

LT Golf Course, river's futures wrapped in EIR/EIS

By Kathryn Reed

MEYERS – With \$6.1 million pumped into the greater South Shore economy each year from the Lake Tahoe Golf Course, officials are doing what they can to make sure those 18 holes exist when it comes time to restore the 1.5 miles of the Upper Truckee River that meanders through the greens.

“The revenues vary annually. In the economic study completed in 2008, the average was \$981,000 per year, \$139,000 of which was reinvested as capital improvements,” according to the website.

State parks generally lose money. This is the only one in the Sierra District to make money, and it is in the top five for the entire state.

American Golf is the concessionaire. It's a month-to-month lease until a decision is made about what will happen on the South Shore course along Highway 50.



Lake Tahoe
Golf Course
and the
eroding Upper
Truckee River
in Meyers.

Photos/Kathryn

Reed

Although California State Parks, which owns the land the course and river are on, did not select a preferred alternative in the EIR/EIS that came out Aug. 26, much of the discussion Thursday during the media tour was on Alternative 2.

This would move seven full holes and three half holes from what is now known as Lake Valley Recreation Area to Washoe Meadow State Park. About 37 acres of stream environmental zone would be restored.

Groups like Washoe Meadows Community have long been against moving holes into the 700-plus acre state park. These people and others believe it will take-away from the biking, hiking and cross country ski experience.

Though this undeveloped state park is unknown to many longtime locals, it's popular every season with those who do use it.

Park officials say there would be a trade-off with acres taken from the state park for the golf course being exchanged for accessible terrain along the river. As it stands now, the river through the golf course is essentially off-limits except to golfers and youth who wander in in search of errant golf balls to later sell.

The five short bridges crossing the Truckee are considered in areas of play. In more than one proposal they would be replaced by one bridge, 120- to 150-feet long that would be accessible to everyone.

South Shore media reps were given a tour of part of the property on Aug. 26. Like previous tours, the decaying banks were pointed out, a short walk taken to the old sand and gravel quarry pit. But what is hard to envision is just how close the golf course might come to the old Celio barn or the

popular trails accessed from various sides of the park.

If the course were moved, then the lines of the recreation area and state park would be redrawn to reflect the golf course being in the former.

The environmental documents study 520 acres of the park. The federal document was required because the Bureau of Reclamation has contributed money to the process.

As with most reaches of the Upper Truckee River, which is the largest tributary to Lake Tahoe and biggest conveyor of fine sediment, the channel was straightened out years ago to accommodate the uses at the time. The problem is at the time no one was paying attention to erosion.

“What straightening the river means is it eats at the banks. As it ate its banks, it got larger so it had more power to erode,” explained Cyndie Walck, the state parks lone hydrologist.

She started monitoring erosion at the site in 1994.

The riverbank is obviously eroding. It is also evident stopgap measures to shore-up the banks have been unsuccessful.

The dispute rests in what may happen next.

The alternatives are:

1. Do nothing.
2. Restore the river and reconfigure the golf course to keep it an 18-hole facility.
3. Restore the river and reduce the course to nine holes
4. Leave everything intact, but stabilize the banks.
5. Restore the river and remove the golf course.

With 30,000 rounds of golf played at the course each year, officials looked at moving the golf course somewhere else on the South Shore, but no suitable land was found.

If the course is reconfigured, it will not affect winter snowmobiling.

Comments on the EIR/EIS will be taken until Nov. 4. The Tahoe Regional Planning Agency Governing Board is expected to discuss the documents in October. The documents are expected to be certified by state parks officials in the spring. At that time a more formal cost estimate will be available, though now \$5 million is the amount talked about that is needed for river restoration. The soonest work would begin in 2012.

Walck says a project like this would likely rise to the top as her agency goes after grant money to fund it.

If golf course holes are moved, that will be part of a bid package for the next long-term concessionaire. In other words, it won't be taxpayer dollars building the course.

More information:

- Restore the Upper Truckee River
- Washoe Meadow State Park
- EIR/EIS executive summary
- Washoe Meadows Community

Future meetings:

- Public Site Tour

Sept. 8, 2-4pm

Lake Tahoe Golf Course

- Public Site Tour

Sept. 22, 4:30-6:30pm

Lake Tahoe Golf Course

- Public Open House

Sept. 29, 6-8pm

Lake Tahoe Golf Course

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