

Seasons dramatically changing at Tahoe

By Julia Prodis Sulek, San Jose Mercury News

TAHOE CITY – There’s something disconcerting about life at Lake Tahoe these days.

It’s still winter, but visitors are renting bikes instead of snowshoes and kayaks instead of skis. Come summer – without last-ditch torrential rains – the lake level is expected to be at such a historic low that some marinas will have to dredge for boats to launch. Jumping off the end of a pier could result in a rock-hard landing.

California’s epic drought, entering its perilous fourth year, has combined with a pattern of warming temperatures to cast a “Twilight Zone” quality on one of the state’s most popular winter destinations and iconic landmarks.

“It’s bizarre what people are doing now. It’s so out of season,” said Geoffrey Schladow, director of the Tahoe Environmental Research Center and a UC Davis professor. “Years like this are going to become more common.”

In many ways, Lake Tahoe is California’s canary in the coal mine – at 6,200 feet. While our weather can quickly swing from one extreme to the other, the twin realities of the current relentless drought and steady warming over the past century are converging to create a remarkably different experience at the venerable – and vulnerable – lake. Everyone, from environmental agencies to businesses to tourists, is scrambling to adapt.

Long-term predictions by Lake Tahoe scientists warn that by the end of the century, summers could be two months longer and temperatures 8 degrees hotter than when Squaw Valley hosted

the 1960 Winter Olympics. The dire effects of climate change present daunting challenges to local government officials, who have been patting themselves on the back for their efforts to Keep Tahoe Blue and reverse some of the damage caused by rampant lakeside development in the 1960s and '70s.

But there's nothing they can do to guarantee winter.

Read the whole story