

# CHAPTER 5

## Recreation



The Recreation chapter identifies existing recreation activities and provides guidance for the preservation and enhancement of high quality recreation experiences around Donner Summit. The natural splendor of the Sierra wilderness is a draw to day hikers, cyclists, backpackers and skiers. The no-frills ski resorts provide pure winter sport and the outdoor experience for recreationist is valued more than commercial amenities. Access to public lands, trails, beaches, and parks are a significant asset for the community and directly linked to local economy, sense of identity, and quality of life. The Area Plan promotes wheelchair accessible public access to recreation (REC-1.3), and clearly visibly and recognizable trailheads and access points (REC-2.5). Recreation trails should enhance the visitors experience by providing educational and interpretative signage and displays (REC-2.6).

Residents value the natural setting for its diverse recreational opportunities. Access to nature improves resident's connection to the environment, promotes health and well-being, and creates an abundance of recreational opportunities (REC-2.3). Opportunities to expand pedestrian facilities and amenities along Donner Pass Road are important considerations in any future development (REC-2.1). Mixed uses that include recreation concessionaires and services should promote the Soda Springs Rural Center as a recreation hub (REC-2.2.). In addition to recreational uses and access to public lands, private land owners are encouraged to develop improvements including sponsoring community event areas and providing retail space for sale or rental of recreation equipment (REC-2.4).

The continued expansion of trails for downhill skiing, cross country skiing, hiking and mountain biking would elevate the area's appeal to visitors and residents alike (REC-1.1). The area has become a lifestyle community in which residents make a choice to live here for the quality of life, especially outdoor recreation. To optimize development of public lands for recreational activities the Area Plan must build partnerships that foster cooperation with the Truckee Donner Land Trust, Forest Service, and Placer County (REC-1.4). Connecting open spaces and integrating unique settings and isolated habitats is needed to support and broaden recreational experiences (REC-1.2).

Non-winter active recreation on the Summit has not been fully utilized, developed or promoted. It would be prudent to expand on opportunities for year round ecotourism. Attractions such as zip lines, ropes courses, and special events like obstacle racing, and Boreal Resort's Tahoe Woodward are tourism attractions that promote a more diverse sustainable year-round economy. Temporary events such as festivals, races, and competitions should appeal to a rich variety of recreationists that will increase economic activity. Non-winter annual attractions that feature resources unique to the area might include cycling, hiking, bird watching, wild-flower and butterfly festivals, rock-climbing and athletic competitions that could enhance the recreational experience of visitors (REC-1.7). Infrastructure in the form of campgrounds (REC-1.6), and areas that connect commercial and pedestrian areas, provide bicycle linkage should be key considerations in the development of the area as a destination (REC-1.1).

As noted in Chapter 1, Context and Background, the economic viability of the area is confronted with significant challenges. Visitors to the area are not motivated to leave Interstate 80 because there's little that is known by them in the way of attractions that would motivate them to exit the highway. In addition there are many nearby competing areas that have more infrastructure for visitors. This lack of

awareness by highway passerby's is compounded with the absence of a chamber of commerce or tourism board to promote special events and take advantage of branding the area's rich history. There are unique features of the area not known to the public, and the County's General Plan that's in place does not address the specific issues of the community. The road has passed the area by and so has time left it behind resulting in areas of blight as a consequence of lack of investment in the built environment. Soda Springs needs to develop a sense of place and exploration of potential opportunities for creating and maintaining accessible public spaces, including a town center and/or park. In spite of significant challenges the potential for economic development and sustainability to create a vibrant local economy is great.

## A. EXISTING RECREATION ACTIVITIES

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### TRAILS

There are numerous non-motorized recreation trails on Donner Summit that exist primarily on public land. A brief description of the most popular trails is given below.



**Donner Summit Canyon and the Donner Lake Rim Trail** are part of the Truckee-Donner Land Trust trail system network connecting the Summit to Donner Lake and Truckee.



**Royal Gorge Area Trails** are some of the best rails on the summit and include loops to Lyle's Lookout, Rowton Peak, around Summit Valley, and the Point Mariah Trail.



**Hole in the Ground Trail** is probably the best known mountain bike ride in the Donner Summit area. One of the best single track rides in the Sierra, the 13.5 mile loop trail challenges riders with steep climbs and technical downhill sections.



**The Pacific Crest Trail** is the iconic west coast National Scenic Trail that crosses Donner Summit along the trail route that runs from Mexico to Canada. The PCT is open to hikers and equestrian, but not bicyclists.

## DEVELOPED FACILITIES

A variety of developed recreation facilities exist around Soda Springs. The location of these recreation facilities is shown on Figure 5-1, and includes the following:



**Boreal Mountain Resort, Soda Springs Mountain Resort, Sugar Bowl Resort, Donner Ski Ranch, and Royal Gorge** cater to all types of downhill skiing, cross country skiing, snowboarding and snow tubing in the winter and early spring.



**Woodward Tahoe** is a year-round action sports camp with indoor training facilities for skiing and snowboarding in the winter, and skateboarding, BMX, mountain biking, and cheerleading in the summer.



**West End Beach** is a 10 acre beach park offering a wide range of water activities with day use picnic and barbeque facilities on Donner Lake, operated by the Truckee Donner Parks and Recreation District.



**Donner Lake Memorial State Park** is a state park of California preserving the site of the Donner Camp where the ill-fated Donner Party was trapped by weather during the winter of 1846-1847. The park is national historic landmark with hiking trails, campgrounds, and the Emigrant Trail Museum.

## DISPERSED RECREATION

Numerous opportunities for dispersed outdoor recreation exist on public lands surrounding Soda Springs. Popular activities include backcountry skiing and snowboarding, camping, world-class rock climbing, cross country skiing, snowshoeing, dog walking, wildlife viewing, and simply enjoying solitude and the beauty of nature. Public lands supporting dispersed recreation are primarily managed by the USFS and the Truckee Donner Land Trust.



**Rock climbing** the massive granite slabs that form the walls of Donner Pass are a climber's dream. The quality of the rock wall is excellent and makes for world-class crack and wall climbing.



**Simply enjoying the beauty of nature** and taking a break from the fast-paced modern world attracts people to the area.



**Off-road riding** the old unpaved logging roads in the Donner Summit area offer enthusiast's miles of roads to explore.



**Road biking** on the summit is spectacular and can be as challenging as you wish to make it. It is, however, limited to the single paved road that runs through the summit, Donner Pass Road which is Old Highway 40.

## B. RECREATION GOALS & POLICIES

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### RECREATION VISION

Encourage and accommodate year-round active and passive recreational activities, expand recreational opportunities, and improved access to nearby recreation.

### GOAL REC-1: MAINTAIN THE QUALITY OF AND EXPAND ACCESS TO YEAR-ROUND DISPERSED RECREATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES ON DONNER SUMMIT WHERE IT IS CONSISTENT WITH ENVIRONMENTAL VALUES AND PROTECTION OF NATURAL RESOURCES.

#### ***Policy REC-1.1: Connected Trail System***

*Encourage the sustainable development of recreational facilities that complement the mountain landscape and natural resources on Donner Summit. Multi-use trail systems shall be expanded to connect the Rural Center to mountain recreation opportunities, and provide a link to major regional or interstate trails. Biking trails should serve both mountain bikers and road cyclists, providing links to neighborhoods and adjacent areas.*

#### ***Policy REC-1.2: Open Space***

*Support a broad range of enjoyable recreational experiences by integrating a variety of unique settings and isolated habitats and providing connection to regional open space lands.*

#### ***Policy REC-1.3: Accessibility***

*All non-motorized facilities in the Soda Springs Rural Center, including walkways, sidewalks, crosswalks, paths, pedestrianized streets, pedestrian plazas, bike lanes and highway shoulders, shall be designed to accommodate wheelchair accessibility where feasible, and once established, shall provide for appropriate management and maintenance programs.*

#### ***Policy REC-1.4: Partnerships***

*Cooperate with the Truckee Donner Land Trust, U.S. Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, and Placer County to optimize the use of public lands and facilities for public use and recreation.*

#### ***Policy REC-1.5: Compatibility***

*Ensure that non-motorized facility design is consistent with the character of the surrounding lands, the intended and varying needs or users, and the expected volume of use. Discourage passive recreational opportunities adjacent to incompatible land uses and areas with low recreational or aesthetic value.*

**Policy REC-1.6: Campgrounds**

*Provide opportunities to expand public day use and overnight camping. Locate new campground facilities in non-sensitive areas and in proximity to necessary infrastructure.*

**Policy REC-1.7: Temporary and Annual Events**

*Encourage recreation related temporary events within the Rural Center to increase pedestrian and economic activity. Promote activities such as obstacle course races, triathlons, bicycle races, rock climbing competitions, or similar special events that increase local economic activity and enhance the visitor recreation experience.*

**GOAL REC-2: PROVIDE NON-MOTORIZED IMPROVEMENTS THAT CONNECT SODA SPRINGS WITH RESIDENTIAL NEIGHBORHOODS, RECREATIONAL, EDUCATIONAL, NATURAL, CULTURAL, AND HISTORIC RESOURCES.**

**Policy REC-2.1: Project Review**

*All proposed discretionary projects within the Soda Springs Rural Center shall be reviewed for opportunities to contribute to pedestrian amenities along Donner Pass Road, including continuous sidewalks, walkways, pathways, and/or trails.*

**Policy REC-2.2: Recreation Hub**

*Promote the Soda Springs Rural Center as a hub for recreation by allowing a mix of uses that promote outdoor recreation concessionaires, recreation based commercial services, and temporary activities. Connect the Rural Center to recreation opportunities by upgrading existing bike and pedestrian trails, constructing new connections, and increasing transit service. Provide both passive and active opportunities within the natural setting.*

**Policy REC-2.3: Public Land**

*Promote recreational trails on existing public lands, public easements, and other public rights-of-way. Identify facilities and implementation measures to enhance pedestrian, bicycling, and transit opportunities along with other opportunities to reduce automobile dependency.*

**Policy REC-2.4: Private Land**

*Encourage the private section to develop recreational improvements on their land. Improvements may include establishing community event areas and establishing appropriate space for the outdoor display of for sale or rental recreation equipment.*

**Policy REC-2.5: Identification**

*Provide highly visible, recognizable, and safe trail heads or access points into the trail system.*

**Policy REC-2.6: Learning**

*Encourage recreational trails that provide educational and interpretive opportunities.*

**GOAL REC-3: ENCOURAGE RECREATION USES IN AND AROUND THE AREA PLAN TO WHICH LOCAL BUSINESS CAN PROVIDE SUPPORT GOODS AND SERVICES.**

## **C. RECREATION IMPLEMENTATION ACTIONS**

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The following actions will accelerate implementation of the goals and policies listed above.

1. Construct and maintain multi-use trails and associated facilities identified in the Public Facilities and Services chapter of this Plan to provide a range of recreational trail opportunities including non-motorized access between the Rural Center and the Serene Lakes development.
2. Coordinate with the Truckee Donner Land Trust to manage Lake Van Norden either as a lake or a restored meadow.
3. Coordinate with the U. S. Forest Service to construct campgrounds that encourages a mountain biking “campground to campground” circuit.
3. Designate publically-owned land adjoining the Yuba River as Open Space in the Area Plan land use maps.

**FIGURE 5-1: DONNER SUMMIT RECREATION MAP**

