

Fine sediment clouds future of Washoe Meadow State Park

By Kathryn Reed

MEYERS – “Parklands are for the entire state, not just one community.”

That was the overriding message of Pam Armas, superintendent of the Sierra District of the California State Parks. She was one of many park officials dressed in their trademark green uniforms at Thursday night’s open house at Lake Tahoe Golf Course.

The golf course in Meyers sits on land that is part of the Lake Valley State Recreation Area, adjacent to the Washoe Meadow State Park. Both are part of the State Park system. Many people, even locals, don’t know this is one of the 17 parks in the Sierra District. It made the news in 2007 when nearly 20 acres of the more than 700-acre park burned in the Angora Fire.

America Golf is the concessionaire of the golf course and will continue to have a month-to-month contract until a decision is made about the future of the links, the park and the river that runs through it.



Celio dairy
barn in Washoe
Meadow State

Park.

Photos/Kathryn

Reed

This undeveloped park is ideal for snowshoeing and cross country skiing in the winter, hiking and mountain biking in drier conditions. The old Celio dairy barn is an iconic relic of days gone by.

Trails traverse alongside and across the meandering Upper Truckee River.

A mix of meadows and forest dot the landscape.

Snowmobiling is the most common issue Brian Barton and other park law officials handle. It's not allowed in the park. In the summer it's dogs – especially ones off leash. They are only allowed on drivable roads.

Maria Mircheva, executive director of the Sugar Pine Foundation, was dispensing information about blister rust and how it affects the sugar, white bark and Western white pines in the Lake Tahoe Basin.

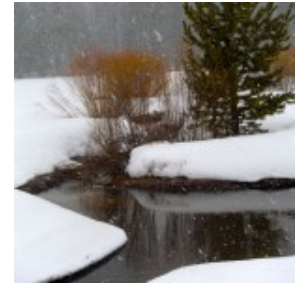
“We donate sugar pines to the State Parks and they plant it in the upland areas where they see fit,” Mircheva said. “We brought them two boxes (tonight).”

El Dorado County had a table set up to talk about issues such as the Sawmill Bike Path that will go through Washoe Meadow State Park property.

Earth Day was an opportunity for the parks department to showcase Washoe Meadow, to answer questions about animal habitat, plants, forest fuels management, blister rust, law enforcement issues, and re-routing the Upper Truckee River.

Like most reaches of the Upper Truckee River, the one in the park is being studied to potentially re-route it so it would

follow its natural path. The draft EIR and EIS should be out this summer. It will include five alternatives. A 60-day comment period will follow. Park officials did not give a time line for when the final documents would be released.



Upper Truckee River in the state park.

The reason to mess with the river is to reduce the amount of fine sediment that reaches Lake Tahoe. The theory is stream restoration also allows for better plant management, flooding into meadows and other environmental benefits.

But what has people like Krissi Russell, who is part of the Washoe Meadows Community, concerned is the potential relocation of some of the holes from the golf course into the undeveloped area of the park.

This grass-roots organization of 200 people formed in 2006. Mostly it's people who live in the area or use the park. She said her group also is worried about the logging going on in the park.

Piles of felled trees are sitting in the park waiting to be hauled off when the ground is dry.

"I wonder if the logging is to prepare to move the golf course," Russell said. "It will fragment the park."

Her group has made several Public Records Act requests to Armas' office. The superintendent, after the last request,

invited representatives of the group to Tahoe City to look at whatever documents they want.



Pam Armas,
Sierra
District parks
superintendent
, talks April
22 about
Washoe Meadow
State Park.

Armas said she is trying to be as transparent as possible and keep communication open with the public.

Rich Adams, a forester with State Parks, said the goal of his department is to return the area to pre-settlement conditions. This has necessitated removing trees that are more than 100 years old.

He said the problem is fire suppression has created an unnatural environment. Removing trees by hand and machine is being done, as is chipping the material, burning slash piles, having contractors haul away the lumber and having prescribed fires. Some material is sold as lumber, some to cogeneration plants, some to composting companies.

“We want a variety of vegetation structures,” Adams said. “We think having a variety of structure is good for wildlife.”

This means larger trees will be 30-feet apart, while some stands will be more dense.

Lisa Fields, environmental scientist with State Parks, said, "Anything living in this park is comfortable with people."

This is because the park is surrounded by development.

The golf course is an Audubon certified course – which means it provides substantial bird habitat.

Fields said a study from the state Department of Fish & Game and Caltrans came out this month saying most animals travel around the valley the park is situated in by migrating via the nearby ridges.

[Click here for more information about the Upper Truckee River restoration project.](#)