

Local Agencies and Organizations Partner on Rehabilitation of Independence Trail on the South Yuba River

by Nevada County Executive Office



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Nevada City, CA August 27, 2020 – Staff from Nevada County and the Sheriff’s Office, Bear Yuba Land Trust, South Yuba River Citizens League and the Sierra Gold Parks Foundation accompanied California State Parks and CAL FIRE on Wednesday, Aug. 26 to view the Jones Fire damage to the Independence Trail, the first wheelchair accessible wilderness trail in the United States. The portion of the trail west of Highway 49, owned by State Parks and Bear Yuba Land Trust, was severely impacted by the Jones Fire, resulting in the loss of several wooden flumes, the overlook platform, benches, handrails and the Rush Creek Ramp.



Photo YubaNet

Independence Trail Closed for Repairs

Due to the assessed trail damage and the loss of many wooden flumes and bridges on the west trail plus the instability of the flumes on the east trail, the entirety of the Independence Trail on both sides of Highway 49, as well as neighboring state park lands, will be closed to public access until further notice.

“We’ll rebuild as we did the Bridgeport Covered Bridge and the Malakoff Solar Project, but it will take a collective effort,” said State Parks Sierra District Chief Ranger Matt Green.

“However, right now the area remains unstable with natural and physical hazards, so we are asking the community to support recovery efforts by respecting the closure order. The property will need time to heal.”

The Jones Fire is currently at 85% containment with damage assessments ongoing. However, erosion and heavy equipment repairs of the trail have commenced by State Parks and CAL FIRE.

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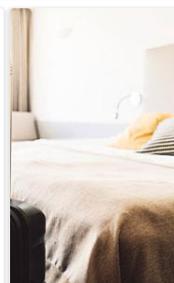
California State Parks and Bear Yuba Land Trust intend to conduct a complete assessment of the work required to reconstruct the flumes following Secretary of Interior Standards for Reconstruction in order to reopen the trail for future generations to enjoy. Bear Yuba Land Trust is currently accepting donations that can be directly designated towards repairs of the Independence Trail. Donations of any amount are now being accepted at www.bylt.org/support/donate/.

“Core to our mission is to provide equitable access to nature and we are fully committed to working with State Parks, Nevada County, FREED and Sierra Gold Park Foundation, along with numerous community partners, to rebuild this trail in a way that will enhance the universal accessibility of this iconic trail for generations to come,” said Bear Yuba Land Trust Co-Executive Director Erin Tarr. “The initial donations we receive will be dedicated to preparing complete damage assessments with engineers and preparing applications for FEMA and other funding requests. It’s going to take a whole community-wide effort to and we are extremely encouraged by the support received from our partners and individual contributors.”

Next Steps

In September, a multi-agency and stakeholder committee will begin meeting to discuss and plan for the repair and restoration of the Independence Trail to modern standards. This will include surveying, planning, and a phased reconstruction of the trail.

Recognizing the historical and community importance of the Independence Trail, there is a joint commitment to rebuild the Independence Trail between public agencies like California State Parks and Nevada County, as well as by non-profit organizations such as Bear Yuba Land Trust, South Yuba River Citizens League and Sierra Gold Parks Foundation.

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“The Independence Trail has been an invaluable asset for our community, enjoyed by thousands of users over the years, serving outdoor enthusiasts of all ages and physical abilities. We look forward to working with the community and our partners to restore and improve this beloved asset, so that it may be enjoyed for generations to come” remarked Holly Mitten, President of the Sierra Gold Parks Foundation.

“We’ve been talking and preparing for a fire like the Jones Fire in the South Yuba River canyon during our Yuba River Safety Cohort meetings. We are grateful there was no loss of life but recognize the loss of this important property is upsetting.” said District 4 Supervisor Sue Hoek. “Like the current restoration of Bridgeport Bridge, we are committed to work together to complete the restoration and have a reopening of Independence Trail.”

About Independence Trail

The Independence Trail follows the route of the historic Excelsior Ditch. Started in 1855, the Excelsior Ditch was constructed by the Excelsior Canal Company serving as a water transport ditch for mining, and later irrigation, covering 35 miles and terminating at the South Yuba River. The ditch operated until it was abandoned in 1961. A portion of the ditch on land under the jurisdiction of the Bureau of Land Management was found eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places in 1982. California State Parks and Bear Yuba Land Trust own the length of the Excelsior Ditch between Highway 49 to approximately 2 miles to the west and 2 miles to the east. The Independence Trail was developed by John Olmsted and his nonprofit Sequoia Challenge as a nature trail for wheelchair access during the 1970’s, includes three miles of the Excelsior Ditch. Remnants of the ditch are still evident along the trail in the form of dirt line ditches, reconstructed wooden flumes and bridges, and rock walls. Most of the wooden flumes were rebuilt in the 1970s-80s and again after they burned during the 1988 “49er Fire”. In 2012, Bear Yuba Land Trust was entrusted with ownership of the 207-acre Sequoia Challenge Preserve in the South Yuba River canyon which consists of seven separate parcels interspersed with California State Parks land along both the east and west portions of the Independence Trail bisected by Highway 49. The goal is for the Bear Yuba Land Trust parcels to transfer to State Parks and become part of the South Yuba River State Park.

