

Memorandum of Understanding: Eastern Nevada Climbers Alliance Hercules Gap Stewardship Proposal

Introduction

Stewardship Proposals are an effective way for land managers to formally and proactively manage climbing on both public and private lands. A successful plan:

- Builds cooperative relationships between climbers and resource managers.
- Articulates climbing as a recreational experience and describes the variety of climbing opportunities as values.
- Identifies management alternatives that address climbing impacts in a manner that is consistent with management approaches used with other recreation groups.
- Provides management direction that is the minimum necessary to protect resources and is implemented on a graduated scale from indirect measures (e.g. education) to direct measures (e.g. restrictions).
- Provides information about status and contextual importance of resource values, climbing activity and provides information about contextual use patterns, and effects of climbing activity on identified resource values.
- Satisfies statutory requirements and internal agency guidance (where applicable).
- Compliments land management agency policy and directives.

Disclosure

Climbing is a high-risk sport, and climbers are solely responsible for their own safety. Climbing involves exposure to hazardous terrain and conditions. The City of Ely is not obligated to assess or mitigate these hazards, nor is it responsible for assessing or maintaining the safety of climbing resources which include but are not limited to; approach/descent paths, climbing routes, fixed anchors or fixed equipment. The City owes no duty to keep the premises safe for entry or use by others for participating in any recreational activity, or to give warning of any hazardous condition, activity or use of any structure on the premises to persons entering for those purposes. The City does not extend any assurance that the premises are safe for that purpose or assume responsibility for or incur liability for any injury to person or property caused by any act of persons with permission to enter the property nor does any person acquire any property rights in or rights of easement to the premises by way of this instrument. No property rights of any kind are granted, transferred or conveyed by this instrument.

Any climbing use or related activity may be restricted or prohibited by the City of Ely when its occurrence, continuation or expansion would result in unacceptable impacts to resources or interfere significantly with the experience of other visitors or the property rights of the City. The City may, at any time with reasonable notice to ENCA, remove fixtures, climbing gear, and/or trails or other climbing related items and shall not be responsible for any costs, damages, or loss to the equipment.

Acknowledgement:



Signature

Derek Steiner

Print Name

Background

Hercules Gap climbing area is a broad and varied geographic region located in the Central Egan Range generally northwest of Ely Nv. Its recorded climbing history dates to at least the 1990's. It is known for its quality sport climbs, and steep cave routes. It is also appreciated for summer shaded climbing, The rock in the Hercules Gap is primarily Limestone.

Hercules Gap encompasses the Egan Range northwest of Ely Nv, from Nevada State Route 490 north west of Ely on APN 010-270-07 and APN 010-270-09. Hercules is a well-known climbing area with well over 10+ established routes in the area, And more potential climbing development on the APN 010-270-07 and APN 010-270-09.

For the purpose of this plan, the area of consideration involves The City of Ely

This plan applies to The City of Ely Parcels APN 010-270-07 and APN 010-270-09. Updates to the plan may occur by mutual agreement of The Eastern Nevada Climbers Alliance and The City of Ely, or at the discretion of The City of Ely, if necessary for resource protection.

Goals of Climbing Management Plan

1. Manage climbing activities while protecting the natural and cultural resources of the Eagen Range.
2. Clearly define a set of management objectives for climbing within the Egen Range area that will allow for continued climbing related activities.
3. Establish management guidelines and best practices that land managers can use in the education of climbers visiting the forest, and in decision making.
4. Enable a productive and efficient working relationship between land managers and the climbing community to address emerging issues and adaptively manage the area in a cooperative manner.

Topics covered in Climbing Management Plan

1. Access Trails and Staging Areas

2. Vegetation Alteration
3. Rock Alteration
4. Fixed Gear
5. Gear Caches
6. Bouldering
7. Human and Pet Waste
8. Social and Recreational Impacts
9. Cultural and Paleontological Resources
10. Wildlife and Rare Plant Resources
11. Search and Rescue Considerations
12. Partnerships

1. Access Trails and Staging Areas

A. Existing access trails and staging areas should be used when possible.

- I. Climbers often bushwhack and scramble to gain access to the base of climbing routes or during descent. Numerous steep access trails can result. These user-created trails are sometimes braided with other paths to the same climb(s). Because they sometimes travel straight up the grade, water can be easily diverted onto these trails, causing loss of vegetation and soils. At the base of climbs (e.g. staging areas) in high use areas, the ground may become compacted and denuded of vegetation. Social trails often contour along the base of the rock formation to the start of other climbs.
- II. Climbers should limit impacts to vegetation and soils by using existing access trails and avoiding creation of new approach/descent corridors.
- III. As conditions warrant, climbers and ENCA may identify specific improvement projects to address safety and environmental concerns along access corridors and at staging areas. Improvements may require environmental analysis including biological and cultural clearances.

B. The intentional construction of access trails or staging areas is prohibited except as follows:

- I. Construction (e.g. improvements, structures, tool work) of new approach/descent trails or staging areas is not allowed under land management regulations without prior approval by the City of Ely.

- II. New trails/staging areas may only be constructed after; identification, assessment, design, are completed through the approval of the City of Ely.
- III. Improvement of existing approach/descent trails and staging areas:
 - a. After prior City approval, access trails and staging areas of well-known and more heavily used climbing routes may be identified, delineated, hardened and maintained to prevent further erosion problems, loss of vegetation, and to establish a durable, sustainable, and safe pattern of use. In certain instances, signs may be placed to direct climbers away from problems or sensitive areas to protect resources. Extraneous user created paths that have developed over long periods of time, or currently see infrequent use, may be rehabilitated to discourage or prevent future travel. Travel in higher use areas should be on established access trails and corridors.
 - b. Dispersed travel to and from the base of climbs, and during descent, is generally encouraged in lower use climbing areas where established access trails do not exist.

2. Vegetation Alteration

- A. Removal of vegetation from the base of climbs, belay ledges, or bouldering areas is strongly discouraged.
- B. While it is understood that some limited loss of vegetation is likely to occur at established climbing areas, care must be taken to minimize such loss. Where necessary, vegetation removal should establish a durable, sustainable, and safe pattern of use.
- C. The removal of vegetation from cracks or rock faces to allow a route to become more climbable is strongly discouraged.
- D. When using trees as natural anchors, care must be taken to prevent damage to the tree.

3. Rock Alteration

- A. The removal of rock from its natural position will be allowed only when the rock to be removed poses a significant risk to the climbing party or a future climbing party.
- B. Chipping, gluing or attaching artificial holds is prohibited.

4. Fixed Gear

A. Fixed Hardware

- I. The use of non-climbing specific hardware (e.g. concrete anchors, home manufactured equipment, cables, etc.) is not allowed.

- II. Modern, commercially available, climbing specific hangers and bolts (both of which can be removed with a wrench for inspection and maintenance) of a length adequate for the rock conditions are recommended.
- III. The use of reflective hardware is strongly discouraged, especially in areas where conflict with other user groups is most likely to occur such as near multi-use trails, developed sites or viewpoints.
- IV. Camouflaging fixed anchors to match natural rock color is encouraged.
- V. When replacing unsafe fixed anchors, recommended hardware will be used whenever possible. A reasonable effort to remove the existing, unsafe hardware will be made and existing drill holes will be used in the installation of replacement fixed anchors whenever possible.
- VI. The installation and removal of pitons does permanent damage to the rock and is strongly discouraged. Pitons should only be used when any other reasonably safe means of protecting the climbing party is non-existent.

B. Fixed Software

- I. The placement of fixed rope for the purpose of retreating from a climb or working a new project may be allowed under the following conditions: (1) the climbing party intends to return to continue the climb, and (2) the placement does not exceed a period of 90 days.
- II. Fixed software (e.g. rope, webbing, slings, cord, etc. left for the purpose of retreating from a climb) should be of a natural color similar to the surrounding rock.

5. Gear Caches

- A. The caching of climbing equipment at or near the base of a climb is not allowed.
- B. Caching climbing equipment at bouldering areas, including crash pads, is not allowed.
- C. The caching of climbing equipment at or near the base of a climb in the event of a retreat due to weather, injury, or illness is allowed for a period not to exceed 7 days.

6. Bouldering

- A. Alterations (e.g. movement of rock or woody debris) to pad placements, or surrounding areas, is strongly discouraged.
- B. While it is understood that some limited loss of vegetation is likely to occur at established climbing areas, care must be taken to minimize such loss. Where necessary, alterations should establish a durable, sustainable, and safe pattern of use.
- C. Dragging bouldering pads damages vegetation and soils and is strongly discouraged.

7. Human and Pet Waste

- A. Climbers should abide by standard Leave No Trace practices for rock climbing.
- B. Climbers should clean up after themselves and pack out all trash and garbage.
- C. Packing out human and pet waste is encouraged, especially in areas with moderate to high levels of use, and where appropriate means of disposal (e.g., catholes, privies) are not available or appropriate.
- D. Availability and placement of toilets should be considered in areas of higher use.

8. Social and Recreational Impacts

- A. Climbers frequently utilize voice signals to communicate specific needs during a climb to facilitate safe ascent or descent. Such noise can disrupt wildlife or impact hikers adjacent to climbing areas. Other noises (e.g. rock hammers, drills) may also be considered intrusive in some settings.

Climbers are encouraged to be sensitive to the value of natural quiet. Use of rock hammers or drills is strongly discouraged during sensitive times for wildlife (e.g. breeding, nesting, fledging periods) and should be used judiciously in areas where other visitors may be disturbed.

- B. Climbers are encouraged to be sensitive to the value of the visual resource. The visual impacts of fixed anchors can be managed by camouflaging equipment. The visual impacts of chalk use can be managed through educating climbers on reducing the use of chalk, cleaning after themselves, and encouraging chalk clean-up projects.
- C. Levels of use should be monitored. Management action including capacity limitations (e.g. allowable route densities, new fixed anchor authorizations, commercial use, group use, etc.) may be utilized if user conflict or crowding occurs, or if there is unacceptable change to resource (e.g. physical, biological, social, managerial) conditions.
- D. The climbing community and land managers will work together to mitigate user conflicts.

9. Cultural and Paleontological Resources

- A. Climbing or new route development may be restricted to protect cultural and paleontological resources.
- B. Leave any cultural and paleontological resource discoveries intact and in place.

Immediately notify the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest Ely Ranger District by telephone or Email of the discovery of any culturally significant objects including antiquities or other objects of historic or scientific interest, including but not limited to historic or prehistoric ruins, fossils, or artifacts.

10. Wildlife and Rare Plant Resources

A. Climbing or new route development may be restricted to protect federally listed threatened, endangered, and sensitive wildlife and rare plant species.

Impacts from climbing activities should be monitored and assessed regularly to ascertain needed management adaptation or necessary improvements.

The City of Ely welcomes input from climbers about observations of any wildlife or rare plants at climbing areas to enhance local understanding of the ecology of cliff communities.

B. Temporary closures may be used to protect nesting raptors during critical phases of the courtship, nesting, and fledging periods. Closures will begin in early spring. Raptor activity should be monitored and those areas or routes with current raptor use may be closed. Other areas where activity is discovered may also be closed. Closures will be in effect long enough to ensure protection and non-disturbance of the birds.

Raptor closure time -period and spatial extent may vary depending on the species, nest site, topography and other conditions.

C. Closures may also be utilized for other wildlife and rare plant protection as necessary.

D. Restrictions and closures for resource protection will be posted at the local Ranger District office (South Platte, South Park, Pikes Peak), and as possible, online, and on the ground near logical access points.

11. Search and Rescue Considerations

A. As climbing management activities continue to increase, the climbing community will work alongside agency and rescue personnel to identify key points of access and to identify, with commonality, key rock features and climbing areas.

B. SAR incidents occurring in designated wilderness do not allow for use of motorized equipment or mechanized transport, except in life threatening emergencies. Climbers should plan accordingly and be self-reliant.

12. Partnerships

A. The City of Ely and climbing community identify the need for collaboration and partnerships.

I. Hercules Gap: (APN 010-270-07 and APN 010-270-09).

II. The Eastern Nevada Climbers Alliance will be the main point of contact for the climbing community.

III. Improve education of the climbing community through engagement in public outreach including use of educational events, social media, articles, etc.

An education plan for user direction may be developed.

IV. Develop an inventory, description, and maps of existing climbing in the Egan Range including significant crags/sub-areas, parking situation, approach paths, existing conditions and areas of concern, area emphasis (e.g. trad, sport, mixed, bouldering, ice, alpine), and estimated levels of use (e.g. low, moderate, high) by sub-area. See Appendix C (Climbing Area Inventory).

III. Support local climbing organizations in order to promote and support stewardship efforts and events. These events may include activities such as litter clean-ups, visual impact mitigation, access trail and staging area maintenance, construction, and restoration, erosion control and closure of user created paths, and wildlife and rare plant monitoring.

IV. Consider formation of a fixed hardware review committee to address concerns about bolting in the area. Consider requiring all new fixed anchors to be reviewed and approved by the committee.

13. Modification and Review of MOU:

- A. The Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) is subject to modification and is reviewed annually by the participants. Signature by the participant agency representative indicates approval and entry into this MOU. It does not set forth any legal liability for compliance beyond what is established by Nevada law, federal mandates and grantor requirements. Any participant may withdraw from this MOU with notification to the other participants at any time.


Acknowledgments and Acceptance Signatures by MOU participants:

City of Ely, Nevada

Nathan Robertson, Ely City Mayor

Date

Eastern Nevada Climbing Alliance



Derek Steiner, President of ENCA

12/8/2023

Date