



GOLD COUNTRY TRAILS COUNCIL

2024

STRATEGIC PLAN

GOLD COUNTRY TRAILS COUNCIL STRATEGIC PLAN OVERVIEW

In 2022 the GCTC Board of Directors asked that the 2017 Strategic Plan be updated. From that direction a committee was formed of GCTC members to update the 2017 Strategic Plan. The committee met in 2023 to review the current goals and programs established in 2017 and updated the goals and programs. The committee also recommended that a survey be conducted of the membership to receive their input before finalizing the goals and programs of the Strategic Plan.

In late 2023 and early 2024 a survey was conducted of the membership. Three main questions were asked with multiple responses. The survey was conducted on Goggle doc's, 82 members responded.

Question one- **Why Did You Join GCTC.** The top response was Equestrian trail riding. The second highest response was Advocate and protect trail access for equestrians and other non-motorized users.

Question two- **What Are Your Top Priorities As It Relates To GCTC Activities.** The top priority was Safety on the trails, the second highest priority was Non-motorized trail advocacy, close behind was Supporting collaboration with other like-minded trail groups.

The last question was **Are You Willing to Participate In Trail Work Days**, 74% of those responding to the survey said Yes.



Based on the survey the goals and programs were affirmed, and supported the Goals and Programs established by the Committee. The Goals and Programs will be presented to the Board and Membership. The Committee identified five critical areas of interest:

1. Support Development, Protection and Maintenance of trails and Campgrounds.
2. Develop Cooperative Relationships with Recreational Trail Users and Land Managers and Maintain a Strong Working Relationship with the Forest Service. Advocate for non-motorized trail use.
3. Nurture the Membership, Develop Meaningful Equestrian Educational Programs and Support Safe Non-Motorized Trail Usage.
4. Publicize GCTC including Outreach, Public Relations, Marketing.
5. Build a Strong Internal Organization that Supports the Membership and Builds for the Future.

From these broad areas, five specific Goals were developed to align the strategies and projects to be considered over the next five years.

GCTC was founded as a non-motorized trail building and trail maintenance non-profit and the specific plan adheres to those roots and provides goals and projects to sustain those founding beliefs.

Since GCTC's inception in 1981, tens of thousands of volunteer hours have been provided to Nevada County and the Tahoe National Forest to build and maintain trails and horse camps.

Defining the Mission Statement, Vision and Strategic Plan

- The Mission Statement is a brief description of GCTC's fundamental purpose and why GCTC exists
- . The Vision Statement is GCTC's inspiration and it articulates the hopes and dreams of GCTC.
- The Strategic plan is a tool derived from a clear vision to provide guidance in fulfilling GCTC mission and establishing goals and describing projects, actions and resources needed to accomplish them over the next 3 to 5 years

MISSION STATEMENT

GCTC is an organization committed to develop, maintain, and advocate for safe integrated trails for equestrians and other non-motorized users.

VISION STATEMENT

Public Access To Trails for Equestrian Use

“ The clearest way into the universe is through a forest wilderness”
--John Muir



History of Gold Country Trails Council



Gold Country Trails Council has the good fortune of having four founding members who are still active with GCTC, Willie and Sue Brusin, Ginny Dix, and Arlene McCallum who were part of a group of Nevada County family's who created GCTC.

It was their fortitude and Nevada County pioneering spirit that created and built the trails that our members and community enjoy to day.



The Gold Country Trails Council was formed over 42 years ago in 1981 as a non profit corporation. One of the limited short comings was a lack of horse trails on the Western side of Nevada County. A group of horse-loving Nevada County families wanted to fill a need for non-motorized trails in Nevada County and surrounding foothills. Their grand plan at the time was to build a trail from above Nevada City to the Grouse Ridge area and Lake Spaulding at the base of the Pacific Crest Trail. For them this was an extremely ambitious plan. They were just working families with 9-5 jobs who had a love for horses and the outdoors. They had limited knowledge of trail building, how to navigate the bureaucratic maze of Federal, State, Local governments and private landholders. In 1981 with the help of Ray Sherman the family's got together to form a non-profit trail council, something of a new concept at the time and GCTC was the first Trail Council in Northern California. Initially the group worked with Nevada County to create a trail map and seek funding. While the Supervisors were supportive they were concerned about a long term commitment and withdrew their support. The families set out on their own to find new partners to build safe non-motorized trails. They found a partner in the Forest Service. At first the Forest Service wasn't sure about allowing volunteers on National Forest to build trails. However, a few trusting and understanding Forest Service rangers saw the potential and provided trail design, training and tools. The relationship grew between the USFS and GCTC, and became so strong that the USFS designated GCTC as the lead volunteer organization for trail management and carried liability insurance for GCTC up until about 5 years ago. This relationship and cooperation with the Forest Service and other trail organizations is deeply rooted in our local heritage.

The first trail was started in 1982 at Lone Grave when GCTC obtained an encroachment permit from CalTrans. The permit was granted for equestrian use within the State Highway 20 Right of Way. It was named the Pioneer Trail. With a long and storied history. The trail followed the early route the pioneers took when traveling over the Sierra Nevada mountains to Nevada City and Grass Valley. The Pioneer Trail utilize segments of the emigrant wagon roads as well as historic mining and hydraulic ditches, old road beds and telephone/ telegraph rights of way. The first 7 miles of the Pioneer trail was completed in August 1983 at White Cloud. In 1984, the Tahoe National Forest approved a proposal to extend the Pioneer Trail to the Spaulding lake area.

Completion of the remaining trail from White Cloud to Bear Valley/Spaulding lake would take another 20 years and on June 8, 2003, The completed trail was dedicated as a national trail and became known as the Pioneer National Recreation Trail.



The Pioneer Trail completion spanned more than 25 miles from above the Five Mile House(Lone Grave) to Bear Valley/Spaulding Lake. This “can-do” attitude brought out the best of Nevada County pioneer spirit and the cooperation of the community and trail advocates alike. From the trails inception they were always envisioned as non-motorized trails.

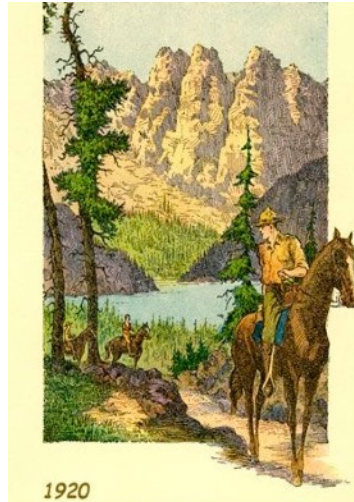
In addition to the Pioneer Trail GCTC also helped to create two horse camps. In the late 1980’s working with Kirt Forest former ranger they approached the Forest Service to allow GCTC to maintain a campground including horse corrals for the public in the Jackson meadow an area off Hwy 89. Creating the Little Lasier meadow campground. For GCTC efforts the Forest Service donated toilets and a well for stock water. By the early 1990’s a second campground was obtained through the Forest Service for GCTC to maintain located off Hwy.20, an old logging mill site. It became known as the Skillman Equestrian campground with corrals (Skillman campground today). These campgrounds are still maintained by GCTC and actively used by GCTC and other trail groups and the public.



This note was received from the US Forest Service
Sierraville District Ranger, Quentin Youngblood:

Mary [Johnson]... We appreciate you and the hard work accomplished by the GCTC at Little Lasier and the trail system. Was up there yesterday and everything looks great! We are seeing lots of equestrian use this year at Little Lasier and that is wonderful. Thanks Again!

Short History of the Forest Service a Key Partner with GCTC



A brief chronology of our key partner the Forest Service which allows GCTC the ability to recreate, develop and maintain trails and campgrounds in the Tahoe National Forest. The United States Forest Service under the direction of the Department to the Agriculture oversees approximately 190 million acres of land the majority being forested. The Forest Service motto today is “Caring for the land and serving People” The Forest Service is also the worlds largest forestry research organization providing support to States and private organizations. The Forest Service was established in 1905 under than President Teddy Rosevelt to primarily provide for the protection and management of timber and water resources for a growing nation, and mapping the Forest.



The Forest Service is divided into regions, Region 5, Pacific Southwest is made up of California and includes Hawaii, and US Pacific affiliated islands. The Tahoe National Forest makes up one of the 18 National Forests in the Region, and is overseen by a Forest Service Supervisor. California has 33 million acres of forested land, 1/3 of the state's total land. The Forest Service oversees 20 million acres of that forest, of which the Tahoe National Forest makes up 850,000 acres. The State of California manages 1.6 million of the total forested land.

America is still to a remarkable extent a Forest one third of the lower 48 is covered in trees, 728 million acres of that 240 million is owned by the Government. A great deal of the land is designated multi use, mining, oil and gas extractions, ski resorts 137 of them, snowmobiling, off road vehicles and lots of logging, 49 million acres available for logging.

The Forest Service over a century ago was conceived as a woodland bank and to manage and protect resources. After 1910 the Forest Service began expanding their programs to timber management, detecting and fighting forest fires, recreation and building roads to access the forest.



To be a Forest Ranger back then you had to be able to manage and ride horses, mules, understand the logging of forests, camping in the forest, types of trees, managing of livestock, fire suppression. Today the Forest Service builds lots of roads besides managing the forest. The Forest Service oversees 378,000 miles of roads in the National Forest, eight times the total mileage of America's interstates. It is the largest road system in the

world controlled by one agency. The Forest Service has the second highest number of road engineers of any government institution. It is estimated that the Forest Service will add at least the current total number of forested road miles by the middle of the next century.

Over the years the Forest Service has expanded independent discretion in the local National Forest to individual Forest Service Supervisors. Recognizing not all designated National Forests are the same. Thus one National Forest adjacent to another may have different policy's, rules and regulations at the desecration of the Forest Service Supervisor. These differing rules and regulations can impact ski resorts, road construction, recreation activities, multi use and off road trails.

This is why GCTC must remain a close partner with the Forest Service and continue to advocate for our vision and what our members support We are only one of many who lobby the Forest Service for recreational opportunities.

*“ Once destroyed natures beauty cannot be repurchased at any price”
Ansel Adams*

Footnote: As this GCTC Specific Plan is being completed the Forest Service is working on completing the environmental document for a project known as Pines to Mines, a trail that would go from Lake Tahoe to Nevada City. A large portion of that trail would be on the Pioneer Trail currently a non-motorized trail. The proposed environmental document plans to allow class 1 e-bikes on the new Pines to Mines trail, and the new name of the trail would be Pines to Mines including the 25 miles of the Pioneer trail envisioned and built by GCTC and the community over a 20 year period. GCTC has raised issues over the last several years and expressed our concerns of allowing e-bikes on non-motorized designated trails.

GCTC is allowed to operate and build and maintain trails and campgrounds in the Tahoe National Forest under a “Non Funded Challenge Cost Share Agreement” the Agreement is in need of updating and signing in 2024.

Cooperative relationship with the Forest Service and what it takes to succeed



What do we need to succeed in the Future?

- We need trail **volunteers** who....
 - Understand sustainable trail design and layout
 - Troubleshoot problem trails
 - Report trail conditions
 - Participate in collaboration, forest planning, forest management projects

**Everything we need
to know about
Partnerships we can
learn from our
Horses!!!**



Several trail heads serve the 30-mile Pioneer Trail, including:

1. Harmony Market across from Five Mile House on Highway 20.
 2. Gold Country Equestrian Trail Head on Washington Conservation Road, a.k.a. Lone Grave
 3. Equestrian Trail Head near the Washington Overlook Vista
 4. Skillman Horse Campground
 5. Upper Burlington Road
 6. Chalk Bluff Road
 7. Omega Overlook
 8. Zebright Road at Bear Valley
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Most of the trails are forested, however there are openings with views of the surrounding mountains, meadows and lakes. Over the years a number of additional non-motorized trails have been developed off the original Pioneer trail, including the:

1. Dascombe Loop
2. Meyer Trail
3. Pfeiffer Trail
4. Zig Zag Trail
5. Cable Trail
6. Harmony Trail
7. Hallelujah Trail
8. Dogwood Trail
9. Grouse Ridge Trail

GCTC established and helps maintain and support two horse camps:

1. Skillman (Horse Camp) off Highway 20 above Nevada City, with access to the Pioneer Trail. Skillman is also open to the public for camping.
2. Little Lasier Meadow (Horse Camp) off Highway 89, north of Truckee, with access to the Pacific Crest Trail. Also open to the public for camping.

GCTC maintains close working relationships with the Tahoe National Forest, BONC (Bicyclists of Nevada County), and NCWR (Nevada County Woods Riders) motorcyclists, to ensure user cooperation and maintenance of the non-motorized and multi use trails in the Tahoe National Forest. This cooperation is supported by an annual United Trails workday. Other activities on the trails include an annual Endurance Ride, GCTC Annual Benefit Poker Ride, and docent lead horse rides out of Skillman. In 2022/23, members of GCTC also supported equestrian trail development and docent lead rides with the Placer Land Trust in the foothills of Placer County.



Goal #1

SUPPORT DEVELOPMENT, PROTECTION and MAINTENANCE of TRAILS

1. Create a yearly project list in December and January. Set defined timelines, responsibilities and tasks for each project.
2. Continue maintenance for trails, trailheads, and campgrounds (Skillman, and Little Lasier) in GCTC's area of responsibility based on the Forest Service cost-sharing agreement with GCTC. (Update the Non Funded Challenge Cost Share Agreement with the Forest Service in 2024)
3. Support trail development and trailheads, in cooperation with land managers (ie. Forest Service, Bear Yuba Land Trust, Placer Land Trust, Truckee Trail Alliance) within GCTCs areas of interests for non-urban trails.
4. In cooperation with trail partners,(NCWR, BONC, Back Country Horsemen)continue to raise and allocate financial resources and GCTC organizational support to develop and maintain non-motorized trails, campgrounds and staging areas.
5. Maintain trail signage consistent with land manager requirements.
6. Direct resources towards Washington Conservation crews, professional trail builders, or non-member volunteer groups when priority projects are beyond the ability of GCTC volunteers.
7. Support United Trails Day with trail work and publicity.
8. Work with Empire Mine State Park in Grass Valley to install a restroom at the trailhead and parking area of Empire Mine with Gold Country Trail Councils signage.



Goal #2

DEVELOP COOPERATIVE RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHER RECREATIONAL TRAIL USERS and LAND MANAGERS

1. Identify GCTC members willing to reach out to land managers and recreational users. Determine goals, methods, and timeframes for engagement.
2. Develop strong ties and working relationships with the Forest Service Tahoe region at the senior levels and work with them to assure long term protection and maintenance of the non-motorized trails and horse camps.
3. Strengthen partnerships with Nevada County Supervisors, State and Federal government agencies and elected representatives, educating them on the Mission and accomplishments of GCTC.
4. Establish GCTC liaisons with the Bear Yuba Land Trust, Placer Land Trust, Placer County Parks and the newly created Nevada County Recreation department.
5. Develop relationships with the Back Country Horsemen, Sierra Club and Audubon society local chapters.
6. Support the Pines to Mines trail, support access to the Historic Emigrant Trail located on Nevada County public trail easements.
7. Develop and use incident data and other available statistical information that supports GCTC's Mission and Vision for discussions with land managers.
8. When identifying projects and timeframes where grants would be needed. Identify and designate an individual to write the grant.



Goal #3

PROVIDE MEANINGFUL EDUCATION to SUPPORT SAFE and NON-MOTORIZED TRAIL USAGE

1. Members are critical to the success of GCTC since they provide vital leadership, income and volunteer efforts on and off the trail and their efforts need to be nurtured.
2. In December and January, develop specific actions to be taken to increase member involvement with specific individual members assigned to the task.
3. Stress incident report date collection with members, conducting how to sessions.
4. Create a survey to probe why individuals join GCTC (2023)
5. Investigate additional educational opportunities, such as CPR, AED, First Aid GPS, GPX training; clinics on horse emergency care on the trail and horse health topics and horse camping education.



Goal #4

PUBLICIZE GOLD COUNTRY TRAILS COUNCIL

1. Conduct outreach through a number of mediums to a broad spectrum of like minded trail building and equestrian and community groups to support the GCTC mission.
2. Continue to raise awareness of the Pioneer Trail, its history and current development so that it becomes a treasured local resource with a strong following of non-motorized users, supporters and friends committed to its protection.
3. Maintain the GCTC annual benefit Poker Ride fund raiser held in June at Skillman Campground. Refresh the program as needed, work with the members to solicit donations and prizes year round for the event. The Poker Ride is the largest fund raiser for GCTC and is a community show case for the organization. **(Update the 5 year operating plan for Skillman).**
4. Publish articles to educate the public on the safe use of trails with horses , hikers and bicycles with the importance of stewardship on the trails.
5. Participate in community events, such as parades, BYLT nature days, horse related events, and community outdoor actives etc. throughout the year to emphasize GCTC accomplishments, it's mission and to recruit new and younger members.
6. Continue as a trail advocacy group. Form a committee to monitor actions that effect non-motorized trails and activate the membership when necessary to support the committees efforts.
7. Develop promotional materials, including business cards and flyers and update the notice in the Union's club news.
8. Continue with GCTC's trail patrol program and encourage members to participate.



Goal #5

BUILD A STRONG INTERNAL ORGANIZATION

1. Make it a priority to review the Strategic Plan action items at the GCTC Board meetings in December and June.
2. Establish defined goals, actions and tasks for organizational improvements.
3. For any actions, projects, tasks - ensure responsibilities, and completion dates are tracked.
4. Develop an annual budget with expense categories, capital projects and projected revenues at the December Board meeting.
5. Develop a succession plan for Board members and committee chairs: encourage rotation of Board positions.
6. Update the job descriptions, duties and responsibilities of the Board positions, including the at large Board members and past President, and committee chairs.
7. In January or February conduct and orientation of the duties and responsibilities for incoming Board members, including a updated binder of GCTC information, including duties and responsibilities.
8. Encourage an openness and inclusion of members and new members alike.
9. Develop and expand interest in committees that provide rewarding and meaningful opportunities for members.
10. Encourage mentoring by the Board and committee chairs with potential future leaders in the organization.



The 2022 GCTC Top Hand Award is presented to Debbie Molloy by the 2021 recipients, Laurie Monkman Sweeny and Michael J. Peckham.





Incoming 2024 Gold Country Trails Council Board of Directors

Bernard Molloy, Board member; Judy Hiyamizu, Board member;
Jamie Cannon, 2023 President; Helen Crawford, 2024 President;
Tracey Cunningham, Secretary; Corrie Silva, Treasurer;
Mary McMillan, Board member; Cathy Scott, Vice President.
Photo taken December 12, 2023, Board of Directors meeting

Conclusion

These Goals are presented in no particular order of significance. The strategic planning format is as follows:

Goals:

To accomplish the mission, The GCTC Board will focus on the 'big picture'.

Steps GCTC will take to achieve the goals:

- Annually the Board will under take an evaluation of the strategies and projects and select those they wish to accomplish for the year.
- Assign responsibilities, project deadlines and resources to complete the tasks.

Submitted by Jeffrey Foltz, Strategic Plan facilitator, February 2024

Thanks to the Committee members who helped develop this Strategic Plan, and helped with the GCTC survey; Helen Harvey, Jaede Miloslavich, Jamie Canon, Laura Duncan, Bernie Molloy, Cathy Scott, Mary McMillan, Andrea Duncan

