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Ski Resort Expansion Threatens Damage to Lake Tahoe

Local residents and Sierra Club ask judge to limit massive Homewood development

San Francisco – In a move to protect the environmental quality of a lake known for its natural beauty, community members and conservationists today asked a federal court to reject an inadequate Environmental Impact Report and to stop the construction of a 325-unit complex along California’s scenic west shore of Lake Tahoe.

Homewood Mountain Resort is a small, quaint, family-oriented ski facility located in a primarily residential community of rustic single-family homes tucked among tall trees. When real estate developers proposed to build hundreds of condominiums and hotel rooms along with a commercial center, local residents challenged the plan before the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency (TRPA) as well as the Placer County Board of Supervisors.

Despite serious environmental issues, TRPA approved the project in December. The Agency further weakened the existing Tahoe Regional Plan by passing special amendments for Homewood that will waive or loosen restrictions on building height, residential density, and commercial development.

TRPA’s fundamental duty under the bi-state Tahoe Regional Planning Compact is to restore the Lake’s water clarity and health, which it has so far failed to accomplish.

In a separate court case decided last September, a federal judge upheld the Compact's mandate to show that an effective regional plan to achieve the restoration is in place and that any new development is consistent with that plan. TRPA approved the Homewood plan without first complying with this court-ordered requirement.

“TRPA has openly acknowledged that its current plan is incapable of achieving even the basic standard for water clarity in the Lake,” says Wendy Park, an attorney for the public interest law firm Earthjustice. “Rather than loosening the requirements for future development, not only in Homewood but across the entire Tahoe basin, TRPA should instead come up with a coherent and effective regional plan to restore and protect the Lake.” TRPA has not updated its Regional Plan since 1987.

Earthjustice filed today's lawsuit against TRPA and the Homewood developers in the U.S. District Court of Eastern California. Placer County is also named in the suit for violating the California Environmental Quality Act. Earthjustice is representing the Sierra Club as well as Friends of the West Shore, a grassroots community organization representing more than 500 members from the California side of Lake Tahoe.

"We welcome a revitalized Homewood Ski Area, but the current project is simply too large," says Mason Overstreet, Conservation Director of Friends of the West Shore. "A smaller resort in scale with the surrounding community would still bring in hundreds of jobs for residents and millions of dollars in revenue. We must be careful not to destroy the beauty that attracts visitors to Lake Tahoe in the first place."

The environmental activists emphasize that they are not asking the court for a permanent halt to the Homewood development. Instead, they are seeking a new Environmental Impact Report that properly mitigates the effects of development near Lake Tahoe's shores, as required by the Tahoe Regional Plan.

"The agency responsible for protecting Lake Tahoe should be enforcing environmental standards, not creating loopholes to drive bulldozers through," points out Sierra Club spokesperson Laurel Ames. "An honest appraisal of the impact on the residents and the environment will make for a better project and a better result for everyone involved."

To read the lawsuit go to:

<http://earthjustice.org/documents/legal-document/pdf/tahoe-homewood-complaint>

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