

Cold Creek reroute in High Meadow turns back the clock

By Kathryn Reed

Disturbances are still visible, but High Meadow no longer looks like the construction site it has for the past two summers.

Instead, the meadow is a verdant green that if on this particular Sunday weren't so chilly, would be inviting to lounge in. It looks ideal for Frisbee. On a hot summer day the creek would beckon to soak ones feet in after the arduous climb. The meadow is at 7,843 feet – a 1,500-foot elevation gain from lake level.

Looming to the left is Monument Peak at 10,067 feet. This is the mountain on the boundary of Heavenly Mountain Resort.



Cold Creek reroute through High Meadow will be done in October. Photo/Kathryn Reed

Looking toward the route for Star Lake are the well-known South Shore icons Jobs, Jobs Sister and Freel peaks. Pockets of snow dot the mountains almost like icing.

At the edge of the meadow is a creek – the realigned portion

of Cold Creek. Barely a trickle of water is flowing.

Part of the reason why the meadow is such a lush green in June is because it's getting a little help beyond what Mother Nature has done.

"The sprinklers we set up to irrigate the constructed channel to help the vegetation along since we've had such a dry spring," explained Stephanie Heller, hydrologist with the Forest Service. "We'll be introducing flow into the constructed channel in mid-July, after that the irrigation will no longer be needed because we expect groundwater levels to come up very quickly."

Two years ago the U.S. Forest Service began a major project to reroute Cold Creek to its natural meander. By Oct. 15 it's expected to be completed.

"We still need to construct the channel and a grade control weir at the downstream end of the project, construct connections of the constructed channels to the existing streams, fill the existing Mainstem channel, and construct in-channel log structures on the East Fork tributary of Cold Creek," Heller told *Lake Tahoe News*.

The final touches will include decommissioning all temporary roads and staging areas associated with the project. Water is still flowing through the old channel.

A towering mound of dirt and piles of logs that look big enough to build a cabin make the entrance to the meadow seem less than idyllic. That's all part of the restoration project. The dirt came from the first year of the project. It will be used to fill in the old channel, according to Heller.

"The logs will be used for a variety of different purposes when we complete construction. For example, logs will be incorporated into the grade control weir at the bottom of the project, logs will be placed in the backfill of the existing

Mainstem and in floodplain areas to break up flow paths and created habitat complexity, and logs will be used to construct in-stream debris jam structures in the East Fork Tributary," Heller said.

Eighty of the 280 acres of this Sierra meadow have been restored.

The \$2 million restoration is being paid for with money from the Southern Nevada Public Land Management Act.

The goal of the project is to have Cold Creek meander like it did before cattle grazed in the meadow, willows will sprout from the bank, the dead beetle-infested lodgepoles will be hauled away, and wildlife will return to the area.