

6 Tahoe basin meadows slated for restoration



Meiss Meadow is targeted for restoration by the U.S. Forest Service. Photos/LTN file

By Kathryn Reed

Restoring the health of six meadows in the Lake Tahoe Basin is the goal of a project the U.S. Forest Service wants to undertake starting this summer.

The agency is seeking comments on the environmental documents through the first week of February. Two options are part of the environmental assessment – do nothing and the proposed work plan.

Between 2000-11 the agency studied 37 meadows, with six rising to the top of needing immediate help.

Those six are Baldwin Meadow, which is south of Baldwin Beach; Benwood Meadow, south of Adventure Mountain snow play area on Echo Summit; Freel Meadow north of Thompson Peak, which is

north of Luther Pass near Grass Lake; Hellhole Meadow, which is north of Freel Meadow; Meiss Meadow is on the south end of Meiss Country, north of Highway 88; and Star Meadow, which north of Freel Peak and west of Star Lake.

Restoration efforts would include a combination of tree removal, prescribed fire, stream channel repair, planting of vegetation and rerouting trails.

When asked why the USFS believes it is necessary to intervene with Mother Nature, the agency responded, "The Forest Service and the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency have identified meadow ecosystems as an important focus area for restoration efforts in the Lake Tahoe Basin. Past land use and recurring droughts have impaired the natural function and processes of many meadows in the basin. Fire suppression, grazing, stream incision, conifer encroachment, climate change and recreation and trails have combined to produce complex effects on meadow function, composition and structure."

The proposal calls for removing trees from 228 acres and thinning another 359 acres – all by hand. Controlled burns would occur on about 1,226 acres.



The corral in Meiss Meadow is on the repair list.

Stream channels, some of which are not named, will be worked on in every meadow area except Hell Hole Meadow. In total, about three miles of water will be affected. This includes planting willows on 22 acres.

Pacific Crest Trail hikers will be affected. The plan calls

for 1.1 miles to be rerouted and 1.1 miles decommissioned.

“We are not sure when implementation will occur, therefore cannot identify how this will impact hikers next summer,” Herron said.

The goal is to build the new section, then decommission the old trail.

“The Forest Service plans to minimize impacts to hikers during implementation by coordinating the trail reroute alignments with the Pacific Crest Trail and Tahoe Rim Trail associations and notifying them both regarding timing of project activities,” Herron said. “We will work with both associations to alert trail users of planned work and potential impacts via their websites and social media.”

Lodgepole pine that will be removed from Meiss Meadow will be used to repair the old corral. This will allow pack animals visiting the area the opportunity for daytime or overnight stays.

A price has not been determined for the work that is planned – either by individual meadow or cumulative. A fraction of the millions that is needed will come from the Southern Nevada Public Land Management Act. Other funding sources have not been determined. Money usually becomes available for projects like this once all the environmental documents are completed.

Work will take place as money becomes available. There is no time line for when the work will be completed.

“If additional work is needed in other meadows where long term plots have been established and continue to be monitored, additional projects may be proposed,” Herron said.

Notes:

- The deadline to comment is Feb. 6.

- The draft environmental assessment is available online.
- For more information, contact Matt Dickinson at 530.543.2769 or matt dickinson@fs.fed.us.