

Tahoe Fund tasked with defining next generation of visitors' centers

By Kathryn Reed

What will the visitors' centers of the future look like and will they even exist?

Those questions are expected to be answered by next summer after the Tahoe Fund delves into what might suit Lake Tahoe's needs the best.

There are various centers around the basin from chamber operated entities to U.S. Forest Service run outlets to municipality led enterprises like Explore Tahoe in South Lake Tahoe.

Visitors' centers have been losing their appeal because these days people are more likely to look up information on a smart phone or tablet. But they still have a role to play because the brick and mortar location usually has someone who can answer questions in a way that a Google search might not be as responsive, and they have other resources to disseminate. Plus, they are often at a central location people want to explore.



Explore Tahoe opened in 2007 as a collaborative effort between South Lake Tahoe, California Tahoe Conservancy, U.S. Forest Service and Tahoe Heritage Foundation. Photo/LTN

“The goal is to see what works best for Tahoe,” Patrick Wright, executive director of the California Tahoe Conservancy, told his board.

The board agreed to allocate \$85,000 to the visitor information and environmental interpretation project. The nonprofit Tahoe Fund is putting in \$10,000.

The idea has in large part morphed from Bonnie Turnbull’s idea of creating a discovery center on the South Shore. The South Lake Tahoe resident was at the CTC meeting last month and expressed her support for how things are evolving.

Jeff Marsolais, supervisor for the Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit and non-voting member on the CTC board, welcomes the study, noting his agency will have a big stake in the outcome. He also expressed how expensive it is to maintain and operate visitors’ centers.

The staff report highlights how things got to this point: “...

after an extensive series of discussions, the group concluded that they first needed a thorough assessment of the needs and desires of both residents and visitors for new or expanded facilities, and to explore alternative approaches to meeting those needs, given the enormous cost of building and maintaining educational and interpretive facilities.”

Wright pointed out how Tahoe is unique in that there is not one point of entry like most national parks. He said California State Parks is looking at creating mobile centers. There is also the option of pop up centers.

It will be up to the Tahoe Fund to reach consensus, if possible, on what is best for the basin. Initial planning will begin soon. Public workshops and vision planning are likely to occur in March. A design charrette and final report are expected in June.