

Opinion: Agencies exhibit bias in Washoe Meadow-river plan

To the publisher,

The debate swirling around the Upper Truckee River Restoration and Golf Course Reconfiguration Project is not a debate about river restoration. All participants support this end. It's not even a debate between golfers and environmentalists. Few, if any, deny the right of the golfers to play on the current Lake Tahoe Country Club.

This debate is rapidly becoming a confrontation between three state and local agencies, and concerned locals and neighborhood groups like the Washoe Meadows Community. The involved agencies are showing an undo bias toward Alternative 2, advocating golf course expansion. They appear ready to do this by ignoring preeminent laws protecting sensitive land, historical and cultural sites, diminishing animal and plant habitat, and quiet and peaceful local neighborhoods.

Aside from the obvious indifference to their own environmental standards, misleading the public about their intentions, and ignoring input from their own constituents, this is being pushed at a time of decreasing popularity in golf. The environmental impact report or EIR clearly details the declining revenues of the current state recreation area's activities. And unless global warming overwhelms us sooner than expected, Tahoe's fragile golf season is not going to get any longer.

It's quite clear the State Parks, TRPA, and Bureau of Reclamation are stretching their powers here by ignoring their own history of written intentions and guidelines. The land in question is bordered roughly by Highway 50, North Upper

Truckee Road, Sawmill Road and Tahoe Paradise. It was purchased by the state in 1984. The 1984 California Legislative Statute appealed for the purchase using taxpayer dollars. They called it an act of urgency "in order to acquire as state lands an environmentally sensitive parcel of approximately 777 acres of land comprising wetlands, meadows, and wildlife habitat for the purpose of protecting a unique and irreplaceable watershed." The parcel contained an existing golf course to the east, and a fragile and diverse piece of land to the west. Separating the two was the main tributary of Lake Tahoe, the Upper Truckee River.

The side containing the golf course was designated a state recreation area, and the land across the river, bordering numerous neighborhoods along North Upper Truckee, was designated a state park, originally named Washoe Meadows Wildlife Refuge.

Here, in the words of the agencies most zealous for expansion, are the reasons Alternative 2 displays a contemptuous disregard of their own standards of stewardship. According to the states' own Unit Purpose Statement adopted in 2000 "the purpose of the Washoe Meadows State Park is to preserve and protect a wet meadow area associated with Angora Creek and the Upper Truckee River at the southwest side of the Tahoe Basin. The unit's associated forest sustains Jeffrey ... and Lodgepole pine. The unit contains 14 Native American occupancy sites and remnants of a historic dairy, and is contiguous to other public lands important for their open space values and recreational uses."

Consider this statement comes before the Angora Fire. It should be apparent how much more important these forests and wetland areas become as a habitat for indigenous wildlife and plants.

The Plan Area Statement of the TRPA Code of Ordinances says this about "PAS 119" (Country Club Meadow), " the following

special policies ... apply to the study area:

- Areas of significant resource value or ecological importance within this Plan Area should be designated as natural areas, and they should be buffered from intensive uses.
- Creation of waterfowl habitats in association with restoration efforts of disturbed areas should be encouraged.
- Intensive uses in this Plan Area that require development of impervious coverage should be discouraged.

The agencies now argue some of these areas have been “previously disturbed,” thus implying it is acceptable to disturb them again. That’s like saying since a bank has been robbed it’s acceptable to rob it again.

What these agencies must remember is that the land in question is theirs to protect, not abuse. While they have been designated guardians of this sensitive and precious parcel of PUBLIC land, it is not theirs. The land belongs to all of us. We must let them know how we feel. Ways to comment are available here.

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