

Crystal Basin recreation closures may impact basin



Crystal Basin Recreation Area is being overhauled. Photo/Terra Breeden

By Terra Breeden

The Crystal Basin Recreation Area is getting a \$150 million makeover that could affect Tahoe while renovations are under way.

In an effort funded by the Sacramento Municipal Utility District (SMUD), the recreation area is being updated with new campsites, facilities, and installments. The massive renovation project is expected to take place over the next two decades.

This summer, Sunset Campground, the largest campground in Crystal Basin with 131 sites, will undergo the first renovation and be closed to the public during construction,

which will take two years. More campgrounds are slated for renovations afterward. U.S. Forest Service officials predict that the recreation area closures will defer many visitors to Tahoe for outdoor activities.

“Considering people will be displaced from Crystal Basin, there will most likely be an increase in visitation to adjacent areas, including Lake Tahoe,” District Recreation Officer of the Pacific Ranger District Becky Shufelt said.

Crystal Basin welcomes about 350,000 to 500,00 visitors annually and is by far the most popular recreation zone in Eldorado National Forest. Offering an array of activities like hiking, biking, camping and horseback riding, and boasting nine reservoirs, the region is a haven for outdoor enthusiasts.

The area was designated as an outdoor destination in 1957 through a partnership between the U.S. Forest Service and SMUD. Crystal Basin is part of the Upper American River hydroelectric project, founded by SMUD. The reservoirs and dams in the area provide electricity to homes in Sacramento and the Bay Area. Although the reservoirs were originally built to produce hydroelectricity, they have become a popular

recreation zone in the dec

Will your favorite recreation site be closed?

Please pardon our dust while we make some exciting improvements to recreation sites associated with SMUD's Upper American River Project in El Dorado County. Over the next few years, many of the facilities will be upgraded, and several new features added for your future enjoyment. The work will require some sites to be partially or completely closed during construction within the timeframes below. We apologize for any inconvenience and thank you for your patience.

- Azalea Cove Campground **closed 2018**
- Angel Creek Day Use Area **closed July – September 2018**
- Sunset Campground **closed 2018** (reopens Spring 2019)
- Gerle Creek Campground **closed after Labor Day 2018** (reopens Spring 2019)
- Northwind Campground **closed after Labor Day 2018** (reopens Spring 2019)
- Camino Cove Campground **closed 2019** (reopens Spring 2020)
- Lakeshore Drive **closed 2019** (reopens Spring 2020)
- North Union Valley Road **closed 2019** (reopens Spring 2020)
- Northshore RV Campground **closed 2019** (reopens Spring 2020)
- Wolf Creek Campground **closed 2019** (reopens Spring 2020)
- Slab Creek Reservoir (not on map) **closed Spring 2019** (reopens Spring 2020)
- West Point Boat Launch **closed after Labor Day 2019** (reopens Spring 2020)
- Yellowjacket Boat Launch **closed after Labor Day 2019** (reopens Spring 2020)



Closures are subject to change.

Please check with the U.S. Forest Service for updates.
530-622-5061 | www.fs.usda.gov/eldorado

“When you create reservoirs, you create boating opportunities, and the SMUD partnership with the USFS is what made this recreation area possible,” SMUD rep Darold Perry told *Lake Tahoe News*.

However, as popular as Crystal Basin is, it has not been renovated since its creation, and campgrounds and facilities are severely outdated. Recently, SMUD obtained a new license from the USFS to operate the Upper American River project in the area and part of the agreement was that SMUD would renovate the Crystal Basin recreation facilities for visitors. The result is an enormous construction project that will take up to 20 years.

“The old deteriorated campgrounds were built over 50 years ago. It will be nice to get those updated and improve the visitor experience,” Shufelt said.

For the renovations, the Crystal Basin campgrounds will be updated with new picnic tables, animal-proof storage lockers, and several group sites will be added. New restroom and shower facilities will be built, and in an initiative to help lessen

trash and alleviate some of the wildlife issues that have been rising in recent years, recycling bins will be installed in all of the campgrounds.

However, all of these renovations require closures. The campgrounds, especially Sunset Campground, are usually fully booked through the summer and although there are a few sites that are first come, first serve, there is often a line out the gate to claim these spots. With all of the campground closures due to construction, most significantly Sunset Campground, Forest Service officials expect to turn away many visitors this year.

“We are a very busy area and with all of the construction activity we are urging people to rethink if this is the area for them to come to or not,” Shufelt said. “Having a large campground like Sunset be closed for almost two seasons has a huge impact. The public may want to go to some other areas around the forest or explore neighboring national forests for their summertime recreation.”