

Friends of the Rubicon

TO: El Dorado County Board of Supervisors
Rubicon Oversight Committee, El Dorado County
Eldorado County Sheriff's Office
John Berry, Forest Supervisor, El Dorado National Forest
(Addresses listed below)

FROM: Friends of the Rubicon (FOTR)
SUBJ: Rubicon Trail Master Plan, 2nd Draft

DATE: March ...2005

The Friends of the Rubicon (FOTR) represents the off-road community and is dedicated to keeping the Rubicon Trail open and available to all OHV recreationists. By the very nature of what FOTR is and those it represents, FOTR is placed in the unenviable role of objecting to portions of the Rubicon Trail Master Plan (RTMP). We view the RTMP as over reaching and expensive, and in many cases it fails to address the specific issues on the trail. Despite this no assumptions should be made concerning FOTR's position towards the establishment of an RTMP. FOTR supports the development of a master plan and wants to see positive change actually become reality. FOTR does not support the status quo and does not support acts of lawlessness. FOTR recognizes issues do exist on the trail that need to be managed. In this document we will provide areas of common ground, details of what we view are the problems on the trail and provide solutions for them.

FOTR represent the single largest group of individuals who recreate on the trail and over the last four years have accomplished more to protect, repair and improve the conditions on the trail than any other group. We have earned the right to be heard. Why? Here is a reminder of who FOTR is and what it has accomplished.

FOTR is a coalition of trail users, clubs and organizations spanning the world with approximately 400 clubs represented mostly four-wheel drive. Formed in 2001, FOTR has already grown to be the largest single-trail coalition ever established and is dedicated to keeping the Rubicon Trail open and available to all OHV recreationists. Our successes set the example for others to follow. FOTR has lobbied to get public officials elected, shown up in force when trail problems exist and raised money to support the trail. And most importantly, we have mitigated or began mitigation for every problem that any management agency or interested party identified concerning the trail for the past four years. We fix problems. We serve, protect and defend our trail.

FOTR has documented over 10,000 hours of labor on the Rubicon Trail since 2001.

Accomplishments made by FOTR and it members during the last 4 years:

- Erosion from the Placer entrance (McKinney) road had the potential to contaminate and increase sedimentation in McKinney Creek, which feeds Lake Tahoe. FOTR fixed the problem in essentially one huge work weekend.
- Pleasant Meadow along Loon Lake was in danger of habitat destruction and wet meadow deterioration due to traffic in this area. FOTR fixed the problem.
- Miller Creek at the base of Cadillac Hill was plugged from floods and eroding out of its banks, flooding trail areas and creating unnatural swamps. FOTR fixed the problem.
- Law enforcement was inadequate on the trail in 2001, 2002 and 2003. FOTR lobbied statewide to assist El Dorado County in obtaining large OHV grants for law enforcement.
- User conflicts between motorized users and cross-county skiers were occurring at Loon Lake during winter months. FOTR voluntarily completely fixed the problem.
- Little Sluice needed a bypass for the commercial runs and non-extreme trail rigs. FOTR built one and fixed the problem!
- Spider Lake was closed in 2004 due to human waste issues. FOTR completely fixed the problem in one work weekend.

All these accomplishments directly addressed specific issues on the trail. Despite these efforts there is a need for regular management, education and enforcement on the trail and this requires help from the counties and agencies responsible for the trail. We need help and we do agree issues exist.

Common ground. FOTR recognizes the following:

- The lawlessness at Little Sluice is a problem that is unacceptable.
- The volume of people on the trail during the three major weekends created an unacceptable human waste issue at the Little Sluice/Spider Lake area.
- There is an overall human waste issue on the trail.
- Overuse has occurred in the Spider Lake and Little Sluice regions
- There is a parking problem at Loon Lake on the access road and damns.
- Volume spikes on the three weekends, Memorial Day, 4th of July and Labor Day generate most of the issues on the trail and left unmanaged will continue barring a drop in use.
- A small percentage of trail users have acted without regard for the environment, themselves or the safety of others.
- The 2004 closure of Spider Lake and the continued private property closure there along with anticipated Forest Service (FS) setbacks around Spider Lake will affect future use patterns drastically over the next several years.
- Finally, FOTR also recognizes all these issues would have been avoided with engineered trail management, education and law enforcement.

How These Problems Evolved:

FOTR recognizes the issues on the trail evolved over several years and to put all the blame at one group's feet is not fair. But no one should be shocked to see issues develop on the Rubicon Trail when it is virtually unmanaged by the counties and agencies that are responsible for trail. Problems will occur and should be dealt with in a timely manner or they snowball. This lack of management, education and law enforcement over the last decade is the problem. Not recognizing a change in use patterns and reacting accordingly is the problem. Rather than deal with the specific problems, the responses are emergency closures and talk of restrictions. Yes, closures and restrictions are the easiest and least expensive way to solve the problems. It worked at Bassi Falls. But locking the public out is failing the public. This pattern of closing land as a management solution is a major frustration within the off-road community. The Rubicon trail is the crown jewel for the off-road community. The management plan revolving around the Rubicon trail should be held up by the 4 wheeling community and the agencies countrywide as an example of how to properly manage such a trail without closure. Closures should be reserved for when the management process fails. Despite our frustrations and disagreements we do want to address the issues we see as problems.

Simply put, FOTR takes the position that given timely management, law enforcement and public education on this county road, like any other county road or heavily used recreation area, the need for closures and restrictions would not be necessary.

FOTR believes that implementation of the below improvements will drastically change the trail for the better. Volume will go down. People will know what is and is not allowed. The trail will be marked. Enforcement will be seen. Facilities for waste will be in place. These improvements are cheaper. They are acceptable to the off-road community. They include the off-road community as part of the solution and make overall sense with the effort to preserve the trail for future generations.

First Priority Improvements:

1. Install, service and/or repair permanent toilets at the Loon Lake and Wentworth entrances to the trail. Provide dumpsters at these locations as well.
2. El Dorado County and the Forest Service need to establish mandatory pack it out waste rules with each vehicle possessing wag bags for human waste and larger trash bags for general trash. Also each vehicle must possess an oil spill kit.
3. Address immediate needs in Little Sluice by anchoring rocks above Sluice with appropriate methods.
4. El Dorado County and the Forest Service need to establish a significant and regular law enforcement presence at the trailheads and on the trail. It must be visible and heavy on the three major weekends of the off road season.
5. El Dorado County Sheriff's Office needs to coordinate and establish regular trail patrols by trained volunteers.
6. The Forest Service and El Dorado County need to establish a temporary/quick plan to resolve parking issues that include trailer parking at both Wentworth and Loon Lake.
7. FOTR and the Rubicon Trail Foundation need to establish kiosks at Wentworth and the Tahoe side to match the Loon Lake kiosk.
8. ROC and DOT need to establish trail signage that designates the proper routes of the trail. Specifically signs should clearly detail proper bypasses, environmentally sensitive areas, repair locations, distance markers etc.
9. Rubicon Trail Foundation along with FOTR & El Dorado County will provide from the kiosks: Wag bags/Trash bags and oil spill kits with education on their proper use. They will distribute trail maps and information on proper driving techniques and other general trail information.
10. USFS will provide a "reasonable" setback from Spider Lake and Buck Island Reservoir for camping, with certain distances well marked, considering water flow and geological formations.

Second Priority Improvements:

1. Eldorado County and the USDA Forest Service should establish toilet facilities at Ellis Creek, Spider Lake, and Buck Island to be brought in via helicopter upon snowmelt or Memorial Day and removed at first snow or following October 1st. Explore composting or other less expensive, self-sustaining facilities that could be brought in and out via helicopter or permanently fixed.
2. The USFS along with FOTR should develop and formalize spurs for camping areas at Spider Lake and Buck Island Reservoir.
3. El Dorado County and the USFS should develop and implement a permanent plan for parking.
4. El Dorado County and the USFS should identify and mark on any published maps GPS coordinates for emergency airlift. Also, they should coordinate with Cal Star and any other agencies to provide those coordinates.
5. If problems persist at Little Sluice, take actions to reduce volumes at that location...consider organized camping first as mentioned above. Then and only then consider modifying the conditions within Sluice to 1998 or prior levels, easier than it is now yet still tough and challenging. But then seriously consider developing an alternate location for extreme rock crawling not because anyone is encouraging it but because it is a reality and will find a new home on the trail if not addressed smartly.

FOTR has the following specific concerns with the RTMP:

Little Sluice:

It is FOTR's position that if the above improvements are implemented the overall issues at Little Sluice will go away. And, FOTR recognizes that competition style rock crawling should not occur on the trail. However, we view discussions of blasting the rocks within the Sluice Box as premature and such actions should only occur if a completed and approved RTMP calls for such actions. The idea of modifying the Little Sluice without the other improvements listed above will resolve nothing. We do believe the above detailed improvements will resolve the problems there. But, in the event they don't, we refer you #5 in the "Priority two improvements" listed above.

Quotas/Limits:

FOTR does not support limits or quotas on the Rubicon Trail until an accurate count of trail use is determined and agreed to by all interested parties. The problem here is current counts are so varied and inconsistent that no one can agree as to the actual use. Additionally, past and current closures will modify traffic in that area for years to come.

On October 9, 2001 California State Parks OHV Motor Vehicle Commission and staff, El Dorado County, and Eldorado National Forest staff commissioned a backcountry sanitation engineer to count trail use and human waste build-up. On December 12, 2001, the results were published (Dan Totheroh) pointing out that:

- It was estimated that 35,000 people days would be a reasonable figure to user for total annual use on the Rubicon Trail.
- The annual waste generated would be about 75,000 pounds, or 8,800 gallons.
- Alternative solutions considered included vault toilets, septic leach fields, dehydration and evaporation units, and "pack it out."
- The recommendation was for a pack it out solution combined with vault toilets where practical.

The county commissioned consulting firm, Environmental Stewardship and Planning, estimated trail use to be significantly less in 2004, substantially less than this previous sanitation study. No one can agree as to an acceptable number. We must have a count before we can manage the trail fairly. Further, it is the position of FOTR that the volume issue becomes a non-issue with the implementation of the above-suggested improvements.

It is important to state again that FOTR does not support the status quo or the current isolated incidents of lawlessness. FOTR recognizes that issues do exist on the trail that needs to be managed and solutions implemented. As always, The Friends of the Rubicon are ready and willing to work side by side with the agencies and counties responsible for the management, maintenance and enforcement on the Rubicon Trail. FOTR and the members it represents possesses the most direct knowledge of the trail, its current conditions, and have the best understanding of what changes to the current conditions will have. It would be foolish to disregard these recommendations without serious consideration. We are not motivated by money, politics, or any radical cause. Our only goal is to keep the trail open for the enjoyment of all recreationists.

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