

Tahoe Ski Resort Develops Plan to Adapt to Low-Snow Seasons

A Lake Tahoe ski resort is developing a plan to improve skiing during low-snow seasons by removing boulders and trees from several runs.

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AP

RENO, Nev. (AP) — A Lake Tahoe ski resort is developing a plan to improve skiing during low-snow seasons by removing boulders and trees from several runs.

Heavenly Mountain Resort's plan calls for widening a dozen trails and removing potentially hundreds or even thousands of trees.

The hope is to reduce skier and snowboard traffic bottlenecks on busy days at the South Lake Tahoe resort straddling the [California-Nevada](#) line. Low-snow seasons are expected to become more common due to climate change.

The Forest Service is currently reviewing the plan. It determined in a draft environmental assessment the plan would have no significant environmental impacts. The assessment is now subject to a 45-day public comment period.

Lewis Feldman of Zephyr Cove is among those who support the move.

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Feldman, a Heavenly pass-holder for 40 years, told the Reno Gazette Journal that he's witnessed firsthand how climate change has reduced the reliability of ideal ski conditions at Tahoe.

"The snow levels have risen, the amount of accumulation has become far more variable and the ski experience has been significantly impacted," Feldman said.

Removing boulders and downed trees will make additional runs skiable even in low-tide conditions.

"This isn't rocket science," Feldman said.

In the hazard removal areas, boulders would be blasted with explosives to a height of 12 to 18 inches (30 to 46 centimeters) and moved by hand or equipment. Stumps would be ground or cut to a height of less than 6 inches (15 centimeters).

By making terrain more skiable with less snow the operators reduce the amount of snowmaking necessary to open runs.

"The height of these natural features can require up to five feet (1.5 meters) or more of snow coverage before runs can be opened," the draft assessment states. "During low snow years, a great deal of energy and water resources for snowmaking is required to provide enough snow on these trails so they can be safely opened."

Twenty-two of the 25 public comments on the initial plan didn't include any objections.

But Elizabeth Kingsland of the Nevada Department of Conservation and Natural Resources questioned whether analysis of the potential impact on whitebark pine was sufficient. She said the project would result in the loss of more than 6 acres (2 hectares) of the trees.

"It appears that the impacts cannot be fully stated without properly evaluating the long-term effects of removing thousands of healthy whitebark pine trees from the part of the Lake Tahoe Basin with the healthiest whitebark pine population," Kingsland wrote.

The Forest Service responded by stating the removal would be a small portion of the total whitebark population.

"The proposed action may affect individuals, but it is not likely to accelerate the trend toward federal listing or result in loss of viability for whitebark pine," the agency said.

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