

Initial phase highlights cooperative nature of bi-state park



Van Sickle Bi-state Park from Heavenly's gondola.
Photo/Kathryn Reed

By Susan Wood

Nevada park officials were granted a weeklong excavation extension by TRPA to work past today's deadline of no more dirt moving so progress can be made on the 725-acre Van Sickle Bi-state Park that is situated under the Heavenly gondola near Stateline.

Storm drainage work on the \$2.8 million phase of the park that is split between California and Nevada behind the casino corridor was put to the test as Tuesday's severe storm roared through the South Shore.

"We've been impressed with everything the contractor has been able to do," parks Project Manager Ned Wallace said Wednesday. "Everything was working fine after this recent storm."



Working on the park's stormwater drainage system.Â Â
Photo/Kathryn Reed

This wasn't the first time the grounds have been tested. The Gondola Fire in July 2002 ignited under the gondola on the 150 acres California bought from rancher Jack Van Sickle. Van Sickle donated 575 acres to Nevada with the intention of building a park.

The park as first envisioned was novel for being an urban trailhead to nature and made history as the nation's only bi-state park.

Earlier this year when it became apparent California had no money to chip in for the day-use picnic area, the state granted an easement to the Silver State to proceed with the first phase of construction. There's talk of California selling bonds to fund the other four phases of the master plan, which includes a visitor center and campground large enough to accommodate recreational vehicles.

"Our biggest challenge for the park is it not getting built," Wallace said. This is why baby steps that show resilience go a long way.

Park officials are starting at Montreal Avenue along the gondola line and working uphill. This 2.5-acre phase of the

project calls for picnic tables near the historic barn, a rest room, parking lot with spaces to accommodate horse trailers, and a half-mile of road to the lot.

Bonds approved by Nevada in 2007 funded the stormwater drainage system billed as an environmental improvement project. The road is proposed to be porous pavement designed to absorb stormwater that flows from the ridge toward Lake Tahoe. EIP projects are all about preserving or enhancing Lake Tahoe's clarity.

Nevada wants contractor Burdick Excavating Company to complete the phase next August. Nevada park officials have until Oct. 22 to cap-off work for 2009.

Tahoe Rim Trail Association volunteers have begun building a connector trail to the 165-mile route that circles the lake. The group also agreed to clean the rest room once it's built. California once indicated it would staff the park, but with its reoccurring budget problems those best-laid intentions remain to be seen.

Susan Wood is a freelance writer based in South Lake Tahoe. She may be reached at copysuel@yahoo.com.