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WEEKLY

MLTPA:

MAMMOTH LAKES TRAILS • PUBLIC ACCESS

Providing specific trails and
public access plans for
Mammoth's future

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The trails system in Mammoth Lakes needs a makeover—enter Mammoth Lakes Trails and Public Access, a group whose goal is to bring Mammoth's outdoor amenities into the 21st century.

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MLTPA: Providing specific trails and public access plans for Mammoth's future

By Lara Kirkner
Mammoth Times Staff Writer

Take a parking problem, add a private gate, then stir and let the whole thing sit for about nine months.

While the gate on Ranch Road may still spark controversy here in Mammoth Lakes, its lasting legacy may be the broader interest it has provoked in public access and an improved town-wide trails system.

A group called Mammoth Lakes Trails and Public Access (MLTPA) was formed over the summer, spearheaded by Mammoth local John Wentworth. The group is dedicated to identifying and preserving trails, outdoor recreation assets and backcountry access.

It took a mere two months for the group, made up of volunteers, to complete its first action—an inventory of as many trails as possible in Mammoth Lakes. Wentworth then presented the group's cataloged work, along with its own peer resort survey, plus a signage and way-finding catalog, to the Town Council and Town staff at the end of July.

At a time when all other plans for the future of Mammoth Lakes are seeing very little tangible progress, what Wentworth and his volunteers accomplished was an astounding effort.

The Town was so impressed with the volume of work MLTPA produced in such a short amount of time that it contracted the group to continue its efforts. "The contract with the Town is for just shy of \$11,000," Wentworth says. "And we're going to make sure that every dime is well spent."

With the contract in place, MLTPA Project Director Kim Stravers is conducting a more organized version of the trails inventory process. The group is still using volunteers for its effort, but has been able to put together packets so that volunteers understand exactly what they are looking for when they head out into the field. The technical requirements are more exacting this time around, and volunteers are also asked to take photos of every access point they inventory.

"The first catalog we created and presented to the Town was not 100 percent accurate, nor was it meant to be," Stravers said. "Now we are going back over all the trails, plus adding more, to make sure we know the exact uses of each trail."

"The first document was more of a political statement," Wentworth told the Tourism and Recreation Commission last week.

The new, complete catalog of trails needs to be finished for the Town by early November, according to Stravers. "They plan to take our information and incorporate it into their GIS (Geographic Information System)."

The information will then be used by the Town to ensure that current and future planning takes into account the vast array of outdoor recreation amenities that surround our community and are integral to our culture and our economy.

In order to keep the public in tune with MLTPA's progress, the *Mammoth Times* will publish bi-monthly updates written by Stravers, until the Nov. 1 deadline.

Show's not over after inventory

MLTPA's contract with the Town of Mammoth Lakes is only the beginning for the trails and public access group. In a presentation to the Tourism and Recreation Commission last week, Wentworth laid out ambitious plans for the future of MLTPA as a nonprofit trails and public access advocacy organization and introduced "Mammoth Trails," a user group organization that will be the primary beneficiary of MLTPA's efforts. Wentworth described the future character of "Mammoth Trails" as "exuberant, brimming with energy and excitement, and committed to world-class outdoor recreation in the Mammoth Lakes region."

Mammoth Trails will be "a confederation of user groups and clubs, organized and maintained to not only promote the pursuit of their particular passions, but to extend the necessary stewardship to the physical resources upon which their activities take place. Mammoth Trails will serve as the primary liaison between the needs of the clubs, user groups and the recreating public and the resources of MLTPA. Mammoth Trails will provide the means to resolve disputes between user groups and Mammoth Trails will be an effective liaison between clubs and user groups and the Forest Service." (See sidebar.)

The Tourism and Recreation Commission agreed to set up an ad hoc committee with MLTPA in order to figure out how best to go about bringing user groups together for this venture. Commissioners Bill Sauser, Tony Colasardo and Shields Richardson, who represent a wealth of knowledge and connections with the targeted user groups, agreed to serve on the committee to keep things moving forward on this project.

As for MLTPA's future, it will host a trails and public access summit over the weekend of Nov. 4-5. The summit will feature a public forum that will present nationally recognized trail designers and signage and way-finding consultants who will address how Mammoth Lakes can create a master planned system of trails and public access to fit the specific needs of the community while providing stewardship for our surrounding public lands.

An invited group of decision makers will simultaneously be given the task of determining MLTPA's mission and how

Mammoth Trails

The three specific components of Mammoth Trails will be:

First: In order to become a member of Mammoth Trails, a club or user group will need to demonstrate its capabilities as an organization. This may include a specific mission statement, a proposed annual budget and membership plan, and a detailed description of the activities that are its reason for being. But most importantly, it must include a detailed action plan to extend the organization's resources for the purposes of stewardship to its use area, both for the benefit of the natural environment and for the Mammoth Lakes community.

Second: Should a recreation club or user group meet the established criteria, it shall be eligible to apply for a grant from Mammoth Trails for an amount up to, and not to exceed, \$5,000 in annual support. Additionally, a qualified recreation club or user group shall be eligible to apply for a grant from Mammoth Trails for up to \$10,000 for a specific one-time project. These projects may include seed money to get a club organized, infrastructure projects, tools and machinery purchase and maintenance, or matching funds for grants from outside organizations that will specifically better and improve the outdoor natural resource in which their activity takes place.

Third: All qualifying recreation clubs and user groups shall have reserved space on a server, provided and maintained by Mammoth Trails, and access to graphic artists and web site designers, also provided by Mammoth Trails, so as to create graphic identities for their organizations and produce competent and engaging web sites that will provide complete access and activity information for the clubs' primary outdoor recreation pursuit as well as information germane to its resource stewardship mission and contact information for commercial resources in the Mammoth Lakes community."

it will be financed and organized, among other things. The outcome that MLTPA hopes to achieve at the end of the summit will be a proposal that can be put before the community of Mammoth Lakes for ratification. This will incorporate MLTPA as a nonprofit trails and public access advocacy organization, modeled on similar organizations in Sun Valley, Idaho, Jackson Hole, Wyo., and Park City, Utah, but specifically designed for the benefit of Mammoth Lakes and hopefully a positive example for the region and the state.

To get involved with MLTPA, contact Kim Stravers, Project Director, at (760) 934-3154, or e-mail her at volunteer@mltpa.org.



Signage for Mammoth's trails system is outdated and falling apart. With the help of MLTPA, Mammoth may be able to catch up to the trails systems of many other mountain resorts.

Kudos to Mammoth Trails and Public Access

In every walk with nature, one receives far more than he seeks.

- John Muir

Perhaps, for longtime residents of Mammoth, to walk out into the mountains is the simplest thing there is. They know the trails from beginning to end and everything in between. They know the best time of the year to hike certain trails—when the water isn't gushing over the path, when the wildflowers are screaming color, when mules or bicycles have turned a path into dust, or when the leaves are turning to gold.

We are grateful when we run into one of these locals who can tell us all about the trails. If we are new in town or visiting for a week or two, we can go on one of the marvelous Sierra Club led hikes. However, even Sierra Club guides don't always know the name of a particular trail.

Imagine how helpful it would be to be able to find a trailhead, and there find the number of miles to trail's end or to a fork and a diverging trail. Imagine that as you hike, mileposts guide the way and small signs describe flora.

Mammoth Trails and Public Access (MLTPA) has begun the process that can improve Mammoth trails and signage, and create a town-wide trails system and access to the backcountry. Never short of volunteers, Mammoth's citizens have come forward to inven-

tory existing trails, usage and signs.

It's an exciting turn for the town, and refreshing to see that individuals, fatigued by the molasses-in-January pace of the General Plan update, have opted not to criticize but to take action, to mobilize into a fact-gathering service that can aid the council in its planning.

A well planned and maintained trails system can only be a boon to Mammoth and a visible and usable adjunct to a transit system. When we consider that the wilderness is one of the greatest reasons people come to Mammoth, we realize that access to the wilderness, at several levels, is key to an enjoyable stay and to an experience a guest can't wait to repeat.

A trails system should be integrated into a functioning transit system that can enable people to leave cars at home. In Aspen, for instance, you can take a bus to a trailhead and walk or hike from there—in town along the river or up into the mountains. By doing so, you have reduced emissions and traffic (by leaving your car home) and you've done something great for your body and spirit.

We applaud and support MLTPA for getting out there and identifying trails, how they are used, what kind of signage they have and what kind of maintenance they receive. And we look forward to walking out into the wilderness and knowing where we are.