Mountain bikers join forces to have a voice in Lake Tahoe

By Kathryn Reed

Free ride, downhill, cross country, or something else – the mountain bike community is becoming one and a force to be reckoned with.

At a two-hour meeting Nov. 5 at the South Lake Tahoe Parks and Recreation Complex, more than 60 cyclists packed the room to express their desire to unite in an effort to have an influence on what is going on in the Lake Tahoe Basin and beyond.

The gathering came out of the three-day conference put on by the International Mountain Bicycling Association in early October. Since then folks from IMBA have been working in the area. They put on a trail building workshop at Kirkwood Oct. 15-17.

Becky Bell talks about the early days of TAMBA. Photo/Kathryn Reed

On Friday several IMBA representatives spoke at the meeting led by John Drum, a longtime South Shore cyclist. So did

Garrett Villanueva with the U.S. Forest Service.

“What’s lacking is a common voice from the mountain bike community,” Villanueva told the group. Villanueva is the top trail builder for the federal agency. So revered is he that he regularly helps other states and international locales with trail building.

Villanueva organized five trail building days this past summer. No one showed up for three of them.

He wants to bring out an expert to help design a pump track on Corral Trail on the South Shore and bring the Gunmount-Tahoe Mountain trail up to standard – but he needs input from a collective voice of users.

Villanueva said every great cycling destination has a strong bike community.

That’s not the case with Tahoe. It is neither a topnotch mountain bike area, nor does it have the people behind it.

The Whistlers of the world didn’t becom3 cycling meccas solely because city leaders voted for it, but instead they are a reality because the users convinced the powers that be to build the trails, bike parks, pump tracks, and other features.

Villanueva is hoping that same grassroots force will spin out of Friday’s gathering. Based on the enthusiasm in the room Lake Tahoe is ready to rock the mountain bike world.

The assembled group that spanned multiple generations, included both sexes – though mostly guys, had reps from Truckee, North Shore and mostly South Shore, and included a gamut of user groups in the end agreed to resurrect Tahoe Area Mountain Bicycling Association to be the umbrella under which to operate.

Becky Bell, a leader in TAMBA from the get-go with husband Gary, spoke Nov. 5 a bit about the history of the bike club,

the work involved and desire to breath new life into it.

The group that met two days ago and anyone else interested in mountain biking is invited to gather Dec. 15 at 6pm at Blue Angel café in South Lake Tahoe to work on some nuts and bolts issues about how TAMBA will run. Four board members exist. The bylaws mandate they choose board members.

There was talk of having chapters within TAMBA to represent the various areas like North Shore, South Shore, Truckee, Reno, Carson City and Kirkwood. From there, it could be broken down into specialties like downhill, cross country and free ride.

A group of twentysomethings in the back of the room is eager to get dirty and build trails. These meetings aren’t what they want to be involved in. But process is something the others tried to tell them needs to happen before the shovels come out.