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SIERRA CLUB

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www.sierraclub.org/chapters/motherlode/tahoe

*Check the TASC website for changes.

The Tahoe Area Sierra Club
Newsletter

is available for download:
<http://motherlode.sierraclub.org/tahoe>

Send an e-mail to our webmaster
(bryanhz@charter.net) with your
name and physical address if you prefer
the electronic version only.
You'll help save a tree!

MEMBERSHIP

Tahoe Area Sierra Club needs
volunteers for a few hours every
month to help with Membership.
If you are interested or would like
more details, please contact:
Elizabeth Brady at 530-546-7530.

*Together we can make a
difference!*

Please send newsletter comments,
questions or articles to Laurie Connor
at lconnorwrites@aol.com.



8,600 Units and Four-Lane Highway Approved for Martis Valley

by Tom Ameika

By a vote of four to one, the Placer County Board of Supervisors has decided that the Martis Valley is the perfect place for a fake "village" and super-luxury golf course suburb. **Rex Bloomfield**, the Martis Valley supervisor, was the lone dissenting vote at the October 22, 2003, meeting.

The "village," which will have more units than the city of Auburn, will be located at the base of the Northstar Ski Resort. If you've been to Squaw Valley or skied in Colorado, you know these so-called villages are really just vacation rentals on top of luxury malls. Locals don't live there, and the retail caters to the wealthy transients who come to ski then get back on the freeway.

Most of the remaining units will follow the gated-golf-course model. Step right up, local residents, you may not be able to own a home, afford decent health care or reliable transportation, but if you happen to have \$500,000 for a lot, plus \$100,000 or more for a country club membership, you can play all the golf you want on a private course!

You may wonder how in the world our elected officials can allow this sort of irresponsible development. There are two simple answers. The first is called Campaign Contributions/The Urban Growth Machine. Those who make their fortunes from spreading luxury sprawl, pour plenty of money into the supervisors' campaign chests. These contributions, plus lots of propaganda, insure the election of pro-sprawl candidates.

The second answer is the Fiscalization of Land-Use Planning. Because Proposition 13 limits property tax revenue, county and city governments' income does not keep pace with inflation

and population growth. To keep their coffers full, these officials seek to generate revenue from new luxury development and retail sales taxes. Ersatz villages, private golf course developments and Lake Tahoe property are the tax revenue equivalents of Walmarts and auto-malls.

How do we combat this folly? The California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) enables ordinary citizens to join forces to comment on bad plans and, if a plan is not in compliance with CEQA, to use the court system to prevent rapacious development. TASC, Sierra Watch, The Mountain Area Preservation Foundation, and The League to Save Lake Tahoe have vowed to pursue legal correction for the Martis Valley debacle. We know there is a more equitable, environmentally sensible and economically viable plan. We will fight for it.



Photos courtesy of Sierra Watch

HYBRID CARS GO THE DISTANCE

by Bryan von Lossberg

With gasoline prices nearing \$2 per gallon and an increasing awareness of the deleterious effects of fossil-fuel burning engines to both local air quality and global warming trends, hybrid gas-electric cars are becoming popular across the country and around the Tahoe Basin.

Toyota and Honda are leading the hybrid revolution. The Toyota Prius was introduced in 2000, when it received the Sierra Club's "Excellence in Environmental Engineering" award, and Honda debuted its Civic Hybrid in 2002 as a follow-up to its 2000 two-seater hybrid, the Insight. Hybrids have developed a loyal following in metropolitan areas like San Francisco, and now, despite a climate that makes four- or all-wheel drive vehicles a necessity, the Tahoe region is home to several Priuses and at least two Civic Hybrids.

The Civic achieves 45-50 mpg and can travel over six hundred miles on one tank of gas. Even more impressive is the second-generation 2004 Prius, which accelerates from 0-60 in about ten seconds and gets more than 50 mpg.

In the language of the Eastern Sierra that means you can go from Bridgeport to Bishop on Highway 395 on about one gallon of gas (and a steep downhill grade).

There are a few pleasures found in driving hybrids that are rarely noted in formal reviews. For instance, the gauges are distractingly fun! The dashboard lights on the Civic that indicate whether you're charging or drawing energy from the batteries bring a Nintendo-game flavor to a mundane drive. Similarly, the Civic's auto-off feature can be an unexpected source of hilarity: It's pretty enjoyable to watch an uninitiated passenger when the engine abruptly turns off at a stoplight to save fuel. (Don't worry, it turns back on as soon as the brake pedal is released.)

Frivolous pleasures aside, the 2004 Prius received an Advanced Technology Partial Zero Emission Vehicle (AT-PZEV) emissions rating, an approximately 30% improvement on the impressive first-generation's certification by the California Air Resources Board (CARB) and the EPA as a super ultra-low emission vehicle (SULEV). The Honda Civic Hybrid, on the other hand, is classified as an ultra-low emission



My Civic Hybrid and my father, Rich von Lossberg, at the Tahoe Rim Trail

vehicle (ULEV), though California versions with the AT-PZEV rating are available. Both are priced around \$20,000 and qualify for a one-time \$2,000 Clean-Fuel Vehicle federal tax deduction.

And finally, the answer to the most common question about hybrids: No! You never have to plug them in.

I bought my Honda Civic Hybrid in July 2002 and currently have more than 23,000 miles on it. Please contact me at (540) 525-6557 or at bryan_von_lossberg@yahoo.com with any questions or to arrange an informal test drive on the West or North Shore. ❁

EAGLE EYES HIT THE TRAIL



by Glenn Polochko, TASC Outings Chair

If people in general could be got into the woods, even for once, to hear the trees speak for themselves, all difficulties in the way of the forest preservation would vanish.

John Muir's sentiment just seems so valid. What better way to foster love of nature and get more people interested in saving the woods than to help them experience the natural environment for themselves? There is much to do and few to do it to protect our environmental heritage, and outings, more than any

other activity, will inspire people to give the help we so desperately need. On a recent Bald Eagle Migration hike, I saw firsthand the power of nature to invigorate and inspire.

I admit I was apprehensive when more than twenty people and at least ten dogs showed up at the trailhead that autumn morning. Dogs were barking and fighting, and people were nervous. As group leader, I wondered just how much fun this expedition would be.

But when we took off down the trail things calmed down a bit. Many of these folks had never seen a bald eagle in the wild, and my enthusiasm had created expectations of sighting at least thirty. Of course, during the first hour of walking we didn't see any, but we did reach a viewpoint that took people's breath away. From our spot on the trail, we saw a peninsula far below jutting out into a blue lake with snow-covered Mount Rose and the Carson Range mirrored in the water.

We continued through a mullen forest and saw some fresh water salmon as we enjoyed the crisp, clean fall air, but another hour and lunch still produced no eagles. I was beginning to think we might not see any.

When we finally spotted one—the first of twenty—the group erupted like little children. As I listened to their excited chatter I knew all our effort was worthwhile, because we shared a feeling of pure wonderment and joy in being alive.

I made some new friends that day—two people even asked for Sierra Club membership applications—and we all experienced something special. ❁

TASC needs outings leaders. If you're interested in becoming a leader, please contact Glenn Polochko at 530-587-5906. For you existing leaders, a variety of dates are open for hikes, bikes, snowshoes, skis, backpacks, ice-skates, walks, dinners or just about anything else you want to do.

YOU CAN HELP KEEP 85 ACRES OF OPEN SPACE UNDEVELOPED by Kathie Hoxsie

In 2003, the TASC ExCom agreed to watchdog, that is, keep an eye on, a development proposal for the 85-acre Firestone property on Dollar Hill in Tahoe City. The property is currently owned by the North Tahoe Public Utility District (NTPUD).

At issue is a proposed development for the parcel that includes a 44,000 square foot recreation center with a six-to eight-lane indoor swimming pool and 90 to 125 parking spaces. The project is backed by a North Tahoe citizens group known as the Recreation Center Communities Committee (R3C). They view the Firestone property as centrally located available land with low-density usage. The group recently hired architectural and other consultants to create a preliminary design for the facility, to estimate construction costs, and to explore how best to obtain the land, i.e. by outright purchase, trade, mitigation, or the like.

The California Tahoe Conservancy (CTC) bought the parcel for \$1.4 million in the early 1990s and deeded it to the NTPUD for a bike trail. Due to financial and governmental obstacles the bike trail has not been built, though it remains on the drawing board. Any change in the deeded use of the Firestone property will require approval by the CTC governing board and would set a precedent for other Tahoe land purchased by the organization. In May 1999, an 18-month roundtable

sponsored by the CTC concluded that the parcel "represents the last substantial open space that once encompassed Dollar Hill."

The Firestone land abuts busy Highway 28, which on Dollar Hill is a TRPA-designated scenic corridor. For several decades outdoor enthusiasts including locals, second-home owners, and visitors have used the area for various low impact activities like walking, jogging, dog strolling, hiking, birding, mountain biking, snowshoeing, and cross country skiing. At almost any time of day, in any weather, year round, you'll find someone enjoying the terrain, which is generally flat, forested, and offers easy access to Tahoe's back country.

Keeping the Firestone property undeveloped is critical to the quality of life in Tahoe. Recreation there is free, convenient to people of all abilities and ages, and takes place in harmony with our mountain environment. Ecologically, the parcel's location between two prime residential subdivisions, the Highlands and Dollar Point, makes it a valuable habitat for wildlife, while its trees are crucial for clean air and erosion control.

Additionally, maintaining the open space there is of utmost importance since a 25-unit townhouse development with an outdoor pool and affordable senior housing is scheduled to begin construction adjacent to the Firestone property in spring 2004. Traffic on

Highway 28 at Dollar Hill frequently backs up in peak summer hours as it is, and accidents and tie-ups occur regularly in winter storm conditions. Squeezing another large development into the area will only exacerbate the existing traffic problems.

For all these reasons it is apparent that other developed sites with existing recreation facilities would be more suited for the type of recreation center R3C desires.

Voters may have the chance to weigh in on the proposed Firestone development if the project is added to the November 2004 ballot. To assist the TASC watchdog process, some concerned North Tahoe residents are putting together a strategy to give voters an opportunity to understand the Firestone property's history, its value as open space and habitat, and its endangered status as no cost, low impact recreation at North Lake Tahoe.

We need volunteers to make phone calls and presentations, write letters, donate money for media expenses, offer ideas and handle other tasks. Please help. ❁

For more details, please contact Kathie Hoxsie, (530) 583-8115 P.O. Box 857, Tahoe City, CA 96145

Conflict Tracking Project

Reprinted from *Snowlands Network* December 2003

The Forest Service assumes that there are no conflicts between recreation uses unless they receive complaints to that effect. Efforts by Snowlands Network to represent the human-powered winter recreation community on issues of conflict are thwarted when the Forest Service claims that they have received no complaints.

It is for this reason that Snowlands sponsors the California/Nevada User Conflict Tracking Project. Through this project the public is provided with an easy method for contacting the Forest Service concerning what they believe to be conflicts between motor and non-motor vehicle uses. Snowlands supplies the forms and transmits the completed submissions to the appropriate agency.

Snowlands Network urges you to participate in this project. This is your opportunity to take a step beyond being frustrated by a lack of quality winter recreation opportunities, and voice your concerns to the Forest Service. Complete the form (available on the internet at www.snowlands.org) and forward it to us if you have had a negative experience in the backcountry.





Vacation Rental Controversy Marks TRPA Board Meeting by Carla Ennis, TASC Vice Chair

If you don't have a mini-motel on your street yet, you might soon. The TRPA has reneged on its responsibility to protect the environment, insure the retention of affordable housing and guarantee that the community fabric of Tahoe areas is protected from real estate predators.

For many years vacation rentals, or Tourist Accommodation Units (TAUs), have existed in neighborhoods throughout the Tahoe Basin. In the past several years, however, the nature of this rental use has changed and accelerated as investors have bought up homes in quiet neighborhoods and turned them into party houses. Often called "mini-motels," these absentee-landlord properties are a hotly debated topic in the Tahoe area. At their December Governing Board meeting, TRPA decided to turn the issue over to local county and city jurisdictions, despite the fact that the Compact Agreement prohibits such rental use in most neighborhoods.

TASC South Shore Conservation Chair, **Michael Donahoe**, addressed the meeting. Following are his comments:

- *The TRPA's enforcement code is losing strength. "Code erosion" has undermined the credibility and reputation of the TRPA as the protector of Lake Tahoe. There is a growing public perception that people or groups with enough money or political connections can do pretty much what they want, whether or not it is in the best interests of the environment.*

- *TRPA defines vacation rentals as Tourist Accommodation Units, and most Plan Area Statements in the Basin are not zoned for this type of use. When TRPA responded to complaints of local residents and initiated enforcement of its ordinances, there was such an outcry from owners and managers of vacation rentals that the TRPA backed down. This sent the clear message that if you raise enough of a stink you don't have to follow the rules.*
- *Questions about the relative environmental impact of full-time occupancy versus periodic occupancy by large numbers of people has been ignored by the TRPA. The TASC ExCom contends that the cumulative effect of vacation rentals has not been studied to the degree mandated by the Compact Agreement, and believes such study should be completed before a final decision is made.*
- *The TRPA Board must do what is best for the Lake. This cannot be accomplished by holding stakeholder workshops dominated by special interests.*

In addition to the points addressed by Michael at the TRPA Board Meeting, there are some social issues related to TAUs that should be considered.

For example, short-term users of a TAU do not vote here, they do not send their children to local schools, participate in local groups, patronize many local services or businesses and, arguably, have less stake in the commu-

nity and our environment. Locals often say that they live in either a ghost community or party zone depending on the season. This lack of continuity and community has a negative effect on individual neighborhoods and the quality of life here as a whole.

Many owners of vacation rentals argue that if they did not rent to short-term users, they could not afford to own the home. This is not the TRPA's concern. Local zoning laws do not make exceptions for people who can only afford a home if they violate zoning regulations.

Conversion of single-family housing to TAUs reduces the stock of affordable housing and puts pressure on undeveloped land to meet this need.

Many locals who have found themselves living next to a mini-motel have moved out of the Basin.

The rise in neighborhood home prices, which has been exacerbated by vacation-rental investors, has forced many locals to move to Carson City or Gardnerville and commute to the Tahoe Basin for work. This benefits neither the physical, nor the human environment at Lake Tahoe.

Proponents of TAUs claim that the prohibition of this use violates their private property rights, and have worked against local ordinances to control noise, number of vehicles and number of occupants. In their zeal to enjoy their own rights, they do not recognize the legal rights of their neighbors who

Continued on Page 5

Will you help with LOCAL NEEDS?

**Yes, I would like to donate directly to the Tahoe Area Sierra Club Group to help fund:
TASC Newsletters, Environmental Education Materials for the Lake Tahoe Basin,
Preservation of the Martis Valley Watershed**

California Environmental Quality Act for Martis Valley Burke Creek Preservation

Other: _____

\$5 \$10 \$15 \$25 \$50 \$100 \$500

Please make checks payable to:

Tahoe Area Sierra Club
PO Box 16936 South Lake Tahoe, CA 96151

Thank You!



Outings

January 10, Saturday

Bradly Hut Cross Country Ski (2B)

On this intermediate ski we'll travel up a service road near Pole Creek to reach the Bradly hut, which sits in a valley with great views of Silver Peak. We'll eat lunch there and scout around as time permits. Metal edged skies are recommended but not required. Dogs OK with leader approval. Call leader for meeting time and place. Distance: 10 miles. Elevation gain: 1,800'.

Leader: Glenn Polochko (530) 587-5906, gpolochko@yahoo.com

January 17, Saturday

Firestone Snowshoe, Cross Country Ski, or Walk (1A)

This 2-3 hour outing is on the Firestone property that is being "watch dogged" by the Sierra Club. Information about this will be provided en route. Meet at 10:00 a.m. at the end of the driveway of the Watermelon Patch, off of Highway 28 in Tahoe City. Bring water, lunch and layered clothing. Dogs OK.

Leader: Kathie Hoxsie (530) 583-8115

January 17, Saturday

Telemark Hill Snowshoe (2B)

We'll start from the Loon Lake Chalet, travel along the lake shore, ascend Telemark Hill, return to the Chalet, then make a forest loop. The route may be strenuous depending on snow conditions. Bring the 10 essentials, 3 quarts water, lunch, snacks, and a snow shovel. Participation is limited to eight snowshoers; participants must be in good shape. *Note:* This is the same weekend the El Dorado Nordic Ski Patrol has its open house at the Chalet. Call leader for meeting time and place. Distance: 10 miles. Elevation gain: at least 2,000'.

Leader: Ted Lenzie (916) 985-6144 or Mon-Thurs at Clubted@Backpacker.com

February 6, Friday

Full Moon Snowshoe (2B)

We'll skirt Boca Lake, east of Truckee on this intermediate snowshoe, then move up toward Boca Hill where we hope to see the moon rise! Bring a snack, something warm to drink and something dry to sit on. We will meet at 6:45 p.m., leave at 7:00 p.m., and be done by 9:00 p.m.. Dogs OK. Call leader for meeting place. Distance: 6 miles. Elevation gain: 1,000'.

Leader: Glenn Polochko (530) 587-5906, gpolochko@yahoo.com

February 21, Saturday

Truckee River Snowshoe, Cross Country Ski or Walk

This 2-3 hour outing is on the bike trail along the Truckee River out of Tahoe City. There will be a discussion about the history of the river, trail and sites en route, and a no-host coffee gathering at a nearby diner afterwards. Bring water, lunch and layered clothing. Meet at 10:00 a.m. at the parking lot of the Pfeiffer House Restaurant on Highway 89 about a half a mile from the traffic light in downtown Tahoe City. NO dogs.

Leader: Kathie Hoxsie (530) 583-8115

February 21, Saturday

Round Top Lake Snowshoe (3B)

This trip will start from Carson Pass and head south to Round Top Lake. Bring the 10 essentials, 3 quarts water, lunch, snacks, and a snow shovel. For fun, we may practice building snow shelters. A Snow Park pass is required for parking. Participation is limited to eight snowshoers; participants must be in good shape. Call leader for meeting time and place. Distance: 10 miles. Elevation gain: at least 1,500'.

Leader: Ted Lenzie (916) 985-6144 or Mon-Thurs at Clubted@Backpacker.com

February 28, Saturday

Benson Hut Snowshoe (2C)

This is an intermediate snowshoe that is strenuous, with some steep sections. We'll hike over Mount Lincoln in the Sugar Bowl ski area, then continue across the Sierra Crest, which has spectacular views. We'll eat lunch at the hut. Dogs OK with leader approval; must be kept under control by voice command. Call leader for meeting time and place. Distance: 10 miles. Elevation gain: 2,200'.

Leader: Glenn Polochko (530) 587-5906, gpolochko@yahoo.com

March 13, Saturday

Echo Summit Snowshoe (3B)

This trip will start from Echo Pass then head south through Benwood Meadow and up the PCT. Bring the 10 essentials, 3 quarts water, lunch, snacks, and a snow shovel. *Note:* This tour is also a trail checkout for the following week's Echo to Kirkwood race and tour. A Snow Park pass is required for parking. Participation is limited to eight snowshoers; participants must be in good shape. Call leader for meeting time and place. Distance: 11 miles. Elevation gain: at least 1,500'.

Leader: Ted Lenzie (916) 985-6144 or Mon-Thurs at Clubted@Backpacker.com

March 14, Sunday

Echo Summit Ski Tour. (3B)

This trip will start from Echo Pass then head south through Benwood Meadow and up the PCT. Bring the 10 essentials, 3 quarts water, lunch, snacks, a snow shovel, and climbing skins. *Note:* This tour is also a trail checkout for the following week's Echo to Kirkwood race and tour. A Snow Park pass is required for parking. Participation is limited to eight skiers; participants must be in good shape. Call leader for meeting time and place. Distance: 11 miles. Elevation gain: 1,500'.

Leader: Ted Lenzie (916) 985-6144 or Mon-Thurs at Clubted@Backpacker.com



Vacation Rental Controversy

own—and live in—homes located in what are supposed to be single-family neighborhoods.

Since the TRPA Governing Board voted not to enforce its own zoning regulations, and has turned this matter over to local jurisdictions without bothering to study the cumulative impact of vacation rentals on the environment, our only recourse at this time is to try to influence our county supervi-

sors and city council members. *Call or write your elected officials to make your feelings known.*

We can also participate in workshops TRPA will hold to gather input on any proposed regulations. Call TRPA at (775) 588-4547 to find out when and where these meetings will take place. *





Sierra Club
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South Lake Tahoe, CA 96151

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Be sure to check the TASC website frequently for updated information on Lake Tahoe Basin issues, outings, meetings, current committee chairs and activities. Go to: <http://motherlode.sierraclub.org/tahoe>

Two
Outstanding Speakers
of Interest to Both
North & South Shore Members!
MARK YOUR
CALENDARS NOW!!

Sierra Nevada Alliance Executive Director to Speak at January South Shore Conservation Meeting

Come to the TASC meeting on January 15 when our guest speaker will be **Joan Clayburgh**, Executive Director of the Sierra Nevada Alliance. Clayburgh will discuss the focus of the Alliance, the issues in which the group becomes involved, how those issues are chosen and give examples of work they have done in the Sierra. In addition to learning about the organization, we'll explore ways that Sierra Club activities can dovetail with Alliance work.

TRPA's John Singlaub to Speak at February 19 Meeting

Join us at the February TASC meeting!

Our guest speaker will be the TRPA's new EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, JOHN SINGLAUB, and we are honored to have the opportunity to address areas of concern.

WE NEED ALL OF YOUR SUPPORT, so be sure not to miss this meeting. Mark your calendars now!

Meetings will be at the Douglas Co. Fire Station at Elks Point (Round Hill), NV • 6:30 p.m. – 8:30 p.m.
Chair: Michael Donahoe (775-588-5466 for information)