The Lake Tahoe Report

Tahoe City's Commons Beach Now Restored and Open for Use

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The public beach in downtown Tahoe City has been completely renovated to improve its recreation facilities, restore its natural beauty, and reduce nonpoint source pollution to Lake Tahoe. The new facilities include a streetscape with large vista plazas, a playground with rock-climbing and play equipment, a group picnic area, a small amphitheater, restrooms, and an enlarged sand beach. The grand reopening of the park is at 10 a.m., Oct. 31.

The Tahoe City Public Utility District has taken the lead on this project. It convened a 35-member citizen and regulatory agency committee to address the public's desires and the need for environmental improvement. The project is an excellent example of the benefits that our communities are receiving as part of the Lake Tahoe Environmental Improvement Program (EIP).

The property was originally deeded to the residents of Tahoe City by President Ulysses S. Grant in September 1872. A large commercial wharf, which accommodated the Tahoe steamers, a railroad spur line and numerous buildings, occupied the site until a fire destroyed them in 1937. These facilities were owned and operated by the Lake Tahoe Railway and Transportation Company at the time, but the Tahoe City Public Utility District (TCPUD) has been the primary steward since 1949.

Over time, as the Tahoe Basin was developed, the highway was widened, and the slope between the town and the lower terrace became steeper and less stable. Because of steepness, pedestrian traffic and lack of an efficient irrigation system, many areas of bare soil and eroding slopes developed, contributing sediment and nutrients to Lake Tahoe. The Commons Beach Lake Access Enhancement Project placed permanent stone retaining walls and rows of boulders to stabilize the steep slopes, and it amended the soil and planted over 6000 native plants, including shrubs, groundcovers, grasses and wildflowers, on the bare areas. A permanent irrigation system has also been installed throughout the four acre park.

A variety of best management practices have been installed throughout the park to reduce polluted runoff to the lake. The parking lot has been rebuilt, and a sophisticated "Stormfilter interceptor vault" has been installed to remove soil particles and other contaminants, such as motor oil, from runoff before it is released to an overflow basin that further filters the water. Infiltration trenches and vegetated swales will also slow runoff from the slopes and encourage it to percolate into the soil.

The lake edge on the eastern half of the site has long been a source of erosion. Fill had been brought in for the railroad, and later boulders were installed along the shoreline. For years, waves washed over the boulders and transported tons of sediment into the lake. In order to correct this, the ineffective boulders have been removed, and a "dynamic revetment" has been built along the shoreline. This structure incorporates several layers of varying sizes of small boulders and 1,150 tons of cobblestones, which dissipate the

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energy from breaking waves, keeping the erosive water away from the underlying soil. The structure was patterned after naturally occurring beaches around the lake, such as Hurricane Beach on the west shore. Native grasses and rushes have been planted on top of the structure to filter surface runoff.

The play area has been enlarged by 2,500 square feet, with new play equipment that meets all updated safety and accessibility standards. Interpretive signs featuring local animals and Tahoe fish have also been added. The walkways and new restroom conform to requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA accessible). The Tahoe City lakeside trail connects to the trails within the park, and large areas of pavers and signage call attention to pedestrian crossings. Bicycle parking is provided at key locations.

The streetscape has separated the sidewalk from the street with planters where feasible. It features seating and viewing areas, as well as a new cable railing to meet updated codes and allow views through to the lake. Almost two miles of stainless steel cables were installed.

This large, impressive environmental improvement project was funded through numerous community and statewide sources including the California Parks Bond Act of 2000, the California Tahoe Conservancy, the Tahoe City Public Utility District, the North Lake Tahoe Resort Association, the Placer County Redevelopment Agency, the Tahoe City Beautification Committee, the Truckee Tahoe Community Foundation, and the Kiwanis Club of North Lake Tahoe.