

Officials using public input to prioritize how to improve Lake Tahoe Nevada State Park

By Anne Knowles

CARSON CITY – Officials are considering a whole menu of changes in Lake Tahoe Nevada State Park and will prioritize them based, in part, on public input.

The Nevada Division of State Parks received input on Sand Harbor, Cave Rock and Spooner Lake backcountry at its second public meeting on the Lake Tahoe Nevada State Park general management plan update.

About a dozen people showed up here last week to discuss ideas for improving the park, including redesigning the boat launch at Cave Rock, creating additional access for kayakers at Sand Harbor and the future of recreation at Spooner Lake now that the concession for cross-country skiing and mountain bikes has closed.

At Cave Rock, for example, the department is looking at reducing congestion at the boat ramp by possibly adding slips to expedite launching; building a ramada for picnic tables and barbecues; redrawing the parking lot to lengthen spaces; and adding acceleration and deceleration lanes for vehicles at the entrance.



It's possible that slips
would be added at Cave Rock.
Photo/LTN file

At Sand Harbor, the parks division's suggestions include making the south beach area more accessible for kayakers; relieving congestion at the boat ramp; adding picnic seating for groups; and making the whole area easier to navigate for visitors with disabilities.

"That place is loved to death," said Steve Noll, principal at Design Workshop, discussing the challenges at Sand Harbor. His firm is working with Ascent Environmental, the main engineering consultant on the park's general management plan.

A visitor center may be built at Spooner Summit, Noll said. The division is considering three locations: off Highway 50 where 50 meets Highway 28; and two spots on Highway 28, one at the junction of 50 and 28, on the opposite side of 28, and another farther down 28, on the lake side of the highway. Each location has its pros and cons, said Noll.

Jay Howard, parks supervisor, said the division is working on getting another concession in Spooner. But for now, he said, the division plans to plow the parking lot and may use skimobiles to clear some trails for skiers. Previously, Max Jones cleared the trails as part of his work as the concession operator.

"We'll do our darnedest to keep it open," Howard said.

Jones said, "I've had the concession for 27 years, but it's hard to rely on it in the winter. I'm tired of stepping up to the winter roulette table."

Jones said the concession was long a struggle because of unpredictable snowfall, but he finally decided to give up the business when the parks division said it was raising his fees.

"Last year we were open 30 days in the winter," Jones said. "I can't make a go of it."

Jones now operates the Tunnel Creek Café in Incline Village and plans to open a 1,000-square-foot mountain bike shop on a parcel behind the restaurant. He said he'd continue to run a shuttle busing runners, bikers and hikers between Incline and Spooner, and to work with the parks division, on a volunteer basis, to develop bike trails.

"I'm here about the continued winter use of Spooner," said Jennifer Roman, a Minden resident attending the meeting, who said she skis at Spooner and kayaks out of Sand Harbor. "And the boat launch area (at Sand Harbor) gets pretty packed sometimes."

Dave Morrow, administrator for the state parks division, said he and Howard sit on a committee overseeing the plan to improve the Highway 28 corridor from Crystal Bay to Spooner Lake, and are working to coordinate the park's plan with the highway proposal.

The Highway 28 plan involves a dozen state and federal agencies with the goal of making the recreational areas along the East Shore of the lake safer and more accessible for visitors.

Funding is an issue, though, and both plans are long-term roadmaps, not immediate checklists of changes, Morrow said.

"We want people to know that we will use this as guidance," Morrow said. "Trouble is people make comments and think something is going to be done right away. Where we go with this in the future depends on funding."

The division is accepting public comment on the update until Nov. 30. Maps and details are available at the division's website, and comments can be emailed to Dana Dapolito, conservation staff specialist, at ddapolito@parks.nv.gov.

At its first meeting in March, the division said it planned to produce a draft plan by year-end. But a draft is now likely in March or April next year, with time for further public comment then.