Opinion: State Parks is off-base changing Washoe Meadows land designations

By Lynne Paulson

Park users and conservation groups plan to protect the legal, environmental and cultural foundations of Washoe Meadows State Park by protesting a proposed downgrading and appropriation of significant parcels with the park. The California State Parks is bringing its proposal to reclassify portions of Washoe Meadows to the Oct. 21 meeting of the California Park and Recreation Commission. The reclassification would downgrade the land from “State Park” to “State Recreation Area”. There is no other purpose for the scheme other than to pave the way for a development of up to nine holes of the Lake Tahoe golf course onto land that was set-aside in 1984 to save it from exploitation.



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Although there are notices posted about this meeting, what State Parks has not said is how unusual and debatable its action is.

In 2010, California State Parks proposed to reclassify a portion of Tolowa Dunes State Park, located near Crescent City, to a “State Recreation Area” in order to allow waterfowl hunting. As is the case with Washoe Meadows State Park, Tolowa

Dunes contains wetlands with unique cultural and biological resources. Like Washoe Meadows State Park, the affected portion of Tolowa Dunes State Park is a favorite spot for hikers, bicyclists, horseback riders, birdwatchers, wildlife viewers and others. Because the reclassification would have an adverse impact on the Park – as it would with Washoe Meadows – there was a huge public outcry, and State Parks withdrew its proposal, at least temporarily.

During the Tolowa Dunes controversy, the spokesperson for State Parks was quoted in the Crescent City paper as saying that he "was unable to find anyone that knew an instance of a California State Park being reclassified down to a state recreation area." Instead of a down-classification, parks are sometimes upgraded to "wilderness" or another designation that provides additional degrees of protection.

One of the refrains used by State Parks to justify the reclassification in Washoe Meadows is that the targeted land is on "less-environmentally sensitive" parcels. However, a walking tour of the proposed redesigned golf course shows significant incursion into fragile and unspoiled areas as well as important Native American cultural sites.

Even though the State Park has been in existence for 27 years, State Parks has ignored it to the extent that it has not provided signage directing visitors to Washoe Meadows State Park. There are no trail signs showing visitors the way to the river or other points of interest. In addition, questions and complaints continue to arise about aggressive maintenance projects in the past few years that have resulted in damage to land and wildlife habitat.

No general plan has been prepared for the park. Instead, all attention has been on the golf course /State Recreation Area on the east side of the river. In the draft "Lake Valley State Recreation Area General Plan Amendment and Classification Adjustment and Washoe Meadows State Park Classification

Adjustment” the focus is again on the golf course with quotations of the purpose statement for the recreation area but no mention of the purpose of the park.

In its descriptions of the proposed land exchange and reclassification, State Parks fails to mention that its own documents indicate that the park land is more suited to wildlife viewing because it is farther from the highways and airport than the present recreation area.

The draft reclassification document also fails to cite Washoe Meadows’ tremendous natural resources that are described in the 1984 California Statute as well as in the 1984 Legal Settlement Agreement that explained the reasons for the state purchase of the land. Instead the document focuses only on the general plan for Lake Valley State Recreation Area.

Those who don’t agree with this scheme by State Parks should attend the Oct. 21 meeting of the California Park and Recreation Commission to protest this outrageous proposal to steal a significant part of Washoe Meadows State Park from the people of California. The meeting will be at 9am at the Lake Tahoe Golf Course clubhouse.

If you can’t attend the meeting, or even if you can, write to the California State Park and Recreation Commission to let them know what you think. Contact the Commission at: California State Park & Recreation Commission, P.O. Box 942896, Sacramento, CA 94296-0001, Attn. Louis Nastro, Assistant to the Commission; or email Nastro at: LNastro@parks.ca.gov.

Lynne Paulson is a member of the Washoe Meadows Community. The group is also on Facebook.