USFS taking comments on plans to revamp Tallac Site area

The U.S. Forest Service Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit is asking for public input on improvements proposed under the Historic Facilities Best Management Practices Retrofit project. The proposal would improve water quality and enhance sustainable recreational opportunities at the Tallac Historic Site on Lake Tahoe's South Shore.

The Forest Service is proposing to implement a variety of water quality BMPs. These would include installation of infiltration basins, slope and fence stabilization along the shoreline, installation of a fence along Kiva Point Beach on the Taylor Creek Marsh border, installation of informational signs, removal of select user-created trails, and revegetation with native plants.

The project is designed to improve site circulation by reconfiguring the three intersections along Highway 89 (Valhalla, Tallac, and Taylor Creek) into two entrances. A new road would connect the reconfigured intersections within the site, allowing visitors to enter the site and access all areas without returning to the highway.

A 120-space parking lot is proposed at the Tallac Site public parking area, as well as new parking spaces along Highway 89 near the Valhalla entrance. These additional parking areas are intended to offset the proposed reduction in roadside parking associated with Caltrans work along Highway 89.

The project also proposes the installation of a six-unit restroom at the Kiva Point parking area. Improvements to the volunteer RV area and the addition of 32 parking spaces at the Valhalla Estate parking area are also proposed to meet the changing needs of the site.

Project implementation and bathroom construction could begin as early as September 2013. The project is expected to be finished by 2015.

Comments are due by the close of business on Oct. 1. For more information on the proposal and how to submit comments, go online or contact Ashley Sommer at (530) 543.2615 or email asommer@fs.fed.us.

Nevada parks has firewood for sale

Permits go on sale Sept. 15 for the Nevada Division of State Parks' annual wood sale. The sale starts at 8am in the main lobby of the Richard H. Bryan state office building located at 901 S. Stewart St.

Permits are $50 per cord – cash or check only – and are limited to one cord per address/family. Approximately 100 permits/cords will be available on a first-come, first-served basis. The sale will end at 11am or when sold out.

The mandatory pick-up schedule days will be on Sept. 21-23 and Sept. 28-30. There are two available pick-up locations: the North Canyon and Kings Canyon areas near Spooner Lake in Tahoe.

Access into North Canyon requires navigation through areas of loose, sandy soils and access into Kings Canyon navigates through multiple, sharp angle water bars. Four-wheel drive vehicles are strongly recommended. Trailers are allowed at the discretion of staff. Trailers deemed unsafe by staff must remain at the staging area.

The wood consists of a mixture of pine and fir, some seasoned and some green. Most of the wood is approximately 18 inches, although some odd sized and large rounds are possible.

Call Joy Elwood for more information: (775) 684.2793.

USFS wants people to steer clear of tree-felling projects

As tree-felling operations under the South Shore Fuels Reduction and Healthy Forest Restoration project move to new areas, the U.S. Forest Service Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit reminds the public to stay clear of active operations.

Thinning in the first unit along Highway 89 has been completed, and mechanical operations in the Nez Perce Drive area also nearly complete. Once that unit is complete, the contractor will be working near Fallen Leaf Campground and along Trout Creek off Pioneer Trail.

Noise from the operations near Fallen Leaf Lake may affect campers, although operations will occur during the daytime only. The work will also limit access to the Moraine Trail and other trails from the campground leading to Fallen Leaf Lake. The Trout Creek work will limit access to the Railroad Grade Trail.

Once work is complete, the Forest Service will restore official trails such as the Moraine Trail and the Railroad Grade Trail to their previous condition. The agency does not

restore user-created trails, and these trails may be covered with slash that has been left behind for soil stabilization.

The Forest Service has also issued a number of contracts for hand-thinning and piling operations, in project areas around the Lake. South Shore project activities will continue as conditions allow, including possible over-the-snow operations during the winter.

The South Shore project includes mechanical and hand-thinning to reduce wildfire risk to communities, improve forest health and restore aspen stands. The project will treat approximately 10,100 acres from Cascade Lake to Stateline on the California side of Lake Tahoe over the next eight years.

For more information on the South Shore project, go online. You can view current forest closures here.

River cleanup day expanding into Washoe Meadows State Park

Washoe Meadows Community will be participating in the annual Great Sierra River Cleanup event Sept. 15 from 9am to noon.

Meet at the Lake Tahoe Boulevard entrance to Washoe Meadows State Park to pick up instructions and supplies. Wear comfortable trail walking shoes, bring something to drink, and use sunscreen.

The first 80 volunteers that show up at Regan Beach will receive a T-shirt.

An optional volunteer appreciation party will take place at Regan Beach from noon to 2pm.

All volunteers must sign a liability waiver form. All participants under 18 must have a form filled out by a parent or guardian.

For more info, email info@washoemeadowscommunity.org or call Krissi at (530) 307.1357.

Bike trail work temporarily impacts Lam Watah parking

The Lam Watah Trailhead parking lot on Kahle Drive in Stateline is off-limits through Oct. 15.

A contractor for the Tahoe Transportation District will be completing a number of improvements, including grading the trail from the Lam Watah boardwalk to the current parking lot, grading for trail parking lot expansion and restroom construction. This is all part of the Stateline-to-Stateline bike trail.

Lam Watah Trail remains open, with a slight detour. Alternate parking is available in the Douglas County parking lots located on the south side of Highway 50 and Kahle Drive.

When completed, the Lam Watah Trailhead parking will be increased from nine spaces to 20 (with one space reserved for people with disabilities). New amenities will eventually include an additional informational kiosk, two picnic tables, a bear-proof trash container, and bicycle racks, in addition to the restroom.

Nevada Department of Transportation, Nevada Division of State Lands, Lake Tahoe License Plate Funds, and Federal Recreation and Trails Funds are funding the project.

League’s Stewardship Day at Tahoe Paradise park

Hundreds of Lake Tahoe Basin community members will help improve forest health at the League to Save Lake Tahoe’s 15th annual Tahoe Forest Stewardship Day on Sept. 29 at Tahoe Paradise Park in Meyers.

The League welcomes volunteers of all ages and abilities.

This year the Stewardship Day partner is the Tahoe Paradise Resort Improvement District. The focus will be on forest fuels reduction, trail restoration, river restoration, native species plantings, and educational outreach. The event will also include a volunteer appreciation lunch, sponsored by Nature’s Bakery, with a special guest speaker from the Sugar Pine Foundation.

All volunteers should wear sturdy shoes and long pants, and bring a water bottle and snack. Tools are provided, but volunteers who already have work gloves, hardhats, rakes, hand-saws, loppers, and shovels are encouraged to bring them. Do not bring axes or chain saws.

For more information or to sign-up, contact Flavia Sordelet at (530) 541.5388 or events@keeptahoeblue.org. Registration is required.

Derby Dames wrap up season Saturday

The final bout of the season for the Tahoe Derby Dames is at Bijou Community Park on Sept. 15.

It will be a double-header, with doors opening at 2pm and the bout at 3pm.

Tahoe Green Team vs. The Grim Reap-Hers will be followed by the Super Hero Smash. This is where Reno and Tahoe's finest derby athletes square off – pitting good against evil, starting at 5pm.

Cost is $12 at the door, with kids 10 and under free. Attendees are encouraged to dress up and participate in the Super Hero costume contest.

Bike enthusiasts putting on fundraiser to get park in the ground

The Tahoe Area Mountain Biking Association and the South Lake Tahoe BMX Association are working to build a pump track, mountain bike skills park, and relocate the BMX track.

The 4-acre park will be located in Bijou Community Park, near other community recreation features like the skate park and

disc golf course.

The groups are in the design and permitting stage of the Bijou Bike Park. At this time there is no funding. Therefore a local volunteer team of people who work at Design Workshop, Tahoe Regional Planning Agency, U.S. Forest Service, and South Lake Tahoe are donating time to put together documents that get the permits and then implement the bike park. Simultaneously bike park design consultants Alpine Bike Parks from Whistler is designing all the specific bike elements. A complete set of construction documents is expected this fall for permits, with construction hopefully starting next summer.

To get to that point the volunteer team is on a fund-raising campaign. That process starts Sept. 14 at the American Legion (2748 Lake Tahoe Blvd.) in South Lake Tahoe. The event starts at 6pm, with music at 7pm. Cost is $10, with kids free. All proceeds from the party go to the bike park.

A raffle, silent auction and photo booth are part of the festivities.

U.S. Forest Service approach to river restoration as diverse as the bodies of water

By Kathryn Reed

While the goals are the same – to restore the river channel to what it was before man first messed with it, improve habitat and enhance the entire ecosystem – the approach the U.S. Forest Service is taking on two projects in the Lake Tahoe Basin is drastically different.

Cold Creek runs through High Meadow on the South Shore. The terrain allowed for the channel to be rerouted. Grasses are already growing. The water table is rising, despite this being a summer following a minimal snow year. It is peaceful – even with crews still on site.

On the West Shore, Blackwood Creek runs through the canyon of the same name. It's rocky, rugged and looks like a torrential downpour could wipe out everything that stands in its way. There is no way to reroute the channel so other modifications are necessary.



Craig Oehrli with the U.S. Forest Service stands next to a bank in Blackwood Creek that shows the damage that will be repaired. Photos/Kathryn Reed

"The site conditions are dramatically different so the

approach has to be different," Sue Norman, who is overseeing the teams doing the work, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

It also means the time it takes to achieve the goals are different, too. In three years, High Meadow may look like construction crews were never there. It may take 10 to 15 years for Blackwood not to look like a "raw, exposed construction site," Norman said.

While both projects have something to do with water quality, that is not the overriding reason millions of dollars are being spent. If Lake Tahoe and its famously clear water didn't exist, the work would still happen – assuming there was funding.

"The cumulative affects of land use in here is the driver (to do the work)," Craig Oehrli, who is managing the Blackwood site, says as he walks through the project area.

Ecological restoration is what drives the decision-makers within the Forest Service to go forward with projects of this magnitude.

High Meadows restoration started in 2010. The South Nevada Public Lands Management Act is financing the $2.5 million project. Blackwood Canyon has been undergoing some form of restoration for more than 25 years. The fourth and final phase began in 2010. The entire $10 million project is also funded by SNPLMA.

The bulk of the work on both sites will wrap up this fall, though monitoring will be ongoing to ensure the goals are met. Some minor work may need to be done in the spring.

Restoring the sections of the Upper Truckee River and Angora Creek that the USFS owns are the next projects; they will begin in 2013. The Upper Truckee project is a definite water quality improvement, as it delivers the most amount of sediment to Lake Tahoe. Blackwood is the second highest

producer of sediment reaching the lake. However, Blackwood produces more sediment per square foot than the Upper Truckee watershed.

High Meadow

As the landscape changes, so does the animal life. Amphibian creatures are returning to this meadow at 7,843 feet. As the willows take hold, the riparian habitat will change, too.

Birds have begun to forage, deer prints are abundant, six-point bucks have come by and coyotes are everywhere, according to the crew on site.

The channel looks more like it would have had grazing never occurred and the creek not been rerouted to accommodate the needs of the private property owners.

Now the creek will be able to flood the meadow. That hasn't happened since the late 1800s. Sediment will be deposited into the meadow instead of going downstream, the meadow will get needed moisture and the stream channel will not erode now that it has a meander to it.

Some pools are maybe 8-feet wide, but most of the channel is no wider than 4 feet. In mid-July water started running through the 3,600 feet of new channel.

"I hope this becomes a big wildflower meadow. It hasn't had the right water for it for a long time," Stephanie Heller, project manager, said as she surveyed the landscape. "Where we removed the dead trees the meadow has come back."

In the staging area logs are stacked and a mound of dirt is piled high. The wood will be used either as slash or chipped when the site is decommissioned. The dirt is from the 2010 excavation. Much of it is going to fill in the north fork.

Eighty of the 280 acres on this parcel have been restored.

The Forest Service acquired the land in 2001. It is estimated the grazing started in the 1880s and diversion of Cold Creek was in the 1890s. This watershed was also logged during the Comstock.

While the Forest Service is able to do the work it wants, there are 700 acres of private land touching this project area – including part of the road that leads to the meadow.

Blackwood

While heavy equipment is needed to move large boulders into what will be a wild river when the water table rises, and rain and snow descend, the workers are more like surgeons than contractors. They are applying the prescription needed to heal this swath of land that was damaged by previous generations.

Rock was mined from the river to build roads for the 1960 Winter Olympics at Squaw Valley. Trees were logged with machinery in the 1950s and 1960s.

Photos dating to the 1930s help the Forest Service understand how the land and water functioned before the harvest of rock and wood began.

“There is no proof they ran a bulldozer upstream, but it an unnaturally straight channel,” Oehrli says he scampers through the rock terrain. He is almost giddy as he explains the work being done and how it will create not only a healthier river, but also an ecosystem that will thrive.

By the time the job is completed 20 acres of floodplain in this canyon between Homewood and Tahoe City will have been restored.

The crew is raising the floodplain. The floor of the river is 8 to 9 feet below the bank’s edge. It should be 3 to 4 feet.

The water is about 10 feet underground. It’s normal for Blackwood to go dry in August. It did so in July this year and

still had water in September 2011.

“This is as dynamic of an area as we have in Lake Tahoe for a river process,” Oehrli said.

To keep that dynamic nature, large wood structures are being erected to resemble what would have naturally occurred. Oehrli had to point out the work because it looks so natural.

Farther up he stands next to an eroded bank that is taller than he is. Before the season is out it will have a human-made logjam against it to prevent erosion.

In 2008 and 2009 the Forest Service erected 13 rock-log flow deflection structures and 28 log-based floodplain roughness structures.

An erosion analysis was done that determined a 500-foot area was contributing 20 percent of the sediment problem. In all, 3,500 feet of the river has been rebuilt.

Oehrli takes a rock and without much effort it dissolves. This volcanic material is throughout the streambed.

“With a little water and weathering it melts in place,” Oehrli explains. More sediment.

So much is going on this watershed that it doubles as a classroom. College instructors have brought their students to the area to learn about this ecosystem.

Changing the slope will slow down the energy and dissipate the water. It will mean reducing the sediment flowing into Lake Tahoe, especially after the California Tahoe Conservancy finishes its project that links the river to the lake.

Near where the log structure is in place it looks like a riverbed. A year ago the water was 5-feet deep where people were standing last week. Cottonwoods are beginning to sprout. And while the river has exposed herself here, she meanders in

a gentle flow.

These are the changes the Forest Service was seeking when in it first went to work on Blackwood Creek.

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Incline residents discuss ways not to encourage problem bears

By Alyx Sacks, KRNV-TV

The Nevada Department of Wildlife had to euthanize four bears this year in Incline Village and all of those cases started with bears getting into people's garbage.

Community members want to find out how to stop that from happening.

One point that was made loud and clear in a bear subcommittee meeting Monday is it's time Nevadans become more "bear smart."

"The vast majority of Nevadans, 74 percent to 20 percent wants the state to prioritize solving conflict between bears and humans non lethally," bear committee member Kathryn Bricker says.

Community members and NDOW bear subcommittee members say they want to find ways to stop problems with bears before they start.

“It should be addressed before there’s a problem not wait till there’s a problem to help with a solution,” Lake Tahoe resident Leann Dyer says.

One solution, being smarter with trash.

Right now residents in Incline Village are not required to have a bear container.

Only after complaints does the county step in and ask a container to be used and if they have to impose a fine.

NDOW subcommittee Chairman David McNinch says they called the meeting to learn and see what has worked in other communities as far as keeping bears out of the garbage and away from homes.

“Maybe we don’t have to reinvent the wheel maybe there’s some things that are being done in other places we can take advantage of and implement here in this community and that might make the difference,” Chairman McNinch says.

Some states have a one dump system thus resolving the problem of trash near the home.

Others require bear containers.

During the meeting, one college student even volunteered the idea of college students walking around neighborhoods just to spread bear smart information so people can learn about the right precautions.

All ideas to stop the number of complaints, incidents and ways people can be a part of the solution by adjusting habits.

“It’s not a bear problem it’s a human problem we need to co-exist with the bears,” Dyer says.

Chairman McNich says the discussion was a good start and he hopes to have more meetings like this in the future.