

Washoe Meadows State Park EIR ruled invalid

By Kathryn Reed

A five-year legal battle ended this month with a judge ruling the Washoe Meadows State Park environmental impact report is invalid.

Friends of Washoe Meadows filed the lawsuit against California State Parks saying the EIR was not consistent with the California Environmental Quality Act.

The state wants to restore the section of the Upper Truckee River that runs through its property on the South Shore, reconfigure holes at Lake Tahoe Golf Course in Meyers and reclassify some of the property so there would be less land as a state park and more as a recreation area.

All public landowners are reconfiguring the river so it flows more naturally – before it was straightened during the heyday of cattle grazing in the basin. Through the years the channel has gotten steeper, erosion became a problem and fine sediment was and is being carried to Lake Tahoe.

“We would really like to see them take a more rational approach to river restoration that does not sacrifice Washoe Meadows’ resources,” Lynne Paulson, who spearheaded the lawsuit, told *Lake Tahoe News*. “We are sorry it had to come to this. There should be river restoration and a better plan for the park and the golf course.”

Paulson’s group is concerned that downgrading the state park status will be precedent setting.

“The plan to move up to nine holes of a golf course into Washoe Meadows State Parks is inconsistent with the new vision

for California State Parks issued by the Parks Forward Commission. The Commission's priorities include long-term natural resource protection, the preservation of habitats that may serve as a climate refuge, and increasing the diversity of park users," Paulson said. "In addition, it seems inconsistent for the state to encourage any golf course development on its land in light of the new demand for stringent reduction in water usage."

The state has a few options. It can do nothing, it can appeal the decision of the Alameda County Superior Court judge, or it can fix the segments of the document the judge took issue with and hope for a different outcome. It will be up to the Attorney General's Office to decide how to proceed.

"We are very disappointed in the decision and we were not expecting it," Cyndie Walck, hydrologist with State Parks, told *Lake Tahoe News*. "Most of what the issue was was procedural."

Crews will continue improving the trail network this summer, but nothing substantive can occur until the master plan for the park is developed. That got derailed because State Parks headquarters took away the funding as the lawsuit lingered. The golf course continues to be on a year-to-year lease.