

Potential tree removal in Truckee sparks backlash

By Ed Fletcher, Sacramento Bee

A plan to remove nearly two dozen lakeside trees at a Truckee housing complex has sparked a campaign by local residents to save some of the trees and has prompted the Sierra Club to get involved.

The proposal to cut down 23 Jeffrey pine trees to improve the marina area within the Tahoe Donner subdivision along Donner Lake has been approved by the neighborhood association's board of directors and is headed to the Truckee Planning Commission this week.

John Martin, a subdivision resident fighting to alter the plan, said cutting so many trees doesn't fit with the ecology of Donner Lake.

"We want them to preserve as many of the trees as possible and replace them with native trees," Martin said.

Built in the 1970s, the mammoth subdivision of 6,500 property owners features a marina, a golf course and tennis courts on 7,000 acres.

Robb Etnyer, general manager of the complex, defends the plan as a responsible approach that will take out a limited number of trees. He said most property owners are excited about the project.

It would make room for an expanded picnic space that is compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act while preserving enough trees to maintain the shade canopy, Etnyer said.

"A lot of folks love trees and we do, too," Etnyer said. "We

take conservation, land management and open space pretty seriously.”

He said about half the trees are being taken down for forest health reasons.

And, he said, “there is not adequate ADA compliance there. We’re not being forced to, but it’s something that we want to do.”

Etnyer noted that the association planted 5,100 trees on its surrounding property last year. He said the opposition was coming from an extreme minority.

Patricia Schifferle, another resident fighting the plan, said the opposition is more than just a few tree-huggers fighting over a dozen trees. She said the site’s proximity to Donner Memorial State Park and to Donner Lake makes additional scrutiny appropriate.

She called it a microcosm of the larger fight to preserve the California environment and said that each intrusion adds up. She stressed that opponents are not looking to kill the project, just to scale it back to preserve more trees.

“I think the same purposes can be met with less destruction,” she said.

Apparently, the Sierra Club agrees. On Friday, just a few days before the Truckee commission is scheduled to vote on the issue, the organization sent a letter asking for a full environmental review of the project. The commission determines whether the project is granted an exemption from environmental quality laws.

The letter, signed by Tahoe Area Sierra Club Chair Bob Anderson, cited potential impacts from “light pollution, logging, excavation, trenching, installation of pavers and hardscape.”

If the Planning Commission follows the Sierra Club's recommendation and asks for a review, it could mean a significant delay for the project, which faces a narrow time window if it is to happen this year. Because of the rapidly shifting weather, town rules require projects to start before Oct. 15 or wait until the spring.