Cops ready to paint over work of graffiti artists

By Kathryn Reed

Creating “art” on public structures without permission is illegal. That is why this month crews from South Lake Tahoe Police Department will return the underpass of Trout Creek to its natural color.

A myriad colors fill nearly every space under the Highway 50 structure that covers sand. The side where Trout Creek is running through at a good clip is partially covered in graffiti. People had good balance, didn’t mind getting wet or were in there when the water was lower to reach those walls.



Graffiti fills the underpass of Trout Creek in South Tahoe beneath Highway 50. Photos/Kathryn Reed

Even the ceiling has been tagged.

Some of the walls leading into the covered area have been hit with spray paint. These markings are less colorful than the ones below.

Pictures, names, bubbly lettering – to the uniformed eye it all looks tame. A few gang symbols are obvious, but it's not what dominates these slabs of concrete.

It appears to be a place where presumably young people can let loose with their artistic prowess on a large canvas.

It seems to be a game of sorts with officers. Both sides seem to have their color of choice – drab for the officer, colorful for the youths.

"Maybe they will put it on the list of murals to be painted. Caltrans could give them permission just like with the power boxes," South Lake Tahoe police Lt. David Stevenson said.

It's been about a year since community service officers last covered up this area.

"We cover everything that is reported to us. There are no places we just leave," explained Bob Albertazzi, community service officer. "We cover it up as weather permits."

Stevenson said, "With the gang staff, we don't want them to have an outlet for that anywhere."

When the days and nights are warmer, the underpasses are known hangouts for youths and homeless people. Fires in the area are always a threat.

On this particular day in May the sand is as pristine as any beach on the South Shore. Cigarette butts are the biggest components of litter. A small piece of glass shines. If this is a party spot, the evidence is missing.

In many ways it's the ideal place to hang – the noise of the highway knocks out anything anyone below is doing, at night it's dark, what's going on below isn't visible from the street level.

But officers know about this place, so it's not secluded. And

the bike patrol has easy access to this and all locations off the beaten path.

“We don’t like people hanging out under there,” Stevenson said.

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