

TRPA gets earful on river project at golf course, state park

By Maggie Thach

STATELINE – It was hard to know the meeting was about a river project designed to reduce fine sediment reaching Lake Tahoe.

Most of the 38 people who spoke this week before the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency's Governing Board were concerned about Lake Tahoe Golf Course and Washoe Meadow State Park.

This area of the South Shore on the outskirts of South Lake Tahoe is under the microscope as the next reach of the Upper Truckee River is being studied. The problem is banks are eroding and in turn clouding Lake Tahoe, according to officials.



It was standing-room-only at the Oct. 28 TRPA meeting.

Photo/Laurie Brazil

The river runs through the golf course that is on state land and is contiguous with the state park. To make substantive

changes to the river may require changes to the course and park.

The river at this section is owned by the California State Parks. This body as well as TRPA will decide which alternative in the environmental impact study and environmental impact report will be chosen.

No action was taken at the Oct. 28 meeting, but much input was given. People have until Nov. 8 to comment on the five proposals for the project.

The meeting room quickly filled to near the maximum capacity of 100. Concerned patrons ranged in age from middle school students to residents who have lived in the Lake Tahoe Basin for more than 30 years.

Before the meeting was open to the public, staff gave an overview of the project and of the five alternatives. The alternatives are:

1. No action.
2. Restore the river ecosystem and reconfigure the 18-hole golf course, removing several holes from the east side of the river to higher capability lands.
3. Restore the river ecosystem and reduce the area of the golf course by making it a nine-hole golf course, keeping all nine holes on the east side of the river.
4. Stabilize the river ecosystem and make no changes to the golf course.
5. Restore the river and meadow ecosystem and remove the golf course.

There was strong support for Alternative 2. The people who back Alternative 2 said the golf course plays an important role in the community's tourism industry, bringing in \$6

million into the local economy. There are 33,000 rounds of golf played annually on the course, which employs a 76-member staff and generates 92 jobs related to tourism. It pays the state park system an average of \$880,000 a year and is among the top five revenue makers of all California State Park units.

“Alternative 2 is a win-win situation. It’s a win for wildlife, it’s a win for water clarity. It’s a win for the community of South Lake Tahoe,” said Kathy Strain, laboratory specialist in the Science Department at Lake Tahoe Community College. “It will increase outdoor recreation with new hiking and biking trails. This can become a model for how golf courses can be integrated with environmental restoration.”

Interestingly, Strain has been giving presentations about the Upper Truckee River project throughout the South Shore. At those meetings she always says there is no preferred alternative, but would still slant her talks to tout Alternative 2.

State Parks employees have taken the same approach.

Local business owners and avid golfers at the meeting argued Alternative 2 is a fair compromise, making restoration a priority, while keeping the local economy in mind.

Although it got most of the support, there was opposition to Alternative 2. Patricia Handal, whose house borders Washoe Meadow State Park, believes restoring the environment should be the top priority.

“We want to focus on wildlife. If Alternative 2 is implemented, wildlife will be fragmented,” Handal said. “We are a close-knit community and we support restoration of the river. We don’t want something with unintended consequences. We want something that does not increase the footprint of the golf course.”

The League to Save Lake Tahoe and Tahoe Area Sierra Club favor Alternative 3.

After public comment is closed, the TRPA will review and respond to those comments through November and December. A decision on a preferred alternative is set for January and February and action on the project is set to start in September.