

VAN SICKLE BI-STATE PARK IMPROVEMENTS

Van Sickle Bi-State Park (Park) is a 727-acre rustic mountain park with equestrian heritage that forms the backdrop for the most developed corner of the Lake Tahoe Basin (Basin). The Park is located directly adjacent to the tourist core in the City of South Lake Tahoe, California and the casino core in Stateline, Nevada. The Park's unique location, within walking distance of the largest urban area and "tourism bed base," in the Basin, makes it one of Basin's most accessible parks. The Park offers access to serene trails, stunning views of the Lake, and picnicking opportunities within walking distance of casinos, hotels, and neighborhoods. Planned improvements in both states present a great opportunity to enhance visitor experience at one of only a few bi-state parks in the country. At the same time, the Park's unusual status requires collaborative management with the State of Nevada, demanding creative solutions to ensure a seamless visitor experience between the two states. Staff anticipates seeking California Tahoe Conservancy (Conservancy) Board authorization for the improvements in California in June 2026.

Park History

The states acquired land for the Park in stages, and the Park opened to visitors in 2011. Achieving this milestone required the Conservancy and State of Nevada to complete several key steps. In 1988, Jack Van Sickle donated 542 acres to the Nevada Division of State Parks (NDSP). The Conservancy subsequently acquired approximately 185 acres of adjacent land in California to improve access to and enlarge the Park. These acquisitions include approximately 23 acres from the California Department of Transportation in 2000, 160 acres from the Van Sickle family in 2002, and 2.5 acres from a private owner in 2025.

In 2005, the California Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR), NDSP, and the Conservancy signed a three-way, interagency agreement to manage planning, site design, and engineering for the Park. The partners initially planned for the Conservancy to transfer the Park to DPR, but budget constraints have prevented DPR from pursuing the transfer and managing the California side of the Park as one of California's State Parks. Also in 2005, the three agencies developed a master plan for the Park. Through this planning process, the agencies aligned around a common purpose for the Park, developed Park objectives and identified improvements necessary to open the Park to the public. The 2005 master plan states: "The purpose of Van Sickle Bi-State Park is to provide recreation facilities for local residents and visitors to the Lake Tahoe Basin while protecting and showcasing the unique scenic, natural, cultural, and historic features of the site."

In 2009, the NDSP constructed the Park's access road and utilities, as well as Nevada restrooms, picnic sites, trails, and trailhead parking. In the same year, Conservancy staff entered into an agreement with the NDSP to jointly manage the Park.

In 2011, the Conservancy constructed the California day use area in the vicinity of the historic barn with a small gravel parking lot, paved accessible parking, a picnic area, an unpaved entrance trail, restrooms, gates, and the existing state line marker.

In 2019, the NDSP and Conservancy developed a Vision Plan to update the 2005 master plan. The Vision Plan proposes several Park improvements that the states have not yet completed, including:

- a new state line monument;
- paved shared-use trail connections throughout the Park and to the South Lake Tahoe tourist core area;
- expanded day-use amenities such as shaded picnic areas and interpretive exhibits; improved hiking trails; and
- on the Nevada side, a visitor center, campground, maintenance facilities, and employee housing.

Importantly, the Vision Plan also describes improvements necessary to keep the Park open to the public during the winter, including storm water basins and snow-storage areas.

Total average annual Park visitation between 2019 and 2022 was 61,115 people (41,292 in summer and 19,823 in winter). Total average annual projected visitation by 2048, after full Park build-out, is estimated to be 136,492 (109,285 in summer and 27,207 in winter), according to a study commissioned by the NDSP.

The 2019 Vision Plan was informed by a public survey administered online, at a local visitor center, and on-site. This survey showed that the primary activities people seek when visiting the Park are hiking and mountain biking. Respondents identified backcountry trail access as the most valuable existing amenity and the most desirable amenity to improve. Respondents also advocated for establishing connections to public transit, formalized winter use, and improved wayfinding signage. Respondents also expressed interest in overnight camping facilities and interpretive and educational programs.

Upcoming Improvement Projects

Guided by the 2019 Vision Plan, the Conservancy and NDSP are planning major improvements in the Park (Attachment 2). The Conservancy is planning the Van Sickle Bi-State Park Safety and Equitable Access Improvements Project and the Dennis T. Machida Memorial Greenway – Van Sickle Connector on the California side of the Park. Collectively, these two projects are referred to as the California Improvements. The Conservancy is planning the California

Improvements together because the shared-use trails will connect near the California day use area and they both are within the Park. Proposed improvements include: approximately one mile of paved shared-use trail connecting the Park entrance to the California day use area, state line, and nearby neighborhood at Chonokis Drive; a new Park entrance plaza; two new picnic areas; wayfinding and interpretive signage and exhibits; storm water basins; and a new hiking trail.

The California Improvements will enhance public safety on the California side of the Park. Currently, pedestrians enter the Park either by walking along the entrance road alongside vehicle traffic or by using a dirt path adjacent to the road. Because the dirt path ends at the California day use area, the only way to walk to the Nevada day use area is on the road. Many visitors also stop in the middle of the road to take photos at the state line marker embedded in the pavement, creating additional safety hazards. The new shared-use trails and state line monument will be separated from the roadway, which will reduce these pedestrian and vehicle conflicts.

The NDSP is also planning several improvements on the Nevada side of the Park (Nevada Improvements). In 2026, the NDSP anticipates constructing a new state line monument (partially in California), a paved shared-use trail from the state line monument to the Nevada day use area, employee housing, and a maintenance shop. The employee housing will make it possible for employees to live where they work and respond quickly to park management needs. In the future, the NDSP also plans to construct a visitor center and a campground near the existing Nevada day use area. Conservancy staff is in close coordination with NDSP staff to ensure that improvements on both sides of the state line are complementary and provide the greatest public benefit.

The Conservancy completed public outreach in 2025 to help inform the design of the California Improvements. Overall, public support is strong for the California Improvements. This outreach included formal consultation with the Washoe Tribe of Nevada and California, which will continue as the improvements advance towards construction. The 2025 public survey results were similar in many ways to the 2019 survey results. While the states intentionally designed the Park to encourage people to walk, bike, or roll from the casino core rather than drive into the Park, survey respondents still support additional parking. Winter park access is also clearly desired, although some people questioned if it is feasible. Many people also asked for better wayfinding signage throughout the Park to reduce confusion and user conflicts related to hikers and mountain bikers using the same trails. The public also supports protecting the Park's natural and cultural characteristics.

In 2026, Conservancy staff, in collaboration with the Department of General Services, will complete due diligence, preliminary plans, environmental analysis, cost estimates, and a financing plan for the California Improvements. The combined cost of the two California

projects is likely in the range of \$6 to \$10 million. Staff anticipates seeking Board authorization for expenditures, environmental compliance, land use agreements, and other requirements for the California Improvements in June 2026. Currently, staff anticipates constructing the California Improvements in 2028 and 2029.

List of Attachments

Attachment 1 – Location Map

Attachment 2 – California and Nevada Improvements Project Map

Conservancy Staff Contact

Scott Cecchi, Project Manager

scott.cecchi@tahoe.ca.gov