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Plan for park at Bass Lake is challenged

Wildlife, traffic and lights are on a list of homeowners' concerns.

By Sekhar Padmanabhan -- Bee Staff Writer - (*Published July 21, 2003*)

Citing concerns for federally protected birds, traffic and costs, some El Dorado Hills homeowners are questioning El Dorado County's plans for a regional park at nearby Bass Lake.

The homeowners and county officials will meet tonight to discuss the 41-acre Bass Lake Regional Park, proposed north and east of the lake about 2 1/2 miles north of Highway 50.

The park, when fully built, would include turf areas and soccer fields, ball fields and basketball courts, a disc golf course, children's play areas, a 6,000-square-foot community center, trail system, nature interpretive center and even a 1-acre, off-leash dog park.

Despite residents' concerns, county Supervisor Rusty Dupray, who represents part of El Dorado Hills, said the park absolutely will be built.

"We've invested too much time and money," he said. "We'll do everything we can to protect the wildlife in that area."

County officials say the park would help relieve the area's critical shortage of playing fields and add other needed recreational amenities.

But the homeowners, who organized in June as the Bass Lake Action Committee, say the county should create a park with amenities for more "passive uses," such as jogging trails, rather than large, lighted ball fields, said committee member Dave Glazier.

The Bass Lake Action Committee has 25 active members, mostly from the Hills of El Dorado, Bridlewood Canyon and Woodridge subdivisions. It also draws residents from Cameron Park's Woodleigh Lane area. Another group aligned with the committee has been formed in the Green Valley Estates area, northwest of the park site.

Some homeowners say they worry that park users will intrude on the area around the lake, which is used by federally protected birds and other wildlife.

Bridlewood Canyon resident Lauryl Frame said she has seen blue herons, egrets, Canada geese and even a bald eagle, all protected by federal Migratory Bird Treaty Act, grace the lake and nearby open space.

"I'm just hoping they can keep the area around the lake safe," Frame said.

According to county documents, tree removal for the park could affect nesting raptors and protected species. But county documents say the park would not include the lake or encroach upon areas "contained within dikes and other facilities associated with the lake."

Residents say they also worry that the park would generate more traffic on Bass Lake Road, a narrow road that has many curves but lacks turnouts.

However, Gary Hyden, county parks project coordinator, said Wednesday the park will result in less traffic than the homes originally planned for the site would have caused.

And although some residents expressed concerns about bright lights on the park's ball fields, Hyden said plans already call for some lights to be turned away from area homes.

The county proposed to spend \$500,000 on the park's first phase -- a parking lot and soccer field -- but some residents criticize the timing.

Glazier said even though the \$500,000 is coming from Proposition 40, which voters approved statewide in March 2002, the county parks department this year faces a dramatic reduction in funds: Its annual capital improvement budget, typically between \$550,000 and \$600,000, has been reduced to \$150,000.

"A fear is that, 'OK, you are going to start doing something that you don't have the ability to see through?' " Glazier said. "If they do that, will there be ... increased taxes for everybody (in the county)?"

Responding to residents' concerns, county officials have extended into August the time for public comment before the park's environmental impact report is started. The public input will be analyzed, and a draft environmental impact report will be issued. For the park to be built, county supervisors must approve its final environmental report and plan.

Glazier said he expects about 100 residents at tonight's meeting, which he said will provide a conduit for information to reach the lead agency, the El Dorado County Department of Airports, Parks and Grounds.

Another meeting, a public workshop on the park, will be at 7 p.m. Aug. 11 at the Board of Supervisors chambers, 330 Fair Lane, Placerville.

For more information, call the county parks department at (530) 621-5864. The committee can be reached by e-mail at blacinfo@aol.com.

About the Writer

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Bass Lake meeting

Topic: El Dorado County's proposed Bass Lake Regional Park

Time: 7 p.m.

Place: Faith Episcopal Church, 2200 Country Club Drive, Cameron Park

Sponsor: Bass Lake Action Committee

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