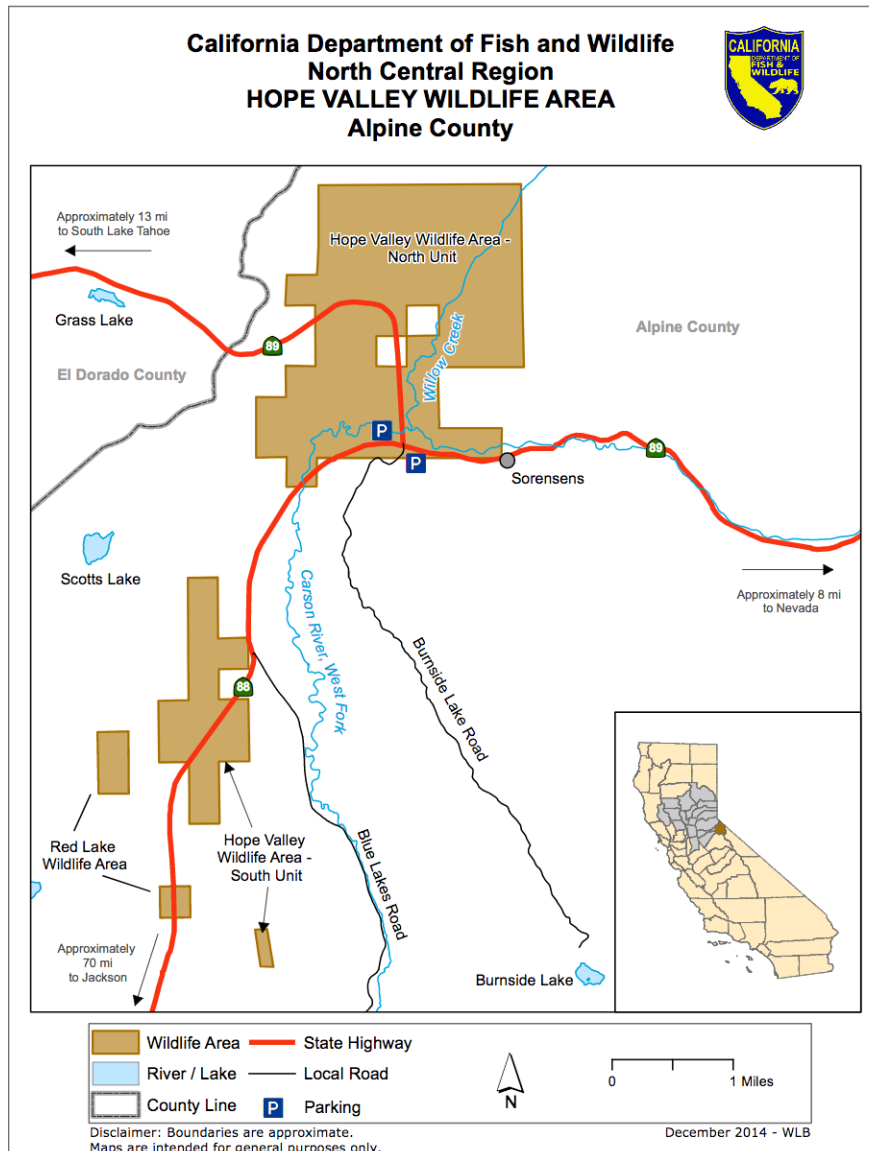


User fee to take effect in Hope Valley on Jan. 1

By Kathryn Reed

Starting Jan. 1 it is going to cost money to recreate in parts of Hope Valley.

The land affected is owned by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife. In Alpine County the areas are known as Hope Valley Wildlife Area-North Unit, Hope Valley Wildlife Area-South Unit, and Red Lake Wildlife Area. Most of the nearly 3,000 acres are at Picketts Junction and then north on both sides of Highway 89 up Luther Pass.



A user fee for the brown areas labeled Hope Valley Wildlife Area starts Jan. 1
 Source: CDFW

The Land Pass Program dates back to 1988, but is only now taking full effect. At that time six properties had a fee, others were added this fall, with the remainder coming on board in 2018.

“Since 2006 the Legislature has been after the department to generate more income from user fees,” Julie Horenstein, ecological reserve coordinator with CDFW, told *Lake Tahoe News*. “In 2012 a statute was passed explicitly directing the (California Fish and Game) Commission to require a lands pass where it was practical and cost effective to do so.”

Statewide, 42 properties come under the land use fee program. The state agency does not have lands in El Dorado or Placer counties that will be subjected to the user fee.

In all, CDFW manages 247 wildlife areas and ecological reserves up and down that state, which encompasses about 1 million acres.

Hunters and anglers have had to pay to use these lands for years. Mostly the money came from licenses, duck stamps, and taxes on equipment they use for their sport. They have been vocal in wanting hikers, birders and wildflower enthusiasts to pay their share. Those with a hunting or fishing license do not have to pay the additional user fee.

Horenstein said a state blue ribbon committee in 2012 mandated the department to "develop more equitable funding sources." This user fee is the source.

The money collected from the new user fee will go into the Native Species Conservation and Enhancement Account. It can only be used for managing the operating CDFW lands. If the agency can identify where the user was going to recreate, then 35 percent of the fee will be reinvested at that location.



A large swath of Hope Valley will no longer be free to access starting Jan. 1. Photo/LTN file

Day and annual passes will be available. They will be like sno-park passes, in that they are available online or at select outlets, and that they are not available at the parking location.

The agency expects to generate a little more than \$150,000 a year statewide. Expenses the first year could reach nearly \$100,000, with metal signs being the most expensive item. Education material is another expense. So the net is about \$50,000 a year to start with. The money could be leveraged to secure federal grants so more work is done on state lands.

Those caught without a pass will face a fine of between \$50 and \$250. Leniency is expected for the first six months or so for the public to become educated about the fee.

While this state department said it sent out notices to all counties and adjacent public land owners and likely interested agencies, Alpine County officials said they never received the information. That is in part why Horenstein will be speaking at today's Alpine's Board of Supervisors meeting.

Supervisor Don Jardine, who has been in office for 30 years, is very familiar with this land. He was on the board when it became public property.

“The county at the time didn’t want to see major development in Hope Valley,” Jardine told *Lake Tahoe News*.

The Trust for Public Land and Friends of Hope Valley partnered to protect 25,000 acres in the area that had been privately held. This started in the late 1980s and took more than 10 years to finalize. The CDFW and U.S. Forest Service bought the land.

Jardine said Alpine was not notified of the fee structure, that’s why he wants a CDFW official to speak to the board.

He is most worried about:

- Access for low income people. – *The state said lower income people may access the land for less money.*
- Nonprofits that use the area. – *The state says schools and organized youth groups are exempt from the fee.*
- People wanting to get to USFS land having to pay. – *They will have to pay.*

Jardine said he isn’t necessarily opposed to the fee, but he and his colleagues want a better understanding of what the state is about to do and they want to make sure the original agreement when the lands became public is adhered to.

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Notes:

- Passes may be purchased **online** and where hunting/fishing licenses are sold.
- Day passes are \$4.32; 2017 annual pass is \$24.33; 2018 annual pass is \$25.10. Passes are good for a calendar year.