

As we managed our way through the pandemic, the lockdowns and working remotely, many of us came to appreciate and value the great outdoors and the trails we have in our region. While our trails are amazing and an essential component of our quality of life, they are also limited, not connected, and need repair. Our community has embraced the outdoors as a critical component of our brand, but we have neglected our trails. There are so many benefits from an integrated, connected, and well-maintained trail system that we must do more to expand and maintain the beautiful trails we have. Fortunately, after more than three years of work by more than 40 groups and agencies, we finally have a trail plan to help us do just that.

The Truckee Meadows Trail (TMT) Plan and Report 2021. This plan is the product of thousands of hours of work, including over three years of research, trails inventories, GIS map production, collaboration with the public, and more than 40 agencies and stakeholder groups, including the US Forest Service, the Bureau of Land Management, Washoe County, City of Reno, City of Sparks, Truckee Meadows Regional Planning Agency, and many others. Public input included more than 300 responses to the survey and 140 participants that attended public workshops.

For The First Time Ever, We Have A Coordinated Plan. The plan provides for a professionally staffed, public/private agency committed to the maintenance and stewardship of our regional trails network. A full-time trails coordinator will work for the Truckee Meadows Trails Working Group (detailed in the plan) and lead future fundraising efforts, while executing the TMT plan. Most of the annual budget will go directly to the maintenance and upgrade of the regional trails network.

Quality of Life Impacts: Trails matter - To enjoy a community like ours, with all the great events, attractions, and fantastic weather, we want to be outdoors, biking, or walking from one part of our community to another. A high priority in this plan is to connect public lands, schools, parks, open space, neighborhoods, and other community areas that are a part of Truckee Meadows and the surrounding areas. There is plenty of research to indicate that property owners adjacent to trails realize the convenience, access to recreation, and connection to the natural environment associated with trails. Numerous surveys suggest that the majority of respondents believe trails have a positive impact on their community.

Public Health Impacts: Given the increased emphasis on walking and physical activity for health, what better way to get one's daily exercise or "steps" in than to have some quality time on a trail, walking or biking, rather than driving and parking to get somewhere. Being near a trail encourages exercise. 60% of trail users reported they exercise more regularly, and 23% indicated that they did not get regular exercise before they started using trails.

It's Time to Invest in our Trails: The pandemic has significantly increased the use of our regional trails and highlighted the need for a coordinated effort to improve them. Unfortunately, our local governments are still dealing with the pandemic and budget cuts in many areas, including parks and recreation, where limited trails funding is allocated. The good news is that the Truckee Meadows Trail Plan proposes a public/private partnership, with an annual budget of just \$250,000, dedicated exclusively to trails. While there are many great things being done by volunteers in the area and non-profits like the Biggest Little Trail Stewards, Tahoe Pyramid Trail, and the Eastern Sierra Trails Coalition, attempting to coordinate the efforts of other non-profits and trail advocates, there has been no single lead agency and no dedicated funding source. The TMT plan fixes that and with our support, will adequately invest in the trails, bikeways, and pedestrian-friendly streets that will give us all a better place to live, work and play.