

Trails & Open Space Committee

September 1, 2021 • Regular Meeting Minutes

FINAL REPORT

<i>TOS Committee Members</i>			
Karen Aaron VJ Bonnard Richard Bothwell Gayle Dana (Vice Chair)	Lorna Dobrovolny John Groom (Staff Lead) Benjamin Levine (Chair)	Livia Quan Ellen Raynor Graham Reid	Peter Sawyer (Vice Chair) Julie Thornton Dustin Young
<i>Affiliated Staff:</i> Christina Thayer (Trails Manager)			
<i>Liaisons:</i> Courtney Murrell (BOD), Jim Roth (BOD)			
<i>TOS Subcommittee Members:</i> None			
<i>TDA Staff:</i> Alec Leonardini, Brian Yohn			
<i>Guests:</i> Merle Fajans, Cathy Ravano (FC), John Dundas (FC), Cameron Seitz			

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1. The meeting of the Trails & Open Space Committee (TOS) was called to order at 2:00 PM with a quorum present.

2. Non-Agenda Comments: There were no member comments. Benjamin noted that the Truckee River Watershed Council's October 17 Truckee River Day volunteer event will include a sapling planting in Tahoe Donner. TOS members were encouraged to volunteer.

3. Appointment Class Selection: The TOS voted 10-0 to approve the following appointment class selections.

Class	Term Expiration	Committee Members
A	January 1, 2023	Aaron, Bothwell, Levine, Thornton
B	January 1, 2024	Bonnard, Dobrovolny, Reid, Young
C	January 1, 2025	Dana, Quan, Raynor, Sawyer

4. Officer Elections: Graham nominated Benjamin for chair. Livia seconded the nomination. Julie nominated Gayle for chair. Richard seconded the nomination. Julie then withdrew her nomination of Gayle for chair, as she had intended to nominate Gayle for vice-chair. Gayle

moved to vote to elect Benjamin chair. Richard seconded the motion. The TOS voted 9-0 to elect Benjamin chair, with 1 abstention (Benjamin).

Benjamin nominated Gayle and Peter for vice-chairs. Dustin seconded the nominations. Benjamin moved to vote to elect Gayle and Peter as vice-chairs. Livia seconded the motion. The TOS voted 10-0 to elect Gayle and Peter as vice-chairs.

5. Meeting Calendar: The TOS voted 10-0 to hold its regular meetings on the first Wednesday of the month at 3:00 PM for the remainder of 2021.

6. TOS Webpage: The TOS reviewed draft copy for the TOS webpage on the Tahoe Donner website and provided feedback. It was noted that the copy should reflect the fact that the TOS is meeting virtually for the time being in accordance with current TDA guidance. To encourage member participation, the TOS discussed working with TD to establish a recurring Zoom meeting room listed on the TOS webpage.

7. Committee Communications: The chair briefly discussed open meeting requirements that regulate how committee members may communicate with one another on trails and open space issues outside an open meeting setting. Later in the meeting, a question arose about committee members providing asynchronous feedback to staff. The chair will provide further written guidance to the committee on these topics.

8. Emeritus Subcommittee: The TOS reviewed a draft purpose statement for the TOS Emeritus Subcommittee, and voted 10-0 to approve the Emeritus Subcommittee Purpose Statement as presented.

9. Equestrian Subcommittee: The TOS voted 10-0 to table the Equestrian Subcommittee Purpose Statement until its next regular meeting.

10. TOS 2021 Task List: The TOS discussed a draft 2021 TOS Task List, and voted 10-0 to approve the 2021 Task List as presented.

11. Interim E-Bike & Trails Policy: At its August meeting, the Board voted to reopen member comment on the proposed e-bike Covenants Rule change for technical reasons pertaining to its noticed member comment period. With the member comment period for the e-bike rule-change proposal extended, the TOS discussed the status of the rule change and interim policy, the form the interim policy should take, and provided feedback to staff with the intention of improving the interim policy proposal.

Though the proposed rule change language would end the blanket ban on Class 1 e-bike use on the Association's trail system, the rule change language does not specify how and where Class 1 e-bikes will be integrated into the system. Rather, the proposed rule change states only that decisions about where and how Class 1 e-bikes will be permitted on the trail system will be set by "open space and trails policies". Staff drafted an e-bike policy proposal for consideration at the August board meeting. Because the Board extended the member comment period for the rule change proposal, the Board did not discuss the e-bike policy proposal.

There has been some uncertainty about what qualifies as an "open space and trails policy". With regard to the e-bike rule change, the assumption has been that the Board requires a policy in the form of a Board resolution. Currently, there are no Board resolutions pertaining to land management. All "policies" pertaining to land management are listed in the Land Management Plan and the Trails Master Plan. Though approved by the Board, neither of those documents are listed as policies or resolutions of the Board.

The updated Trails and Open Space Master Plan, which is anticipated to be completed no later than the summer of 2022, is expected to contain long-term policies regulating Class 1 e-bike usage on the trail system. (Though staff would prefer to have the updated Master Plan before the beginning of the 2022 summer trails season, that may not be possible due to a lack of consultant availability.) The policy regulating Class 1 e-bike usage that is expected to be approved concurrently with the proposed rule change is intended only as an interim policy for the period between the rule change's approval and the adoption of an updated Master Plan.

Considerations for an improved interim policy:

- Generally promote the goal of implementing adaptive management on the trail system.
- Extend the adaptive management pilot program until the Master Plan is completed.
- Equip the Land Management Department with the authority and flexibility to better provide high quality trail experiences for a variety of use cases.
- Facilitate and promote professional management of the trails system by staff.
- Ensure the Land Management Department can work with the TOS on an extended pilot program and other interim trail management decisions.
- Because a more optimal interim policy might include broader guidance on issues like adaptive management, the interim policy may be better framed as an interim trails policy, rather than an interim e-bike policy.
- A broader interim trails policy might also help to promote a broader discussion about trails issues in preparation for the Master Plan update.
- The narrow focus on the e-bike issue has hindered these broader discussions, and the e-bike controversy has diverted staff from dealing with other more pressing land management concerns.

- A broader trails policy discussion might also more effectively address the valid concerns raised by larger social use pattern changes that all area trail systems have experienced in recent years, including increased mountain bike usage on trails that were historically hiker and equestrian trails.
- Pushing e-bike usage to all roads and double-tracks may not be the best approach for all usage cases (e.g. hikers with unsure footing who prefer flatter, more accessible trails as opposed to a more technical single track; families with young children; those walking dogs).
- It is important to balance concerns and build trust, both among those who wish to use e-bikes on the trails and among those who are concerned about e-bike use on the trails.
- Delaying the integration of e-bike usage opportunities into the trail system, or prolonging the integration period, may result in additional conflict.
- It may be advantageous to extend interim opportunities for Class 1 e-bikes to certain single track trails that are otherwise open to mountain bikes.
- The goals of an adaptive management approach should include providing safe, predictable, and enjoyable experiences for a variety of use cases within the broader trail user group categories.
- Whatever interim policy is proposed, it should be designed for success, not set up for failure. A policy that is unlikely to meet with voluntary compliance is a policy set up for failure.
- Any adaptive management plans should be well-communicated before the beginning of the high volume summer trails season.

12. Finance Committee Liaison: By consensus, the TOS agreed to invite the Finance Committee (FC) to appoint a liaison to the TOS to assist the TOS with its participation in the upcoming Budget Workshops. The TOS chair will contact the FC chair with the invitation.

13. The 2022 Land Management Budget: Because “Supporting consistent and sufficient funding for the stewardship, maintenance and improvement of Tahoe Donner’s land-holdings and trail system” is a maxim of the TOS's charter, the TOS discussed the scope and state of Tahoe Donner’s land management budget.

The Director of Land Management position directly oversees Forestry, Trails, and Defensible Space. Additionally, to ensure consistent and integrated land management across the Association’s entire acreage, the Land Management Department serves as a management, coordination, and communications clearinghouse for land management concerns in other departments whose operations include or involve land management issues (e.g. Cross-Country, Downhill Ski, Golf, and Equestrian). The land management concerns of these other departments are budgeted to their departmental operational budgets. Hence, though Forestry, Trails, and

Defensible Space represent the bulk of the land management budget, they do not include the entirety of the land management budget.

The Director of Land Management has been working with the Director of Finance, Director of Capital Projects, and the relevant department managers to verify the land management portions of the 2022 budget proposal currently under development. The focus for all land management budgeting is to ensure that appropriate funding is consistent and sustainable.

For forestry and defensible space, the cost of employees and the cost of contractors continue to be significant driving factors. Additionally, if Measure T is approved, there is uncertainty about how that initiative might affect the forestry and defensible space labor markets. The Director of Land Management is working with the Director of Finance to manage this uncertainty.

For trails, the significant driving factors are also the cost of employees and contractors. Because the economy is doing well, most professional trail contractors are currently booked up. Though trail crew wages may be competitive within the local labor market, the lack of affordable housing has contributed to a labor shortage and made it difficult to retain staff. Consequently, the Trails Department will be without any trail crew members beginning early in September, which is months earlier than in previous years. Most 2021 trail crew members left Tahoe Donner to pursue other employment at higher wages to better afford local housing.

Because the Trails Department experienced a trail crew labor shortage during 2021, both in terms of qualified staff and available staff, the department deferred a number of significant projects that it had intended to complete this year. For example, the planned repairs to the East Perimeter Trail in the wetlands near the campground will not be completed as intended in 2021. This staffing inconsistency also made it difficult for the Trails Department to plan an effective project work schedule.

Improved year to year staff retention is a top priority for the Trails Department. Among other things, improved staff retention would reduce the need for training. A new trails crew member optimistically requires at least 6 weeks of training. Tahoe Donner's trail building/maintenance season begins in late May or early June and runs through October. Hence, this training period can represent approximately 30-40% of the season.

Because of Tahoe Donner's snow load, our trail building/maintenance season begins later than many other areas. Consequently, experienced trail builders have often already found work before Tahoe Donner can employ them.

The Trails Department has historically been budgeted as a construction and maintenance department, not as a member-facing amenity department. With trails management moving

toward a more adaptive approach, the Trails Department may need to be budgeted to do more member outreach than it has in the past.

The Trails Department's capacity to respond to existing member inquiries is already stretched to its limit. The Director of Land Management noted that this is a difficulty across land management agencies in general: land managers often end up spending more time dealing with inquiries about the land than they spend actually managing the land. As a result, overall stewardship of the land is diminished, with the user experience often suffering.

Currently, the land management capital investment is mostly focused on the Euer Valley Restoration Project, Phase 1 (i.e. Coyote Crossing). Staff is working to ensure that this investment provides a cost-effective solution for all the intended four-season usage needs.

Though large scale investments like Euer Valley Restoration Project, Phase 1 are necessary, they can also potentially divert resources from smaller scale capital investments that could provide "quick wins" for improved user experience on the trail system.

Public grant money should continue to be an important funding source for land management needs. Forestry has accessed public funding sources successfully for many years. The Truckee River Watershed Council has been working with Tahoe Donner to access grant funds for the Euer Valley Restoration Project. The Director of Land Management recommended further discussion with the TOS at a later date on these topics, as there may be opportunities for similar public grant money funding for trail projects.

14. The TOS meeting was adjourned at 5:10 PM.

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