



Friends of Hope Valley Newsletter

Winter, 2010
Volume 25, Issue 2

For the preservation
of the scenic,
recreational, and
historic use of Hope
Valley and Alpine
County's eastern
Sierra slope.

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HOPE VALLEY RESTORATION PROJECT

Debbi Waldear

Hope Valley is known for its scenic beauty and spectacular surroundings, but we tend to forget that it is one of the last high altitude undeveloped valleys of its size (over 1,600 acres) remaining in the Sierra. The West Fork of the Carson River runs through the heart of the valley, a sub-alpine meadow lying at an average elevation of 7,200 feet. Upon leaving the meadow, the river plunges through steep terrain and converges with the East Fork of the Carson River to form the mainstream Carson River as it flows into the Nevada Basin and Range. The Upper Carson River Basin, including the West Fork of the Carson River, is one of the largest sources of water supply for this arid region of California's Eastern Sierra and Nevada.

Heavy grazing pressures constitute the dominant historical land-use impact in Hope Valley, as it was once the main

stopover for pack animals and livestock on emigrant trails that passed through the valley and the favorite summer pasture grounds for sheepherders and ranchers. Other historic land-uses having left detrimental legacies in the meadow include mining (mainly copper, gold, tungsten, sulfur, and silver), road construction, logging and a gravel pit just up stream from the Highway 88 bridge crossing. In addition, this bridge constricts the channel, which increases stream power and is most likely responsible for some or most of the channel incision present in the surrounding reaches. The legacies of these heavy historic impacts are still affecting meadow processes today, and although some recovery is evident, systematic and comprehensive actions have yet to be taken to promote meadow recovery. As a result, the recovery process is slow and consistently set back by frequent large and erosive flow events.

In many places the West Fork is in degraded condition, its riverbanks are



Picture by Judy Wickwire

RESTORATION continued

Debbi Waldear

unstable resulting in channelization and erosion. Channelization is the straightening and deepening of a river causing water to run fast and not disperse during flood stages creating a dry environment in the surrounding area. The river is nude of vegetation that holds its banks and maintains the river's water temperatures. Before the river became so channelized its banks were lower ,and the whole valley flooded each spring, its flood plain soaking up moisture allowing a diversity of vegetation, including grasses, to grow. Presently Hope Valley is rapidly changing from fertile grassland to a dryer meadow dominated by sagebrush. The river is not functioning properly; the valley's aquatic and plant life are suffering.

For over fifteen years Friends of Hope Valley has been planting willows and using bioengineering techniques to help stabilize the West Fork's riverbanks. Bioengineering techniques are designed to augment natural recovery by using native materials. Our most recent project was the construction of a willow mattress on a particularly bad bend of the river using native willows in the area.

At this time we are partnering with the Alpine Watershed Group, American Rivers, and the Institute for Bird Population to spend the next year conducting background research and field assessments of stream flow conditions in the Upper Carson River Watershed. After this assessment, conceptual projects will be proposed followed by their technical design and implementation in order to restore and maintain a healthy river ecosystem through Hope Valley.

Updates from the President

Debbi Waldear

TRAVEL MANAGEMENT PLAN

Increasing attention is being focused on uncontrolled use of motor vehicles on U.S. Forest Service lands and the impacts from this use. This winter the Humbolt-Toiyabe National Forest will embark upon the long-over due task of determining what roads and trails will be allowed for off-road vehicle use. The purpose is to establish policies and provide procedures that will ensure that the use of off-road vehicles on public lands will be controlled so as to protect the resources of those lands, to promote the safety of all users of those lands, and to minimize conflicts among the various uses of those lands.

Indian Valley

This sensitive high meadow is in a state of degradation. The U.S. Forest Service has a proposed restoration project that will restore and maintain this beautiful valley.

Winter Recreation

The new Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest, Carson Ranger District Winter Recreation Guide of Alpine County is available at the local U.S. Forest Service office, Alpine Chamber of Commerce and Sorensen's Resort.

Invasive Weeds

The U.S. Forest Service is working along the East Fork of the Carson River to map, inventory, control, and eradicate the noxious weeds on its river banks. Replanting treated areas with native vegetation is its ultimate goal.

Markleeville Guard Station

The U.S. Forest Service fire crew has relocated to a new site. Their old buildings have been removed. The Alpine Watershed Group is working on plans to restore Markleeville Creek's natural flood plain.

ASPEN ENHANCEMENT

Since the beginning of the 20th Century, aggressive fire suppression and timber harvest activities have substantially altered forested landscapes, including the reduction of quaking aspens. There has been a 50 to 96 percent loss of aspen in the west. Although no wildlife species is totally dependent on habitats dominated by aspen, this cover type adds significantly to the richness of the wildlife in areas where it occurs.

Prior to European settlement, the natural fire regimes helped balance the abundance and distribution of tree species that occupied a specific area. Aspen stands are indicators of moist soil conditions. In northern California, a significant portion of aspen stands have been heavily encroached upon by lodgepole pine and other conifers, thus reducing the amount of water available and the ability for aspens to exist.

ASPEN ENHANCEMENT

continued

The U.S. Forest Service implemented an “aspen enhancement” project this past summer in Hope Valley. The project was off of Scott’s Lake Road. The goal is to enhance and expand some existing aspen stands that are declining in size and vigor due to encroaching conifer trees that shade out and replace shade-intolerant aspen. The project will restore an ecosystem component that has diminished in size and vigor. Aspen enhancement includes removal of conifers up to 30” diameter at breast height from within aspen stands and for a distance around the aspen stand. This treatment occurred on approximately 46 acres.

In the spring of 2011 the U.S. Forest Service proposes to repeat this treatment to 800 acres in the Monitor Pass area. Friends of Hope Valley has been a long time advocate of the re-establishment of aspen in Alpine County. We look forward to viewing the results.

BEAVERS VS. TREES ALONG MARKLEEVILLE CREEK

Richard Harvey

It was March of this year and there was still snow along the banks of Markleeville Creek. As I wandered the stream edge just downstream from Markleeville, I was surprised to see just how many large cottonwood trees had been girdled and felled by beavers. (See picture) I also discovered beaver activity on Milberry Creek as it runs into Markleeville Creek. Several downed trees had caused the creek to flood the area of the Markleeville Public Utility District’s clean out well.

The tree-lined corridor of Markleeville Creek is one of the features that I most enjoy about this community. The large trees protect the banks from erosion and provide a wonderful green backdrop in spring and summer followed by the golden yellow colors of fall.

Deciding to protect the larger trees from the beaver was made easier after a discussion with old timers who recalled the day in 1942 that beaver were first introduced to Markleeville Creek by the California Department of Fish and Game. Prior to that date I was told there were no beavers in this area. In fact many biologists agree that beaver are not native to the eastern slope of the Sierra. Lending credence to this

belief is the fact that there is no word in the Washo language for beaver.

Is it any wonder then that beaver, lacking in natural enemies, are capable of leaving a swath of downed trees as they multiply and spread along our local streams and rivers? I have seen signs of their activity along the East Carson River with great old cottonwoods felled for the purpose of eating the smaller branches. The beaver is in the rodent family, and it takes about 3 pounds of bark to make a tasty meal for a single beaver. They multiply rapidly and live in holes along the banks.

This summer the Alpine Watershed Group voted to include protection of the larger cottonwoods and aspens along Markleeville Creek as one of the projects for Markleeville Creek Day. On September 25 a crew of 7 volunteers wrapped nearly 100 trees with chicken wire to protect them from the next wave of beaver activity. There will still be plenty of beaver food along the creek in the form of willows, smaller aspens, and cottonwoods. If the wire isn’t effective the California Fish and Game Department is permitted to trap beavers as needed to keep their numbers in check. Meanwhile, enjoy the fall colors.



Picture by Richard Harvey

EXPLORING GRASS VALLEY TO HOPE VALLEY

Jim Donald

Early ski season always presents a dilemma as to where to go. Usually there's not enough snow on the passes because large rocks and rough terrain require more snow to make the trails safe and negotiable.

An area that's usually pretty reliable in early season is Grass Lake on Luther Pass (Hwy 89). Access is easy and minimum snow pack is usually ski-able. If you're out there first know where the open water was and that the ice is thick enough to support your weight.

The terrain is flat, flat, flat...but variety can be added by skiing across the meadow to the gentle lower slopes of Waterhouse Peak. These slopes are, for the most part, treed, but at the western end of the meadow there are some nice open slopes. Climb as high as you want and ski down or, if the snow is sufficient, just tour through the forest.

A two-car point-to-point ski into Hope Valley is a great way to finish a day after limbering up on Grass Lake meadow. Park a second car at one of the turnouts on Hwy 89 in Hope Valley and follow the old road from the east end of the meadow. You'll break out of the trees about three quarters of the way down to find some nice open slopes left and right of the road. Elevation loss and mileage are about 600 feet and 2 miles.

If the snow is powdery soft, beginners can do this trip, but hard-pack or icy conditions require a little experience on your skis. As a conditioning alternative, start in Hope Valley and ski up the old road and then return. If the powder is deep and you are adventurous ski through the trees to the right of the old road.

A later season deep powder alternative for experienced skiers is Waterhouse Peak. Ascend this peak, using skins, from either the east, middle or west end of Grass Lake meadow. Unless you're first out after a snowfall, the trails are usually obvious on this well used peak. Board riders and skiers populate this area's very steep, mixed conifer slopes.

The area encompassing Grass Lake and Hope Valley offers, for people of all abilities, some of the best winter recreation around. From early season thin snow cover to mid-season deep powder there is something for everyone.

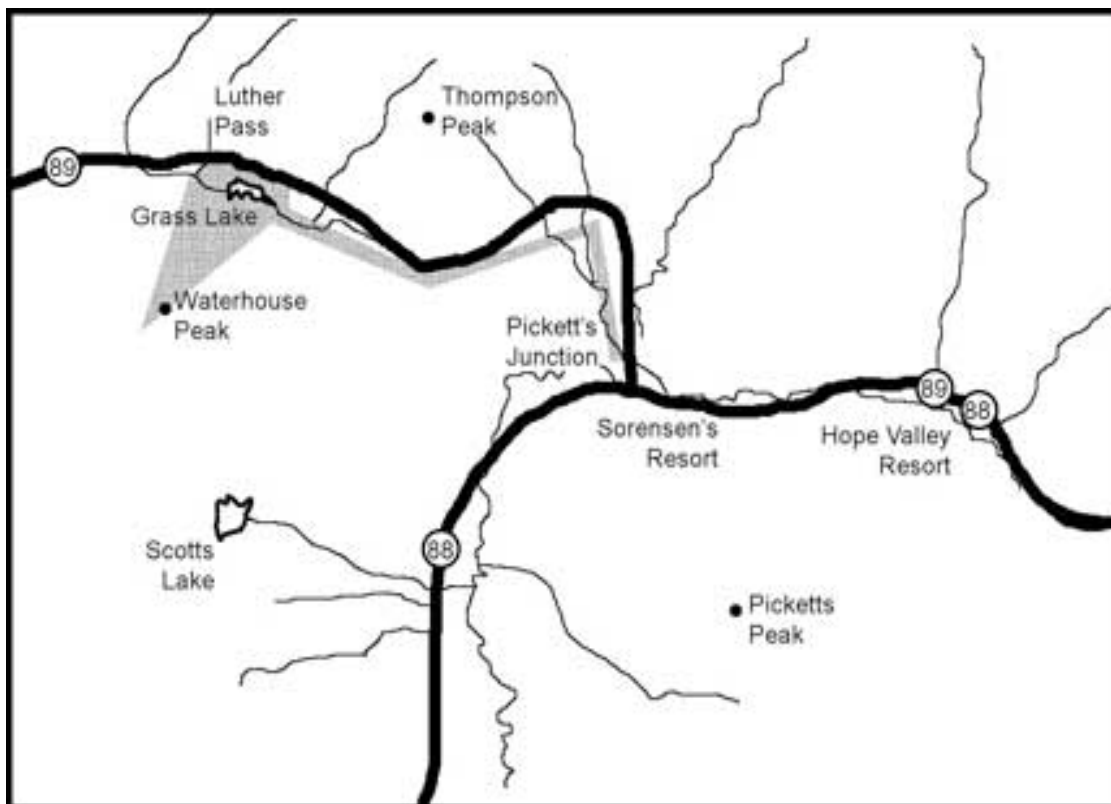
As usual, for the ten essentials, you'll need to carry a snack, water, sunscreen, a topographical map, compass, clothing appropriate to conditions, waterproof matches, a signaling device (whistle or mirror), emergency shelter (large garbage bag), and a first aid kit. Throw in a repair kit for whatever type of recreation you do, and you're all set.

And since pre-trip planning is the single most important thing that ensures your safety, check the

forecast from the National Weather Service, the avalanche forecast from the Sierra Avalanche Center, and road conditions at the Caltrans website. Bookmark all these sites.

Many rely on battery powered devices in everyday activities. Trust me, cell phones won't have reception in many areas, and the batteries in your GPS will run down quickly in the winter cold.

But above all, have fun. That is, after all, why you're out there.



Membership

Now is the time to renew your membership for 2011. Your voice and financial support are needed this year on several important issues and projects. By renewing now you save FOHV the expense of your reminder in the spring.

FOHV is an all-volunteer profit 501(c)(3) organization that watchdogs over the environmental issues of Alpine County's eastern Sierra slope. Your contributions make it possible for us to have a loud voice while addressing a variety of issues and completing projects to preserve and protect the scenic beauty, recreational and historic values of Hope Valley and other pristine places of the eastern slope of Alpine County.

Please pass this newsletter on to friends who might be interested in the work of this nonprofit organization.

We can make a difference,... but only with your financial support.

<http://www.hopevalleyca.com>



Join Us





Friends of Hope Valley
PO Box 431
Markleeville, CA 96120

The Friends of Hope Valley wants to thank you for your past support. We hope that you will continue your membership in this non-profit organization dedicated to the preservation of historic, recreational, and scenic values of Hope Valley and Sierra Nevada's eastern slope in Alpine County. With your help we can continue to address the sensitive environmental concerns of the eastern Sierra.



Friends of Hope Valley 2011

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The FOHV email list is used only for the purpose of alerting our members and friends about time sensitive issues.

Friends of Hope Valley is a 501(c)(3) organization.

Please return this form and your tax deductible check to:

Friends of Hope Valley, PO Box 431, Markleeville, CA 96120
