

Summary Report

Forest Plan Revision Public Workshop

Convened by:
U.S. Forest Service, Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit

December 1st, 2008
Incline Village, NV

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January 8, 2009

INTRODUCTION – WORKSHOP PURPOSE AND ORGANIZATION

This report summarizes the key outcomes from a public workshop convened by the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit (LTBMU) on December 1st, 2008. The workshop was held in north Lake Tahoe at Sierra Nevada College, Incline Village, Nevada.

Workshop Goals and Intended Outcomes

The goal of this workshop was to inform the revision of the Forest Plan. The primary objectives of the workshop were to:

- Invite public input on how to provide a suitable range of recreation opportunities in the Lake Tahoe Basin.
- Inform the public of future public participation opportunities in the Forest Plan revision process.

The workshop was designed to receive public input on: 1) how well the current mix of recreation opportunities meets the desired conditions for recreation in the Basin, 2) key challenges to maintaining an appropriate mix of recreation opportunities, and 3) key strategies the Forest Service should pursue to address these challenges.

LTBMU planning staff will consider the public input provided as they develop a Proposed Forest Plan.

Workshop Participation and Organization

Approximately 95 members of the public participated in this workshop. Participants represented a wide variety of interests, including local recreational users, members of organizations representing recreational user groups, conservation interest groups, local business representatives and planning agencies, state and federal agencies, and local residents and concerned citizens. The workshop was facilitated by Eric Poncelet and Briana Moseley of Kearns & West, Inc.

The workshop opened with self introductions of LTBMU staff. Next, the LTBMU Deputy Forest Supervisor, Eli Ilano, presented an overview of the Forest Plan Revision process to date. Bob King, the Forest Plan Revision Team Lead, followed with a presentation on current conditions and trends affecting recreation, key proposed desired conditions for recreation, and key proposed strategies to achieve the desired conditions for recreation in the Lake Tahoe Basin. Participants were provided an opportunity to ask clarifying questions after each presentation. In the second half of the workshop, participants were organized into five breakout groups, each containing 12-20 participants. Each breakout group was asked to provide comments on the current mix of recreation opportunities, challenges the Forest Service faces in providing an appropriate mix of recreation opportunities, and strategies the Forest Service can use to handle these challenges. Forest Service staff recorded participants' comments on flip charts. Each breakout group then reported back to the full group on key issues discussed. The workshop concluded with a recap of the Forest Plan Revision process and future opportunities to provide public input on the Forest Plan.

The December 1, 2008 workshop agenda and PowerPoint presentation can be found on the LTBMU website at <http://www.fs.fed.us/r5/ltbmu/forest-plan/>.

Note: This Summary Report represents our efforts to synthesize the input received by workshop participants during breakout group discussions. This report summarizes the public's input on key forest management and planning issues; it is not intended to serve as a transcript of all issues discussed or points made.

SUMMARY OF LTBMU STAFF PRESENTATIONS

LTBMU staff presented an overview of current conditions and trends affecting recreation in the Lake Tahoe Basin. Staff also presented a proposed *desired condition* and *strategy* for managing recreation opportunities in the Basin. This desired condition and strategy are under consideration for inclusion in the Forest Plan Revision:

Proposed desired condition for recreation management: To provide a suitable spectrum of high quality recreation opportunities while sustaining the Basin's natural setting as an outstanding recreation destination.

Proposed strategy for recreation management: To manage to a desired range of activities, settings and experiences across the Forest.

SUMMARY OF PUBLIC INPUT ON TOPIC OF MANAGING RECREATION OPPORTUNITIES

In the workshop breakout sessions, participants were asked to address the following three questions on the Forest Service's proposed approach to managing a mix of recreation opportunities:

1. Does the current mix of recreation opportunities on National Forest System lands around the Lake Tahoe Basin generally meet the proposed desired condition?
2. What challenges do you see in maintaining an appropriate mix of opportunities?
3. What strategies should the Forest Service consider to address these challenges?

The sections below recap the public input received at the workshop. The comments are organized under the following topic headings:

- Mix of Recreation Opportunities
- Recreation Challenges
- Recreation Strategies

Mix of Recreation Opportunities

Workshop breakout group participants were asked if the current mix of recreation opportunities on National Forest System lands around the Lake Tahoe Basin generally meet the desired condition described above. Participants offered the following input:

General input on the mix of recreation opportunities in the Basin

Participants varied in their views on the current mix of recreation opportunities in the Basin. Many expressed general support for the current mix. At the same time, others expressed concerns about the current mix. Some were concerned about increasing pressure on the recreational resources, and the risk of overuse and associated negative impacts on the ecosystem. Others expressed concern about challenges in managing the mix and difficulties caused by user conflicts. Still others believed the mix was now outdated or out of balance, given

current demographic and recreation trends. These participants advocated for a revised mix of recreational opportunities. Some wanted to increase the diversity of recreational opportunities and accommodate increased visitation. Others were more interested in limiting the recreation opportunities and improving environmental protection.

In general, many participants expressed an interest in achieving better or more diverse recreational opportunities in the Basin. Others stated that the Forest Service should not and cannot accommodate all recreation uses. There was broad support for forest planning to be a dynamic process that takes new recreation trends into account.

Comments on the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum Map

Several participants expressed concern that the Recreational Opportunity Spectrum Map is now out of date and in need of revision. Key comments included:

- The recreation use map and actual use patterns do not match.
- The recreation maps do not incorporate the information from the PowerPoint graphs presented or trends for the future.

Specific comments on achieving the proposed desired condition

Several participants commented specifically on whether the current mix of recreation opportunities can meet the proposed desired condition for the Forest Plan. Comments included:

- The desired condition is not being met because 75% of environmental standards are not attainable.
- An evaluation of the effects that climate change will have on suitable uses needs to be conducted.

Comments on the need for additional information to inform recreational management

Several participants stated that more information is needed to determine if the current mix of recreation opportunities in the Basin is on target. Key information requests included the following:

- Basin-wide data on the number of people using different recreation opportunities.
- Capacity and demand studies with regards to the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS).
- Developed recreation maintenance backlog.

Comments on motorized/non-motorized recreation opportunities

Workshop participants were engaged but split on the mix of motorized and non-motorized recreational opportunities. Participants generally recognized that the demand for both non-motorized and motorized recreation users has increased since the last Forest Plan was adopted in 1988. Some participants believed that the mix between motorized and non-motorized recreation was good. Others supported re-examining the proportions of non-motorized and motorized recreation opportunities. Some of these participants found the mix of recreation opportunities to be out of balance with too much emphasis on hikers and non-motorized users.

These participants offered comments such as:

- There are insufficient motorized use areas, and insufficient use of green sticker monies.

Others found the mix to overly favor motorized use. Comments along these lines included:

- The mix of recreation opportunities should shift to incorporate more environmentally “gentle” non-motorized recreation opportunities. Tahoe cannot be all things to all people.

- There are an insufficient number of quiet recreation areas, especially in the winter time (north of hwy 431).
- There are insufficient non-motorized areas for snowshoeing, quiet recreation, etc.

There was broad support that the current mix of recreation opportunities needs to address conflicts between motorized and non-motorized recreation opportunities.

Comments on mountain biking recreation opportunities

Several comments focused on the role of mountain biking in the mix of recreation opportunities.

Comments included:

- There is a need for more mountain biking opportunities to meet the current demand, especially in wilderness areas.
- The old Forest Plan had more equestrian recreation opportunities. Current trends for recreation use are more towards mountain biking. The mix of recreation opportunities should reflect this trend.
- The current mix of recreation opportunities needs to address the conflict between hikers and bicyclists. Enforcement is needed.

Comments on trail recreation opportunities

Participants also focused their comments on the mix of trail recreation opportunities. Key comments here included:

- There needs to be a better mix of trails for different users. The trails currently support a high density of visitors.
- There needs to be more recreation opportunities with trails.
- Trail networks need to be completed (e.g., bike trail linkages, connections to other trail efforts originating outside of the Tahoe Basin, water trail, etc.).

Comments on seasonal recreation opportunities

Finally, several participants commented on the need for additional seasonal recreation opportunities. Key comments included:

- More snow sport opportunities are needed because of crowding on peak weekends in both the backcountry and resorts.
- There is a need for additional activities in the off season to accommodate trends and increase in number of visitors (e.g., campground use).

Recreation Challenges

Workshop breakout group participants were asked to describe the *challenges* they see in maintaining an appropriate mix of recreation opportunities. Participants identified a number of key challenges here. These are listed under key categories below:

Challenges to managing mixed-use recreation. Challenges include:

- Maintaining quality recreation experiences while providing a variety of recreation opportunities.
- Accommodating many different recreation groups.
- Solving a variety of user-group conflicts.
- Addressing safety issues associated with mixed-use recreation.
- Maintaining trails and developed recreation opportunities.

Challenges to providing adequate access to recreation opportunities. Challenges include:

- Working with agencies that have jurisdiction over parking and snowplowing (e.g., CalTrans) to improve accessibility of recreation opportunities.
- Addressing limited parking access in the winter.
- Parking issues at Mt. Rose.
- Addressing trespassing issues (e.g. motorized intrusion into Mt. Rose Wilderness).

Challenges to managing the ecological impacts of recreation. Challenges include:

- Providing recreation opportunities and addressing environmental issues at the same time (e.g., water quality, wildlife, habitat issues). Participants noted that this issue is complicated by increased demand on resources due to climate change.
- Balancing traffic with ecological impacts.
- Monitoring ecological damage from snowmobile activity.
- Containing and controlling invasive mussels.

Challenges to managing and enforcing motorized recreation restrictions. Challenges include:

- Enforcing laws for motorized recreation.
- Enforcing motorized recreation uses, because of points of access. High Meadows was identified as a good example.

Funding challenges:

- Satisfying everyone's desires for recreation opportunities in the Basin, given budget limitations. Participants acknowledged that Forest Service funding for recreation programs is very low at all levels and that additional funding is needed for community and economic reinvestment.
- Gathering large amounts of public input given funding and time constraints.

Recreation Strategies

Workshop breakout group participants were invited to describe *strategies* the Forest Service should consider to address recreation management challenges. Participants identified a wide variety of possible strategies.

Some of these strategies were *overarching* in nature and apply to the LTBMU's general approach to recreation management. Key recommendations here included:

- Focus the LTBMU's approach on prevention. Prevent overuse rather than correct damage in unnatural ways.
- Address potential user conflicts and environmental damage stemming from overuse by dispersing recreation uses.
- Ensure that there is adequate data to support recreation planning and management decisions. Participants suggested conducting additional studies on carrying capacity, the environmental impact (demand on the land), and noise impacts of different recreation opportunities. An additional suggestion was to define each recreation area in terms of capacity limits to help determine which recreation uses are appropriate for a specific location.
- Ensure that fuels management and recreation management efforts are well coordinated within the Forest Service.
- Increase public involvement in recreation planning and management. One suggestion was to provide online surveys as an efficient way to gather public input.
- Design recreation opportunities to be in line with climate change trends. It was noted that, due to climate change, "shoulder periods" will be longer.

Most of the strategies identified at the workshop were more *specific* in nature. Participants offered strategies on the topics of: ensuring an improved mix of recreation opportunities, addressing recreation access issues, managing the ecological impacts of recreation, addressing motorized/non-motorized issues, coordinating with other agencies and building partnerships, improving enforcement, improving education, managing visitor expectations, and improving funding of recreation management. Key strategies identified for each of these topics are listed below.

Strategies for improving the *mix* of recreation opportunities

Workshop participants offered several suggestions for improving the current mix of recreational opportunities. Key comments included:

- Designate land for specific recreation uses by the type of recreation that a majority of users are currently participating in on that site.
- Tailor recreation opportunities of certain areas to trends in recreation use.
- Accommodate urban visitors with urban recreation opportunities.
- Provide a wider range of summer activities at ski resorts (winter resorts).
- Provide additional resort opportunity through the completion of the Round Hill Pines Future Use Determination.
- Promote and enhance recreation areas that are of lower demand.
- Provide fresh untracked, unpacked snow conditions for skiers.

Strategies to address recreation *access* issues

One of the most discussed approaches for improving the mix of recreational opportunities at the workshop was on the topic of access. Key strategies identified included:

- Separate user-group access areas, and separate temporal access for different user groups (e.g., summer versus winter access). For more on this topic, see the section on motorized and non-motorized recreation below. Note: a smaller number of participants recommended decreased segregation of recreation opportunities.
- Improve parking. Suggestions included:
 - Improve winter parking and access to the backcountry.
 - Work with CalTrans to improve clearing of snow.
 - Conduct seasonal analysis of parking and backcountry access.
 - Coordinate with other agencies to achieve better winter access.
 - Increase parking access for non-motorized recreation.
 - Improve parking in urban areas.
 - To address limited parking access in the winter, provide mass transit opportunities in the summer and winter months, coordinate with Blue Go shuttle system, and provide mass transit to Tallac.
- Use permitting to better management access. Suggestions included:
 - Increase permitting opportunities for winter recreation activities.
 - Provide broader access to Special Use Permits, specifically for the Tahoe Rim Trail.
- Address traffic issues. Suggestions included:
 - Provide shuttle busses and no parking areas, and reduce asphalt.
 - Participate more in transit; Persons At One Time (PAOT) to equal capacity targets maintained in plans.
- Increase access for urban visitors to rural/wild settings.
- Improve the trail system. Suggestions included:

- Maintain existing trails.
- Create more trail opportunities for dispersed use. Create shorter trails and loops. Create shorter hikes to access wilderness areas.
- Develop more trails in Wildland-Urban Interface for use in both the winter and summer (specifically Kings Beach area).
- Improve access to interior trail systems from the lake. Provide for dispersed camping opportunities from the lake (from the water trail).
- Address peak capacity through trail design.
- Improve lake access for the expanding kayak (and car-top boat) contingency. Include opportunities for camping in stretches of the lake where the private sector cannot provide overnight facilities due to public landownership patterns.

Strategies for managing the *ecological impacts* of recreation

Some workshop participants expressed the concern that recreation activities have a negative impact on the ecology of the Basin. These participants proposed the following strategies to avoid or mitigate for negative ecological impacts:

- Manage capacity to protect the environment and provide quality recreation experiences.
- Protect the environment first; then balance it with recreation uses.
- Create a carrying capacity for recreation in terms of environmental impacts.
- Identify sensitive resources and close off certain areas to recreation for protection.
- Improve monitoring to help evaluate changes to the environment due to recreation activities.
- Focus solutions for traffic congestion on ecological preservation, not on social experiments.
- Control invasive mussels; partner with other agencies to formalize points of access to the lake.

Strategies to address *motorized and non-motorized* recreation issues

Strategies to improve management of motorized and non-motorized recreation were of high interest in the workshop. Many of these strategies encouraged improved dispersal or increased separation of motorized and non-motorized recreation. Identified strategies on this topic included:

- Separate human powered and over snow vehicle (OSV) access points or staging areas to avoid user group conflicts.
 - Create a separation or buffer between motorized recreation use and Mt. Rose Wilderness. Current situation invites snowmobilers to enter wilderness.
- Build additional trails to provide opportunities for all of the recreation users in the Basin.
 - Increase mileage of OHV trails through fees – green sticker money needs to be utilized.
- Encourage motorized users to recreate outside of the Basin (e.g., near Truckee). Do not promote motorized recreation, such as snowmobiling, in the Basin.
- Prohibit motorized recreationists from using non-motorized recreation areas. Cross-country skiers and mountain bikers are seeing a trend of more motorized recreation use. This is negatively impacting their experience making them not want to recreate in these locations.
- Allow snowmobile use in more remote areas. This can help reduce noise and other conflicts.
 - Provide specific access areas (including small corridors) for snowmobiles to get to remote recreation destinations.

- Snowmobiles can travel long distances.
- Current off-highway vehicle (OHV) recreation opportunities are limited.

Some motorized/non-motorized recreation strategies recommended uses for specific geographic areas. Example comments included:

- Spooner to Kingsbury is appropriate for motorized recreation.
- Hwy 50 at Spooner Summit should be an access point for human powered recreation only.
- Mt. Rose is not appropriate for motorized recreation.
- Prohibit OSV use in Tahoe Meadows. Relocate this use elsewhere.
- Martis, Mt. Rose is a good area to showcase human powered recreation in the wintertime.

Other strategies on the topic of motorized/non-motorized recreation advocated for improved enforcement. Suggestions included:

- Improve monitoring and law enforcement of designated non-motorized/motorized recreation areas.
- Provide a clear definition of motorized and non-motorized recreation boundaries.
- Revise the recreation map to improve enforceability.

Still other motorized/non-motorized recreation strategies focused on ecological or noise impacts. Key suggestions included:

- Manage motorized recreation use by minimizing adverse ecological impacts and impacts on other users.
- Use electric OHVs as an alternative to traditional OHVs.
- Require mufflers on snowmobiles to limit decibels. Snowmobiles should be highly muffled in transit areas.

A few additional strategies were more general and included the following:

- Consider OSV use differently from OHV use.
- Focus efforts on the effects of recreation on the resources themselves (i.e., snowmobiles leaving ruts).

Strategies for *coordinating* with other agencies and *building partnerships*

Workshop participants offered several strategies to improve overall Forest Service coordination and collaboration. Key suggestions for improved coordination with other agencies included:

- Ensure that the LTBMU's forest planning occurs in conjunction with other surrounding Forests.
- Comply with the visions of other management and planning agencies.
- Strengthen relationships with other stewardship organizations.
- Cooperate with agencies to maintain joint facilities to create seamless recreation opportunities.
- Look for potential for landownership adjustments for management efficiencies with other public agencies with like missions. Explore swaps of landownership with public agencies to gain economies of scale.
- Attain bi-state compact and threshold standards. Some participants pointed out that these standards are currently not being met.

Suggestions for partnership-building included:

- Establish public-public partnerships for construction and maintenance of joint facilities to best “leverage” public investment and provide seamless recreation opportunities.
- Use public/private partnerships to maintain trails and developed recreation opportunities.
- Create partnerships with outfitters and guides to provide additional presence in the backcountry.
- Work with both organized and unorganized groups to help with recreation projects.

Strategies for improved *enforcement*

Many workshop participants advocated for additional enforcement of Forest Service regulations. Some suggested that a greater presence of the Forest Service staff, volunteers, and guides is needed in the Basin. Others believed that the number of recreation users should be limited in the Basin. Participants offered the following strategies to address enforcement challenges:

- Provide more law enforcement and signage.
- Recruit volunteers within user-groups to police themselves. It is easier to get compliance from within a group. McKinney–Rubicon was discussed as a good example.
- Place more emphasis on boundaries of specific recreation uses. Improve posting of boundaries, maps, regulations, and other informational materials.
- Increase the number of outfitters and guides in the backcountry to improve communication and monitoring of activities.

Strategies for improved *education* of recreational opportunities

Many workshop participants advocated that additional information be provided to educate recreation users about the spectrum of recreation opportunities in the basin, winter versus summer recreation opportunities, appropriate conduct in mixed-use recreation areas, appropriate uses of recreation resources and boundaries, and Forest Service regulations. Participants offered the following specific strategies to address education challenges:

- Provide better signage, education, and orientation at bottleneck access areas to inform recreation users of Forest Service rules.
 - Provide comment forms at access areas.
 - Provide visitor information at trail entry points.
- Provide outreach and education of Forest Service regulations to shops selling snowmobiling equipment. Law enforcement is not the answer.
- Better advertise existing Forest Service information centers, or provide new or additional information centers.
- Provide more information about winter recreation opportunities at Forest Service information centers during non-winter months.
- Provide more education on multi-use areas and how to co-exist in a mixed recreation use setting.
- Provide an “ambassador program” for all types of recreation users.
- Provide outreach to the Latino community by providing signage.
- Increase educational opportunities on forest sustainability, Leave No Trace (LNT), and guiding permits.

Strategies for *managing visitor expectations*

Some participants focused on managing visitor expectations as a key approach to recreation management. Specific strategies here included:

- Inform visitors of high use destinations, dates, and times of day. This will create realistic expectations and satisfaction with the recreation experience that visitors are going to have.
- Complete the network of visitor information stations at entry points to the basin and areas of concentrated use in order to get information out to inform visitors' expectations.
 - Provide information so that people understand how to get the solitude they want at Inspiration Point by including information about more than just the site's availability. Inform visitors that Inspiration Point will be packed between 11 AM and 4 PM on summer weekends and that, if they want solitude, going there for a picnic breakfast instead of a picnic lunch is a good idea.

Funding Strategies

Finally, several participants acknowledged the link between recreation management and funding availability and discussed strategies that addressed this issue. Key suggestions included:

- Develop additional recreation funding sources.
- Consider cost-share opportunities.
- Install kiosks at Emerald Bay and charge people that take pictures. Implement under the Recreation Enhancement Act (REA).
- Allocate less money to recreation and more money to fuels management.

NEXT STEPS IN THE FOREST PLANNING PROCESS

LTBMU staff outlined the following key next steps in the Forest Plan revision process:

1. LTBMU staff will use the outcomes of the November 3rd, November 12th, and December 1st, 2008 public workshop to inform the development of a "Proposed Forest Plan."
2. LTBMU staff is aiming to complete preparation of a Proposed Forest Plan for public review in the spring of 2009. At that point, there will be a formal 90-day comment period for the public to review and comment on the entire Plan, as stipulated in the 2008 Planning Rule.
3. LTBMU staff will incorporate and address public comments received on the Proposed Forest Plan into a pre-decisional Forest Plan, which is expected to be released in late summer 2009. At that point, members of the public who have commented previously and are not satisfied with the revisions to the Proposed Forest Plan will have a 30-day period to file formal "objections" for consideration by the Regional Forester for the Pacific Southwest Region.