

Proposed Squaw-Alpine gondola raises concerns about environmental threats, avalanche devices

By Kathryn Reed

KINGS BEACH – While the proximity to Granite Chief Wilderness Area has been a dominate argument for not building the gondola that would link Squaw Valley and Alpine Meadows ski resorts, on Thursday neighbors raised the issue of the proposed avalanche control devices as another concern.

Heather Beckman, senior planner for Placer County, acknowledged at the end of the public comment that the Gazex devices have emerged as an issue.

“It’s definitely something we will be researching and addressing in the final document,” Beckman told the county Planning Commission.

Commissioners on May 24 received an update on the project and took public comment. This was Commissioner Anders Hauge’s first meeting, having been sworn in that day.

Placer County and the U.S. Forest Service (Tahoe National Forest) have the final say over approving the project. Together they have released the EIR and EIS.

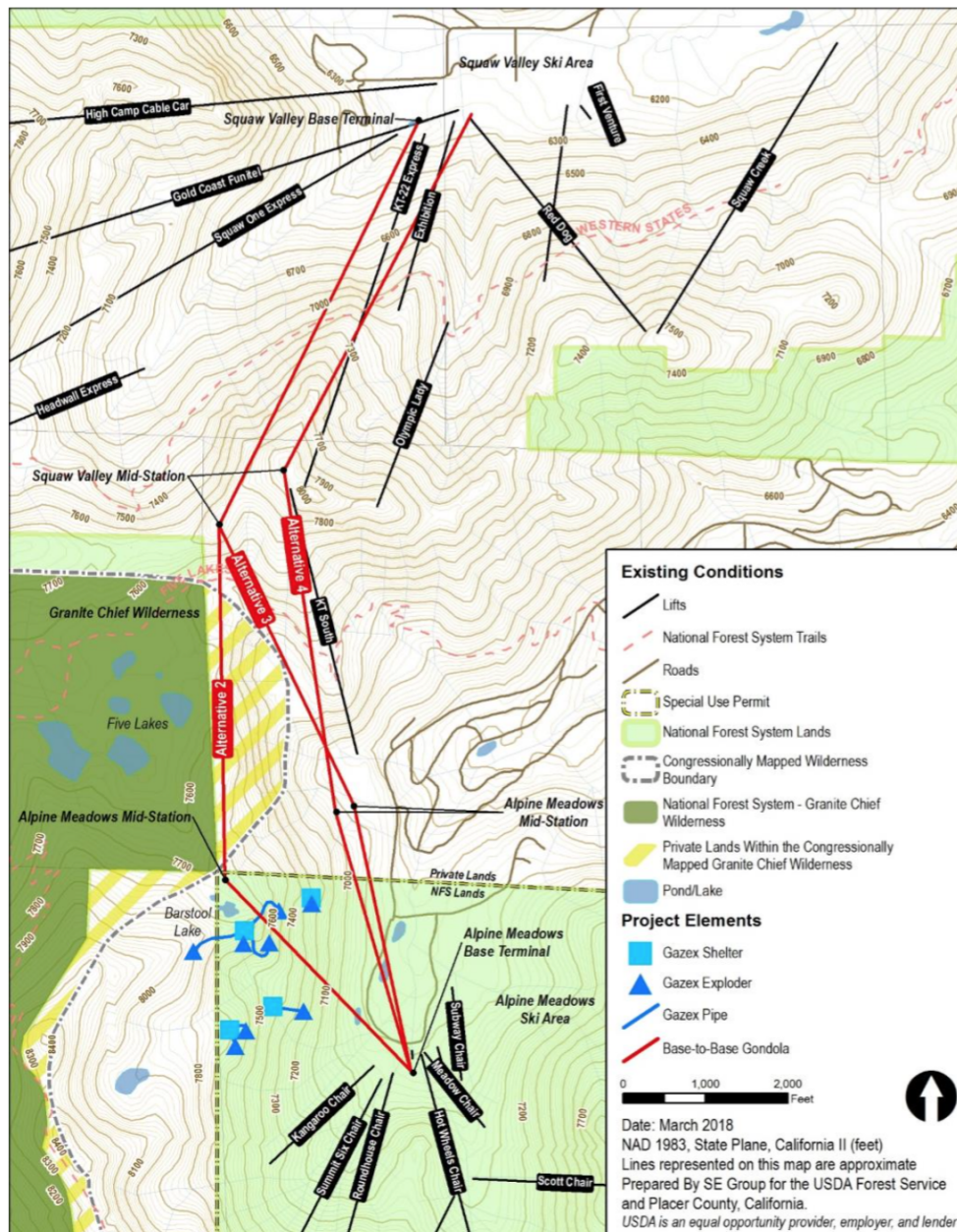


Figure 1: Gondola alternatives; land ownership and designations

Red lines are possible gondola routes from Squaw (top) to Alpine (bottom). Source: Placer County

The eight-person gondola would link the base areas of the two resorts, taking 1,400 passengers an hour in each direction. The ride would take 16 minutes.

Beckman said it will not open new terrain, but will provide better access to some terrain. It will be possible to load/unload at the midstation. The gondola would only be operational during the ski season.

Beckman said the gondola is expected to have a mild impact on skier visits the first year; with a projected increase of 1.4 percent or 12,400 skier visits the first year, then tapering off by year five.

This, according to the county, could equate to an increase of 422 vehicle trips, which will impact Highway 89 the most and the left turn lane onto Alpine Meadows Road.

The ski resort owner wants alternative 2, which is the closest to the Granite Chief Wilderness Area. Alternatives 3 and 4 are farther away and would have fewer environmental impacts.

Nine people spoke during the meeting at North Tahoe Event Center, with most having concerns about the proposed project.

Craig Hamilton lives on Alpine Meadows Road, which is prone to avalanches. The resort is now using Gazex devices to manage that area.

“The shockwave force feels like the house has been hit by a bomb,” Hamilton said. He called it a “terrifying event.”

While he said he loves the idea of the gondola, he and others don't like the Gazex machines that are already visible from the **5 Lakes Trail**. The trail is in the wilderness area, while the machines are not. A wilderness area by definition is not open to machinery, not even mountain bikes are allowed in these federal lands.

A representative from Sierra Watch said his group's main concerns center on the gondola's proximity to the wilderness area, the impact on wildlife – the endangered yellow-legged frog that has been found at Barstool Lake, and intensification of development. The latter is a concern in terms congestion on Highway 89 and the roads leading to the resorts, as well as the plans Troy Caldwell has with his 460-acres.

Part of the gondola infrastructure would be on Caldwell's

property. He has talked about developing some of his land and tying it into one of the midway stations of the gondola.

That is why some people want the powers that be to look at cumulative effects of projects and not each one in a silo.

Ron Cohen, deputy general counsel for Alterra Mountain Company who is also interim COO at Squaw Valley Ski Holdings, was the lone voice in support of the gondola. Alterra is now the parent company of Squaw and Alpine.

“We are trying to address the issues raised by the project,” Cohen told the commissioners. He said his people are working with the environmental community, adding that the company cares about the wilderness area and the endangered yellow-legged frog.

The commissioners had no comments.

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Notes:

- The environmental document is available **online**.
- The deadline to comment is June 11 at 5pm.

Nev. recreational pot sales reach \$41M in March

By Wade Tyler Millward, Las Vegas Review-Journal

Move over sagebrush, Nevada may have a new state flower.

Recreational marijuana sales topped \$41 million in March, the

largest since legal sales began statewide in July.

That translates into \$7.09 million in tax revenue in March from marijuana, according to a state Department of Taxation release Wednesday.

Read the whole story

NASA launches satellites to track world's water

By Ian James, Desert Sun

For 15 years, two NASA satellites revealed an unprecedented picture of movements in water around the Earth, tracking ice sheets melting, glaciers retreating, oceans rising and groundwater declining as humans drain aquifers.

Now, NASA is carrying on the mission with the next generation of satellites that will monitor changes in the world's water supplies.

The twin satellites soared to orbit on a SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket that blasted off Tuesday from California's Vandenberg Air Force Base.

Read the whole story

TRPA confident shoreline plan on solid ground

By Kathryn Reed

STATELINE – Increasing the number of boats on Lake Tahoe and where they can dock once on the water are anticipated outcomes of the shoreline plan that is being considered by the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency.

The Governing Board on May 23 received a presentation about the draft environmental impact statement. Comments are being taken on the document until July 9, with the goal of having a final EIS to the bi-state regulatory board in October.

This all-encompassing document regulates piers, buoys, slips, marinas and ramps.

This is the seventh iteration of the shoreline plan since the early 1990s. Executive Director Joanne Marchetta gave a brief history about the process, explaining why this topic was not part of the original Regional Plan in 1987. At that time studies were still being conducted regarding the impact of piers on fish habitat.

Lawsuits derailed the 2008 shorezone plan approved by the TRPA. The hope is that by inviting the League to Save Lake Tahoe – one of the litigants in the case – to the table along with a slew of other stakeholders that this latest version will sail through without a lawsuit being filed. The Sierra Club was also part of the lawsuit, but not part of the stakeholders meetings in the last two-plus years.

Based on the comments at Wednesday's meeting, it isn't a sure bet this will be a slam dunk. Nine people spoke, many who were involved in the process up to this point. Those questioning the document represented the California Attorney General's

Office, local Sierra Club chapter, and Friends of the West Shore. Impacts on non-motorized users, including those just at the beach, were brought up.

While there has been a 600-foot no wake zone in place for years, seldom has it been enforced. TRPA said increased enforcement is part of the plan. Ensuring all of Emerald Bay is a no-wake zone is another goal.

Staff anticipates the following issues to be controversial in the draft EIS:

- The number and location of new shoreline structures.
- Processes for allocating new shorezone structures.
- Effects of structures and boating on non-motorized water recreation.
- Visual effects of shoreline structures.
- Water and air pollution from boating.
- Effects on public access along the shoreline.

Recognizing that the lake could be at low levels as climate change takes a stronger hold, officials know there needs to be flexibility with pier construction. This means allowing floating piers so the structures can actually be used instead of people walking under them as was the case during the latest drought.

As it stands today there is essentially a prohibition on new construction of piers.

There would be an 18 percent increase in piers and 24 percent increase in moorings if alternative one is adopted.

Ultimately boating activity is expected to increase 16 percent in the next 20 or so years.

At build out, which is expected to be 2040 at the soonest, the preferred alternative would allow up to 2,116 new moorings (buoys, lifts or public slips), 128 new private piers, 10 new public piers, and two new public boat ramps. Some new and existing buoys could be converted to slips, and vice versa at marinas.

The 2008 plan also called for 128 private piers as well as 1,822 buoys. At that time 768 piers and nearly 4,500 buoys existed.

Darcie Collins, executive director of the League, told the Governing Board her agency supports the draft document, but will be most interested in making sure the mitigation measures will be sufficient. She did not express what has changed for her agency in the last decade. What the League wanted at the time of the lawsuit was better science to prove TRPA's assertions.

It was noted by Adam Lewandowsky with Ascent, the firm that wrote the environmental document, that boat manufacturers don't regulate greenhouse gas emissions. This is an ongoing concern.

On the flip side, this process has brought the marina operators together. They have formed the Lake Tahoe Marina Association, which includes all 14 commercial marinas in the basin. They are behind the preferred alternative and welcome the opportunity to implement to clean marina certificate program.

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Notes:

- The environmental document is **online**.
- Public workshop on June 4, 5:30-7:30pm, TRPA offices, Stateline.

- Public workshop on June 6, 5:30-7:30pm, North Tahoe Event Center, Kings Beach.
 - Public hearing, June 13, on draft EIS, TRPA offices.
 - July 9, deadline to comment on draft EIS.
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Mountain bike group fights for wilderness access

By Carl Segerstrom, High Country News

Ted Stroll, a bespectacled, balding, retired attorney whose remaining hair is short and white, doesn't fit the stereotype of an extremist mountain biker. But his group, the Sustainable Trails Coalition, is challenging the mainstream mountain biking establishment by fighting to permit bikes in America's wilderness areas.

Stroll's crusade has sparked strong resistance, particularly from wilderness advocates and environmentalists. His alliance with notoriously environmentally unfriendly Republican congressmen, whom he has enlisted to push a bikes-in-wilderness bill, is particularly controversial. Stroll's group has alienated would-be allies in the mountain biking community, who are loath to ostracize the greater recreation and conservation communities, especially at a time when many feel public-lands protections are taking a back seat to extractive industries.

The original text of the 1964 Wilderness Act bans "mechanical transport" – and bicycles are clearly a form of mechanized transport. For the federal agencies tasked with enforcing the

ban, however, the definition hasn't always been clear-cut.

Read the whole story

Rising gas prices putting a chill on travel

By Kellen Browning, Sacramento Bee

As gas prices continue to rise nationwide – with California leading the way, at \$3.71 per gallon – Americans are planning fewer and shorter road trips this summer, a recent survey found.

Currently \$2.93 per gallon on average in the U.S., gas prices are expected to rise to \$2.95 by Memorial Day – 50 cents more than last year. The 2018 summer travel survey for GasBuddy.com, a gas price tracker, found drivers plan to cut costs and avoid gas guzzling by limiting road trips.

Fifty-eight percent of GasBuddy's survey respondents said they will take a road trip this summer, down from 82 percent last year.

Read the whole story

200-acre meadow in S. Lake

Tahoe publicly owned



A section of the Upper Truckee River is part of the 200-plus acre land deal. Photo/Kathryn Reed

By Kathryn Reed

With the acquisition of the 206-acre Johnson Meadow, 93 percent of the Upper Truckee watershed is now owned by public agencies.

Tahoe Resource Conservation District in April closed on the South Lake Tahoe property. It roughly borders Lake Tahoe Airport, Highway 50, the Upper Truckee River on the Sierra Tract side, and the Barton Memorial Hospital/Fourth Street area.

It cost \$8.315 million to buy, with the money coming from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (\$4 million), California Tahoe Conservancy (\$4.215 million), and Tahoe Fund (\$100,000).

Standing above the river it's like being transported to an oasis that should take hours to walk to, but is less than a five-minute walk from the Sierra Tract neighborhood. Two arms of the river are running at a pretty good clip, with the one to the right likely to dry up as the snowmelt subsides.

Unfolding behind the river is a carpet of native green grasses. From this distance it looks like a playground. One day it might be. Recreation and connectivity are two words being associated with the parcel now that it is in the public domain.

This large swath of land in the middle of South Lake Tahoe was once going to be an integral component of the original South Tahoe Greenway bike trail that was to go from Meyers to Stateline. The owners wouldn't sell. The route was scrapped and downsized.

But with the property now in the public domain it's possible the original plans could be resurrected by the California Tahoe Conservancy.

The CTC tried to buy the land in 2006, but Bill Mosher wouldn't sell. Talks resumed in 2010, then stalled. Then Mosher reached out to the TRCD about three years ago. **Mosher died in January 2017** before the deal could be finalized. His extended family continued on with the talks and made the transaction a reality this spring.

Mosher was familiar with resource conservation districts in the Sacramento area, and knew the work they did. They are all about being local.

"One of the big concerns or challenges is the main channel is deeply incised and the erosion," Nicole Cartwright, TRCD executive director, said as she peered out at the Upper Truckee River.



The Johnson Meadow spills forth beyond the Upper Truckee River, with Lake Tahoe beyond the tree line. Photo/Kathryn Reed

In the distance is a grove of willows where historical photos show the river once ran. This is something scientists are analyzing as they consider how to restore this damaged landscape.

It wasn't that long ago this was ranch land. Names like Mosher, Ledbetter and Johnson all have ties to this acreage. In the ranching world a parcel is named after the previous owner not the current one. So, maybe it will be renamed Mosher Meadow.

In an attempt to be good stewards, the Moshers erected an array of fencing to keep the dairy cows from the river so as to reduce the erosion. Those fences dot the landscape and keep the public from the area.

"There is a lot of fencing throughout the meadow," Cartwright told *LTN*. "There is some exposed barbwire and T-posts in the river."

Safety is the No. 1 concern. That will be addressed before any

real plans are put into action. The majority of the fencing will remain until funding is secured for restoration.

It's estimated that between \$10 million and \$15 million will be needed for planning and implementation. The hope is the plans can be designed in the next three to five years, with implementation taking no more than 10 years.



Molly Hurt and Nicole Cartwright with the TRCD on the remaining portion of the Barton Bridge. Photo/Kathryn Reed

Creating a meandering wet meadow that naturally floods and therefore keeps sediment from reaching Lake Tahoe would be a big goal – just like it is with other reaches of the Upper Truckee River. Providing sustainable recreation and access are other desires. It is possible trails will be built, maybe boardwalks, with connections to other parts of town.

Today there are user created trails; mostly on the border of the property.

This parcel is surrounded by various other landowners, mostly public entities.

Preserving habitat – primarily riparian – will be another centerpiece of restoration work. Song birds, migratory birds and the threatened willow flycatcher make their home here.

“It’s also a refuge for species. As ranges contract these meadows will be ever more important,” Molly Hurt, TRCD director of programs, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

This is the first land acquisition for the TRCD. It’s too soon to know if this is the first of many or the lone one. It was a good fit, according to Cartwright, and one other agencies supported.

Also on this parcel is what’s locally known as Hospital Bridge. A large section of it came tumbling down in winter 2016-17. It was a popular connector for mountain bike riders from Barton Memorial Hospital to what could be considered the Pioneer Trail side of the river.

TRCD wants to rebuild the bridge. It’s possible a temporary structure could be erected, perhaps not in the exact same alignment. A more permanent solution will be studied in the formal planning process.

It was originally installed and maintained by the prior owner, with the last iteration built in the early 1990s.

The money to purchase what at the time was the largest sensitive public land holding in the basin came with strings attached. This means it won’t be developed with structures. But it does mean the public will have access, which hasn’t happened in more than 100 years.

Calif. TV news disappearing from Tahoe

Updated May 23, 9pm:

By Kathryn Reed

“It is 100 percent about commercials.”

That is the reason Charter-Spectrum is telling customers Sacramento station KCRA is being removed from the lineup in the South Lake Tahoe area. Instead, people will have to get their programming from the NBC affiliate KRNV out of Reno.

“Even though you reside in the state of California, you are part of the Reno, Nev., market,” Sylvester, an employee with the cable company, said. He said because people in this region are more likely to shop in Reno instead of Sacramento this area will soon only have access to the Reno station.

It comes down to money. Advertisers are being sold on the broadcast product based on how many people the station is reaching. Businesses in the capital city region aren't going to see the Tahoe-Truckee area as having viable or potential customers. Reno and Carson City businesses, though, do consider the basin their market and therefore want to reach them.

While most of the programming is the same, the news is not. And that is what has some locals riled up.

“KCRA is where our community gets its news on issues that affects us. Political and vital California news,” South Lake Tahoe Councilman Tom Davis told *Lake Tahoe News*. “We don't get California news from Reno stations. I, as an elected official, will not let Charter censor what news we get.”

But it has nothing to do with censorship. It has to do with

Charter being a business, and like all businesses, it wants to make a profit and not give its product away for free.

Bret Picciolo, senior director of communications for Charter, didn't know if people would still be able to stream KCRA.

He also wouldn't release how many people are affected by this decision that will take effect on or after June 4.

El Dorado County Supervisor Sue Novasel plans to have a conference call with Charter officials on Friday. On that call will be county CAO Don Ashton, PIO Carla Hass, and city electeds Davis and Wendy David. Novasel said she would ask *LTN's* streaming question.

Novasel has been down this road before with Charter. When she was on the Meyers Roundtable Committee the Sacramento station was pulled in 2008. Public outcry helped restore the service. In 2003 Charter blamed the elimination of KCRA from Meyers televisions because of technology, which was then resolved.

"None of the Reno stations acknowledge us," Novasel told *Lake Tahoe News*. "This is really a public safety issue. If they are going to be our home station, that has to change."

The FCC requires Charter carry the in-market NBC affiliate, which would be the Reno station. Still, it is solely Charter's decision – not the feds', not the station's – to remove KCRA from the local offerings.

While KCRA has no say in the matter, no one from the station returned *Lake Tahoe News'* call. The station must care a little about Tahoe, it has a skycam on the South Shore.

People still have the option of tuning into the 10pm airing of KTVU to get Bay Area news, and thus California news, through this Fox affiliate.

On the North Shore it's different. Charter subscribers had KTVN Reno removed. Placer County gets Sacramento stations KOVR

and KCRA on Spectrum as well KRNV out of Reno.

Train passenger found injured near Truckee tracks

By Sam Gross, Reno Gazette-Journal

It's been a week since Aaron Salazar was found battered and unconscious near railroad tracks in Truckee, California, and his family is no closer to understanding what happened to the 22-year-old student who was traveling by rail from Colorado to Oregon.



Aaron Salazar's family and friends want answers.
Photo/Austin Sailas

Was he attacked?

Was he thrown from the train?

Was this a hate crime?

After a week of sitting by Salazar, who lies comatose with a broken pelvis and damage to his brain stem in a Reno hospital

critical care unit, his family is still in the dark as to what circumstances left Aaron beside the tracks on May 15 in Truckee, a town his Amtrak train was scheduled to stop in for just a few minutes.

Read the whole story

Doctor-historian dissects 1800's medical care



Bob LaPerriere's talk on historical medical care is a bit graphic.
Photo/Kathryn Reed

By Kathryn Reed

CAMP RICHARDSON – Saws and drills that look like they belong in woodshop, medication with no known benefits, prescriptions for maggots. This is what medical care was like in the 1800s.

Bob LaPerriere, a retired medical doctor and historian, shared

stories this month about life during the Gold Rush era in terms of health care. He is the curator of the Museum of Medical History of the Sierra Sacramento Valley Medical Society. That medical society, which is the oldest one in the state, covers El Dorado, Sacramento and Yolo counties.

This was a time when doctors treated the patient because they didn't know the cause of the disease.

Bleeding, vomiting, blistering and purging were four the main ways to help relieve someone of their symptoms – at least that is what was believed at the time. Leeches were one way to get people to bleed. A sharp, knife-like instrument called a fleam was another.

With immunizations not yet created and living conditions at times substandard based on today's regulations, childhood diseases were the norm. Measles was common.

"Surgery was pretty primitive," LaPerriere told the packed room at Camp Richardson Lodge. The talk was put on by the Lake Tahoe Historical Society. "The most common operation was amputation."

Gastrointestinal issues were the No. 1 complaint for people heading West on wagon trains. Contaminated water was common.

Even once they reached California the once pristine area was ravaged by the gold miners. Human sewage polluted the streets and drinking water. As LaPerriere said, "Sanitation was a luxury."

Anesthetics were rare. Ether wasn't introduced until after 1846.

Prior to the 1900s it was arsenic and strychnine that were the medications of choice. Then came mercury and narcotics.

Chinese herbalists were practicing as well. They are credited with saving the life Jane Stanford, the wife of then-Gov.

Leland Stanford.

One of the worst things to strike the Sacramento area was the cholera epidemic of 1850. It hit all classes, killing nearly 1,000 people in three weeks and by some estimates 5,000 in total. Of the 50 doctors in the area at the time, 17 died from the disease.

At the museum in Sacramento is the original X-ray tube that came to Sacramento in about 1900. Also on display is an iron lung used for polio patients.