Welcome to the Crystal Basin Recreation Area of the Eldorado National Forest, spanning 85,000 acres of pine and fir forests along the western slopes of the Sierra Nevada. Capped by the majestic, granite peaks of the Crystal Range and traversed by lakes, reservoirs and streams, the Crystal Basin's four seasons and varied terrain offer a diverse range of rugged outdoor adventure.

History
Crystal Basin was once the home of the Miwok, Washoe and Maidu people. In the 1800s, ranch settlers grazed dairy cattle on the high mountain meadows now covered by reservoirs. In the early 1900s, the U.S.D.A. Forest Service opened Crystal Basin to the public. In 1957, Sacramento Municipal Utility District (SMUD) began construction of the Upper American River Project (UARP), a series of hydroelectric power plants in the Crystal Basin. Today, UARP is capable of producing 1.8 billion kilowatt-hours of clean, affordable electricity — enough energy to power about 200,000 homes a year in Sacramento.

As part of the Upper American River Project, SMUD created a network of beautiful mountain reservoirs and built a variety of recreational facilities around the reservoirs. Working together, SMUD and the Forest Service continue to provide land and water based recreation opportunities for all forest visitors to enjoy.

Camping
Over 700 developed campsites are available in Crystal Basin. Most require fees and/or reservations and have a fire ring with grate, a table and parking spur. Campground sites have bear proof storage and trash containers, toilets and many provide piped-in water. Most sites accommodate recreational vehicles (no hookups). The maximum stay is 14 days.

Camping in an undeveloped setting is allowed in most areas of the National Forest. When you pick your spot, make sure it is at least 100 feet away from streams and lakes, to protect streamside vegetation and prevent pollution.

Fishing
Anglers can cast for kokanee salmon, small mouth bass, rainbow trout at Union Valley Reservoir. Throughout the summer, Ice House, Union Valley, and Loon Lake Reservoirs are stocked with rainbow trout by SMUD and the California Department of Fish and Wildlife. For fishing enthusiasts eager to reel in a wild brown trout, try your luck at Gerle Creek. Be sure to check photos of your fish on the SMUD Crystal Basin Bragging Board located at the Ice House Resort.

Bicycling
Crystal Basin has trails for both road cyclists and mountain bikers to enjoy. For families with children and cyclists who prefer a relaxed ride on pavement, Union Valley Reservoir has a well paved 5.5 mile bike trail that winds along the edge of the lake. Mountain bikers can enjoy a 3.1 mile stretch of single track trail along the Ice House campgrounds.

Horseback Riding
Equestrian campgrounds are available at Loon Lake, Wrights Lake and Tells Creek with access to scenic riding trails. The individual sites at Loon Lake have hitching posts and pull-through parking to conveniently accommodate horse trailers.

Boating
Recreational boating is a favorite pastime on the clear mountain lakes of Crystal Basin. Ice House, Union Valley and Loon Lake Reservoirs have paved boat ramps and are large enough to accommodate motorboats and water sports.

Hiking
Crystal Basin provides a gateway to Desolation Wilderness, offering access to 117 miles of hiking trails across the Sierra Nevada. Many of the trails located within Crystal Basin offer easy to moderate day hikes. For an easy, informative hike, try the wheelchair accessible Gerle Creek Summer Harvest Trail and learn how Native Americans utilized the resources available from the forest.

Wheelchair Access
Many of the developed areas throughout Crystal Basin are accessible for people with disabilities. The Crystal Basin Information Station, fishing pier and trails at Gerle Creek, many of the campgrounds, parking areas and the paved boat ramps at the reservoirs accommodate wheelchair users.

Snow Skiing
Cross-country skiers can traverse miles of exquisite, pristine ski trails near Loon Lake, the highest elevation reservoir in the Crystal Basin. The un groomed trails are rated "Easiest" to "Most Difficult". Trail maps are available from the Forest Service. Keep safety in mind, know your limitations and stay within your difficulty level.

OHV
For those who prefer 4-wheels, Crystal Basin is home to one of the most famous OHV trails, the Rubicon trail. Another popular trail is Barrett Lake Jeep Trail near Wrights Lake.

Robbs Hut
Robbs Hut is a popular mountain hut located on a 6,700 foot peak overlooking the Crystal Basin. It is open year-round, and is equipped with a cook stove, outdoor barbeque and sleeping accommodations for six. Overnight reservations are required.

Loon Lake Chalet
Skiers, hikers, and mountain bikers can take refuge at the Loon Lake Chalet year-round. It offers a large warming room, a small kitchen and sleeping accommodations for up to 20 people. Overnight reservations are required.

Big Hill
For a panoramic view of the captivating scenery of the Crystal Basin, visit Big Hill Vista and Lookout. It offers views of the Crystal Range and west to Sacramento and Mt. Diablo.