

Cameras around Tahoe change fight against wildfires

By Scott Sonner, AP

A growing network of cameras trained on the mountains around Lake Tahoe is changing the way crews fight Western wildfires by allowing early detection that triggers quicker, cheaper, more tactical suppression than traditional war-like operations, experts said Wednesday.

The high-definition cameras can be operated remotely to pan, tilt and zoom in the search for the first wisps of smoke in remote areas, said Graham Kent, director of the Nevada Seismological Laboratory.

Equipped with real-time and time-lapse imagery, the cameras piggyback on an existing network that detects earthquakes, Kent told the annual meeting of the Seismological Society of America in Reno.

Last summer, a half-dozen of the hazard cameras at Tahoe were credited with the discovery of six fires and provided early intelligence on more than 25, Kent said.

"The old style of firefighting is like storming the beach at Normandy, but if you can get on a fire early, with special tools, then it becomes more like a special forces situation," Kent said. "Firefighting is going to become much more tactical."

He said he's currently working with firefighters in Idaho and Montana to develop similar networks.

Frank Vernon, a research geophysicist at the Scripps Institution of Oceanography at UC San Diego, began developing the "virtual fire lookout towers" in 2002 when he and others

built a large-scale, wireless network in Southern California.

It now includes more than 64 fixed mountaintop cameras in 16 remote locations across San Diego, Riverside and Imperial counties.

“Working with partners to provide this technology to the community is vitally important as extreme drought conditions, warmer weather and more frequent Santa Ana wind events have all contributed to increased wildfire activity and longer fire seasons each year in Southern California,” Vernon said.

The multi-hazard function of the cameras is especially valuable to communities such as Lake Tahoe and Reno that border wildlands,

“The big three for us are floods, fires and earthquakes,” said Kyle West, safety and training manager in Reno. The city is located in Washoe County, where officials recently updated their hazard mitigation plan.

Kent said officials hope to have more than 20 of the cameras up and operating by the end of this year.

“The notion of fire cameras has been out there for 20 years. But they were mostly closed circuit, analogue systems with poor resolution,” Kent said.

The video feeds are available to state, local and federal firefighters and can be viewed by the public on the AlertTahoe website.

UNR scientists are working on technology to use “machine vision – to teach computers to spot the fires without humans,” Kent said.

“We’re sort of crowd-sourcing lookout towers,” he said. “Anybody in this room, if they are feeling anxious or just have a premonition, they can go onto AlertTahoe, right click on the camera pane and see the time lapse. We could have

hundreds of people searching for fires at any one time – people who are just basically concerned.”

LTCC hosting free youth soccer tourney

Lake Tahoe Community College is hosting a free children's soccer tournament May 1 from 9am-4pm at the community playfield next to the PE building.

Kids in grades K-5 and all abilities are welcome.

LTCC men's soccer coach Nick Arbelaez will run the tournament. Several athletes from his 2015 conference championship soccer team will assist, along with players from LTCC's women's soccer team.

Water and snacks will be provided to all participants. Participants should bring cleats, shin guards, and any other gear they have, but no special equipment is required to play. Just wear comfortable clothing and athletic shoes.

Sign up by April 25 by emailing nrarbelaez@ltcc.edu.

SLT to offer water safety

instructor course

The South Lake Tahoe Recreation Department is offering an American Red Cross Blended Learning Water Safety Instructor Class.

Classes are April 30, May 7, May 14 and May 21, 10am-5pm. Registration closes April 28.

Cost is \$125. Register **online**.

The class is conducted by American Red Cross certified instructor Larry Phippen.

The course helps develop instructors' understanding of how to use the course materials, how to conduct training sessions and how to evaluate participants' progress. Successful candidates are eligible to teach parent and child aquatics, preschool aquatics, learn to swim, adult-focused courses, as well as the basic water rescue and personal water safety courses and more.

Participants must be at least 16, proficient swimmers, and able to successfully complete the pre-course session. Call 530.542.6059 for a swim test.

Wildfires no longer confined to one season

By New York Times

The first Alaska wildfire of 2016 broke out in late February, followed by a second there just eight days later.

New Mexico has had 140 fires this year, double the number in the same period last year, fueled by one of the warmest, driest winters on record.

And on the border of Arizona and California this month, helicopters dumped water on flames so intense that they jumped the Colorado River, forcing the evacuation of two recreational-vehicle parks.

Fires, once largely confined to a single season, have become a continual threat in some places, burning earlier and later in the year, in the United States and abroad. They have ignited in the West during the winter and well into the fall, have arrived earlier than ever in Canada, and have burned without interruption in Australia for almost 12 months.

Read the whole story

Slow going in Truckee possible because of roadwork

Work on the second phase of the Brickelltown project in Truckee started this week.

Donner Pass Road will be shifted to the south next week while the north side of the roadway is being worked on. On Sunday night, some asphalt in Donner Pass Road will be milled out from the crosswalk near Mane Attraction to the crosswalks at Spring Street. The roadway will remain as asphalt through the summer, just thinner.

The contractor plans to close Donner Pass Road from 10pm to 6am starting April 24. This will be for approximately three

weeks, Sunday-Thursday. It will be closed at the crosswalk near Mane Attraction to Spring Street. Paid parking areas on Commercial Row, Jibboom Street, Jax Diner Lot, Beacon Lot, Spring Street (north of Donner Pass) are OK for parking overnight. Donner Pass Road will be open during the day and some parking will be available during the day.

Parking during the day on Donner Pass Road will continue to shift a bit.

For more info, go **online**.

Locally made items to be featured at festival

The 4th annual Made in Tahoe Festival returns to the Village at Squaw Valley for Memorial Day Weekend, May 28-29.

This one-of-a-kind event celebrates all things local, and hosts an array of offerings that are made in or inspired by the Lake Tahoe Basin and Truckee areas. Local artisans, businesses, foodies, organizations and entertainers will come together to celebrate all things Made in Tahoe including music, food, art, clothing, and more.

New this year, Squaw Valley Alpine Meadows' MTN ROOTS food truck will host the Made in Tahoe Community F2T Dinner, a five course family style dinner featuring local chefs and produce benefiting the Squaw Valley Institute and Tahoe Food Hub. The dinner will take place May 28 at 6:30pm on the KT Sun Deck.

There will be more than 70 booths. The event includes music from local bands and musicians. Local food and beverage will

be offered, with proceeds from all drink sales will benefit Tahoe Food Hub.

Go **online** for more info.

Artwork by mental health patients to be shown

Participants in El Dorado County mental health programs will have a chance to show off their skills in an art exhibit hosted by the Tahoe Art League. The exhibit will take place at Lake Tahoe Community College May 2-6 in recognition of Mental Health Awareness Month.

The art that will be on display has been created through Art Angels, a program of the Tahoe Art League. Each Friday Charisse Sotto, a volunteer with TAL, teaches clients of the county's Mental Health Department various techniques in artistic expression. The program not only develops participants' artistic skills, but also allows them to focus on a positive, creative process that builds confidence and pride in their accomplishments.

The arts allow people of all walks of life to experience the human desire to be creative.

The exhibit will be a juried event with renowned local artist and Lake Tahoe Community College Art Director Phyllis Shafer serving as jurist.

Cadre of people working to keep Tahoe clean

By Kathryn Reed

A whole lot of trash talk was going on Wednesday afternoon in South Lake Tahoe.

Those tasked with cleaning up after the rest of us spoke about how the plastic bag ban in the city is working, trash left out for animals to rummage through is still a problem, and that Tahoe does have a bit of a garbage problem.

South Tahoe Refuse in 2014 took in 10 tons of film plastic – the category plastic bags fall into. In 2015, that number fell to 6.6 tons.

While the South Shore garbage company is seeing fewer grocery store bags since the city implemented the ban, there has been an increase in reusable plastic bags – the thicker ones. The value of them is next to nothing when it comes to STR recycling them. Some stores have gone to paper only, like BevMo and Ross.

An advantage to paper is that it breaks down and the money is slightly better as a commodity.

Jeanne Lear with STR explained that to reuse plastic the original item must be shredded, washed, dried, made into pellets and then repurposed.

She said Coca-Cola is developing plant-based bottle to try to get away from using fossil fuels.

Marilee Movius with the League to Save Lake Tahoe touched on

the five large masses of plastic floating in the oceans, with the biggest being off the Pacific Coast. Plastic isn't biodegradable. It just breaks apart into tiny pieces that animals can ingest, and litters the land and waterways.

Her mantra is to not only reduce, reuse and recycle, but to also redesign and refuse. The latter means bringing a bottle, bag, utensils and other items so they are used multiple times instead of being discarded after one use.

The League has also been instrumental in hosting cleanup days throughout the basin – mainly at beaches.

Also at the April 20 talk at Lake Tahoe Community College were reps from Clean Tahoe and Tahoe Regional Planning Agency.

Catherine Cecchi of Clean Tahoe, a nonprofit operating on the California side of the South Shore, last year collected 490 cubic yards of litter that had been illegally dumped. Her crews pick up trash in neighborhoods and along the roads. Mattresses and appliances are often abandoned.

In 2015, Clean Tahoe dealt with more than 600 animal-trash incidents.

"It's a major problem," Cecchi said. It's locals, tourists, owners and renters, single family and multi-family, as well as commercial entities that are putting out trash before pick up day or having dumpsters overflow.

Devin Middlebrook with TRPA spoke about the collaborative effort under way called Take Care. It's aimed at those who don't have common sense manners – the ones leaving trash behind, throwing cigarette butts off ski lifts or grinding them into the sand and leaving them on the beach, and not picking up after their dogs. The messages are clever, like "Nobody wants to see your dirty butt" and "If it's your dog, then it's your doody".

Notes:

- Earth Day is being celebrated April 23 at Bijou Community Park in South Lake Tahoe from 10am-3pm.
 - Dump Day is June 4. For \$5, people may unload a pickup worth of trash at South Tahoe Refuse.
 - Report litter issues to Clean Tahoe **online**.
 - More info about the Take Care campaign is **online**.
 - The League to Save Lake Tahoe is having a community cleanup day near Heavenly Village on April 22. Go **online** for details and to sign up.
-

Opinion: A school district without a teachers' union

By Joe Mathews

What would a California school district be like if it jettisoned its teachers' union?

That question, once hypothetical (conservatives saw it as fantasy, liberals as a threat to teachers to questions), is now real. With the death of Justice Antonin Scalia, the U.S. Supreme Court is now divided 4-to-4 on the validity of the funding model for teachers' and other public employees union. So if the country elects a Republican president this fall, the likely result would be a new conservative justice who would vote to weaken teachers' unions so much that some might

disappear from some school districts around the country.



Joe Mathews

What would that mean for teachers, schools, and parents? It's impossible to know for sure. But California offers one fascinating example of such a future: the Clovis Unified School District.

Clovis Unified is by far the largest school district in California without a teachers' union. Centered on the city of Clovis (pop. 100,000) and swaths of Fresno, it's the 16th largest school district in California (smaller than Riverside, bigger than Stockton), with 42,000 students, 49 schools, and 5,000 employees. It also happens to be one of California's most representative districts. About half of its children are on free and reduced lunch, and there's no ethnic majority among the student body.

Parents, teachers, and administrators in Clovis are proud of their schools. But they don't brag—publicly, at least—about their lack of a teachers' union. This isn't because they want a union, I've found on visits. It's because they're skeptical that Clovis' one-of-a-kind structure could be a model for anyone else.

Clovis Unified teachers and administrators see their district as having a peculiar history that gave it an effective method of governing itself. This history starts with Floyd "Doc" Buchanan, the district superintendent from 1960 until 1991. In the 1970s, California's teachers' unions won the right to represent teachers in districts throughout the state, but

Buchanan, who was deeply respected by teachers, resisted. And teachers voted against union representation.

But that wasn't the end of the story. Instead of a union, Clovis' teachers and the district formed a "faculty senate"—the goal was to have something worthy of a university—to give teachers more of a role in the governance of the district. Teachers were elected to represent each school, and in turn elected officers for the senate, which served as "advocate for teachers at all levels of policymaking, procedures and expenditures, in partnership with our administration, fellow employees, and community as a quality education team."

Clovis Unified could only be so different. In California, state law governs most of what happens in school districts, including matters such as teacher tenure and firing.

But, as the faculty senate evolved, the teachers it represented exerted more power, by forming committees, often jointly with the district, for everything from benefits and wages to the school calendar and curriculum. "If there's a committee, we're on it," says Duane Goudy, the faculty senate president. "If there's a meeting, we are part of it."

Among the many advantages of this committee system: It forces the district to come to a consensus on issues. And this method of governance provides crucial flexibility in bad times. During the Great Recession, the district avoided layoffs of full-time employees and cuts to the length of the school year because the teachers on committees agreed to impose a 2 percent pay cut and three furlough days on themselves.

For this system to succeed it requires great openness among administrators; the superintendent has an open door. This also breeds closeness to the community. For example, while it's now routine to find school campuses closed after-hours throughout California, Clovis Unified prides itself on keeping its school

campuses open so that neighborhoods can use them on evenings and weekends.

Of course, there are drawbacks. Privately, teachers say committee meetings can feel endless and waste time. Clovis' method of governing itself is so different that it can be hard for administrators hired from outside the district to adapt. And even staunch believers in the faculty senate approach wonder whether a system that relies on face-to-face meetings and relationships can survive as the district continues to grow. They say it's already hard to make changes quickly because so many people have to be consulted.

But the system is likely to endure, in part because the district gets results. Clovis Unified performs above average academically and does well in attendance. Teachers shower praise on the district in surveys.

For the rest of us, Clovis Unified suggests that school districts without teachers' unions won't be hells—or paradises. They could even be places where teachers have the power to be true partners in running school districts—with all the responsibilities and headaches that come with it.

Joe Mathews writes the Connecting California column for Zócalo Public Square.

Study: Teen e-cigarette use on the rise

By Sabrina Tavernise, New York Times

WASHINGTON — E-cigarette use continued to rise among young

teenagers and preteens in the United States last year, according to federal data, but cigarette smoking overall did not increase, suggesting that, at least so far, fears that the devices would hook a new generation on traditional cigarettes have not come to pass.

Experts said it was too soon to answer the essential question about e-cigarettes: Will they cause more or fewer people to smoke? But the broad trend in youth cigarette smoking has been down in recent years, and researchers have been taking note of that.

About 5 percent of middle-school students reported using e-cigarettes in 2015, up from about 4 percent in 2014, according to data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. That is a substantial increase from 2011, when less than 1 percent of middle schoolers used the devices.

Read the whole story