

Tahoe National Forest about to be a wonderland of fall color

Fall is an exceptionally pretty time to explore the Tahoe National Forest. Warm days and crisp, cold nights make forest outings especially enjoyable.

At the lower elevations (2,500–4,000 feet), autumn colors are at their best in mid-October through early November, while in the higher elevations (4,000–9,000 feet), colors peak from early to mid-October.

Although most trails are open year-round, many of the campgrounds will begin to shut down in preparation for winter weather. Some campgrounds, however, can be used (without services) all year. Also, campfire restrictions are still in effect limiting campfires to developed recreation sites. These will stay in effect until there is significant rain or an increase in humidity levels.

Scenic drives:

Highway 49 – A beautiful drive along Highway 49 from Nevada City through Downieville to Sierra City features big leaf maple, oak, locust and dogwood foliage. As you wind through the North Yuba River canyon, dogwoods and oak trees start to change colors in early October. The colors are often reflected in the river, doubling the intensity of color.

Campgrounds along Highway 49 will be open through the weekend of Oct. 27 except for those in higher elevations which may close sooner.

Campgrounds at Bullards Bar Reservoir will close Oct. 15.

Gold Lake Road – In the Sierra Buttes vicinity, color peaks in

early to mid October with the yellow and gold of aspen and maple trees in this beautiful alpine area. Views of and from the Sierra Buttes are outstanding.

Campgrounds in the Sierra Buttes area are open through Oct. 27.

Highway 89 – Fall colors extend from late September though the month of October. The drive along Highway 89 from Lake Tahoe through Truckee and on to Sierraville is especially picturesque with aspens, willows and cottonwoods painting the landscape with brilliant yellows. Expanding the drive from Sierraville west via Highway 49 up to Yuba Pass provides spectacular views of the Sierra Valley. The drive from Highway 89 through Kybuz Flat and Sardine Valley is also especially nice with grasses, willows, cottonwoods, and aspens.

East of Highway 89 and north of Boca Reservoir, cottonwoods, aspen, and willows follow the Little Truckee River.

Campgrounds along Highway 89 and northeast of Truckee are open until early October to late October, depending on conditions. Contact the district office for more information.

Highway 267 – From Truckee south toward Lake Tahoe through Martis Valley, the gold and browns of willows and grasses contrast with the deep green of the pines.

Highway 20 – East of Nevada City, the landscape comes alive with crimson hues of dogwood and bright yellows of the big leaf maples. Bear Valley is especially pretty as the grasses, willows and cottonwoods turn gold.

Campgrounds along Highway 20 will close Oct. 1. Campgrounds in the Bowman Lake/Grouse Lakes area close when access is eliminated due to snow.

Mosquito Ridge Road – Mid-September to mid-October is a great time to drive Mosquito Ridge Road, east of Foresthill, which

passes through beautiful canyons and forests of oaks, maples, dogwoods, and evergreens providing an array of fall colors. A cautionary sign reduces the road to one lane for a short distance where a slide damaged the road. The Big Trees Picnic Area is an excellent stop to view the northernmost stand of Giant Sequoia interspersed with the ruby red of the dogwoods. Mosquito Ridge Road also leads to French Meadows Reservoir and the Granite Chief Wilderness where fall color can be outstanding.

Campgrounds on the American River Ranger District – The group sites are all currently closed. Regular campgrounds will close between Sept. 30-Oct. 21.

Old Highway 40 and I-80 – Another scenic drive follows old Highway 40, parallel to Interstate 80 along the rocky South Yuba River lined with aspens and cottonwoods. When the leaves turn, the vibrant yellows and golds are duplicated in the reflections of the river. These colors are usually best in early to mid-October.

Campgrounds along I-80 will close Oct. 1.

– *Ann Westling, Tahoe National Forest*