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Newsletter: February/March 2016

More traffic threatens not only our environment, but also our safety.

Neither Placer County nor the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency have a sufficient evacuation plan for Lake Tahoe, yet both agencies continue to approve traffic-generating projects. With increases in visitation, several large projects already approved (i.e. Homewood Village Resorts and Boulder Bay) or proposed (e.g. Squaw Valley, Martis Valley West, and the Brockway Campground), congestion problems will likely get worse.

In addition, [new mobile phone apps](#) are sending visitors [through residential neighborhoods](#), which in some cases have served as alternative routes for emergency responders. Also, drivers unfamiliar with winter conditions mean more road-closing accidents ([1,2](#)). **In emergencies, such delays could mean life or death for someone, or interfere with the ability of firefighters to suppress a wildfire before it grows.** Last year, a wildfire [literally trapped people on a congested highway](#). We simply can't keep adding more traffic and people without figuring out how emergencies will be handled. Further, although the Fanny Bridge bypass project is [touted as improving emergency access to the West Shore](#), SR 89 along the West Shore will remain two lanes. The new bypass simply moves the bottleneck south.



How will more traffic impact emergency services?
(Recent congestion. Lower right image from [unofficialalpine.com](#))

In addition, as seen in the updates below, there are two other themes that keep popping up. First, developers (generally out-of-state large corporations) [seek to damage our environment for private profit](#) and second, they want the rest of us to pay for the infrastructure they need to do it. *The good news is that many of these projects have not yet been approved, so there are still opportunities to speak up!*

We urge you to help FOWS and others in our community increase awareness of these issues. Talking to your neighbors, sending letters to the media, commenting on projects and plans, or even just sharing this Newsletter are all ways to help engage others. In addition, if you belong to a Homeowners Association on West Shore, we welcome the opportunity to speak with you and your neighbors regarding local issues, our activities, and how we may work with you to better represent your concerns and ideas. Please [contact us](#) for more information!

Sincerely,

Susan Gearhart
President, Friends of the West Shore

Regional and Local Planning Updates:

TRPA Regional Plan Update (RPU):

The final hearing in the U.S. Court of Appeals, Ninth Circuit, regarding FOWS' and Sierra Club's RPU [lawsuit](#) has been set for April 12. The hearing is scheduled for the morning session at the James R. Browning US Courthouse, Courtroom 3, 95 7th

St., San Francisco, CA. The public is welcome to attend.

In addition, the 2012 RPU called for an evaluation of TRPA's environmental threshold standards every four years and consideration of amendments as needed to achieve the standards. This year marks the first four-year update. FOWS will follow this process closely and keep you updated on conditions, proposed amendments, and opportunities for improvement.

Placer County - Tahoe Basin Area Plan (TBAP):

According to [staff's report to their Board of Supervisors](#), the draft environmental impact report/study is expected in late spring. Staff notes that coordination with the TRPA regarding regional impacts, especially traffic, has delayed the report's release.

Martis Valley West Parcel Specific Plan (MVWSP):

Public comments on the draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR) for the Martis Valley West Parcel Specific Plan were due 12/22. [Comments posted on Placer County's website](#) include 172 written public comment letters. Notably, none of the 145 individual public comment letters expressed support for the proposed project.

[FOWS submitted substantial comments](#) regarding the project's potential impacts to the Lake Tahoe Basin, including but not limited to more traffic, air and water pollution, scenic impacts, and impacts to emergency services and evacuations. Comments submitted by other organizations raised many of the same concerns. Several alternative options that relocate development to less impactful areas were recommended (in fact, these options would be consistent with the existing adopted land use plans for the area). Placer County anticipates release of the final EIR this spring.



Although the DEIR claims the buildings would not be seen from Lake Tahoe, this image (taken by a drone at the approximate height of proposed development) indicates otherwise. (Provided by Ann Nichols, North Tahoe Preservation Alliance)

Brockway Campground:

Advertisement in Sierra Sun (early January)
[View larger image](#)

In early January, many were surprised to find this insert in the Sierra Sun proclaiming a "Planned Opening" in 2018 for the Brockway Campground. This 550-unit, amenity-laden campground hasn't even undergone CEQA scoping (involving a [Notice of Preparation or NOP](#)). Based on this brazen advertisement, it appears that public involvement and environmental review are of little concern to the developer.

Many are also concerned about the cumulative impacts of the MVWSP project *plus* the Campground, as they will collectively add 1000's more people and vehicles to the undeveloped forested ridgeline. In addition, removal of trees for the Campground may open up views of proposed development to - and therefore *from* - Lake Tahoe (an impact not addressed in the MVWSP DEIR).

Opinion letters have recently been published in our local news. We encourage you to send in your own ideas and concerns to help spread awareness of these proposals and their impacts to Lake Tahoe.

[Brockway Campground advertisement presumptuous, misleading](#)

[What is Lake Tahoe-Truckee's environmental tipping point?](#)

The NOP has been "put on hold" while the developers and their consultants respond to comments on the MVWSP. Because this project falls entirely within the Lake Tahoe Basin, it will presumably have to meet TRPA's environmental standards, which are more protective than Placer County's. *It is never too early to start telling TRPA how you feel about this project* ([click here to email TRPA](#)).

Local Project Updates:

Homewood Update:

On 12/22 a [legal ruling](#) from the Court of Appeals of California, Third District regarding the Clean Energy Commission's (CEC) challenge of the Homewood Village Resort's environmental impact report (EIR) was released. * While the Court did not agree with all claims, one of the most notable outcomes is the Court's decision regarding emergency evacuation:

“There are two components to the wildfire evacuation risk - evacuation by residents, workers, and visitors, and the impact of that evacuation on access by emergency entities responding to wildfire.

The EIR fails to evaluate both.”

- Court of Appeals of California, 3rd District

The Court also stated: "...evacuation [of people from the project area] could also impact the environment by impeding emergency responders who might otherwise be able to prevent the spread of wildfire," and the EIR also "failed to identify the capacity of SR 89 or connecting roads to accommodate the evacuation of people, including additional people from the project."

The CEC noted that analyzing this impact must involve the evaluation of "the total number of residents, businesses and tourists that can be safely evacuated from the West Shore, without impeding emergency vehicle access, in the event of wildfire, earthquake or seiche and evaluate the cumulative impact of the project on natural disaster evacuation and emergency vehicle access to the West Shore." The Court also pointed out that while the EIR concluded significant and unavoidable impacts to congestion on SR 89, the EIR "inexplicably" did not conclude those "same inadequate roads to be a significant, unavoidable impact in the context of a wildfire requiring emergency evacuation."

The Court directed Placer County to comply with CEQA, which will require addressing the failure to identify, describe, and analyze the wildfire evacuation risk. FOWS will keep you updated on opportunities to engage on this topic.

* The ruling notes it is "not to be published." This means it cannot be cited by other legal documents; however, the ruling is public information.

Squaw Valley Expansion:

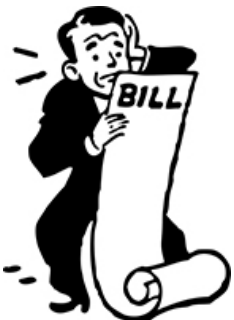
Release of the final EIR for the massive Village at Squaw Valley project is [now expected this April](#). In the meantime, Sierra Watch, local organizations (including FOWS), business owners, and others continue to [express concerns](#) regarding the negative impacts the proposed project will have on our region. We urge you to send comments to the Board of Supervisors (as noted in our recent Alert, you may easily do so through Keep Squaw True's letter - [click here](#)). In fact, the TRPA has also [expressed concerns regarding Basin impacts](#) (better late than never). Given the attention by other organizations, agencies, and the public, there remains the opportunity to encourage Placer County to do the right thing!

Fanny Bridge/SR 89 Realignment Project:

Placer County Supervisors [recently approved a resolution](#) wherein once the project is completed, a segment of SR 89 including Fanny Bridge will be relinquished to the County. How the County will pay for maintenance of the roadway (the County assumes it will receive more road maintenance funding although [California is already struggling to pay for roadway maintenance](#), while also hoping federal funding will be available for future bridge work) or the new 'improvements' advertised with the project, including sidewalks, parking areas, landscaping, and lighting, has yet to be determined.

Liberty Utilities (aka Calpeco):

As expected, our [energy rates will be increasing](#) in part to allow Northstar, Squaw Valley, and other developers out of the Basin to develop more. Last year, Liberty Energy requested an increase of 17.34% over present rates, beginning 1/1/2016. Although [the project was already approved by the TRPA and Placer County](#), future phases of construction can begin only after certain demand-based milestones are met. As more developments are proposed for our area, ratepayers should continue to raise questions regarding impacts to future demand and eventually, our utility bills.



Other Regional Projects:

Several other regional projects are in the works, including substantial developments in Alpine Meadows and the proposed Base-to-Base Gondola that will cut through the Granite Chief Wilderness Area. View project updates [here](#).

We invite you to contact us to learn more, ask questions, or simply get to know the FOWS Board.

Please contact Jennifer Quashnick, FOWS Conservation Consultant, at: jgtahoe@sbcglobal.net, or Susan Gearhart, FOWS President, at: susan@friendswestshore.org or (530) 525-0368.

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