

**Trails & Open Space Subcommittee**  
June 27, 2019 • Meeting Minutes

<i>Association Members</i>			<i>TD Staff</i>
<del>VJ Bonnard</del> <del>Richard Bothwell</del> <del>Dave Cohen</del> <del>Sue Crum</del> <del>Gayle Dana</del> <del>Kathy Englar</del> <del>Jayne Hahn</del> <del>Jennifer Jennings</del>	Guy Joaquin Benjamin Levine (Co-Chair) Paco Lindsay Carole Mahoney <del>Nan Meek (GPC)</del> <del>Steve Miller (GPC)</del> Scot Nicol Bill Phelps	Marina Phillips Lynette Powell Livia Quan Charlene Simmons Michael Sullivan (GPC) Susan Terrell Julie Thornton	<del>Robb Etnyre</del> Annie Rosenfeld (Co-Chair) Christina Thayer <del>Brian Yohn</del>
<i>Guests:</i> None			

**Meeting Attendance Note:** Due to technical problems, remote call-in was not available for this meeting, severely limiting TOS member and guest participation.

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

1. The TOS approved the 05/23/19 meeting minutes.
2. The TOS was updated on the status of the Nature Trail and Bermgarten Trailhead projects.
3. Tying up a loose end from the previous month’s meeting, the TOS was informed that there are approximately 100 25’ by 80’ undevelopable private inholdings within the Bucknam Tract. Added together, these private “paper lots” total approximately 5 acres.

**4. First Discussion: Trails Survey Update.**

The TOS continued planning for a survey to be conducted later this summer. After the May meeting, several TOS members volunteered to form a working group to draft the survey. This working group includes: Englar, Levine, Quan, Rosenfeld, Simmons, Thayer, and Thornton. Also after the May meeting, suggestions for questions and topics were solicited from both the TOS and the GPC. Drawing from these suggestions and its own deliberations, the working group produced an initial survey draft that was circulated to the TOS before the June meeting. TOS members were encouraged to submit comments in writing. Additionally, the TOS was briefed on relevant findings from the recent Board survey.

**5. Second Discussion: The Future of The TOS Schedule.**

The TOS is concluding its preliminary Trails Master Plan update analysis and preparing to move that process along to the next stage: enlisting the help of a qualified consultant. While continuing to meet as necessary to work on the Trails Master Plan update, to address emerging issues, and to

form recommendations on trails and open space related capital projects, the TOS was notified that sometime in the fall the subcommittee may consider adopting a reduced schedule. At an absolute minimum, however, the TOS intends to continue to meet twice a year: once at the beginning of the summer trails season and once at the end of the summer trails season.

## **6. Third Discussion: Volunteerism, Stewardship, and Building a Trails Community**

Benjamin Levine opened discussion with a reflection on the history of volunteer stewardship in Tahoe Donner and the challenges associated with organizing volunteer stewardship events in Tahoe Donner.

While there are reasons for optimism, and an apparent appetite among a portion of Tahoe Donner members for a greater variety of stewardship events and activities, there are also reasons to temper our expectations about what can be accomplished in terms of “real work” through volunteers alone. However, the value of volunteer stewardship cannot be adequately measured in terms of the “real work” it produces. The volunteer experience and the engagement with stewardship it represents have value in themselves for the participating members and the community.

Though trail work is the most frequent stewardship activity on Tahoe Donner’s trails, the TOS recognized the need to reduce the identity between trails stewardship and trail building. To better appeal to a wider audience, the Trails Club has offered more “family-friendly” stewardship events in the past, and continues to offer less labor intensive stewardship opportunities in the present. For instance, the club has scheduled well-attended, family-friendly cleanup days in the Alder Creek meadow. (Not every “cleanup day” is, however, family-friendly. For instance, the Trails Club has conducted barbed wire cleanups in the past.)

Additionally, since 2013 the Trails Club has partnered with the Truckee River Watershed Council to conduct an educational non-native invasive weed walk for Tahoe Donner members. The weed walks have proven extraordinarily successful, continuing to draw notably large crowds year after year. (However, non-native invasive weed pulls have been poorly attended in Tahoe Donner.) With the Watershed Council, the Trails Club also conducts a well-attended informational “River Walk” in September.

Another family-friendly stewardship event that Tahoe Donner offers is the annual sapling planting that occurs in October as part of the Truckee River Watershed Council’s Truckee River Day. This event is a low-skill, fun, and rewarding event for all ages, that has historically been extremely well attended.

In addition, since 2013 Tahoe Donner has sponsored a National Trails Day guided hike on the first Saturday in June, that has also been very well attended, at least when an interesting hike is on offer. As one TOS member observed, “If you want people to show up in Tahoe Donner, have a guided hike.” Though this hike was cancelled in 2019 due to adverse trail conditions, it will be resumed again in 2020.

The June guided hike and the October tree planting are well established Tahoe Donner, family-friendly traditions: one opens the summer trails season and the other closes the summer trails season. These are “bookend” events, and Tahoe Donner could do more to promote these events as trails community traditions. These two events could serve as models for other family-friendly stewardship and trails events.

Before 2012, the Forestry Department (which was then in charge of the trails) organized a single annual volunteer trail work day. These events were generally well-attended, often offering an array of lower-skilled, less-demanding, more family-friendly options for volunteers. Similarly less demanding trail clean-up events have also been organized by the Trails Club since 2013, often attracting very high participation levels. Because these less skilled projects were so well attended, frequently volunteers ran out of tools and meaningful work, which reduced the positive experience for volunteers.

In the last few years, however, the Trails Club has moved away from these more family-friendly events to focus on more intensive trail building projects (Teewinot and the Donner Lake Rim Trail) that appeal to the more skilled regulars. Additionally, partially due to feedback from regulars, the club’s events have recently changed from more family-friendly 3 hour work days to more intensive 5 hour work days. However, the Trails Club could offer more family-friendly projects again in the future if suitable project opportunities should arise.

While it is theoretically possible to offer two volunteer tracks (one for a wider audience, one for a niche audience), administrative costs and organizational demands pose practical constraints. If Tahoe Donner wants to offer a wider range of volunteer and stewardship opportunities, additional staffing and a larger group of active member-organizers would be necessary. Further, the larger events that appeal to a wider audience are also more difficult to organize, and Tahoe Donner does not always have viable, permitted projects available.

Despite the organizational and administrative difficulties, TOS members made clear that they believe increased volunteer stewardship and increased trail engagement events should be a priority and a goal, that member engagement with trails stewardship is a good in itself, and that it would be worthwhile to offer more family-friendly, lower commitment trails and open space stewardship events. It was also noted that, by introducing more people to trails and open space stewardship, lower-skill, less demanding “feeder” events would help sustain the more demanding events over the long run.

There was some concern that, though often well publicized to Tahoe Donner members, volunteer and stewardship events may get lost amid all the other events that are available. There was also a particular concern that Tahoe Donner does not do enough to develop different ways for families to engage with the trails and open spaces. Some TOS members suggested that experts from within the Tahoe Donner community might be able to help rectify this inadequacy. As an example, Annie Rosenfeld noted that she had recently met a couple in Tahoe Donner, one a retired ornithologist and the other a retired botanist, who seemed eager to lead events in Tahoe Donner’s open spaces.

Tahoe Donner's Trails Department is fundamentally focused on trails construction and repair. It is not focused on member recreation. Tahoe Donner's recreation staff manages some trails related recreation (for example, geocaching) but they have not traditionally been focused on outdoor education and stewardship. Though some efforts have been made in the past (docent led interpretive hikes, guided hikes, bird watching events), because these programs are typically free to members (and thus non-revenue generating), they also tend to be the first programs cut to meet budgetary goals.

Because administrative costs and organizational demands are the primary limiting factor for member stewardship and volunteer events, the TOS also discussed whether the subcommittee itself should assume some responsibility for organizing and administering these events. There was also some discussion about whether clubs other than the Trails Club should provide stewardship opportunities, both to the club members and to the wider Tahoe Donner community. In this vein, it was noted that the formation of a mountain biking club would benefit the Tahoe Donner trails community.

The mountain biking community in general has a strong tradition of volunteer trail work. This tradition developed as a way for that community to "earn the right" to use the trails through "sweat equity." This volunteerism is a way for that community to "pay its dues" by giving back to the trails more than they take out of the trails. This ethic, if you use the trails, you must also give back to the trails, is not unique to the mountain biking community. But as a group that historically struggled to secure trail access, this ethic is notably well-established within that community.

A distinction should be made between trails stewardship/service programs and trails community building programs. Trails community building programs could include trails oriented happy hours at the ACAC's Trailside Bar. There could also be trails related celebrations similar to the equestrian community's Wild West Fest. These community building events could be coupled with stewardship events earlier in the day: do work in the morning, celebrate in the afternoon. This is a model followed by many successful trails and open space stewardship volunteer organizations: "Build great trails, throw an incredible party." Because the "entrance fee" to the party is showing up to do the work, people do the work so they can go to the party. Some TOS members wondered what appeals to people more: the stewardship work or the social aspect?

The TOS also touched upon who is included within Tahoe Donner's "trails community." Does it include only Tahoe Donner members or does it extend to others, particularly within the greater Truckee region? It was suggested, for instance, that the local mountain biking community has more of a regional identity. Members of the Hiking Club noted that their club permits 40% of their membership to come from outside the Tahoe Donner community. (Unusual for Tahoe Donner clubs, the Trails Club is exclusively for Tahoe Donner members.) Whether monetized or not, if Tahoe Donner does offer more recreational and stewardship programs on the trails, public participation in such programs may become a point of controversy.

Related to this, Christina Thayer reported that outside trails building groups (including the Truckee Trails Foundation and TAMBA) have expressed an interest in volunteering their

expertise and labor to Tahoe Donner's trails. Recognizing that their members regularly use Tahoe Donner's trails, these groups feel an ethical duty to volunteer their labor in order to give back to the trails. These groups frequently possess highly skilled and effective trail builders whose expertise and volunteer labor would provide for savings and efficiencies that would help stretch the Trails Department's budget.

### **7. Incidental Discussion: The Absence of Tahoe Donner's Trails From Regional and Topographic Maps.**

During the course of the scheduled discussion, the TOS briefly discussed the absence of Tahoe Donner's trails from regional maps. Under the current "no outside promotion/no outside invitation" policy, if the Town of Truckee, the Chamber of Commerce, the US Forest Service, or a similar outside organization were to produce a regional trail map to be published for public purposes, Tahoe Donner would ask that its trails not be shown or mentioned. One effect of this policy is that Tahoe Donner trails are not always included on commonly used topographic maps. However, websites and apps like Runkeeper, Trailforks, AllTrails, and Strava display all of Tahoe Donner's trails on their maps. Mapbuilder Topo and the open-source Wikimedia Maps and the OpenStreetMap websites also include all of Tahoe Donner's trails. And certain Tahoe Donner trails appear on Google Maps. The TOS briefly discussed whether Tahoe Donner's restrictive mapping policy is reasonable and whether it should be revised to distinguish between "outside promotion" and "accurate mapping".

### **8. Incidental Discussion: "Blue Ribbon Equestrian Panel" Analysis For The Trails.**

Throughout the scheduled discussion, TOS members frequently brought up issues related to the "publicness" of Tahoe Donner's trail system, Tahoe Donner's historical inhibitedness toward public use of the trails (and whether this could be surveyed), the financial strength of the trails system as an amenity, and the potential for the trail system to generate revenue so that it might be a more self-sustaining amenity. In the course of this discussion, it was noted that the trails are budgetarily unique (and perhaps budgetarily disadvantaged) among the amenities because we cannot measure the user check-in data that we routinely have for other amenities. Recently, Tahoe Donner convened a Blue Ribbon Equestrian Panel that was tasked with improving the financial performance of the Equestrian Center. The GPC's Golf Subcommittee has chosen to undertake a similar financial performance review for the Golf Course. At its July meeting, the TOS will consider undertaking a similar exercise for the trails. This discussion will also pick up on earlier discussions about Tahoe Donner's 501c4 status and about the potential for offsetting some of Tahoe Donner's trails and open space costs through grants.

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### **Next TOS Meeting**

*TOS Regular Meeting: July 25, 2019, 3:00 PM at The Northwoods Clubhouse.*