

Mountain bike advocates work on cohesiveness

By Dana Turvey

STATELINE – Trail builders, trail users and landowner gathered for three days to talk all things mountain bike related.

“IMBA is a good, knowledgeable organization specific to mountain bike trail building,” attendee Dave Clock said. “People don’t understand the hoops you have to jump through to build trails. The Forest Service as an entity has come to IMBA asking for help ... they aren’t being hard-nosed, saying we have to do things this way or that. The Forest Service is saying ‘help us to know what you want.’ It’s been extremely productive.”

Clock is an example of the 90-plus who signed up for Oct. 1-3 conference. A former bike shop owner, he’s now lead bike mechanic for Tahoe Sports Ltd. in South Lake Tahoe.



The Flume Trail above Sand Harbor is a popular mountain bike trail.

Many familiar faces rounded out the meeting room, from shop workers to trail volunteers and a blend of cycling enthusiasts

of all skill levels.

“This is a unique opportunity for riders to have their voices heard on the type of trails they want in the Tahoe region,” Tom Ward, IMBA’s California policy advisor, said of the event. “The Forest Service is ready to unveil their plans for managing Lake Tahoe over the next 10 to 15 years, so this is a key moment for mountain bikers to prepare our best speaking points for the public commentary period. Decision-makers in the Forest Service will be on hand at this event, and it’s IMBA’s goal to prepare both sides to work together in the months ahead.”

The International Mountain Bike Association and U.S. Forest Service hosted this first Tahoe regional mountain bike conference. While the Boulder-based bike advocates attend worldwide conferences every two years, the Tahoe meetings stood as a prototype of what IMBA hopes to provide to other regions across the nation.

The three-day conference at MontBleu used a series of seminars to share information directly between the mountain bike community of Lake Tahoe to the U.S. Forest Service.

Topics included Mountain Biking at Summer Resorts, Building the Tahoe Bike Community and Trail Science, Design and Management.

One of the more popular conferences was a roundtable discussion titled Trails for Tahoe. Nine topics were listed on dryboards around the room; after splitting into small groups attendees spent a few minutes discussing each issue before listing pertinent solutions or feedback for each.

Topics and some of the shared input included:

- What should IMBA do to help the Lake Tahoe mountain bike community? Create an online community message board; develop a local IMBA club to specifically focus on Tahoe mountain biking

(currently there is not a Tahoe branch);

- What specific input should mountain bikers provide on USFS planning efforts? Volunteer hours can help with grant funding; explain the type of trails and experience we want, both front-country and back-country;
- What types of trail/riding experiences are desired? Develop more beginner and advanced trails (it was agreed there are ample for intermediates); add signage with trail descriptions; connectivity of trail system; use natural terrain features on advanced terrain;
- What role can local bike shops play? Share information about successful and new trail work; influence where people ride; promote trail work days for volunteers.

A seminar on the final day called Community Bike Parks focused on the viability and popularity of mountain bike parks within a Parks and Recreation structure.

Ty Polastri of the Lake Tahoe Bike Coalition reported, "This idea of a bike park within the community is something I presented to the [South Lake Tahoe] City Council for Bijou Park. This seminar brought it down to two ideas: first, we need to organize a group of people to present the idea formally and second, it needs to be accompanied by a feasibility study generated by people like us. These can run from \$5,000 to \$10,000 and there are companies who create professional feasibility reports, like (seminar leaders) Hillride Progression Development Group.

"With this whole Trails Conference, where we're headed is toward the hope of the local bike shops and the local volunteer groups and the local riders coming together in a cohesive way to work with the city, with the Forest Service and with the other entities to have a bigger voice than just mine, so the agencies will respond."

Echoing the sentiment was Max Jones from Spooner Lake Outdoor Co., at the base of Tahoe's famous Flume Trail.

He said, "We all have to work together ... local bike shops could promote the variety of trails as they get built. Then we get people back over and over. Why does a downhill ski resort have 150 runs? Well, because tomorrow when that guest comes back, they want to ski on that one now. Here, the Forest Service is asking for our help. If the mountain bike community, if the trail building fringe doesn't step up to this opportunity, then we are lost. I'll say it that strongly."

Polastri concluded, "The Forest Service has reached out to us, which is huge. They are responding to all the illegal trails that are being built, which use USFS resources to repair or remove them and also, they need to build a volunteer base. They have had trail workdays and had no volunteers show up.

"Overall, this conference has brought together the various groups – the bike shops are here, the Rim Trail is here, the Bike Coalition, TRPA, trail builders and passionate riders are all here. It's the first time all these entities have gotten together and I feel energetically that they can come together to make the steps we need for our bike community."

For those interested, the next USFS trail workday is Oct. 9 from 9am to 1pm. Volunteers should meet at the first gate of the Corral Loop at Oneidas Road in South Lake Tahoe. Call (530) 543.2694 for more information.