TAHOE REGIONAL PLANNING AGENCY
Lake Tahoe ENVIRONMENTAL IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM

TRPA
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STAFF REPORT

Date: August 19, 2026

To: TRPA Governing Board

From: TRPA Staff

Subject: Tahoe Meadows Winter Safety Management Master Plan

Summary and Staff Recommendation:
The USDA Forest Service and TRPA staff will provide an informational briefing on the Tahoe Meadows Winter Safety Management Master Plan. This is an informational item; no staff recommendation is included.

Required Motions:
There are no motions because this is an informational item.

Background:
State Route 431 (SR 431), also known as Mt. Rose Highway, is a critical transportation corridor in Washoe County, Nevada, connecting Lake Tahoe communities with the Reno metropolitan area. The highway also serves as one of the region's primary gateways to year-round recreation and provides access to extensive National Forest System lands.

Tahoe Meadows is located just south of Mt. Rose Summit (see Attachment A) and is a primary location for recreation access. Situated at nearly 9,000 feet in elevation, Tahoe Meadows typically receives snowfall earlier in the season and retains snow longer than many other recreation areas. Combined with its proximity to Reno, these conditions make the area a popular wintertime playground for snowmobiling, Nordic skiing, snowshoeing, backcountry skiing, and general snow play.

On peak winter days, including holidays and days immediately following winter storms, parking demand exceeds available capacity, contributing to roadway congestion, safety hazards for motorists and pedestrians, and operational challenges for snow removal, emergency response, and roadway maintenance.

Improving safety and access along SR 431 requires coordination among many agencies and stakeholders along the corridor. SR 431 is owned and operated by the Nevada Department of Transportation (NDOT), and much of the roadside parking occurs within its right-of-way. The land surrounding SR 431, including Tahoe Meadows, is almost entirely National Forest System land within the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest Carson Ranger District and the Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit. Additional stakeholders along the corridor include Washoe County, local municipalities, law enforcement agencies, the Nevada Division of Outdoor Recreation (NDOR), the Washoe Tribe of Nevada and California, the Tahoe Rim Trail Association, Tahoe Fund, TRPA, recreation user groups, and local residents.

Under the auspice of the Nevada Recreation Shared Stewardship Agreement, NDOT, the Forest Service, and NDOR are working together to develop the Tahoe Meadows Winter Safety Management Master Plan (Plan). The plan will provide an actionable framework for coordinated decision making, funding, maintenance, operation, and future project development. Stakeholder and public engagement will be incorporated throughout the planning process:

August 2026

- First stakeholder workshop
- Small group interviews
- Online survey

September 2026

- Develop draft master plan.

October 2026

- Second stakeholder workshop
- Public engagement

November 2026

- Final master plan.

The plan builds upon previous planning efforts that have occurred along SR 431 including:

2016 Mt. Rose Scenic Byway Corridor Management Plan
2025 Tahoe Meadows Winter Recreation Access and Safety Assessment (Attachment B)

Contact Information:
For questions regarding this agenda item, please contact Shannon Friedman, Environmental Improvement Program Manager, at (775) 901-2800 or sfriedman@trpa.gov.

Submitting Public Comment:

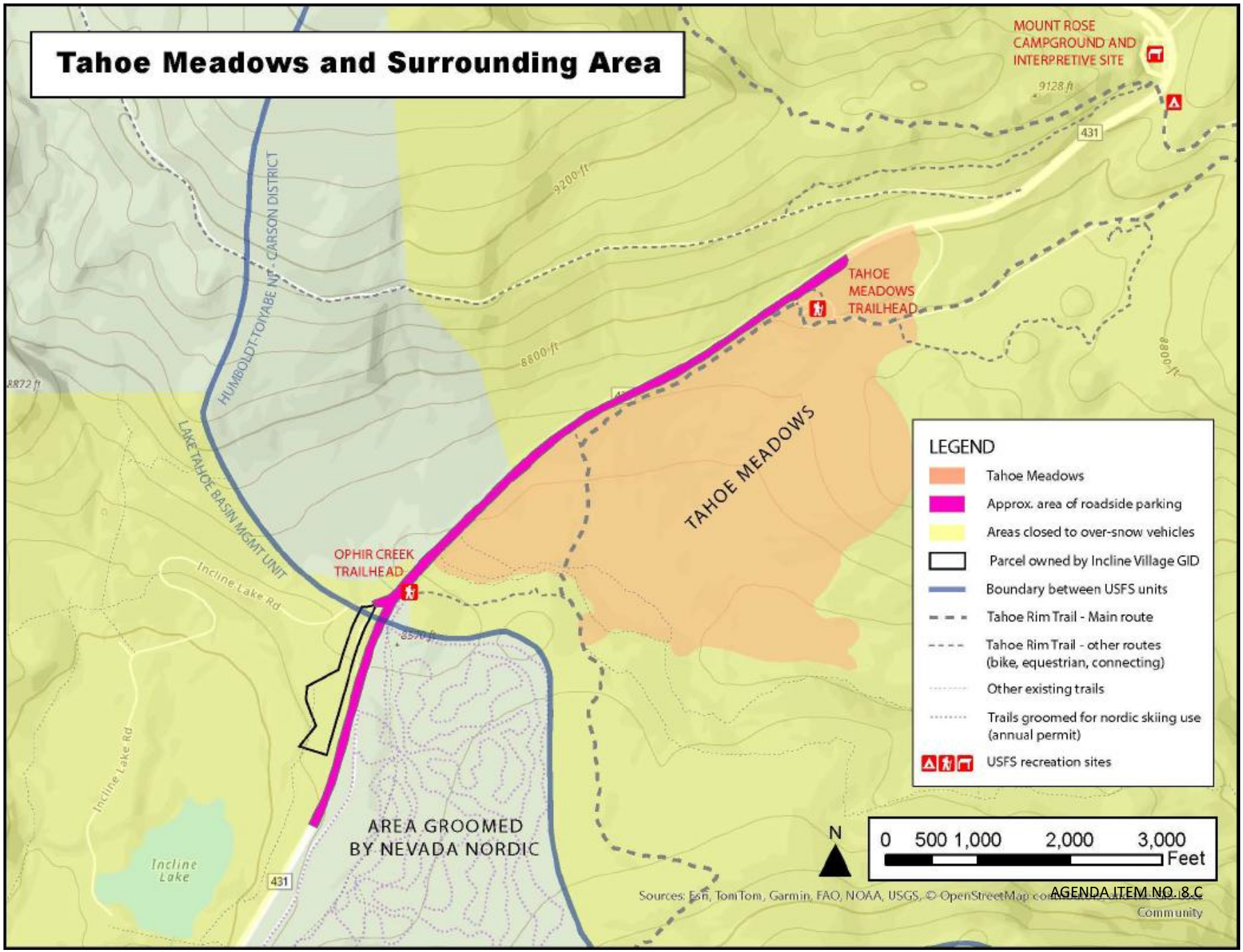
- Please submit written comments by 3 p.m. the day before the meeting.
- You may email comments to publiccomment@trpa.gov. Include meeting details and agenda item in the subject line or write "General Comment" for non-agenda items.
- You may also send by mail, fax to (775) 588-4527, or drop off in person at 128 Market Street.

Attachments:

A. Tahoe Meadows Map
B. 2025 Tahoe Meadows Winter Recreation Access and Safety Assessment

Attachment A

Tahoe Meadows Map


Tahoe Meadows and Surrounding Area
MOUNT ROSE CAMPGROUND AND INTERPRETIVE SITE
9128 ft
431
9200 ft
8800 ft
HUMBOLDT-TOIYABE NF - CARSON DISTRICT
TAHOE MEADOWS TRAILHEAD
TAHOE MEADOWS
LAKE TAHOE BASIN MGMT UNIT
OPHIR CREEK TRAILHEAD
Incline Lake Rd
8570 ft
AREA GROOMED BY NEVADA NORDIC
Incline Lake
LEGEND
Tahoe Meadows
Approx. area of roadside parking
Areas closed to over-snow vehicles
Parcel owned by Incline Village GID
Boundary between USFS units
Tahoe Rim Trail - Main route
Tahoe Rim Trail - other routes (bike, equestrian, connecting)
Other existing trails
Trails groomed for nordic skiing use (annual permit)
USFS recreation sites
N
0 500 1,000 2,000 3,000 Feet
Sources: Esri, TomTom, Garmin, FAQ, NOAA, USGS, © OpenStreetMap
Community

Attachment B

2025 Tahoe Meadows Winter Recreation Access and Safety Assessment

8. SCOPE 8.4D FINAL

Tahoe Meadows Winter Recreation Access and Safety

A Cross-Jurisdictional Preliminary Assessment

A joint effort of the USDA Forest Service, Nevada Department of Transportation, and Nevada Division of Outdoor Recreation

With technical assistance from the National Park Service – Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program

December 15, 2025

AGENDA ITEM NO. 8.C

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Abbreviations and Acronyms

NDOR	Nevada Division of Outdoor Recreation
NDOT	Nevada Department of Transportation
NPS-RTCA	National Park Service – Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program
NTCD	Nevada Tahoe Conservation District
USFS	U.S. Forest Service
USFS Carson RD	U.S. Forest Service, Carson Ranger District (Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest)
USFS HTNF	U.S. Forest Service, Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest
USFS LEI	U.S. Forest Service, Law Enforcement and Investigations
USFS LTBMU	U.S. Forest Service, Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit

Recreation at Tahoe Meadows

The Tahoe Meadows area lies along a short stretch of the Mt. Rose Highway (Nevada State Highway 431), roughly halfway between Reno and Lake Tahoe (refer to Maps 1 and 2 below). Designated a scenic byway, this high mountain highway is valued for its natural setting and recreational opportunities. It is also a vital regional corridor, serving both commuter and visitor traffic.

At nearly 9,000 feet, the Tahoe Meadows area sits just below the Mt. Rose summit. Its high elevation and open terrain make it a popular year-round recreation destination. In summer, visitors are drawn to the area's mountain views, subalpine meadows, and forested paths. Opportunities range from an accessible boardwalk trail with interpretive signs to more challenging hikes that extend into nearby wilderness areas. The area covers about 1,500 acres, giving visitors plenty of space to spread out and enjoy solitude. Motorized vehicles, including e-bikes, dirt bikes, and snowmobiles, are permitted in designated routes and areas that vary by season, conditions, and management goals.

Winter brings an entirely different recreation experience.

Winter Appeal

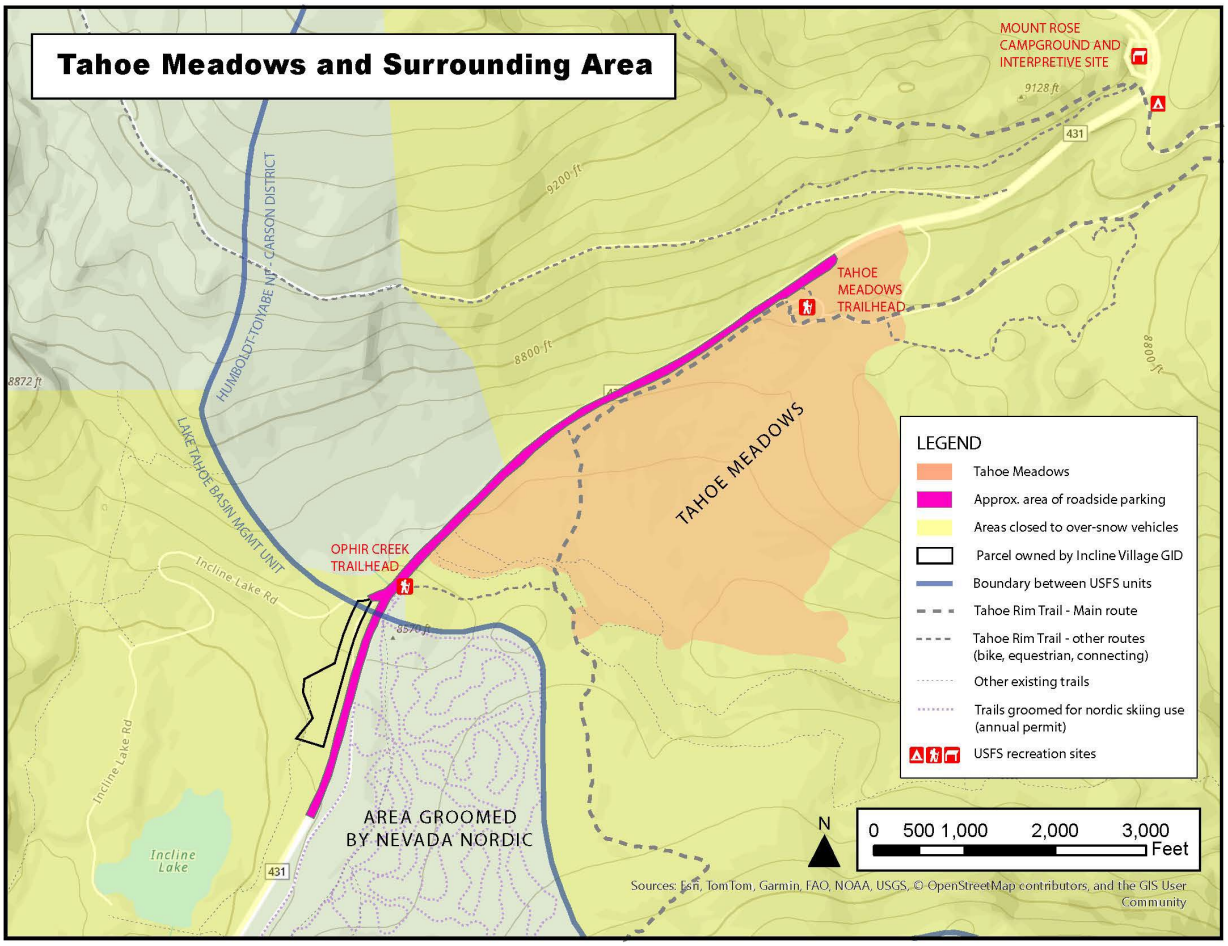
In winter, the same setting transforms into a popular spot for snow-based recreation, bringing a surge in visitors. Because of its elevation, the Tahoe Meadows area often receives snow earlier and retains it longer than nearby locations, making it a reliable area for snow play, cross-country skiing, and backcountry exploration. A majority of the recreational use is concentrated into a smaller area, as visitors gather in the meadows where the terrain and snow conditions are ideal.

With few other low-cost snowplay options near Reno, demand at Tahoe Meadows area and along Mt. Rose Byway corridor is especially high on weekends and after fresh snowfall. While heavy winter use is not new, many believe visitation has increased over time, although the specific patterns and causes are not well documented. This popularity brings challenges, including concerns about roadside parking congestion, pedestrian safety, and environmental impacts.

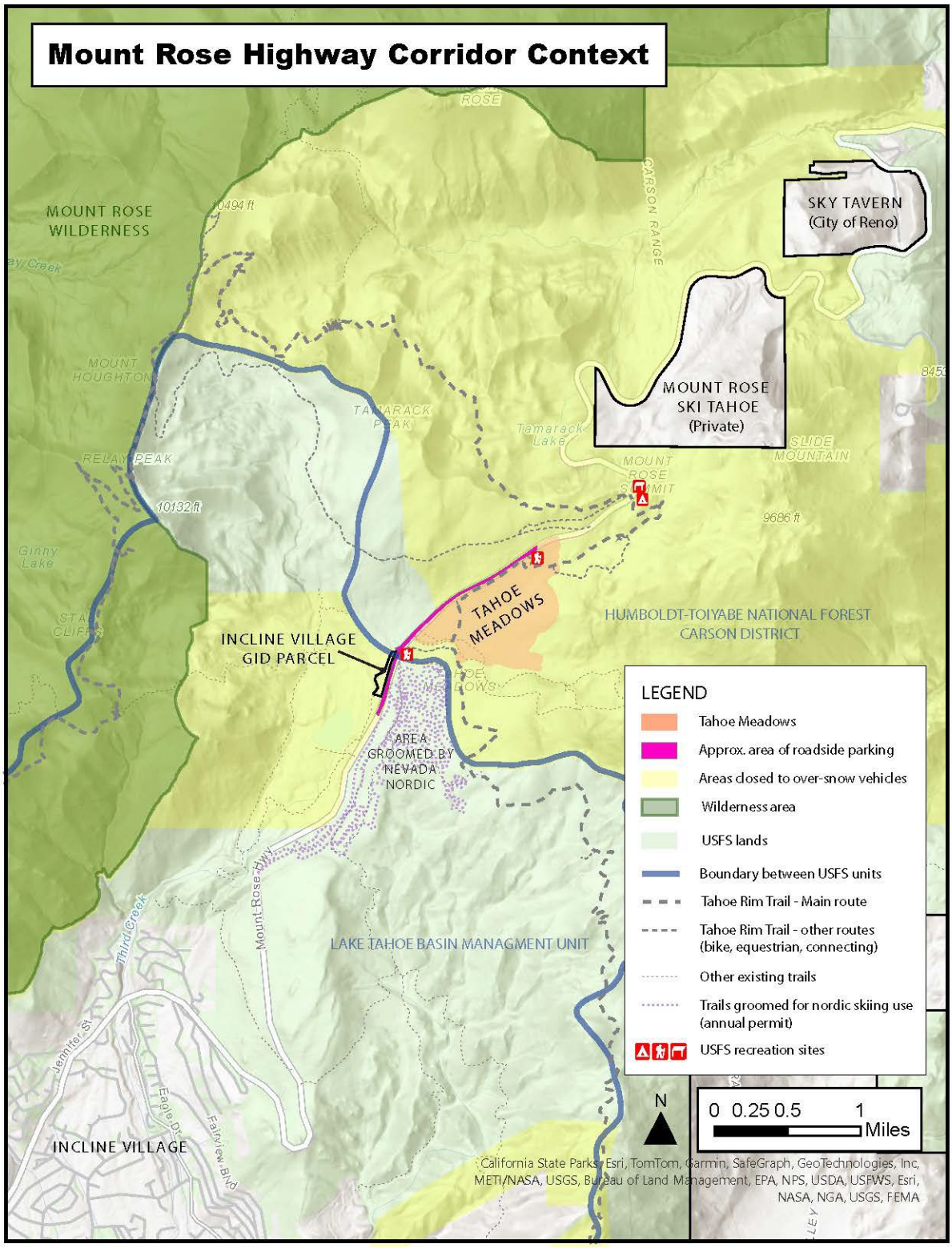
Winter Challenges

Concentrated winter use creates challenges not present, or not as critical, during the summer season. Each winter, hundreds of visitors park along snow-covered highway shoulders and cross the road at unmarked locations, often with children and gear in tow. These activities occur close to fast-moving traffic, creating safety concerns for both drivers and pedestrians. Vehicles parked along the corridor can also block snowplows or limit emergency access. These issues are most pronounced after fresh snowfall, when the area is both most appealing to visitors and most urgently in need of plowing.

In winter, the area also lacks amenities suited to high levels of use. While some facilities are available in summer, they are closed or not functional in winter, leaving visitors without designated parking, restrooms, pedestrian crossings, signage, or basic services such as trash removal. Although accounts of environmental impacts and use conflicts remain largely anecdotal, they underscore the need for coordinated management and clear strategies.



Map 1. Tahoe Meadows and surrounding area. The map shows the two-mile segment of the Mt. Rose Highway corridor through the Tahoe Meadows area, where roadside parking and winter recreation activity are concentrated.



Map 2. Mt. Rose Highway corridor context. The map shows the location of the Tahoe Meadows area within the larger context of the Mt. Rose Highway corridor, including nearby ski areas, wilderness, and overlapping land management jurisdictions.

Shared Management

Addressing these challenges requires coordination across multiple jurisdictions. Responsibility for managing the Tahoe Meadows area and Mount Rose Highway corridor is shared among several public, private, and nonprofit entities, each with distinct missions and areas of authority. Together they all play a part in supporting seasonal recreation, education, and stewardship activities, making collaboration essential to managing this complex, high-use area.

U.S. Forest Service

The majority of the Tahoe Meadows area falls under the jurisdiction of the U.S. Forest Service (USFS), specifically the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest's Carson Ranger District and a portion administered by the Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit (LTBMU). As a federal land manager, USFS's role is bound by cornerstone environmental and land management laws, such as the National Environmental Policy Act, the National Forest Management Act, and the Federal Land Policy and Management Act.

The USFS classifies and manages different types of recreation settings, from primitive backcountry to highly developed areas, based on the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS). The Tahoe Meadows area is currently managed as semi-primitive for dispersed recreation, which by design includes only minimal infrastructure and limited visitor amenities. While semi-primitive sites sometimes evolve toward more developed conditions due to increased demand or changing conditions, USFS policy is to reclassify these areas as part of an intentional land management planning process.

For the Tahoe Meadows preliminary assessment, the ROS framework is particularly relevant. Tahoe Meadows is managed as a dispersed recreation area where visitors engage in a mix of motorized and nonmotorized uses across sensitive landscapes. The ROS guide offers a standardized way to describe existing conditions, identify mismatches between current use and desired settings, and evaluate management options.

Learn more about how the USFS uses ROS to classify and manage recreation areas in Appendix C.

Nevada Department of Transportation

While the USFS manages land at Tahoe Meadows, the Nevada Department of Transportation (NDOT) oversees the Mt. Rose Highway, the only direct road access to the area. NDOT's mission is to maintain a safe, reliable, and sustainable transportation system, and along this corridor it is responsible for snow removal, traffic management, and roadside safety. Because nearly all visitors arrive by car and park along the highway, NDOT's management directly shapes recreation, parking congestion, pedestrian crossings, and emergency access. In 2011, NDOT completed a road safety audit of a two-mile stretch through Tahoe Meadows that highlighted conflicts between through-traffic and recreation use and recommended improvements ranging from a 25-mph flashing speed zone to long-term off-highway parking and shuttle options.

Nevada Division of Outdoor Recreation

Although the Nevada Division of Outdoor Recreation (NDOR) does not manage land directly, it has broad statewide responsibility for outdoor recreation in the state. Its mission is to advance and

promote sustainable, world-class outdoor recreation opportunities throughout Nevada. For the Tahoe Meadows area and the Mt. Rose Highway corridor, its role is to advance statewide planning, provide resources and grant funding, and support coordination among partners. These responsibilities are reflected in the State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) 2022–2026, which guides priorities for planning, conservation, and access statewide. Learn more about Nevada's SCORP in Appendix D.

Washoe County

Washoe County has taken a direct role in the Tahoe Meadows area. In cooperation with state and federal partners, the County's Department of Regional Parks and Open Space led the development of the Mount Rose Scenic Byway Corridor Management Plan, which was adopted by the Board of County Commissioners in 2016. Many of the plan's recommendations are similar to those suggested by stakeholders in this assessment, but the CMP has not been broadly implemented. It is used occasionally in permit and land-use reviews, particularly for issues such as parking, night-sky preservation, and lighting.

Local Municipalities

Some areas along the Mt. Rose Highway corridor are owned and managed by local governments. The City of Reno owns the Sky Tavern ski area, which is operated by a nonprofit. The Incline Village General Improvement District (IVGID) owns a parcel of land near the Tahoe Meadows area and directly across the highway from the area groomed by Nevada Nordic. While their direct role in managing land in the Tahoe Meadows area is relatively limited, both remain part of the larger picture and have interests in decisions about visitor access and winter recreation along the Mt. Rose Highway corridor.

Nonprofits and Private Operators

Beyond government entities, nonprofit and private operators also contribute to recreation management and services in the Tahoe Meadows area and along the Mt. Rose Highway corridor. The nonprofit Nevada Nordic grooms cross-country ski trails within the Tahoe Meadows area under permits from both the USFS (for activities on National Forest land) and the NDOT (for highway access and related use). Mt. Rose Ski Tahoe is a private resort operating within the Mt. Rose Highway corridor under a long-term special use permit issued by the USFS.

Toward Shared Solutions

In response to growing concerns about safety, traffic flow, and recreational access, the USFS, NDOT, and NDOR launched a joint effort to assess current conditions and explore safety improvements. Recognizing that no single agency has the full authority or capacity to address the area's complex challenges alone, the partner agencies requested assistance from the National Park Service – Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program (NPS-RTCA) to lead an independent, collaborative assessment.

NPS-RTCA served as a neutral facilitator, engaging a range of agencies, user groups, nonprofits, and community partners to gather input, clarify issues, and identify shared priorities. Participants expressed broad agreement that winter recreation at Tahoe Meadows presents growing challenges related to safety, access, and management. Many suggested improvements typical of more

developed and managed areas, including clearer signage, designated parking, safe pedestrian crossings, and greater agency presence.

This preliminary assessment documents current conditions and perspectives to help shape a broader planning effort. Its findings and insights provide a strong foundation for coordinated, collaborative planning. Future phases will include wider stakeholder and community engagement and will focus on developing a shared approach to safe, sustainable winter recreation at Tahoe Meadows.

Stakeholder Engagement

Approach

The goal for this initial assessment phase was to gather a range of perspectives from local organizations, state and local government officials, and federal agency staff with a vested interest in making winter recreation at Tahoe Meadows safer and more accessible. Participants were selected to reflect the diversity of use types, land management roles, and geographic jurisdictions and included motorized and non-motorized recreation groups, conservation nonprofits, and federal, state, regional, and local agencies with responsibilities or interests in Tahoe Meadows.

The partner agencies—USFS, NDOT, and NDOR—identified organizations with deep knowledge of the area who could speak to current use, challenges, and opportunities (refer to Appendix A for the list of organizations invited to participate). Not all of the organizations that were invited were able to participate during this early phase; the partner agencies will prioritize engaging them in future stages of the planning process.

Discussion topics were developed collaboratively by NPS–RTCA and the partner agencies to explore both current conditions and future aspirations. In March and April 2025, NPS-RTCA staff met with representatives from 14 of the 19 organizations invited to participate. Each conversation lasted approximately one hour and followed a semi-structured interview format. While allowing for open-ended discussion, the NPS-RTCA asked a common set of questions focused on current use, challenges, desired outcomes, and ideas for future planning (refer to Appendix B for interview questions).

Main topics included:

1. Relationship to the Tahoe Meadows area and role in winter recreation
2. Perceptions of the primary issues and underlying causes
3. Barriers to safe, sustainable, or enjoyable recreation
4. Observed use patterns and experiences on the ground
5. Visions for the future of winter recreation at Tahoe Meadows
6. Desired level and type of involvement in the next steps of the planning process
7. Suggestions for additional stakeholders and effective engagement strategies

NPS-RTCA staff summarized each conversation and shared the summary with the participant for review and correction.

Analysis and Synthesis

Meeting summaries were analyzed to identify recurring themes, points of consensus, and areas of divergence among stakeholders across key categories. These initial conversations offered valuable insight into the organizational landscape, existing efforts, and latent potential for coordination.

Core questions explored current use, perceived barriers, root causes, desired future conditions, and ideas for future planning and collaboration. While responses varied, they revealed a set of recurring themes and shared concerns that informed this assessment.

While participants brought a range of perspectives, responses consistently clustered around six cross-cutting issue categories across jurisdictions and recreation types. These themes highlight both the challenges at Tahoe Meadows and opportunities for collaborative progress.

Issue Assessment and Stakeholder Insights

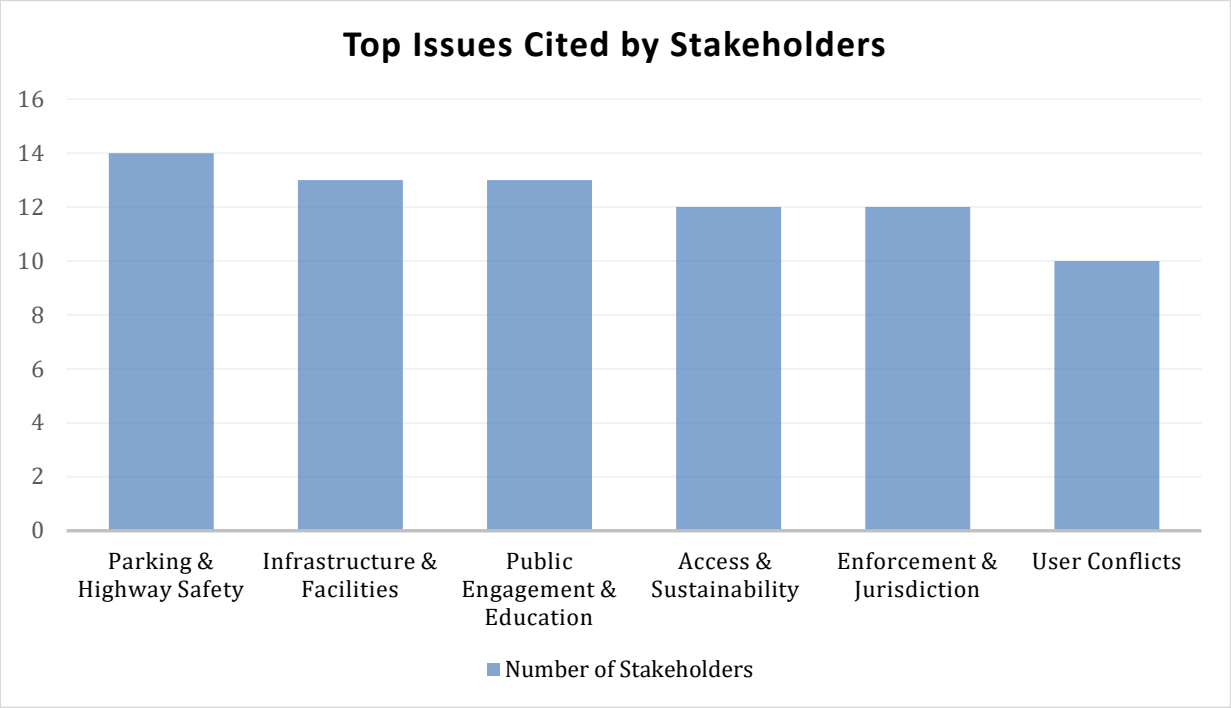
Laying the Groundwork for Cross-Jurisdictional Planning on Winter Use, Safety, and Site Stewardship for Tahoe Meadows

While this assessment prioritized qualitative insights, stakeholder responses were synthesized into six core issue areas that emerged repeatedly across conversations, reflecting both widespread agreement and nuanced differences in perspective.

1. Parking and Highway Safety
2. Infrastructure and Facilities
3. Enforcement and Jurisdiction
4. Conflicting Uses
5. Public Engagement and Education
6. Access and Sustainability

The visuals below offer summary views of stakeholder input. The first chart shows how frequently each issue was raised across all 14 interviews, providing a snapshot of the most commonly discussed concerns.

Although the number of stakeholders citing each issue varies, the order in which issues are presented in the following section reflects more than frequency alone. It also considers how foundational each issue is to others, how strongly stakeholders aligned, and the degree to which each area presents opportunities or challenges for near-term collaboration.



In addition to frequency, the table below highlights where stakeholder views converged or diverged, offering insight into which issues may be most ready for joint action and which may require further coordination. The second table summarizes the general level of agreement among stakeholders on each issue, along with notes on areas of divergence or nuance that may shape future planning efforts.

Stakeholder Agreement Matrix

Issue	Agreement Level	Divergence
1. Parking and Highway Safety	High	
2. Infrastructure and Facilities	High	
3. Enforcement and Jurisdiction	Medium	Some disagreement over agency roles
4. Conflicting Uses	Medium	Diverging views on severity of conflicts
5. Public Engagement and Education	High	
6. Visitor Access and Sustainable Use	High	Concerns about managing access vs. overbuilding

Issue #1: Parking and Highway Safety

Parking and roadside safety are persistent challenges at Tahoe Meadows. Visitors often park along snow-packed shoulders of State Route 431, where visibility is limited, pedestrian infrastructure is

absent, and traffic moves quickly. Snow berms frequently block safe passage from vehicles to recreation areas, forcing pedestrians—often families with children and gear—to climb snowbanks and cross the highway at unmarked points. These conditions create hazards for drivers, pedestrians, and maintenance crews, and can also obstruct snowplows and emergency vehicles.

Stakeholder Perspectives

Participants consistently identified parking and highway safety as the most urgent issues. Many described the arrival experience as chaotic, confusing, and risky, particularly for first-time visitors unfamiliar with mountain conditions. They noted that without safe unloading zones, turnarounds, or walkways, the likelihood of injury increases and traffic slows.

Stakeholders agreed that safety must improve but offered different ideas about scale and approach. Some supported small, seasonal measures such as improved berm access, pull-outs, or loading zones. Others favored more formal solutions, including off-highway parking areas and pedestrian crossings. A recurring theme was the tension between the need for safety improvements and concerns that new infrastructure could invite more use unless carefully designed and managed.

Stakeholder-Suggested Strategies

Common suggestions included:

- Creating designated off-highway parking areas or widening shoulders.
- Installing seasonal pedestrian crossings with signage or lighting.
- Clearing berm access points at key roadside zones.
- Establishing formal loading and unloading areas.
- Placing signage to discourage unsafe parking in narrow or high-speed sections.
- Prioritizing access for emergency and maintenance vehicles.

Several participants emphasized that any improvements should be modest, seasonal, and context-sensitive, with implementation phased in to match the capacity for snow removal, staffing, and enforcement.

Issue #2: Infrastructure and Facilities

Tahoe Meadows lacks many of the basic amenities typically found in high-use winter recreation areas. Restrooms, trash bins, trailheads, signage, and formal access points are absent. Without facilities or a clear point of arrival, the area cannot absorb current levels of visitation with minimal impact on the landscape and experience.

Stakeholder Perspectives

Participants consistently described the lack of infrastructure as a source of safety risks, environmental stress, and visitor confusion. Many noted that, in the absence of guidance, visitors tend to remain near the road or spread into sensitive areas not designed for sustained use. The gap between visitation levels and available infrastructure was frequently described as a mismatch.

Most participants agreed that the corridor needs targeted improvements to handle seasonal demand safely and sustainably. They diverged, however, on how infrastructure should be approached. Some favored minimal, seasonal solutions that would blend with the landscape. Others

argued that basic amenities such as signage, restrooms, and trash service are essential to safety and stewardship.

Concerns about "overbuilding" were common. Several participants worried that permanent or large-scale facilities could encourage more visitation and alter the area's character. Others countered that the current lack of investment has already created safety and environmental issues that education or enforcement alone cannot address. Across perspectives, there was a strong preference for low-impact solutions that improve safety and reduce harm without fundamentally changing the dispersed, undeveloped character of the site.

Stakeholder-Suggested Strategies

Stakeholders offered a range of ideas, including:

- Creating modest, trailhead-style access points with restrooms and trash bins
- Establishing a managed snow play zone to reduce roadside use
- Installing interpretive kiosks to provide maps, safety tips, and behavioral guidance
- Exploring partnerships for facility maintenance and visitor support
- Using portable or seasonal structures rather than permanent buildings
- Linking infrastructure improvements to funding and stewardship agreements

Overall, participants supported scalable, low-impact amenities that improve safety, protect resources, and support stewardship, while avoiding facilities that could drive overuse or diminish the area's natural qualities.

Issue #3: Enforcement and Jurisdiction

Management responsibility at Tahoe Meadows is divided among multiple jurisdictions, including two U.S. Forest Service units (the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest and the Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit), the Nevada Department of Transportation (NDOT), county law enforcement, and local and nonprofit partners. This patchwork can leave visitors uncertain about which agency is responsible for signage, maintenance, enforcement, or emergency response.

Stakeholder Perspectives

Participants frequently described the area as a "gray zone," where problems appear to go unaddressed because complaints are directed to the wrong agency or because agencies lack capacity to respond. Even when signs are posted, visitors are not always sure which authority enforces them, and the limited on-the-ground presence contributes to perceptions of inconsistent management.

Nonprofit agreements provide some support for education, grooming, or maintenance, but do not fill gaps in formal oversight. Law enforcement responsibilities also overlap among federal, state, and county officers, with different staffing levels and priorities. Law enforcement staff noted that new facilities or signage can increase expectations for enforcement without adding capacity, underscoring the importance of aligning decisions with available resources.

Across conversations, participants agreed that no single agency has the authority or bandwidth to manage Tahoe Meadows alone. Many expressed frustration with duplicated efforts and slow progress on modest improvements, while also acknowledging the dedication of agency staff. Overall, they emphasized the need for more structured collaboration, clearer roles, and coordination mechanisms that reflect the complexity of the setting.

Stakeholder-Suggested Strategies

Participants offered several ideas to improve coordination and clarity, including:

- Establishing an interagency working group or area management team to formalize collaboration
- Developing shared protocols for signage, enforcement, trash collection, and plowing
- Clarifying which agencies are responsible for different parts of the corridor during winter months
- Exploring shared funding or staffing models to fill persistent gaps
- Ensuring new infrastructure or management decisions are matched with the enforcement and maintenance capacity needed to support them

Stakeholders broadly supported creating a more consistent and predictable management approach—not only to improve safety and visitor experience at Tahoe Meadows, but also to reduce duplication, enhance accountability, and build a stronger foundation for long-term planning.

Issue #4: Conflicting Uses

Management at Tahoe Meadows allows both motorized and non-motorized recreation, with designated boundaries that can be difficult for visitors to recognize or interpret. Access points are limited and often serve multiple user groups, bringing different activities into close proximity. These conditions contribute to crowding and occasional conflict among users.

Stakeholder Perspectives

Stakeholders acknowledged that conflict occurs, but they varied in how severe they believed it to be. Some described tensions between snowmobile riders and non-motorized users as a major barrier to safe and enjoyable recreation, citing noise, pollution, or users crossing into areas perceived as off-limits. Others noted that most conflicts are not caused by malice but by unclear boundaries, inconsistent signage, and visitors unfamiliar with local norms.

Several participants emphasized that even among non-motorized users, such as cross-country skiers, backcountry skiers, and snowshoers, differences in expectations and crowding sometimes create friction. Others highlighted positive examples where users coexisted without issue, especially when information was clear and norms were respected.

Stakeholders broadly agreed that future management should avoid favoring one group over another. They urged that access restrictions be considered only if other options cannot resolve serious safety or resource concerns, and that any such decisions be guided by broader planning goals. Many underscored that the long-term solution lies more in communication and shared stewardship than in enforcement.

Stakeholder-Suggested Strategies

Participants suggested a range of ideas to reduce conflict and encourage shared use:

- Clarify and consistently mark boundaries between motorized and non-motorized use areas
- Improve signage and maps to help users navigate zones and understand expectations
- Install physical markers or visual cues to distinguish use areas
- Consider a designated access point with layout and design features to better separate uses
- Promote shared norms through outreach, safety campaigns, and on-site ambassadors

- Adopt policies and strategies that are practical to implement and enforce
- Foster a culture of mutual respect and shared stewardship rather than relying solely on enforcement

Most participants stressed that long-term success will depend on education and communication that promote cooperation among user groups, rather than restrictive measures that could deepen divisions.

Issue #5: Public Engagement and Education

Clear, consistent visitor information is limited at Tahoe Meadows. Signage is sparse, sometimes inconsistent, and often obscured by snow. There is no centralized source for orientation or up-to-date cross-jurisdictional guidance. As a result, many first-time visitors arrive without knowing where to park, what rules apply, or how to engage in winter activities safely.

Stakeholder Perspectives

Participants strongly agreed that outreach, education, and communication are essential to improving safety and reducing conflict. Many pointed to fragmented and reactive messaging across agencies, which contributes to confusion and rule violations. Several noted that simple changes in signage or wayfinding could reduce unsafe parking, sledding toward the highway, and entry into areas not suited for certain activities.

Stakeholders emphasized the importance of messaging that is welcoming and instructive rather than punitive. They also highlighted the need to reach a broad range of visitors, including families from Reno, new users unfamiliar with mountain recreation, and underrepresented groups who may not access traditional information channels.

Several participants observed that effective engagement cannot rely on signage alone. They encouraged creative approaches to reach visitors where they are, through digital tools, visitor-facing partners such as gear rental shops, or on-site ambassadors.

Stakeholder-Suggested Strategies

Stakeholders suggested a wide range of communication tools and approaches, including:

- Installing consistent, seasonal signage at key access points
- Using multilingual messages and clear visual symbols to increase accessibility
- Providing QR-code linked maps or mobile-friendly safety information
- Placing kiosks near popular roadside pull-offs to orient visitors
- Coordinating digital outreach through gear rental shops, lodging partners, and visitor services
- Developing targeted awareness campaigns for both tourists and local residents
- Partnering with shuttle drivers, vendors, and nonprofits who interact directly with visitors
- Aligning messaging with Lake Tahoe basin-wide frameworks to ensure consistency across jurisdictions

Education was widely seen as one of the most cost-effective ways to reduce risk and improve the visitor experience. Stakeholders stressed that communication should not simply list rules, but should foster a sense of shared responsibility and respect for both the place and other users.

Issue #6: Visitor Access and Sustainable Use

Tahoe Meadows is one of the most accessible winter recreation areas near Reno and serves as an important low-cost option for families, new users, and those seeking casual snow play. Snow play, cross-country skiing, sledding, and backcountry access all occur in close proximity, often without designated zones or support facilities. Heavy use has contributed to concerns about trash, trampled vegetation, and water quality.

Stakeholder Perspectives

Participants broadly agreed that Tahoe Meadows should remain open and welcoming to the public, especially for those who rely on free or affordable recreation opportunities. At the same time, many recognized that current use patterns are unsustainable without more deliberate management.

Some emphasized the need for modest infrastructure and regular maintenance to protect ecological integrity. Others worried that new restrictions, fees, or permanent facilities could limit access or change the area's character. Several stressed that long-term sustainability cannot be achieved through infrastructure alone; it will also require stewardship, outreach, and consistent agency support.

Stakeholders generally called for a balanced approach: one that protects the setting's natural qualities while ensuring that the public can continue to enjoy it. Many also highlighted the importance of developing new funding and partnership models to sustain operations and maintenance.

Stakeholder-Suggested Strategies

Suggestions for supporting sustainable access included:

- Providing seasonal transit options or shuttles to reduce roadside congestion
- Creating modest parking areas with restrooms and trash facilities
- Establishing trailhead-style entry points to concentrate use and reduce sprawl
- Developing funding approaches such as voluntary passes or shared maintenance agreements
- Avoiding fee structures that could exclude lower-income or casual users
- Embedding sustainability messages into outreach and education efforts
- Partnering with local organizations or volunteers for seasonal staffing and maintenance

Across perspectives, sustainability was not seen as a limitation on access, but as a way to ensure continued enjoyment of the area while protecting its ecological and recreational value.

Stakeholder Input on Collaborative Planning

In addition to sharing views on current conditions and potential solutions, many stakeholders offered ideas about how the planning process itself should be structured to encourage productive collaboration. Several reflected on past efforts that struggled due to unclear roles, limited coordination, or lack of follow-through.

Stakeholder Perspectives

Participants strongly supported a coordinated, well-facilitated process that brings together public agencies, land managers, recreation groups, and community partners. Many emphasized that no single entity should lead alone; instead, they called for shared planning, formal coordination, and alignment across jurisdictions. Some pointed to existing models in the Lake Tahoe Basin that could provide useful examples of interagency work.

Stakeholders expressed varied preferences for how they would like to participate. Some were eager to be active in working groups or collaborative forums, while others preferred periodic updates, targeted opportunities for input, or time-limited roles. Some noted that their ability to engage would depend on the clarity of the process and their organization's capacity.

For broader public input, participants offered practical suggestions to expand engagement beyond organized groups. These included multilingual outreach, mobile surveys, family-oriented messaging, and partnerships with gear rental shops, shuttle operators, and other visitor-facing organizations. Several stressed the importance of hearing directly from day users, particularly families from Reno and other nearby communities, who may not be represented by formal organizations.

Stakeholder Vision for the Future

Alongside process suggestions, participants shared their hopes for the future of winter recreation at Tahoe Meadows. Many envisioned a setting with safe, designated parking, modest seasonal infrastructure, clear roles and expectations, and sustainable strategies for upkeep and coordination. Several emphasized that any improvements should be both realistic and durable. Improvements should be designed to support long-term safety, stewardship, and access while preserving the area's natural character.

These perspectives provide a reference point for partners as they define the focus and scope of the next phase of planning.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This preliminary assessment is not a plan but a foundation for informed next steps. It was designed to clarify current conditions, identify shared concerns, and document a range of stakeholder perspectives on winter recreation access at Tahoe Meadows. While it does not prescribe specific solutions, the findings reveal areas of agreement, highlight implementation challenges, and demonstrate strong interest in continued collaboration.

Some stakeholders are already taking steps, either independently or in small partnerships, to improve safety, manage use, and support access within their areas of responsibility. These efforts

represent important momentum and should be recognized, supported, and, where possible, integrated into broader coordination.

Moving forward effectively, the next phase of work can build on this foundation through wider public engagement, deeper input from landowners and user communities, and more formal interagency coordination. Establishing a shared planning framework will be essential to align priorities, clarify roles, and ensure that future strategies are both realistic and durable.

This moment presents a valuable opportunity. The relationships built and insights gained through this assessment can serve as a springboard for developing cross-jurisdictional solutions that improve safety, support responsible access, and protect the ecological and recreational values that make Tahoe Meadows distinct.

Recommendations for Moving Forward

To support the next phase of work, the following ideas offer a flexible starting point for more structured, cross-jurisdictional planning. They reflect stakeholder input and observations from this assessment. They are offered not as prescriptive steps, but as a menu of potential next actions to be tailored through collaboration.

Structure a Collaborative Process

- Broaden outreach to include landowners, user groups, Tribal representatives, and community-based organizations not yet involved.
- Convene interested stakeholders, both those engaged in this assessment and others identified through additional outreach, in a structured planning process.
- Use a neutral facilitator, such as a consultant or nonprofit partner, to guide discussions, tailor participation to different levels of interest, and help build trust across agencies and user groups.
- Develop a shared planning framework to clarify roles, identify mutual goals, and align agency priorities.

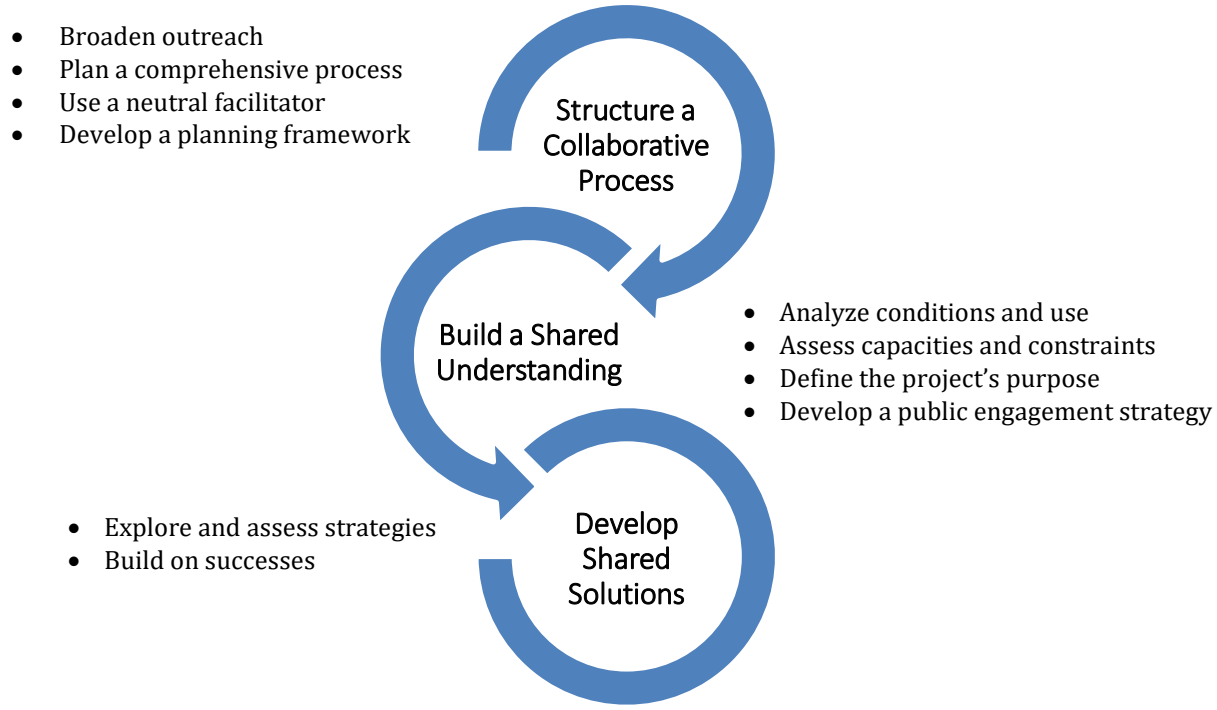
Build a Shared Understanding

- Analyze current conditions and visitor use patterns at Tahoe Meadows and along the Mt. Rose Scenic Byway to create a common baseline for decision-making.
- Assess the staffing, maintenance, enforcement, and funding capacities of key agencies and partners to inform realistic strategies.
- Define the project's purpose and geographic scope early to ensure efforts are focused, appropriately scaled, and aligned with participant roles.
- Design a public engagement strategy that builds on stakeholder insights and reaches a broad cross-section of users, especially those not yet well represented.

Develop Shared Solutions

- Provide space for stakeholders to explore and evaluate strategies that reflect their interests and expertise while considering the diversity of recreation and management needs in the Tahoe Meadows area.

- Facilitate conversations that surface trade-offs, clarify shared goals, and encourage practical solutions grounded in dialogue and mutual understanding.
- Recognize and, where possible, build on efforts already underway by individual stakeholders to strengthen partnerships and coordinate strategies for improving winter recreation access and safety.



Thank you to all who participated in this preliminary assessment.

NPS-RTCA
Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program

The National Park Service – Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance program (NPS-RTCA) supports community-led natural resource conservation and outdoor recreation projects across the nation. NPS-RTCA assists communities and public land managers in developing or restoring parks, conservation areas, rivers, and wildlife habitats, as well as creating outdoor recreation opportunities and programs that engage youth in the outdoors. As a collaborative partner, NPS-RTCA helps achieve successful project outcomes by engaging communities in the visioning, planning, and implementation of each project.

Appendices

Appendix A: Local Organizations Invited to Participate

1. Incline Village General Improvement District
2. Lake Tahoe Snowmobilers
3. Mt. Rose Ski Tahoe
4. Nevada Department of Transportation, District 2 Highway Maintenance
5. Nevada Nordic
6. Nevada State Police Highway Patrol
7. Nevada Tahoe Conservation District
8. Reno-Sparks Indian Colony
9. Snowlands Network
10. Tahoe Fund
11. Tahoe Rim Trail Association
12. Tahoe Transportation District
13. USFS Carson Ranger District (Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest)
14. USFS Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit
15. USFS Law Enforcement and Investigations (Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest)
16. Washoe County Commissioner, District 1
17. Washoe County Regional Parks and Open Space
18. Washoe County Sheriff
19. Washoe Tribe of Nevada and California

Appendix B: Guiding Questions for Stakeholder Conversations

Relationship to Tahoe Meadows

- *Please tell us about your organization and your interest or involvement in winter recreation access in/near Tahoe Meadows.*

Current use

- *Can you go into more detail about how you interact with/use Tahoe Meadows now?*
- *How would you describe your experience there now? Are there ways that other people use it that have a significant impact on how you experience it?*
- *Overall, what kinds of uses do you observe happening in the area? Are there new or emerging activities or opportunities that you see for the area, or that are giving you concern?*

Issues and challenges

- *What barriers or challenges have you experienced that prevent you from being able to safely enjoy the area while visiting or working?*
- *What do you think is the leading or main issue at Tahoe Meadows?*
- *What do you see as the root cause or causes of this issue?*

Desired future

- *Describe the ideal experience at Tahoe Meadows (in context of how they interact with it now)*
- *What aspect or aspects of the area should future management strategies or plans focus on?*

Involvement in future planning and implementation

- *How would you/your organization like to be involved in this planning process? Involvement can range from not being involved at all to receiving periodic updates, to active roles in planning, implementation, maintenance, or other responsibilities.*
- *Are there any other individuals or organizations you suggest we engage in this stage of the process?*
- *Do you have any suggestions about how to engage with other stakeholders, local community and/or the public in later planning steps?*

Appendix C: USFS Recreation Opportunity Spectrum

Originally developed to meet the requirements of the National Forest Management Act, the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) is a core agency tool embedded in Forest Service regulations, policy, and directives. It provides a consistent system for classifying, mapping, and monitoring recreation settings based on their physical, social, and managerial characteristics. ROS informs every stage of planning, from assessment and plan development through project implementation and monitoring and helps managers provide a balanced mix of opportunities, protect natural resources, and ensure recreation remains sustainable over time.

ROS advances the USFS's mission to sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of the Nation's forests by ensuring that recreation is managed as a renewable resource. By focusing on settings rather than individual activities, ROS enables managers to provide public access, maintain a range of opportunities, and balance recreation with ecological and cultural values.

The USFS classifies and manages recreation areas on a spectrum from primitive to developed, depending on an area's recreation opportunities, which range from promoting a sense of solitude and exploring a natural, open environment to focusing more on visitor amenities in areas that appear natural-looking, with moderate development and sights and sounds of human activities.

You can download a copy of the ROS Technical Guide on the USFS website:
https://www.fs.usda.gov/sites/default/files/fs_media/fs_document/ros-guide.pdf

Appendix D: State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan

The State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) 2022–2026 is Nevada's most authoritative statewide outdoor recreation planning document. Developed by the Nevada Division of State Parks with support from the Nevada Division of Outdoor Recreation (NDOR), it articulates NDOR's role in statewide recreation planning, grant prioritization, conservation, and access strategies.

The plan identifies three overarching goals for Nevada: sustaining outdoor recreation while protecting resources, strengthening community and economic vitality, and expanding pathways to health and wellness. While statewide in scope, its framework helps guide how funding, planning, and partnerships are directed. In particular, SCORP emphasizes balancing high demand with resource protection, expanding trail and access opportunities, and improving safety and visitor experience—issues that reflect conditions in the Tahoe Meadows area and the Mt. Rose Scenic Byway corridor.

You can find the full 2022–2026 SCORP on the Nevada Division of State Parks website at https://parks.nv.gov/uploads/documents/NV_SCORP_FINAL_2022-2026_reduced.pdf