

Letter: USFS and the Carson River hot springs

To the community,

This letter is in regards to the hot springs on the East Fork of the Carson River in California near the Nevada border. Friends of Hope Valley wants to bring greater public awareness of the situation and needs readers to help apply pressure on the Forest Service to take action.

Friends of Hope Valley (FOHV) is a nonprofit organization whose members share a deep affection for the unspoiled beauty of the Sierra's eastern slope of Alpine country. Our mission is to preserve the scenic, recreational and historic use of Hope Valley and Alpine County's eastern Sierra slope.

Since 2007 we have been involved in the East Carson River Strategy Plan produced by the Carson Ranger District, Humboldt-Toiyable National Forest. Some of the proposed actions have been completed. The most impacted area, the hot springs on the river, has been over looked. Various users have abused the area for many years. The area is full of trash, most of the trees have been cut for firewood, new "user created" roads have been established, the place is littered with ammunition casings. Although hundreds of people visit the area each year there are no sanitation facilities.

As the river levels drop OHV's illegally drive across. YouTube videos depict vehicles floating down the river, crashing through the mud and the causing serious environmental damage. The problems at the hot springs area were discussed during multi-agency and volunteer group river runs during the last two summers. Recommendations were proposed to clean up the area and protect it from future abuse. So far, none of them have been acted upon.

It's up to us to tell the Forest Service to take action now.

Friends of Hope Valley recommends that access roads leading across the river should be barricaded, user-created roads closed, and the hot springs' natural environment restored. There are no signs in the area; friendly educational signs would be a good place to start. Four years ago FOHV volunteered to help pay for the signs, to this date no sign has been produced.

There is California OHV grant money to begin the planning process, complete restoration and close road; the Forest Service has yet to apply for the grants.

We do understand it's a very challenging situation for the Forest Service. Roads leading into the area are high clearance 4wd (it takes several hours to drive in) and cross tribal and private lands making law enforcement and maintenance difficult. We would just like to see a few positive steps forward.

Thank you for you time,

Debbi Waldear, Friends of Hope Valley chair