



# FRIENDS OF HOPE VALLEY

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# NEWSLETTER



## WINTER 2023

### Caltrans Proposes Message Signs on Scenic Highways

By Debbi Waldear



*A non-profit, grass roots organization dedicated to the preservation of the scenic, recreational and historic use of Hope Valley and other pristine places of Alpine County's eastern Sierra slope. Members share a deep affection for the unspoiled beauty of the Sierra eastern slope of Alpine County.*

*FOHV was formed in 1985 in response to a proposal to run a transmission line through Hope Valley. The group has been successful in their ongoing protection efforts, including preserving over 25,000 acres of open space in Hope Valley and eastern Alpine County.*

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**Caltrans (California Department of Transportation) is proposing \$26.2 million to install changeable message signs along the highway 88, 99 and 4 corridors.** A total of seven signs will be placed. Of most concern are the signs at Pickett's Junction in Hope Valley, bottom of Woodfords Canyon and one in the historical town of Markleeville. Other signs include one at Kirkwood, a sign further west highway 88 and one near Bear Valley on highway 4. All of these roads are Scenic Highways.



Friends of Hope Valley is opposed to the signs because there is no evident need for them and it's proven that very few drivers pay attention to the signs. The system is antiquated since most drivers use cell phones for updated information on road conditions. Caltrans claims the need is a safety issue but this is simply not true. The accident rate along these mountain roads is very low.

Hope Valley is one of the jewels of the Sierra. It is one of the few scenic meadows the public can easily access by car. Driving through this incredible alpine meadow has to be one of the most picturesque experiences in the state. Views of the surrounding mountains are breathtaking. In our view, large electronic signs would change the entire character of the valley. Any project of any size anywhere in

Hope Valley and along SR 88 could end in permanent damage to the unparalleled beauty and views of this area.

Caltrans findings of less than significant impacts are not accurate. An overhead message sign will permanently and negatively impact the scenic and recreational qualities of this unique high alpine wet meadow ecosystem and the surrounding peaks and vistas. Hope Valley is a California Department of Fish and Wildlife Area providing habitat for several threatened and endangered species, migrating deer and nesting birds. It's a pristine recreation area year-round.

The town of Markleeville's economy is almost 100% based on tourism outside of the government sector. A bright overhead message sign would permanently degrade the scenic quality of the town and does not fit in with the scale of the surrounding buildings, signage, and nature. People visit Markleeville for the small town feel and a Caltrans overhead message sign would destroy that.

Due to so much opposition to the project Caltrans is now in the process of re-evaluating the project. We do not know what this means or what to expect. Friends of Hope Valley has obtained a lawyer to help oppose this proposed project.

To view the complete proposal: Carson Transportation Management System Project  
(<https://dot.ca.gov/caltrans-near-me/district-10/district-10-current-projects/10-1g020>)



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## FOHV Updates

### Aspen Festival

On October 8 & 9, the Chamber of Commerce, in collaboration with the Friends of Hope Valley, Alpine Watershed Group, Alpine County and the Alpine Trails Assn. held the Aspen Festival, a celebration of the Eastern Sierras, recreation and environmental activities.

Two locations, County library area in Markleeville and Pickett's Junction in Hope Valley, set up tents to provide education and disseminate information. The library area served food and had live music. Pickett's Junction had an estimated 250 visitors. Visitors came from as far away as Texas and Arizona. Staff led multiple "color" and area historical tours. All in all, the event was deemed to be a complete success in promoting the splendor of Alpine County.

### Fish Barriers on the Carson River

Trout Unlimited, the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation and other management entities are working toward Lahontan cutthroat trout (LCT) recovery. Their efforts include an evaluation of the feasibility of placing a physical barrier on the East Fork Carson River to limit upstream passage by non-native fish. We are not in favor of this project. Our concern is the use of rotenone to kill off the non-native fish, it also kills invertebrates and amphibians. Treatment to kill off unwanted species would involve a huge network of streams, including Wolf Creek. The proposed project is still in the feasibility study phase, we will oppose it once the final study is out. The East Fork is also a designated Wild and Scenic River, building barriers not acceptable.

### Washoe Tribe Helps Preserve Sacred Rock in Hope Valley

The Scenic Highway '88 runs through Hope Valley and eastward down Woodfords Canyon. Hope Valley Campground is along the route. Recently a yurt was constructed high up on rock overlooking the canyon. It's in the view shed of the scenic highway and on top of a sacred native American site. The rock is also along the Emigrant trail route, it does have writings from the 1850's on the lower wall.

Despite it being a Scenic Highway, highway department was not interested in requesting the removal of the yurt. The Washoe Tribe took interest in preserving this sacred rock. In time the managers of the campground (Wylder Hotels) agreed to remove the yurt. It took a year of negotiations, the yurt has now been removed. Thanks to the Tribe and Wylder Hotels.



### Da-ek Dow Go-et Mountain

One of the prominent peaks of eastern Alpine County, a towering mountain off Blue Lakes Road in Hope Valley, has long been known as Jeff Davis Peak. The name was first recorded on a U.S.G.S. map in 1889, but was undoubtedly used for many years prior to that date.

The renaming process included the local Washoe tribe, a Native American tribe that originally lived around Lake Tahoe and many adjacent areas of the Great Basin east and south of the Lake. (The name "Washoe" derives from the Washoe word "waashiw" and means "people from here.") The southern band of the tribe (called

Hung-A-Lel-Ti) spent their summers in Hope Valley and the surrounding area. They continue to live in the Woodfords area of eastern Alpine County. Their suggestion for change was to use the name the Washoe tribe had always used: Da-ek Dow Go-et, meaning "saddle between points."

### Alpine Trails Association Projects

ATA has been very active in trail work to repair damage as a result of the Tamarack fire, falling trees and extensive erosion and ruts caused by flooding and water run off as a result of deforested hillsides. All trails created and refurbished since ATA inception (2012) were damaged to a greater or lesser degree. Thus, all trails require various levels of repair. Extensive measures have been, and will be, taken to improve trail stability. These efforts will enable trails to withstand harsher environmental conditions until vegetation has been replanted and/or regrown. Two trails have been repaired to a level that now allows hiker, biker and equestrian use. These are the 7.5 mile Thornburg Canyon Trail and the 1.25 mile Curtz Lake Trail. For Curtz, BLM is in the process of designing new interpretative signs. It is currently projected these signs will be available for installation in late spring of 2023.

Other activities include: 1) In conjunction with the Chamber of Commerce, Friends of Hope Valley and multiple governmental agencies, development of a county wide master trail plan that outlines outdoor recreational and destination locations. 2) Concerted efforts to increase donor based membership and volunteer workforce. 3) Development of a collaborative agreement with the Tahoe Climbing Coalition to create access points to various sites in Woodfords Canyon. 4) Development of a collaborative agreement with the Hung a Lel Ti community to construct a "Washoe Tribe Trail."

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## Aspen Enhancement

By Debbi Waldear

Since the beginning of the 20th Century, aggressive fire suppression and timber harvest activities have substantially altered forested landscapes, including the reduction of quaking aspens. There has been a 50 to 96 percent loss of aspen in the west. Although no wildlife species is totally dependent on habitats dominated by aspen, this cover type adds significantly to the richness of the wildlife in areas where it occurs.

Prior to European settlement, the natural fire regimes helped balance the abundance and distribution of tree species that occupied a specific area. Aspen stands are indicators of moist soil conditions. In northern California, a significant portion of aspen stands have been heavily encroached upon by lodgepole pine and other conifers, thus reducing the amount of water available and the ability for aspens to exist.

A fuels reduction, aspen and meadow restoration project has begun. The goal is to enhance and expand some existing aspen stands that are declining in size and vigor due to encroaching conifer trees that shade out and replace shade-intolerant aspen. The project will restore an ecosystem component that has diminished in size and vigor. Aspen enhancement includes removal of conifers up to 30" diameter at breast height from within aspen stands and for a distance around the aspen stand. This treatment will occur on approximately 349 acres.

Friends of Hope Valley has been a long time advocate of the re-establishment of aspen in Alpine County. We look forward to viewing the results.



## BDAs in Faith Valley Restoration Project

By Peter Lathrop

As a member of Friends of Hope Valley I had kept abreast of the plans and progress of the Faith Valley Restoration Project for many years. This project is headed by American Rivers, and Friends of Hope Valley (FOHV) is a partner. FOHV has been collecting our own data on all of the beaver dams on the West Carson River as well as all of its tributaries including this section. Based upon the conversations of that day and observations on many days afterwards FOHV was able to see how the plans were being put to practical purposes.

The key to the project in most of the area are Beaver Dam Analogs, BDAs. (Just in case, an analog is "something that is similar or comparable to something else". And yes, I had to look it up.) So, BDAs are artificial beaver dams, also flippantly referred to as PBDs, pseudo-beaver dams. The BDAs put in this year are made up of two rows of posts about sixteen inches apart. Willows have been weaved together between the two rows of posts with a skirt of willows and conifers extending downstream. This summer BDA's were

constructed through the middle reach of the river. The BDAs will extend farther upstream and onto some of the tributaries next summer. BDAs have been used in many other locations to good effect.

The purpose of the BDAs is to enhance the riparian and meadow environment. Natural beaver dams do the same thing by much of the same means. These barriers to the river's flow slow down the current causing the sediments to settle down on the bed of the stream. These alluvial deposits build up over time resulting in a higher stream level. This in turn raises the water table in the meadows increasing the growth of grasses and herbaceous plants, as well as willows and perhaps aspens. Thus during the summer and early fall a lush meadow or even marshy area would exist where previously there were browned-off sages and bare, dry dirt. This change will result in a greater variety and abundance of plants and therefore of wildlife. The BDAs tend to be much stronger than the natural dams partly due to small size of the willows the beaver have to work with. In addition the redundancy of these BDAs, three to seven rows have been built at each site, will prevent them from being washed out during the high spring run-off. This has happened to many of the beaver dams each year. If ecologically feasible perhaps the larger species of willow found in Hope Valley and/or aspens could be made available to the beavers here.

It is also planned that the beavers will use the artificial dams as foundations for their own dams. FOHV has observed the workings of a fairly healthy beaver population in Faith Valley since our observations started in autumn of 2014. It is possible that this summer's work has temporarily decreased the beaver's activities in the project area. Dams that were in use in this area may no longer be so. However this theory is based on our own observations and suppositions. These dams are still holding and creating large wetlands. Also a new dam was built within the project area this summer. Very recently the beaver's construction of large dams above and below the project area has increased significantly. The constructions of the BDAs may have adversely affected the beavers in the short term and just within the project site, in the long run they will not only positively affect the beavers but also the populations in this biome.

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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. With your help we can continue to address the sensitive environmental concerns of the eastern Sierra.

## FRIENDS OF HOPE VALLEY 2023

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