

1. FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Standing-Room-Only Crowd Signals Strong Community Support for Arnold Rim Trail Improvements

More Than 75 Attend Community Meeting on Safety, Connectivity, and \$500,000 SNC Grant Opportunity

ARNOLD, CA — January 8, 2026 — The Arnold Rim Trail Association (ARTA) drew a standing-room-only crowd of 77 residents to a community update meeting at Lakemont Lodge, more than doubling expected attendance and underscoring strong local support for planned improvements to the Arnold Rim Trail system.

"We expected a good turnout, but the response exceeded our expectations," said Greg Novacek, Chair of ARTA.

The meeting provided updates on a recently completed environmental review and ARTA's upcoming grant application to the Sierra Nevada Conservancy (SNC). Representatives from ARTA and the U.S. Forest Service presented project details and answered questions.

Evan Watson, OHV and Dispersed Recreation Manager for the Calaveras Ranger District, described the completion of the National Environmental Policy Act Finding of No Exceptional Circumstances (NEPA FANEC) in November 2025, which clears the way for implementation. The approval authorizes 31.5 miles of trail work, including new trail construction, decommissioning of unsustainable routes, and strategic reroutes to improve safety and connectivity.

The proposed improvements address a documented public safety concern. Approximately 25% of Calaveras County search and rescue calls originate from the Arnold Rim Trail, highlighting the need for improved wayfinding, sustainable trail design, and visitor education.

"Safety is the foundation of equitable access," said Rob Houghton, who presented ARTA's application for up to \$500,000 in competitive SNC funding, with a March 2, 2026 deadline. If awarded, the grant would support both trail infrastructure improvements and an Outdoor Literacy program serving disadvantaged students in the Vallecito Unified School District.

Community engagement extended beyond attendance. Interactive map-based breakout sessions allowed participants to provide direct input on proposed trail alignments and priorities. Attendees also signed petitions supporting the grant application and

expressed interest in volunteer opportunities. Members of the mountain biking community engaged actively on trail design considerations.

Written comment cards collected during the meeting reflected overwhelmingly positive sentiment for the proposed projects. Feedback highlighted consistent themes: strong support for safety improvements, enthusiasm for the collaborative partnership between ARTA and the U.S. Forest Service, interest in volunteering, and appreciation for ARTA's inclusive planning process.

ARTA achieved 501(c)(3) nonprofit status in January 2025, formalizing an 18-year partnership with the U.S. Forest Service. The organization currently helps maintain 32 miles of trail through more than 1,000 volunteer hours annually. ARTA's vision, "*Trails for Everyone...Forever*," reflects a commitment to inclusive access and long-term sustainability by pairing resilient trail infrastructure with education and stewardship programs.

Community members interested in supporting the project can sign letters of support, volunteer, or learn more at **arnoldrimtrail.org** or by contacting info@arnoldrimtrail.org.

2. About Arnold Rim Trail Association

The Arnold Rim Trail Association is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization dedicated to developing and maintaining sustainable, non-motorized trails in the Calaveras Interface. In partnership with the U.S. Forest Service and Stanislaus National Forest, ARTA supports trail systems serving hikers, mountain bikers, equestrians, and families across more than 8,000 acres of public land.

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