

Public input changes USFS Fallen Leaf Lake plans

By Kathryn Reed

CAMP RICHARDSON – People are cycling and walking on what's commonly referred to as the Camp Rich bike trail. A red-tail hawk soars overhead. Fallen Leaf Lake is glassy, almost inviting to water ski on. An embankment at Taylor Creek along a user-created trail exposes tree roots. The bridge at the dam is accessible only to the able bodied and to those who get off their bikes.

The U.S. Forest Service has big plans for these 13,000 acres on the South Shore that encompass more than 40 miles of trails.



This section of Taylor Creek may no longer be an equestrian crossing.

Photos/Kathryn Reed

Based on comments received regarding the Fallen Leaf Lake Trail Access and Travel Management Proposal, changes are already in the works. Comments for this scoping segment of the project ended Jan. 13.

The 285-foot long dam/bridge at Fallen Leaf Lake-Taylor Creek needs to be replaced to accommodate modern day uses and meet current access standards.

“This was never intended for public access,” Garrett Villanueva, forest engineer with the Forest Service, said while standing on the bridge.

A significant portion of the nearly 50 comments received mentioned the federal agency’s idea to expand the bridge to accommodate equestrian use. And people didn’t favor the original idea.

Now the USFS is considering a 6-foot-wide bridge, which would meet its minimum requirements and likely better satisfy those who have said a bridge twice that wide would have changed the character of the area.

It’s about 3-feet-wide now. It was built in 1934 with Anita Baldwin’s money.

The concrete spillway would remain. No changes are slated for the dam. Just the bridge will be altered. A cut out is likely to be incorporated into the design so people could stop to look at the scenery without impeding the flow of people.

Equestrians currently cross Taylor Creek about one-third of a mile from the bridge. While this location is also a popular swimming area, especially for people from the Fallen Leaf Lake campground, it’s not where USFS officials want horses.

Looking at the tree roots exposed near the creek, Forest Service engineer Mike Gabor, says, “It’s not natural. It’s an indication of how much sediment is going in the creek.”

Bare soil is in abundance here.

“We are not trying to stop people from swimming, but how they get to and from there is the challenging part,” Gabor told *Lake Tahoe News*.

The plan is to move the equestrian crossing closer to the bridge.

Protecting resources and providing recreation are the two main reasons to create what is essentially a master plan for the area. While talk about doing much of what is proposed first started in the 1980s, a comprehensive plan never got off the ground.

With an average of 1,600 people using the paved bike trail at Camp Richardson during peak season, this area is among the most popular and heaviest used areas in the Lake Tahoe Basin. It is also part of the National Trail System.

The paved area would be brought up to AASHTO (American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials) standards – so 10-feet wide, shoulders 2-feet wide, and a grade of no more than 5 percent.

Many of the trails on both sides of Highway 89 were user created – not ones developed or maintained by the Forest Service. These types of trails have been created since the beginning of time, and even more recently by people with the last names of Gilmore, Price and Baldwin.

The problem is trampling on so much land compromises vegetation and habitat. It's also a safety concern because land managers may not travel those routes and therefore not find someone who is injured.

Some people, though, are concerned the trail closest to the creek by the bridge will be removed. With the embankment eroding, Forest Service trail gurus say it has to go or at least be moved back.

Another concern is a heavily used trail traverses two private parcels at the far end of Fallen Leaf Lake. Those are Forest Service managed trails that have existed for 100 years. But without permission by the owners, which has not been granted

yet, those routes could be off limits.

More information about the proposed project, including maps, is online.

A public workshop will be conducted in the next few months. The public will be able to comment again when the draft environmental assessment comes out, which is likely to be late spring/early summer.

The Camp Richardson project ties into the Fallen Leaf Lake plans. The environmental assessment is done, with comments regarding Jameson Road still being worked on. A written finding on that project could be released in a matter of weeks.

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