

Final APRA Board Minutes
15 January 2021 Meeting

Meeting held on Zoom, 5 pm – 6 pm

Attendees: Bob Anderson, Bob Zimmerman, Brenda Giese, Doug Pepper, Greg Briggs

Minutes of the Meeting

Background: The meeting was called to order by President Bob Anderson. The meeting was called to discuss recent communications received by the Board and APRA members, including a survey being conducted by Placer County, and promoted by the Backcountry Alliance (BCA), regarding access to public lands around the North Tahoe Basin for human-powered activities access, conversations between Placer County staff and Board members, an email received from the Executive Director of the BCA, Greg Garrison, and several emails received from concerned APRA members regarding increased public access and parking in Ward Valley.

The stated goal of the BCA is to increase public access to public lands, including having new public parking areas established to allow easier access to the Stanford Rock and Twin Peaks areas in Ward Valley. Placer County is in the process of developing the North Tahoe Recreation Access Plan (NTRAP), and created the survey in order to gather information re: where people access the backcountry and how they get there. Tim Boyer, a Placer County staff member, initiated the survey and is charged with driving creation of the NTRAP. The goal of the plan is to accommodate public demand for backcountry access and to manage it reasonably, which is expected to reduce the multiple severe problems Placer is dealing with re: enforcement of parking restrictions in the winter. Illegal winter parking to access the backcountry has become a major issue throughout the Basin.

Potential Impacts: The Board discussed the possible impacts of the County creating a new parking area in Ward Valley, including the problems of more traffic on the roads, the likelihood of increased noise and trash from a larger public presence, and the increased risks of interference with emergency vehicle access, particularly on upper Courchevel, Gstaad, and Verbier because those roads are narrower than the lower roads. The Board agreed that a new parking area would have a significant negative impact on Alpine Peaks residents and that this topic needed to be actively addressed by us as one of the major stakeholders in this discussion. While several members have said they would object to paying snow removal fees if it encouraged more traffic and parking in the neighborhood by non-homeowners, the Board noted that the surest way to lose access to the parking pad was to stop plowing it, since that is the contingency in the agreement with the County that allows APRA-exclusive use. Plowing the roads is not viewed by the Board as being connected to the parking issues.

Stakeholders: It was agreed that we need to engage other important stakeholders as well and bring them into the discussion in order to ensure that all voices contribute to the County's decision-making, including Squaw/Alpine, Tahoe City and Placer County emergency services (North Tahoe Fire, Placer County Sheriff, California Highway Patrol), the BCA, our County Supervisor Cindy Gustafson, and Placer County staff (Tim Boyer and possibly others).

APRA Team: Doug Pepper agreed to be the Board's point person on this effort and to form and coordinate a team to assess the situation in more detail and to recommend next steps.

The Board noted that this will be a public relations discussion to some degree, that we need to have clear messaging and talking points, and that it is important for us to stay on message and not create negative situations to the extent possible. This is likely to be an emotional topic for many people and runs the risk of creating confrontational interactions that may not be beneficial to negotiating the best outcomes for the APRA.

Current Information: Greg has had early informal discussions with Tim Boyer. It is not clear where they are considering installing a new parking pad (or possibly two) in Ward Valley. One relatively good option appears to be the current snowplow turnaround space just above the Pineland neighborhood. This area would allow access to Stanford Rock, however a bridge would likely be needed to cross the creek which would add to the expense. Tim believes it would be useful to have a parking lot further up in Ward Valley to improve access to the Twin Peaks area, however he apparently did not have specific ideas. The County recognizes the APRA's agreement regarding the current parking pad, and does not plan to change that relationship at this time.

It was also noted that the BCA's website is inaccurate as it states that there is public parking in upper Ward Valley and that the parking pad is public parking. The BCA website also states that the lot should be signed as public parking and expanded if possible, and that BCA may be willing to provide funding for snow removal and maintenance of the Sherwood lot. The Board agreed that this messaging needs to be corrected immediately and should be a high priority for the team to address, probably through contacting Greg Garrison. In the email from Greg Garrison received by the Board, he stated that the BCA recognized that the parking pad was for the exclusive use of APRA members, and that he appreciated the occasional accommodation we made when Sherwood wasn't spinning and the lot was not crowded to allow non-members to park there. Changing the website to reflect these statements should not be an issue but needs to happen.

The question was raised as to where we are re: the possible APRA acquisition of the 9 acre parcel that the County owns south of Courchevel. Greg noted that the last information we had was that the County needed to survey the parcel and mark the boundaries before we could have further discussions. He did know if they had surveyed the land by now, and would check into it.

Squaw/Alpine clearly does not want backcountry skiers accessing their terrain. Unauthorized use of their terrain creates serious safety risks for their avalanche mitigation activities and staff, and slows the opening of the Sherwood chair because they first have to make sure no one is in the areas they need to do avalanche work on. It was agreed to open discussions with Squaw/Alpine on this topic and to explore their openness to running a shuttle bus and other options.

Next Steps: The Board agreed to take the following initial steps pending more information becoming available:

1. Doug to identify a team composed of both Board and non-Board members. Merrill Milner, Shorty Boucher, Chris Snideman and Gina Grinnis were mentioned as possible non-board members.
2. The first priority is for Doug to contact Drew Briner and evaluate our legal options.
3. Doug and Brenda also agreed to contact Brendan at Alpenglow to have a discussion re: his thoughts on these topics and to gather any background information he may have.
4. The Board agreed to draft talking points by email over the next several days for discussion at the next meeting.

Because of the urgency to gather this critical information and discuss it as a Board, the team agreed to next meet by Zoom on Saturday, 23 Jan 21, at 7:30 a.m.

Post-meeting note: The 23 Jan 21 meeting was cancelled. These topics will be discussed at the 29 Jan 21 Board meeting.