

State upholds decision to reclassify Washoe Meadows park, alter river-golf course

By Kathryn Reed

BRENTWOOD – It was almost like the California State Park and Recreation commissioners had split personalities at the Jan. 27 meeting. The morning was jovial and jocular when it came to approving the general plan and EIR for a new state park in the Bay Area, as well as the naming of it. The afternoon was rushed and seemed like commissioners would rather go to lunch than hear what people had to say about Washoe Meadows State Park.



Norma Santiago addresses the State Parks commission Jan. 27 as staff listens. Photo/Kathryn Reed

In fact, the Lake Tahoe state park's name wasn't even listed on the agenda.

The board, after seven people spoke, voted 5-0 to maintain the decision made Oct. 20 to accept the final EIR for the Upper

Truckee River restoration project, and to swap land between the park and Lake Valley Recreation Area to allow Lake Tahoe Golf Course be reconfigured.

Kathryn Tobias, legal counsel for State Parks, before comments and the vote were taken said the matter before the commission was procedural. State Parks employees had earlier said the rehearing was necessary to make sure everything was in order now that the project is tied up in a lawsuit.

It would be hard to know what the commissioners truly thought beyond their body language because they voted without discussion. Commission Chairwoman Caryl Hart cut people off and only gave people representing an organization three minutes to speak instead of the customary five minutes. She also said the commission had heard everything they needed to hear.

El Dorado County Supervisor Norma Santiago was the first of the seven to speak. All believed the commission should either overturn its original vote or delay Friday's vote. Santiago asked for three months to prove the information she provided is correct.

"Page 5 of your Draft Resolution 3-2012 states: 'Resolved: That the legal, social, economic, technological and other benefits of the Project described herein outweigh the unavoidable short-term environmental risks, as described in the Statement of Overriding Considerations adopted by the director of State Parks at the time of project approval, and so the unavoidable significant environmental impacts are overridden by these factors and are, therefore, acceptable'," Santiago read to the commission.

"I submit to you that there is significant scientific documentation that does not support this statement. Andrew Simon, who did most of the analysis on stream channel erosion for the [Lake] Tahoe Basin TMDL, clearly documents that 90

percent of the problem resultant from this type of erosion can be resolved by addressing 14percent of the toe slope issues. Additionally, in this case, the channeling of parts of this river that currently show no evidence of erosion now and in the future will take 10 to15 years to recover. At the time of recovery, the benefit generated from this channeling is incremental at best. In the meantime, the return on the economic, social, technological, legal and environmental investment are disastrous.”

Besides being the elected official for the area of the South Shore where the project is located, Santiago is also chairwoman of the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency. The TRPA must still approve the project.

Brian Judge, a principal planner with TRPA, was at the meeting, but did not speak on the record. After the meeting he told *Lake Tahoe News* how important it is to fix this reach of the river and that it’s a critical piece of the environmental improvement program.

Bob Anderson with the Sierra Club’s Lake Tahoe chapter was one of the speakers. After the meeting he told *Lake Tahoe News* he believes the issue will be “dead in the water” when it reaches the TRPA Governing Board.

The Sierra Club wants the river to be restored, but believes the alternative chosen to do so is not achievable and therefore the status quo will remain, Anderson told the commission.

“Financially, it does not pencil out,” Anderson said.

Restoring the river is not the issue that has people up in arms. It’s how it will be done and the impacts to Washoe Meadows State Park that concerns people. It’s biased tours of the area that don’t show pristine locations that will be disturbed, it’s a precedent-setting ruling that allows a state park to be reclassified to a lower status, it’s putting golf

before other recreation, it's putting money before the environment that have people upset.

And as was stated at the meeting at the Brentwood Community Center in the East Bay, they are tired of the condescending reference to being a neighborhood group when members of the Friends of Washoe Meadow reach well beyond the perimeter of the park and basin.

"It was hard to listen to the meeting, especially at the end when so many false statements were made. But the meeting process doesn't allow us to make any more comments. The word of parks staff is accepted," Lynne Paulson told *Lake Tahoe News* after the meeting. "For example, it was completely incorrect that the findings were available at the last commission meeting. Our attorney was there, as was I and others. We picked up all information available in the back of the room and our attorney specifically asked about the findings, but was told they were not available. "

Paulson is part of the group that is suing to stop the project. The suit in large part is based on perceived inadequacies with the California Environmental Quality Act.

"Also, when they said that they had already considered everything public speakers said, it wasn't true. For example, we were proposing that they use several different methods of river restoration, not just one type," Paulson said.

Cyndie Walck, hydrologist with State Parks, told *Lake Tahoe News* after the meeting she is confident the commissioners made the correct decision and that it will benefit the South Shore environmentally and economically.

"It will open up a public park to the public," she said. More than a mile along the Upper Truckee River that is now only accessible by golfers will be developed into a hiking trail.

Keeping the golf course 18-holes by moving up to nine holes

into what today is the state park, but when the project is done will be recreation area, is more economically viable, according to Walck.

The TCW economic analysis that was done after the October decision challenges the state's assertions. However, the commissioners made no comment on this fact despite being presented with information Friday.

For now, the project is tied up in court, with the next hearing date set for March.

Walck is waiting to be told she can move forward.

"I have the funding to go to the design level of the river restoration," Walck said.

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The new state park that was OK'd is near the town of Brentwood, where the meeting was. The name will be Marsh Creek State Park and will be operated as a historic park.