

NORTH FORK AMERICAN RIVER TRAIL

TRAIL PLAN

Placer County Facility Services
California



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Introduction

The Auburn State Recreation Area has an established network of trails throughout the American River Canyon that provide a variety of recreational opportunities. With the substantial growth that Placer County has experienced over the last two decades and the associated demand for recreational facilities—specifically hiking, biking, and equestrian activity along the North Fork American River—expansion of the trail network in this area has emerged as a priority to accommodate County residents and visitors alike.

Consequently, Placer County Department of Facility Services (Facility Services), in conjunction with the California Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR), has prepared the *North Fork American River Trail Plan* (herein referred to as the “Trail Plan”) to augment the existing trail network in response to this demand. The North Fork American River Trail project is proposed as a multiple use trail that will begin at the confluence of the North and Middle Forks of the American River and end at Ponderosa Bridge, approximately 14.2 miles upstream.

The purpose of the Trail Plan is to provide Facility Services with a working document that describes the project background setting, and scope; and provides guidelines for plan implementation including detailed trail construction techniques, and preliminary cost estimates. The Trail Plan will also be used to assist the County in 1) coordinating the environmental review process; 2) informing the community about the project; 3) applying for grants to fund trail development; and 4) soliciting bids for trail construction.

Background

The genesis for the County’s project grew out of a concept initiated by Placer County Supervisor Rex Bloomfield to develop a continuous trail from Sacramento to Carson City, Nevada, along the North Fork American River canyon; this conceptual plan is referred to as the Capital-to-Capital Trail or “Cap-to-Cap” Trail. The Cap-to-Cap trail concept has been around in various forms for decades.

Several years ago, Placer County staff and elected officials began meeting with the primary land management agencies that had jurisdiction along the proposed Cap-to-Cap trail route; they also met with interested trail groups to gauge interest and to gain support for the conceptual project. As momentum increased and some funding sources were tentatively identified, Placer County entered into negotiations with United States Bureau of Reclamation (USBR) and DPR, since portions of the conceptual route would cross both Folsom and Auburn State Recreation Areas (Note: USBR is the landowner of both Folsom Lake SRA and Auburn SRA, and DPR has an operating agreement to manage both of these facilities).

As a result of these negotiations, DPR identified a number of concerns with the proposed trail concept. These included 1) potential user conflicts due to the varying allowed uses on the proposed Cap-to-Cap trail; 2) poor condition of existing trails along the route; 3) the proposed

trail alignment and its proximity to the river; 4) future maintenance of the trail; and 5) determining if there was a common vision for the trail among the involved agencies.

The County originally identified construction of a new section of trail from the Confluence to Ponderosa Bridge in Auburn SRA as "Phase 1" of the Cap-to-Cap Trail concept. In subsequent meetings with DPR, the County addressed many of the agency's concerns: 1) acknowledging DPR and USBR would need to approve the trail alignment; 2) agreeing to provide some separation between the trail and river; 3) providing for future maintenance of the trail; and 4) assisting with the assessment of trail repairs needed on existing trails in the proposed Cap-to-Cap route.

The County also agreed to design the trail section from the Confluence to Ponderosa to function as a stand-alone section with adequate parking and staging facilities, as well as connections to existing trails. Under these conditions, DPR agreed to explore the development of the North Fork American River Trail from the Confluence to Ponderosa Bridge.

At this time, the Cap-to-Cap Trail remains a concept and there are many potential barriers to completing such a trail in the upper portions of the North Fork Canyon. These potential barriers include private land ownership, extreme topography and Wild and Scenic River and Wilderness designations. DPR believes that developing a trail from the Confluence to Ponderosa is appropriate given the topography and other physical characteristics, existing uses and development in this portion of the Canyon, and the direction in existing management plans for the area.

DPR will not consider developing any further sections of trail in the North Fork Canyon above Ponderosa Bridge until the General Plan for Auburn SRA has been completed. It is anticipated that the General Plan process will begin in 2006. The General Plan will determine if the development of trails or other facilities in these portions of the Canyon is appropriate.

Trail Advisory Group

With DPR concurrence on exploring a stand-alone North Fork Trail from the Confluence to the Ponderosa Crossing, Placer County Facility Services began work on identifying an alignment and convened a citizens' Trail Advisory Group (TAG) to work through issues related to the trail alignment and design. It was anticipated that, by providing an opportunity for citizen input from the outset, salient issues and areas of controversy would be identified and dealt with early in the process.

The TAG is comprised of 12 representatives from various trail groups (i.e., equestrians, hikers, mountain bikers), environmental organizations and DPR (see *Appendix A* for the list of members and their affiliations). This group met monthly for five months and in the field on two occasions, guided by their mission statement to focus discussions and stay on task. The mission statement reads as follows:

"To provide information and assistance for the creation of a multiple use trail from the Confluence to Ponderosa Bridge that conserves the wilderness and scenic values of the land."