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NEWS RELEASE

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TRPA GOVERNING BOARD VOTES ON HEAVENLY MASTER PLAN AMENDMENT

Lake Tahoe, CA/NV – After nearly eight hours of discussion and public testimony, the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency’s Governing Board voted Wednesday to approve the Heavenly Mountain Resort Master Plan Amendment.

In a series of several procedural votes, the board certified the environmental analysis of multiple alternatives, approved amendments to various planning documents, and approved a modified version of Heavenly’s project for the North Bowl ski lift and trails. The main debate was whether a stand of late seral red fir trees constitute old growth in the area where the new lift will be located, according to Agency officials.

After lengthy deliberations, the Governing Board approved the staff recommendation which included further protections for the environment by not allowing Heavenly to cut trees over 24 inches in diameter (diameter is measured at breast height) in the ski run adjacent to the new North Bowl lift. Heavenly also agreed not to groom the run, which will protect underlying vegetation from disturbance.

“TRPA believes the modified alternative was the best option for total environmental quality—removing trees is only one part of the equation,” said Julie Regan, Communications Chief. “The agency was concerned about the excessive amount of ground disturbance and grading in Alternative 4A, which was the preferred alternative of several environmental organizations,” Regan said.

If Heavenly were to construct an angled or “kinked” lift, the amount of ground disturbance and grading would double because of the need for a mid station and additional lift towers. “In the end, the Governing Board could not approve an alternative route for the North Bowl chair featuring an angled ski lift because of the potential negative impacts from the removal of nearly 31,000 cubic yards of soil versus about 15,000 cubic yards for a straight lift option,” Regan said.

“I believe in the end, and the science showed us, that this stand of late seral forest was already highly fragmented and did not offer the ecological benefits important to an old growth forest,” said John Singlaub, Executive Director. “It boils down to the difference of only 62 large trees from one alternative to the other but the angled lift would require cutting into the mountain and disturbing twice as much soil which in my mind demonstrates that Alternative 4 is better for Lake Tahoe,” Singlaub said.

The debate over old growth trees heated up with emotional testimony from those opposing the North Bowl Project. Consultants for the project pointed out the context of the old growth issue by explaining various facts: there are approximately 37,000 acres of late seral or old growth forest in the Tahoe Basin and the approved North Bowl lift would affect only about six acres for the entire project.

“Our policy is to protect stands of large, older trees whenever possible since they are an important part of our forest ecosystem,” said Regan. “But the Heavenly project required a trade off between the removal of additional large trees versus a more damaging alternative that didn’t solve the problems that need to be addressed,” she said. In addition, Heavenly agreed to implement forest treatments to accelerate old growth ecological characteristics on a 41-acre timber stand.

Officials from the TRPA, USDA Forest Service and Heavenly Mountain Resort have worked for several years to create an alternative that has the least amount of impacts on the large trees and on water quality. The Forest Service supported the recommended alternative and testified to that effect before the Governing Board.

In addition to the North Bowl ski lift, the board voted to approve the following projects outlined in Phase 1 of the Heavenly Mountain Resort Master Plan Amendment:

- Skiways Gladed Ski Trails and Powderbowl Gladed Ski Trail
- Gondola Hiking and Cross-Country Ski/Snowshoe Trails, Zipline Adventure Ride, Emergency and Limited Maintenance Use of Gondola Mid-Station Road, and Top of Gondola Special Events Area
- Skyline Trail/Summer Road Relocation and Re-grading

To review the final environmental document, visit <http://www.fs.fed.us/r5/lbmu> or www.trpa.org.

The Tahoe Regional Planning Agency cooperatively leads the effort to preserve, restore, and enhance the unique natural and human environment of the Lake Tahoe region now and in the future. For more information, contact Angela Moniot at 775-589-5235 or for a complete GB agenda, visit www.trpa.org.

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