Recreation opportunities on USFS land in Tahoe a concern

By Kathryn Reed

Playing in the outdoors is clearly what is important to people who live on the South Shore.

During two public meetings Tuesday at the U.S. Forest Service office in South Lake Tahoe the nearly 70 people at each session wanted to talk about and ask questions regarding recreation.

(There are two more meetings today in Kings Beach.)

The Forest Service is taking public comments until Aug. 30 on the draft Forest Plan that is expected to be a working document for up to 15 years. (The current plan is from 1988.) A final plan with a preferred alternative could be released in early 2013, with a record of decision expected in fall 2013.

Four alternatives are in the plan, with B being what the Forest Service is favoring. Plan A keeps the status quo, while plans C and D create new wilderness areas. It's possible the final environmental document could meld various alternatives as well as include new items based on public input.



Deputy Forest Supervisor

Jeff Marsolais talks July 17
about the draft Forest Plan.
Photo/Kathryn Reed

Jeff Marsolais, deputy forest supervisor for Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit, told *Lake Tahoe News*, "Alternative B really reflects a balanced approach to all aspects of managing public lands in the basin."

He said this alternative is consistent with how the Forest Service currently manages its thousands of acres, but provides more flexibility and new thinking.

Between the two sessions the Sierra Club, Sierra Forest Legacy, Sierra Nevada Alliance, California Wilderness Coalition, Defenders of Wildlife, Friends of the River-California Wilderness Project, and Snowlands Network issued a joint press release. Collectively they would like stronger protections for the forest and watersheds. The groups support additional wilderness designations.

Alternatives C and D would do just that. The former includes the Dardanelles-Meiss Meadows area and the latter would also have Freel Peak as wilderness.

When land is designated wilderness it means mechanical recreation is forbidden – this includes bicycles.

Several people at the evening session wore T-shirts that said "Say No to Alternative D". These people are concerned snowmobiling opportunities are going to be eliminated. And they would be with alternatives C and D. Even if the Forest Service wants a wilderness area, Congress must make that designation.

Then there were the people with stickers that read, "Protect our forests".

Water enthusiasts were represented by guys who just arrived on

dry land based on being dressed in wetsuits.

In addition to the recreation group, the breakout sessions included watersheds, biological resources and forest vegetation-fuels management.

Alternative B allows for more terrain to use managed fire – meaning letting a fire that was started naturally (lightning) be allowed to burn. This technique would only be used if there would be environmental benefits and no safety issues.

For instance, when the Showers Fire occurred 10 years ago, is was suppressed based on policy that is still in effect today. If plan B were the law, that fire would have been allowed to burn naturally – the way Mother Nature intended.

However, Randy Striplin with the Forest Service stressed that a fire would be monitored daily, so if conditions change, suppression may be the ultimate answer.

Alternative D would eliminate the wildland urban interface as an area to be treated for fuels reduction after 10 years.

Any project currently on the books will proceed no matter what alternative is chosen. This includes the South Shore fuels reduction project that just started and will take about eight years to complete, as well as restoration to the Upper Truckee River.

Assumptions were made in creating the alternatives – like money from Washington isn't going to increase, visitors to the Lake Tahoe Basin would increase 1.4 percent a year, and climate change will impact the ecosystem in the forest.

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Notes:

• Today's sessions are at the North Tahoe Conference Center, 8318 North Lake Blvd., Kings Beach, from 2-4pm and 6-8pm.

• An online session will be July 19 from 1-3pm. More information on how to participate in the webinar is available at the USFS website.

• The draft EIS is online. It includes an executive summary. It is near the bottom, middle of the page.

Clarity on ball field priorities remains murky

The South Lake Tahoe Recreation Facilities Joint Powers Authority might not have much to choose from when it comes to how to spend the $500,000 in the bank for fields – or the list could be overwhelming.

The committee responsible for making a recommendation to the JPA met July 16. The JPA is expected to make its decision at the July 27, 9am meeting at Lake Tahoe Airport. The report for the board is not done.

“I will be doing a summary of field needs, with my detail list as an informational attachment. Steve Noll will take some photos of current conditions on fields to show to the JPA,” John Upton, JPA staff member, told *Lake Tahoe News*. “Steve Morales gave us a breakdown of unfunded items on a list, but we still need clarity from LTUSD whether or not they want the entire list done.”

South Tahoe High School’s softball field has been the sticking point for the committee since it started meeting earlier this year. For Lake Tahoe Unified and the city to be compliant with

federal and state laws more improvements need to be made to that field.

That has to happen before any other blade of grass gets touched, let alone other infrastructure improvements on the California side of the South Shore.

At the meeting next week the bicycle committee will also make its recommendations to the JPA board.

This is also the board's annual meeting where all things financial are discussed.

– Kathryn Reed

Camp Tadaka headed for Carson Valley

Camp Tadaka is having a field trip Thursday for grades K-10 at the South Lake Tahoe Rec Center.

The trip is to Carson Valley Swim Center and Lampe Park for lunch and games.

Preregistration is necessary – (530) 542.6056. Cost is $25. Space is limited.

Bring lunch, swim stuff, sunscreen, tennis shoes, and a water bottle.

Physicians make money acting as pharmacy to patients

By Barry Meier and Katie Thomas, New York Times

When a pharmacy sells the heartburn drug Zantac, each pill costs about 35 cents. But doctors dispensing it to patients in their offices have charged 10 times that price, or $3.25 a pill.

The same goes, insurers say, for a popular muscle relaxant known as Soma. From a pharmacy, the per-pill price is 60 cents. Sold by a doctor, it can cost more than five times that, or $3.33.

At a time of soaring health care bills, doctors, middlemen and drug distributors are adding hundreds of millions of dollars annually to the costs borne by insurance companies, employers and taxpayers, experts say, through a little-known practice called physician dispensing.

Most common among physicians who treat injured workers, it is a twist on a typical doctor’s visit. Instead of sending patients to drugstores to get prescriptions filled, doctors sell the drugs in their offices to patients who walk out the door with them. Doctors can make tens of thousands of dollars a year operating their own in-office pharmacies. The practice has become so profitable that private equity firms are buying stakes in the businesses and political lobbying over the issue is fierce.

Read the whole story

South Lake Tahoe is close to having just 1 pot shop

By Kathryn Reed

The clarity of where medical marijuana in South Lake Tahoe stands is like walking into a room of pot smokers. Something smells funny and the air is murky.

Accusations flew Tuesday during the City Council meeting, with it clear the electeds are fed up with what they consider is illegal activity occurring at some of the dispensaries.

Most of the anger was leveled at Patient2Patient, which had its permit revoked July 11. Unless the collective wins the Aug. 7 appeal before the council, the dispensary will have to close its doors that day or another date specified by the council.



Patient2Patient would have to close if the owners lose their Aug. 7 appeal before the South Lake Tahoe City

Council. Photo/LTN

City Manager Nancy Kerry was looking for direction from the council to make sure the four who were there (Councilwoman Angela Swanson was absent for most of the meeting) wanted the medical marijuana ordinance enforced. To this, the four said "yes" without any reservation.

The ordinance was passed in September 2011.

At the July 3 meeting staff was directed to look into whether Patient2Patient and Tahoe Wellness Collective were in compliance with the ordinance. Both had already been sent a letter June 1 saying they had 10 days to comply or face permit revocation. Though they did nothing to come into compliance, then City Manager Tony O'Rourke allowed the two establishments to keep their doors open.

But Gino DiMatteo, who owns City of Angels 2, at the July 3 meeting told the council his colleagues at the other two collectives were still not in compliance and asked why when he had a valid permit and all the paperwork signed off he was being treated differently.

While DiMatteo never mentioned the 14th Amendment, that is in fact what he was invoking – that he be treated equally.

It was at the meeting earlier this month that the council reversed course and denied DiMatteo the ability to move. He has to move because his landlord wants him out this month because of threats from the U.S. Attorney General's Office, not because of any infraction with the city.

At the July 17 meeting, DiMatteo refused to talk to *Lake Tahoe News*.

"We haven't canceled escrow, but it's on the market," listing agent Claudette Miles of Coldwell Banker-McKinney told *Lake Tahoe News* in reference to the building DiMatteo was planning

to purchase. She says DiMatteo still wants to buy the property and the sellers are interested in selling, but “it’s a complicated situation.”

Tahoe Wellness Collective came into compliance July 6.

City building inspector Dave Walker went to Patient2Patient July 9 and July 10 to check on construction of the firewall. No work had been performed.

The next day Kerry issues the notice revoking the collective’s permit. Later on July 11, Kerry and Walker are asked to look again. What they find on July 13 is the firewall work was done wrong by an unlicensed contractor.

On top of that, Patient2Patient was growing marijuana upstairs in an area not permitted for that activity. This is being done with grow lights and no firewall. If a fire were to occur, it could wipe out a swath of Lake Tahoe Boulevard.

Despite all of this, the collective is allowed to operate until the Aug. 7 appeal.

Nine people spoke at the July 17 meeting – all saying the collectives are necessary.

While the council supports medical marijuana, it does not like what is going on. In fact, Councilman Hal Cole said the collectives are potentially hurting their clients.

“You are putting people in this town in danger of losing their medicine. You are putting their health in jeopardy,” Cole said.

He was the most vocal and heated. But all four expressed frustration with the drug task force report that came out at the July 3 meeting regarding increased pot activity because of the collectives, the need for the post office to hire a specialist because of the reported drug activity, and then the police report involving Patient2Patient owner Matt Triglia

that was made known Tuesday.

The report from December 2011 says Triglia was in Missouri in a rented RV that had specialized Nevada plates when he was pulled over for a traffic infraction. Subsequently the report says $85,000 in cash was seized. The officer wrote, “I observed several bundles of money in rubber bands that had been heat sealed in a plastic bag. The packaging method was very commonly associated with that of currency and narcotic smugglers.”

In some states, like Missouri, it’s not uncommon for goods to be seized and no charges to be filed, which happened in the Triglia case.

While Triglia confirmed the date of birth and Social Security number on the report were his, he told the council he was not in Missouri and this report was not about him. The report also describes his wife’s tattoos.

After the meeting he told Kerry and others who were listening that he would be calling his attorney.

It’s possible that in three weeks South Lake Tahoe will have only one medical marijuana collective.

Sandoval weighing Medicaid

expansion in Nevada

By Sean Whaley, Nevada News Bureau

CARSON CITY – Nevada officials are busy preparing cost and enrollment estimates so Gov. Brian Sandoval will have reliable information before deciding whether to expand Medicaid following the U.S. Supreme Court ruling last month upholding much of the Affordable Care Act.

But even if Sandoval does not expand Medicaid to 138 percent of the federal poverty level as provided for in the law, the program is expected to grow significantly as Nevadans who are now eligible but not enrolled decide to sign up when the health insurance mandate takes effect on Jan 1, 2014.

The effective date is in the middle of the first year of the upcoming two-year budget now being prepared by the Sandoval administration. The Legislature will take up the budget, and the Medicaid issue, when the 2013 session starts in February.

State officials are readying data for Sandoval to make a Medicaid decision

Mike Willden, director of the Department of Health and Human Services, and state Budget Director Jeff Mohlenkamp, are gathering the data to show the anticipated effects on the state budget of these two distinct Medicaid groups.

“Our goal is to have the numbers over to the governor by the end of next week,” Willden said. “We’re just not ready to give out numbers yet and I don’t want to give out bad numbers. There are 10 moving parts.”

Mohlenkamp said the court threw everybody “a bit of a curve,” when it decided states do not have to opt into an expanded Medicaid program.

“So we’re now in the process of analyzing what that looks

like, the pros and cons of that, the financial impact on the state of the options, and, is it absolutely straightforward; you either opt in or opt out," he said. "Or are there other options within the Supreme Court ruling that we can consider."

When the Supreme Court said the federal government could not penalize states if they do not choose to opt into the Medicaid expansion, Sandoval's initial comment was that the state could not afford to do so. But he is awaiting the information before deciding how to proceed.

"This is going to be a governor's office decision," Mohlenkamp said. "The governor will make the decision as to the policy of the state going forward. He has not yet made that decision. He's looking for a very critical analysis of what the options are and the pros and cons for the state."

The bigger cost to the state general fund will likely come from those eligible but not enrolled in Medicaid, because the state share of adding those individuals is projected to be 38 percent in 2014, compared to a 62 percent share from the federal government.

This cost to the strapped state budget will occur whether or not an expansion is approved by the Nevada Legislature.

All of the analysis is dependent on the implementation of the federal health care law. Republican members of Congress and GOP presumptive presidential nominee Mitt Romney want to repeal the law.

Federal funding will pay for 100 percent of any Medicaid expansion for the first three calendar years beginning in 2014, with the state required to pick up a percentage of the cost beginning in 2017. The first year state cost is 5 percent, in 2018 the state cost is 6 percent, in 2019 the state cost is 7 percent, and in 2020, the state cost is 10 percent.

But Willden said there are also administrative costs to the state that are not fully covered by the expansion but instead are shared between the federal government and the state at a 50-50 match. They include information technology costs and the cost to hire new eligibility workers, for example, he said.

“And so we’re trying to again cost out for the governor, clear through 2020, because there are state costs involved in those out years even though everybody says it’s 100 percent federal the first three,” Willden said. “There are state costs in the out years, there are also state costs associated with the administrative costs for the new eligibles.”

There will be some savings because mentally ill people now being treated by the state at full cost to the state general fund will be Medicaid eligible, and there will be some savings to the counties because they now use county general fund money to pay for medical care for individuals who would become Medicaid eligible, he said.

The counties are analyzing that potential impact, Willden said.

Another question that is being researched with federal officials is whether the opt-in option would require a full commitment to the 138 percent of poverty level, of if some lesser level could be pursued, he said.

“The goal is to try to get all of this to come together in the next couple of weeks,” Willden said. “That way the governor would have enough information to at least review on the opt in, opt out opportunity.”

If Medicaid is expanded in Nevada, new participants will be childless adults, who are not covered by the state program now, Willden said. The other expansion will come from parent caretakers of children who are covered at 75 percent of poverty now.

Medicaid now covers primarily low-income children, the disabled, pregnant women and seniors. These groups are now covered at different poverty rates ranging from 100 percent to 138 percent.

State Sen. Ben Kieckhefer, R-Reno, who will be involved in the Medicaid issues in 2013 as a member of the Senate Finance Committee, said Sandoval is taking a prudent course because there are so many unanswered questions given the Supreme Court's surprise decision allowing states to opt out of the expansion.

A critical question is what happens with the generous federal funding after 2020 and as Congress and the President grapple with unsustainable spending on federal programs, he said.

"It is a very good deal in the first couple of years," Kieckhefer said. "I mean the feds pay 100 percent of the medical costs for the first three years. That's a great deal. It then goes down to 90 percent after the fifth year. And there is nothing that mandates that that goes on forever.

"So I think the stronger concern is, how does the federal government continue to justify paying 90 percent of those costs as it's trying to deal with the massive federal deficit and reducing that deficit," he said. "And I think that there is a strong likelihood that eventually the feds start shifting that cost burden back to the states and that's a risk that the state needs to weigh."

Assembly Ways and Means Chairwoman Debbie Smith, D-Sparks, said her plan is to have an overview of the court ruling from staff at the Legislature's Interim Finance Committee on Aug. 23.

"I want to just make sure that we have a really good understanding of what all the possibilities and ramifications are," she said. "I want that to be the first informational piece and then we can go from there."

Another variable in the assessment is the Silver State Health Insurance Exchange now being readied in Nevada where residents will be able to shop for health insurance beginning Oct. 1, 2013. Nevadans between 100 percent and 400 percent of the federal poverty level will be eligible for subsidies when they purchase insurance.

The ACA rules appear to indicate that if Medicaid is not expanded, Nevadans who would have been covered in an expansion could go to the Exchange and receive a tax credit as long as all other requirements are met.

The Exchange is gearing up now with federal funds, but the state will have to pick up the cost of its operation when federal grants run out in 2015, Willden said.

Another issue is whether there are enough doctors and other medical providers to offer services to an expanded population, he said.

Willden said in May that as many as 150,000 additional Nevadans would be eligible for Medicaid if the law was upheld by the court, but that estimate was two years old and was made before the court said states could opt out of the expansion.

He estimated that bringing new residents onto the rolls would cost the state general fund an estimated $574 million between now and 2020.

But Kieckhefer said only $63 million of that cost estimate was due to the Medicaid expansion. The rest was due to those already eligible who were expected to enroll as a result of the mandate to obtain insurance.

Truckee police survey merchants for tobacco sales to juveniles

The Truckee Police Department, in conjunction with the Nevada County Tobacco Use Prevention Project, conducted a non-enforcement under-age tobacco purchase operation in Truckee on July 9.

Of the 17 merchants contacted, two sold tobacco to underage purchasers, according to Capt. Harwood Mitchell.

The two merchants that sold tobacco to the juveniles will be cited as a result of this initial operation.

All of the merchants will be receiving letters telling them that the police department had conducted the operation and whether they are doing well on their compliance or need improvement.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

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16 basketball teams compete in South Shore tournament

Sixteen teams competed in the 28th annual South Tahoe Basketball Jamboree last weekend. The teams from California and Oregon each played at least five games during the July 12-14 event.

The girls of Oakridge High School from El Dorado Hills were

crowned the champions, with Justin Siena of Napa placing second.

“Our South Tahoe team didn’t win it, but played well most games,” Les Wright, event organizer, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Games were played at Kahle Community Park on Thursday, and at Lake Tahoe Community College on Friday and Saturday.

“We turned away many others because we couldn’t get more than one gym a day to play,” Wright said. “With help, we hope to have all six gyms in the community next year and host 96 teams from around the country.”

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Traffic delays this week between Tahoma and Tahoe City

Caltrans is alerting motorists of traffic restrictions and to allow additional travel time on Highway 89 from Tahoe City to Tahoma.

Motorists can expect one-way traffic control restrictions and up to 10 minute delays from now through 10am Friday.

Southwest Gas Corporation of Carson City is scheduled to do utility work.

USFS seeking public comment on Zephyr Cove Resort pier replacement

The U.S. Forest Service Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit is asking for public input on the proposed replacement of the pier at Zephyr Cove Resort.

The proposed replacement pier would be approximately the same size as the current pier which is 358 feet long by 18 feet wide, including the existing fueling dock. The fueling dock would be re-used and would be connected to the new pier by gangways. Water, sewer, electrical, gas and fire department lines would be run through the new pier from existing connections on the shore. The abutment that anchors the pier to the shore would also be replaced.

Work could begin as early as this fall and would take several months to complete.

Comments are welcome until Aug. 3. For more information, contact Matt Dickinson at (530) 543.2769 or go online.