

Forest Service creating blueprint for Tahoe's future

By Kathryn Reed

Creating a working document with a bit of elasticity is the goal of the Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit. With the current Forest Plan dating to 1988 and its roughly dozen amendments since then, the local Forest Service office is looking to create a new bible of sorts from which to seek guidance.

About 20 people gathered at the Forest Service office in South Lake Tahoe on Tuesday night for two hours to offer their feedback and input. The main topics were:

- Watershed and aquatic habitat;
- Forest health/terrestrial habitat;
- Recreation.



Forest Service
personnel
listen to the
public May 11
in South Lake.
Photo/Kathryn
Reed

Recreation is always a popular topic because so many people move to Tahoe to play in the 155,000 acres in the Lake Tahoe

Basin that the Forest Service manages.

The irony is that as local tourism officials change their mantra from gaming to the outdoors, more stresses will be put on an already overused system. LTBMU is one of the heaviest used forests in the country on a per acre/per capita basis.

What more people will mean to an ecosystem that is already taxed and to an agency that is hard up for money to manage its resources remains to be seen.

Eli Llano, assistant forest supervisor, said the current plan is not entirely outdated and therefore his agency is not starting from scratch. He said that nationally all forests are looking at climate change, aquatic invasive species and incorporating new science into their respective plans. These concerns were not part of the 1988 plan.

The idea behind developing a flexible plan is that when changes need to occur it will be easier to do so instead of going through the formal, more cumbersome amendment process.

In the current plan the emphasis is on expanding recreation opportunities in the basin. The focus going forward is maintenance, especially with a \$25 million backlog of projects needing to be done to keep the facilities functioning.

However, not all expansion ideas are off the table. Under consideration is allowing ski resorts to offer more to the public outside the traditional ski months.

The need for separation of user groups is high on the list of the public's concerns. People want mountain bikers on trails not used by hikers. Moving snowmobilers someplace else is also a common refrain. Promoting the use of the water trail was also talked about.

Much of the plan is integrated and not isolated. For example, watershed and recreation are tied together when authorities

look at removing recreation sites from stream environmental zones.

It's issues like these the Forest Service will wrestle with as the Forest Plan is created.

As the people in attendance Tuesday broke into three groups, Forest Service personnel wrote down the public's wish lists.

"Relocate trails from meadows" and "make sure recreation doesn't interfere with biodiversity" and "increase the amount of fuel reduction" and "restore fire to the landscape for fuel reduction, vegetation conditions, ecological health" were some of the comments.

The LTBMU Forest Plan revision has been in the works for years. Initially an environmental impact statement was not going to be done. However, a court ruling in 2008 changed that course of action. The draft EIS is expected to be released this fall, with a 90-day comment period to follow.

The EIS will have the option of doing nothing, a preferred alternative and several other alternatives. The exact number of other alternatives to be studied has not been determined.

USFS officials anticipate another public hearing to air concerns during the comment period. Responses to comments will then be put together, with the final EIS released in summer 2011. People will have 45 days to appeal it. It will be up to the regional forester in Vallejo to sign off on the framework.

Another meeting on the plan will be tonight from 5-7 at the North Lake Tahoe Conference Center in Kings Beach.