

MCRAT TO GO ... HOLD THE FRIES

By Geisel

Mammoth Lakes has its Trails Master Plan, and soon a version of that same concept, one tailored to Mono County, will likely get into gear.

On May 5, Mammoth Lakes Trails and Public Access (MLTPA) Exec. Director John Wentworth and Paul McFarland from Friends of the Inyo (FOTI) briefed the Board of Supervisors on the Mono County Recreation Access Tool (MCRAT), designed to take the first steps in developing a comprehensive inventory of the points of access to recreation amenities in Mono County. In addition to outlining the tool's general methodology, the duo also hoped to secure funds (\$37,260) to start Phase 1.

Wentworth told the Board that part of MCRAT's objective is to develop a geographic database of jumping off points to areas of interest in parts of Mono County, as well as help inform updates of the Inyo National Forest's general plan and provide other "functional tools" for public relations, RPACs and government administrative use.

Blueprint drafts, initiated in part with the Sierra Nevada Conservancy, are already far along; corridor specific

applications (June Lake and others) are in formative stages. Phase 1, Wentworth said, will incorporate existing GIS information. Phase 2 would verify the GIS information compiled in Phase 1, as well as public outreach from RPACs (Regional Political Action Committees) and other reports sent to Mono County. Phase 3 would compile information from Phases 1 & 2 and submit a final report to the County. The timeframe? Fully funded, Wentworth estimated all three phases could be completed by next fall.

Worst case, with no other funding input, Wentworth estimated the County's financial participation at \$86,000. Finance Director Brian Muir thought the money should come from Local Transportation Commission funds. Wentworth and McFarland both said that FOTI and MLTPA could each kick in \$11,500.

McFarland said they used the Big Sur Chamber of Commerce's trails/back-country guide as a model for MCRAT. "Everything you need about height, trailhead conditions and tons more was contained in that piece," he said.

The Supervisors were intrigued at the proposal, but the discussion brought up some areas that many on

the Board agreed could use a little more definition: where is it based, for one, and what input other County-related agencies would have in the process.

Supervisor Hap Hazard's main concern: "The County typically has had little input in this type of process. It's left to big land management organizations, even though the County is the overall umbrella body."

Supervisor Byng Hunt agreed with that point. "There are so many agencies involved. We have to find a home for this process," he said. McFarland and Wentworth agreed, saying they thought it should live with the County. Supervisor Tom Farnetti was more cautious. "The County should take the lead, but I'd like to hear from other agencies before committing the County to the project," he stated. Hazard took Farnetti's point. "I think the County is and should be the lead agency on it, but it should go back to recreation roundtable for discussion with various partners as to how they can participate."

Hazard also had reservations about the County's role in funding, which he thought shouldn't be the sole investor. "Maybe it's time to go back to our

partners and talk about funding it. The County should foot the entire bill," he said. "Conceptually should we fund this? Is it a good product? If so, then let's talk to our partners about funding it."

Planning Director Scott Burns advised the Board that additional funding could come as a portion of the Scenic Byway Status Study grant application, which the County has already submitted in association with the Town of Mammoth Lakes. "I'd be in favor of funding Phase 1, then go back to partners for additional funding for Phases 2 & 3," Supervisor Bauer proposed. (Wentworth and McFarland estimated costs for Phases 2 & 3 at \$52,215 and \$19,380, respectively. Total for the entire project is \$108,855.)

Board Chair Bill Reid's concern was one of timing. "Let's get something moved forward conceptually at least, so we don't lose the whole summer waiting for other partners' input," he put forth.

The Board voted 4-1 to fund Phase 1, with Farnetti the lone "nay" vote. "I'm not against it in concept, but in principle I'd like to see the chicken first," he explained.

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