

# USFS-Barton promote wellness via nature

By Lake Tahoe News

The next prescription you get might not be able to be filled at a pharmacy or come in the form of a pill. Instead, it might require athletic apparel.

Nature as medicine is what it's being called. While people who regularly recreate outdoors know the benefits, those who are recovering from an injury or illness have often been treated indoors. That tradition is no longer always the protocol.

Barton Health and Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit this fall signed an agreement to provide wellness outings for patients. They've been doing so since last year, but it wasn't until last month that the formal agreement was inked.

"These agreements allow the two entities to contribute staff time toward a mutual goal, which is to facilitate therapeutic experiences on the National Forest for at-risk populations in the community of South Lake Tahoe," Lisa Herron with the U.S. Forest Service told *Lake Tahoe News*. "No funds, public or otherwise, are flowing from USFS to Barton Health as part of this agreement. Instead, both entities have agreed to contribute staff time toward reaching a mutual goal."

The outings will be free for the patients who are "prescribed" this therapy.

"Wellness outings will be scheduled for community members by Barton Health providers as part of their care. Guided walks and winter snowshoe outings with Barton Healthcare providers and Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit personnel are tailored to the patient's needs and ability level," Jenna Palacio with Barton told *Lake Tahoe News*. "Wellness Outings are intended to

deliver the healing properties of nature with U.S. Forest Service land education in South Lake Tahoe.”

The comprehensive program includes options for people with chronic or terminal illness, patients recovering from surgery, and at-risk youth.

According to Barton, time in nature lowers blood pressure, heart rate, and cortisol levels, while it increases concentration, memory, and attention spans.

Steve Bannar, who has been a doctor with Barton for years, in a statement said, “A prescription for nature can enable accessibility for at-risk groups as well as preventive medicine for other members of the community. We need to change our mindset from treating disease to promoting wellness.”

To date, Barton and the Forest Service have led six community wellness outings for dozens of people. They include:

- Wellness walk for the chronically ill at the Taylor Creek Visitor Center (fall 2016);
- Moonlight snowshoe for orthopedic patients on the shore of Lake Tahoe (spring 2017);
- Wellness Walk for youth with emotional and behavioral challenges along the Upper Truckee River restoration (summer 2017);
- Interpretive walk for Spanish speaking youth in South Lake Tahoe (summer 2017);
- Wellness walk and facilitated mindfulness for the chronically ill at the Tallac Historic Site (summer 2017);
- Wellness walk at Valhalla historic property for full-time nursing patients (fall 2017).

USFS staff time for each of these wellness outings is estimated at two to three hours.

For the Forest Service, the partnership helps bring another

segment of the community to its lands. Barton is also providing preventative medical training to Forest Service personnel who work in injury prone positions. Barton has hosted three wellness workshops, including a foot care for wildland firefighters, emergency medicine for backcountry rangers, and a wellness training at a USFS all-employee meeting.