

Cover Story: City budget layoff impacts P. 44

FREE

T A H O E M O U N T A I N N E W S

Serving Lake Tahoe's South Shore Since 1994

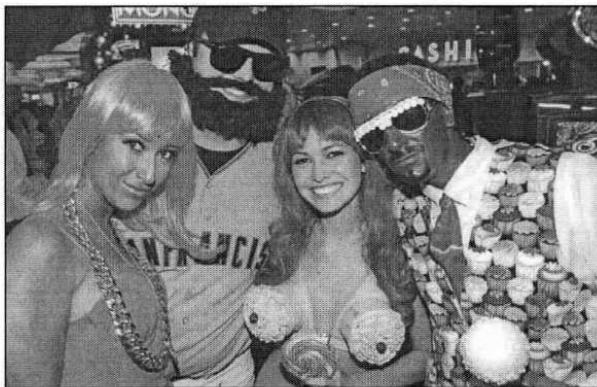
Vol. 18, No. 5 • November 2011



Local resident and photographer John Adamski recently captured this fall scene of Taylor Creek. Photo by John Adamski

It's the Environment

More than almost any other place, Tahoe's world thrives on natural beauty and the environment, and this month we have a huge Environment section with stories on prescribed burns, the Lake Tahoe Golf Course battle, and TRPA oversight issues.



inside:

Tons of Freaker's P. 56

Cops cracking down on pot?
Lakeview Commons update
Catching up with Todd O.
Mountain Marketplace
Dave at the movies
Spoke Junkie
Ski Bum

Golf course battle continues

By Jeff Munson

The fight is pure Tahoe: A project proposed to improve the environment versus a group of people who don't want things to change.

Mud has been thrown, sides are dug in, and lawsuits are likely looming with the proposed reconfiguration of the Lake Tahoe Golf Course as it backs up to Washoe Meadows State Park and Recreation Area.

On one side are park users and nearby residents, who say the scientists aren't deserving of their jobs nor their degrees and there is a conspiracy to cause environmental harm rather than protect the land that backs up to the park. They are passionately arguing that California State Parks, in this instance, has ignored its own Washoe Meadows property for the past 27 years and is only doing what it is doing to enhance the golf course because it generates money for state park system.

And on the other side are scientists of all sorts of environmental stripes, all saying that the Upper Truckee River, the way it has been manipulated, degraded and abused over the past 100 years, needs major restoration. In fact, environmentalists and state scientists agree that the Upper Truckee River is the biggest contributor to



Photo by Jeff Munson
Nathan Shasha and Cyndie Walck of California State Parks do a walk through of the proposed changes at Lake Tahoe Golf Course.

suspended and fine-grain sediment that runs into Lake Tahoe.

For five years, California State Parks has studied, drafted and sampled the area and has generated what it calls its preferred Alternative 2, which is to move seven holes on the golf course.

The alternative is an "outrageous proposal to steal a significant part of Washoe Meadows

State Park from the people of California," said Lynne Paulson, who is leading the fight against the proposal under the group Washoe Meadows Community.

The Washoe tribe is also against the project. At issue is access to a grinding stone located on the south side of the park. At no time has the Washoe been denied nor will they ever be denied access to the park or to the grinding stone or any other cultural heritage features associated with the park, said state officials. The Washoe, park officials say, have been against the project based on its overall and cumulative belief that its places have been disrespected and that the overall integrity of the Washoe Indians has been lost.

The State Parks commission last month voted to proceed with the project. Now Paulson and others are hoping to convince the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency that the proposed environmental restoration efforts are suspect. The League to Save Lake Tahoe has come out against the plan, arguing for the full removal of the golf course.

The *Tahoe Mountain News* took a tour of the golf course and the holes in question and posed questions that have circulated among detractors of the plan. Here are the responses from California State Parks personnel, including various soil, river, wildlife and habitat and cultural scientists associated with the proposal.

Detractors: The golf course is

being expanded.

State Parks: The golf course would remain an 18-hole, regulation golf course with approximately the same par and yardage, but area turf will decrease by ten to 15 percent (from 98 acres to approximately 84 acres).

Detractors: Project is not about river, it's just to expand the golf course.

State Parks: Restoration of the river requires more room for both restored meanders and increased floodplain area. Golf course holes in this zone need to be removed to allow for restoration. The project's primary purpose is to restore natural geomorphic and ecological processes along this reach of river, improve riparian habitat, and to reduce the river's suspended sediment discharge to Lake Tahoe.

Detractors: The golf course was "downgraded" to a state recreation area.

State Parks: It was never "downgraded." When the state acquired the property in 1984 it set up a boundary between the State Park and the State Recreation Area. Recreation areas allow for multiple uses, such as golf.

Habitat issues

Detractors: The wildlife corridor will be degraded.

State Parks habitat scientists: The completed project will enhance the wildlife corridor. The

purpose of this project is to restore the river, which means this project will be creating a riparian corridor in an area where it is currently fragmented due to the existing golf course alignment. This is the only travel corridor for wildlife that does not require crossing human development, as the entire park is surrounded by roads and housing developments.

Detractors: The golf course will block bear routes to the river.

State Parks: Bears have a very large range (up to 30 square miles) and readily cross a variety of terrain including urbanized areas and golf courses. A 2011 study used GPS collar to track a bear from Tahoe's west shore to the other side of the crest of the Sierra Nevada.

Detractors: The project has nothing to do with Lake Tahoe.

State Parks: This is a high priority Environmental Improvement Program project. It is identified as a significant producer of clarity-reducing sediment.

Historic and Cultural Issues

Detractors: The golf course will impact the historic Celio Barn currently located in Washoe Meadows State Park.

State Park historic and cultural scientists: The barn is not in the project area.

Water Quality and Resource Protection

Detractors: The proposed project is worse for the environment than current conditions.

State Parks Water Quality and Resource Protection

Scientists: The project would restore 32 acres of the stream environment zone containing critical riparian habitat, reconnect the river to its floodplain, decrease fine sediment loads, raise the water table, and provide wildlife corridor connectivity along Upper Truckee River. It has been identified in the Environmental Improvement Program evaluation as a critical area for environmental improvement in the Lake Tahoe Basin.

Detractors: Other reaches should be restored instead of the golf course reach.

State Parks: This project is part of a multi-agency, multi-reach effort to treat the river from

Continued on Page 28

GAIALICIOUS



987 Tallac Ave • South Lake Tahoe
www.gaialicious.com

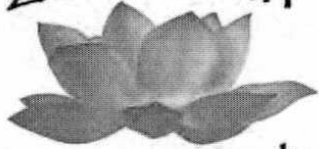
Fair Trade,
Locally Made &
Eco-Friendly

Gifts
Clothing
Jewelry
Music
Books



530.542.4244

Zen Within



Massage Studio

\$39 | **\$59** | **\$89**
 1/2 hour massage | 1 hour massage | 1 1/2 hour massage

~ Voted Tahoe's Best! ~

Lydia Weed

Nationally Certified Since 1999

Deep Tissue • Myofascial • Therapeutic
 Relaxation • Reflexology • Reiki
 Hot Stone • Spa Treatments

Pinecone Plaza Ste A7 • (530) 545-8009

PERSONAL CHEF BY
JAYLYN
 Home Chef Service

FINEST INGREDIENTS
 COMPLETE GROCERY SHOPPING
 MEAL PREPARATION
 SPECIAL DIETS
 ORGANICS
 COMFORT FOOD
 VEGETARIAN

Let Me Prepare Your Holiday Appetizers!

Chef Jaylyn
 (530) 721-1547

www.personalchefbyjaylyn.com

Special Events • Intimate Weddings • Dinner Parties
 Business Luncheons • Family BBQs • Reunions

"Golf Course"

Continued from Page 26

Christmas Valley to Lake Tahoe. It is being planned in cooperation with the Upper Truckee River Watershed Assessment Group and is part of a regional effort to restore the river in order to protect the clarity of Lake Tahoe.

Detractors say: There is nothing wrong with the river.

State Parks erosion and river scientists: The Upper Truckee River has a long history of disturbance leading to poor habitat and water quality. The river is unnaturally straight and disconnected from its floodplain. This increases erosion and sediment and degrades riparian and stream zone habitat.

Detractors: The golf course is increasing along the river.

State Parks: The golf course is being moved away from the river onto less sensitive land. The portion of the golf course within 100 feet of the river will decrease from 6382 linear feet to 850 linear feet (Over 5,532 linear feet of the golf course is being removed from the river edge).

Detractors: Relocation of golf course will adversely impact the stream environment zone.

State Parks: The portion of the golf course in a stream environment zone will decrease from current 128 acres to approximately 96 acres, restoring 32 acres of the stream environment zone. The active floodplain area will increase by 40 acres.

Detractors: The relocated golf course will impact the fen (A fen is a type of wetland fed by mineral-rich surface water or groundwater.)

State Parks wetland scientists: The fen is upslope of and outside of the golf course area, and no grading will occur to disrupt drainage. California State Parks is working with the California Native Plant Society to study the fen areas to ensure the golf course does not impact them.

Recreation and Public Access

Detractors: Public access to the river will be blocked.

State Parks public access and recreation studies: An additional mile (approximately) of the river will be available to the public. The additional, restored public access river area (due to golf course holes being moved) will include: a new trail, fishing, bird watching, and other river access for the public.

Detractors: Recreation access will be decreased.

State Parks: There will be

much greater recreational access available to a broader community. Parking will be available at a trailhead by the clubhouse. The trail will connect to the Sawmill regional bike path and cross the new bridge to the west side of the park. The new segment of the trail will be designed to be ADA-compliant. A mile of restored river area will be open to access such as fishing, bird watching (ecotourism), canoeing and picnicking. State Parks will also consider future access for snowshoeing and cross-country skiing.

Detractors: Snowmobiles will be allowed on the west side of the river.

State Parks: Snowmobiles would continue to be allowed only in the driving range area operated by the winter concessionaire.

Detractors: There will be a decrease in hiking trails.

State Parks: There will be approximately a mile of additional trails with greater regional connectivity. A trail would be constructed through the restored area along the river connecting to the new bridge and the Sawmill bike path and Country Club corner. This would provide connectivity between the eastern and western parts of the Washoe Meadows State Park and to regional bike trails.

Detractors: The project isn't good for fishing.

State Parks: The restored river will have better habitat for fish and better access for fishermen. Approximately a one mile reach of river that is currently closed will be open to fishing with access from the clubhouse parking lot along the new trail to the river.

Golfing/Golf Course

Detractors: Golfers won't be able to play 18-hole regulation golf.

State Parks: The golf course would remain an 18-hole regulation golf course with similar par and yardage as the existing course.

Detractors: Prices for a round of golf would rise significantly. **State Parks:** The current cost is \$80. Fees are and will be capped by California State Parks. CSP may allow the operator to charge about a \$5 surcharge for the new course.

Detractors: The golf course will close for several years during construction.

State Parks: The golf course would remain open throughout construction. The new western holes would be built first, keeping the existing course open. CSP

would strive to keep an 18-hole course open the entire time, but during some periods may have shortened or modified holes.

Detractors: A nine-hole golf course is economically feasible

State Parks: The 2008 Hansford economic study concluded that a nine-hole golf course is not economically feasible. CSP would be unable to find a concessionaire willing to run the golf course at little profit or a loss, thus the nine-hole option is actually a no-golf-course option.

Detractors: Golf is a sport in decline, so a golf course not needed.

State Parks: The demand for "alternative golf courses" (nine-hole, pitch and putt, executive style courses) has been declining as evidenced by the number of closures of these types of courses; however, 18-hole golf courses continue to open nationally (source: National Golf Foundation "NGF"). NGF estimates that the total number of golfers and total number of golf facilities is about the same now as in 2000, although the total number of rounds may be less. As the economy strengthens it is likely that the leisure / recreation industries will also strengthen, although most likely spending on leisure will lag behind spending in other economic activities.

Economics

Detractors: Golf course construction would be funded by grants

State Parks: California State Parks anticipates receiving grant funding to complete the river and meadow restoration work. The construction of relocated golf holes is anticipated to be paid for through the lease agreement.

Detractors: The golf course isn't important to local economy.

State Parks: The 2008 economic feasibility study showed the LTGC contributed about 90 jobs and \$6 million to the local economy, not including jobs at the golf course itself. The economy has declined since that time, however the golf course still is an important source of revenue and jobs.

Detractors: Golf revenue to California State Parks is declining and thus not important.

State Parks: The golf course is lagging with the poor economy. The revenues vary annually and have decreased in recent years, but the decrease follows the general economic trend. In the economic study completed in 2008, golf course revenue averaged \$685,000 between 2003 and 2006 (not including the Capital Improvement Program). Between 2007 and 2010 golf course revenue averaged \$557,000 per year.