 15,011 acres located on the Doublehead Ranger District, Modoc National Forest. It borders the Klamath National Forest on the west, and consists of the summit and upper slopes of the Medicine Lake Highlands. (See Appendix A) The terrain is rocky with forested acres interrupted by volcanic flows. Elevations range from 5,598 feet at Medicine Lake to 7,899 feet. The Medicine Lake Management Area is a unique ecosystem with high elevation vegetation and soils. This vegetation/soil type is particularly sensitive to disturbance and slow to recover when disturbed.

The proposed action is located within a portion of the Medicine Lake Highlands in portions of T42N, R3E; T43N, R3E; T44N, R3E; and T43N, R4E. All of this area is contained within the *Medicine Lake Highlands Traditional Cultural Property District* that has been determined eligible for the National Register of Historic Places by the Keeper of the Register in 1999. The area has important historic and present day cultural value to the Tribes of the area.

Dispersed recreation activities, such as hunting and hiking, take place throughout the area. It receives continual visitor use during the summer months with four developed campgrounds and a day use area with a boat ramp on Medicine Lake. The area also has approximately six miles of hiking trails. The district recreation officer on the Doublehead Ranger District estimates that the Medicine Lake recreational area is experiencing an over 20% increase in visitors each year. The campgrounds recorded 43,408 visitors in 2007, with use steadily increasing over the past four years.

The Medicine Lake Highlands area includes Paynes Spring, Bullseye, Blanche Lake, Medicine and Little Medicine Lakes, Alcohol Crater (a resting site for Bald Eagles), Arnica Sink and Glass Mountain flow areas. The Medicine Lake Glass Flow area has been designated as a geologic special interest area and the entire area provides important recreational opportunities that are heavily utilized by the public. Several permit holders use the area for harvest of mushrooms, minerals and geothermal exploration and firewood collection. Private landowners adjacent to Medicine Lake also have a stake in the area.

Background

On September 11, 1991, motorized wheeled vehicle use in the Medicine Lake area was restricted to designated roads through a closure order (USDA,1991a). This closure order used road numbering language that is inconsistent with the current road numbering system. This has caused confusion for the public and has caused difficulty for enforcement of off road vehicle use by law enforcement officers. Signing, posting and gating have generally been effective in limiting vehicle use to the designated routes but some use off from these routes is still occurring.

Direction in the Modoc National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (LRMP) for the Medicine Lake Management Area states that on sensitive soil areas, to allow Off-

Highway Vehicle (OHV) use only on established roads and trails. Restrict use or obliterate roads and trails when necessary to protect the soil resource and maintain water quality (LRMP, 4-212).

This area also falls under Zone C on the Off-Highway Vehicle Use Map which accompanied the LRMP (Map Packet, Forest Plan Maps). Direction for Zone C is: Motorized land vehicle travel is prohibited off of existing roads and trails and permitted on existing roads and trails except for those designated closed.

Additionally, the Medicine Lake Glass Flow area is within the proposal area and is classified as Zone A (Geologic Special Interest Area) where motorized travel is prohibited.

Purpose and Need

The proposed action is being considered to assure that forest visitors remain on designated roads to carry forth direction in the LRMP to protect recreation, cultural values and vegetation.

The Forest Order and Map implementing the action is necessary to clarify which roads are open for public motorized vehicle use and which roads are for administrative and permitted uses.

The Forest Order closing the area to cross country vehicles and closing roads to public use will implement Forest Plan Direction to:


- Manage and maintain the transportation system to protect soil, water and all other resource values. Close local roads as needed to meet these objectives. Develop road closure and OHV plans. (Appendix A) (LRMP, 4-14)
- Avoid impacts to cultural resources (LRMP, 4-14).
- Minimize adverse impacts to threatened, endangered, and sensitive species. (LRMP 4-20)
- Minimize conflicts between wheeled motor vehicles and existing or proposed recreational uses of NFS lands (LRMP, 4-19).

Proposed Action

Permanently close 28 miles of existing National Forest System (NFS) roads and 6.64 miles of known unauthorized user created routes. Restrict wheeled motorized vehicle travel by the public to designated NFS roads in the Medicine Lake Area. Authorized users would not be affected. This would not prohibit the use of over-snow vehicles during the winter time and for the purposes of this proposal, a wheelchair is not considered to be a motor vehicle. There will be 45 miles of NFS roads, within the project area, left open for public access and use as displayed on the Medicine Lake Travel Map (Appendix B).

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Roads Remaining Open for Public Use			
Route Number	Miles	Route Number	Miles
43A17B	0.1	43N47B	0.3
43A21A	0.1	43N48	4.6
43A47AA	0.1	43N53	1.6
43A48	0.1	43N53Y	2
43A48A	0.3	43N55	0.4
43A48D	0.2	43N56	0.9
43A53YA	0.1	43N58	0.3
43N17	2.9	43N59	0.3
43N19	0.5	43N60	0.3
43N19A	0.5	43N99	9.1
43N19B	0.1	44B17A	0.1
43N21	2.5	44B17C	0.1
43N32	0.6	44N17	4.6
43N42	1.8	44N75	9.9
43N44	0.1	44N75C	0.1
43N47A	0.6	44N75D	0.2
Total Miles of Road Remaining Open		45.4 miles	

 Represents roads that are partially open and partially closed.

Roads Closed for Public Use			
Route Number	Miles	Route Number	Miles
42N22	0.8	43N15	0.3
43A01A	0.1	43N17A	0.6
43A21B	0.7	43N23	1.7
43A21C	0.5	43N23B	0.6
43A42A	0.2	43N23C	0.4
43A48A	0.8	43N29	1.2
43A48B	0.1	43N29A	0.8
43A48D	1.4	43N32	1.2
43A48DA	0.7	43N39	0.7
43A48DB	0.3	43N42A	0.5
43A53A	1.1	43N42B	0.4
43A53B	0.1	43N47	0.9
43A53C	0.9	43N47A	0.7
43A53D	0.4	43N56	1.1
43A53E	0.5	43N66	1.3
43A66A	0.2	43N66A	0.4
43A99A	0.8	44A75BA	0.4
43A99B	1.4	44A75BC	0.3
43N01	1.2	44A75BD	0.1
43N01A	0.3	44A75BE	0.1
43N01B	0.4	44B75A	0.1
43N01C	0.4	44B75B	0
	0	44N75B	0.7
Total Miles of Roads Closed		27.8 miles	

Decision Framework

The responsible official will decide whether to adopt and implement the proposed action which will permanently close 28 miles of existing roads and 6.64 miles of known unauthorized user created routes. This will restrict public use to 45 miles of designated NFS roads in the area, or to take no action which will allow the current management direction to remain in place.

Public Involvement

This project was initially published on the Modoc National Forest’s Schedule of Proposed Actions (SOPA) on January 2007. A scoping letter was mailed on May 21, 2007, three to individuals, six to groups, three to county government, two to state government and seven to other federal agencies. We received one comment from the public during scoping. This comment was from a private leaseholder who was concerned that his access would be restricted. The proposed action will not restrict authorized use.

Tribal Consultation

On February 14, 2007 and on March 7, 2007, members of the Modoc National Forest met with representatives of the Pit River Tribal Council to share information and to consult on a variety of Forest projects including the proposed action. The Forest Tribal Relations representative gave the Council a draft map of the proposed road closure for the Medicine Lake Highlands. The District Ranger at the Doublehead Ranger District had shared the same map with the Klamath Tribes. Direction was given to the Council to look at the map from two perspectives: one for access and the other for use that is detrimental. Several issues were identified and considered at that time. The tribes have indicated support for this proposal.

Issues

No issues were identified during scoping that would be useful in developing alternatives to the proposed action.

ALTERNATIVES

No Action Alternative

Under the No Action Alternative, roads would not be closed to use. Enforcement of vehicle restrictions will be difficult because a Forest Order would not be in place. Off road vehicle use would probably continue due to confusion in the existing direction document.

Proposed Action

Permanently close 28 miles of existing NFS roads and 6.64 miles of known unauthorized user created routes. Restrict wheeled motorized vehicle travel by the public to designated NFS roads in the Medicine Lake Area. There will be 45 miles of NFS roads, within the project area, left open for public access and use.

Authorized users would not be affected. This would not prohibit the use of over-snow vehicles during the winter time and for the purposes of this proposal, a wheelchair is not considered to be a motor vehicle.

Consideration of Alternatives

Because no substantive issues were identified in scoping, no alternatives to the proposed action were considered.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

Historic Properties Management

The following is taken primarily from *The Medicine Lake Highlands Historic Properties Management Program: Including a Cultural Assessment and Guidelines for Management* (2007).

The Medicine Lake area represents an area of continuing traditional cultural value to several northern California Indian tribes. This area is valued by Indian communities as a sacred place of healing and renewal. Medicine Lake, and the volcanic caldera it rests in, contains an interrelated series of locations and natural features associated with American Indian spiritual beliefs and traditional practices. Ethnographic studies, extant physical resources and contemporary testimony attest to the historic and continuing value of the area for maintaining the Tribes' traditional cultural identity. "Management direction that tends toward the most restrictive in terms of roads, developed recreation, off-highway vehicle use, mineral, and geothermal extraction is more compatible with, and less likely to affect, traditional cultural values" (USDA, 2007). The proposed action would benefit this resource by being more restrictive than the current direction.

Cultural Resources

In terms of compliance with the 1966 National Historic Preservation Act, the proposed action will have no effects on known archaeological resources within the analysis area. The proposed road closures may prevent unauthorized access to archaeological resources and thus, may have a beneficial effect in reducing the potential for illegal collection of archaeological artifacts and other forms of vandalism or unintentional degradation of these resources. Due to the nature of the proposed action no additional archaeological inventories are required at this time (USDA, 2007a).

Botany

The Medicine Lake Highlands have several known occurrences of Watchlist plant species (*Carex halliana*, *Collomia larsenii*, *Erigeron acris* ssp. *debilis*, *Gratiola heterosepala*, and *Hulsea nana*) and habitat, and may also include Sensitive plant habitat (esp. for *Botrychium pumicola*), all of which may be adversely affected by cross-country motorized vehicle use off of officially designated roads. Boggs Lake Hedge-hyssop (*G. heterosepala*), a State listed species, in particular is known to be threatened by recreational vehicles and trampling (CNPS, NatureServe). Talus collomia (*C. larsenii*), though not directly affected on its talus habitat by vehicles, might suffer from increased foot traffic, as recreational vehicles make it easier for people to access this rare habitat (*ibid.*). The Proposed Action will prohibit motorized vehicle use off from designated routes and therefore, there will only be a positive effect on these species (USDA, 2007b).

Recreation

Medicine Lake is a highly utilized summer recreation area, valued for its exceptional beauty and unique geologic resources. High elevation vegetation, hiking opportunities, wildlife viewing and the availability of Medicine Lake increases the value of the area to the public. The Medicine Lake Highlands area is also heavily utilized by hunters and damage to the roads occurs during hunting season. Motor vehicle use is occurring on roads closed to the public. This travel does not allow the roads to close naturally. OHV use occurs cross country and damages soil and vegetation. When vegetation is damaged it is slow to recover because of the porous soils, high elevation and short growing season. Wildlife is displaced by this disturbance. Mushroom and firewood gatherers also contribute to the heavy use of the area. If no action is taken in the Medicine Lake

Highlands to close roads to unauthorized use, degradation of resources in the area may be affected by the creation of new roads and off road use. This could lead to an increase in erosion, damage to vegetation, and disturbance of wildlife. This increase may have a negative impact on the recreation experience which is dependent upon the natural beauty and unique geography of the area.

Closing roads to public use, as proposed in this action, will protect the natural beauty of the area while still allowing public utilization and enjoyment into perpetuity. The proposed action will have a positive effect on recreation resources. (USDA, 2007c)

Wildlife

The following species, or their habitats, are known to occur, or may occur, within the project area: Northern spotted owl, marten, wolverine, Townsends's big-eared bat, pallid bat, northern goshawk, willow flycatcher, peregrine falcon, great gray owl and bald eagle. The northern spotted owl was listed as a threatened species in 1990. The bald eagle was reclassified in 1995 from endangered to threatened. The others are Region 5 Forest Service sensitive species. Restricting vehicles would prevent disturbance to nesting, reduce animal movement to avoid noise and vehicles and possibly have some minor reduction in the risk of habitat loss from fire occurrence and snag and tree removal. The Proposed Action will restrict travel to designated routes and therefore will have a positive effect on these species. (USDA, 2007d)

Soils

Soils in the Medicine Lake Highlands are classified primarily in the Divers, Kinzel, Yallani and related families. Soils, for the most part, originated from ash, cinders, basalt and pumice. The soils are moderately deep with moderate to rapid permeability and generally low to moderate erosion hazard. Some of the soils are covered with a layer of surface pumice. Due to parent material and soil texture, soils are slow to recover after disturbance. The proposed action will have minimal impacts to soils in the area. The closures will, over the long term (10+ years), allow soils in the area to recover to a more natural state. Recovery would occur more quickly if the road beds receive treatments such as ripping and seeding with native species. An indirect effect of the road closures would be that access points for OHV use would be more limited. With limited access, there would be less potential for further disturbance to soils in the area. (USDA, 2007e)

CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION

The Forest Service consulted the following individuals, Federal, State, and local agencies, tribes and non-Forest Service persons during the development of this environmental assessment:

ID Team Specialists

Laurence Crabtree – District Ranger (Line Officer)

Barbara Raymond – ID Team leader

Cheryl Beyer - Botanist

Rob Jeffers - Soils Specialist

Boyd Turner - Wildlife Specialist

Gerry Gates - Heritage Resources

Mike Kegg - Recreation Resources

Dan Meza – Tribal Liason

Tribal

The Klamath Tribal Council

The Pit River Tribal Council

Law Enforcement

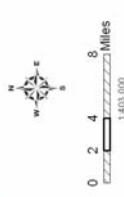
Jim McKeehan (Retired LEO)

Mike Zunino (LEO Captain)

Appendix A VICINITY MAP Medicine Lake Highlands Road Closure Order

Modoc National Forest
Doublehead
Ranger District

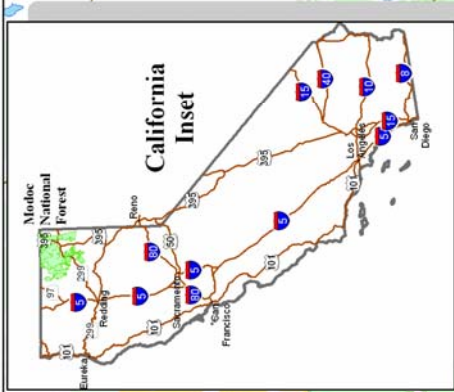
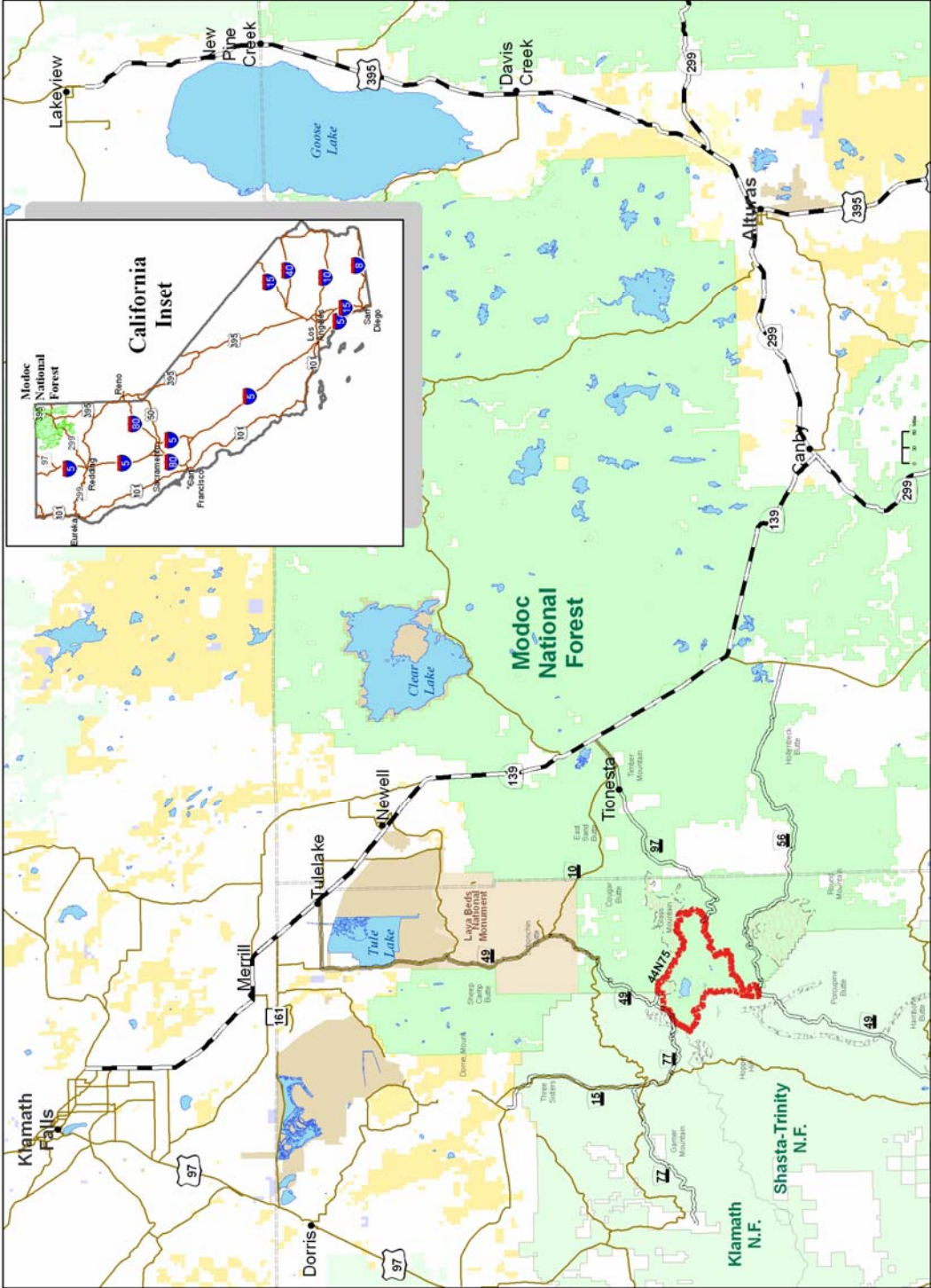
- Legend**
- Analysis Area
 - Medicine Lake Access Roads
 - County Boundaries
 - Private
 - US Fish and Wildlife Service
 - Lakes and Reservoirs



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Forest Management
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Forest Science
Forest Stewardship
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Forest Protection
Forest Restoration
Forest Utilization
Forest Management
Forest Health
Forest Science
Forest Stewardship
Forest Planning
Forest Protection
Forest Restoration
Forest Utilization

This map was prepared using the Modoc National Forest's data.

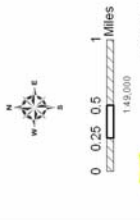
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Appendix B OPEN ROADS Medicine Lake Highlands Road Closure Order

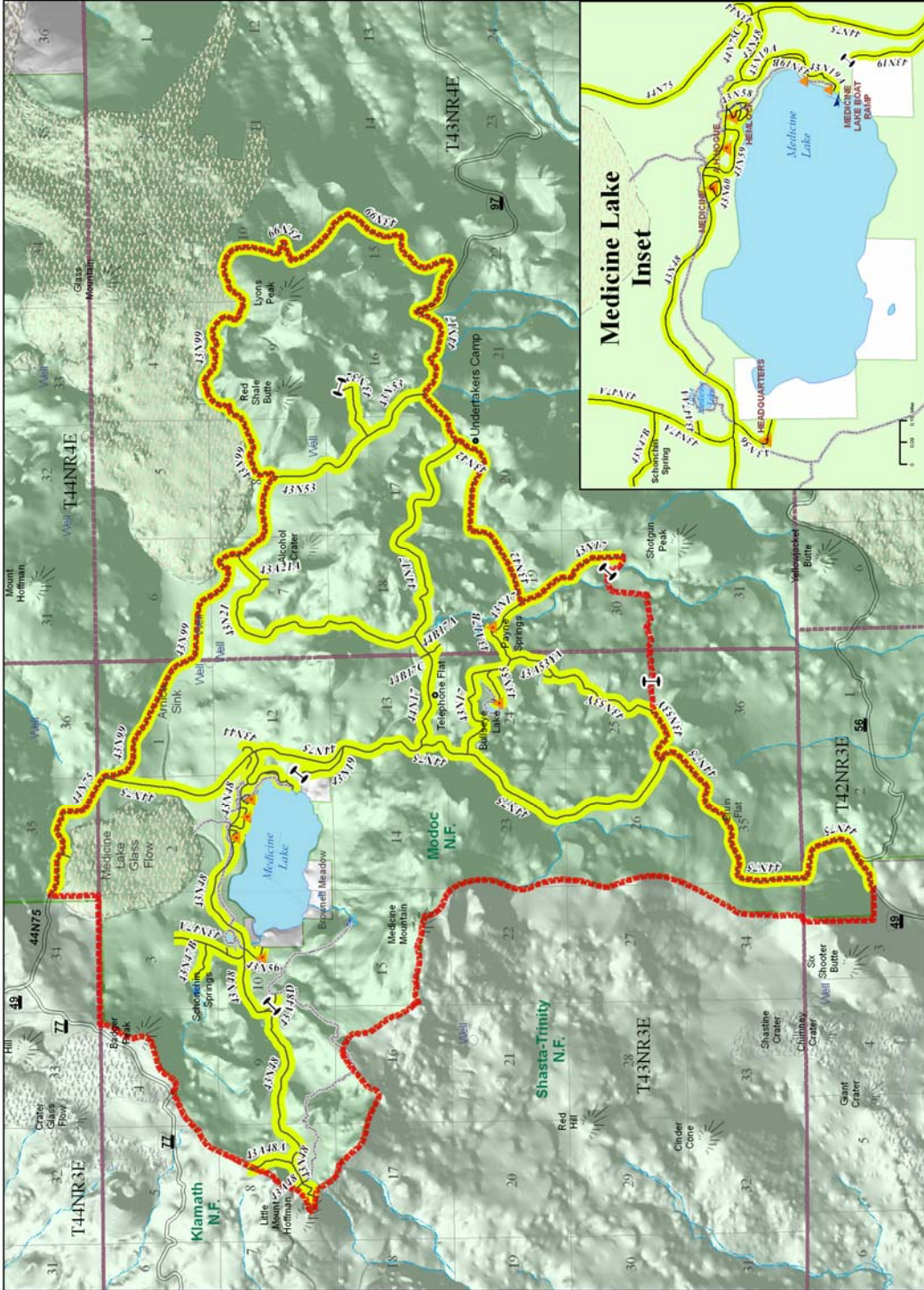
Modoc National Forest
Doublehead
Ranger District

- Legend**
- ▲ Developed Campground
 - ▲ Day Use
 - 👉 Roads Proposed Open
 - 🔴 Analysis Area
 - 📏 Medicine Lake Access Roads
 - 👉 Existing Non-Motorized Trails
 - 🚪 Existing Gates
 - 🟩 Modoc National Forest
 - 🟨 Private
 - 🟦 Other National Forests



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This map was prepared using the National Wetland Inventory (NWI) data available on the National Wetland Inventory (NWI) website. US data and products are provided "as is" without any warranty, expressed or implied, including but not limited to accuracy, completeness, or timeliness. The USDA Forest Service is not responsible for any errors or omissions in this map or any data derived therefrom. The map was prepared using the National Wetland Inventory (NWI) data available on the National Wetland Inventory (NWI) website. US data and products are provided "as is" without any warranty, expressed or implied, including but not limited to accuracy, completeness, or timeliness. The USDA Forest Service is not responsible for any errors or omissions in this map or any data derived therefrom.

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APPENDIX C - References

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