

The Setting



Knowing the conditions under which the trail is developed is critical for the trail planning and implementation process. Understanding land ownership, key recreation areas and ongoing resource protection issues will help plan appropriate trail access and guide trail management decisions. Addressing the sensitive nature of cultural and historic sites is important to preserve and protect our common heritage. A comprehensive look at what exists, and the opportunities and challenges that are associated with these conditions, will allow development of a trail that provides maximum benefit to trail users and the communities, while protecting our resources and heritage for future generations.

Process and Mapping

To identify existing conditions and begin the process of defining the work of trail development, the Core and Planning Teams have drawn information from many resources. They have examined and analyzed existing public and private maps and data. They interviewed locals and consulted with members of key cultural groups. This, coupled with archeological and historical research, has provided important context. Finally, they physically examined the corridor. For map making convenience the trail was divided into four segments: (1) McCloud to Bartle Wye; (2) Bartle Wye to Hambone; (3) Bartle Wye to Cayton; and (4) Cayton to Burney (including the Sierra Spur). These section maps may be found on pages 35–38.

Corridor Description

Location: The Great Shasta Rail Trail will be approximately 80 miles long and stretch across Shasta and Siskiyou Counties connecting the communities of Burney and McCloud. This will incorporate the corridor for the main rail line as well as that of the Hambone and Sierra Spurs. The route passes through the Lassen and Shasta-Trinity National Forests, and

runs near McArthur–Burney Falls Memorial State Park and over Lake Britton. The remainder of the corridor passes through private land.

Grade and surface: The corridor is 50 to 200 feet wide with a gentle railroad grade. The elevation ranges from a low of 2,830 feet at Lake Britton to a high of 4,500 feet at Dead Horse Summit. Existing rail bed surfaces are packed cinder with portions of the route on elevated beds. Rails and ties have been removed, but some areas of railroad debris and hardware remain.

Ownership of the Corridor and Trail Access

Right of Way: The McCloud River Railroad Company was incorporated in January 1897. Since that time ownership of the railroad company and right of way property has changed hands four times. Some of the property is held in fee title by the railroad and other sections of the line operate under a variety of easements.



In 2005, the current owner of the right of way, 4 Rails, Inc., filed for abandonment¹ of four portions of the railway, including the section of line between Burney and McCloud and three spurs. These sections of the railroad are now being purchased for conversion to the Great Shasta Rail Trail.

Adjacent Land: Twenty different neighbors own property along the trail, nine in Siskiyou County and eleven in Shasta County. These neighbors include the United States Forest Service, a utility company, private timber companies, and individual landowners.

Access: There are numerous potential access points, including existing trails and public and private roads that intersect the trail. Access development in partnership with landowners and agencies must consider private property, seasonal access issues, access point maintenance, use regulations on existing trails, and user safety.

Improvements and Leases within the Right of Way

Leases — easements: There are a number of leases and easements either within or adjacent to the right of way. These include Covanta/Burney Mountain Power and a fiber optics line where the corridor crosses Fruit Growers Supply Company and Forest Service land. A full inventory has been completed as part of the title search which was part of the “due diligence” before fulfilling the purchase agreement.

Roads: State Route 89 crosses the trail three times along with six paved Forest Service and County roads. Numerous small dirt and gravel roads also bisect the right of way. As the trail is developed, these crossings will have safety markings as required to alert both trail users and drivers.

Bridges and Trestles: The railroad crossed various creeks and streams via bridges, trestles and culverts. The largest trestle crosses Lake Britton, while smaller trestles cross Burney and Goose Valley Creeks and small bridges or large culverts cross Moosehead Creek, Mud Creek, the Upper McCloud River, and others. All these, and numerous culverts and small crossings, will require a needs assessment, and complete engineering inspections to assess their condition for safety, erosion control, and restoration.

Historical Sites: The four sites that contribute to the McCloud River Railroad Historic District are the Bartle Water Tank, Bartle Spring, Hambone Camp, and Car A Camp. These sites are eligible for inclusion in the National Historic Register.

¹ More detailed information about abandonment and railbanking can be found on our web site.

Existing Recreational Uses

Shasta-Trinity and Lassen National Forests: The two National Forests crossed by the GSRT offer a multitude of recreational opportunities. The popular McCloud River Recreation Area, about eight miles from the town of McCloud, is a destination for anglers, kayakers, hikers, and swimmers. Hunters and fishermen enjoy other locations in the National Forests near the GSRT as well.

McArthur-Burney Falls Memorial State Park: The GSRT corridor passes within a half mile of one of the most popular state parks in the California State Park System, McArthur-Burney Falls Memorial State Park. With camping, hiking, interpretive programs, and a waterfall named by Theodore Roosevelt as the “eighth wonder of the world,” the park draws travelers from around the world.

Lake Britton: Formed by a hydroelectric dam on Pit River, Lake Britton provides great fishing and boating opportunities to local residents and visitors to the area. Campgrounds can be found along the lake, as well as boat launching facilities. A giant trestle that towers over Lake Britton, originally served railroad traffic, will eventually offer GSRT users sweeping vistas of this beautiful lake. The trestle is famous as the setting for the railroad scene in the 1986 movie “Stand by Me,” directed by Rob Reiner, based on a novella by Stephen King.



Pacific Crest Trail: Hikers enjoying this 2,650-mile long National Scenic Trail will cross the Great Shasta Rail Trail at a point about halfway between its terminuses at the borders of the U.S. and Mexico and the U.S. and Canada. The Pacific Crest Trail is open to hikers and equestrians only.



Overview of Natural Features

Geography and Climate: The trail region encompasses several different geographic and climate zones extending from the near desert of the Modoc Plateau to the eastern slope of the Cascade Range. Average rainfall varies from around 30” inches a year in Burney to about 45” annually in McCloud, with about 60% of regional precipitation falling during the winter months. Across the region, daytime temperatures are generally mild with average of 47–85°F in the summer and 20–42°F in the winter.

Mountains: The northeastern regions of California are dominated by the presence of many active volcanoes, including Medicine Lake Volcano, Burney Mountain, Mount Shasta, and Lassen Peak. The latter two are the southernmost peaks of the Cascade Mountain Range that extends from northern California through central Oregon and into Washington and British Columbia. Mount Shasta stands at 14,162 feet above sea level, a full 10,000 feet higher than the surrounding countryside and Lassen Peak rises 10,457 feet above sea level. There are also a variety of smaller peaks and cinder cones, as well as recent and ancient lava flows.

Vast Mixed Conifer Forests: There are both public, (the Lassen and Shasta-Trinity National Forests) and private forest lands along the route of the GSRT, featuring Ponderosa pine (*Pinus ponderosa*), Douglas fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*), incense cedar (*Calocedrus decurrens*), white fir (*Abies concolor*), and sugar pine (*Pinus lambertiana*).

Watersheds: The GSRT crosses a large watershed divide at its highest point near Dead Horse Summit with waters flowing into the McCloud River to the west and to the Pit River to the southeast. Both of these watersheds provide important wildlife habitat within the Lassen and Shasta-Trinity National Forests.

The Upper McCloud watershed covers an area of over 500 square miles. Snow melt from Mount Shasta permeates the volcanic soils of the mountain’s southern flank and arises down slope in the numerous springs and seeps that feed the McCloud River and its tributaries. The eastern portion of the Pit River flows into Lake Britton and supports warm water species in the lake. The lower river supports a cold water fishery for native trout.

Wildlife: Several areas near the GSRT have been designated by the Forest Service and the State as wildlife viewing sites, including on the Upper McCloud River region near Fowler’s campground, McArthur-Burney Falls Memorial State Park, the Ahjumawi Lava Springs State Park, and the Ash Creek Wildlife Area.

Mammals found in the area include black bear, elk, blacktail deer, mountain lion, coyote, grey fox, bobcat, river otter, marten jackrabbits, and numerous species of squirrels and chipmunks. Bird species commonly found in the area include eagles, hawks, vultures, ravens, as well as the western tanager, owls, nuthatches, woodpeckers, and the stellar and scrub jays. Additionally, herons, dippers, killdeer, and ospreys can be found near Lake Britton and along the river corridors.

Cultural and Historic Features

The human history of this area goes back thousands of years. Features that represent the tribal cultures, the lore of the westward expansion of the United States in the later 1800’s, and the stories of the early loggers and homesteaders are all to be found in the region surrounding the trail.

Tribal: There are numerous sites in the region which are integral to the cultural and spiritual heritage of the Pit River Tribe, the Shasta Nation, and the Wintu. These sites remain important to the Native American tribal culture and practices of today and trail development will respect these areas.

Wagons, Rails, Timber, and Hydropower: The GSRT will pass through many historic areas including the remains of early logging camps, remnants of wagon roads used by trappers and homesteaders, and the rail line built to bring materials to the sites of the first hydropower plants built on the Pit River in the early 1920’s. The town of McCloud has a registered National Historic District and offers opportunities to learn about its unique history.

Socioeconomics

The decline of the region’s timber industry and loss of the rail has resulted in reduced economic opportunities for the communities along the corridor. Subsequent periods of high unemployment have led to an out migration of job seekers, particularly young families, which has placed further stress on communities and small businesses struggling to provide goods and services. Trail development offers these communities new economic potential through the attraction of tourists for new year-round outdoor recreation opportunities, and expanded population thanks to the attraction of second home owners.



GSRT Project Timeline

