

Upper Truckee River set to meander more naturally

By Kathryn Reed

In many ways, the segment of Upper Truckee River behind Lake Tahoe Airport looks anything but natural.

Guys are out there with what looks like a fire hose watering vegetation. Black berms filled with water are close by. Pumps are draining what will be the new channel.



Scott Carroll talks about the new river channel behind him.

Photo/Kathryn Reed

It has the look and feel of a construction zone because it is one.

It was two years ago this month the California Tahoe Conservancy board took a field trip to this location for the ground breaking of the multi-million dollar project that will re-route the river to its more natural curves and bends. The board re-visited the site as part of this month's meeting.

"By creating meanders, we create diversity. We will rebuild a

whole food web,” explained Scott Carroll, the CTC staff member who led the tour.

Diversity comes in the depth of the channel, the plant species as well as wildlife.

A channel was dug closer to the airport, but not far from the current flow to mimic what the river would have looked like before it was straightened out years ago for ranchers’ needs.

In a matter of days officials are expected to make a decision as to whether the vegetation has taken root enough to start using the new channel.

“This vegetation is like rebar in a concrete building. It’s what will hold the bank,” Jennifer Taylor, assistant engineer with South Lake Tahoe, said.

Planning for the project cost \$1.4 million, with construction coming in at \$6.6 million.

Two concrete fish barriers farther upstream were removed.

Carroll said this type of project is designed to be sustainable so maintenance is not needed in the future.