

Washoe Meadows wins suit against State Parks

By Kathryn Reed

Lake Tahoe Golf Course's footprint will not be expanding any time soon. This is because Washoe Meadows Community prevailed in court against California State Parks.

Nearly six years to the day after the **initial lawsuit** was filed in Alameda Superior Court, the First District Court of Appeal this month upheld the lower court's **April 2015 decision** which in effect ruled the environmental documents are invalid.

This means State Parks, which has owned the 777 acres that comprises Washoe Meadows State Park and Lake Valley Recreation Area in Meyers since 1984, must start over with its desires to revamp the Upper Truckee River in that location, and put on hold its desire to move some of the golf holes across the river.

To make the state's plans work would have meant reclassification of some of the land. Downgrading actual State Parks land would have been unprecedented.

El Dorado County officials had protested the state's plans as well.

The appellate court said, "The public was not provided with an accurate, stable and finite project description on which to comment," which is required by law. The draft environmental impact report "did not identify a proposed project but described five very different alternative projects."



Washoe Meadows State Park will remain as it is per a court decision. Photos/LTN file

State law through the California Environmental Quality Act demands that a preferred alternative be identified and studied in order for the public to have an opportunity to comment on the proposal and to bring transparency to the process. That didn't happen. While federal law is different and through the National Environmental Policy Act multiple options may be studied at once without a preferred alternative, the appellate court said, "California courts will not follow NEPA precedent that is contrary to CEQA."

The court further said, "In this case the differences between the five alternative projects was vast, each creating a different footprint on public land."

Lynne Paulson, who spearheaded the lawsuit with the backing of

the Washoe Meadows Community, said, "This reaffirms all the comments we had about this project from Day 1. Now we have to wait and see what other projects State Parks propose."

While Paulson and others would like to celebrate this victory, now isn't the time. "We are not done with our work," Paulson told *Lake Tahoe News*. "Washoe Meadows Community will stay engaged in order to ensure a transparent process along with a project that benefits the environment and the general public by minimizing the destruction of what was set aside due to its natural resource values."

Although the court made its decision on Nov. 15, Sierra District Superintendent Marilyn Linkem said she was unaware until *Lake Tahoe News* called.

"We are evaluating the court opinion," Linkem told *LTN*. She would not say anything else, so it's unknown what State Parks' next move will be.

The park has never had a master plan. It also doesn't receive much attention from the state or even the local Sierra District headquarters, though trails have been improved in recent years. Officials had said a planning document for the park could not start until the lawsuit was settled.

The golf course continues to operate on a year-to-year lease.