Acreage near Truckee bought by public land trusts

By Bill Lindelof, Sacramento Bee

Two land trusts have acquired an alpine lake, along with biologically and historically significant property north of Truckee, and plan to open the land to the public for the first time in more than a century.

The Truckee Donner Land Trust and the Trust for Public Land announced Nov. 16 that they have purchased the 3,000 acres of property for $8 million from a conservation-minded owner, a press release states.

The acquisition includes the 260-acre Webber Lake at the headwaters of the Little Truckee watershed. The other major component of the purchase is Lacey Meadows. The meadows near Webber Lake provide critical habitat for several species.

“This property has it all: 1,900 acres of pristine sub-alpine meadow, California history with Henness Pass Road and Webber Lake Hotel,” said Donner Lake Trust Executive Director Perry Norris, “and critical habitat for a number of threatened or endangered species.”

The property will be opened to the public for the first time in more than 100 years when the snow melts in the spring.

“This will provide exceptional recreation opportunities,” said Dave Sutton, Northern California director of the Trust for Public Land in the press release. “It was the largest piece of unprotected private land in the entire Little Truckee river watershed.”

The property was purchased from Clifton and Barbara Johnson. The family owned the property for almost a century, using

Lacey Meadows for summer sheep pasture.

The sheep were herded from the Johnson ranch near Roseville. The the trip took 15 days into the mountains and 10 back to the valley.

“The beautiful lands we have worked on and cared for are, at long last, protected for future generations to enjoy forever,” said Barbara Johnson.

Highlights include Webber Lake, stocked with trout as far back as the 1800s, Henness Pass Road, which was once a heavily traveled emigrant route, and the 1860s-era Webber Lake Hotel, once a stagecoach stop.

The property also is home of animals protected by state law, such as the pine marten and the Sierra Nevada red fox. Other animals include black bear, mule deer, mountain lion and birds such as the bald eagle and the endangered willow flycatcher.

Flora includes exceptional wildflower displays in Lacey Meadows, which include lupine, larkspur and alpine buttercups.

The Truckee Donner Land Trust will own and manage the property. Near-term plans include establishing new trailheads along Henness Pass Road and Meadow Lake Road, paths that would provide non-motorized access to Lacey Meadows.

Ceremonial sound practitioner coming to S. Tahoe

Rene Jenkins is a ceremonial sound practitioner who performs “attunements” with many ancestral instruments.

Jenkis will be at Unity at the Lake on Nov. 18 from 12:30-3pm for a Ceremonial Sound Healing. It will include ancient indigenous instruments based on Peruvian cosmology, ancestral wisdom and modern healing principles performed by Rene' Jenkins.

A $30 donation is being asked, but no one will be turned away. To reserve your space or for more info, call (530) 544.2266.

Unity is located at 1195 Rufus Allen Blvd., South Lake Tahoe.

Red Hawk Casino rewrites deal with state to stay afloat

By Dale Kasler, Sacramento Bee

The Indian tribe that owns struggling Red Hawk Casino in Shingle Springs struck a new deal with the state Friday that could bring the tribe some desperately needed financial relief.

Gov. Jerry Brown announced a new gambling compact that significantly reduces the amount of money the state gets from Red Hawk's owners, the Shingle Springs Band of Miwok Indians.

The deal acknowledges how badly the casino has performed – and what a financial disappointment it's been to the tribe, which was counting on Red Hawk to lift it out of poverty.

"The compact is designed to address fiscal challenges the tribe has faced and to meet the requirements of federal law that the tribe be the primary beneficiary of its gaming operation," said an announcement from the governor's office.

Nick Fonseca, the tribe's chairman, said in a press release that the compact "ensures the long-term financial prosperity of the tribe and its casino."

The agreement is far from a done deal. It must be ratified by the Legislature – and it requires the tribe to restructure its debts with bondholders and Lakes Entertainment Inc., the Minnesota company that manages Red Hawk.

The governor will have final say on whether the restructurings go far enough to ease the tribe's debt burden, which is around $500 million.

As part of the deal, the maximum number of slot machines allowed at Red Hawk is cut from 5,000 to 3,000. Red Hawk now has 2,200 slots.

The new deal suggests that without help, the casino is headed toward disaster.

Red Hawk "cannot currently or in the coming years generate enough revenue for the tribe to cover its financial obligations," the compact says.

The biggest change involves the state's takeaway. The tribe now pays the state up to 25 percent of its slot-machine winnings – believed to be the highest percentage of any tribal casino in California. Under the new deal, that would fall to 15 percent.

The new compact may be unprecedented. I. Nelson Rose, a gambling-law expert at Whittier College, said he's never heard of a state rewriting a tribal compact to ease the financial terms.

"It's innovative," Rose said. "It's better to get … a lesser amount, 15 percent, than to get zero."

The casino is doing so poorly that when an El Dorado Superior Court jury ordered the tribe last winter to pay its former

casino partner $30 million in a contract dispute, the tribe said it didn't have the money and warned Red Hawk might close.

The case is on appeal.

AmyAnn Taylor, the tribe's general counsel, said the Shingle Springs band hasn't yet spoken to bondholders or Lakes Entertainment about restructuring the debts. The tribe has two years to complete the restructurings, according to the new compact.

Lakes executives couldn't be reached for comment. The company already agreed a year ago to let the tribe defer principal payments on a $66 million start-up loan.

Taylor said the tribe recently amended the deal under which it pays $5.2 million a year to El Dorado County – another requirement of the new compact. She said the tribe will pay the county the same amount, but will get reimbursed $2.6 million a year to help run its medical clinic, which serves the community at large.

"The county saw an opportunity to help them out," said county Supervisor Ron Briggs. "They're here, they're our partner." Red Hawk employs 1,350 workers.

Federal law says Indian casinos are mainly supposed to benefit their tribal owners. Yet Taylor said the casino has been generating far more income for the state than for tribal members.

The tribe has earned just $6 million a year from Red Hawk – the bare minimum guaranteed under the management contract with Lakes. Fonseca, in an interview last year, said individual tribal members were getting just $800 a month from the casino.

By contrast, Taylor said the tribe has been paying the state $30 million a year.

The casino opened in December 2008, during the worst of the

recession, and has never performed up to the tribe's expectations. In 2010, its gambling revenue fell $100 million short of projections, according to testimony in the Superior Court case.

Winter weather advisory for Lake Tahoe

A winter weather advisory is in effect from 4pm Saturday through 10am Sunday in the Lake Tahoe area.

Snow levels are expected to start high, but drop to lake level by Sunday morning.

According to the National Weather Service, the heaviest period of snow will be between 10pm and 6am. Above 7,000 feet there could be 8 to 12 inches and up to 6 inches down to 6,500 feet in that time period. More snow is expected later Sunday morning.

Expect roads to be slick because of the rain-freeze effect, making travel difficult.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Ski report: Likely to be wet

on the slopes



Add Sugar Bowl to the list of ski resorts in the Lake Tahoe area that are open.

Mammoth is reporting 8 inches of snow in the last day.

In Tahoe today, it’s going to be a mix of rain and snow, so dress accordingly.

Here is the Nov. 17 ski report.

— Curtis Fong

Blue Ribbon winners announced

The eight winners of the annual Blue Ribbon awards put on by the Lake Tahoe South Shore Chamber of Commerce were announced this week.

Unlike years past, the winners and honorable mentions were not notified beforehand.

The winners are:

Geotourism: Tahoe Tallac Association

Tourism: South Tahoe Standup Paddle

Experience: On Course Events

Entrepreneur: Paul Reder, PR Entertainment Inc.

Small Green Business: Elevated Fitness

Large Green Business: Harrah’s & Harveys Lake Tahoe

Public Agency Customer Service: Judy Finn, South Lake Tahoe

Customer Service: Tommy Gunnell, Embassy Suites Lake Tahoe.

Letter: Diverse groups help Bread & Broth

To the community,

Bread & Broth would like to express its sincere gratitude to Hope Lutheran Church of the Sierra, which sponsored the Adopt A Day of Nourishment on Oct. 29. Members of the Hope Lutheran congregation collected $250 in donations to sponsor the AAD and church members, both regular B&B volunteers and sponsor night volunteers, were on hand to assist with serving almost 100 meals. Their generous donation of their time and money is greatly appreciated.

Bread & Broth could not provide these community meals without dedicated teams of volunteers. We had “all hands on deck” on Oct. 29, with teams from Hope Lutheran Church of the Sierra and Hard Rock Cafe helping out. David, Cathy and John Haynes from Hope Lutheran helped with sorting and preparing items to be distributed to diners, along with Brett Melickian and

Jessica Astorga of Hard Rock Cafe.

In addition, Kimberly Templeton, Taylor Corsin, Lizzy Gates and Nate Schrimshire from Hard Rock Cafe helped with cleanup efforts.

“We had a lot to coordinate that afternoon and their help was invaluable,” said one Bread & Broth volunteer. “We were grateful for the extra helping hands.”

Bread & Broth is able to continue its mission of feeding the hungry of South Lake Tahoe due in large part to the generosity of the local community. For more information on how to Adopt A Day, contact Carol Gerard at (530) 542.2876 or carolsgerard@aol.com.

Georgette Riley, Bread & Broth

Heavenly seeks to expand summer operations

Heavenly Mountain Resort wants to start expanding its summer operations next year, with the goal of having the projects in the ground in the next building season.

Before they can move forward the U.S. Forest Service must sign off on the proposal. Public comment is being taken by the Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit.

The projects are consistent with the improvements identified in Heavenly’s Master Plan Amendment.

Additions would include a climbing wall, zipline canopy tour, adventure course, aerial challenge park and zipline center.

The Adventure Peak climbing wall would be replaced with a larger, realistic three-dimensional rock structure approximately 30-feet high adjacent to the Tamarack Lodge. A Discovery Forest Zipline Canopy Tour is proposed for the forested area between Tamarack Express lift and the Big Easy trail. The Discovery Forest would provide a tree-bound zipline and canopy tour activities that would incorporate environmental education information designed for children. This would require selective tree removal.

A proposed Bear Cave Challenge Course adjacent to the ski school near Tamarack Lodge would include a multi-level climbing structure approximately 40-feet high. Selective tree removal would be required.

Boulder Cove Challenge Park would be built across from the base of the gondola stairs and would include a self-guided challenge activity that consists of a series of vertical wooden columns, platforms and rope walkways/bridges approximately 30-feet high. Limited tree removal and limb removal of existing trees would be required.

A new Zipline Center would be constructed in the area between the existing tubing hill and the Big Easy lift and would include four ziplines approximately 1,000 feet in length. Limited tree removal would be required and low voltage electrical and communication lines would be installed. A total of 40 trees would be removed for the entire project.

Comments should be turned in by Dec. 21. For more information on the proposal, contact Jonathan Cook-Fisher at (530) 543.2741 or email jcfisher@fs.fed.us. A map of the proposed project area is online.

Skiers enthusiastic about Kirkwood opening day

By Kathryn Reed

KIRKWOOD – It wasn't exactly a powder day, but there was powder to be found and more of it falling – especially as the morning turned to afternoon.

Considering the calendar said Nov. 16 – it was a great opening day at Kirkwood Mountain Resort. The resort didn't open daily last season until December.

If bartender Patrick relayed the forecast correctly, by Tuesday the 'Wood could have 5 more feet of snow. And if even half that amount falls from the sky, more terrain will keep opening – which is true at all the Tahoe area resorts.

What's going on at lake level is never a good indication of what is happening at Kirkwood. While it rained in South Lake Tahoe, it was all snow in Kirkwood on Friday. This spot on Highway 88 where the counties of El Dorado, Amador and Alpine come together is a magnet for the white stuff.



The number of passes proves Ben Russo likes skiing Kirkwood. Photos/Kathryn

Reed

Ben Russo was proud to show off his slew of passes from Kirkwood from years past. He and buddy Greg Hutton thought it worth the drive from Orangevale to take in early season runs.

An addition they like is the safety bars that have been installed on all the lifts. It helps those with height issues.

About six people were waiting for Solitude to start spinning at 9am Friday. More people quickly filled the few runs that are open off that chair.

Justin Oltesvig of Oakland and Daniel Valenzuela of San Leandro aren't sure if they'll buy a pass that would include the other Vail Resort properties in the Tahoe area – Heavenly and Northstar. They were satisfied to skip work and pay the daily rate just to experience opening day.

Troy Mayers of Santa Cruz was thrilled to be on his tellies for the first time this season. He's been a longtime Kirkwood season passholder and wasn't about to give up the opportunity to ski no matter who owns the resort.



Snow fell for most of the day Nov. 16 – which didn't seem to bother anyone.

Colorado-based Vail Resorts bought Kirkwood earlier this year, with this being the first full season under the new ownership. For the time being, it's mostly the status quo. Food prices

are a bit more, but two bloody Marys at Monte Wolfe's were $12.50 – about what one is at Tamarack Lodge at Heavenly. New to the eatery's menu is the Epic Burger, which the parent company is known for.

What was strikingly noticeable was the attitude of every employee. The friendliness was refreshing – and seemed sincere. And when someone didn't know the answer, they went to get it.

Pile burning near Davis Creek, Spooner

North Lake Tahoe Fire Protection District's fuels crew will continue the hazardous fuels reduction project in the Davis Creek Park area (just south of Davis Creek Regional Park) on Nov. 17.

Also weather permitting, on Nov. 19 the crews anticipate beginning pile burning in the North Canyon area near Spooner. This 80-acre project will go into the middle of next week, again weather permitting.

This project is a cooperative effort between North Lake Tahoe Fire Protection District, Truckee Meadows Fire Protection District, Washoe County Parks Department and Nevada Division

of Forestry.

The debris or “slash” piles were created as a result of a hazardous fuels reduction and defensible space project earlier this year, to help minimize the risk of wildland fires in the area.