

SEED 07-17-25  
Item #3

El Dorado County needs a strong, long-term strategy for economic development, using outdoor recreation — especially recreation tourism — is the most viable path forward. Due to our geography, large-scale agriculture isn't realistic, but we have world-class terrain and historical assets that can be developed into a sustainable tourism engine.

I'm currently working on a draft master plan — a big-picture vision — that's still in early stages. Below are some of the core components and examples guiding this effort.

---

### Proven Models: Auburn & Beyond

A great example nearby is Auburn. Their **Confluence Trail system** is far more expansive than it looks on a map, and any weekend you'll find hundreds of users — hikers, bikers, equestrians, and even motorcycles. It's a true multi-use system and a major draw for the region.

<https://www.visitplacer.com/discover/confluence-trail/>

Every year, Auburn hosts high-profile events like:

- **Tevis Cup (Western States Trail Horse Ride)**  
<https://www.wser.org/>
- **Western States 100 Ultramarathon**

These events attract elite athletes and well-funded participants — the kind of visitors who stay in local hotels, dine in town, and support local businesses. The ultrarunning community is rapidly growing and spends significantly when they travel.

<https://ultrarunning.com/calendar/stats/ultrarunning-finishes>

---

### Massive Opportunity: Gravel & Mountain Biking Events

Another model is **Unbound Gravel** in Emporia, KS, which now brings over **12,000 visitors** and **\$5 million** in tourism dollars annually.

<https://www.emporiarda.org/news-and-media/news/p/item/56346/unbound-gravel-brings-12000-visitors-and-5-million-to-emporia-this-summer>

The Sea Otter Classic brought 77,000 visitors to Monterey in 2024. <https://www.seaotterclassic.com/>

Both of these are organized by **Life Time Events**, which runs some of the most successful endurance events in the country:

<https://my.lifetime.life/athletic-events.html>

With our scenery, terrain, and access, El Dorado County could easily host a similar event — and the demand is already there. Consider the **Sea Otter Classic** in Monterey, which draws international participants.

---

## Our Hidden Gem: The Pony Express Trail

Here's the exciting part — **we already have the backbone of this trail system**. The **historic Pony Express Trail** runs through El Dorado County from west to east.

- In the **western part**, it overlaps with the **El Dorado Trail**, which is already in partial use.
- **East of Pollock Pines**, however, it's largely unmaintained, especially after the **Caldor Fire**. Some riders still attempt to use it, but often resort to **Highway 50**, which is dangerous.

🔗 <https://visitolaketahoe.com/attractions/the-pony-express-rides-again/>

Despite its condition, the trail is **mostly usable** and could be **rehabilitated with relatively modest investment**. This could become the centerpiece of a broader county-wide recreation strategy.

## Why This Trail Makes Sense

- It has **national historic significance**, which opens doors to unique public funding.
- It qualifies for funding through **Proposition 68** and the **Recreational Trails Program (RTP)**.
  - 🔗 <https://www.grants.ca.gov/grants/proposition-68-grant-program/>
  - 🔗 [https://www.parks.ca.gov/?page\\_id=24324](https://www.parks.ca.gov/?page_id=24324)
- The trail runs directly through **Sierra-at-Tahoe**, now **Vail Resorts** property — a natural partner. Vail depends on year-round tourism and could be a powerful ally in this effort.

---

## Broader Vision: Sly Park as the Trail Hub

While the Pony Express is a strong spine, we need to create a full trail system that serves everyone — from families and casual hikers to competitive athletes. I see **Sly Park** as a logical hub for this network.

A strong model to follow is **Chestnut Mountain Nature Park** in North Carolina:

🔗 <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/d75d6b2e41354d5a975d854f68248011>

At a larger scale, **Bentonville, Arkansas** — backed by Walmart — has become a mountain biking mecca. While we don't need to go that big, their success proves that trail-based development can completely transform a town.

🔗 <https://www.visitbentonville.com/bike/>

---

## Support & Expertise

We don't have to build this alone. Organizations like the **International Mountain Bicycling Association (IMBA)** specialize in this kind of trail development. They also help with:

- Planning and design
- Funding strategies

- Political advocacy
- Community engagement

<https://www.imba.com/>

---

### **Next Steps: Building a Foundation**

I'm working on formalizing an organization that can serve as the engine behind this — inspired by the **Santa Cruz Trails Alliance** model.

<https://santacruztrails.org/>

It'll take time, but the first step is clear: **fix the Pony Express Trail** and build from there.

---

Let me know if you'd like to connect on next steps, refine the plan, or collaborate on outreach. I'm excited about where this could go — and how it could benefit the entire county.

Best,

**Mica**

