

TDFPD wants to build pier on USFS land



Tahoe Douglas Fire wants to dock its boat at a yet to be built pier at Zephyr Shoals. Photo/LTN file

By Kathryn Reed

A prime piece of South Shore real estate may be back in the limelight.

Tahoe Douglas Fire Protection District would like to build a pier at the Dreyfus estate that would be used only by public agencies, but not the boating or recreating public. The U.S. Forest Service owns this land. No pier currently exists at the property.

“We are discussing and assessing options. We have not approved anything. We’re evaluating Tahoe Douglas Fire Protection District’s request for a safety pier. We’re actively looking at locations for opportunities, considering all options at this time,” Heather Noel, spokeswoman for the Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit, told *Lake Tahoe News*. “NEPA (National

Environmental Policy Act) is used to disclose any environmental impacts to the public. So if we plan to do new construction on the Dreyfus site, or any site, we would scope the public.”

In other words, the public will have an opportunity to comment on any proposal.

When the public will be brought into the discussions remains to be seen. There have already been meetings between the fire department, Forest Service and Tahoe Regional Planning Agency.

Tahoe Douglas currently keeps its fire boat at Zephyr Cove Resort, which is operated by Aramark under a concession agreement with the USFS, which also owns that land. The Dreyfus estate sits adjacent to Zephyr Cove Resort. Zephyr Shoals is how the USFS now refers to the Dreyfus estate.

Under the shoreline plan the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency Governing Board is expected to approve later this year it allows for new piers to be built, including specifically for the use of public agencies. Most law enforcement agencies, as well as some of the fire departments in the basin have boats, as do TRPA and U.S. Coast Guard.

The current plan would not allow a pier to be built at Zephyr Shoals because of fish habitat concerns. The new plan has updated science which says such concerns are unwarranted.

Still, it would take USFS, TRPA, Army Corp of Engineers and Nevada Department of Wildlife approval for the pier to be built.

Eric Guevin with Tahoe Douglas Fire said his agency is the lead, but that it will be a partnership. He told *Lake Tahoe News* the cash to pay for it will come from “grant money and donations, not tax dollars at this time. (We’re) not sure of the cost, still working numbers.” He said a rough minimum is \$500,000.

He said the pier will be at Zephyr Shoals or Round Hill Pines, which is also owned by the USFS. Publically, the Forest Service has not committed to either location.

“We effect and have a negative impact on the long-term commerce. Plus, there is conflict with public use and public access. The improvements needed would be onerous,” Guevin said.

Today all public agencies use docks/piers where the public recreates. Guevin contends tourists don't want to see medical emergencies at the dock. Of course they have to see trauma on ski slopes and there are car accidents every day, so trying to protect people from the reality of life would be difficult. He also said a dedicated pier would speed up the rescue efforts because the public would not be in their way.

The Forest Service hasn't done much with the Zephyr Shoals property since it acquired it in 1997.

That year the feds entered a land swap valued at \$38 million with the land-brokerage firm Olympic Group for it to acquire public land around Las Vegas in exchange for the Dreyfus estate.

The 46-acre parcel in Zephyr Cove had been owned by New York mutual fund tycoon Jack Dreyfus. Dreyfus built the 10,000-square-foot nine-bedroom estate in 1984, spending only two weeks a summer there. He had acquired the land from the Whittell estate and in that same purchase bought the Thunderbird Lodge along the East Shore.

There are reports that the Forest Service allowed the Olympic Group to sell the buildings to Park Cattle, now Edgewood Companies. Their plan was to turn it into a convention center. The price: \$300,000, two memberships to Edgewood Tahoe Golf Course, and seven weeks' exclusive use of the mansion annually for 20 years.

A special use permit was needed from the Forest Service for Park to use the buildings. The company withdrew the application when the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Office of the Inspector General began a criminal investigation into the financial deal. No wrong-doing was found, but Park never used the buildings.

The Forest Service in summer 2002 had open houses to gauge what the public would like to do with the property. Those discussions didn't go anywhere. There was a time when the USFS was set on tearing down the structures. Today there are user created trails on the property and people use the beach. The Forest Service has no plans for making this property more accessible to the public.

There are some who have told *LTN* off the record that a plan for the entire site should be in place before a decision about the pier is made, especially since the original purpose for acquiring the parcel was for recreation.