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Rubicon Deal Paves Way for Trail Improvements to Protect Water Quality

Placerville – The Forest Service has agreed to increase protections for water quality in a deal with diverse interests that will allow improvements to the Rubicon Trail to move forward.

Eight Appellants, including conservation and off-road organizations, as well as El Dorado County, dropped their appeals of a U.S. Forest Service Decision that grants the County an easement for the route of the historic Rubicon Off-Road Trail and approvals for trail improvements. Changes to the Decision, negotiated and agreed to by the eight appellants, will require the County to close the Trail when weather conditions are likely to result in runoff of sediment and petroleum products.

“This agreement is a win for everyone”, said Karen Schambach of Center for Sierra Nevada Conservation and California Field Director for Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility. “It allows the County to proceed with bridges and erosion control, and includes a winter closure that ensures those improvements will not be destroyed by irresponsible use.”

“The trail improvements along with the agreed to procedures for needed closures will significantly increase protections to water resources and the many riparian and aquatic species that live depend on these waters, including the California red-legged frog and Sierra Nevada yellow legged frog.” said Lisa Belenky, senior attorney for the Center for Biological Diversity.

Four conservation organizations jointly appealed the decision: Center for Sierra Nevada Conservation, based in Georgetown where the Rubicon Trail originates, Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility, the Center for Biological Diversity and Snowlands Network. The primary concern for these groups had been the erosion and water quality issues that result from winter and early spring use of the trail, especially by so-called “extreme off-roaders.” Currently the Trail is under a Regional Water Board Cleanup and Abatement Order, due to water quality issues such as sedimentation and petroleum products contamination.

"It took last minute efforts of all participants and a willingness to compromise on a plan that everyone can live with in order to make the settlement a reality, said Marcus Libkind, Chairman of Snowlands Network. "My only regret is that this same outcome was not worked out long ago."

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