

Kings Beach residents want Tahoe Conservancy, State Parks to leave them alone

By Kathryn Reed

KINGS BEACH – If State Parks, California Tahoe Conservancy and North Tahoe Public Utility District officials cannot find a way to work together in a manner that residents can live with, it's possible state legislation will resolve the issue.

State Sen. Ted Gaines, R-Roseville, said in the next week he wants all parties to come together and figure it out. The *it* is what to do with Kings Beach State Recreation Area.

State Parks has owned the beachfront area since 1978, but it has always been run by NTPUD. Suddenly, State Parks wants to change how business is done. But neither State Parks nor CTC publicly has said a bad word about what NTPUD has been doing.

More than 150 people attended a meeting March 20 at the North Tahoe Event Center in Kings Beach. This building used to be a bowling alley, but is now the town's main gathering place. It is owned by NTPUD, while the parking lot and beach are owned by State Parks.



Parking could become an issue at North Tahoe Event

Center. Photo/LTN

All of the 24 people who spoke want NTPUD to remain the operator of the recreation area.

Gaines and Assemblyman Brian Dahle, R-Bieber, hosted the meeting. They are behind Senate Bill 832, which would transfer ownership to NTPUD and keep it as the operator. A decision by the Legislature is likely to come by July.

Last week State Parks said it would close the area during the winter. On Thursday Jess Cooper, northern division chief for the agency, said it will remain open year-round.

But residents are not convinced. One after another commented on how state budget matters could change the policy.

It was pointed out how Van Sickle Bi-state Park on the South Shore is still gated even though there is no snow on the ground. Van Sickle closed for the season Oct. 31. Gates are set to open May 1.

Van Sickle was supposed to be operated by Nevada and California state parks. Instead it is a Nevada, CTC and Tahoe Rim Trail Association operation. State Parks continues to be a missing partner and the recreation area continues to be open seasonally. State Parks last week said it wants to revisit the possibility of being involved with Nevada.

Cooper, at the meeting, said his agency has the money and manpower to operate the Kings Beach facility. But he did not say why the state has not been investing in the property. There is \$600,000 worth of improvements needed to bring the site into compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, plus there are more than three-quarters of a million dollars in deferred maintenance that needs to be dealt with.

Paul Schultz, NTPUD general manager, explained that Placer County would not allow the district to go after grants for

projects without a 25-year lease in place. He said the district would go bankrupt without assistance to fund improvements.

The contract NTPUD had with State Parks expired in 2008. Since then a month-to-month agreement has been in place.

State Parks has long talked about extending the pier from 140 feet to 545 feet. This would accommodate waterborne transportation. The Tahoe Transportation District is exploring the possibility of bringing a ferry to the lake that would at this time service South Lake Tahoe and the North Shore. It's said to be more of a commuter vessel than a tourist attraction.

"The biggest thing is we felt we would be in a better position to make improvements if we were in charge of operations," Patrick Wright, CTC executive director, told the crowd.

CTC owns Kings Beach Plaza, which is adjacent to the Kings Beach SRA. It also owns Coon Street, North Tahoe Beach, Moon Dunes Beach, Secline Beach and Sandy Beach.

It was announced last week that CTC and State Parks would be partnering on the management and operations of Kings Beach State Recreation Area. CTC does not manage entities like parks, that is why it would be State Parks doing the day-to-day grind in Kings Beach.

But the outcry from locals was they don't trust the state and they don't believe NTPUD needs to be replaced.

"I like local control. There is more accountability," Gaines said.

Wright said, "Parks and the Conservancy felt we were in a better position to make investments if we managed the parks."

But what no one from the two state agencies explained is why improvements cannot be made if NTPUD were to continue to run

the facility. It was also not disclosed how taxpayers may benefit or be hurt by operational changes.

Wright and Cooper from the state agencies said there will be a transition team put in place by the time State Parks takes over in November. Neither one said anything after the state senator told the three parties to figure out a compromise.

Placer County would like to have lodging on the beach in Kings Beach. With the Tahoe Expedition Academy in Kings Beach going forward on the lakefront property where Ferrari Crown Motel, Falcon Lodge and Goldcrest Resort properties are, the prime lodging spot is eliminated. That leaves the event center location.

This adds to the distrust locals have when it comes to the state taking over operations. They don't know that State Parks won't make it impossible for the event center to operate, especially if access is limited because the state owns the parking lot. This could then open up the opportunity for new development.