

# MEMORANDUM

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**To:** Fred Carpenter, via HAND-DELIVERED

**Copy:** n/a

**From:** Andy Romance

**Subject:** Council Consideration of an improved Community Trail System

**Date:** September 30, 2006

*FRED. I would like formal consideration to have Staff create and Council adopt an improved Community Trail System in and about the Town of Payson. As appropriate, please supply this information to your staff, council members, task force members, committee members, and participants of the next Council Agenda-Setting Meeting. Since my introductory Memo to you, dated June 12, 2006, I have been talking to many citizens, Town personnel, State leaders, and Federal officials about construction of a Community Trail System. The suggestions and enthusiasm has been entirely supportive, therefore I feel it is now appropriate to execute a Council Decision Request to consider directing your staff in preparation and presentation of a comprehensive proposal. Following is a summary of ideas and findings resulting from recent interviews:*

## **BACKGROUND**

*Payson is a jewel set within the vast Tonto National Forest. Many of our rugged citizens' recreation is done in the forest. Although the forest is large and contiguous for many miles beyond Payson, access is currently available at only minimal locations. The Tonto Forest dominates Payson's perimeter and has rich significance to our community character, yet these public lands are relatively underutilized by our population.*

*Currently Federal and Local fire prevention forces are removing vegetation in the forest around Payson, as to reduce fuel loads in an effort to subsequently reduce fire danger at the urban/wildland interface. This worthy task has been supported financially by Payson taxpayers. The task, however, appears to comprise the single purpose of fire suppression. It is believed that all projects can serve multiple objectives, and this position is particularly important when local coffers are tapped for use on federally managed land.*

*Payson's roadway projects are costing exceedingly more each year, with costs arguably surpassing the rate at which we can afford to construct all the needed miles. Payson's current standards for street construction accommodate automobile movement very well, with ample travelway widths and often multiple lanes. Unfortunately, Pedestrian and Bicycle users are accommodated less consistently, with some streets containing no dedicated bikelanes/sidewalks, other streets with one bikelane/sidewalk, and most often when sidewalks are installed, they adjoin a street's vertical/rolled/flat curb. The number of speeding automobiles traveling Payson streets is increasing, resulting in neighborhood concern. Normal automobile speeds cause discomfort and intimidation to pedestrians when sidewalks are right next to the automobile travelway. Vehicle speed is not only observed by concerned citizens, but is recorded by Public Works' measurements. Automobiles traveling at excessive speeds go beyond causing pedestrians discomfort, but create imminent danger. Often our walking and cycling citizens are ditched by radical drivers, and regrettably, some citizens are actually hit while on the road's edge.*

*Existing on our shelves is the Trails Master Plan dated 12/10/98. Although it has served a purpose, our citizens should now have a well deserved substantial system of trails within and around Payson which are safe, connected, and appealing.*

## **THE IDEA**

*It is desired to be innovative and stretch our dollars. One way is to take individual projects that our departments are working, such as street construction, recreation opportunities, and fire suppression, and mesh them into a creative multi-objective approach. A Community Trail System can serve multiple objectives.*

*The idea is to create an interconnected trail network within our town and around the perimeter. It combines recreation, commuting options, traffic safety, and tourism. The system could be visualized as a Wagon Wheel laid over Payson; the wheel's rim would be in the forest fuelwood clearing project, the wheel spokes would connect the perimeter rim to interior Payson parks and commercial centers, while spurs off the perimeter rim would allow access deeper into the forest.*

*A preliminary sketch is attached which is a visual aid to what the project can provide. Sketches include a plan view of major trail routes laid over a map of fuelwood thinning locations. Also attached is a page showing a trail cross-section with Town streets and a plan view of trails not along streets. These quick sketches were presented during my interviews that provided much feedback, so I chose not to update the sketches and base mapping. More detailed drawings would need to be created for future presentations. The following outline of system elements are generally conceptualized by the sketches, while some modify the sketches based on interview results:*

- An 8- to 12-ft wide pathway to facilitate pedestrians, fitness/recreation bicycles, horses, etc. The pathways within town would be detached from streets about 4-ft and paved with AC. The pathways within fire breaks would be compacted granite, also serving as a USFS/PFD vehicle route for maintenance and monitoring of the fire break.*
- A 24- to 30-ft wide street to facilitate automobiles and faster road bicycles*
- The vision primarily separates automobiles from pedestrians, but could secondarily help reduce automobile speed; this by constructing more country roads and less wide race tracks.*
- Interior trail system along streets will control stormwater by use of our historically dominate roadside bar ditches in lieu of more urbanized curb & gutter. These open channels can better facilitate groundwater recharge, can be less costly, and can add an element of rural character, as compared to closed stormdrain conduits.*
- Interior system's area between the street edge and pathway will convey stormwater and can facilitate native tree preservation. This combination provides 4- to 8-foot separation and additional physical barriers between automobiles and pedestrians.*
- Interior system is Alternative, Economical, Safe, & Cool transportation for urban commuters. Exterior perimeter system is a tourist draw that enhances the hub to the forest that we already are, but makes the Tonto more appealing to the softer population than doesn't currently take on the hardcore mountain bike routes.*
- Equestrian privileges would be worked out with innovation, so multi-user types can share the trail.*
- The Wagon Wheel spurs off the perimeter rim would align with existing forest roads and master planned Trailheads & Trail Accesses.*
- A common signage system throughout the network would give it that touristy feel, as well as make it attractive and comfortable for visitors.. A Payson-Style should be developed - whether rustic carved wood, at-grade sand-blasted boulders, or etc. Trail maps would be available at USFS Admin Office, Parks & Recreation Office, Chamber of Commerce, and Commercial Centers.*

## **BENEFITS**

*Although a project serving multiple objectives is fiscally responsible, the common thread in the below fabric of benefits is improving the Quality of Life of Payson residents. Consider:*

- *For pedestrians, pathways detached from streets and highways are safer, more comfortable, and more of the current trend. The additional flexibility in routing also can save more specimen trees than a wide and rigid swath of pavement and concrete.*
- *Hikers of varying ages and abilities are attracted to trails. Members of Search and Rescue are also aware of the dangers of hiking alone. The proposed would create a ring around town that would be safe and nearby for the inexperienced or the lone hiker, yet provide the user with a forest experience.*
- *If trail users respond to an effective challenge, then a segment of trail maintenance and enhancement could be adopted by existing outdoor enthusiast groups.*
- *Promoted is healthy living. "Walkability" is a current term to identify healthy community values. Prevention Magazine recently named Glendale AZ the #12 "best walking city" in USA - the highest of any Arizona city. Statements such as, ".....in the end, walkability is a quality-of-life issue, whether it comes in the form of rugged trails in nearby mountain preserves, pathways in city parks or shaded and inviting downtown sidewalks. We applaud Glendale officials for their efforts to provide residents with ample opportunities to get out of the house and take a stroll."*
- *Existing master planned trailheads and accesses will be more useful and identifiable.*
- *Created will be a cool place for us; This will likely catch on and tourists will be attracted to it also. The spokes of the wagon wheel leads to commercial centers where people eat and stay. More facilities for tourists should strengthen our local economy.*
- *Provided will be alternative transportation options for residents. Getting to work and shops may not always require the car.*
- *Improves traffic safety.*
- *Reduces cost of street improvements.*
- *Makes perimeter fire break more useful for recreation.*
- *If automobiles continue to exceed the speed limit, if speed enforcement continue to be insufficient, and if traffic calming devices are not adopted, then separating the speeding car from the baby stroller makes good sense. This approach of creating detached pathways might be an adequate alternative to conventional traffic calming devices on collector and minor arterial designated streets in Payson. Although it wouldn't necessarily slow down automobiles, it would give the pedestrian a fighting chance.*
- *Payson currently has a few isolated segments of pathways detached from modest streets. We should be reminded of the success of these projects like the East Frontier Street pathway between Mud Springs Road an St Phillips Road.*

## **CHALLENGES**

*Although challenges are expected as a complex project progresses, a fatal flaw was not identified during conversations with various regulating agencies. The following issues might be expected:*

- *Highways and pathways will need to cross. One citizen suggests utilizing box culverts to work the pathway under the highway. Although monetary cost is a factor, this approach could also facilitate deer and elk crossing of the highway, being responsible to that unattended element of our General Plan.*
- *There may be a need to educate some on the benefits of modifying street dimensions. Often people believe that only automobiles should be found on streets, thus encounters with pedestrians and bicycles are not accepted well.*
- *Payson needs to keep in good standing with CAAG & HURF. Designating streets as collector, minor arterial, and arterial generally provides funding opportunities. We might though have a local designation, so that even if we call a street "arterial", we can still have a standard that serves Payson, even if it isn't what a Phoenix arterial looks like.*
- *New parking at masterplanned trailheads would require land that may not readily be available. Partnerships with owners of commercial centers should be negotiated, promoting the economic benefits of facilitating hiking and biking outings from their parking lots, adjacent to their stores and eateries.*
- *Some of the perimeter trails will be in terrain needing drainage crossings.*
- *Payson citizens currently owning land abutting the forest may object to new people walking by. Local forest officials suggested those citizens be targeted and asked to assist in design of their nearby segment. Maintenance could also be done by the neighboring homeowner group, to give them an organized voice and positive participation. The benefits of organized public use should also be uplifted in educating this group.*
- *OHV/ATV uses would have to be coordinated with USFS policy, which is evolving. We might create OHV intersections to facilitate continued use on existing forest roads (wheel spur), continue allowance on Town streets (wheel spoke), but prevent access upon the perimeter trail (wheel rim).*
- *Payson's tax dollars are helping facilitate work on federally-managed forest land, however there still may not be flexibility in federal policy to readily facilitate permitting of trail construction. If anxious citizens appeal to the idea of a perimeter trail then they may not wait for Town initiated permits and just start building and/or using trails on the public lands.*
- *USFS Archeological Survey accomplished for fire break clearing might be tiered upon for trail construction. However, Environmental Analysis (NEPA) will likely be needed to support specific trail enhancements. The Payson Ranger District may partner with the Town, which might expedite this permitting.*
- *Even though the perimeter trail is close to Town, there will be some isolated areas. It will be important to create clear and consistent signage and/or trail markings so residents and visitors alike will feel sure and secure.*

## **FUNDING**

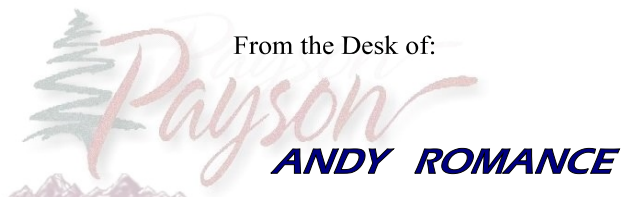
*Federal, State, Local, and Private funding sources are possible.*

- *The forest segments might be funded in part by fire-break funds and other forest service programs like YCC.*
- *The Federal Highway Administration recently selected 40-cities that are committed to innovative reduction of single-occupant automobiles. Might Payson be one of the next 40-cities in ten years?*
- *Trailheads and Trail Access points might be funded in part by Heritage grants. The Arizona Heritage Fund provides revenue to local governments for land acquisition and development of local, regional, and state parks. Funding is also provided for trail construction, historic preservation projects, and non-motorized trail development. The Heritage Fund is a resource that cities and towns use to assist with open space acquisition, preservation, and the development of public recreational facilities.*
- *ADOT and/or AGFD may participate in selected elements pertaining to the special task of creating wildlife crossings.*
- *Interior segments (wheel spokes) should be considered as a very economical alternative to the Town's current street section standards. I would expect that, the proposed reduced AC street pavement/ roadside ditches/ detached AC pathway would be profoundly less expensive than the swath of 3-lanes of street, along with curb/gutter/sidewalk that we are trying to get built. This funding would be along the line of "a penny saved is a penny earned" philosophy.*
- *If a specific Community Trail Plan were adopted, even funding from future private development would be a solid option. We should take the lead on this and not merely judge a future developers designs.*

## **NEXT STEPS**

*This project will require care and commitment by the Town of Payson during planning, design, construction, maintenance, and operation. Though longterm procedures will need to be developed, the more immediate required tasks include:*

- *Town Personnel to analyze above considerations and prepare a comprehensive recommendation, ready for Council decisions, preferably within 90-days. Include Cost Estimates and Comparisons of Alternatives.*
- *Modify the current street standards. A "Street Containing Community Trail" designation will need to be added to the UDC.*
- *Commit to specific restrictions/allowances of motorized vehicles on trails. Payson's policy should compliment policy of USFS.*
- *During interviews, USFS Payson Ranger Station personnel considered immediately going ahead with construction of some southerly segments of the perimeter trail. Payson therefore needs to accelerate our work as not to impede cooperation by the USFS.*



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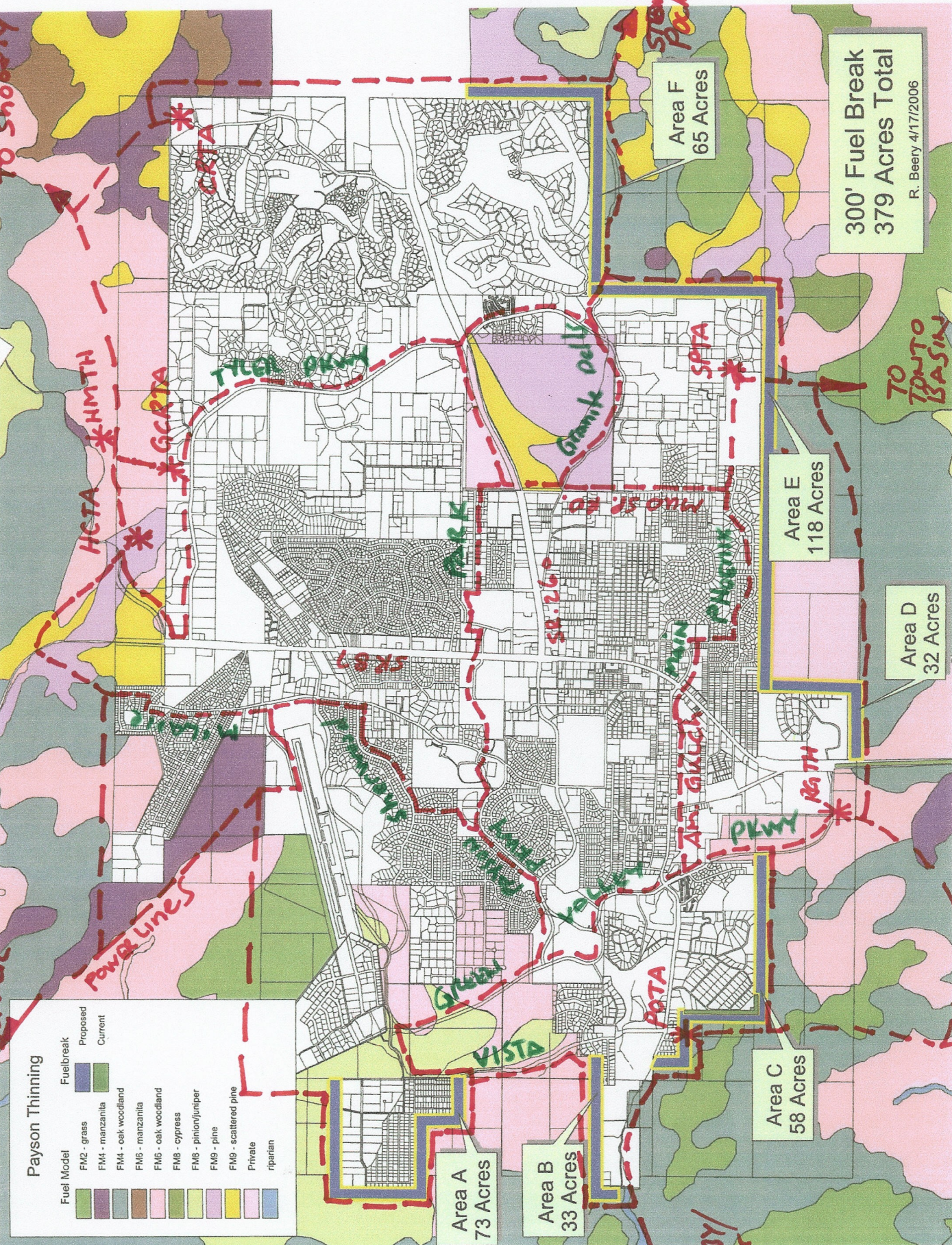
PAYSON  
URBAN/PERIMETER PATHWAYS

TO EAST VERDE RIVER

TO SHOOLY

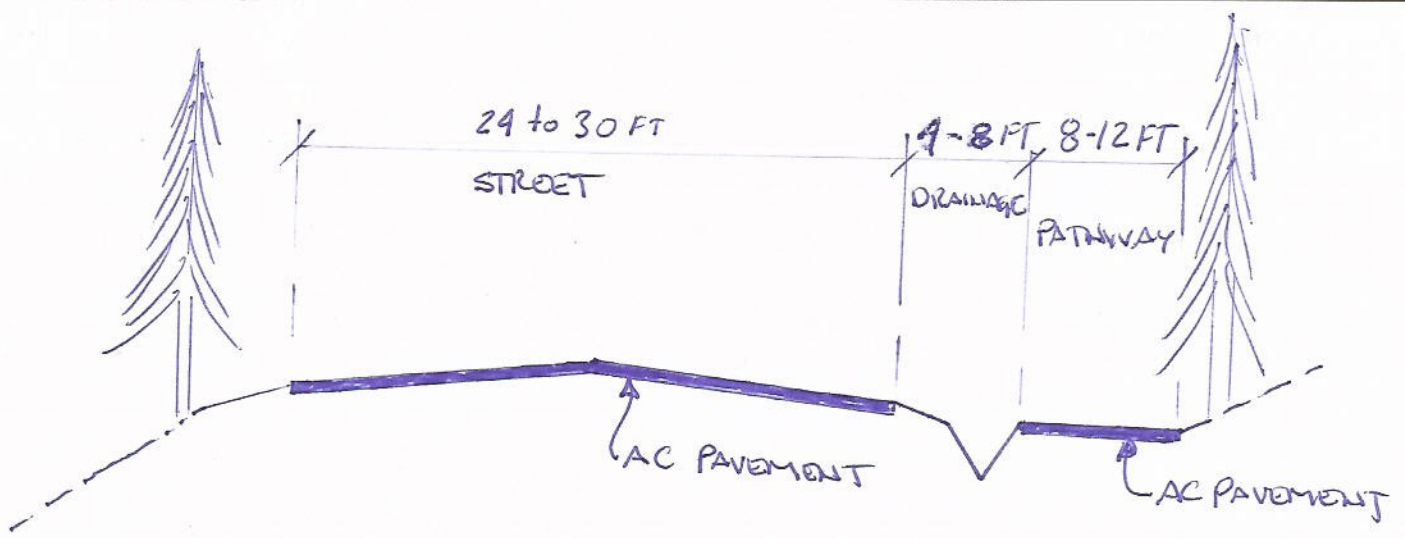
TO OAK BASIN/ VERDE RIVER

TO ONDOWY



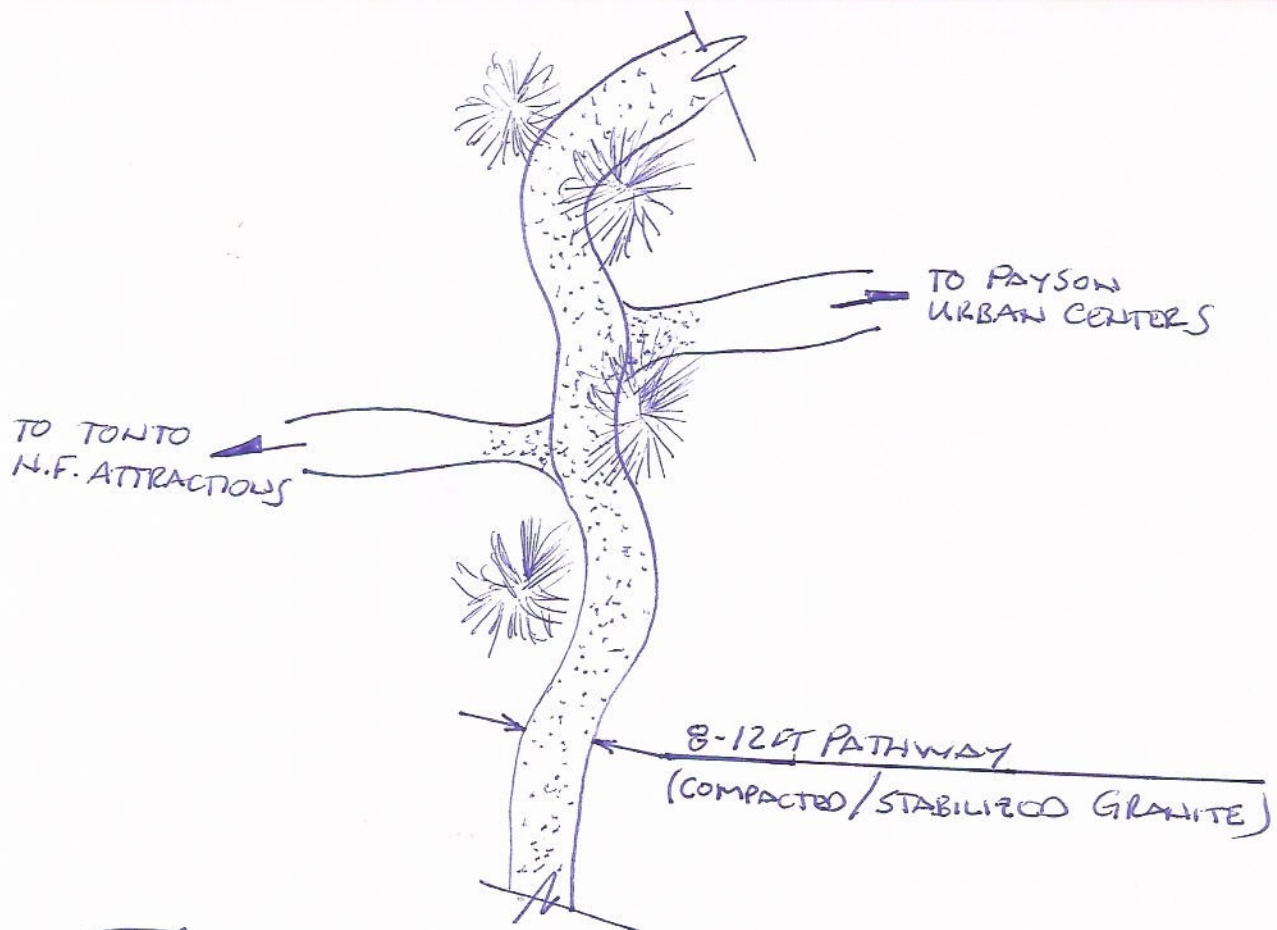
300' Fuel Break  
379 Acres Total  
R. Beery 4/17/2006

6-12-06



TRAIL WITH TOWN STREET

SECTION VIEW



TRAIL WITHOUT STREET

PLAN VIEW