

Cave Rock Drive Vehicular Access Gate Proposal

Excessive vehicular traffic and parking violations create dangerous public hazards on Cave Rock Drive. These problems have been increasing in recent years as social media encourages more and more tourists and sightseers to seek access to Cave Rock, “a sacred site of immense cultural, spiritual, and historical significance” – not an authorized recreation destination.

Prompted by our constituency’s concern for safety, the Cave Rock Estates General Improvement District (CREGID) proposes to fund and manage the construction of a vehicular access gate near the Cave Rock Drive to U.S. Highway 50 intersection to improve safety and other related problems, by providing a means to normalize vehicular traffic through the Cave Rock neighborhood. The proposed gate is not intended to prevent all public access. Rather, it is intended only as a tool to enable better management of problematic and excessive vehicular traffic and parking hazards. Pedestrians and bicycles would remain able to access the neighborhood at any time. Integrating input from local agencies, systems that allow for uninterrupted access by emergency vehicles (emergency vehicle beacon capability, knox keys, backup power systems, contingency operation plans, etc.) would be incorporated.

The primary goal of this initiative would be to address a pronounced public hazard for the residents and visitors of the Cave Rock neighborhood and for the sightseers themselves. Recurring safety and other related problems that this initiative should help to address include the following (see attached photos):

- Parking in the middle of the road,
- Parking that blocks emergency vehicle passage,
- Parking that blocks fire hydrants,
- Parking in fire lanes,
- Parking in posted ‘No Parking’ zones,
- Parking that blocks resident driveways,
- Pedestrians walking and standing in the middle of the vehicular roadway,
- Illegal and dangerous U-turns,
- Repeated parking on a potentially unstable hillside with occupied residences below,
- Double parking,
- Speeding,
- Parking in the wrong direction,
- Vehicles parking on both sides of the narrow roadway (constrained on one side by a steep uphill mountainside and on the other side by a steep downhill hillside) blocking or slowing potential emergency response,
- Too many sightseers at the top of Cave Rock at one time (fall/trip hazard),
- Unlawful waste disposal (litter as well as large volume dumping),
- Carelessly tossed lit cigarettes,

- Unlawful camping,
- Unlawful urination/defecation,
- Unlawful graffiti,
- Unlawful vandalism.

The above hazards are exacerbated by the following:

- There is a steep and blind hairpin turn adjacent to the trailhead where parking becomes the most congested. There have been occasions when navigating through this hairpin turn was impossible, obstructing any vehicular traffic and preventing emergency access to the neighborhood above this hairpin turn.
- Latecomers are often in a rush to catch the sunset, so they are more inclined to speed and attempt dangerous vehicle maneuvering and parking. At the same time, rushed pedestrians tend to meander into the roadway, often stopping and standing in the middle of the roadway for photos.
- Inebriated sightseers (alcohol and marijuana) with poor judgment and other impaired faculties routinely join the crowds.
- As sunset and dusk attract the largest crowds, and since the area does not have street lighting, darkness routinely accentuates the hazards.

Already in 2026 – well before the spring/summer tourism peaks – the Douglas County Sheriff’s Department has been called on numerous occasions to address unsafe conditions. Though greatly appreciated when available, such enforcement efforts do not discourage unlawful behavior from repeating. Often, enforcement officers are unable to respond, and the problematic behavior typically results from out-of-town tourists oblivious to public safety hazards as well as the site’s historical and cultural significance.

In addition, the amount and the nature of related issues have become increasingly problematic and alarming. Garbage, including food waste and lit cigarette butts, pollutes Lake Tahoe, presents a threat to wildlife, and exposes the Tahoe area to increased wildfire hazards. Public urination and defecation have been observed. Illegal overnight parking / camping has been occurring more often. Also, incidents of graffiti and other forms of vandalism have increased recently.

The Washoe Tribe of Nevada and California (the Tribe) have expressed support for this initiative (see 18 August 2025 Letter from the Tribe to CREGID attached). In this letter, Serrell Smokey, Chairman of the Tribe, has expressed concern over the “increased visitation, particularly for non-cultural purposes, contributing to disturbance, erosion, and the intrusion upon the sanctity of the site.” He further expresses that, “restricting public access through the installation of a gate is a practical, effective step toward protecting the area and ensuring that its cultural and spiritual values remain intact for future generations.”

Nevada Department of Wildlife (NDOW) has indicated that the human presence at Cave Rock has disturbed the nesting activities of desired species, a natural and integral component of the Lake Tahoe ecosystem. TRPA has highlighted similar protection efforts in its literature.

Without pointing out that Cave Rock is not an authorized recreation destination, social media continues to promote the site as “a great place to view a sunset” and “a short, easy hike.” As time passes, crowd numbers have only been increasing – both in number of sightseers at one time and in the number of days/nights when overcrowding occurs.

The crowds observed generate safety hazards and other related concerns, especially with their vehicles. Cave Rock needs to be protected and respected. NRS 318.120 Streets and alleys paragraphs 1. and 2. empowers CREGID to install traffic-control equipment to address this. Enclosed with this submittal are engineering plans for the proposed vehicular access gate at the entrance to the Cave Rock neighborhood, intended to mitigate the numerous safety hazards listed herein and to help preserve one of Tahoe’s most important historical and cultural landmarks.