

Vandals have CTC rethinking Upper Truckee Marsh access

By Kathryn Reed

Walking down Lily Avenue, the couple is asked if they know the entrance they are headed to is private and they aren't supposed to use it.

They both look quizzical and say no signs are up saying as much.

They continue on, saying the trek on this late Wednesday afternoon to the Upper Truckee Marsh is the second time they've accessed the property this way.



Vandals have created an opening in the gate at the end of Lily Avenue.

Photos/Kathryn Reed

If the California Tahoe Conservancy has its way, it will be the last time they do. A new gate was supposed to go up June 23. Signs are coming to explain to people on both sides of the iron fence that the public access point is two blocks down at San Francisco Street.

Though it would seem like a natural gateway to this South Lake Tahoe outdoor splendor that leads to the meadow and Lake Tahoe, the CTC has its hands tied. When it acquired the property it was deed restricted to prevent the public from accessing the parcel from Lily.

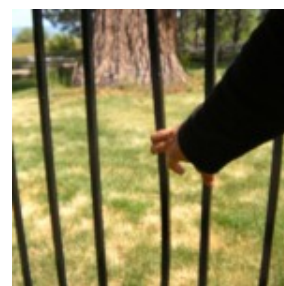
This entrance is for administrative access only – CTC crews, Clean Tahoe, law enforcement and animal control. It's the closest entrance to the beach.

Vandalism has become the big problem – to public and private property – as well as safety and trespassing concerns.

The slats of the gate keep being bent so people can crawl through. Vandals have tried to pry the posts of the resident who lives next to the CTC property. A couple years ago a house was tagged with graffiti. Users have created a visible trail through a private lot that owners and CTC try to cover over at times.

“One thing people don't really get is the right of access doesn't come without responsibility,” said Dana Dapolito, CTC associate environmental planner.

Yes, it's public land on both sides – the street belonging to South Lake Tahoe and Conservancy on the other side. As with any public parcel, there are rules to abide by. Vandalism and trespassing issues will not be tolerated.



Slats on a private fence have been

marred.

Dapolito said CTC crews are regularly repairing the fence.

“In times of severe fiscal constraints, this is not the best use of money,” Dapolito said. She did not have a dollar figure for how much money the CTC has spent on fixing the problem at this area or the personnel hours involved.

The City Council on Tuesday approved another contract for the police department to patrol this area. A no tolerance policy has been established.

Parking on Lily is no longer a problem because the city put up signs a few years ago banning parking on the street. People walk in, though.

Dapolito said a sense of lawlessness can pervade the area. The calm, tranquil meadow with its myriad calls of wildlife and lapping shore give way to parties, illegal fires and loud music. It’s party central.

The CTC is conducting a study today to count how many cigarette butts litter the beach. Blue flags will be inserted into the sand to signify where a butt was plucked from.



The entrance to the Upper Truckee Marsh off San Francisco Street is

welcoming and
well marked.

One only need look at the scar on Heavenly to know what an errant cigarette can do. And one only need remember to three years ago today when an illegal campfire became the Angora Fire in 2007 and destroyed 254 homes.

The CTC is going to clamp down on smokers. It's a form of fire and no fires are allowed on its property anywhere in the basin.

With Fourth of July weekend a week away, policies will be enforced even more. Signs are posted at legal entrance points as well as on the beach about what is not permitted.

The Conservancy wants to keep allowing the public on these public lands, but it wants the rules adhered to ensure the natural state remains protected and people are safe as well. Without cooperation from users, one day the whole Upper Truckee Marsh could be off-limits.