

Sand Harbor parking, kayak access concern beach-goers

By Anne Knowles

CARSON CITY – Capacity and kayakers top the list of issues to be addressed in the Lake Tahoe Nevada State Park general management plan update.

The Nevada Division of State Parks had meetings this week with interested agencies and the public to get input on the blueprint for managing the park that runs along the East Shore of Lake Tahoe, from Incline Village to Spooner Lake, and contains the popular Sand Harbor beach and miles of hiking trails.



Bus access to Sand Harbor may ease parking issues.

Photo/LTN file

The update, which will revise the current plan done in 1990, will cover everything from natural resources to recreation as well as fiscal management of the park. The division plans to produce a draft by the end of this summer, followed by a 30-day review period with another public meeting, and a final version by the end of the year.

First on the list of challenges is Sand Harbor beach, which on summer days quickly fills up, causing cars to back up on Highway 28 and creating a public safety hazard.

“Capacity at Sand Harbor is a huge issue for us,” Jay Howard, park supervisor III at Lake Tahoe Nevada State Park, told about 100 people during the public meeting. “We close the gates as soon as it is full and may reopen them at 3(pm), but we don’t have the staff to open, close, open, and close the gates.”

Inadequate staffing is a problem that may not be resolved any time soon due to budget constraints. In the last two years, the Nevada parks division has cut staff in department offices and the state’s 25 parks by 60 percent.

“It’s a challenge, but we have found some opportunities,” said Dana Dapolito, environmental planner with California Tahoe Conservancy, who attended the meeting the Nevada parks division hosted for agencies. “What it has done is made us more creative in pursuing public-private partnerships.”

CTC, while it operates in California, is interested in what Nevada State Parks does because the two agencies jointly run Van Sickle Bi-State Park on the South Shore. A general management plan for it was created in 2005.

To address the capacity problem on the East Shore, the Tahoe Transportation District is launching a shuttle bus service between Incline Village and Sand Harbor. Scheduled to start in mid-June, the service will run two to three 40-foot buses with room for people and gear back and forth between the sites. Tickets are expected to cost \$3.

Howard said the location of the Incline Village bus stop is still being worked out because it will need adequate parking.

If successful, the East Shore Express will be extended to Spooner Lake, taking in Chimney Beach where parking is also is

short supply, said Howard.

Meanwhile, a 1.5-mile zone around the entrance to Sand Harbor is being marked to deter people from parking on Highway 28, said Howard. Signs going up before the summer season will clearly delineate the area and warn drivers of a \$115 fine for parking there.

Howard said the division will monitor for overcrowding at Sand Harbor, but he expects attendance to remain about the same as people deterred by fines along the highway will be replaced in equal numbers by beachgoers who take the shuttle bus to the beach.

Sand Harbor has another capacity conundrum: kayakers. Kayakers must use the boat launch, where parking is limited, because kayaks are a hard-bottomed boat which cannot be launched from swimming beaches.

“There are only 14 places to park,” said Lola Mitchell, an Incline Village resident and kayaker who attended the meeting. “So we need new access. They are talking about letting them access the beach.”

Howard said a designated launch for kayaks and paddleboards – another hard-bottomed vessel – on the beach is being considered but nothing has been decided yet.

Paddleboards are competing with kayaks in popularity and visitors are requesting the park add a concession for renting the boards, said Curtis Appling, principal with Ascent Environmental, a Sacramento-based environmental planning firm hired by the parks division to develop the general management plan.

During the public meeting, at a series of information stations for different parts of the park, the division was writing down concerns and suggestions from the public. At the Sand Harbor station, for example, one attendee suggested requiring

reservations to reduce traffic jams. At the station for the Spooner Lake backcountry, mountain bikers said visibility is poor on the path dedicated to bikes.

Another issue of concern to the division and public alike is fuels management and indentifying priority areas, such as Tunnel Creek, where ladder fuels in dense forested areas can develop. The division's plan is to control it through hand thinning and controlled burns.

Howard said the agencies that met with the division at a separate meeting voiced concerns about fuels management as well, and about protection of certain species including bald eagles, mountain beaver and Northern Goshawk.

Officials said information on the developing general management plan would be posted at the parks division website.