

Castle Valley Trailhead & Outreach Project Public Kick-Off Meeting Summary

June 8, 2023 (4:30 – 6:30 pm)

Soda Springs Mountain Resort Main Lodge, Soda Springs, California



F. Overview

The US Forest Service (USFS) and South Yuba River Citizen’s League (SYRCL) held a public meeting on June 8, 2023, to kick-off planning for a new parking lot and trailhead for Castle Valley. This memo summarizes what was presented at the meeting, the input received from participants, as well as the next steps in the planning process. A video recording of the full meeting is available from the project website [HERE](#) and Attachment 1 to this memo provides the presentation that was given at the meeting.

G. Meeting Attendance

Nearly forty (40) individuals attended the meeting on June 8, including representatives from the following organizations:

- Auburn Ski Club
- Boreal Ski Mountain
- California State Parks
- Donner Summit Historical Society
- Lake Tahoe Snowmobilers
- Sierra Club
- Sierra Snowmobile Foundation
- Snowlands Network
- Tahoe Backcountry Alliance
- Tahoe Backcountry Ski Patrol
- Tahoe Donner Land Trust
- Truckee Trails Foundation



Attendees who provided an email address on the meeting sign-in sheet have been added to the project mailing list.

H. Presentation Overview

Welcome, Purpose, Introduction, and Agenda Review: The USFS Tahoe National Forest District Ranger Jonathan Cook-Fisher opened the meeting by explaining his background and focus on

recreation that led to him work on the Tahoe National Forest (TNF). He explained that the TNF has two main work priorities: 1) vegetation management to reduce the risk of catastrophic fires; and 2) public services and recreation. Improving access to the public lands is critical and the current conditions are not ideal. While there are numerous sites being looked at, the Castle Valley trailhead stands out for its importance in providing access to multiple types of users to a unique site that provides connectivity to many areas. With this in mind, the TNF is launching this effort to seek public feedback on what public access looks like at the Castle Valley trailhead. Specifically, the meeting is being held to accomplish the following:

- Share goals and constraints for the Castle Valley trailhead and proposed parking area.
- Receive community feedback to help inform project development and design.
- Explain overall project timeline and upcoming opportunities for interested user groups and members of the public to be involved in the project design process.

He also introduced the various project team members assisting the effort and explained that the effort was being supported by a grant from the California Off-Highway Vehicle Green Sticker Program to support improvements to the parking area at the trailhead. Specific team members include:

- Tahoe National Forest (TNF): Jonathan Cook-Fisher, District Ranger, Christina (Teeney) Hood, and Kaitlin Mansfield
- Tahoe Donner Land Trust (TDLT): Kevin Starr
- South Yuba River Citizens League (SYRCL): Aaron Zettler-Mann, Alecia Weisman, and Daniel Elkin
- Project Engineer (GHD): Teresa Garrison
- Meeting Facilitator: Austin McNerny

He then introduced the meeting facilitator, Austin McNerny, who provided an overview of how the meeting would be conducted, asked for help in following guidelines to ensure a civil discussion, and asked several questions so attendees could get a sense of who was in attendance. From the responses, it was clear that nearly all attendees lived relatively close to the project site and had intimate knowledge of the site in both the summer and winter seasons. Attendees also reported that they had all experienced challenges finding parking when visiting the site before. Lastly, participation was essentially equally split between motorized and non-motorized interests.

Overview of the Project: Aaron Zettler-Mann, SYRCL's Interim Executive Director, began the presentation explaining what SYRCL is and why the organization, which is celebrating its 40th anniversary this year, is involved in this project. Since Castle Valley drains into Norden Meadow and, ultimately, into the South Yuba River, SYRCL believes this project has the potential to improve environmental conditions within the watershed.

He then asked SYRCL's Headwater Program Director, Alecia Weisman, to provide greater detail about the effort. Alecia started off by orienting attendees to the project site location and explaining that the TNF received a grant from the California Off-Highway Vehicle Division and matching funds from the Tahoe Donner Land Trust to cover the planning expenses of the effort. Then, she explained that the project goals are:

- Reduce health and safety concerns.
- Reduce environmental impacts.
- Improve user experience, for both:
 - Off-Highway Vehicles (OHV) / Over-Snow Vehicles (OSV) and non-motorized users, and
 - Winter and summer use

She also explained that to achieve these goals, the following activities would be undertaken:

- Develop engineered designs for the trailhead and parking areas;
- Conduct public outreach throughout the design process; and
- Complete environmental review process (both Federal and State).

Using currently available data, the concept design phase of the effort is underway and with survey data from CalTrans, Nevada County, and others, the goal is to produce 65% design for the site by Spring 2024 and then 100% designs by Summer 2024 to complete the environmental review process by Winter 2025. Additional public meetings will be held at key stages in the process to ensure that interested parties are provided opportunities to contribute to the overall effort.

She explained that the site is challenging due to its topography and natural features and explained the following constraints:

- Project Scope
- Land Ownership/Right of Ways
- Slope and Topography
- Wetland and Riparian Habitats
- Drainage
- Large Rocks
- Large Trees

She closed her presentation by sharing a conceptual design for the project site (see slide #17) and reiterated that this design is preliminary and intended to solicit feedback. Please see Attachment 1 for the slides that were shared during the presentation and watch the [video recording](#) to view the entire meeting, including the question and answer period.

I. Clarifying Questions

Following the presentation, several meeting participants asked questions to better understand the proposed project. The questions (Q) and staff responses (A) are below.

Q – Will we still be able to park on the shoulder in the CalTrans easement if the lot is full?

A – *That area is out of the jurisdiction of this project, we cannot answer. There will not be any improvements to the areas outside of the TNF property. However, conversations are underway with CalTrans to determine to what degree they will be involved in the planning*

and implementation of any improvements to their right-of-way that provides access to the project site.

Q – Will this result in a change to the HOV v. non – HOV closure areas or access points?

A – *No. This project will not change designated or restricted uses or access points for those uses.*

Q – Why do we need both California (CEQA) and federal (NEPA) compliant environmental review of this project if the project site is only on federal lands?

A – *A significant portion of the funding is coming from the state of California and, thus, CEQA applies.*

Q – Wasn't the NEPA review conducted for the previously approved project for this site?

A – *It may have, but a new NEPA review will be undertaken to analyze the yet-to-be finalized project design that this process produces.*

Q – If future travel management planning undertaken by the TNF changes where OHV/OSV use is allowed, will this project be affected?

A – *The goal of this project is to improve the user experience and reduce environmental impacts resulting from poor drainage from the project site; the effort will not change currently allowed uses.*

Q – What is the current use estimate and how with this improved access change that? Do we have a sense of whether this project will serve future needs?

A – *The site capacity due to the topographic of the area will limit the maximum size of the designed trailhead and number of parking spaces provided. TNF staff added that current demand is far exceeding what can be provided and no one solution will fix everything.*

Q – Who will oversee the maintenance of both the completed trailhead/parking lot and the access to the site?

A – *This is an important question that needs to be explored more as the process proceeds. There will be snow plowing needs as well as increased maintenance. Possibly, some sort of partnership between various entities can be created to ensure adequate care.*

Q – Will there be pedestrian access to/from the SNO-Park located on the south side of the highway?

A – *This is not a goal of the project.*

Q – Will there be a fee for use of the site?

A – *This has not been determined and it would be good for the community to share their thoughts regarding whether fees are appropriate.*

Q – What is the percentage of OHV and non-OHV use currently at the site and is there a percentage of the parking that needs to be allocated to any specific uses?

A – *We do not know the current breakdown of different users at the site and are trying to include as many parking spaces as the site can accommodate. The OHV grant that was received does not stipulate a minimum or specific number of OHV parking stalls that need to be planned for. There will be an assortment of different sized parking stalls and the planning team is looking for input from the public to help design the site.*

Q – Do you have any real-time photos of the site?

A – *The planning team will be collecting photos of the site this summer.*

Q – What is the total cost of the project?

A – *The cost is not known at this time as the site design has not been completed yet. The OHV grant that was received is for planning and more funds will have to be sought and secured to allow construction.*

E. Breakout Group Work and Report-Out

Participants were asked to sit at tables with individuals that they do not know and spend a few minutes getting to know one another before individually completing a worksheet that asked for input on several questions, which are identical to an online survey that is open until June 19 for those unable to attend the meeting. The responses to these questions will be added to those submitted online and the responses will be summarized in a separate document. After completion of the worksheet, participants were given thirty-five minutes to discuss the proposed project site constraints and share ideas for how best to design the trailhead and parking lot. Then, each group summarized their discussion and shared ideas and concerns that were identified. The comments are grouped under relevant topics and presented below.

Public Comments After Table Discussion

Parking Design

- Maximize parking space and minimize aesthetics and natural features to allow for more parking and to simplify snow plowing.
- Most attendees in favor of requiring payment for parking.
- Suggestion to require a pre -reserved permit system to ensure space is available prior to arrival or maybe a winter only (peak use) payment process.
- No need for OSV equipment loading and unloading zone, but larger parking stalls to accommodate trucks with ramps is desired.
- Potential to collaborate with existing shuttle/ bus systems to drop off people at site should be explored.
- Optimize for all backcountry groups, but do not let parking lot become overflow parking for those visiting the SNO-Park on the southside of the highway.

- Designate some overnight parking spaces, but don't allow people to leave cars indefinitely.
- Ratio of motorized and non-motorized parking stalls need to be seriously considered before final design is determined.
- The OHV grant request to cover construction costs will have to be very clear describing how the funds will benefit motorized users.
- Please get CalTrans involved in the planning of this site and the access road.

Site Facilities

- Elevated bathrooms would be good so that entry doors are not locked closed by snow.
- Access road needs to be wide enough for two cars so that people can pass each other and avoid stuck vehicles causing the lot to be inaccessible.
- Need for accurate data on desired use of the lot to determine best configuration of the parking stall.
- The restrooms will need to be designed properly to be accessible during the winter.
- Can the restrooms be tied into the sewer system at Boreal?

Maintenance and Enforcement

- Who will oversee the snowplowing and how will it be funded?
- Who will maintain the restrooms and trash collection?
- Someone may be needed to sell parking passes or to check that users have permits before parking.
- Enforcement of proper use of the parking lot is critical.

SNO-Park Related Concerns & Access

- With the SNO-Park on the south side of the highway being heavily used, there is fear that folks who don't want to buy the SNO-Park permit will come over to the improved parking lot to play. How will this be managed?
- What are the design considerations for pedestrians walking between the existing SNO-Park and this new parking lot?
- Equestrian users will be very interested in using this parking lot as horses are very scared of using the tunnel under the highway when travelling along the Pacific Crest Trail.

F. Next Steps

The USFS Tahoe National Forest District Ranger thanked everyone for their participation and expressed his appreciation for the constructive input and questions raised at the meeting. He reiterated that he believes this project can provide both OHV/OSV and non-motorized users an improved experience at the site. He also emphasized that he is concerned about the existing

steepness of the access road to the parking lot and the team will work to see how this might be addressed.

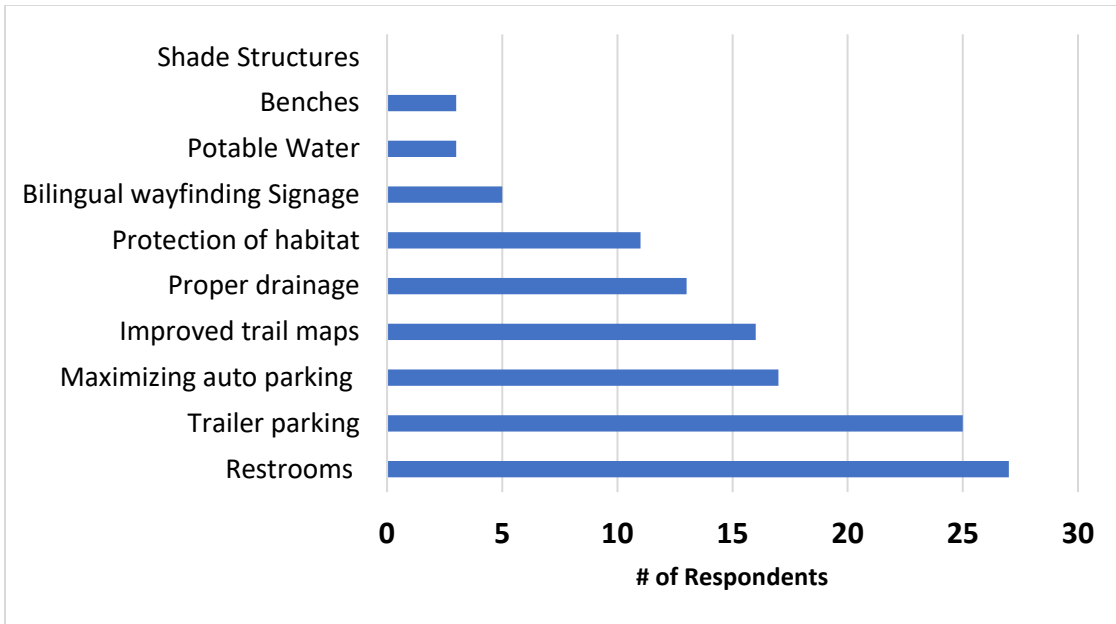
The facilitator encouraged participants to share their email addresses in order to receive project updates and to check the project website [HERE](#) for more information and to keep informed of developments. Lastly, attendees were provided one additional opportunity to share their ideas for the project site in the exercise detailed below.

G. Meeting Exit Dot Voting Exercise Results

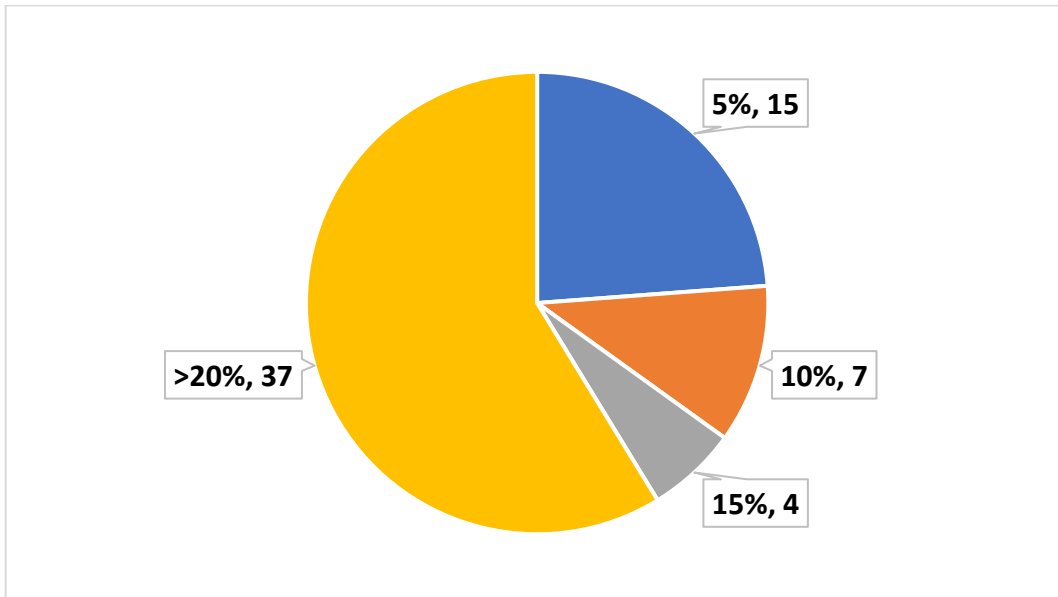
Meeting participants were each given eight (8) smaller sticker dots and asked to use them to identify their preferences for the project by affixing them to posters with assorted questions lining the walls outside the meeting room. The results from this exercise are presented below the photograph showing the total responses on the posters. The numbers under each graph represent the total number of sticky dots that the item received.



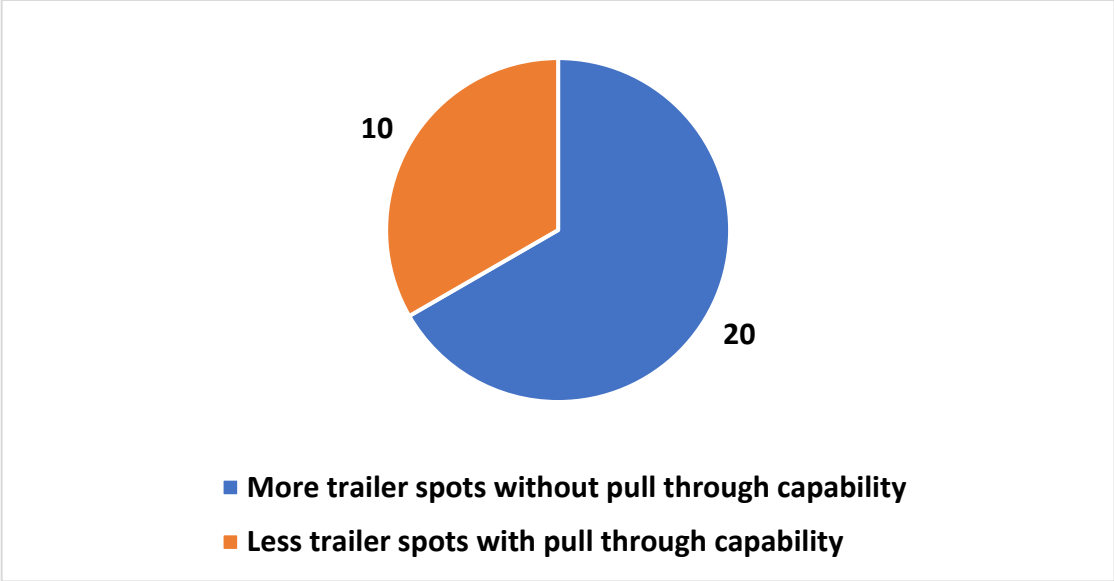
Which of these are important to you in parking area and trailhead design?



What percentage of total available parking do you believe should be reserved for larger vehicles with trailers for Over Snow Vehicles "OSV" (snowmobiles), horses, etc.? (Note: number of respondents are shown next to the percentage selected)



What is your preference for the design of trailer parking spots within the available Project site? (Note: number of respondents is shown next to preference)



Do you support the retention of natural features such as trees and large rocks which may reduce the total useable space in the parking area? (Note: number of respondents are shown next to the preference)

