

River restoration to displace recreationists

By Kathryn Reed

A popular recreation area is about to be off-limits while the U.S. Forest Service works on rerouting the Upper Truckee River.

Sections of much of the river are being restored as land managers have the resources to do so. The end result is to make this body of water flow like it did before ranchers, loggers and others changed the natural meander.

The goal for each reach and for the entire river is that meadows will again thrive by having the water from the river flood the banks on a regular basis, thus increasing the groundwater table, providing better habitat, improving the entire watershed, and particular to the reach – revegetating about 5.6 acres of floodplain and restoring 120 acres of floodplain. Ultimately, it will also mean less sediment reaching Lake Tahoe.

Forest Service personnel on Thursday night spoke about what people can expect during the four-year project on this stretch of land that is near Lake Tahoe Airport and goes into the meadow by Elks Club Road.



Restoring this section of

the Upper Truckee River will begin in mid-June. Photo/LTN file

For the most part, the river will be moved farther away from the runway.

The area will be closed for safety reasons beginning June 15 and lasting until Oct. 15. Signs will be posted.

Popular biking and hiking trails nearest the river will not be accessible. A trail on the far side of the meadow will remain open.

When the project is complete, some of the user-created trails are likely to disappear because a river will occupy them or the meadow will be so wet that the trails will naturally disappear.

The Forest Service does not intend to decommission any trails. A route must be maintained because South Tahoe Public Utility District has a line in the area. It will be relocated next year.

The river will remain accessible, however there will be an area where kayakers and other boaters will have to portage because a temporary bridge will be built that they will not be able to go under. The bridge, which will be about 5,000 feet below the Elks Club bridge, will be one of the first things to be built this season. It will provide access from the Sunset Stables staging area to the meadow.

"The channel will be smaller, but the flow for rafts and kayaks will be greater," Theresa Cody, USFS project manager and hydrologist, said of what the experience will be like when the work is completed.

For a few days fishing could be impacted as block nets are in place.

A little more than half of the 7,340 feet of new river channel will be built this season, with the remainder to be done in 2014.

While the California Tahoe Conservancy also owns part of this section of river, the Forest Service is the lead agency, and the one paying for and doing the work. How the properties connect would not allow for the project to be separated.

The actual work is costing the Forest Service \$4.5 million. This money came from the Southern Nevada Public Lands Management Act.

Tree removal for the project is necessary. The plan is to use that wood for structures in the river. (The USFS and CTC also have fuel reduction projects scheduled that are not related to the river project.)

Cody said the Forest Service has gone to great lengths to make sure those structures look natural – having learned from work done on other sections of the river.

“Most of the woody material is intended to be below the low water line,” she said at the May 30 meeting.

In 2015, there will be a break in construction. This will be the summer of irrigation and making sure the vegetation has taken hold.

In 2016, the channel tie-ins will be constructed if the vegetation is intact. This will likely result in more temporary area closures.

When it’s all done, access will be as it is today – just with a “new” river and not all the same trails.

Public tours of the area are planned for Aug. 2 and Oct. 25.

More information about the project is online.