

Lingering snow puts chill on Tahoe's early summer tourism

By Jim Carlton and David Ferry, Wall Street Journal

TAHOE CITY – One of the heaviest winter snow seasons in years is putting a chill on the Sierra Nevada's summer tourism, with lingering drifts forcing camping trips, rafting excursions and horseback rides to be canceled or postponed.

Although the snow has mostly melted in this Lake Tahoe resort town, snow at higher elevations is keeping many area campgrounds off-limits, and the two local rafting companies remained closed this week because water managers won't release sufficient lake water into the Truckee River until more snow melts downstream.



Cyclists are hitting snow not far from the trailheads in the Lake Tahoe Basin.

Photo/LTN

“This is devastating for us,” said Aaron Rudnick, owner of Truckee River Raft Co., where about a dozen seasonal employees were on staff Tuesday, compared with as many as 87 during the busy season.

At the Sunnyside Restaurant and Lodge, which relies on its lakeside deck to draw diners, manager Raif Anderson said business was down 10% to 15% for May but warm weather in the past week meant June's numbers would likely be on par with last year's.

Two miles up the road, the Tahoe City Golf Course is still reeling from a series of spring snowstorms. The course, which normally kicks into full swing by early May, didn't open until May 28 and even was forced to close for several snow days in June.

"Mother Nature has a little noose around our neck, and she's calling the shots," co-owner Debbie Bechdolt said, adding that business was down almost 50% last month and about 25 percent so far in June.

From the Rockies to here in the Sierra, summer recreational activities are being put on hold after the mountains were buried under as much as double their normal snowpack. The mountains in California and Nevada also experienced an unusually cool spring that has slowed the normal melting.

The economic impact has rippled throughout the Sierra. At Lake Tahoe, where tourism is a \$2 billion-a-year industry, "we have had a little bit of a slow start to our summer season," said Carol Chaplin, executive director of the Lake Tahoe Visitors Authority. Among the big setbacks: A late-season snowstorm forced organizers of the Amgen Tour of California to cancel the first stage of the bicycle race, which had been set for May 15 at the alpine lake.

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