

Ridgeline Trail would create world-class trail system along Northshore

Contributed by Elizabeth Larson
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CLEARLAKE OAKS – The hilltops that parallel Highway 20 along the county's Northshore offer some of the county's most breathtaking vistas, complete with Mt. Konocti's handsome profile and a view of a huge portion of Clear Lake.

A Clearlake Oaks couple is working to create a trail system offering those views along with linkages to local campgrounds, wilderness areas and vineyards.

The Ridgeline Trail project is the brainchild of Chuck Lamb and Holly Harris, whose concept of a non-motorized recreational trail system has gained approval from county officials and community groups.

The trail would link trails for hiking, biking and horseback riding, with the added goal of integrating blueways – or waterways – as part of the Clear Lake Shoreline Water Trail.

The Ridgeline Trail would run “roughly parallel” to the 23-mile stretch of highway between the intersection of Highway 53 and Highway 20 and Upper Lake, but will follow a longer, more circuitous route through the mountains.

Harris and Lamb's proposal suggests that the system would offer recreational and educational opportunities to county residents as well as a potential ecotourism destination for visitors.

To make the trail as low-impact as possible, Harris and Lamb said they're seeking to use existing trails, fire roads, fire breaks, power line trails and property easements.

In areas where they can't get landowner support, Harris and Lamb have proposed that the trail could utilize areas along High Valley Road and Bartlett Springs Road, and possibly Pacific Gas & Electric easements.

Plans call for using county boat launches and parks as staging areas for connector and blueways trails to prevent the need for creating additional parking and facilities.

On July 24 the Board of Supervisors gave the concept its approval, and OK'd a resolution approving an application to the National Parks Service Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program.

A report to the board from County Public Services Director Kim Clymire said the grant would fund 300 hours of county staff time in developing a project master plan and finding funding resources.

Harris told the supervisors that Sheriff Rod Mitchell offered inmate workers to assist with working on trails and campsites.

Clay Shannon of Shannon Ranch and Richard Kuehn also have pledged their support, said Harris, which include offering trail easements.

The board greeted the project with enthusiasm.

“I think it's a fantastic idea,” said Supervisor Jeff Smith.

Supervisor Denise Rushing added, “This would be a world-class trail system, and there are not many in the world like this.”

Harris and Lamb reported that the concept has received widespread support from Congressman Mike Thompson, Assemblywoman Patty Berg, the Lake County Sheriff's Office, Northshore Fire Protection District, North Shore Business Association, Clearlake Oaks/Glenhaven Business Association, Sierra Club, Audubon Society, Chamber of Commerce, Land Trust, Lake County Tribal Health and Sutter-Lakeside's Wellness Program, among many others.

The project enjoys a great deal of county support as well, with its steering committee composed entirely of county staffers, including Clymire, County Administrative Officer Kelly Cox, Supervisor Denise Rushing, Amanda Thompson of Community Development, Jackie Armstrong of Public Services, Debra Sommerfield of Economic Development, Deputy Redevelopment Director Eric Seely, and deputy Water Resources Director Pam Francis.

The project's benefits are many, according to Harris and Lamb. The trail system will offer opportunities to learn about the county's natural resources and biodiversity, expand local recreational opportunities, encourage entrepreneurial ventures into ecotourism and recreation, bring more customers to current businesses and offer more healthy activities to area residents, especially youth.

The trails also serve a very important function for preservation and conservation, Harris and Lamb said. Creating access now will help ensure it isn't lost later. They also believe that increased use of rural areas will help cut down on illegal off-highway vehicle riding, illegal garbage dumping and other illegal activities.

Developing the trail systems also will give public agencies greater access to remote areas for firefighting and rescue activities, said Harris and Lamb.

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