

Trails & Open Space Subcommittee
 April 25, 2019 • Meeting Minutes

<i>Association Members</i>			<i>TD Staff</i>
VJ Bonnard Richard Bothwell Dave Cohen Gayle Dana Kathy Englar Brenda Gilbert Jayne Hahn Jennifer Jennings	Guy Joaquin Benjamin Levine (Co-Chair) Paco Lindsay Carole Mahoney Nan Meek (GPC) Steve Miller (GPC) Scot Nicol Bill Phelps	Marina Phillips Lynette Powell Livia Quan Charlene Simmons Michael Sullivan (GPC) Susan Terrell Julie Thornton	Robb Etnyre Forrest Huisman Annie Rosenfeld (Co-Chair) Christina Thayer Brian Yohn
<i>Guests:</i> Susan Crum, Jeff Shellito			

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At this meeting the Trails & Open Space Subcommittee (TOS) took the following actions:

1. The TOS approved the 03/28/19 meeting minutes with one amendment.
2. The TOS was notified that the Board would be making a decision on permitting for the Nature Trail repairs at an upcoming meeting. Further, though the project would be approved under the General Manager’s authority alone, at the same meeting the Board would be advised of the Bermgarten Rustic Trailhead project. Finally, the TOS was notified that on 04/26/19, chairs and co-chairs from the TOS and TCRC Subcommittees would meet with a co-chair from the Golf Subcommittee to discuss the Nature Trail/Trout Creek Trailhead concept.

3. First Discussion: Hiker Needs and Desires

Background

When drafting the 2013 Trails Master Plan (TMP), foot travel was understood to be the dominant use of the trails. Today that dominance is more uncertain. Hikers may remain the plurality of trail users, but growing numbers of mountain bikers have had an effect on the hiker experience, and so has ongoing equestrian trail use. Some hikers now feel that there is a greater need to speak up regarding their trails experiences and needs given these changes. The TOS’s goal is to make sure that the needs and desires of those who travel the trails by foot are as well-represented in the next iteration of the TMP as other user groups.

The 2013 TMP states that: “Hikers are the most flexible trail users and adapt to the broadest range of trail designs.” However, being the most flexible user group does not mean hikers can adapt to any and all trail designs and conditions. There are naturally limits to adaptation and acceptance. Nor does it mean that hikers are without particular needs and desires.

In thinking about hiker needs and experience on the trails, we need to distinguish between trail use and trail design. Compared to 2013, hikers are now more frequently on alert for mountain bikers, and especially mountain bikers coming up from behind. And regardless of posted yielding guidance, some report that mountain bikers appear to expect hikers to stay out of their way. The hiker experience has also changed due to trail design features that are in place to accommodate mountain biking. These design differences mean the experience on Tahoe Donner's newer trails is different than on a mountain bike prohibited trail like the PCT..

What kind of experience are we trying to give to hikers on the trails? For some TOS members, hiking on the trails is a meditative experience, and there is a desire to preserve that meditative character. Others emphasized the traditionally family friendly nature of our trails. The trails should be a place where family hikers feel safe and welcome. However, some were concerned that mountain bikers are not always sensitive to this character, particularly in areas where they are more likely to encounter family hikers (like the first mile around trailheads). To resolve similar problems, some ski areas designate "slow zones," a concept that may be useful here too.

Equestrian Effects

The presence of horse manure on the trails continues to be an issue for hikers. However, though common for carriage horses in urban settings, equestrians on the TOS report that manure bags (aka horse diapers) are not a viable solution with the saddle horses we have in Tahoe Donner. We could consider periodic cleanup efforts, but these would entail considerable staff time with additional costs.

Many trails used by equestrians and by the equestrian group rides were not built originally as equestrian trails. This may lead to trailbed deterioration, effecting hiker experience.

Response Options

- Radical Response: Construct single-use trails.
- Moderate Response: Try to provide a better hiker experience through better trail design. Can we identify specific problem areas or particular kind of trail features or characteristics that cause problems? (Though Cinnamon Twist was noted specifically, Christina Thayer reported that there are plans for a new, more hiker friendly alternative trail. Wild West and Whoop It Up were also mentioned.) Can we make trail design changes (better line of sight, features to slow bikers, and so forth) to create a better hiker experience?
- Minimal Response: Improve trail user etiquette. There were doubts about the effectiveness of this option because rules are seldom followed, and people often feel entitled to do as they please.
- Single-Use Subsidiary/Bypass Trails: Create short single-use-only/single-use-preferred subsidiary trails to separate user groups through specific problem areas. This strategy is already under consideration for Teewinot.

- “Slow Zones”: As noted above.
- A number of options considered at the 03/28/19 TOS meeting, and especially those pertaining to the “first mile” where user density is highest, are also relevant to these hiker issues.
- Signage: New signage may help alleviate some of these issues, provided we have the flexibility to permit solutions. In this vein, it was noted that rules can sometimes have signed exceptions (dogs on leash near the Equestrian Center or in an environmentally sensitive area, single-use in this particular spot/route, and so forth).
- To better understand the true scope of these issues, it would be useful for TOS member and others to take note of their experiences on the trails during the summer of 2019 to try to inventory specific problem areas, and to better understand the specific causes of problems (sightlines, etiquette, trail design, and so on). One hypothesis is that, though hikers may have anxiety about fast bikers, negative hiker encounters with fast bikers may actually be fairly rare. As such, it would also be useful to better understand the true frequency of negative encounters between hikers and bikers. Notably, within the last 5 years, there have been zero reports of hiker-biker collisions on the trails.

Other Issues

- It was pointed out that trail users with dogs, though overlapping with hikers, bikers, and equestrians, constitute what might be called a Fourth User Group, meriting particular consideration in themselves. The TOS was not prepared to deal with this topic at this meeting.

4. Second Discussion: Should the trail system (and the master plan) be transitioned into a four-season amenity?

The 2013 TMP briefly touches upon winter trail use in and beyond the Cross Country Center. There were also some discussions leading up to the 2013 TMP about the potential for winter time trail use. For example, some asked about maintaining the Nature Trail for snowshoeing in the winter, about plowing the golf cart paths for winter walking, or about developing new plowed winter-time walking trails in Tahoe Donner. Additionally, there have been experiments grooming the trail from the Glacier Trailhead to the Donner Lake Overlook for pedestrian use in the winter. Finally, some in the TOS have wondered about winter recreational potential in the McGlashan Springs and Bucknam Tract properties.

Christina Thayer reported that members have asked her about the potential for developing winter, paved walking trails, especially given the danger and discomfort associated with walking on Northwoods Boulevard. Many members use the paved Trout Creek Trail and Legacy Trail in winter, and some wonder if we could build something similar within Tahoe Donner to improve neighborhood connectivity. She also noted that in the winter many use the golf course to connect to various places within Tahoe Donner. There seems to be a feeling that “there’s no place to walk in Tahoe Donner” during the winter, especially with dogs or strollers.

With regard to plowing the golf cart paths, there would be costs and concern from the golf community about potential turf damage. Annie Rosenfeld reported that some work was done to research this concept in the past, which could be resurfaced for the TOS to review. In 2010, the Board rejected a proposal to open the cart paths to walkers during the shoulder seasons. Some concern was raised about the suitability of the cart paths for plowing, and whether by opening up the cart paths in the winter, we might habituate people to use those paths when their use would be prohibited in the summer.

When paved and plowed winter time trails in Tahoe Donner were last considered, the discussion was somewhat theoretical, because no paved and plowed winter trails existed in the area. Today the Trout Creek Trail and the Legacy Trail demonstrate the popularity of paved and plowed winter trails. Because of its proximity to Tahoe Donner, the Trout Creek Trail is especially popular with Tahoe Donner members, and may be building an appetite for similar trails within Tahoe Donner. It was also noted that the Trout Creek and Legacy Trails proved far more popular and heavily used than the city planners had anticipated.

Tahoe Donner members are used to (and enjoy) the easy access they have to Tahoe Donner's open spaces during the summer. But when the snow falls the members actually lose much of that access because there are few parking options (outside the Cross Country Center) or because they need to pay additional fees (within the Cross Country Center). This also focuses use on the few areas that remain accessible. This is one reason why the Glacier Trailhead is overburdened in the winter. The TOS agreed in principle that winter open space access should be improved. Improving winter open space access is largely a parking issue.

Additionally, it is "a mammoth amount of work" for staff to keep the Glacier Trailhead open during the winter. It is also the last plowing priority. If we had a more accessible winter trailhead at a lower elevation, it would be an easier trailhead to maintain open during the winter. One option would be to pave the Bermgarten Trailhead. While we might still want to preserve access at Glacier as well, plowing Bermgarten could be done more quickly and easily, and by providing a second access point we could better preserve member access to the open space and better distribute user load across a wider area.

Snowshoe trails and snowshoe access outside the Cross Country Center was also discussed. At least some members also want snowmobile groomer snowshoe trails outside the Cross Country Center. However, there would be costs and operational complications associated with this idea. The TOS preferred option would be to continue offering a groomed snowshoe trail experience exclusively at the Cross Country Center (for a fee), while also providing better winter open space access (i.e. parking) to areas outside the Cross Country Center for those snowshoers who are looking for an ungroomed or more "backcountry" experience.

- *Long Term Concept:* Class 1, four-season (plowed) bike/walk trail from the ACAC to the Trout Creek Trailhead. There was general consensus in the TOS that this idea should be investigated and possibly pursued.

Paving the Northwoods side of the Nature Trail was often discussed leading up to the 2013 TMP, but the idea was not incorporated into the plan. This larger concept is an extension of that idea. Annie Rosenfeld reports that she is hearing members ask for better community connection.

Other Truckee subdivisions are being built with Class 1 connectivity, and the Town of Truckee is designing their Class 1 trails to connect to these other subdivisions, creating an integrated network of Class 1 trails as alternative transportation options.

Town of Truckee right of way is available to improve what we already have to a Class 1 trail connecting our core amenities. A project of this sort would be eligible for TSSA-1 funding, and also Measure R funding for plowing.

Beyond enjoyment and environmental issues, the trail would improve walker safety by removing pedestrians and bikers from Northwoods Boulevard. Overall, building a trail of this sort would improve Tahoe Donner's walkability rating.

The Town of Truckee's Trails and Bikeways Master Plan includes plans to add a Class 1 spur trail from the intersection of Basel and Mougale to the existing Trout Creek Trail.

Currently, the governing documents prohibit the Board from dedicating land to the town for trail development absent a member vote. However, there are plans to change this through the ongoing governing documents update process.

5. Bonus Discussion: Trails Survey

Though not on the agenda, at the end of the meeting the TOS discussed the possibility of conducting a membership survey on trails issues. There is an appetite in the TOS to conduct a survey at this point, and it certainly would be possible to conduct a survey specifically on trails related issues. With the support of the GPC's Communications Subcommittee, the TOS will aim to conduct a trails related survey this summer.

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Upcoming TOS Meetings

TOS Regular Meeting: May 23, 2019, 3:00 – 4:45 PM at The Northwoods Clubhouse.