

\$1 million to be cut from state parks in Tahoe



Vikingsholm

By Kathryn Reed

Keeping California's state parks open doesn't mean they will be fully operational. The governor is still cutting \$14.2 from the parks budget. It's just that the decision how to do that is being made at the local level.

Pam Armas, superintendent of the Sierra District, expects to decide by November how to trim nearly \$1 million, or 10 percent, from her budget. The Sierra District encompasses the entire Lake Tahoe Basin, goes down to Mono Lake and includes Bodie.

In addition to crunching the numbers, Armas must work with fewer people. Politicians in Sacramento axed the seasonal budget.

"I don't have any money to hire park aides to clean the park bathrooms," Armas said. "It's a huge stress on the permanent staff. Typically it's not their job."

The stress will be even greater next year when employees prepare the seven state campgrounds in the basin to be ready for Memorial Day. Anyone who lives in snow country knows what spring is like for cleaning up a yard " multiply that by the

acreage in a state park and the workload is pretty hefty.

Staff vacancies are not being filled. The Tahoe Basin usually has seven rangers “ it’s down to five.

“It costs a lot to maintain parks. We provide recreation, we protect resources,” Armas said. “We don’t just provide camping. There is a lot that goes into protecting the land that we have. That is our mission and what we are mandated to do by law.”

Even though Lake Tahoe Golf Course in Meyers that is on Washoe State Park property is a huge money generator, the cash doesn’t stay in local coffers. What’s collected at state parks is put into one big pot and then doled out accordingly.

“I don’t make enough money through day-use fees, camping and concessionaires to fully fund my district. Very few do,” Armas said.

One idea to trim the Sierra budget is to not allow winter camping at Sugar Pine Point on the West Shore. Those wanting to set up a tent in the white stuff can go to Grover Hot Springs near Markleeville.

Other ideas being talked about to cut the \$1 million are closing museums like Vikingsholm and Ehrman Mansion a couple days week, and curtailing camping operations.

“I’m still looking at numbers and doing a cost-benefit analysis,” Armas said.

She said the best thing is that even though a decision on what will be cut will be made in the next couple of weeks, she has several months to figure out how to implement the decisions because much of her district is closed during the winter.

“We will get through this. We are resilient,” Armas said of the budget fiasco.