

Heavenly tree removal could reduce bottlenecks

By Kathryn Reed

Congestion on the slopes at Heavenly Mountain Resort could be lessened in the coming winters via trail widening throughout the mountain – in both states, and inside and outside the basin.

The resort has plans to remove hundreds of trees in a 25.3-acre area for widening, while another 29.6 acres would be part of a ski run hazard reduction area. The exact number of trees will be identified in future environmental documents.

“There are locations on select ski trails across the resort which are not sufficiently wide enough to accommodate the existing use. Based on use levels and patterns particularly in early-season and low-snowpack conditions, these trails are not providing a high-quality experience and cannot be opened on a consistent basis,” the U.S. Forest Service scoping document says. “In addition, there are also locations where boulders, stumps and other obstacles make grooming difficult and require a great deal of electrical energy and water through snowmaking in the early season.”



Widening trails could start in spring 2018 at Heavenly. Photo Copyright 2017 Carolyn E. Wright

The U.S. Forest Service, which owns most of the land the South Shore resort operates on, is seeking comments until April 28 on the scoping document. Later this summer an environmental analysis will be developed, which will give the public another opportunity to weigh in on the plans.

Matt Dickinson, acting planning staff officer for the Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit, said most skiers and riders are not apt to notice the bulk of the likely forthcoming changes.

“Some people will notice it in the pinch-point areas where people stop and they’re all jammed together,” Dickinson told *Lake Tahoe News*. “People will be able to zip right past and not worry about crashing into someone else.”

The changes are part of Heavenly’s larger master plan that the

USFS has approved. Each project, though, then needs approval.

The soonest the resort could start on the projects would be spring 2018. All improvements affect winter users of the resort, not summer. The amount of time for completion will be dependent on money and weather. It will likely be a multi-year project.

Kevin Cooper, spokesman for Heavenly, did not respond to questions about the project.

Today, the plan is to remove the trees over the snow. It's possible some trees will be felled before it snows, but the extraction will be with snow on the ground.

Trail Name	Area (acres)
Cascade	3.5
Sam's Dream	2
49er	2.5
Advanced Round-a-bout	3.3
Little Dipper ²	4.9
Upper Stagecoach ²	10.1
Meteor ²	3.3
Total	29.6

Ski run reduction locations

Trail Name	Area (acres)
49er	0.3
Sam's Dream	1.2
Cascade	0.3
Ridge Run	2.9
Upper Powderbowl	1.0
Ridge Way	0.3
Lower \$100 Saddle	0.5
Comet ¹	3.3
Orion's ¹	10.9
Big Dipper ¹	1.2
Lower Olympic Downhill ¹	3.2
Bonanza ¹	0.2
Total	25.3

Ski trail widening

locations

Source: *USFS*

“The snowcats have such a light touch on the ground. They really alleviates those (erosion and compaction) issues,” Dickinson said.

In areas where snowmaking lines will be affected, they will be relocated. It’s possible the resort will upgrade those devices where applicable.

Another component of the project is to make snowmaking more efficient by getting rid of large boulders and downed trees that take several feet of snow to be covered. This is most troublesome in drought-like conditions when Mother Nature is not able to sufficiently cover them, especially in what resort officials and skiers would consider a timely manner.

“The height of these natural features can require up to 5 feet or more of snow coverage before trails can be opened. During low snow years a great deal of energy and water resources is put toward making snow on these trails or else they can’t be opened,” the scoping document says. “Boulders would be capped – blasted with explosives – to a height of 12-18 inches and moved by hand or equipment. Stumps would be ground or cut to a height of less than 6 inches but would remain in place. Large diameter logs would be moved from the ski trail, chipped or used along steeper sections of trail for erosion control.”

Notes:

- Comments are due April 28.
- Email comments to: comments-pacificsouthwest-ltbmu@fs.fed.us.
- More information is available **online**.