

Opinion: Value of parks, monuments is more than money

By Jerry Nickelsburg

The United States has an extensive system of amazing parks. From the Shenandoah National Park, close to where I grew up, to Sequoia National Park, where I am a trustee for Lost Soldier's Cave, our national parks connect Americans to our remarkable landscapes and wilderness areas.

I have annual passes to the U.S. and the California Parks and Recreational Areas. So when someone asks what we need in terms of parks, my visceral answer is always: More! But others view the National Monument and National Park systems differently. Right now, the Trump administration is re-evaluating them with an eye toward shrinking some and opening up others to mining and development.

The economist in me wants to ask: What are the trade-offs of making such changes in our parks? And how are such changes valued?

Let's start by acknowledging there is always a trade-off between economic activity and the environment. Everything we do—from sheltering and feeding ourselves, to going to movies and ball games—changes the natural environment around us. And this is not new. Pre-Columbian hunter-gatherers altered the environment as they burned Great Plains grasses in their quest for buffalo burgers.

What are the costs of such alteration? For a long time, planners have sought to ascertain the value of urban open space. A recent study by Harvard lecturer Linda Bilmes and Colorado State University Professor John Loomis tried to estimate the value of the National Park Service system. It is a big number, \$92 billion. But even then, they admit that many

aspects of the park system are undervalued because putting any price on them would be speculative at best.

Among these difficult-to-price aspects are the health and psychological benefits to those who use the parks—and to those who don't use the parks, but who benefit from changed behavior by those who do. Their analysis also does not consider the opportunity cost of the parks—in other words the money that might be made were they not parks, but were privatized for housing, mining, logging, or commercialized recreation.

The Trump administration's current evaluation is focused on those parks that are designated as national monuments under the Antiquities Act of 1906. While there are huge challenges in conducting a cost-benefit analysis of the national monuments, it is still a worthwhile exercise to think about the values that can be pinned down.

Let's begin with an easy example. The Statue of Liberty is a national monument. It sits in New York Harbor on Liberty Island; prime real estate. In 2016 there were over 4.5 million visitors. They paid about \$27 each to visit, which includes the boat ride to and from, and admission tickets to all or part of the monument. If we compare this to Manhattan skyscrapers that have an average age of over 60 years, then over the same amount of time visitors will have spent more than \$7 billion at the monument.

Again, we don't count those who benefit because others have been inspired by their visit to the Statue of Liberty, nor the value of connecting us to our heritage. It is undeniable that these are significant.

An alternative to the statue would be a skyscraper. The island would be prime real estate for building exclusive condos with views of the city and the harbor. The value would be diminished by the fact that domestic and maintenance workers would have to be paid more to get over to the island, and that

access to the city would require a boat ride. So perhaps the comparable development is the Kushner family's 666 Fifth Ave. office tower, another prime property.

The Kushners paid \$1.8 billion for it, and the New York Times reports that they expect to spend \$3.3 billion to renovate it. When you add this up—\$5.1 billion—it is clear that the Statue of Liberty Monument (with a value of \$7 billion-plus) is worth more than the alternative condo skyscraper occupying the same land.

And this is just the pure economic cost-benefit analysis. It leaves out the non-pecuniary value of being inspired by Lady Liberty, of connecting us to our heritage, and of reminding Americans that we were all once immigrants yearning to breathe free.

So it's clear why no one, as far as I know, is contemplating selling or leasing parts or all of Liberty Island. But what about Bears Ears National Monument, the first target of Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke's effort to shrink national monuments and open them up for development?

I'm betting that, at least until recently, you never had heard of it. Bears Ears is in a remote part of southern Utah.

But as an example, Bears Ears is instructive—and the economics are a bit more complicated. First of all, Bears Ears, like many monuments, is free to visit. So we don't have admissions revenue to look at. Plus, the remoteness of the park means it will not have the same level of visitor traffic as the Statue of Liberty National Monument. Of course, luxury condos are not an alternative in such a remote place. But you can make the case that mining is an alternative use.

Now let's consider the full value of Bears Ears. It spans an area with a fossil record from the age of the dinosaurs, one of the most complete records we have. The value in studying this record is that we may obtain a better understanding of

the fossils from this time spanning the Triassic and Jurassic periods. Also, Bears Ears is home to more than 1,000 archaeological sites dating from when early Native Americans lived in the area. This civilization vanished and new knowledge on how climactic changes seemed to have decimated their civilization is going to be useful for our grandchildren (or maybe even ourselves). The monument also has other values—to the visitors who make the trek there, and to Native Americans who still live in the area and have a spiritual and heritage connection to many parts of it.

What are we giving up by protecting this potentially useful historical, cultural, and scientific research site? Uranium. The Daneros Mine in Red Canyon is an existing uranium mining operation in the Bears Ears area that was purposely left out of the monument. But the monument effectively prevents further exploration and mining inside its boundary.

Here is the context. Uranium prices have been falling since they peaked in 2007, and economics teaches us that this happens when demand falls or supply increases. So if other parts of Bears Ears were not great places to mine before the monument was declared, they certainly are not now.

The counter to that point is: uranium prices may change someday. How and when is hard to predict. But uranium ore is important, and could be critically important to our national security. Still, this is unlikely. The U.S. demand for uranium is not likely to increase anytime soon, as reactors like San Onofre in California close and other reactors—such as two to be built in Jenkinsville, S.C.—are abandoned in mid-construction. Indeed, there is so little demand that most of the uranium now mined from southwest Utah is exported.

In such a case, where we are dealing with “might-be’s” instead of quantifiable benefits, we can turn to optimal decision theory to help us make wiser choices.

The optimal decision is the one that provides at least as good an outcome as all other available decision options. So if the costs of the "might-be's" are not immediate, they receive little weight. In the case of Bears Ears, the optimal decision now is to leave well enough alone and to keep an eye on the "might-be's" just in case.

In other words, if we don't need to make a decision, the optimal action is to make contingency plans for the time when a decision must be made.

A secondary argument for opening Bears Ears to mining is that it takes time to open a mine and begin ore production. So if we need uranium for national security, we could be behind the production power curve. The answer to this is quite easy. If quick access to uranium is valuable, then instead of exporting it from the Daneros Mine to South Korea, the federal government should purchase and stockpile it. The reason why this is superior is that uranium seams play out, and if they are opened today they still might not be available when a national crisis requires them. Thus the uncertainty of the need for the strategic ore drives the decision to preserve Bears Ears.

There is also the issue of jobs. According to the Salt Lake Tribune, this amounts to less than 40 jobs. In an economy of 147 million jobs in the United States and 1.5 million in Utah, this is no more than spit in the ocean. So the strategic metal arguments are the ones to consider seriously, and they point to economic alternatives superior to doing nothing with Bears Ears at the moment.

My guess is that other national monuments would end up with a similar cost/benefit calculus. There may be legitimate arguments about future needs, either by those who will benefit from maintaining the park in perpetuity, or by those who see a national interest in exploiting resources from the park at some point in time. But the absolute wrong economic decision

would be to change a “might-be” to a “must,” thereby creating a cost in the loss of the park.

That brings me back to my personal interests in parks and monuments. Of course, I don’t want to see even one-tenth of one acre given over to mining or development. But the point that should drive decision-making is not personal preference, but analysis of costs and benefits to society as a whole. And it’s clear that careful study and a willingness to admit what we don’t know can lead to a better solution for such places than short-term changes in policy to satisfy exploitation interests.

And if we don’t take care to respect the analysis, you might find yourself booking a tour of the unique architecture of Liberty Island Condos in the middle of Upper New York Bay some day.

Jerry Nickelsburg, an economist at UCLA Anderson School of Management, writes the Pacific Economist column for Zocalo Public Square.

Opinion: California lawmakers and their taxes



Ted Gaines

By Ted Gaines

Following the conclusion of the 2017 legislative session, I'd like to highlight just a few of the ways the Legislature voted to increase taxes and make California less affordable.

Gas Tax (Senate Bill 1)

The Legislature passed and the governor signed a transportation proposal that imposes \$52 billion in permanent new gas taxes and user fees on motorists. Starting this fall, every motorist in California will pay an additional 12 cents per gallon of gasoline and 20 center per gallon of diesel. That might not sound like much, but with this and the increase in annual vehicle registration fees by as much as \$175 per vehicle, it adds up to an average of \$350 per household over the course of a year. If you're a commuter, live in the country, or own a business, the cost could be much higher.

Cap-and-Trade Extension (Assembly Bill 398)

The Legislature passed and the governor signed an extension of the state's cap-and-trade program. Fuels under the program already adds 11 cents to every gallon of gas. The new gas tax adds an additional 12 cents to every gallon (that number will go up every year after 2021), and the cap-and-trade extension could add another 73 cents to every gallon of gas on top of that. While the rest of the country is paying \$2 a gallon for gas, we are going to be paying a dollar and a half a gallon just in taxes and climate fees. A large portion of the money collected through the cap-and-trade program has been allocated to fund high-speed rail.

Housing Package (Senate Bill 2)

Included in a package of housing bills was Senate Bill 2, which the Legislature has approved and sent to the governor for signature. The bill would impose a \$75 to \$225 "recording fee" on all real estate transactions. The fee would generate

as much as \$258 million per year. Instead of addressing the housing crisis by reducing the obstacles to housing development, legislators have chosen to put the cost on the backs of California taxpayers.

Legislative Democrats have touted this year as 'one of the most productive sessions in California history.' I suppose this is accurate if you define 'productive' as continuing to pile on taxes and make California increasingly unlivable for businesses and hardworking working families. I will not give up. I will continue to stand up for California taxpayers that are getting nicked and dined at every turn.

Ted Gaines represents the 1st Senate District, which includes all or parts of Alpine, El Dorado, Lassen, Modoc, Nevada, Placer, Plumas, Sacramento, Shasta, Sierra and Siskiyou counties.

Opinion: Close encounters with a scary fire season

By Michael Baughman, High Country News

In September 1982, my wife, Hilde, and I learned firsthand about wildfires during a backpacking trip in Northern California. While we were fly-fishing a creek miles from camp, we noticed a cloud of smoke drifting upstream. More smoke, thick smoke, soon followed, and then hot wind, and then we saw the first orange flames. We had no choice but to run for our lives, trees exploding in bursts of flame not far behind us. After two hours we made it safely out of the forest, our white T-shirts splotted with red by the fire retardant dropped from overhead planes. If we hadn't been in good shape, we might

have died.

Fast-forward to September 2017. The Klamath, Siskiyou and Cascade mountain ranges converge near the Oregon-California border to create an irreplaceable combination of co-existing ecosystems. In 2000, to protect this unique area, President Bill Clinton established the 86,774-acre Cascade-Siskiyou National Monument. Then, in 2017, President Barack Obama expanded it by adding 48,000 acres.

Thanks to Donald Trump's Interior secretary, Ryan Zinke, a recommendation that would scale back the monument's size is currently under review. Zinke's proposal comes as no surprise. While serving as a congressman from Montana, he voted for a House resolution that would make it easier for the ownership of public lands to be transferred to the states.

Read the whole story

Letter: Stop the proliferation of VHRs in SLT

To the community,

I live in a part of South Lake Tahoe with many vacation rental properties. Most are rented to people who just want a nice outdoorsy vacation. But not all. Most are registered with the city and pay appropriate taxes and fees. But not all.

There is a debate now, with many residents concerned about noise, parking and trash associated with rentals, VHR owners and Realtors resistant to change, and city government struggling to improve the situation while enraging the

smallest number of people.

There are signs of change – positive things. City government is becoming less responsive to the financial interests of absentee-owners and more to quality of life concerns of residents. There are now online databases of rental properties, and of city responses to complaints about VHR properties. Clean Tahoe continues to do a fine job of cleaning up after the careless, sloppy, and furry. Best of all, enforcement of existing VHR regulations is improving.

City Council has studied our VHR situation, and sought input. For this they should be complimented, but this is a polarizing issue. Council is offering compromise. It's a large improvement, but it doesn't always go far enough. For example, here are some VHR listings in my neighborhood (from the city database), street addresses and allowed occupancy:

3478 Saddle Road – 16

3639 Saddle Road – 20

3739 Saddle Road – 22

1321 Ski Run Blvd. – 18

1399 Wildwood Ave. – 18.

Do people build vacation homes to sleep 22? No. These are hotels, built in residential areas, and they shame us all. A maximum occupancy of a VHR should be included, and should not be based on number of bedrooms. That's the definition of a hotel.

A few weeks ago the city sent me a notice of a nearby vacation home rental application. It went to all homeowners within 300 feet of the applying property, along with a map. Curious, I looked on the city database of VHRs to see how many were already within that 300 feet. And the answer? There are already 21 in the city database, plus one which isn't. Twenty-two VHRs within 300 feet of the applicant, and the city is considering another. A maximum density limit is a must, and should be much lower than current.

Property rights are a frequent rallying cry, as in “I get to do what I want with my property.” The proper (polite) response is “nonsense,” zoning laws are here to stay, and communities require concessions to neighbors.

Surely the pro-VHR community has the most to lose. Lacking some restrictive compromise it’s likely that the issue will end up on a ballot in the near future. In California, ballot initiatives usually involve lots of misinformation, and one can foresee large limitations on VHRs, if not at least a partial ban. Without the VHR taxes, the city would be in financial difficulty. People who bought homes intending to rent would feel victimized. My home would decline in value. Most of us would lose in this situation, but if I’m forced to choose between more of the same or a total VHR ban, I’m voting for a ban.

I’m grateful for the efforts of people who have spent time on the issue. There is a problem, the VHR community need to make many concessions, and by their present intransigence are doing their best to maximize their loss.

Josh Benin, South Lake Tahoe

Letter: Kirkwood workers help at B&B

To the community,

On Sept. 11, Kirkwood Mountain Resort base operations team members joined Bread & Broth volunteers serving the dinner guests who came to Grace Hall for a delicious meal and the companionship of fellow diners. The diners were in for a real

treat when the B&B cooks whipped up fried catfish and French fries, which received rave reviews from the meal's guests.

The nutritious and tasty dinner was made possible by Kirkwood's Adopt A Day of Nourishment sponsorship, which is just one of the many ways that Vial Resorts gives back to the Lake Tahoe South Shore community. Encouraging employee volunteerism is an integral part of Vail's commitment to its resort communities. B&B always looks forward to the amazing Vail team members who assist at the sponsorship meals.

Kirkwood's base operations sponsor team crew was no exception. The team consisted of Brian Bigley, director; Christian Neville, administration; David McCullers, security manager; Tim Edison, transportation/parking manager; and Branden Gardella, building maintenance manager.

"We are proud to work together with this wonderful organization giving back to our community" was the collective response from this awesome team.

B&B is thrilled to have this on-going partnership with Vail and its committed and hardworking employees.

Carol Gerard, Bread & Broth

Opinion: Living online, will anyone know when you die?

By Emma Jones

I suspected that something was wrong on the Sunday morning when I saw the beginning of a Facebook post in my newsfeed sidebar that said, in French, "Our dear AJ has given up " I

was unable to read the rest because it was removed as I looked at it, but I was concerned that it might actually mean that AJ was hurt or in trouble.

It could have said something like, "AJ has given up his studies," because the French wording is similar for all scenarios. That particular formulation is most often used in reference to death, true. But on this quiet Sunday morning, when I was about to go grocery shopping, I found the concept outrageous: AJ was simply too real to me to turn up dead online.

AJ loved the LA Zoo, Donald Duck orange juice, and cats. He often held his arms close to his chest, like a T-Rex. He was sarcastic. He could play the guitar, and would sometimes play mine, but he didn't sing. He was very much alive in my mind.

I texted Fergus, a mutual friend from high school: "AJ is fine, right? He didn't kill himself or anything." Fergus texted back: "I don't think he killed himself. Nico got a Snapchat from him the other day." The text-tone was mocking. I didn't text AJ for this very reason, I was so sure that he was alive that I thought he, like Fergus, would make fun of me for being worried that he was dead.

So now all was presumably well. We had Facebook, we had Snapchat, we knew what was going on! I responded with "OK yay, glad AJ is still alive!" and Fergus and I continued to debate whether pancakes or waffles were tastier. Something significant and heart-wrenching had happened, but it quickly disappeared, lost in the way social media collapses all distinction between the trivial and the profound.

I met AJ sometime in the fifth grade. At first we weren't friends. In fact, I hated him for a good portion of the sixth and seventh grades in that irrational way that children sometimes hate one another. Eventually I no longer found him an awful person to be around, and we were good friends

throughout high school. When we went off to college we carried on our friendship online—the way my friends and I do almost everything. But an unforeseen hazard of living life online is that it confers a kind of immortality that doesn't square with real life—and certainly not real death.

Around 11pm that same Sunday, I was cooking chicken-less chicken nuggets for a group of friends in my New York apartment when I went to my bedroom to grab my phone. There was a text: "Emma, AJ did kill himself. I'm sorry if you wake up to this." Fergus had just gotten off the phone with AJ's mother. Later, I would find out that he had died two days earlier after overdosing on heroin. I would learn that he was an addict and had overdosed once before. I would remember that he'd dabbled in drugs while we were in high school. But the moment that I read those words, the only thought that came to mind was being 16, out past curfew, parked somewhere in the Hollywood Hills, and as I collapsed in the hallway of my apartment, weeping, I kept repeating: "Oh my god, I kissed him in the back of a truck and now he's dead."

I had some previous experience with death: the passing of a great uncle. The sensations that I was having now, though, were new and horrible. This death made me frantic. Finding out that a close friend has died without any human contact, not even the sound of another person's voice, is disorienting. For me there was no ritual to delineate when he had died and when he had lived—no sheet pulled over the face, no pennies on the eyelids, no pronouncement and silence.

That night everyone who knew him was bewildered. We exchanged shocked online messages. Was this real? Could these texts be trusted? Because that's all anyone was getting: texts. The mother of a friend of mine was waiting to tell her children until she had "more evidence."

But in the end, it didn't matter, because there wasn't any. There were only those same words sent over and over again from

person to person: "AJ is dead."

My relationship with AJ was always somewhere between friendly and flirtatious, and it reached an apex the summer before we became seniors in high school when we watched a lot of movies, kissed in a truck; I even had dinner with his parents. Maybe for a second we almost were, and then we weren't. But that was OK; our relationship had always been fluid and easy. I trusted AJ. Even though I knew he liked drugs, and would often do them at parties, I never worried that he'd take things too far. He once told me that he would never do heroin "because I know I'd like it too much."

But of course that wasn't what happened. Fifty thousand Americans died from drug overdoses in 2016, and AJ was one of them. As soon as Fergus texted me the news I wanted to call him to find out how AJ had gotten involved with opioids. I wanted to know whether everybody else was aware of his drug problem and I was just in the dark. I wanted to understand how in the world this could have happened.

But Fergus lived in Canada and didn't have a phone plan. It would cost him a fortune to talk on the telephone. I realize how irrational that sounds—your friend died and you were concerned with phone plans? Or: What about Skype? Maybe it was also easier not to call. Maybe I appreciated the distance that technology gave us. I knew that a call would reflect my own shock and sadness back at me, and I didn't want to stare at someone through a screen who I knew felt as hollow as I did.

And calling would also have made it real, as though I'd killed him. He wasn't really dead yet. Not if I let the Internet stand between me and his death.

After he died, I was alone in Manhattan, texting people and reading Facebook messages filled with condolences. I found out about the date of his funeral in a Facebook post from his mom. So while all of this public grief was unfolding online, each

of us was experiencing it alone, tucked away in our separate corners of the world.

Later I got a message that AJ had “liked” one of my photos, but in fact his mother had taken over his Facebook page and it was no longer him, though it seemed to be. I still get the occasional notification that AJ has posted something on his wall or that he is online. This always feels existentially wrong, a dead person spending time making Facebook posts.

The first time I felt genuinely better after his death was when I flew home to LA for the funeral. I spent the whole weekend in a cluster of friends, and was alone for no more than two hours the entire time. We really “shared” memories and stories. We held one another. We cried. We also went go-cart racing and ate garlic fries. We existed together in a way that was impossible over social media. We couldn’t plan what to say or how to express ourselves, as you can in online forums, and I think we suffered less because of it. We got to experience the honesty and relief of laying our grief bare to one another.

And, perhaps most important, we could all see, plainly, that AJ was not there.

Emma Electra Jones, a senior summer fellow at Zócalo Public Square, is a senior at Barnard College, Columbia University.

Opinion: A Calif. residency program for the undocumented

By Joe Mathews

MEMO

To: Acting U.S. Secretary of Homeland Security Elaine Duke and Attorney General Jeff Sessions

From: The Golden State

Re: An alternative to mass deportation of Californians

This is a legal proposal, so let's start with a stipulation.

You are monsters.



Joe Mathews

You are rapidly deporting undocumented Californians, many of whom are crucial members of our communities, workplaces, and families. In removing parents, you routinely orphan children who are U.S. citizens, and in the next breath say you are for "America First." Your next targets for removal are the 800,000 young people known as "Dreamers," people who were brought to the United States as children by their undocumented immigrant parents.

Tragically, my people can't stop you, since immigration enforcement is the province of the federal government. But we are slowing you down. While we provide legal aid and drivers' licenses to support undocumented immigrants, we deluge you with litigation, target you with protests, and work politically with like-minded people in other states to undermine the very legitimacy of your government.

This ever-escalating conflict is dangerous—which may be what

you want. The president's political advisor Roger Stone has called for a new Civil War, and, as the Charlottesville aftermath made clear, President Trump is keen on refighting the last one.

But if civil war is not your intention, let's make a deal that would protect Californians and perhaps de-escalate the conflict, at least over immigration.

Under this deal, Congress and your administration would grant California an exemption from federal immigration law, just as the U.S. government has granted me exemptions to fight air pollution.

In effect, I, California, would win the power to designate certain people— undocumented folks who meet standards that my elected officials determine—as California residents who would have a legal right to live and work here even if they are not U.S. citizens or legal residents of the United States.

The federal government could still deport people, but with a couple of conditions. If a California resident were detained for immigration enforcement in another part of the country, he or she would have to be deported not overseas but back to California. And if the federal government decided to go ahead and deport a California resident out of the country, it would—under the contract I'm proposing—pay all the costs of that deportation.

In my view, you, the federal government, should cover the legal expenses of any California resident that you deport, and the costs of providing care, income and schooling for children and other family members that deported people leave behind.

To do this, California would need to create standards and a process for granting residency. Dave Marin, the research and policy director for the California Freedom Coalition, which works for greater California autonomy, points out that state legislation appropriating money for legal aid to the

undocumented already offers a list of people that Californians consider to be our own. These include those with family members who are U.S. citizens or legal permanent residents; veterans of the U.S. military and their spouses; asylum seekers; the “Dreamers”; and just about anyone without a violent felony conviction.

Such a concept of California residency is not new. In 2002, the state’s reform body, the Little Hoover Commission, suggested creating a “Golden State Residency Program” to accelerate the integration of immigrants, including the undocumented, into California society. Little Hoover suggested that anyone who was participating in their local community should be considered a resident, with the rights and responsibilities that entails.

Residency is not ideal; it still leaves a sub-class of people who have full rights only in California. But it’s the best that can be done until the day when a federal administration fully legalizes undocumented people. And residency is principled in one fundamental way: Californians should get to decide who gets to live and work in our state—not a faraway federal administration that routinely slanders us.

Will you, the Trump administration, do this deal? I suspect not. Your strategy so far has been to undermine the American institutions that produce compromise. And you prefer to lie and scapegoat diverse California—you think it fires up your racist base—rather than learn from our long experience with immigration.

One of America’s most notable traditions is our federalist system—letting states choose their own paths and then seeing how things work out. California is confident that being a haven that integrates immigrants into our society will produce far more greatness than your approach of removing millions of people and breaking up families in the process.

So what will it be? Will you make a deal that respects California's sovereignty? Or are you dead-set on waging war against your country's largest state?

Joe Mathews writes the Connecting California column for Zócalo Public Square.

Letter: Questions about Kings Beach event center

Publisher's note: *The following comments were sent to the North Tahoe Public Utility District board by Tahoe Vista resident Ellie Waller regarding the North Tahoe Event Center-Laulima lease.*

Can the attorney please explain the terms of the out clause and its enforceability? What language in the out clause is ironclad that guarantees the district can walk away from this unsecured deal? And who will actually make the determination of financial feasibility and what criteria will be the benchmark in the determination?

Just say no to the lease terms and re-evaluate this as a community asset and not utilize the skewed survey results that will always be skewed due to the second homeowner population always outweighing the full-timers when it comes to not wanting to pay additional taxes for a center they do not utilize. The survey fell short of being a reality check and did not clearly convey the issues or pose other potential solutions. Reaching out to second homeowners has never been a priority and they are at least 50 percent of the vote.

The LLCs must be vetted and introduced to the public before

any decision is made. I understand that more LLCs could be created, but we need to know who these others are now. Be reminded LL means "limited liability," so what does that really equate to in a security bond if bankruptcy is filed? Can the attorney explain how that might be handled? Due to the uncertainty of who will really be leasing the event center and the possibility it could be Laulima Northstar LLC Nick Donovan that came into existence Aug. 1, 2017, or Laulima Development LLC Dena Grunt June 27, 2017, which occurred after the original negotiations began in 2016 or Alexander Valley or any other out of the basin entity as an LLC. Let Laulima build their own event room as stated they could.

The FAQ answer that the community benefits because we get a renovated center isn't really true. Laulima LLCs' (plural) get a multi-million dollar lakefront property they don't have to finance, build or pay property taxes on, renovation is much less. Can the attorney tell us how much in lease taxes they will pay versus what the event center property taxes are?

The negotiation for whatever hours for the public is not on a prioritized basis. I completely understand the third party must recoup investment on the asset. With that said, I say level it and develop a plan for a new community center and not lease a multi-million dollar asset for third party gain. At this point I'd rather explore demolishing the asset with permission from the state as the tenant could do the same as stated in No. 31. What is the attorney's interpretation of No. 31?

If it's such an albatross and deferred maintenance has not been prioritized for years and the PUD doesn't want to run it anymore, why not level it? It can become an open beautiful view-shed for the locals and tourists alike. A nice park area as deed defined as recreation; could be maintained by the PUD if desired. Lake Tahoe is an Outstanding National Resource Water and does not owe anyone a living. The TC Golf Course and IVGID assets do not produce a positive margin.

A private-public partnership that will benefit the locals can be developed with Placer County and the resort association, much like their MOU with the Tahoe City Golf Course with request of TOT funds that could supplement a smaller tax increase. The tax increase was never really defined and questions like fixing basketball courts obscure.

Also an excellent comment that this will give an unfair advantage to a singular lodging property was made and be reminded this is a North Lake Tahoe asset. Maybe all the lodging properties should get together and propose an alternative where they as well as Placer TOT could come up with some of the costs for deferred maintenance and renovation. The NLTRA could help market it.

The facilitation has gone well and I commend the moderator, but with that said the public record will be skewed as questions have not been answered sufficiently in some cases and dissenting comments were sanitized.

The negotiation from \$200K to \$50K is not acceptable. Why not \$90K for first year as a due diligence at the very least as that is the deficit?

Editorial: Don't bend Calif. environmental rules for Olympics

Publisher's note: This editorial is from the Sept. 8, 2017, Los Angeles Times.

California lawmakers are – again – considering a last-minute

bill that would let deep-pocketed developers and favored projects cut corners on the state's landmark environmental law.

State Sen. Steven Bradford, D-Gardena, introduced a bill that was pitched as a way to dramatically speed the construction of transit lines and parking lots needed for the Olympic Games in Los Angeles in 2028. Bradford's big idea? Exempting the projects from all the studies and public input required by the California Environmental Quality Act. The primary beneficiaries of Senate Bill 789, however, would be the proposed Clippers arena and other projects in Inglewood's sports and entertainment district.

Bradford's bill is the latest salvo in the ongoing fight over CEQA, which was enacted more than 40 years ago as a way to inform, protect and empower the public by requiring developers to disclose the environmental effects of their projects and to mitigate any harm they may cause. While CEQA is a vital tool that has made countless projects better since its inception, it is also too easily used to tie up projects with costly and time-consuming lawsuits for reasons that have nothing to do with environmental protection.

Read the whole story

Opinion: Most popular outdoors program is in danger

By Elizabeth Miller, Backpacker

Jonathan Asher didn't know much about the Land and Water Conservation Fund when he started working for the Wilderness

Society, where he's a senior representative for government relations. But when he scrolled through the list of projects that it had paid for, he found that it touched his life from end to end.

"I couldn't throw a stone and not see a place that I knew of or grew up around or had had some interaction with, whether it was Evergreen Lake and growing up skating there, or the Evergreen rec center, or my fondest or most epic trips, like Kenai and Denali," he says. Even visiting his father in Buena Vista, Colo., he passes a sign touting the fund's support of the town's river park.

But the fund, to which Congress can allocate up to \$900 million, saw many of its components zeroed out by the president's proposed budget. All in all, the fund is looking at a whopping 85 percent cut, one of a series of reductions to the Department of Interior that saw millions dropping from the budgets for the National Park Service, Fish and Wildlife Service, and Bureau of Land Management. Conservation groups called it "reckless" and "a shameless attack on America's parks and public lands."

No taxpayer dollars go to the Land and Water Conservation Fund, which was created in 1964 to direct royalties paid by energy companies drilling on the outer continental shelf toward efforts to safeguard national parks, cultural and recreation sites, forests, rivers, and lakes.

Read the whole story