

TAHOE-PYRAMID BIKEWAY

Bikeway continues miles-long journey



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PROVIDED TO THE REG

Clockwise from top: Janet Phillips, the guiding force behind the Tahoe-Pyramid Bikeway, walks across the Fish Bridge over the Truckee River on Dec. 23, 2009; a group of Tahoe-Pyramid Bikeway supporters participated in an organized ride from Wadsworth to Pyramid Lake in October; and bicyclists ride toward the ribbon on April 26 at the opening ceremony of the bikeway's newest addition west of Sparks.

With 68 miles open, group has 45 to go between Tahoe, Pyramid

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The Tahoe-Pyramid Bikeway could be extended by several leaps and bounds in 2011, including opening the first trail in the Truckee Canyon west of Verdi, possibly gaining access along the Truckee River at the S-Bar-S Ranch north of Wadsworth and opening a new stretch through the scenic McCarran Ranch.

Once McCarran is opened to bike riders after a new bridge is built, they will have nine miles of trail to ride from Mustang to Tracy, said Janet Phillips, bikeway leader.

Phillips said work could begin this year on the first four miles of trail into the Truckee Canyon from Verdi after the Truckee Meadows Water Authority signed an agreement in 2010 making its dirt maintenance road public.

That trail, however, won't be opened until the Fish suspension footbridge is made sturdy, Phillips said.

A grant to cover \$200,000 of a \$350,000 in improvements now is in the works, she said.

Mile by mile, Phillips and a band of about 11 professionals and recent retirees now are in

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FIND OUT MORE: The Tahoe-Pyramid Bikeway's website at www.tbikeway.org has descriptions of the trails, projects and maps. It also has a link to its Facebook page, where group trail rides are organized.

ANNUAL MEETING: A kick-off party for the group's work for 2011 will be held at the River Room cafe in the Riverside Lofts building from 5 to 7 p.m. on Jan. 24.

HONOREES: Sponsors of the Century Circle fundraising effort will be honored. Bikeway leader Janet Phillips said 87 supporters agreed to provide \$100 a year for planning, grant applications and operations.

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Bicyclists ride along a four-mile stretch of the Tahoe-Pyramid Bikeway on Nov. 24, 2008. The project now is in its seventh year of pursuing a bikeway linking Lake Tahoe to Pyramid Lake.

Bikeway/70 volunteers construct, maintain trails

From 1D

In their seventh year of pursuing a bikeway following the Truckee River from Lake Tahoe to Pyramid Lake, So far, 68 miles are open, and there are 45 miles to go.

Another 70 volunteers, she said, can be counted on for trail construction, pulling weeds or maintenance.

The bikeway can be a dirt trail or road or a wide road shoulder, such as along California or between Square Valley and Truckee, Phillips said. The big push, she said, is to get a bikeway opened, making improvements along the way.

"The original wide-eyed optimism that this was a sprint has become a marathon," said Phillips, a retired Sierra Pacific Power Co. executive.

She said the project requires "the passion, the time and the stubbornness" to see it through. "If we can continue to get a few miles every year, then it should be finished in time for me to still ride a bike. It could take another 15 years, and I'll be 74 by then."

Fred Boyd, Reno Sparks Chamber of Commerce acting executive director, said the plans for next year sound exciting.

"I'm not a bicycle person per se, but I like to hike and bike," Boyd said. "I think it's a definite plus for our area, for the people who live here. And for visitors, it's another little arrow in our quiver."

Starting at Lake Tahoe, a paved trail ends near the Square Valley entrance and then a wide shoulder takes bikers to Truckee. From there, town locals are working to extend and improve the ride through its Legacy Trail project.

In 2010, the bikeway group's efforts to obtain grants failed to start building a trail from Hirschdale Road at the west end of the Truckee Canyon, near Boca Reservoir.

That section is expected to be the most expensive, requiring a contoured — or projecting — trail along the side of a steep cliff below Interstate 80 and a freeway overpass.

So, the group now is concentrating on the Verdi side.



STEVES WOODARD

East of Reno and Sparks, bikeway volunteers Pat Roe and Heidi Littenberg headed up an effort in 2010 to build 1½ miles of trail through a cottonwood forest on the McCarran Ranch, where the Nature Conservancy began work to return the Truckee River to its wild state.

To open the trail at the ranch, a 100-year-old bridge over the Truckee River at the ranch will have to be replaced.

The Nature Conservancy has raised nearly all the money needed for the bridge work, and construction bids should be released soon, said Paul Bakke, the conservancy's river project manager. It would be constructed in late summer when the river is low, she said.

East of there, the bikeway group opened two miles of trail in Tracy last April.

Once the McCarran Ranch is opened, this will allow for the nine-mile section from Mustang to USA Parkway in Tracy.

"It's unparalleled river riparian scenery," Phillips said of McCarran Ranch. "It will get to three of the four river restoration projects."

There's a lot of waterfowl, cottonwood forest and wild horses.

In the meantime, Phillips said she likes to ride the Tracy section and then follow USA Parkway at the Tahoe-Reno Industrial Center to its end to check out herds of wild horses.

"For someone who likes a road ride and desert scenery, it's really dramatic," she said, adding a map of the 17-mile loop is on the group's website. "It's best on weekends.

There's less truck traffic." Getting the trail from Sparks to the Mustang Ranch still depends on Storey County Commissioners and people at Rainbow Bend subdivision in Lockwood changing their minds about the trail, Phillips said.

The commission blocked an effort in January 2007 to extend the trail after the bikeway group had obtained a \$450,000 state grant to build a needed bridge at Pioneer Crossing. That grant was forfeited.

"We are stuck right here at Lockwood," Phillips said. "To get to town on a bike, Rainbow Bend residents have to ride on I-80 or illegally cross a railroad bridge. She said either route is extremely dangerous."

North of Wadsworth, Phillips has hopes of replacing two miles of trail as the desert hills that bypass the S-Bar-S Ranch with a river route on the ranch. The bypass trail was built by volunteers in 2008.

In December, however, the Board of Regents agreed to sell the 288-acre ranch to the Pyramid Lake Paiute Reservation for \$3.7 million. Federal funds under the Truckee River negotiated settlement are available for the purchase.

Phillips said she is hopeful that the tribal council will agree to grant access for the bikeway as the tribe already has opened 22 miles of paved or dirt road along the river on the reservation to get to Pyramid Lake. Visitors must first stop and get a day-use permit for \$6.50 per car at the Smoke Shop in Wadsworth.