

Donner Memorial State Park

General Plan

Newsletter #1 – May 2002

State Parks will Provide an Opportunity to Review Preliminary Planning Proposals for a New Museum/ Visitor Center at Donner Memorial State Park

When: Thursday, May 30, 2002
Where: The Emigrant Trail Museum
At Donner Memorial State Park
Time: 4:00 – 8:00 pm

California State Parks is currently preparing a general plan for Donner Memorial State Park, which will address our desire for a new museum as well as other significant park planning issues.

State Parks Plan for a New Museum

The current Emigrant Trail Museum at Donner Memorial State Park does not have the capacity to adequately serve the increasing numbers of visitors eager to learn about the park's history and natural resources. Over the years, park staff has heard many comments from the public concerning the lack of adequate space and interpretive facilities in the museum.

A Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) Planning Team has been working to identify the most appropriate location for a new and expanded museum/ visitor center for the park.

There have been two appropriate locations identified, each with its own set of criteria. One location has developed in collaboration with DPR's neighbor to the east of park property, A. Teichert and Son, Inc. With Teichert, the Department has submitted a grant application to the federal Transportation Enhancement



The Emigrant Trail Museum

Activities (TEA) program for a new museum/ visitor center on a site within land owned by Teichert. This land would be donated by Teichert to the Department as part of the potential TEA grant. The California Transportation Commission will be considering the grant request at a meeting scheduled for May 9, 2002.

The Planning Team has also been investigating alternate locations for a new facility within current park boundaries, if the grant proposal is not successful. The most appropriate location the Team has found, determined by a set of criteria explained later in the newsletter, is at the east end of Donner Lake, set back in the trees from the shoreline.

The General Plan will provide goals and guidelines for management of significant resources and public access and use. Current traffic problems at the park entrance area have also been looked at by the Planning Team. On busy days, heavy traffic can prevent museum visitors from accessing the museum parking lot, and vehicles can stack up from the kiosk onto Donner Pass Road. Proposals have been made to alleviate these problems.



**Coldstream Canyon from
the Teichert Alternative
Site**

SUMMARY OF PLAN PROPOSALS

Teichert Property Alternative

The Department’s preferred alternative is to develop a new museum/ visitor center on the Teichert parcel. This would be possible if funding were approved for this project, and the property transferred to California State Parks. This project would require future detailed planning and design, which would include public review and a subsequent Environmental Impact Report.

General Plan Process

General Planning for the Department of Parks and Recreation consists of a series of steps that include information gathering, analysis, and proposals with opportunities for public input.

Where we are in the process:

Step 1: Data gathering.

Step 2: Issues identification and analysis.

Step 3: Establish plan goals and develop alternatives.

Step 4: Planning Workshop, to present planning goals and alternatives, and receive public comments.

Step 5: Incorporate public comments into Preliminary General Plan/ Draft EIR.

Step 6: Public review of Preliminary General Plan/ Draft EIR (45-day California Environmental Quality Act process) (CEQA).

Step 7: State Parks and Recreation Commission Hearing (Fall, 2002).

- The general location for this new facility would be at the southwest portion of the existing Teichert property. This site was chosen as the plan’s preferred building site due to spectacular views of the surrounding mountain passes traveled by the pioneers, and for its distance from day and overnight use and archeologically-sensitive areas in the park.
- This alternative proposes that vehicle access to the new visitor center be from Donner Pass Road to Coldstream Road and through the western portion of the Teichert property.
- Campground and day use areas would continue to be accessed through the existing park entrance and kiosk.
- Short term and disabled visitor parking would be provided near the Pioneer Monument and the park’s cultural attractions.
- If this alternative were to be implemented, the Emigrant Trail Museum would be converted to offices for park operations and administrative purposes, and screened from public use areas.



Proposed In-Park Alternative Site for a New Museum/Visitor Center

In-Park Alternative

If the Teichert site is not available for the establishment of a new museum/ visitor center, then our Department will consider an alternative location within the existing park. Several sites were evaluated during the planning process, and the best in-park site for a new museum/ visitor center was identified as being at the east end of Donner Lake.

This site is in a location set back from the shoreline in the trees. The location provides good views of Donner Pass and Donner Lake for interpretive purposes. It is located in an area of potential archeological value. However, this site was extensively modified by the previous owner and is currently considered the least sensitive of the areas along Donner Pass Road. This site is desirable because it is not adjacent to existing overnight facilities and is relatively close to Donner Pass Road for year-round public access.

This alternate museum/ visitor center site was the Department’s preference for the location of a museum when the park was being established in the early 1960’s (it was not built here because acquisition of that particular parcel was not complete at the time a new museum was funded for construction).

This in-park alternative includes:

- Two separate park entrances off Donner Pass Road.
 - **Main park entrance:**
A camping and day use entrance will be maintained at the existing entrance road and kiosk. The point of entry off Donner Pass Road may be moved slightly to resolve traffic stack-up problems in front of the kiosk.
 - **Museum/ visitor center access:**
A museum/ visitor center access road is proposed at the west end of the park, in an area that is now an unpaved road.
- The existing Pioneer Museum would be converted into offices for park operations and administrative purposes, and screened from public use areas.
- There would be short-term and disabled visitor parking near the Pioneer Monument and the park’s cultural attractions.

PURPOSE of the PARK

Donner Memorial State Park was established to commemorate the people who crossed the Sierra Nevada through time, and the Donner Party tragedy that took place here in the winter of 1846 – 47.

An important part of this Purpose is to preserve and interpret the park’s natural and cultural resources as part of the Truckee River Basin, a major passageway to the crest of the Sierra Nevada.

The draft General Plan also proposes that the park's landscape be managed in a way that restores biological diversity and provides an important link in the fragmented ecosystem of the Sierra Nevada. Another priority is that facilities are provided to interpret the park's prehistoric, historic and natural resources and to allow the public to enjoy its scenic and recreational attractions.

ADDITIONAL GOALS FOR THE PARK

The following are several of the **planning goals and guidelines** that will be included in the general plan.

- Ensure the highest level of appropriate protection, preservation, and interpretation of the park's significant cultural resources.
- Reduce or eliminate unnatural soil and stream bank erosion and habitat degradation.
- Prepare a Road and Trails Management Plan for guiding the location, use, and maintenance of existing & future roads and trails.
- Manage the Cold Stream Creek watershed to re-establish geological stability and ecological balance.
- Interpret the park's natural and cultural resources for the public to help promote enjoyment and protection of those resources.
- Provide a multitude of recreational opportunities that will allow California's diverse population to visit, enjoy and better understand the significance of the park's resources.

Further studies needed:

Planning zones outside the park's developed areas will require additional studies and management planning to identify more specific

resource management guidelines and appropriate facility development and land use. Current land uses may continue while further studies help determine visitor impacts and the ultimate potential of these areas.

These studies would include:

- Site specific studies of soil, geologic and hydrologic conditions.
- Evaluation of existing data and collection of new information to determine existing and potential value of habitats to wildlife in the park.
- Archeological investigations in areas of potential facility development.
- Surveys to determine demand for existing or new types of recreational activities in the park.



The Pioneer Monument

What's Next?

Following this planning workshop, the Planning Team will take all the comments received, modify plan proposals where appropriate, and complete a Preliminary General Plan/Draft EIR for public review. This next opportunity for public review and

comment on the general plan document is anticipated in July.

After the CEQA public review period, the Department will respond to public comments and present the general plan to the State Park and Recreation Commission at its public hearing, tentatively scheduled for October 2002. Future public notices, indicating the date, place, and time of this hearing, will be sent to those on our mailing list and will appear in the local newspaper.

Our Department would welcome any written comments that you may have on the materials presented at the Planning Workshop.

There will be information posted on the Department's web site as it becomes available. You may also reference the Department's web site (at www.parks.ca.gov) for additional information about the park and other park planning efforts in progress.



A Relaxing Day at Donner Memorial SP



For More Information or to Offer Ideas or Concerns:

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