

NEVADA COUNTY OUTDOOR VISITOR SAFETY FUND CONCEPT PROPOSAL FORM

ORGANIZATION NAME: Bicyclists of Nevada County DATE 3/31/2022
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REQUEST AMOUNT \$13,724 TOTAL PROGRAM/PROJECT COST \$273,790
PROGRAM/PROJECT NAME Improving and Quantifying Trail Use for Harmony Ridge Trail System
START/END DATE OF PROGRAM/PROJECT 9/30/2022 - 9/30/2023

Overview of request (1-2 sentences):

This funding request is for \$13,724 to design and install navigational and informational trail signs and counters for the popular Harmony Ridge trail network in Nevada County and purchase a new motorized wheelbarrow and trail tools to support construction and maintenance efforts in remote locations.

Need(s) addressed by program/project

Nevada County's outdoor spaces have been heavily impacted as a result of COVID-19. We have seen a significant increase in the number of recreational users over the last two years, especially from people who do not live immediately in our community. While this increase in visitors can be beneficial economically, it has also led to significant environmental impacts, impacted the quality of life of residents, and created public health and safety concerns due to increased congestion. Funding from this grant, along with matched local business and individual donations to the Bicyclists of Nevada County (BONC) , will be used to address these issues by improving signage and maintenance on new and existing mountain bike trails and multi-use trails in the Harmony Ridge area.

Health and Public Safety

Mountain biking in the Harmony Ridge area is a popular destination year-round, drawing many people from the greater Sacramento and Truckee areas including significant numbers of new recreational trail users inspired to take up new outdoor activities during the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite serving significant numbers of inexperienced trail users and out-of-town visitors, physical signage with navigational and safety information in the Harmony Ridge area is virtually non-existent.

Insufficient navigational signage increases the risk that visitors become lost and end up on trails that are inappropriate for their ability or fitness level, they are not permitted to use, or become disoriented and unable to find their way back to their vehicle. Each can create public safety issues. Poor signage can also lead to increased response times by medical personnel or law enforcement in the case of medical or other emergencies. Poor to non-existent mobile phone service in the area makes this need even greater.

Similarly, a lack of signage detailing proper trail etiquette for sharing multi-use trails between hikers, trail runners, equestrians, and mountain bikers makes user conflicts more likely. An influx of new trail users makes this need particularly urgent.

Quality of Life Concerns

Nevada County has seen a significant increase in visitors and the Harmony Ridge area trails are no exception. Although increased visitation to any trail network increases the likelihood of conflict between different user groups, a lack of appropriate signage indicating which trails are open to, and popular with, individual user groups in the Harmony Ridge area exacerbates this problem. This increase in users also creates additional wear-and-tear on trails which can trigger erosion and water quality issues in adjacent streams and create unpleasant and unsafe trail surface conditions. The result is that all trail users experience a decrease in their enjoyment of the trail network.

Program/project description

Funding of this proposal will help address the public health, safety, and quality of life concerns outlined above while enhancing the visitor experience for all trail users in the popular Harmony Ridge area. The proposal scope includes signage for the existing trailhead parking area near the Harmony Ridge Market (i.e., Five Mile House), the planned Parliament trailhead parking area, and required equipment to construct approximately 8 miles of new trail and conduct ongoing maintenance on existing trails. The construction of navigational, safety, and trail rule signage will help create a safer and more enjoyable experience for visitors. At least three of the trails will be safe to use for adaptive bikes/trikes designed for users with disabilities.

The two large signs at each trailhead parking area will include a map that provides navigational and use information including the difficulty and length of trails in the area along with permitted users and directions of travel on individual trails. Trailhead signs will also remind users of right-of-way rules for sharing multi-use and multi-direction trails. Safety signs will be bilingual or pictographic and will be placed at trailheads and at road crossings..

Additional signage dispersed throughout the approximately 25-mile trail system will allow for more accurate navigation for trail users and emergency responders and improve safety for all users by indicating appropriate user group and/or direction of travel restrictions, trail features and hazards and other site specific information. All system signs will have GPS coordinates for EMS location of injured persons. Signed document indicating USFS permission to install signage on their land can be found on page 7 of the USDA Decision Memo (Page 12 of this document) attached.

The proposal also includes the purchase of a motorized wheelbarrow and specialized trail tools to facilitate signage installation and trail maintenance and construction activities in remote locations throughout the network. These tools will elevate efforts by BONC's dedicated volunteer trail crews to both maintain existing trails and construct new ones for years to come.

The public safety and user experience improvements created by improved signage and maintenance will help to maintain and expand the economic opportunities for Nevada County related to outdoor recreation in the Harmony Ridge area. Development and support of mountain bike trail networks in particular has been shown to have a significant economic benefit. As the above cited study shows, visitors who come to mountain bike also patronize local businesses, purchasing meals, gas, lodging, and groceries, etc.

Leveraging resources and partnerships (20 points).

This project will leverage a combination of local business donations, our dues-paying members, our productive relationships with the Tahoe National Forest, and our active and engaged volunteer base. Dues-paying members of BONC are deeply committed to the Harmony Ridge trails. BONC led efforts to construct the Hoot Trail and maintains existing mountain bike trails in the area including Scotts Flat Trail, Miner's Trail, the Pioneer Trail and others. In addition to financial donations BONC members and volunteers have provided over 2000 hours of in-kind time donations for trail maintenance and construction over the past 16 months of this project.

Provide program primary outcome, the indicator for the specific outcome(s) and how measured

The primary outcome of this project will be the installation of a trail use counter, 2 large trailhead signs and approximately 20 smaller navigational, use, and safety signs dispersed throughout the trail network the effectiveness of which we can estimate through more dispersed rider data using on-line platforms such as Strava. Additional outcomes include improved efficiency and safety of BONC's volunteer trail maintenance and construction crews resulting from improved equipment which we will estimate using the relationship between volunteer hours needed per completed trail length.

Please describe the connection between this project and impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic

In 2020, mountain biking sales saw a 150% increase in front suspension mountain bikes and a 92% increase in full suspension mountain bikes with industry experts predicting an annual 10% increase through 2027 [NY Times](#). This increase in bike sales is directly linked to an increase in mountain bike trail users – meaning more traffic on trails, increased wear-and-tear, and more congestion at trail heads. This trend has been seen throughout the outdoor recreation industry, with the Outdoor Industry Association documenting that an additional 7.1 million more Americans participated in outdoor activities like hiking and biking in 2020 compared to the year before. Although location-specific data for the Harmony Ridge area is not available, anecdotal evidence from long-time trail users strongly suggests similarly large local impacts on local trail use. This surge in interest has placed new stresses on local recreation infrastructure and organizations like BONC that exist to help maintain and support it.

If you do not receive the full amount requested, how would the program/project continue?

If we do not receive full funding we will continue to work with our other partners and growing membership to address the funding needs for local trails and projects, including this proposal. Although BONC continually looks for opportunities, and funding, to help improve the user experience on our local trail systems, a likely outcome of a reduced award would be a reduction in scope of the signage plan to focus exclusively on the (currently under construction) Parliament trail system.