

Busy year ahead for Tahoe-Pyramid Bikeway in 2016

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A short gap in the Tahoe-Pyramid Bikeway's trail project in the Truckee Canyon west of Reno is to be completed this summer, clearing the way for bikers to ride for 11 straight miles from Verdi to Floriston.

Design work, environmental studies and fund raising, meanwhile, will continue in 2016 before the last four miles is expected to open in 2018 in the steep, rugged canyon leading to Truckee. The Reno nonprofit group behind the bikeway announced the award of a \$2 million federal trails grant for the project in December.

And for the first time, the volunteers will hold an event this year to clear brush and debris all along key sections of trail opened by the group over the last 12 years, said Janet Phillips, bikeway project founder and president. The work day is scheduled for National Trails Day on June 4.

Not bad for a group of about 80-90 volunteers, largely retired professionals from Northern Nevada, that formed 12 years ago. And in last few years, the town of Truckee, the Truckee Donner Recreation and Park District and Truckee residents have lent their support to open more miles of trail.

They all share the dream of opening the Truckee Canyon to more public access and eventually riding a bikeway along the Truckee River's 116-mile journey from Lake Tahoe to Pyramid Lake. In all, people can now make 75 percent of that journey on trails or bike lanes built in Nevada and California.

Donald Hays, a professional trail builder from Tahoe City, and fellow worker Doug Hulett, opened nearly two miles of trail last summer east of Paradise in the Truckee Canyon. But they were stopped in their tracks when rocks came tumbling down the hill.

Hays now plans to build this 300-foot-long trail section starting in May or June.



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A cyclist is pictured along a utility road near Floriston. The Floriston-Boca segment is a key part of the Tahoe-Pyramid Bikeway.

The Bikeway team is evaluating special techniques to cross the boulder field, in collaboration with California Department of Transportation or Caltrans.

Rocks and boulders were simply pushed over the edge in building Interstate 80 through the canyon almost 60 years ago, Phillips said, in creating the unstable field of boulders.

At the western entrance to the canyon, the bikeway project could have been stopped by Nevada County's plans to demolish a bridge on Hirschdale Road. While closed to truck traffic, the bridge is still safe for pedestrians and bike riders. In late 2014, a huge email campaign from area residents to the county "saved the bridge," Phillips said.

From that bridge, the next four miles of trail will be built with the help of the \$2 million grant and the first two miles will be easy, Phillips said. The trail will head into the canyon for the first mile on pavement built for the old highway. Then volunteers will be sought to clear debris from the old roadbed for the next mile in 2017, Phillips said.

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Bikeway

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The next two miles will be built along the steep mountainside, just below Interstate 80, and will be the most difficult, Phillips said. The trail will require a number of retaining walls and probably will have to be built alongside the freeway for 1,200 feet, hovering over the edge. Below are walls supporting the freeway.

"If you ride fast, it will be quick," said Phillips, saying riding next to a freeway is less than ideal.

While difficult, "I haven't seen anything that I haven't done yet," said Hays, the professional trail contractor, of these last two miles.

Clay Grubb, a retired U.S. Marine trail builder from Stateline, scouted three alternatives over 2½ years before recommending the

route, hugging the side of the mountain below the freeway. He rejected a route on unstable ground along the river bank and a route on top of Hogback Ridge near Floriston that dead-ends at a steep cliff.

"There's no cure for a bad design," said Grubb, who accepted the Volunteer of the Year at the bikeway group's recent annual meeting in Reno.

These last two miles will require three-fourths of the \$2 million grant and the approval of Caltrans, the landowner, Phillips said. The \$2 million comes from California State Parks' \$8 million share of federal Recreational Trail grants for 2016 and will be administered by the Truckee Donner parks district.

"It's a huge, huge statement from California Parks," Phillips said. She said she believes the grant was awarded because it will fill one of the last major gaps in the bikeway, a regional trail system that won four national awards in the last four

years. And she said the bikeway group has a history of getting projects done on time and on budget.

Phillips said the group should be able to raise the \$300,000 to match the \$2 million grant. Phillips doesn't consider that insurmountable: In its biggest year, the bikeway group raised \$200,000, mostly from private foundations.

Once the trail is fully opened in the Truckee Canyon, only two gaps remain in the bikeway system and both are in Nevada. One gap covers three miles immediately east of Sparks and the other is a 15-mile stretch west of Fernley. The property owners are opposed to opening their lands for the bikeway, she said.

For now, "all of our energy is going to getting to Truckee," Phillips said.

Susan Voyles is a volunteer for the Tahoe-Pyramid Bikeway group and a retired Reno Gazette-Journal reporter.