



**NEVADA
COUNTY**
CALIFORNIA

BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

Vice Chair Heidi Hall, 1st District
Edward C. Scofield, 2nd District
Lisa Swarthout, 3rd District
Susan Hoek, 4th District
Chair Hardy Bullock, 5th District

Jeffrey Thorsby, Chief of Staff/Clerk of the Board

NEVADA COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
BOARD AGENDA MEMO

MEETING DATE: July 9, 2024

TO: Board of Supervisors

FROM: Jeffrey Thorsby, Chief of Staff

SUBJECT: Resolution designating the Excelsior Ditch/Independence Trail, located off State Route 49, Nevada City, CA 95959 at the Independence Trail Head at and around the South Yuba River State Park, as Nevada County Historical Landmark 24-05

RECOMMENDATION: Adopt the attached Resolution

FUNDING: N/A

BACKGROUND: On January 24, 2024 the Nevada County Historical Landmarks Commission (NCHLC) voted unanimously to recommend to the Board of Supervisors to designate the Excelsior Ditch/Independence Trail, located off State Route 49, Nevada City, CA 95959 at the Independence Trail Head at and around the South Yuba River State Park, as Nevada County Historical Landmark 24-05. Specifically, the NCHLC sponsored the application and received consent and authorization from the State of California Department of Parks and Recreation District Superintendent Robert Griffith on December 14, 2023 for its recommended designation as a county historical landmark.

As outlined in the attached supporting documents, the Excelsior Ditch was built between 1854 and 1859 by Chinese workers to bring high pressure water for hydraulic mining to western Nevada County from the South Yuba River. Initially it ran from about 3 miles upstream of modern Highway 49, 19 miles to Deer Creek near what is now Lake Wildwood. There it connected to the China Ditch which extended 12 more miles to the Smartsville area. The Ditch operated until it was abandoned in 1961.

After the Excelsior Ditch was abandoned, John Olmsted and his nonprofit Sequoia Challenge converted part of the Ditch to the Independence Trail, the nation's first wheelchair accessible wilderness hiking trail. The Independence Trail opened in 1983. Most of the remaining original wooden flumes of the Excelsior Ditch were destroyed in the 1988 49er Fire and in 2020, the Jones Fire destroyed the reconstructed flumes of the Independence Trail. Ditch remnants are still intact throughout the historic alignment. Presently, the California State Department of Parks and Recreation is committed to the

rebuilding of the destroyed and damaged flumes and trestles. Currently, the County of Nevada County and California State Parks, along with the Bear Yuba Land Trust are working together to create the necessary funding to reopen the western portion of the Independence Trail.

As such, there is no doubt that the Excelsior Ditch/Independence Trail is both an historical treasure and an economic development and recreation asset. Therefore, the Nevada County Historic Landmarks Commission recommends the Board of Supervisors adopt the attached Resolution designating the Excelsior Ditch/Independence Trail, located off State Route 49, Nevada City, CA 95959 at the Independence Trail Head at and around the South Yuba River State Park, as Nevada County Historical Landmark 24-05.

Item Approved By: Jeffrey Thorsby, Chief of Staff
Submittal Date: June 26, 2024