

Building fees cut emissions on Fallen Leaf via electric boats

By Kathryn Reed

A distinct hum is usually associated with motor boating. Not anymore. Two boats cruising Fallen Leaf Lake are electric, creating a new boating experience for the user and others on or near the water.

Self-described marina boy Joe Zanetell turns on the engine. Nothing seems to happen. No sound emerges from the engine. That's one of the benefits of electric boats – no noise. But it also means the lake and air are not being polluted with fuel emissions.



Joe Zanetell fires up the electric boat at Fallen Leaf Lake.

Photos/Kathryn Reed

This is the first season the South Shore lake has had electric boats. Rob and Sandy Wirth, who run the concessionaire, bought the boats for \$35,000. After all, his background is in the electrical business.

The pontoon boat holds nine people, while the V-hull can take seven. Both go about 6mph and have a charge lasting about four hours.

Most people cruise out a ways and then drift, according to Zanetell.

On today's agenda, the Fallen Leaf Lake Community Services District board will consider becoming owners of one of the boats by using mitigation funds passed to it from El Dorado County via the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency.

The board will discuss and possibly vote on accepting \$20,000 from TRPA. (Funds must be given to a public entity, thus the reason the CSD is involved and the money is not going directly to the Wirths.) The district and Wirths would then likely enter a six-year lease agreement.

The agenda says the district has received confirmation from its insurance carrier that liability will be covered under the concessionaire's policy.

"People are really digging them," interim CSD General Manager Tom Barnes said of the boats. "They are very stable. It's a good way to poke around the lake."



Fallen Leaf Lake has two electric boats for rent.

Last spring talks about electric boats began between Barnes

and TRPA officials. Then Steve Kooyman, a civil engineer with the county's transportation department, got involved, along with Supervisor Norma Santiago.

"Given that the electric boats have no emissions as well as address other thresholds such as noise, this is a very logical project to support with these funds," Santiago said. She is also on the TRPA Governing Board. That agency will vote this month or in August to allocate the mitigation funds.

What are mitigation funds?

All new construction projects in the Lake Tahoe Basin pay air and water quality mitigation fees to TRPA. That check must be written before the final permits are signed by the bi-state regulatory agency.

Whichever jurisdiction the construction is occurring in has the funds deposited in a pot for that city or county. The government agency then can request money from the TRPA board for projects that have to do with air and water quality improvements.

"This is a restricted fund by law. The money is invested back into the community," explained Julie Regan, TRPA legislative affairs analyst. "It can't go to operations, the building or salaries."

With so many state and federal grants requiring matching funds, the mitigation account is a source for local governments to point to as money in hand.

Air quality mitigation fees for single-family residences are based on the projected number of trips that will be made. On average, the fee is \$3,300. (Remodels don't pay this fee.)

For water quality mitigation fees, it's \$1.86 per square foot of land coverage. So, 3,000 square feet of coverage will cost the builder \$5,580 in fees.

“The fees are tiered on actual impacts,” Regan said. “It’s really designed to off-set the impacts on the ground.”

Commercial construction also pays mitigation fees, as well as other fees, which are calculated on a different scale.

For the five counties and one city in the basin (and only basin projects can use the money), there is \$7 million in the account. From 2007 to the end of June 2010, \$4.19 million in mitigation funds have been spent.

Spending the money



Mitigation funds helped pay for the Sawmill bike trail in El Dorado County.

Local jurisdictions make requests to TRPA for the money. It’s up to the Governing Board to say yea or nay. The project must have some benefit to improving air or water quality to qualify.

About \$200,000 in mitigation funds was used to help build the bike path in front of Lake Tahoe Golf Course in Meyers.

Several entities, including South Lake Tahoe, tapped the mitigation pot to purchase dustless street sweepers.

Placer County used these dollars to build bus shelters.

Regan said her agency is looking at whether mitigation funds could be used for a water taxi.

The electric boats are just one example of what mitigation fees can go toward. The idea is to see how well they work and what the public thinks of them so maybe they would be a staple at Lake Tahoe marinas.

“So much extensive research has been done to make sure these boats were eco-friendly, including the batteries that the boats use,” Santiago said. “This is a definite win-win for the community as it continues with its commitment to protecting Fallen Leaf Lake, while providing an eco-friendly boating experience to lake visitors.”