State of California • The Resources Agency
Arnold Schwarzenegger, *Governor*
DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND RECREATION • P.O. Box 942896 • Sacramento, CA 94296-0001
Ruth G. Coleman, *Director*

November 21, 2008

Dear Park Neighbor:

I wanted to make you aware of work beginning this winter on the Osborne Hill recreational trail network at Empire Mine State Historic Park. We are in the second year of cleaning up areas of the park identified as having elevated levels of metals in historic mine waste rock and tailings.

As you may remember, on October 27, 2007 California State Parks conducted a public workshop to discuss the proposed reorganization of the trail network at Osborne Hill, which would include re-routing and/or closing of some volunteer trails, creating new trail alignments, converting some roads to trails, and providing mine waste remediation in those sections of trail deemed necessary in order to allow them to be open for public use.

We took your feedback and gathered additional information during the environmental review phase of the proposed project. In doing so, we found that some of the proposed trail reroutes had steep grades and erosion issues. In addition, biologists contracted by California State Parks to survey Empire Mine State Historic Park for sensitive species located a pair of California spotted owls (*Strix occidentalis occidentalis*) roosting in the Osborne Hill area. This owl is both a state and federal Species of Special Concern, and management guidelines are currently in place for the Sierra Nevada region to protect occupied territories and potential habitat.

Upon further evaluation, after discovery of the owls, our qualified biologists determined that if we went forward with the original plan, the suitable habitat would be fragmented and disturbed, resulting in significant impacts to the owls.

Because this project was planned prior to the Characterization and Remediation Project and because of the importance of recreational trails to users, this project was reviewed and assessed independently from the major project and is ready to take a step closer to the construction phase.

In light of the road/trail grade issues and the owl discovery, we took the road/trail map proposed at the October '07 public workshop and revised it to avoid cutting road/trail alignments through roadless patches of steep terrain and owl habitat; however, the project will continue to provide first-class multi-use loop trails and emergency vehicle access in the Osborne Hill area.

We are now submitting the Draft Osborne Hill Trail Network Project Mitigated Negative Declaration (MND) for public review and comment. As you will see, it contains specific details regarding the project, real and/or potential impacts to the environment, and mitigation measures that will reduce impacts to below levels of significance.

Considering the challenge of balancing public access and recreation with natural and cultural resource protection, and remediating mine waste all at the same time, I consider this resulting plan to be a remarkable collaborative achievement.

Additionally, you may have received a mailing from State Parks on behalf of the Department of Toxic Substance Control (DTSC) that included their Fact Sheet and Public Service Announcement about the Osborne Hills Trail Network Project. State Parks and DTSC are working together to provide a safe, sustainable trail network that meets the needs of the park as well as the users. This mailing fulfilled DTSC's requirements to inform the public of their Department's work.

The enclosed Notice of Availability explains where you can access a copy of the MND and how to submit comments. Your views and comments are welcome.

If you have questions or need clarification about the changes in the project description since the October '07 meeting you are welcome to contact me at 530-273-3884 or stop by my office at 10556 E. Empire Street in Grass Valley. Otherwise, if you have questions or comments about the Mitigated Negative Declaration, please follow the procedure outlined in the Notice of Availability.

You are always welcome to come out and visit what was once the most productive gold mine in California. We look forward to seeing you here.

Sincerely,

Ron Munson
Park Superintendent,
Empire Mine State Historic Park

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DATE: November 19, 2008

TO: WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

Subject: **Notice of Availability and Intent to Adopt an Initial Study/Mitigated Negative Declaration for the proposed Osborne Hill Trail Network Project**

The California Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) has directed the preparation of and intends to adopt a Mitigated Negative Declaration (MND) for the proposed project, in compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and State CEQA Guidelines. DPR is the lead agency for the proposed project under CEQA.

Project Location: Empire Mine State Historic Park
Grass Valley, California

Description of the Proposed Project: The Department of Parks and Recreation proposes to renovate the recreational trail network in the Osborne Hill area of Empire Mine State Historic Park to minimize erosion and sedimentation of soil and elevated metals on road/trail surfaces. The following is a brief summary of proposed work:

- Reconstruct existing official roads/trails and construct new roads/trails along sustainable topographic grades.
- Close select official roads/trails with unsustainable alignments or elevated metals.
- Close or improve user created trails to DPR trail standards and maintain them as official roads/trails.
- Replace and install new accessory trail equipment such as public entry gates, signs, and fences.
- Relocate one public access point.
- Remove existing fences in areas closed due to elevated levels of metals once road/trail reconstruction is completed.
- Replace/install new fences or install other closure equipment at mine shafts.

Public Review Period: The Initial Study/Mitigated Negative Declaration is being circulated for public review and comment for a period of 34 days, beginning November 21, 2008. Written comments should be submitted no later than December 24, 2008 to the following address:

Heidi West
California Department of Parks & Recreation
Northern Service Center
One Capitol Mall - Suite 500
Sacramento, CA 95814
Fax: (916) 445-8883
Email: CEQANSC@parks.ca.gov [subject line: Empire Trails]

Copies of the Initial Study/Mitigated Negative Declaration may be reviewed at the following locations during normal business hours:

Northern Service Center
California Department of Parks & Recreation
One Capitol Mall - Suite 410
Sacramento, CA 95814

Empire Mine State Historic Park
10791 East Empire Street
Grass Valley, CA 95945

Madelyn Helling Library
980 Helling Way
Nevada City, CA 95959

Sierra District Headquarters
California Department of Parks & Recreation
7360 West Lake Blvd.
Tahoma, CA 96142

Grass Valley Library
207 Mill Street
Grass Valley, CA 95945

California State Parks Internet Website: www.parks.ca.gov/deafult.asp?page_id=981

Your views and comments on potential impacts of the project on the environment are welcomed.