

# Residents want to put a stop to tourist traffic

By Kathryn Reed

MEYERS – El Dorado County is in the process of crafting a “traction ordinance” that could help keep tourist traffic out of neighborhoods – at least in the winter. It would not solve the summer traffic problem.

The ordinance would allow the county to require chains, snow tires and/or four-wheel drive on county streets. This in turn would mean law enforcement could cite anyone who is violating that law – even locals.

However, with how slow the wheels of government work, the ordinance is not expected to be in place to make an impact this winter.

Residents – especially those in the Meyers area – are tired of sharing their neighborhoods with tourists looking for a short cut. Not only do these wayward drivers want to avoid the backup on Highway 50, many want to bypass the chain inspection at the base of Echo Summit.

What these people don't realize is often the side streets have more snow and really are where two-wheel drive vehicles without chains are going to be the most problematic.

The advent of navigation apps has people going places they have no business being. Some roads are narrow, others are steep, all are residential streets that were never designed to be a thoroughfare. Topography isn't part of the information that is given out, though it may not matter even if it were a feature.

Local authorities have spoken with Apple. Old Meyers Grade is

no longer listed as a viable route. Google officials, though, have been unreachable. Novasel said San Francisco was able to get Google to change some things. The City, unlike El Dorado County, has leverage with Google because the tech company does business there.

Of the 100-plus people who attended the meeting Feb. 13 convened by El Dorado County Supervisor Sue Novasel, more than 30 voiced their frustration about what has become a chronic issue on Sundays or the last day of a holiday period. Questions were asked. Ideas were shared.

One person suggested a class-action lawsuit against the app makers. It was then pointed out even if the more than dozen apps out there affecting the local situation were shutdown, there is nothing to stop someone from creating something else.

One of the more popular ideas was to fight technology with technology. One man suggested using the FasTrak device used on Bay Area bridges so tourists are paying for the use – then ideally upkeep – of local roads. Cameras would record the license plate and the person would be sent a bill if they didn't have a transponder.

Novasel said toll roads have been talked about. Doing so would be reviving a practice what was popular more than 100 years ago.

In addition to Novasel on Monday night there were reps from the California Highway Patrol, El Dorado County Sheriff's Office and county transportation department. The latter had nothing to contribute to the discussion.

Law enforcement pointed out how the roads are public so it's not possible to legally close them to some of the people and keep them open for others. Audience members, though, questioned if public safety were an overriding concern, then perhaps that would be reason enough to regulate who comes and goes.

One of the more immediate and basic things that could be done is better signage. Even the chain requirement sign on Highway 89 toward Hope Valley was covered with snow for about two weeks. New signs were suggested for residential areas to tell people it's not a suggested route, or warning them of the grade/conditions ahead.

Part of the backup problem is farther west beyond Echo Summit. People making snow play areas along Highway 50 are creating traffic problems that reverberate back to the basin. Dealing with those landowners is one strategy. Other ideas included talk of eliminating passing lanes because, according to the CHP, they cause more problems with people jockeying for front position. Another idea is to stop eastbound traffic at Sierra-at-Tahoe for a bit and let multiple lanes of traffic go west to clear things out.

Getting hotels to not all have an 11am checkout, to offer discounts for another night, for restaurants to entice people to stay longer for meal – those are all ideas that have been brought up in the past, but either aren't implemented or don't work.

Long drives from Tahoe to the Bay Area aren't new. It's been happening for decades. And the people making the drive keep doing so weekend after weekend. These people presumably sit in traffic during the week going to work so this isn't much different.

But it isn't the norm for people living in Tahoe. Being caught in Highway 50 traffic in one thing, taking hours to drive a few miles home is another. What those gathered Monday night really want is to be able to get around their neighborhoods and not be delayed by tourists who have no business being on side streets.

Novasel said she'd take the suggestions, concerns and questions back to Placerville where all the real decisions get

made .

