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Upgrade plan for Sly Park gains approval

By Cathy Locke - Bee Staff Writer

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A plan to improve safety and enhance recreational opportunities in and around a popular lake has received the stamp of approval.

The El Dorado Irrigation District board Monday adopted a 20-year blueprint for managing, developing and restoring facilities in the 2,000-acre Sly Park Recreation Area, east of Placerville.

The master plan outlines an estimated \$31.4 million in projects, including new parking lots, improved campsites, new and improved trails and a visitor center.

"You're not committed to perform them in any order," Dan Corcoran, environmental review manager, told the board. "There's quite a range of opportunities here."

Some area residents, however, said they fear improvements will attract more visitors, contributing to the degradation of the recreation area.

"When we arrived, it was as near perfection as you could imagine," said Robert Sonke, a 19-year resident of Pollock Pines.

That has changed with the recreation area's growing popularity, he said.

"Now people in Pollock Pines are run off the lake, especially on weekends," Sonke said. "The people who come don't respect the outdoors."

District funds would be better spent increasing staffing at Sly Park to oversee activities than building more facilities, he argued.

The recreation area, with the 640-acre Jenkinson Lake as its centerpiece, draws about 190,000 visitors a year. The irrigation district assumed ownership from the federal Bureau of Reclamation in late 2003 and set about preparing a plan to upgrade boating, camping and other facilities.

Among the first projects is expansion of the marina parking area on the western shore for boat trailers to help reduce illegal roadside parking. The district has applied for a state grant for about half the anticipated \$800,000 cost, with construction expected between July and October.

Although the project will provide parking and traffic relief, it will have a negative aesthetic

impact, Corcoran said, noting that it will require removing 180 trees in a highly visible area.

Other projects include improvements to Scout Hill. Kate Kirsh of Rocklin-based Foothill Associates, the firm that prepared the master plan, said work on the north portion will be done first and will include new access roads, designated tent sites, trail improvements, a circle of yurts, a waterless restroom and low-flow showers. Similar improvements are planned later to the south.

The district is negotiating an agreement to allow the Sugarloaf Foundation to develop a center at Sly Park for a summer fine arts camp. It would be rented to other groups the rest of the year.

Board members said they were sympathetic with residents' concerns about abuse of park facilities by some visitors. They stressed, however, that upgrades are needed to better manage current use, not to increase the park's capacity.

Chuck Nozicka, a consultant who prepared the market and financial analyses, said the issue of degradation is common at recreation areas throughout the foothills.

Part of the district's job, Nozicka said, is to teach visitors how to treat the area properly.

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