

Ridgeline trail proposal up for federal grant

Contributed by Elizabeth Larson
Sunday, 23 September 2007

NORTHSHORE – The proposed Northshore Ridgeline Trail system has received an important piece of news: it's being recommended for a federal grant that will support its development process.

Lake County's Public Services Department, which oversees the county's park system, reported that earlier this summer it submitted an application to the National Parks Service (NPS) for technical support from its Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance (RTCA) Program. The application seeks support for developing nonmotorized land and water trails along the Highway 20 corridor.

This spring, Clearlake Oaks residents Holly Harris and Chuck Lamb took the concept of developing a series of interlinking recreational trails to benefit both residents and visitors to county staff, as Lake County News previously reported.

Harris and Lamb proposed developing 20 to 25 miles of land trails along the ridgeline above Highway 20 from Highway 53 to Upper Lake, which will give expansive views of the lake, Mt. Konocti, vineyards, valleys and the National Forest. The plan includes using High Valley Road and Pacific Gas & Electric easements where ridgeline access is not possible.

Connector trails will link the main Ridgeline Trail to Northshore communities. The trails will include interpretative signage to highlight wildlife, topographical, cultural and historical viewspots.

Last week, RTCA Leader Barbara Rice notified the county that she is forwarding the proposal to the Washington, D.C. office with her recommendation that the project receive full support.

Harris told Lake County News that the grant is for part-time technical assistance by RTCA staff – up to 300 hours for one year, with the possibility of renewing for a second year. The grant will support the development of a master work plan and identification of funding sources.

“We are very excited about getting the technical assistance award, as the NPS expertise is invaluable,” said Harris.

Harris said this was a tougher year to receive funding, with limited resources due to RTCA granting several new awards last year that are continuing in the coming year.

She said they're also excited because Rice is personally taking on the Ridgeline Trail project. “Barbara was very impressed with Lake County and its potential.”

Rice told the county that formal approval is expected mid-October.

"Your proposal was excellent and all the right partners are at the table," Rice said in her letter to the county.

Those community partners include the Board of Supervisors, who on July 24 approved the trail concept; state and federal legislators, the Northshore Fire Protection District, Northshore business groups, Sierra Club, Audubon Society, Chamber of Commerce, Land Trust and Lake County Tribal Health, among others.

Part of the overall trail system would include water pathways. Northshore water trails would be the first in an integrated Clear Lake Shoreline trail system, giving kayakers and canoers the opportunity to experience ecological, geological and cultural perspectives from the lake, Public Services reported. Established public access points, including waterfront county parks, will provide access to a variety of water-based adventures for both the novice and expert.

Eventually, there are plans to connect Lake County's trails with other regional trails including those in the Mendocino National Forest, Snow Mountain Wilderness Area and Blue Ridge-Berryessa Natural Area, Public Services reported.

On Sept. 13, Congressman Mike Thompson visited Shannon Ridge Vineyards in Clearlake Oaks, a point along the trail, to hear more about the trail plan, joining a group that included District 3 Supervisor Denise Rushing, county Chief Administrative Office Kelly Cox, Clay and Margarita Shannon of Shannon Ridge Vineyards, Thompson aide Brad Onorato and county Deputy Redevelopment Director Eric Seely. Harris and Lamb gave a presentation to the group explaining the plans for the trail system.

Harris said the trails proposal was well received by Thompson, who was able to see the view from potential Ridgeline Trail route at the Shannon Ridge location, as well as Snow Mountain back country, Mt. Konocti, and Clear Lake and its potential water trails. She added that Onorato also pledged as much help as possible to make the trail system a reality.

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