

COUNTY OF NEVADA  
STATE OF CALIFORNIA  
BOARD OF SUPERVISORS



**Hardy Bullock**  
Supervisor, 5<sup>th</sup> District

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**NEVADA COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS**  
**Board Agenda Memo**

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**MEETING DATE:** February 22, 2022  
**TO:** Board of Supervisors  
**FROM:** **Hardy Bullock, District V Supervisor**  
**SUBJECT:** Resolution supporting the national designation of the Donner Summit Tunnels as a National Historical Landmark and its preservation thereof

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**FUNDING:** None.

**RECOMMENDATION:** Adopt the attached Resolution.

**BACKGROUND:**

In late 2021, representative of the Summit Tunnel Conservation Association, a local non-profit organization, Terry McAteer informed the County that an application to designate the Donner Summit Tunnels as a National Historical Landmark had been submitted and was pending review by the United States Department of Interior National Park Service via National Historical Landmarks Program. If designated as a National Historical Landmark, the Donner Summit Tunnels would be the county's second National Historical Landmark alongside two Donner Party Campsites designated in 1961.

The Donner Summit Tunnels are located on the eastside of the pass, just south of I-80 off Donner Pass Road, a stone's throw from the Pacific Crest Trail. The tunnels represent a then modern-day engineering achievement that required 10,000 workers, with 8,000 being Chinese, working 24 hours a day for 18 months chiseling through pure granite to complete the Transcontinental Railroad opened in 1869. While the tunnels are no longer active, they remain located on property owned by the Union Pacific Railroad and United States Forest Service (USFS). It should be noted that should the private property owner object to the designation, the Department of Interior Secretary cannot designate the property. To date, the Union Pacific Railroad remains neutral and has not submitted any objections to its designation. However, the designation of the landmark does have some special effects including requiring the mitigation of impacts to the landmark from any future federal projects, opening eligibility for federal grants for its preservation, along with other tax exemptions, and promoting direct and indirect tourism in the area. The proposal would allow the Summit Tunnel Conservation Association to work in partnership with the USFS to maintain its preservation and provide education docent tours, along with an interpretive center on its history.

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An overview of the process for national designation is as follows:

- A letter of inquiry submitted to the National Park Service.
- National Historical Landmark (NHL) Program staff review the letter to determine if the property appears to meet the criteria for NHL designation. If the property has the potential to be considered for designation, the staff provides the preparer with detailed guidance as the nomination is written.
- Working with the preparer, staff from the National Historic Landmarks Program review and edit the nomination.
- Subject matter experts and scholars from across the nation review the nomination. Their suggestions and assessments are incorporated into the nomination.
- The Landmarks Committee reviews the nomination before making a recommendation to the National Park System Advisory Board.
- The National Park System Advisory Board reviews the nomination before making a recommendation to the Secretary of the Interior.
- The nomination is submitted to the Secretary of the Interior.
- The Secretary considers the recommendations and decides whether to designate the property as a National Historic Landmark.

The designation of the Donner Summit Tunnels is in alignment with the Soda Springs Area Plan Economic Development Policy Goal ED-2.8 (adopted by the Board on October 25, 2016 ) to “improve the visitor experience by creating community gateways, establishing signage to identify the community, creating a year-round economy through expanded use of the railroad and home businesses. Promote and enhance Soda Springs’ role as a sustainable year-round tourist destination,” and Natural and Cultural Resources Policy Goal NCR-4.1 to “encourage the inclusion of significant archeological and cultural resources in the Federal or State Historical Registrar based in the recommendation of the local historical society or a qualified professional.” To date the Donner Summit Tunnels are identified as a cultural resource in the Soda Springs Area Plan and identified in the Nevada County Historical Landmark’s Commission book *Exploring Nevada County* via plaque dedicated in 1999 by Chap 3691 E Clampus Vitus on Donner Pass Road.

Therefore, I urge the Board of Supervisors to adopt the attached Resolution supporting the national designation of the Donner Summit Tunnels as a National Historical Landmark and its preservation thereof.

Sincerely,

Hardy Bullock  
District V Supervisor