

Trout Creek breach sends water flowing into Lake Tahoe

By Kathryn Reed

Mother Nature is hard at work this season as she creates another tributary into Lake Tahoe.

Trout Creek in South Lake Tahoe normally flows into the Upper Truckee Marsh and then into the Upper Truckee River that lets out into Lake Tahoe at Cove East.

Not this year.



Trout Creek is flowing into Lake Tahoe -- a rare thing.
Photos/Kathryn Reed

The creek has its own outlet into the lake. Although it is crossable via foot, it might mean getting soaked up to at least one's knees in some locations.

"It's nature doing what nature does," Bruce Eisner of the California Tahoe Conservancy said. The state agency owns the marsh. "It's fascinating to see nature in action."

The CTC will continue to let Mother Nature do what she wants. It's likely in a month the breach will not be evident as the

snowmelt decreases and temperatures rise.

This is not the first time a breach has occurred. But it's also not an annual event.

For now, much of the meadow near the edge of the Al Tahoe neighborhood is more like a marsh. Egrets are swooping low as if fish may be in those waters. Flocks of Canada geese waddle in the muck. Mountain chickadees chatter about cheeseburgers.

Blades of wild grass poke above the water. Reflections of the cloudy unsettled sky are reminders summer has yet to arrive in this part of the state.

But all has not been quiet this spring along the beach. On a couple warm nights South Lake Tahoe police officers have been called out to break up parties. Bonfires have been a problem in the past. Several cigarette butts line the trails in the area. A wildfire is a real concern.

At the May 18 City Council meeting it was agreed the CTC will pay \$12,251 to the city for police officers' overtime to patrol the Upper Truckee Marsh and beach area, as well as Cove East on the other side of the river through June 25. An agreement between the city and CTC was entered into in July 2009 for police to patrol the areas at a cost of not more than \$20,000. The extra money is to fill out the current contract.

The CTC is in the process of crafting a draft environmental impact report regarding restoration of the Upper Truckee marsh. It will come out this year. It was delayed for several months because the bond freeze by the state prevented money from flowing to the CTC to fund the creation of the document.

"We have an obligation to protect habitat. That is our overriding concern," said Ray Lacey, CTC deputy director. "The CTC is closely monitoring the use patterns. It's likely in the future there will be different recommendation to tailor some of those patterns."

The agency is worried about dogs off leash, more so in the wetlands than on the beach. Residents have become reluctant to frequent the beach when young people are partying there.

Wildlife habitat as well as recreation concerns are things the CTC staff and ultimately the board will have to balance.

Public input will be sought by the CTC as it moves forward with plans.

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