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Official route for Rubicon Trail is adopted

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El Dorado County officials this week took a critical step toward resolving recreational and environmental management problems that have plagued the historic Rubicon Trail.

The Board of Supervisors this week designated an official route for an approximately eight-mile stretch of the 22-mile trail that extends from Georgetown in El Dorado County to Tahoma at Lake Tahoe in Placer County.

Once used by California Indians and settlers crossing the Sierra with horses and wagons, the trail is now an attraction for off-highway vehicle enthusiasts worldwide.

County officials say the eight miles from the Wentworth Springs Campground and Loon Lake areas to the El Dorado-Placer county line are the most difficult section to traverse and that which is subjected to the most abuse.

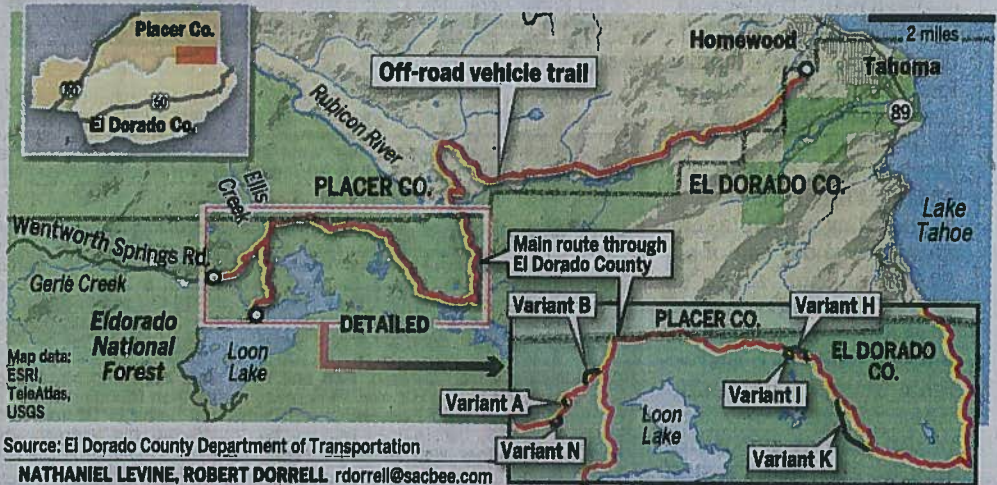
The Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board last spring ordered the county and the Eldorado National Forest to come up with a plan to curb pollution and erosion.

During a five-hour hearing Tuesday, environmentalists pushed for a single route, while off-road vehicle users lobbied for a main route plus more than a dozen side routes, or variants.

The board opted for a middle ground, approving a main route plus six variants.

OFFICIAL ROUTE DESIGNATED FOR KEY SECTION OF THE RUBICON TRAIL

The El Dorado County Board of Supervisors approved the main route for an approximately 8-mile stretch of the Rubicon Trail, a key step toward meeting the requirements of a Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board cleanup and abatement order issued last year. Six side routes were also approved.



Although the trail is a county route, it runs through national forest land, and the supervisors called for the Forest Service to establish designated campgrounds to discourage use of more sensitive areas.

"It's something we can live with," Karen Schambach of the Center for Sierra Nevada Conservation said Wednesday.

Schambach said she was encouraged by the board's decision to make a section known as Little Sluice passable to more vehicles.

Over the past decade, some of the more aggressive off-road users have rolled huge boulders into the trail at Little Sluice to increase the challenge, and people often congre-

gate there to watch what has become something of a spectator sport.

That, Schambach said, reflected a "mind-set that said the trail is something to be destroyed rather than something to be enjoyed."

The types of experiences people seek on the Rubicon have evolved, said Scott Johnston, president of the Rubicon Trail Foundation. "We will have some irresponsible people," he said, "but those are the exception."

Johnston said many trail users were disappointed by the board's decision to "resize" the rocks in Little Sluice, but most remain committed to helping maintain the trail.

He said a number of side routes are important for safety

along the trail.

People seeking different types of challenges need to have legal places to drive their vehicles, said Daphne Greene, director of the state Parks and Recreation Department's off-highway vehicle division.

"If you narrow people in, they're going to push out," she said.

Phil Jenkins, chief of the state's off-highway vehicles division, said his staff will assist with law enforcement on the Rubicon Trail this summer.

A water quality protection plan must be submitted to the state by October and a long-term management plan by April 2011.

Call The Bee's Cathy Locke, (916) 773-6866

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