

Efforts made to keep LT Water Trail afloat

By Kathryn Reed

Twenty years ago images of people playing on Lake Tahoe all involved motorized watercraft. Today it's almost always human powered vessels that are in photographs and video.

Some of that change has to do with a project that started 20 years ago – Lake Tahoe Water Trail. The idea then and now is to promote non-motorized boating. The Lake Tahoe Water Trail Association has been active for the last 11 years.

The California Tahoe Conservancy board on Feb. 5 further committed to this goal by authorizing up to \$50,000 on planning activities for the trail and in large part turned control over to the Sierra Business Council. The money is coming from a donation the state agency received years ago.

“We use it as incubator money to spin things off of us,” Executive Director Patrick Wright said of this pot of cash.

He equated it to how the CTC helped the Tahoe Fund get started and how it is now run as a standalone entity. Wright foresees the water trail doing the same thing under the guidance of SBC.



Paddling is a growing attraction for Tahoe locals

and visitors. Photo/LTN file

SBC hired Becky Bell as the project manager. One of her tasks will be to find more money. It's anticipated Nevada Commission on Tourism grants will be applied for so then there will be money from both states funding the trail.

Initial goals of SBC are to improve trail maps and signs, do outreach and education, work on the lodge-to-lodge network, and create a business plan.

The trail is the 72-mile perimeter of Lake Tahoe. But not everyone knows where to go once they launch a canoe, kayak or paddleboard or how faraway a destination is or rules about public-private beach access. Signs and education would help answer those questions.

Education is also going to come in the form of explaining about aquatic invasive species and the mantras clean-drain-dry to prevent their spread.

Bell, who has been active in outdoor issues in the basin for a couple decades, also was instrumental in developing Tahoe Keepers, the group promoting clean human-powered watercraft on Lake Tahoe.

"I'll create a marketing plan for stewardship," she told the board Thursday.

Bell said 6 percent of the U.S. population is into paddling, with there being 19.2 million kayakers in 2012 and 8 million standup paddlers. She envisions this being a new type of traveler who will venture to the basin.

Greg Jones, vice president of SBC, said he wants to connect the business community to the trail – to make it an economic driver. And then he wants it to be a destination for national and international travelers. He envisions its being the equivalent to the Tahoe Rim Trail as a draw for locals and

visitors, but on water.

The lodging component has been talked about for years, but has not taken off. That is something SBC expects to develop.

Bob Kingman, who is considered the father of the water trail, returned to Tahoe for the meeting. He is a former CTC employee who now works for the Sierra Nevada Conservancy.

“We have the opportunity to create the flat paddle mecca in the Sierra Nevada,” Kingman said. “Lake Tahoe is the gem of this.”