

News Release



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
April 24, 2013

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California State Parks Completes Major Environmental Renovation of Ward Creek Unit

A Newly Restored Forest Area is Now Open to Hike and Bike

Recreation opportunities in the Lake Tahoe area just got better with the restoration of Ward Creek Park, a small, but beautiful park area near Tahoe City. This park now offers new hiking and biking opportunities that show-off how an abused forest and wetlands area can be restored.

California State Parks (CSP), with the assistance of the California Tahoe Conservancy, the California Conservation Corps and the North Tahoe Fire District, initiated the restoration as part of the Tahoe Environmental Improvement Program. The effort has restored a forest and wetlands area and improved roads and trails for visitor use.

“When we acquired this property it was in sad shape”, said Nathan Shasha, Environmental Scientist with California State Parks. “It was overgrown with thick, fire-prone Conifer forests, there was a myriad of old logging roads, user-created trails were damaging the ecosystem and there was an old diversion dam on the property. After working with our partners, we have a natural area that is recovering and becoming a beautiful place to visit.”

Ward Creek is a unit of the California State Parks system and is located about 5 miles south of Tahoe City on Highway 89. The park is 180 acres in size with Ward Creek flowing along the northern edge and Highway 89 on the east. Visitors can access the park by trail from the Highway 89 bike path or can park at trailheads off Timberland Drive at a park gate or at the Rideout Community Center.

In 2006, CSP worked with the California Tahoe Conservancy to remove the dam and restore that section of the creek. CSP partnered with the North Tahoe Fire district to procure funding to improve forest health and reduce fire hazard by thinning the forest between 2008 and 2010. In 2011 and 2012, CSP initiated a park wide road and trail rehabilitation project to improve recreation access while reducing impacts to the watershed.

“One of our missions in the State Park system is to preserve our state’s extraordinary biological diversity,” said Cyndie Walck, Engineering Geologist with California State Parks.

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“This project is an example of the kinds of projects we do all over the state to bring natural health back to damaged areas and we are proud of the work that we and our partners can accomplish through such efforts.”

Roads and trails can have a major impact on watersheds when they are not constructed properly. They capture and divert natural drainage, causing erosion and causing impacts to habitat and water quality. The trails project is part of the Tahoe Environmental Improvement Program and received additional assistance from California Conservation Corps crews through Proposition 84 funding. CSP developed a plan that included removing unnecessary or poorly aligned routes, improving existing trails, and constructing new trails properly to reduce erosion and improve visitor experience. The project included construction of 5,700 feet of single track trail and 270 feet of boardwalk, and the removal of 8,100 feet of poorly aligned routes. Additional minor improvements are planned for summer 2013, including signage.

Visitors can hike or bike through the park and continue to Stanford Rock or the Tahoe Rim and Pacific Crest trails to the west, or just take a leisurely hike around the park and down to Ward Creek. Dogs are allowed on a leash only.

Please exercise courtesy while using the park, bikers should yield to hikers and maintain controllable speeds, and please stay on the developed roads and trails. Wet meadows are especially susceptible to damage from bikes, hikers or even dogs going off of the trails.

Come on out to the park and enjoy the spring wildflowers and wildlife and see a part of the Lake Tahoe Basin and a California State Park you may have never known existed. But please help keep the improvement in good condition by staying on the trails and keeping dogs on a leash.

For Press: If you need assistance to contact persons listed in this news release, please contact Roy Stearns, Deputy Director for Communications, (916) 654-2270, roy.stearns@parks.ca.gov.

Reporters interested in photos of the restoration can contact Nathan Shasha at 530 581 1794 or Nathan.Shasha@parks.ca.gov.

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