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**Council calls for \$2.7 million recreation area funding: More rangers, campground changes and trail improvements on ranger's wish list**

By Bridget Jones

The Auburn City Council wants to make sure the Auburn State Recreation Area gets the \$2.7 million in funding it needs.

This week the City Council unanimously approved sending a letter to the House Appropriations Committee in Washington, D.C. asking that the committee grant the funding.

The Bureau of Reclamation, which owns the area, has included a line item in the president's budget for \$2.7 million for the state recreation area, and now the budget is in the hands of the committee.

Mike Finnegan, area manager for the Bureau of Reclamation's Central California Area Office, said it isn't apparent how the funding will affect the area, because Reclamation doesn't know how much will come through, but he feels "optimistic" that there will be funding.

The bureau is in talks with State Parks for a new management contract for the area, Finnegan said.

"We are in the process right now of negotiating a long-term agreement with (State Parks) for managing not only Auburn but Folsom and Natoma," Finnegan said. "We need to get that out of the way and let the appropriations process continue to a natural end."

Reclamation is also working with Cal Fire on fire protection as well as shaded fuel break maintenance contracts, Finnegan said.

Finnegan couldn't give an exact breakdown of how the funding would be split between the two agencies, but said State Parks would receive the biggest portion of it. Reclamation budgets for basic public health and safety, law enforcement and management of the area, Finnegan said.

Finnegan said he thinks if the full \$2.7 million comes through it will be enough to support the area.

“Yes I do,” he said. “We will have to wait and see what Congress finally enacts ... at the end of the day we’ll get what we get. We are not looking at anything called a closure, that’s not anything we are looking at at this point.”

Scott Liske, supervising state park ranger for the Auburn State Recreation Area, said there have been no changes in the way the recreation area is operating this season. Liske said he does have a wish list for the funds, including trail improvements.

“(Our campgrounds) are classified as primitive, but certainly if there is money there are always improvements that can be made even to a primitive campground,” Liske said. “We could use more rangers. If you increase the size of the campgrounds, then you would want to have more staff.”

Liske said he hopes the committee will find it necessary to fund the resource.

“Auburn (has) a unique state park and there are a number of different activities that someone can do,” he said. “Obviously the main (ones): horseback riding, hiking, running, fishing, a lot of state parks offer those things, but we have an off-highway vehicle unit, we offer hunting during the fall hunting seasons. The mountain biking is some of the best in the region, and the fact that it’s open year round is pretty valuable to people. Whitewater recreation, that’s huge.”

Councilman Mike Holmes said he put the letter approval on the council agenda because he wants to make sure the committee hears the voices of those who want the recreation area to remain funded.

“We are trying to impress upon the chair of the House Appropriations Committee, ‘Do not cut this,’ and that we would like to have the whole thing,” Holmes said. “What I’m concerned about is that the Bureau of Reclamation put this in the budget and if Congress cuts it, then the Bureau of Reclamation is basically off the hook because they can truthfully say, ‘We did what you asked us to do.’ So that’s the reason this letter is being sent. I requested that it be faxed first ... so that by the end of this week I’m hoping it will have reached the committee staff.”

During the council meeting Councilwoman Bridget Powers said she thought it was important to include more information in the letter about the large amount of

wild land urban interface Auburn has and the importance of having enough fire protection funding.

“(I don’t think it’s good) if we just talk about recreation in our community and we don’t talk about what’s really more important is the safety of our community,” Powers said Tuesday. “Not to say recreation isn’t important and doesn’t help develop the economy of our community, but we are at very high risk of suffering a very catastrophic fire because of the fuel management we are not doing right now in the state park.”

Powers said she was going to add a paragraph to the letter before it was faxed.

Michael Otten, president of the Placer County Historical Society and member of the Placer County Visitors Bureau board, said he thinks the city and Placer and El Dorado counties should try to push to have the recreation area named a national monument.

“Whether a dam is ever built or not, it could still qualify, and it would ensure that the area is protected and recognized for what it is,” Otten said. “It had such a major part of the Gold Rush, California history and of course U.S. history in terms of a lot of the gold that came from California was used to help the Union cause during the Civil War.”

Auburn resident Karen Tajbl said she is a frequent user of the Auburn State Recreation Area and she hopes the funding comes through.

“We just got back this very second from kayaking on Lake Clementine,” Tajbl said Tuesday. “We walk in the canyon area at least once a week, and I have been kayaking this season at least four times at Lake Clementine. It’s very dear to my heart. The ideal situation would be to transfer that to the State Parks control, but the state parks don’t have money now either.”

Tajbl said the area seems to be as popular as ever.

“Sunday we went down there and walked, and it was just parked full,” she said. “Cars were just lining the highway. So, this is a much-used area and I’m sure it contributes to the health of our community.”

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