

Vehicles leave significant traces in Washoe Meadow park

By Kathryn Reed

A tree-thinning project in Washoe Meadow State Park that left substantial tractor tracks in the meadow and surrounding area has been suspended for the winter.

Rich Adams, forester with California State Parks, visited the South Shore park Dec. 7 after being notified by park users about the perceived degradation of the area.

His written recommendations to his superior, senior environmental scientist Tamara Sasaki, are, "Do not attempt additional over snow operations on the meadow this season.



Deep ruts in Washoe Meadow park from a tree-thinning project.

Photos/Provided

"Revisit and inspect the meadow after all the snow and ice has melted off to adequately determine the full extent of soil compaction that occurred during over snow tractor operations.

"After the winter season has ended, mitigate any and all areas

of soil compaction by lifting the compacted soil with hand tools such as fire rakes and shovels. The contractor has already agreed to perform this task. At least some handwork will be required, although it is impossible to determine the extent of handwork that will be required until the meadow is completely clear of snow and ice.”

The Tahoe Regional Planning Agency permitted the 12-acre fuels reduction project. Over the snow operations are supposed to be less harmful to soils in stream environment zones.

The area being logged is one-eighth of a mile east of Seneca Drive and east of North Upper Truckee Road.

Adams in his report said, “The tree harvester and the log forwarder, two pieces of rubber-tired logging equipment equipped with snow chains and steel tracks, were operated over snow from Amacker Ranch to the forest thinning area, over a large open meadow. Ruts in the snow pack were visually very obvious today [12/7/2010].”

The work was done Dec. 1 and Dec. 2. By Friday contractor Dave Mercer determined further operations could not continue because of the deteriorating snow conditions brought on by warmer weather and snowmelt.

Jeff Cowen, spokesman for TRPA, said his agency’s forester, Megan Scheeline, visited the site Dec. 2 at which time she deemed the site looked fine.

Photos taken Dec. 4 that were sent to *Lake Tahoe News* are the same ones sent to Adams. He said the photos look worse than reality.

“Upon close inspection, the visible segments of meadow surface actually appeared almost entirely untouched. There was some localized evidence of at least some minor soil compaction, where the weight of the logging equipment left an impression a few inches below the surrounding soil level,” Adams wrote.

“These compacted areas were isolated and for the most part, shovel digging of the snow and ice immediately next to the melted out snow ruts showed that the meadow surface below the melted out snow ruts was still at the same elevation as the surrounding meadow surface. Therefore the dramatic photos of melted out snow ruts within the shrinking snowpack do not necessarily show rutting in the underlying meadow surface.”

For now, the logs will remain stacked until the contractor can remove them after the snow is gone.