

Tahoe Conservancy ready to restore Upper Truckee Marsh

By Kathryn Reed

While the Tahoe Keys subdivision will remain as is, the sensitive wetlands surrounding it could expand, sand dunes may return, the sailing lagoon that abuts the Cove East walking trail may be filled in and that trail rerouted, and the mouth of the Upper Truckee altered.

These are some of the proposals in the draft environmental documents that will be released by the end of the year for the Upper Truckee Marsh.

Four alternatives are being studied. The California Tahoe Conservancy owns this swath of land that borders the Tahoe Keys and Al Tahoe neighborhoods in South Lake Tahoe and goes from Highway 50 to Lake Tahoe. No preferred alternative has been selected, so all four will receive equal analysis.



It's possible this lagoon at the Tahoe Keys will be filled in. Photo/LTN file

“The purpose of the project is restoration, but we know it is well accessed so we had to do some level of public access,” explained Scott Carroll, project manager. “We just put different features in different alternatives so we could

evaluate the impacts – from water quality to impacts on biological resources to parking – the array. In the end, when we develop a preferred alternative, what we do to the site will be guided by what access works in that type of setting.”

One option includes building a platform that would allow cyclists and walkers to get from one side of the meadow to the other. Other things being considered to make the area more people friendly include a fishing platform, signs and kiosks.

Most of the proposed changes are for the Cove East side of the marsh. It’s possible the mouth of the Upper Truckee River could be rebuilt or reduced. In the 1960s it was dredged and was the original access to the Keys.

The Conservancy acquired the 22 acres in a settlement agreement stemming from the Keys development. In 2002, a \$10.5 million restoration project was completed that brought back the wetlands that run between the walking path at the end of Venice Drive and the river.

Three of the alternatives would fill in the sailing lagoon, which is to the left of the trail when walking toward the lake. Then the trail would head in that direction where boats come into the marina instead of along the river.

Restoring the Upper Truckee River is a large component of this project.

“We want to restore the historic and natural hydrology of the system as much as we can within the constraints we have,” Carroll told *Lake Tahoe News*. “(The) express purpose (is) enhancing the ecosystem of the area – from habitat for aquatic species and terrestrial, and species utilizing the riparian zone. We are trying to create a sustainable linked system.”

The other goal is improving the water quality that enters Lake Tahoe.

Three individuals own some of the land where the Conservancy would like to do work – Marjorie Springmeyer, Knox Johnson and Royce Dunlap. All have been approached, but no agreements are in place.

For the most part, little is proposed for Trout Creek, which runs through what was known as the Barton Meadow. Those 311 acres were purchased about 11 years ago for \$10 million and is now referred to as the Upper Truckee Marsh. It is considered one of the most sensitive areas in the basin.

The bank of the creek near the highway is proposed to be fortified in each of the alternatives.

What this project will cost is unknown. And when it would begin is also undetermined. CTC employees expect a number of comments will be received during the 60-day comment period. The plan is for the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency's Advisory Planning Commission and Governing Board to discuss the project in January. The final environmental impact report and environmental impact statement could take a year to prepare.

When the project begins, it's possible it will be done in multiple phases depending on funding sources.