

Upper Truckee Marsh to temporarily ban dogs

By Kathryn Reed

“No dogs allowed” signs will soon be erected at the entrances of the Upper Truckee Marsh.

With 10 years of data recorded since the California Tahoe Conservancy bought the South Shore property for \$10 million, the conclusion is wildlife and their habitat are not being protected.

This is because dogs are running off-leash. Only about 70 percent of people walking in the area leash their dogs, according to Dana Dapolito, CTC associate environmental planner.



Upper Truckee Marsh will be dog-free for three months starting May 1. Photo/LTN May 2010

Because this site was acquired to enhance habitat, degrading it does not meet the standards for which it was purchased.

The closure of the 311-acre marsh/meadow to dogs will be from

May 1 to July 31. This map details the area. People will still be able to access the area.

“This is not routine. It’s a reflection of the extraordinary value of this habitat,” CTC Deputy Director Ray Lacey told *Lake Tahoe News*. “We saw birds chased downed and eaten. It’s a little dangerous when you are in the business of resource protection and you let it go too far.”

The decision to ban dogs was first reported by *Lake Tahoe News* in July 2010 after the board made the decision.

Letters will be mailed next week to residents bordering the marsh in South Lake Tahoe to let them know about the closure and the reasoning behind it. CTC staff knows the three-month dog ban will not be popular. But they also said it may not be permanent.

Dapolito said, “If after the closure we see a significant increase in the leashes, we could bring to the board a recommendation during breeding season to allow dogs on leash.”

The time period of the ban is because this is when the birds are breeding. Dogs roaming free – which is never legally allowed – are not only attacking birds, but are also disturbing nesting areas. On top of that, some of the migratory birds going from one end of the earth to the other may not make it to their final destination if their energies are used up in Tahoe flying away from canines, CTC officials said.

This is not just any marsh. It is home to animals and plants not found elsewhere in Tahoe.

“It is the singular and most unique habitat in the Lake Tahoe Basin. That is why we singled this out of our 5,000 other properties,” Lacey explained.

The willow flycatcher – a songbird – was put on the federal

endangered species list in 1997.

“Habitat destruction and degradation plus overgrazing by livestock are the major causes of population decline,” according to the Audubon Society.

This area of Tahoe was once grazed. It is a meadow once the water leaves via Trout Creek into Lake Tahoe.

The yellow warbler and yellow-headed blackbird are on the state list of endangered species.

Asked what would happen if dogs were left to do as they please, CTC wildlife biologist Adam Lewandowski said, “Some species would adjust, but this is unique habitat. (Others) are rare or threatened because they are not adaptive and have specific habitat area. So this is one of the only areas where they can survive.”

Although the Conservancy is more worried about protecting the animals and their habitat, two plants in this area are also of concern. This acreage has the largest growth of Tahoe yellow cress and is home to the rare American mannagrass.

The Conservancy has enlisted the help of El Dorado County Animal Control and Sheriff’s Office to police the area. They will be enforcing South Lake Tahoe city ordinance 18A-11J.

The first offense will be a warning and removal of the animal from the property. The second and subsequent offenses will involve money, though the CTC staff didn’t know how much.

An alternative for people wanting to walk their dogs in a natural environment during the ban is across the meadow at Cove East – another CTC property.