

LTWC's permanent home coming to life



The first phase of Lake Tahoe Wildlife Care's new home is coming to life.
Photos/LTN

By Kathryn Reed

Building cages for animals takes more than just putting up four walls. In some ways, the amount of infrastructure needed is the same as a house.

The sites for the 12 cages on the 27-acre home of what will be Lake Tahoe Wildlife Care are equipped with water, sewer and a ton of cables to provide webcam access to all the critters. Enough infrastructure is being put with the idea is will sustain the animal rehabilitation center as it grows.

Tom and Cheryl Millham, who started LTWC in 1978, are building their dream rehab facility on the corner of Al Tahoe Boulevard and Pioneer Trail.

Hal Cole, who is the general contractor for the project, called it "Cherry Hills on steroids" – a reference to the Millhams' current location.

“We are designing each cage specifically for each animal,” Cole told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Predators can't be next to prey, bears need a substantive enclosure, and birds need netting.



Underground utilities are in place at the animal cages.

While the new LTWC will be in the center of South Lake Tahoe the site feels very much like it is in the middle of the forest. As many trees as possible have been saved.

“Even when the building is done, unless you really look for it you won't know it's here,” Cole said as he walked the property.

The site did not have any utilities so all of that work has taken place in the last few months. The foundation for the caretaker's unit is poured.

However, not enough money is in the coffers to continue work past the Oct. 15 grading deadline that Tahoe Regional Planning Agency mandates.

“We are happy to get the rehabilitation center done and move

things away from our house and to the new location," Tom Millham told *Lake Tahoe News*.

The property is owned by Marjorie Springmeyer. A lease with an option to buy was signed last year.

LTWC is on a fundraising campaign to secure the \$3.5 million needed to complete the caretaker's unit and cages. The goal is to have those facilities done by 2017.

Denise Upton, a longtime volunteer and current director of animal care, will be the initial caretaker. Her quarters will be about one-third of the nearly 10,000-square-foot building that is under way. Another third will be used for LTWC equipment, a generator, as well as for a mini animal hospital. Veterinarian Kevin Willits is slated to continue his work for the center. The remaining third of the structure will be upstairs housing for college interns.

The front of the building will be where people can drop off sick or injured animals. That will be the only public access.

The cages are being built on a loop road. Just like today the public can't interact with the animals. This is because the whole goal is to keep the animals wild so they can return to their natural environment.

Down the road the plans are to build an education center that will have classrooms, gift shop and other amenities. That part of the project is a long ways off because of funding. Plus, it will require environmental review, which will cost more than \$1 million and will take at least 18 months. This in part is because the property is not zoned for that type of facility.

Everyone working on the project is trying to keep costs to a minimum – including Cole, Jim Ferguson (excavator), Chuy Caro (masonry) and Ed Cook (trees).

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Notes:

- More information about Lake Tahoe Wildlife Care may be found **online**. There is a button on the website that will accept donations.
- LTWC has taken in more than 24,000 animals, returned 15,000-plus to the wild, and has trained more than 2,000 people to help care for these animals.
- LTWC is California's only rehab facility for bear cubs.