

SLT goes forward with Upper Truckee River restoration

By Kathryn Reed

Assuming new vegetation along the Upper Truckee River near Lake Tahoe Airport is stable, work will continue next summer on this portion of the river.

The South Lake Tahoe City Council gave the go-ahead for the work to be completed even if the California Tahoe Conservancy doesn't have the money in hand to reimburse the city.



A water filled berm keeps the Upper Truckee River out of the new channel near Lake Tahoe Airport.

Photo/Kathryn Reed

Even though the state sold bonds in October, the money has not been distributed.

“We are still waiting to see if any (bond money) will be for our projects,” Bruce Eisner, CTC program manager said. “We don't have a time frame when the bonds appropriated to us

will be funded.â€

City Manager Dave Jinkens had suggested the council take the money from the capital improvement fund until CTC can reimburse the city. Councilmembers Bill Crawford and Hal Cole were the most vocal about that being a bad idea. They were not about to take more money from roads and the like. Already in the last fiscal year \$1 million was cut from that budget, which instead of leaving a monetary hole allowed potholes in South Tahoe to proliferate and grow in size.

The council unanimously agreed to borrow the \$536,709 from reserves if the CTC is not flush with cash when construction resumes.

Work on this reach of the Upper Truckee River started in summer 2008 and is expected to be complete in 2010.

The idea behind the various projects on the river, which is the largest tributary into Lake Tahoe, is to restore the river to its natural flow. Years ago it was straightened in various places, which has caused erosion problems, meadows to deteriorate, overgrowth of conifers in some locations and detrimental affects to wildlife.

As the walls of the river became steeper, it meant the natural flooding of meadows has ceased to occur.

â€œBefore the airport was built, the floodplain encompassed the airport so it had a wider area to meander through,â€ explained Robert Erlich, South Tahoe engineering supervisor.

A new channel was built in 2008 that has a more natural curve. Vegetation was planted. A large water filled berm is keeping the river from flowing into the new channel. Footprints can be seen in the snow covered berm. A bear has punctured it in places, necessitating some patch work.

The plan is to gradually release the water into the new

channel, which is closer to the airport, and then fill in the old channel with dirt.

This is just one of many sections of the river where work will be done. Above the airport section the river runs through Washoe Meadow State Park and the golf course that sits on state property. The environmental document for that section should be out in 2010.

Near Elks Club Road is the old Sunset Stables property that CTC now owns. Environmental review on that section is also expected next year.

Downstream from the airport the river runs through U.S. Forest Service land, private property and more CTC land. Environmental documents on all of those sections could come out this year.

“If we find the money, there should be an awful lot of work going on on the river,” Eisner said.