



Friends of Hope Valley Newsletter

Winter, 2006
Volume 21, Issue 2

For the preservation
of the scenic,
recreational, and
historic use of Hope
Valley and Alpine
County's eastern
Sierra slope.

Board of Directors

Debbi Waldear
President

John Barr
Yvonne Chen
Jim Donald
Carla Ennis
Gay Havens
Greg Hayes

Forest Service Off-road Vehicle Route Designation

Debbi Waldear

On November 2, 2005, the Forest Service (FS) announced the release of the "Travel Management Rule (see 36 CFR [Code of Federal Regulation], parts 212 and 261), which governs the use of motor vehicles in our National Forest.

The rule is a major step forward in addressing unmanaged recreational use - a major threats affecting our nation's forests and grasslands. Successful implementation will require adjusting priorities of all concerned parties for collaborative planning at the field level. The designation process must be completed soon and is one of highest priorities of the agency.

The plan is commendable and long overdue. The task of determining which roads and trails will allow off-road vehicles (4x4's, dirt bikes, and all-terrain vehicles) is enormous. Thousands of miles have been "user-created" over the past thirty years. These routes exceed the miles of designated FS roads. These "non-system" routes were not built to any standard; their haphazard creation has resulted in resource damage on a large scale.

As part of the Route Designation Process, the FS has asked the public to identify roads and trails that should be part of the "system". The Blue Ribbon Coalition (a national promotorized-access group) insists that it does not want to lose a single existing mile currently used by motorized off-road vehicles. Off-road vehicles have gradually taking over most Forest Service trails.

The Friends of Hope Valley, along with other environmental groups throughout the state, has taken part in the ad hoc dialog on this issue. This group composed a letter to the FS that included a detailed list of recommendations for managing California's forests. We hope that our input assists the

FS as it considers the impact of off-road vehicle use on wildlife, vegetation, and watersheds - among other concerns. Ultimately, route decisions will be made at the forest or district level, taking into account ecological, cultural, and other information particular to each site.

Much of eastern Alpine County, including Hope Valley, is in the Humbolt-Toiyabe National Forest. Field surveys on the whole have been completed and the maps of this area shared with the public. We have made comments on the field data and are now waiting for the Forest Service's next set of detailed maps.

Wild and Scenic Proposal

Jim Donald

In July, the U.S. Forest Service began accepting public comment on management plans for the East Fork of the Carson River. This river runs un-dammed and mostly roadless for miles through eastern Alpine County before crossing the state line into Douglas County, Nevada, becoming a slow-flowing, agricultural conduit.

The Friends of Hope Valley submitted comments in support of Federal Wild and Scenic status for the section of the river from below Hangman's Bridge to the Nevada state line. This section, already designated California Wild and Scenic, is a popular rafting and fishing area; except for one undesignated use road, it is accessible only by raft, kayak, or on foot.

There are a number of reasons to push for Federal Wild and Scenic status, not the least of which is that it affords the river the most protection possible under present law. The Washoe Tribe has significant cultural and spiritual attachment to this river and the surrounding lands. Federal Wild and Scenic status would establish a management plan of local and federal agencies that would ensure a free-flowing river and good water for future generations.

cont on p.2

Wild and Scenic Proposal continued

Burgeoning populations in western Nevada, as well as California, have resulted in overuse of this resource and water quality degradation. Four-wheelers, intent on reaching a hot spring on the lower river in Alpine County, have created erosion, trash and waste problems.

Over the past several decades, Nevada has talked about water storage possibilities and, at one point, building a dam near Gardnerville just above where the river spills into Carson Valley. The dam would have backed water up far into California. California's response was to designate the section from Hangman's Bridge to the state line as California Wild and Scenic. Some Nevada agencies still want a form of water storage on the lower reaches of the river, potentially affecting the river's recreational values we have come to enjoy.

There are several private holdings along the river that have development potential. Visions of golf courses, shops, second homes and high-rent condominiums are particularly unappealing. Federal Wild and Scenic status would greatly mitigate such possibilities.

Some people fear federal protection would endanger their use of the river. In fact, existing uses would continue, and a ¼-mile wide corridor on each side of the river would be established. This corridor would be accessible only by non-motorized users, and nothing that would degrade water quality would be allowed. Permits to control human activities might be established, especially for dispersed camping and the area near the hot spring. Regulations that are simply common sense and should already be followed by users of the river and surrounding areas would apply equally to all. A healthy aquatic ecosystem and riparian habitat are good for all of us. It is what the river needs... now.

Rotenone Again?

Jim Donald

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced in July that the Silver King Creek rotenone project will go forward if a favorable EIR is produced. This is the same project that California Department of Fish and Game was enjoined from doing by a Federal judge who maintained that the Environmental Analysis done by the Forest Service was inadequate.

Friends of Hope Valley opposed this project at the time of previous the federal ruling, and we still oppose it. Wiping out an entire aquatic ecosystem in a wilderness area is not the way to re-introduce the Paiute cutthroat trout to its small portion of range. The species has been established in other reaches and watersheds and now occupies more stream mileage than ever.

Mahalee Lodge Time Share Resort

Carla Ennis

The Mahalee Lodge is a project time-share resort planned for Markleeville, California. The developer proposes a 25-room lodge and spa, 49 fractional ownership cabins, 15 new commercial spaces, and a parking structure. The project would be built on the north hillside of town, near the intersection of State Highway 89 and Montgomery Street. To learn more about the scope of the project, visit markleevilleusa.com.

Friends of Hope Valley has been following the project as it works its way through the permit process. In March 2006 we submitted comments on the project's Draft Environmental Impact Report and, in June, comments on the Final Environmental Impact Report.

FOHV supports economic growth in Alpine County, but we believe the developers and planners should move in a direction that assures the project is sustainable and does not fundamentally alter the attributes of the area. The Mahalee project is massive when compared with the size of Markleeville. The biggest issues are the water supply and wastewater treatment. The area's aquifer has not been mapped and recharge rates need to be documented. The water supply must be proven by direct observation and measurement during the dry months of the year, with concurrent monitoring by wells as outlined by the Alpine County Health Department. Many locals and some experts believe the water supply to be inadequate for a resort of this size and may adversely affect existing seeps and springs.

According to project documents wastewater would be discharged just above a wetland where water levels during the wet season can vary from surface flow to as little as two feet below grade. Such a strategy appears inadequate and may cause negative environmental impacts to the wetland. If the project is allowed to move forward, we encouraged the developer and county officials to pursue appropriate water treatment through the Markleeville Public Utility District.

Some of the other issues addressed in our comments include potential traffic impacts, erosion, ecologically appropriate "green" building, native landscaping, bear-proof dumpsters, affordable housing, and aesthetics. You may read our comments by visiting the Alpine County Planning Office at Turtle Rock Park, Markleeville.

You Can Help

This newsletter summarizes some of our issues, but there are many more ahead. The larger our membership, the stronger our voice. Please help us by passing this newsletter on to a friend who might be interested in helping to protect and preserve the eastern slope of the Sierra.

Markleeville Guard Station

John Barr

On May 16, 2005, United States Forest Service (USFS) found its Markleeville Guard Station filled with water due to flooding of Markleeville Creek. This area, once the creek's flood plain, has flooded on numerous occasions. In 1997, flooding destabilized a downstream bank that supports Markleeville's primary sewer and damaged the water supply line for the Markleeville Campground. This flood damaged USFS buildings, threatening an above ground fuel storage tank.

To protect USFS resources two floodwalls were constructed in the 1930's just north of the Highway 89 bridge. The floodwalls have been successful at straightening and confining the stream channel. However, the bridge and the wall are responsible for periodic dramatic increases in stream flow.

An assessment of the Upper Carson River Watershed prepared for the Alpine Watershed Group (AWG), identified the impact of these flood walls, recommending that the streambed configuration be restored. The AWG is a nonprofit organization whose mission is to preserve and enhance Alpine County's watersheds. It is comprised of a vast array of stakeholders, including government representatives, small business owners, landowners, ranchers and recreation interests. Several members of the "Friends" are actively involved. This year the FOHV gave AWG an unrestricted \$2,300 grant.

The AWG has completed a design to restore this reach of Markleeville Creek and its adjacent flood plain. The floodwalls would be removed creating a more natural riverbed and floodplain, improving water quality by filtration and vegetative uptake as water is spread over the wetland. In addition, public access to the creek would be improved. The USFS has agreed to relocate its facilities and allow the county to acquire ownership of the land. The California Department of Water Resources, through the Urban Stream Restoration Program, is funding the planning phase of the project.

The planning phase of the project, including receiving and implementing public input, is to be completed by June 2007. Presently, no money has been acquired for the project itself

Hope Valley Workday

Debbi Waldear

Snow at the end of May is nothing new in the High Sierra. And this was the case on May 31, 2006, the date of our annual workday. It was a beautiful, cold morning with over three inches of fresh snow on the ground. The contrast of the light snow over the green meadows and



ice along the river was startling, striking—in a word, beautiful.

At first it seemed too cold, but the cool weather turned out to be a pleasant relief for the workers. The fence builders' hard labor was definitely more easily done under the cool conditions. The building project was to pull the old barbed wire fences and replace them with posts close enough together to prevent cars from driving into the meadow. The finished product looks great! Old fence posts found nearby were used to maintain Hope Valley's rustic, historic look. Not only is the fence's appearance improved, it is safer, with the barbed wire eliminated from critical areas.

A watershed project was also completed. As we have done for over ten years, willows were planted along the West Fork of the Carson River. This on-going successful project is beginning to have a measurable effect on the river. The river banks once denuded of vegetation are now lined with willows, stabilizing river banks, preventing further channelization of the river, and reducing sediment accumulation.

A picnic lunch provided by the "Friends" was served on the bank of the Carson River, a beautiful setting for a cool spring day. A general membership meeting followed lunch.

Join us next spring for our yearly workday. Thank you to all for making our projects successful.





Friends of Hope Valley
PO Box 431
Markleeville, CA 96120

The Friends of Hope Valley want to thank you for your past support. We hope that you will continue your membership in this non-profit organization dedicated to the preservation of historic, recreational, and scenic values of Hope Valley and Sierra Nevada's eastern slope in Alpine County. Be sure to read our newsletter as we have addressed many important issues this year. With your help we can continue to address the sensitive environmental concerns of the Sierra.



Friends of Hope Valley 2007

_____ \$25 Friend _____ \$50 Sponsor _____ \$\$ other

Name (Print clearly) _____

Mailing Address _____

City, State, Zip _____

Phone (____) _____

E-mail _____

Please return this form and your check to:

Friends of Hope Valley, PO Box 431, Markleeville, CA 96120
