

OFF THE TRAILS

NOW WHAT?

Will NIMBYs derail a trail system in Mammoth?

By McKenna

For many years, Jackson Hole, Wyoming had a partial, incongruous trail system just like Mammoth. One of the main reasons the trail system in Jackson Hole had never been completed was because of the battle put up by NIMBYs, which is an acronym describing those who argue “not in my back yard.”

Eventually, the inevitable happened. First, a 13-year-old girl was struck by a car and killed while out for a bike ride with her family. Shortly thereafter, a 40-year old male bicyclist met with the same fate. Finally, the people of that community became enraged enough to take action, and a campaign called “Take Action Jackson” was born. At the first public meeting about a trail system one of the leading NIMBYs stood up and said, “I’ve been fighting against a trail system for a long time, but I won’t fight it any longer. You can build the path through my property.” The worm had finally turned and now Jackson Hole doesn’t just have a world-class ski area, it has a world-class—bicycle and pedestrian safe—trail system.

Jeff Olson is a Senior Planner for Alta Planning + Design and he helped make the dream of Jackson Hole’s trail system a reality, as his company has done for both Truckee, California and Mount Hood, Oregon. Last Saturday night, in front of an enthusiastic standing room only crowd at Little Eagle Lodge, Olson gave a presentation (that many members of the audience felt was a bit long-winded) and led a public forum about a trail system for Mammoth Lakes. Mammoth Lakes Trails and Public Access (MLTPA) sponsored the forum and Olson began it with the story of Jackson Hole. But he didn’t tell that story in an attempt to scare the audience, but rather, to give an example of what is possible.

“If you believe we can make this happen then there’s no doubt that we can,” he said. “There’s lots of money (federal and state grants) available to do this type of transportation.”

Olson is one of the country’s foremost experts on trail systems. National Public Radio had just interviewed him on the subject earlier in the week. Olson explained that the way he was taught to tackle tough situations, like complet-

ing a trail system originally included in Mammoth’s 1992 General Plan, is to answer three successive questions: “What? So what? and Now what?” It’s clear that Mammoth has long reached the “Now what?” part of the equation.

“You’ve been wanting this to happen,” he said. “The pieces (sections of a town-wide trail system) are here, and they’re quality pieces...but it’s hard to find. It’s disconnected.”

“It’s not going to happen if you wait for somebody else to do it,” Olson said as a rallying cry. “Every project always has a champion. There’s no other way,” he added, explaining that anyone interested in helping make a trail system

in Mammoth a reality has some kind of skill that could come in handy. (Check out mltpa.org for more info.)

“Ideas are the easy part, making them happen is tough,” he said, warning that problems will arise but none of them will be insurmountable. “For every one of those problems there’s someone out there somewhere who’s come up with an innovative solution,” he said. “Before you build a trail system into the community, build the community into the trail,” Olson advised, and before turning the program over for public comments said, “Any opinion is a good opinion. Now is the time to discuss things.”

The public opinion portion of the program began with requests to incorporate dogs into the trail system and to connect Mammoth Lakes with June Lake (the crowd cheered these ideas). But this good cheer was quickly met with the negativity of some local NIMBYs. A woman who said she was representing the Mammoth Knolls Home Owners Association (MKHOA) said that their group was against a trail system for a host of reasons, primarily that it would encourage people to pass through and possibly park in their neighborhood, and they would fight it.

It turns out, however, that not all ho-

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A special thank you to David Fults, Dick Emerick and "the man" Brian Shibley.

Sincerely,
Eric Olson
Varsity Baseball Coach, Mammoth High School

NOW WHAT

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meowners in the Knolls are against a trail system running by their neighborhood. Some homeowners in the Knolls, like Dawn Vereuck for example, support it. Therefore, MKHOA NIMBYs may be better described as the Knolls Association Against Zoning for an Inter-connected-trails System, or to turn into an acronym, the KNAAZIS. Several members of the audience spoke up against the ideas of the KNAAZIS, which included com-

ments like, "There's a lot of greed in this town."

Olson advised that dealing with opposition doesn't have to be all that difficult. Sometimes, he said, the solution can be as easy as not "putting the trail by their homes" or by simply "listening to their concerns." Of course you can always "give 'em money," he said.

Plus, there's always the hope that some of these NIMBYs will eventually act like their counterparts in Jackson Hole and follow the philosophy of Olson, "Our job is, in part, to make the world a better place," he said



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Pretty little pictures are nice, but do not a trail make.



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