

Jessica L. Araiza

From: jmarenz@comcast.net on behalf of john.arenz@rubicontrailfoundation.org
Sent: Tuesday, January 7, 2025 12:44 PM
To: Jessica L. Araiza
Cc: 'Ken Hower'; 'Jeff Blewett'
Subject: Comments on the El Dorado County Parks and Trails Master Plan

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Please submit the following comments to the El Dorado County Parks and Recreation Commission.

Comments on the El Dorado County Parks and Trails Master Plan, Complete Draft Version, dated 12-13-24 and presented at the December 19, 2024 Parks and Recreation Commission Meeting

Prepared by Rubicon Trail Foundation (RTF), an educational non profit public benefit foundation whose mission is to enhance the future health and use of the Rubicon trail, while ensuring responsible year-around motorized access.

Comment 1. We noticed on the first page that the American River Conservancy, a non profit with a similar mission to RTF, but with focus on the American River, has been included in the acknowledgements, indicating they were participants in the shaping of this document as members of the “Master Plan Advisory Committee”. RTF would be pleased if we were invited to the table as well.

Comment 2. On page 10, the plan states that, “Stakeholder meetings were held in October and November 2022, and a series of five public workshops were conducted in the Winter and Spring of 2023”. The stated purpose of these meetings was to build public awareness, engage stakeholders, and come to a shared understanding of County’s goals and constraints, and to inform and guide the final product. During that era, the former parks manager attempted to close the Rubicon Trail illegally and was generally hostile towards this foundation. We were not invited or notified of any of these meetings or workshops, even though multiple directors have placed ourselves on the parks email list. We do not find that to be a coincidence. This document is the first we have heard of an opportunity for input to the plan, though we did make multiple comments to the goals and objectives of the plan presented at the August 2024 Commission meeting.

Comment 3. On page 37, there is a list of one non-profit that has provided recreational opportunity in the county, the American River Conservancy. While we applaud the efforts of the ARC, and frankly admire the level of involvement they have achieved, Rubicon Trail Foundation should be on that list as well. As the Parks and Recreation Department is aware, RTF has purchased and opened for recreational use approximately 300 acres connected to and adjacent to the Rubicon Trail. Though there are no developed facilities on the property, there is a ¾ mile entrance road and a 2 mile loop for access to the property. RTF has also provided full time seasonal staff on the trail whose direction is to provide interpretive services, educate, and assist the public when needed.

Comment 4. On page 104, Objective 1.2 is to, “Connect people to nature through enhanced access to open spaces for walking, hiking, biking, horseback riding, and nature observation and education”. We commented at the August 2023 Commission meeting (and submitted the comment in writing) that this objective ignores motorized recreation on the Rubicon Trail for which the department is responsible, and the thousands of miles of Forest roads and trails within the County. We stand by that comment.

Comment 5. On page 104, under Objective 102, there are several initiatives. At the August 2024 Commission meeting, we commented that there should be an additional initiative that reads, “In collaboration with user groups, identify improvements to the Rubicon Trail program to enhance sustainable responsible use, and improve the user experience”. We stand by that comment.

Comment 6. On page 104, Initiative 1.4.2, the plan lists as an objective to, “Strengthen and build relationships with State Parks OHV Division, Placer County, and the US Forest Service through regularly scheduled meetings and forums to improve integrated information, use of grant funding, mapping, volunteer coordination, etc. on the Rubicon Trail, to maintain water quality and trail access”. We commented at the August 2024 Commission meeting (and submitted the comment in writing) that these meetings should include the public. One of our biggest concerns about the Rubicon is that the public has gradually and systematically been left out of the discussion over the last seven years. We stand by that comment.

Comment 7. On page 105, Initiative 1.4.10. says, “In collaboration with American River outfitters and the private boating community, identify improvements to the River Management Program and to enhance safety and user experience”. Once again, we don’t want to take anything away from other forms of recreation, but where is the public involvement with Rubicon Trail users? There should be an initiative that addresses collaboration with Rubicon trail users and private outfitters on the trail.

Comment 8. RTF has asked repeatedly over the last year, at least 6 times, to reinstate the Rubicon Oversight Committee (ROC). For ten years, the ROC was an ad hoc committee that agencies and the public were invited to on a regular basis for the purpose of information and collaboration. This is so important to the future of the trail that it should be listed as an initiative in this plan.

Comment 9. On page 109, Initiative 2.3.1 directs that the Parks and Recreation Department should, “Under the direction of staff, engage volunteers and non-profit groups to assist in building and maintaining trails”. We commented at the August 2024 Commission meeting (and submitted the comment in writing) that the infrastructure for this type of effort is already in place in Rubicon. The Tahoe National Forest and the Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit have consistently used large scale volunteer efforts since the 2000’s, but El Dorado County has not allowed or embraced a plan on the Rubicon Trail in years. Put it in the plan and reach out, please. We are here to help.

Comment 10. Initiative 2.4.4 says that the department will, “Establish regular meetings with the City of Placerville and El Dorado County Parks & Recreation agencies, the El Dorado County Office of Education, the U.S. Forest Service, and other park districts and jurisdictions to continually review common natural resource and recreation issues and to coordinate programs, activities, and facilities”. Stakeholders such as non-profits, property owners, and user groups should be included in strategic planning.

Comment 11. On page 110, Initiative 4.2.4. says, “Consider opportunities for volunteers to participate in trail mapping and assessment efforts to update and track maintenance needs of trails”. We have made several overtures to the Parks Manager(s) to assist with mapping and trail assessments and have not received a reply. We are encouraged that this will be added to the Master Plan and look forward to assisting with these efforts. A trail assessment plan in the form of Adopt-A-Trail was in place on the Rubicon trail and was suspended two years ago without explanation. We look forward to that being restarted as well.

Comment 12. Adopt-A-trail and Adopt-A-Park type programs should be included in the Master Plan. By including them specifically in the plan, it sets in motion a real and realistically attainable goal to include the public.

Comment 13. On page 114, Initiative 4.2.5 says to, “Coordinate with Friends Groups for support of single facilities or programs that will better the community and their special interest”. We commented at the August 2024 Commission meeting (and submitted the comment in writing) that Friends of the Rubicon (FOTR) has been in existence since 2000 and working on the trail continuously since then. Since 2017, no volunteer projects have

been approved on the El Dorado County portion of the trail, though FOTR has been working on the Tahoe/Placer County side consistently during that time. We look forward to FOTR and RTF going back to work in El Dorado County.

These comments are submitted on behalf of RTF in the spirit of cooperation and improvement. We look forward to discussion, interaction, and working with you and the Commission in the future.

Regards,

John Arenz
Director
Rubicon Trail Foundation
530-651-3028