# Proposed Action for the
# Taylor Creek Environmental Education/Visitor Center Project

USDA Forest Service Pacific Southwest Region
Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit
El Dorado County, California

## I. Background

Strategically located as the centerpiece of the Pope-Baldwin Recreation Area, portal to Desolation Wilderness, and access to Lake Tahoe, the Taylor Creek Visitor Center complex was designed in the 1960's as the major visitor information, environmental education, and interpretive facility for the Forest Service at Lake Tahoe. The site has offered a variety of interpretive facilities and educational programs - the Stream Profile Chamber, Rainbow Trail, Lake of the Sky Amphitheater, outdoor educational exhibits and interpretive trails - with resounding success for over 40 years.

Here, visitors are able to participate in a variety of guided and self-guided educational activities designed to fit with the overall mission for the site:

> ***"The Taylor Creek Visitor Center complex will assist visitors in gaining a greater understanding and awareness of the Taylor Creek ecosystem and its direct relationship to Lake Tahoe, and through that understanding - protection of the streams, wetlands, fish, wildlife, and plants of the Lake Tahoe Basin."***

The Taylor Creek Visitor Center complex includes a small Visitor Information Center staffed by USFS personnel and volunteers, a wilderness information trailer, the Stream Profile Chamber, Rainbow Trail, Lake of the Sky amphitheater, several self-guided trails, wildlife viewing platforms, a 160-space parking area, restrooms, and day use access to Lake Tahoe along the Lake of the Sky interpretive trail. The site is adjacent to the Tallac Historic Site and is served by the Pope Baldwin Bike trail, a 3.3 mile Class I link to the City of South Lake Tahoe. Public transportation is provided by the Nifty Fifty Trolley at a designated transit stop on-site.

In addition to self-guided interpretation, guided interpretive activities and evening programs are offered during the summer months. During the spawning run each October, the site hosts the Kokanee Salmon Festival and the Kokanee Salmon Conservation Education Program.

Originally constructed in the late 1960's, most of the site's interpretive exhibits, facilities, parking lot, and infrastructure have been upgraded or replaced in the last 10 years. The parking area was reconfigured and reduced in scale to provide a transit stop, accommodate large bus/RV turning movements, and provide pull-through parking. The Stream Profile Chamber and Rainbow Trail interpretive exhibits were redesigned and replaced, and wildlife viewing platforms and interpretive panels added resulting in a

comprehensive, multi-sensory interpretive and educational experience. More recently, the outdoor amphitheater was redesigned and reduced in scale to enhance and blend with Taylor Creek's environmental setting.

However, the functionality of the present Visitor Information Center building remains to be addressed. A visitor center structure was planned in the 1960's. In 1967 a restroom and storage annex for the proposed visitor center was constructed. However, due to declining funds, the main visitor center was never constructed. Later the restroom was converted to a quasi-information center. The storage half of the structure was retrofitted with a counter and opened as a staffed Information Center. A second floor was constructed within the upper portion of the building to accommodate storage needs. The upstairs evolved as staff space for educational program preparation and storage of cleaning supplies, toilet paper, informational brochures, etc. As demand for visitor information services outgrew the limited size of the structure, a temporary trailer was added on-site to accommodate the Desolation Wilderness permit and "Leave No Trace" wilderness education program. Recently, the upstairs was declared unsafe for occupancy, and staff use restricted. Subsequently, a second temporary trailer was added on-site to accommodate staff working area needs.

## II. Decision Framework

The decision to be made by the responsible official is two-fold: 1) whether to implement the proposed action, take action through an alternative combination of activities, or take no action at this time, and 2) to make a determination as to the potential for and nature of significant environmental effects.

## III. Existing Conditions

The existing condition of the current Taylor Creek Visitor Center is not adequately serving the rest of the site. It is undersized for the number of visitors, is inefficient and requires two temporary trailers to meet the functional needs of the overall program, and is unsafe for workers to use.

## IV. Desired Condition

By improving visitor information functions, correcting unsafe working conditions, meeting accessibility standards, eliminating the trailers, and providing adequate space for staff needs, we can provide a safe, efficient, and more effective visitor center operation that serves the entire site. The elimination of multiple locations for visitor services will streamline staffing needs. Improvements to the interpretive materials sales area will benefit visitor education and interpretive programs. The incorporation of sustainable green design will serve as a model toward reducing our carbon footprint, reducing overall impact on the built environment by efficiently using energy and other resources, reducing waste pollution and environmental degradation, and reducing operating costs.

# V. Purpose and Need

The present Visitor Information Center building was never designed to accommodate visitor information and support staff use activities. There is a need to address the following problems with the existing Visitor Information Center:

- The upstairs is not usable due to the following unsafe conditions: the steep, narrow staircase violates building code and accessibility standards; it lacks adequate ventilation; there is no means of alternate escape in the event of a fire; and the presence of mice, bats, and their droppings presents a health risk to employees.

- Downstairs, the small gathering area is undersized and consequently, overflows with visitors waiting to ask questions or purchase interpretive sales items during peak summer and fall months.

- The addition of temporary rental trailers merely serves as a "band aid" instead of addressing the needs for adequate space for program preparation and staff working area. The current effect to overall program function and delivery is inefficient, visually obtrusive, and creates a need for additional staffing.

# VI. Proposed Action

The current proposal is for a structure of approximately 3,800 square feet. The proposal does not expand operational seasons or visitor capacity. The proposal includes replacing the existing restroom/storage building and temporary rental trailers with a single structure designed to accommodate current functions more efficiently, and better serve the visitors. These functions include a staffed information counter, wilderness education and permit issuance area, public restrooms, sales of maps and educational materials, interpretive program preparation, seasonal staff working space, adequate storage space, and an area for small outdoor patio talks.

The structure will be located in the area of the present building site. The existing patio areas, walkways, utilities, and landscaping will be retrofitted. The existing access roadway from Highway 89 and the parking lot will remain unchanged.

The Visitor Center will be designed to blend with and enhance the existing landscape through the use of native materials and neutral colors. Sustainable building design will incorporate "Green" technology to the extent possible and that technology will be interpreted on site as an example of "green" public building design.

Other Forest Service projects in the vicinity of this project include the Camp Richardson Resort Campground Best Management Practice (BMP) Project, Fallen Leaf Campground BMP Project, Angora Fire Restoration Project, South Shore Fuels Reduction and Healthy Forest Restoration (South Shore) Project, and the Angora/Twin Peaks Access and Travel Management Project. These projects are outside the scope of this proposed action.

# VII. Project Design Features

Project design features are elements of the project design that are applied to the project area. These features were developed based on Forest Plan direction and site specific evaluations in order to reduce or avoid negative environmental effects of the proposed action on forest resources. In order to minimize impacts to water resources from the proposed activities, standard BMPs will be implemented as a design feature across all activities (USDA 2000). Project design features associated with this project include the following:

Recreation and Access

- Provide temporary visitor center operations during construction at a trailer within the parking lot. Provide temporary toilet facilities while the site is open to the public. Provide a safety buffer around construction site (i.e. signing and temporary fencing).

Engineering

- Incorporate sustainable "Green" technology features to the extent possible (i.e. orientation to capture solar, ground source heat pump, photovoltaic roof tiles and/or green roof, etc). Design should consider LEED certification.

Scenic Resources

- Design structure to blend with and enhance the existing landscape through the use of native materials and neutral colors. Design will be consistent with the USFS Built Environment Image Guide.

Soil and Water

- Project activities will occur within the TRPA grading ordinance season (May 01 - October 15). If grading or movement outside of this window becomes necessary (i.e. to finish BMP's, etc.) a standard grading exception permit request will be submitted to TRPA and LWQCB for approval. During periods of inclement weather, operations would be shut down until conditions are sufficiently dry and stable to allow construction to continue without the threat of substantial erosion, sedimentation, or offsite sediment transport.

- Erosion control and prevention of sediment transport for this project will be implemented in accordance with; *USDA, Water Quality Management for Forest System Lands in California -Best Management Practices* (USDA 2000). This project will also be included in the Region 5, Best Management Practices Evaluation Program (BMPEP) monitoring sample pool and will be subject to temporary BMP (TBMP) monitoring evaluations while construction is ongoing.

- Include provision for hazardous materials spill kits in contract specifications.

- Restore areas disturbed temporarily during construction activities. Restoration could include decompacting and mulching soils.

Sensitive Plants/Non-Native Invasive Plant Species

- Complete surveys for sensitive species and non-native invasive plant species prior to July 31, 2009. There is no habitat for Tahoe Yellow Cress in the project area.

- Include non-native invasive species prevention measures in the project contract and/or Special Use Permit, see noxious weed coordinator for clause terminology.

- All construction and earth-moving equipment must be sanitized and required to be free of non-native invasive plant species before moving into the project area. Equipment will be considered free of non-native invasive plant species when visual inspection by the Contracting Officer's Representative does not reveal soil, seeds, plant material, or other such debris.

- Equipment will be cleaned at a washing station before moving to other National Forest Service system lands.

- All gravel, fill, or other materials are required to be weed-free. Obtain certified weed-free materials from gravel pits and fill sources that have been certified weed free or have been surveyed and approved by the LTBMU Botany Department.

- All mulches must be weed free.

- Staging areas for equipment, materials, or crews will not be situated in areas infested by non-native invasive species. Areas containing non-native invasive species should be "flagged and avoided" before implementation.
    - Cheatgrass infestations will be hand treated and covered with weed matting prior to and during project implementation.
    - Staging areas for equipment, materials, or crews will be designated in parking lot areas away from cheatgrass and noxious weed infestations.

- Disturbed areas will be revegetated with weed free native seed mix approved by LTBMU Botany department or a professional appointed by the forest botanist who has knowledge on local flora.

- After the project is completed, all disturbed project areas will be monitored for 3 years to ensure non-native invasive species do not spread and additional s non-native invasive species do not become established in areas affected by the project.

Wildlife

- Any new sightings of threatened, endangered, sensitive, management indicator, or special interest species, or nests or dens of these species during construction shall be reported to the Forest Biologist or Forest Botanist by the Visitor Center Director. These species or habitats will be protected in accordance with the management direction for the LTBMU.

- Conduct protocol surveys for willow flycatcher during summer 2009 through the willow flycatcher demographic study group, if possible. Resurvey in the year project implementation activities begins unless all project activities are scheduled outside of the limited operating period (June 1 – August 31).

Heritage

- If any previously unrecorded cultural resources are discovered during project monitoring or project construction, all project-related activities will cease immediately in the vicinity of such discoveries, the Forest Service would begin the consultation process, as outlined in Section 800.13 of the Advisory council on Historic Preservation regulations *"Protection of Historic Properties"* (36 CFR Part 800).

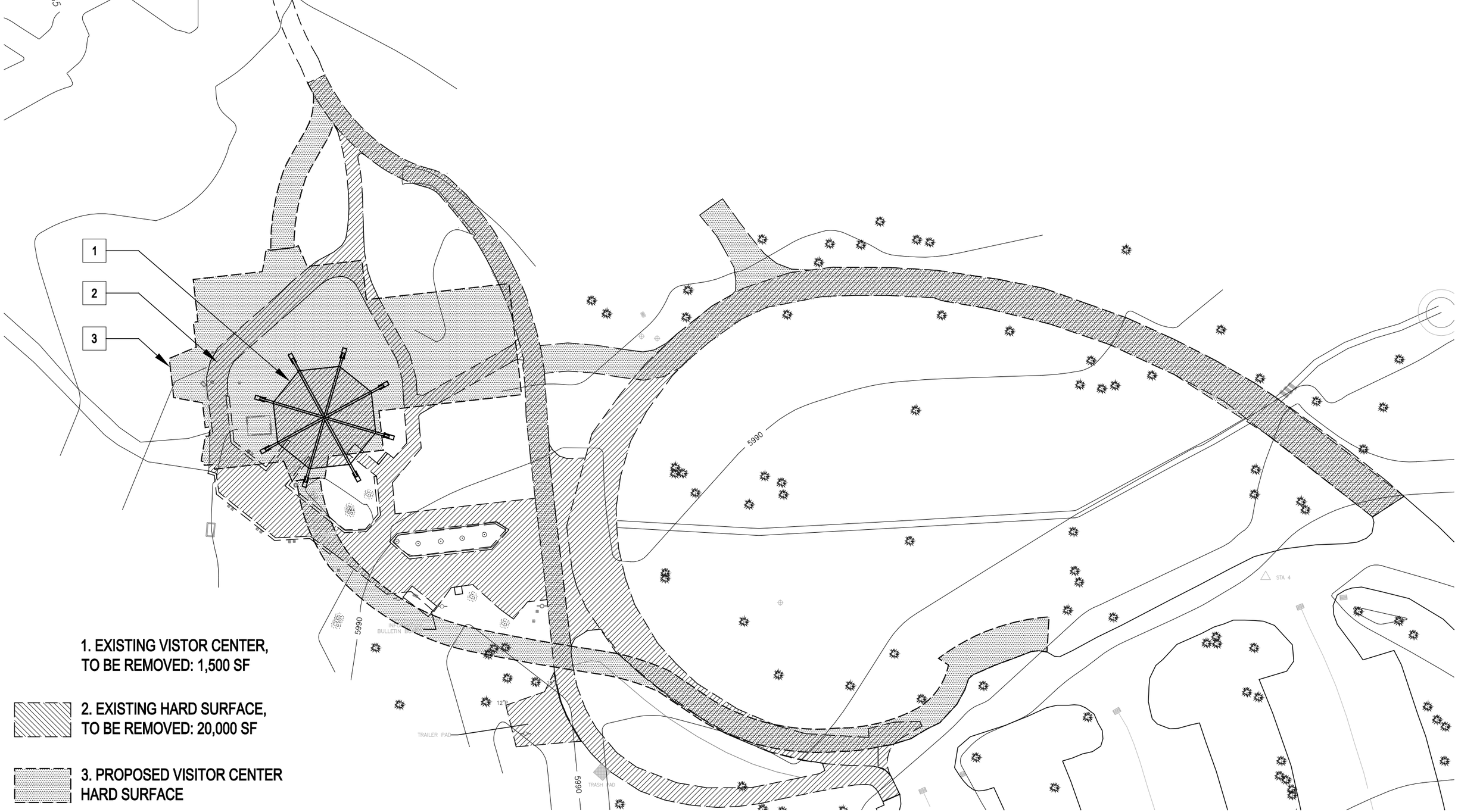
THE PORTICO GROUP

0′ 50′ 100′ 200′

## SITE PLAN

SCALE: 1″ = 100′

**TAYLOR CREEK VISITOR CENTER**
**USDA/FS LAKE TAHOE BASIN MANAGEMENT UNIT**
**1 JUNE 2009**




1. EXISTING VISTOR CENTER, TO BE REMOVED: 1,500 SF

2. EXISTING HARD SURFACE, TO BE REMOVED: 20,000 SF

3. PROPOSED VISITOR CENTER HARD SURFACE

## SITE DEMO PLAN

SCALE: 1″ = 40′

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0′ 20′ 40′ 80′

**TAYLOR CREEK VISITOR CENTER**
**USDA/FS LAKE TAHOE BASIN MANAGEMENT UNIT**
**1 JUNE 2009**

TO AMPHITHEATER

EXISTING LAKE
OF THE SKY TRAIL

BIKE RACK

DUMPSTER

VISITOR CENTER

EXISTING
RAINBOW TRAIL

SEAT WALL W/
STONE VENEER

EXIST. GATEWAY
TO RAINBOW TRAIL

POROUS PAVING

DIRECT SITE LINE
& PATH TO VISITOR
CENTER

PAVED
SERVICE DR.

PAVED TRAIL

EXISTING ROAD
TO BE REMOVED

DROP OFF

1. PROPOSED VISITOR CENTER: 3,842 SF

2. PROPOSED HARD SURFACE: 19,050 SF

## SITE PLAN

SCALE: 1″ = 40′

THE PORTICO GROUP

0′ 20′ 40′ 80′

**TAYLOR CREEK VISITOR CENTER**
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**1 JUNE 2009**