

Digging for Washoe artifacts delays Sawmill bike path

By Kathryn Reed

Cultural resources belonging to the Washoe Indians have delayed construction of the extension of the Sawmill Bike Trail for at least one year.

The Washoe summered in Lake Tahoe and fished in the Upper Truckee River. Their presence is throughout the South Shore.



Completion of the Sawmill Bike Trail is at least two years away. Photos/Kathryn Reed

El Dorado County officials, the ones behind the trail project, are involving the Washoe in every step. They have met at the site and other places to ensure everyone's interests are addressed.

The people that make the rules don't seem to care this area has been disturbed for years, that cars drive on it every day and snowplows regularly traverse it.

Nor do the feds care the soil is compacted and much of the

area covered in asphalt. Cultural deposits will be sought about 1-foot deep.

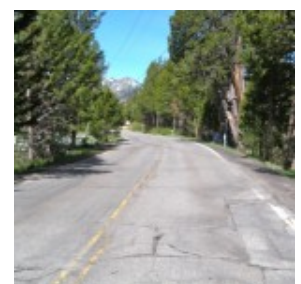
In the odd way projects get funding, not every holder of the checkbook would have required the level of research currently being undertaken. Because it's federal dollars funding the bulk of the project the National Environmental Policy Act must be followed. This means looking for sensitive cultural resources.

Completion of the NEPA study is also required to obtain some of the rights-of-way. Easements from California State Parks, California Tahoe Conservancy, U.S. Forest Service and private landowners will need to be secured.

"We hope to have a draft work plan to Caltrans (this) week. Then we can conduct the field work," said Brendan Ferry, senior planner with the county's Department of Transportation. "If something is found, it's a whole other story. If there's a burial ground, it's a major issue. Hopefully, nothing is found."

If California's financial situation weren't so bleak, the California Tahoe Conservancy would have paid for the two miles of trail. But the CTC's cash flow is at a trickle and had to give up on this project.

The county is getting Federal Highway Administration money that is being passed through to Caltrans and then to the county. Caltrans is pulling cash from its Congestion Mitigation for Air Quality fund.



Cyclists
currently must
share the
shoulderless
Sawmill Road
with cars.

The project, which was supposed to be done this summer, could start next summer. It will be broken into two phases. The first will go from Lake Tahoe Boulevard to Echo View Estates. The second goes from Echo View to Highway 50 to connect with the bike trail bridge that was completed last summer.

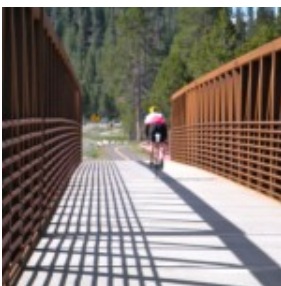
“We really want to get this project built for the community. It will be nice when we can link Meyers to the Y,” Ferry said.

The project could cost close to \$3 million.

Connecting the Class 1 trail to the bridge will be an engineering feat because of the wetlands in the area and the stilt house on the corner of Sawmill Road and Highway 50.

“We will need to build a retaining wall. We can do it, but it will be expensive,” Ferry said.

He said at one time the CTC was looking at buying the corner lot. That would have made securing easements easier and possibly allowed for a different design.



A road bike
rider turned
from Sawmill

Road onto the
bridge headed
toward Meyers.

“It is 8-foot-wide with shoulders, fences, drainage, culverts, rock-lined channels. The design is fairly detailed. We have the design basically done,” Ferry said. “We were ready to build it this year. We are just running into paperwork issues.”

Ferry said by late August or early September a decision should be made about starting the trail in summer 2011.