

Friends of Hope Valley sue for access to land

To the community,

A lawsuit has been filed in the United States District Court for the Eastern District of California on behalf of the Friends of Hope Valley in an effort to reassert the public's right to access Pleasant Valley in Alpine County. Past trail users are being sought to appear as witnesses in the case against private landowners who closed access to the Pleasant Valley trails in 1999.

Pleasant Valley is a beautiful meadow south of Lake Tahoe that for more than 100 years had served as a primary access point into Alpine County's high country, including the Pacific Crest Trail and the Mokelumne Wilderness Area. Access to Pleasant Valley was gated shut in 1999 by the Dressler family, private land owners who no longer wished to have hikers, anglers, and other recreationalists cross their land in order to reach the federal public lands beyond.

In the years that followed, Friends of Hope Valley worked to persuade the Dresslers to voluntarily reopen access to the Pleasant Valley trails for public use, but despite years of attempts to find a resolution, this gateway to public lands remains closed. With no other corrective recourse available, the FOHV has engaged San Francisco law firms Shute, Mihaly & Weinberger LLP and Kerr & Wagstaffe LLP and has filed a lawsuit to reopen the trail.

Says Matthew Zinn of Shute, Mihaly and Weinberger, "This case represents a clear violation of the public's right to have access to trails where there is a long history of use by the public."

The public's right to access public trails, even where they

pass through otherwise private land, is firmly established in California state law. Any land in California that was open to public access for five continuous years before 1972 cannot lawfully be closed to public access. There is ample evidence demonstrating many decades of public use of the trails, according to the Friends of Hope Valley.

“We know fisherman, hikers and native Americans have used this private property access corridor for over one hundred years to reach the high country, including the Pacific Crest Trail and the Mokelumne Wilderness Area,” says Debbi Waldear, board member and president of Friends of Hope Valley. “We are calling on the area’s residents and visitors to come forward and tell us about their Pleasant Valley trail use prior to the 1980s so the public can once again enjoy this area.”

Community members who used the Pleasant Valley trails at any time before the 1980s are asked to contact Friends of Hope Valley by emailing info@hopevalleyca.com or to call FOHV’s lawyer, Matthew Zinn of Shute, Mihaly and Weinberger LLP, at (415) 552.7272 as soon as possible. Potential witnesses will be interviewed by FOHV’s legal team, possibly deposed by the defendant’s lawyers, and may be asked to testify in court in Sacramento. The deadline to discover witnesses is approaching and is essential to building the case for the trail’s historic use.

For more information about the Friends of Hope Valley lawsuit, [click here](#).

Severn Williams, Friends of Hope Valley