

Echo Summit closure could impact S. Shore ski resorts

By Kathryn Reed

South Lake Tahoe officials were in Sacramento on Wednesday discussing Caltrans' plan to close Highway 50 over Echo Summit next month and what it will mean to the local economy.

With the contract already awarded to C.C. Myers contractors out of Rancho Cordova, the city and tourism entities have no control over whether the road will be closed Easter weekend. Work could begin as early as April 15. The start date is up to Mother Nature – as in if there is snow on the ground and when the skies look to be clear for a two-week stretch.

The contractor has until Memorial Day weekend, per the contract, to close the road for two weeks.



Caltrans crews
restripe
Highway 50 in
South Tahoe on
March 10 --
one activity
that doesn't
impede traffic
too much.
Photo/Kathryn
Reed

A major issue is how the road closure will impact Heavenly Mountain Resort and Sierra-at-Tahoe, and all the businesses their customers frequent on the South Shore. As of now Heavenly plans to close April 24 – Easter Sunday. Sierra has not set a closing date.

Caltrans needs to shutdown the main gateway to the South Shore from the Bay Area and Sacramento for two solid weeks to replace the deteriorating rock wall. Then for another six to eight weeks there will be delays on Highway 50 Monday-Thursday until the work is completed.

Tom Davis, the City Council's rep on the South Lake Tahoe Lodging Association board, on Thursday updated his colleagues and the full room at Inn by the Lake about the plan.

He said on March 9 he met with state Sen. Ted Gaines, Caltrans, Sierra General Manager John Rice, Andrew Strain of Heavenly, B Gorman with Lake Tahoe South Shore Chamber of Commerce, and the contractor.

"Once the road closes, Sierra is done," Davis said.

However, the resort isn't exactly saying that. A number of their patrons come from outside the basin and would be able to access the resort even if the summit were closed.

Historically, Sierra has closed the second or third week of April. With Easter being late this year and the abundance of snow, spokesman Steve Hemphill said the resort would like to stay open until April 24.

"We are keeping our options open and hoping for the best," Hemphill told *Lake Tahoe News* in regards to the Echo Summit closure.

Jerry Bindel, a lodging board member, at the meeting said, "It may not be terrible if snow occurs in mid-April."

His concern as well as others in the lodging industry is

people have booked rooms over Easter with the intent to ski. Hoteliers are concerned skiers will head to the North Shore instead of taking the back roads to the South Shore.

Bindel is less concerned about how the road closure could impact the Tour of California cycling event that starts in Stateline on May 15; speculating people coming for that won't mind the additional time it takes to be routed to the South Shore because it's a one-time special event.