

Spooner Lake operator ends ski business, moving bikes

By Kathryn Reed

Gliding along the perfectly groomed trails at Spooner Lake is no longer an option – and not because the seasons at Lake Tahoe are changing.

For 27 years, Max Jones has run the cross country ski center as concessionaire for the Nevada Division of State Parks. And for a dozen years he has operated the summer mountain biking operation out of the park that is at the junction of highway 28 and 50. That, too, is leaving the park.



Groomed trails at Spooner Lake may not be available next winter. Photo/LTN

While Jones, who was in the 1986 Olympic trials for cross country ski racing, is giving up the snow side of his business, he is keeping the biking component. After all, he is a two-time national mountain bike champion and in the Mountain Bike Hall of Fame.

“My wife (Patti McMullen) and I have not had a paycheck since October,” Jones told *Lake Tahoe News*. “This was the winter that never snowed on this side of the lake.”

It was so bad Jan. 1 when the parks department wanted to lead a snowshoe it turned into a walk in hiking boots around Spooner Lake.

The couple is tired of fluctuating winters – the feast or famine way of doing business in the winter at Lake Tahoe.

Their focus, though, will still be split. Now it will be between mountain biking and a café that is slated to open in July.

The cycling business will operate out of Incline Village starting next year on property once home to the Bonanza television set and later theme park-like attraction. Tunnel Creek Café will be open year-round, serving sandwiches, coffee, beer and other items. It will be in the building that sits on the mountain side of Highway 28 that says Tunnel Creek Station.

This biking season Jones’ operation will be the same as it always has been at Spooner – with rentals as well as a shuttle bringing people who are finishing the Flume Trail back to Spooner.

Starting in summer 2013 the shuttle will take people to Spooner, drop them off, and then let them ride the Flume Trail, which will end where the café is.

Rentals will still be part of the mix. The primary focus will be the Flume Trail, then the shuttle on even days up to Tahoe Meadows for riders to pedal on the Tahoe Rim Trail.

Expanding beyond that is possible – maybe even into Genoa.

Jones says he likes how in the last handful of years the mountain bike trails in the basin have improved, in large

because of the U.S. Forest Service. He said the expansion of trails is good so riders are spread out.

What happens next winter at Spooner remains to be seen.

“What we want to do is spend some time to evaluate what the public wants us to do up there,” Dave Morrow, administrator of Nevada State Parks, told *Lake Tahoe News*. “There is certainly a dedicated group of cross country skiers who would like to see the trails groomed. There are others who may like to see additional or other activities.”

Ice fishing and more access to snowshoe trails are options. Parks staff may use a snowmobile as a groomer for cross country skiing next winter until a more permanent solution is settled on.

Morrow said not to expect the level of grooming that Jones did.

The lease between Jones and the state was up, so it was a natural time for a change. Jones didn't want to pay more, and the state wanted to increase its take.

“The concessionaire at Spooner was more of a convenience to the park visitor than a source of income for the park,” Morrow said.

Surveying users and conducting public workshops will help determine the future of the park and what type of, if any, concessionaire is brought in after the summer season.

Also, state parks in the process of developing a management plan for Lake Tahoe State Park.

For people who want to suggest what should happen post-Jones at Spooner, they should call (775) 684.2770 and ask to speak to the administrative assistance or email dmorrow@parks.nv.gov.

