

Sno-parks provide gateway to winter fun

By Kathryn Reed

Parking can be a difficult thing to find in the winter for those who want to play outdoors. That is why there are sno-parks throughout California.

The 19 sites, six of which are in the greater Lake Tahoe area, are regularly cleared of snow. The catch is that a permit is required to park there. It costs \$5/day or \$25/season, with a season being Nov. 1-May 30. Access is on a first-come, first-serve basis.

The fine is \$94.50 for parking at a sno-park without a permit.

California State Parks manages the program with cooperation from the U.S. Forest Service, California Highway Patrol and the vendors selling the passes. No one from State Parks was available to explain when the program started or if the money is used for things other than snow removal.

Lake of the Sky Outfitters sold a record number of passes last winter – almost 300. Most years they sell between 160 and 250 permits. Weather is the main factor when it comes to sales.



The South Lake Tahoe store, which will be closing Jan. 31, gets to retain a little bit of the cash, but most of the money is sent to the state.

“Mostly for us it was a convenience for our customers,” store

owner Peter Hussmann told *Lake Tahoe News*. People interested in snow play areas were the main purchasers of passes.

The Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit's main office in South Lake Tahoe is another popular place to get passes. Staff field a ton of calls about what the parks really are. Those on the other end of the line are hoping it's a real park. The reality is these locations are nothing more than a parking lot at a trailhead. Some have porta-potties, but that's it. There are no concessionaires renting toys or selling food, often no trash bins.

Overnight camping in vehicles used to be permitted, but is no longer allowed at any of the sno-parks. Tent camping is also prohibited as are fires in the parking lots.

Backcountry skiers, snowshoers and snowmobilers are the primary permit seekers at Sorensen's Resort.

"We have been going through them like water right now," Kel Gennert of Sorensen's told *Lake Tahoe News*. Thousands of dollars' worth, she added. It's been a mix of day and season passes. "We do it as a courtesy for Alpine County Chamber of Commerce. They make a little bit of money on it."

Because Sorensen's doesn't make a penny, the Hope Valley resort only accepts cash or checks for the permits.

"When people say what kind of park is it, we tell them it's access to backcountry, that it is a safe place to park," Gennert said.

Sorensen's also has a brochure to hand people that has a map of where the sno-parks are and the rules. It's been so busy they are temporarily out of them.

Oregon and Idaho have similar programs, with the three states having a reciprocal agreement.

Notes:

- For more information about California sno-parks, including locations, go **online**.