

Heavenly taking strides to overhaul Cal Base Lodge

By Kathryn Reed

Heavenly Mountain Resort is in the process of having the soil composition for the California Base Lodge and parking lots be reclassified.

This is because a soil report the resort had done a year ago came back with a different analysis compared to what was recorded in the mid-1970s. Besides the soil difference, the latest study says the stream environmental zone at the resort is smaller than originally indicated.

The South Shore resort has long planned to revamp that area. A new lodge and other changes to the acreage are part of the master plan that was approved in 2007 by the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency and the U.S. Forest Service. Because this lodge and parking are not on Forest Service land that agency is not involved in the current talks.



Heavenly is inching forward with plans involving the lodge and land at the base of Gunbarrel.

Photo/LTN file

TRPA, though, is the agency tasked with reclassifying land designations. A hearing about Heavenly's desires to change things is slated for Sept. 29 at 2pm at TRPA's Stateline headquarters. This is done before a hearings officer.

Mike Cavanaugh, the TRPA planner handling this situation, did not return multiple phone calls.

He is the one who signed the letter dated Sept. 15 that was sent to neighbors alerting them to the hearing about Heavenly's request.

The staff report, which doesn't have a name on it, recommends the hearing officer make the changes Heavenly is asking for.

"This is a step in the process, in the TRPA review process so we can move forward with future planning," Russ Pecoraro, Heavenly's spokesman, told *Lake Tahoe News*. "There may be some mitigation we need to plan for. We want to know what we are dealing with."

He would not say if a time line exists for redeveloping the outdated lodge and making that entrance to the resort visually more appealing.

"Since it is a scientific prediction and not a verification, TRPA requires all land capability classes be verified on a parcel before a project is permitted. A land capability challenge is one of TRPA's administrative mechanisms for correcting the land capability maps, which are based on the 1972 soil survey," TRPA spokesman Jeff Cowen said. "Heavenly's master plan is an approval of long range concepts, but not of the individual projects. Each project contained in Heavenly's master plan needs to be permitted and fully reviewed as they come forward. Master plan areas don't necessarily have all their land coverage verified prior to proposing a master plan."

“The California Base Lodge parcel never had its land capability verified and the applicant predicted they would need substantial soil testing and expert review, so they chose to forego the verification step and go directly to a land capability challenge, which includes soil boring, test pits, expert review and a public hearing.”

Since its creation in 1974 by the TRPA and USFS, the Bailey Land-Capability Classification is the system used to determine what can be built where in the Lake Tahoe Basin based on the soil.

The extensive document says, “For purposes of this study, land tolerance is used as the principal measure of capability. Land capability is in turn defined as the level of use an area can tolerate without sustaining permanent damage through erosion and other causes. Although capability classes are expressed as levels of tolerance, they are estimated by the degree to which potential hazards arising from improper use are absent. (The lower erosion hazard a soil has, the higher its capability rating for development.)”

In April 2008, Heavenly put more than 400 filters under the 15-acre California Base Lodge parking lot through manhole covers to reduce sediment from flowing into Bijou Creek. They are rated to handle a peak flow of 1-inch of runoff or rain per hour.