**Hiking the Tahoe Rim Trail,** *Presenter Notes* & Transcript

Logistics:

* Which environmental setting is most appropriate for your presentation? Inside (classroom/meeting room) or trailhead
* What age group is the presentation most appropriate for? adults
* Does a particular species, rock, landscape, habitat, etc. need to be present?
  + - * Not if presented inside with slideshow.
      * Yes, If done outside should be at a Tahoe Rim Trail trailhead.
* Are any props required?
  + - * Projector if done inside, copies of slides if done outside.
      * Not necessary but helpful:
        + Branches showing needles from Jeffrey Pine, Red Fir, & Sierra Juniper
        + Dried sample of Lupine, Paintbrush, & Woolly Mule’s Ears
        + Granite sample
        + Pictures of Mountain Chickadee, Steller’s Jay, & Black Bear
        + Recordings of bird calls if not comfortable mimicking
* What skills are needed? Familiarity with Lake Tahoe Basin, public speaking, knowledge of bird calls
* How much prep/practice time is required? Time to read through script and make notes for self (~30 minutes)

Presenter Notes are in *italics* and the slide script is below each slide number.

**Slide 1 Hiking the Tahoe Rim Trail**

*Introductions & salutations. Ask audience if they have visited Lake Tahoe or are planning a trip there.*

Welcome to Hiking the Tahoe Rim Trail. This presentation is not a lesson on hiking or backpacking but instead an introduction to the Lake Tahoe Basin and its ecology so that new visitors to the Basin can better appreciate the area as they explore it.

**Slide 2 Lake Tahoe Basin**

Lake Tahoe is an alpine lake on the border of California and Nevada that is surrounded the Sierra Nevada mountains to the west and the Carson Range to the east. The lake level is approximately 6,225 ft and the ridge crests around the lake are over 10,000ft. Collectively, this area is called the Lake Tahoe Basin.

**Slide 3 Changing Land Usage in the Basin Land**

Native Americans have inhabited the basin for over 8,000 years. The Washoe tribe being the most recent tribe having lived in the basin for the past 2000 years and counting.

**Slide 4**

*Printed slide should be used if presenting outside.*

In 1859, silver was discovered in nearby Virginia City, Nevada. This discovery spurred migration to the Lake Tahoe area as people sought out their fortunes. Over 60% of the basin’s forests were clear cut over the next 30 years to support mines and mining towns in California & Nevada.

Around the same time, sheep and cattle were brought into the basin for summer grazing. The picture on the left shows the Meiss ranch which was active until 1936 and grazed into the early 2000s.

**Slide 5**

Currently the basin is a year-round travel destination, drawing in tourists with skiing, hiking, mountain biking, sailing, and more. It is estimated that over 7.7 million people visit the basin annually to recreate outdoors. One of the draws is the Tahoe Rim Trail.

**Slide 6 What is the Tahoe Rim Trail?**

*Printed slide or TRT map should be used if presenting outside.*

The Tahoe Rim Trail, also known as the TRT, is multiuse trail that circumnavigates Lake Tahoe. As a multiuse trail, it is open to hikers, horseback riders and mountain bikers. Certain parts of the trail have limited or no access for horses and bikes, but for the most part the trail is enjoyed by all three. It’s possible to enjoy small sections of the trail as there are trailheads all around the lake. For those with a bit more time, the TRT is a popular thru-hike which means backpackers attempt to hike the entire trail in one go.

**Slide 7 TRT Statistics:**

The trail is over 165 miles long with over 20k ft of elevation gain. The highest point on the trail is Relay Peak at 10,335ft. The lowest point is 6275ft in Tahoe City where the trail is closest to the lake.

**Slide 8 Common Birds:**

*If not familiar or comfortable mimicking bird calls, have audio recordings of calls for Mountain Chickadee & Steller’s Jay.*

*Pictures of birds can be used if presenting outside.*

So, what will you see as you hike the TRT? There is a huge variety of plants and animals, we won’t be able to get to them all now. But to start, let’s talk about what I call the noisy duo: the Mountain Chickadee and Steller’s Jay.

The Mountain Chickadee is a small grey, black and white bird. You might not be able to spot one initially as they fly through the evergreen forest but you’ll hear them. The song of the Mountain Chickadee is a two-toned “fee-bee-bee”, the first note is higher and the second is repeated. Once you recognize the song, try to find this little songbird. You’ll hear them all through the Sierra Nevada.

The second half of the noisy duo is the Steller’s Jay. Easily recognized by their blue bodies and black crests, the Steller’s Jays are also found in evergreen forests and campgrounds where they are opportunistic scavengers of picnic tables. The call of the Steller’s Jay is a harsh “shack-shack-shack”, this call can be repeated at different speeds.

Again, this is just an introduction, while you are out on the trail try to take pictures or remember the details of the birds that you see to identify later.

**Slide 9 Common Animals:**

*Individual pictures of each animal can be used if presenting outside.*

Now onto the ground dwellers. While hiking it’s a constant battle to decide where to direct your focus, to the scenery around you or the ground at your feet. Two species that you’ll see while watching the trail are Western Fence Lizards and Golden-Mantled Ground Squirrels.

The Western Fence Lizard is found in a variety of habitats from grassland to forest, even as high up as 10,800ft. They are a small lizard, growing up to 3.5 inches long and can be brown to black in color. It is possible that their color change is a to thermoregulate as they bask in the sun. The defining feature of the Western Fence Lizard is the blue stripes on either side of their bellies, it’s hard to see while they scurry across the trail but if you come across a lizard doing push-ups try to get a glimpse of their undersides. Be thankful if you see Western Fence Lizards while hiking, Lyme disease is less prevalent in areas where they are found.

The Sierra is home to a wide variety of squirrels and chipmunks. It can be hard to decide which is which. If the critter has a solid colored head, it’s a ground squirrel, if it has stripes on its head then it’s a chipmunk. Behavior of the two is also different, ground squirrels hibernate and therefore need to develop a large fat store to get them through the winter. Chipmunks don’t hibernate so they need to cache food supplies to eat through the winter. One species that is found along the TRT is the Golden-Mantled Ground Squirrel. It is recognizable by the golden color across its shoulders and the black and white stripes on its back.

Bears are a common fear of hikers but are not commonly seen on the TRT. There are NO brown bears, also known as grizzlies, in California. While it is possible to see Black bears, especially in Desolation Wilderness, they are not commonly seen by hikers. You are more likely to see their berry-filled scat (poop) or claw marks on Quaking Aspens. Black bears are opportunists and will scavenge food from hikers. It is important to protect food and other “smellies” when on the TRT.

Help keep bears and other animals wild, do not leave food out where animals can get it and do not feed wildlife.

**Slide 10 Common Flowers:**

*Pressed samples of flowers would be beneficial to see details of each species.*

*Individual pictures can be used in place of slide if presenting outside.*

One of the draws of hiking the TRT is the multitude of wildflowers that grow along the crests and in the basin. Depending on elevation, most flowers bloom between June and August, the higher you are the later the bloom.

Giant Red Indian Paintbrush is easily identified by its red to orange leaves that resemble a paintbrush. Paintbrush are parasitic and grow amongst grasses and forbs.

Woolly Mule’s Ears are frequently seen growing densely in alpine meadows. They are identified by their silvery-fuzzy leaves and yellow flowers. A look-a-like wildflower is the Arrowleaf Balsamroot. A tell-tale difference is the Arrowleaf’s leaves are shaped like arrowheads and grow on long stems. The Mule’s Ear’s leaves are elongated with shorted stems.

Lastly, is the Lupine. There are over 70 species of Lupine found in California so to begin let’s just focus on the genus. Lupine are identified by their palmate leaves and tall spike of pea-like flowers. In the Sierra, Lupine species with purple, yellow and white flowers can be found.

Again, this is just the beginning! Take pictures of the flowers that you find for identification later.

**Slide 11 Common Trees:**

*Branch samples with needles would be beneficial whether presenting inside or out.*

*Individual pictures can be used in place of slide if presenting outside.*

*Ask audience if they know the difference between different types of evergreen trees.*

There are multiple species of pines found along the TRT. Pines are easily identified by the fact that their needles grow in bunches called fascicles. One prevalent species of pine is the Jeffrey Pine. It has fascicles with three needles, over 4 inches long.

There are two species of fir in the basin, White and Red. Red is more common at higher elevations. It’s possible to tell the difference between White and Red as White has triangular needles and Red has more rounded needles. The Red fir needles will roll between your fingers.

Lastly is the Sierra Juniper. Juniper needles are scale-like, resembling narrow pieces of rope. Their bark is a distinct shreddy texture with red color. Sierra Junipers generally grow straight and tall but on exposed and rocky slopes, their trunks frequently twisted by the winds and snow.

**Slide 12 Habitats**

As TRT covers its 165+ miles it crosses a range of habitats. Each is determined by its elevation, from lake-level to the crest, soil type, and amount of precipitation. Few areas in the Lake Tahoe Basin remain in their natural state, unchanged by humans.

**Slide 13 Forest**

Through most of the TRT, the trail winds through coniferous forest. The growing season is short and the soils are sandy. The trees grow tall with little growing in the understory. Because of the history of clearcutting, most of the forests are now even-aged and dominated by the firs that were left uncut. The Forest Service is working to restore a more natural balance of pines and firs, of varying ages. Forest management practices such as selective cutting and prescriped fires can be happening during spring through fall.

**Slide 14 Meadows**

Meadows are defined by their lack of trees. Along the TRT, meadows can be “wet”, such as Big Meadow, or alpine as along the crests. Wet meadows were historically, and as recently as the early 2000s, used for summer grazing of sheep and cattle. Meadows are the place to find wildflowers and to enjoy the relative break on your legs as the trail is generally flat. The alpine meadows along the crest also offer the best views of Lake Tahoe and the surrounding mountains.

**Slide 15 Lakes**

Lastly are the lakes of the TRT. The trail passes by many lakes, especially in the southern and western sections of the trail. At Echo Lake, the trail passes over a dam used for hydroelectric power generation. Lake Tahoe and its surrounding alpine lakes are famous for their deep blue color.

**Slide 16 Rocks**

*Granite sample would be beneficial for inside and outside presentations.*

And through all parts of the TRT, there is the presence of granite. Granite forms the bedrock of the Lake Tahoe Basin, from the mountain peaks to the sandy soils. In the alpine zones, it’s possible to see the scars of glacial action on the smooth granite slabs. Wildlife, like the Yellow-bellied Marmot on the left, take advantage of the boulders for sunning and the ease of hiding in the cracks and crevices.

**Slide 17**

To continue learning about the TRT, look for signs at the trailheads around the lake. The signs include a variety of information about the local flora, fauna and history. The Tahoe Rim Trail Association also leads guided hikes for adults and children.

For help identifying plants and animals, there are a variety of phone apps, two to start with are iNaturalist and the CornellLab’s Merlin. The *Laws Field Guide to the Sierra Nevada* is also a great resource, whether brought onto the trail or as a reference to browse on the car ride home.

Happy Trails!

*Answer any questions and direct audience to where they can continue learning about the Lake Tahoe Basin and the TRT.*