

River restoration, golf course move OK'd by state board

By Kathryn Reed

MEYERS – Tears of relief. Gearing up for the next hearing.

Those were the reactions from the two sides in the divisive Washoe Meadows State Park, Upper Truckee River, Lake Tahoe Golf Course issue.

On Friday, before a crowd that at times numbered more than 100 people, the California State Park and Recreation Commission unanimously approved staff's recommendation to accept the final EIR for the river restoration project, and to swap land between the park and Lake Valley Recreation Area to allow the golf course to be reconfigured.



State Park and Recreation commissioners on Oct. 20 get an earlful. Photo/Kathryn Reed

It was Cyndie Walck, State Parks hydrologist who after the vote was taken, broke down in tears. She had no idea how the

six commissioners would vote. She has been working on this project for five years, attending dozens of public forums.

"I'm surprised," Walck told *Lake Tahoe News* after the vote.

On the opposite side are members of Washoe Meadows Community. They don't want undisturbed parkland on the South Shore to be developed into nine holes of golf. They have been working just as hard as Walck – but for a different outcome.

"We revise our strategy and we get ready for TRPA," Lynne Paulson said outside Lake Tahoe Golf Course as to what is next for her group.

(On Dec. 7 at 9:30am, Tahoe Regional Planning Agency APC votes on the EIR at the Stateline office. On Dec. 15 at 9am, the TRPA Governing Board votes on certification of final EIR at the Stateline office.)

Fifty people spoke during the 2½ hours of public testimony. Thirty-one were against the preferred alternative 2 in the environmental impact report, 17 in favor, and two were in the middle.

The reach of the Upper Truckee River that flows through State Parks property is called one of the worst. Banks are eroding, causing sediment to plop into the river and be carried into Lake Tahoe – which is said to be helping to maintain that body of water's clarity loss.

Most of the opponents to alternative 2 are in favor of river restoration. What they opposed is moving half of the 18-hole course into the park.

Each side disputes how much pristine v. disturbed land will be affected. Each side gives tours that are very different and show their respective realities.

Ultimately, though, the commissioners know that if they don't fix the sediment issue, Lahontan Water Quality Control Board

will level the hammer. While they had issues with Washoe cultural sites being covered in dirt as a way to preserve them, it wasn't enough to vote against the project.

Commissioner Elva Yanez echoed LTVA Executive Director Carol Chaplin's comments that the triple bottom line is crucial – the economic, environmental, and social needs.

"It's very clear river restoration has to happen," Yanez said. "I'm moved by the notion that millions of dollars are generated by the golf course."

But alarming to many is that Goldman Sachs and Starwood Capital own American Golf Corporation, the concessionaire of the Meyers course on Highway 50.

Jeff Perry, with American Golf, said the Meyers course generates \$2 million a year in revenue, of which the State Parks receives one-quarter of that figure. His firm is interested in bidding on redesigning the course.

(Any concessionaire will pay for moving the holes, which will likely mean a smaller annual fee to State Parks. But in the end the park system owns the upgrades.)

Huey Johnson, California secretary of Resources from 1978 -82, gave the commissioners a book about how Michigan put together a trust from oil severance taxes to fund its parks.

Some questioned how the parks people could think about spending millions of dollars on river restoration when dozens of parks are slated for closure in 2012. Officials said the money for restoration would come from grants, while the concessionaire pays for the golf course.