

TRPA floating ideas for pier regulations

By Kathryn Reed

STATELINE – No longer is the number of piers at Lake Tahoe being disputed. Now the debate is about all the strings attached to build one.

The latest plan calls for 10 public piers and 128 private piers, with a maximum of 12 every two years.

The shorezone plan that was adopted in October 2008 also called for 128 piers. That month the League to Save Lake Tahoe and the Sierra Club filed a lawsuit in U.S. District Court in Sacramento to block the plan, citing inadequate science. In September 2010 the decision by U.S. District Judge Lawrence Karlton that struck down the TRPA's shorezone ordinance was appealed by the bi-state regulatory agency. In February 2012 the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeal gave a ruling that had both sides claiming a partial victory.

For the past 18 months a committee put together by the TRPA, which includes the League and affected property owners, has been working to come up with what is now called a shoreline plan. (The League helped create the 2008 plan and still sued.) The committee's latest iteration was brought before the Regional Plan Implementation Committee of the TRPA on May 24.

Not everyone is going to get a private dock considering there are more than 700 parcels in the basin without a pier that might want one.



Not much room for more docks in the Tahoe Keys in South Lake Tahoe. Photo/Kathryn Reed

The latest proposal calls for 28 new piers in El Dorado County, 21 in Douglas County, 21 in Washoe County and 58 in Placer County.

Today there are about 800 piers and 4,000 buoys on Lake Tahoe. The 2008 plan allowed for an additional 1,822 buoys. The current plan calls for 1,430 more moorings, which are defined as buoys, slips, or boat lifts.

Density issues will also preclude everyone who wants a dock from getting one. Scenic quality is a top criterion. The goal is not to allow them all to be built in one area, but to spread them out.

How to make it equitable, well, that hasn't been worked out. There will inevitably be people who lose out on having a pier.

One goal is to have more shared piers. This is intended to reduce clutter and density. A problem, though, could be getting buy-in from neighbors.

“The whole point here is delicate harmonization,” said Gina Bartlett with Consensus Building Institute. CBI was hired by TRPA to work with the shoreline stakeholders to build consensus.

The current plan calls for the pier owner to retire development rights. This was the biggest hurdle for several of the RPIC members. They didn't see the nexus between the two.

And for those with nothing to retire nor the means to buy other property and have it retired notches up the pier issue to something only the uber-wealthy are likely to be able to afford. Not every lakefront parcel comes with a ton of land.

“We might be creating a situation where only those who can afford to can play,” RPIC member Jim Lawrence acknowledged.

The lack of outreach to those affected is another concern of RPIC. TRPA staff assured the committee they intend to try to connect with property owners.

Obviously there is still work to be done before the environmental document process can begin. The RPIC group is expected to get another update in June.