

Sierra avalanche risk subsides

By Benjamin Spillman, Reno Gazette-Journal

Avalanche danger in the Sierra Nevada around Lake Tahoe is low on all aspects for the first time since New Year's weekend.

The apparent stabilization of the snowpack is good news for skiers, snowboarders, snowshoers and snowmobile riders following more than three full weeks of delicate conditions in the backcountry. Although some risk remains, the likelihood of slides is low.

The unstable period saw myriad avalanches throughout the region, including one that buried professional skier JT Holmes and another at Sugar Bowl Resort that resulted in accusations of trespassing and reckless behavior against the snowboarder said to have triggered it.

[Read the whole story](#)

Avi safety message targeted at younger crowds

By Phuong Le, AP

MOUNT BAKER, Wash. — Walker Smith has been skiing in-bounds at resorts since he was young, but lately the Seattle teen has become more interested “in getting tracks where no one else has really gone.”

He knows backcountry travel comes with avalanche risks, he said. So under a brilliant blue sky one Saturday, he and a dozen teens hiked out into the snowy landscape outside the boundaries of Mount Baker ski resort to learn how to identify avalanche terrain and spot warning signs.

"It's not 100 percent safe in the backcountry so you have to know about all the dangers," said Smith, 17, a member of the Mountaineers Adventure Club, a Seattle-based teen program that partnered with Northwest Avalanche Center to organize the avalanche awareness field trip.

As more young adults head out of bounds to ski, snowboard or hike in the winter, experts are targeting their message about avalanche safety to an even younger audience. They're trying to reach kids early – in middle or high school, sometimes even in elementary school – to build their knowledge about snow and avalanches.

"They're young, they're impressionable. They don't have a pattern of bad behavior yet. By spending more time on youth, we feel like we can make a difference in changing behavior," said Scott Schell, program director of the Northwest Avalanche Center, a Seattle-based non-profit and federal government partnership.

The center, which issues weather forecasts and avalanche warnings, also offers about 200 free or low-cost education classes each winter to church groups, schools, shops and other organizations. About one-third are now geared toward teens or young adults.

"We feel that working with younger people is the way to affect behavior down the line," since they're likely to be lifelong users of the outdoors, Schell said. "We tell them that most of the time it's safe and sometimes it's not. Learning when it's safe and when it's dangerous is one of the key takeaways."

At least 14 people have been killed in slides so far this

season; the three most recent deaths happened Sunday in Washington and Wyoming. This month has been the deadliest January for slides in nearly 20 years, according to the Colorado Avalanche Information Center, the central archive for avalanche accidents in the country. On an average, 27 people die in avalanches across the U.S. each year. The center doesn't track age of all fatalities, but avalanche deaths typically involve men between 20 and 45, the center said.

After a 2003 avalanche killed three young men in Utah, the Utah Avalanche Center created a free avalanche awareness program for middle and high school students. The hour-long program includes a high-energy video that helps them understand how to have fun in the mountains while avoiding avalanches.

Better gear, more media coverage and rising lift tickets at resorts have made the backcountry more accessible and appealing to a wider range of people.

A lot of the kids may not go into the backcountry, but the idea is that "when someone talks them into getting into the backcountry 15 years from now, they'll have this knowledge that they've stored away," said Paul Diegel, executive director of the Utah Avalanche Center.

More than 200,000 students in Utah have been exposed to the "Know Before You Go" program over the last decade. And the program has spread to other states.

In Jackson, Wyoming, the American Avalanche Institute, which targeted high schoolers, has expanded its program to middle schools as well. It runs several free avalanche programs for kids 10 to 18, which is funded by the Steve Romeo Memorial Fund.

Lessons are shorter with more hands-on activities; the goal is repetition and learning progresses through the age groups. "We try and send our younger, hipper instructors who are easier to

relate to,” said Sarah Carpenter, co-owner and teacher at the American Avalanche Institute.

The message to younger age groups is to stay in bounds and avoid the backcountry, Carpenter said. But with older teens, “our goal is not to preach abstinence. As the kids get older, they’re going to go into the backcountry.”

The goal is to give them good habits and skills to build a foundation, she said. The message: if they duck under a rope or venture out-of-bounds, the conditions are going to be very different.

For the teens, ages 14 to 18, with the Mountaineers Adventure Club, the day began with a review of the avalanche forecast, which said conditions were moderate.

Eric Gullickson, an avalanche instructor with the Northwest Avalanche Center, lead the group as they set off, snow crunching under foot, toward Artist Point on Mount Baker, about 130 miles northeast of Seattle.

As they hiked, Gullickson pointed roller balls on slopes, cornices and other avalanche dangers. He asked the group what the difference is between snow inside ski resorts and out of bounds. The teens chimed in that ski resorts control the snow by grooming it and skiers and boarders are packing down the snow.

“The snow is always changing so you always have to be assessing,” he said. “As you’re walking around, keep an eye on the slopes. In your mind, think: ‘Do I want to go there? What’s a good place to go?’”

Gullickson then used a shovel to dig a snow pit, carving a 6-foot vertical face in the snow to reveal the layers of snowpack. The teens moved closer as Gullickson pointed out the hard layer of snow between two soft layers.

“It’s good to know,” said Rowan Forsythe, 15, of Seattle, afterward. “The more knowledge you can have, it’s another tool.”

Snippets about Lake Tahoe



• The Restoration of Fire Adapted Ecosystems project is a proposal to restore **six impaired meadows** in the Lake Tahoe Basin. The draft decision has been issued, which triggers a 45-day comment period. Those who submitted comments during the comment period last year, have standing to object during the objection period. The draft decision and environmental assessment are available **online**.

• Fit Pup Fridays is an event on the last Friday of the month at Elevated Fitness in South Lake Tahoe that benefits the Lake Tahoe Humane Society. Classes are free that day for people who bring a pet food donation. Dogs are welcome at the classes. For more info, call 530.318.8666.

• University of Nevada Cooperative Extension’s Radon Education Program is offering an educational presentation Jan. 28 at 6pm, Incline Village GID Public Works, 1220 Sweetwater Road, Incline Village.

• Students in Incline Village schools, including Lake Tahoe School, may receive a free 2015-16 Diamond Peak season pass in exchange for their January 2016 report card with straight A’s.

• The North Lake Tahoe Fire Protection District responded to a backcountry rescue incident near Monkey Rock Road off

Tunnel Creek Road in Incline Village on Jan. 26 at 3pm. The man was taken to Renown Medical Center in Reno with unknown injuries. An agency rep didn't know what type of rescue it was.

Truckee dramatically reduces DUI arrests, crashes

In 2015, the Truckee Police Department led a communitywide campaign to reduce the number of DUI accidents and arrests after there was a significant spike in 2014.

The efforts paid off.

There was an overall reduction of 48 percent in arrests for DUI drivers and a 47 percent decrease in DUI related traffic collisions for the year. Last year there were 83 driving under the influence arrests and 12 traffic collisions caused by DUI drivers. One was a fatality that involved a solo driver.

In 2014, there were 161 DUI arrests by Truckee officers and 23 traffic collisions caused by DUI drivers.

The same number of police officers were on patrol in 2014 as in 2015 and the department did not have any change in its enforcement posture.

“In essence, we believe the reduction in arrests and crashes was the result of a collaborative effort between the community and their police department. The department led this

discussion and implemented a number of actions directed at making our roadways safer,” the department said in a statement. “We introduced a robust community discussion about alcohol abuse in Truckee; we reallocated one police officer position to partner with the community on alcohol education, DUI prevention, and worked closely with the courts to address habitual offenders.”

It is also believed that increased transit opportunities in form of shuttles to and from events such as Truckee Thursdays and New Year’s Eve cut down on the drinking and driving incidents.

According to TPD data, 49 of the 83 people arrested for DUI in 2015 had a primary Truckee-Tahoe address.

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*

Realignment more than just altering Hwy. 50

By Kathryn Reed

Panels depicting what the proposed multi-million dollar loop road project could be filled the room at Lake Tahoe Resort Hotel.

Tuesday night’s open house about the potential realignment of Highway 50 around Harrah’s and MontBleu on the South Shore was an extension of the gathering in **December**.

For Clay Grubb, a trail builder with the Tahoe Rim Trail

Association, he is most excited about the proposed overcrossing that would link the casinos to Van Sickle Bi-State Park. It would provide a safer route than negotiating a five-lane highway.

Carl Hasty, executive director of Tahoe Transportation District, said he liked seeing new faces in the crowd on Jan. 26. The environmental documents are still slated to be released this spring, which will be followed by a 60-day comment period. TTD is the lead agency.

A slew of entities will have to sign off on the project for it to go forward – including both state departments of transportation, South Lake Tahoe, Douglas County, TTD and Tahoe Regional Planning Agency.

The City Council will have to approve the final environmental documents, and relinquish local roads and accept the new highway alignment. For the city streets that would be replaced with the highway it also means figuring out how the connector streets work, routes for emergency vehicles, and how those living in the neighborhood access the new highway and other routes they are accustomed to today.

There will be another loop road meeting Feb. 10 from 4:30pm-7pm at the South Tahoe Middle School multipurpose room. It will feature a presentation of the project, and include a question and answer session. Questions about the project are being taken in advance. Submit them to Tracy Franklin at tfranklin@cityofslt.us by 5pm Feb. 8.

Conner adds more allegations against SLT

By Kathryn Reed

South Lake Tahoe City Councilwoman JoAnn Conner has added more grievances to her **lawsuit** against the city and City Manager Nancy Kerry.

Conner now claims:

- The council violated the open meeting law in September;
- She can't get things on the agenda in a timely manner;
- Her personal email is being blocked;
- That rules are being created to hurt her personal business.

Who will decide this matter remains unknown. A Placer County judge is tasked with ruling on Conner's attorney's request to have El Dorado County Superior Court Judge Steve Bailey dismissed.

Jacqueline Mittelstadt, a one-time attorney for the city, is representing Conner.

Her accusation about the Brown Act violation reads, "In fact, the discussion was not a performance evaluation of the city manager, but rather, was simply a discussion by all present criticizing City Councilmember Conner for a variety of reasons. It is believed that this closed session violated the Brown Act. The discussion included presentation of documents and allegations of evidence against Ms. Conner by both the city manager and members of the City Council."

This closed session was on Sept. 15. The item to be discussed

was Kerry's performance. Conner along with the other four electeds is Kerry's boss.

Kerry on Jan. 27 would not comment about the amended motion.

As for getting something on an agenda, a councilmember needs consensus to do so from one colleague. The soonest it would be on the agenda is two meetings later. Staff also has a huge say in the agenda. The Tuesday prior to the meeting the city manager, city clerk, city attorney, mayor and mayor pro tem solidify the agenda.

Conner last fall asked for the parade policy to come before the council. With November, December and January each having one meeting instead of two, the parade policy has not risen to the top level of importance. Conner has a vested interest because she owns an event company that puts on parades.

She is also upset with what she deems a change in policy regarding public safety being part of her parades. If the fire department were to be part of the parade, that would in essence mean an elected official was benefitting from taxpayer resources, which is illegal. Police may provide an escort, as is customary any time safety is an issue.

Conner is also disgruntled with what she believes is a change in policy when it comes to her being able to put on events at city property, most notably the rec center. Last summer the council, which she voted for, agreed to alter some of the permit regulations. Because one of her events is slated to bring in more than 1,000 people it's necessary to get a special use permit instead of a just renting the facility.

As for the email, this was part of mandate dating back to **September** where Conner was banned from communicating with staff in any manner without going through the city manager or city attorney.

"People should be shocked and appalled. Today they don't like

what JoAnn is saying and tomorrow it might be you. There is no due process," Mittelstadt told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Opinion: Highway funding needs long-term solution

By Jim Madaffer

California drivers are bearing the burden of the state's transportation funding crisis, with the average driver spending more than \$500 a year to repair the wear and tear on their vehicle caused by bad roads. Gas tax revenues currently fund most of the state's road maintenance and repairs, but gas tax revenues are declining as cars become more fuel efficient and as drivers adopt hybrids and electric vehicles. Caltrans estimates the funding gap to be about \$5.7 billion per year for the state highway system alone.

Unless we address the transportation funding shortfall immediately, the funding gap will only widen. Lawmakers are working on a short-term solution to maintain our roadways and we will have to depend on the gas tax for the immediate future. However, gas tax revenues will continue to fall behind our transportation funding needs over the longer term. We must ultimately find a new transportation funding model that better reflects today's realities.

One potential solution is the road charge. Under a road charge system, drivers pay by the mile rather than by the gallon. Whether you drive a gas-guzzling truck or an all-electric sedan, the road charge is the same per mile. Everyone pays their fair share. Several other states are already testing the road charge concept, and we must explore it further in

California to determine if it is the right solution for us.

The state has already taken steps to begin exploring a road charge system. Senate Bill 1077, signed into law last year, requires California to study the feasibility of a road charge in a statewide pilot that includes a variety of volunteers from all regions of the state. To help ensure the parameters of the pilot meet California's unique needs, SB1077 also established a Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) to design the pilot with the benefit of robust public input. The TAC includes experts in telecommunications, data security and privacy, as well as highway users, business and consumer advocates, elected officials and academic researchers.

In 2015 the TAC conducted a robust stakeholder outreach process to seek feedback and input on the design of the pilot. The TAC had 12 public meetings throughout California and invited residents all over the state to attend a meeting or comment through the TAC's website. Additionally, the TAC invited more than 400 stakeholder groups and 130 elected officials to participate in the process, and it consulted a Road Charge Work Group made up of representatives from local government, vehicle manufacturers, fuel distributors and highway users.

After carefully reviewing all of the feedback and input gathered, the TAC released its final recommendations for the design of the pilot in early January. Some of the highlights of those recommendations are that the pilot should:

- Give drivers multiple options to report miles driven
- Provide non-technological options for those who choose to report their miles manually
- Protect driver privacy and personal data
- Measure the impact of a road charge on rural and urban drivers

- Require no cost to participate.

The pilot is now scheduled to launch this summer and aims to recruit 5,000 participants that reflect the geographic, demographic and socioeconomic diversity of the state.

Because it has been rigorous, this endeavor gave us the opportunity to carefully examine and develop a set of recommendations that reflect the unique nature of our state. While we know the current gas tax system will not keep pace with state and national needs in the future, we also know the development and implementation of a sustainable long-term solution will take time to deliver. That is why we should all do our part by signing up for the pilot. Together, we can help the state determine if paying by the mile is the right transportation funding solution for California.

For more information, go **online**.

Jim Madaffer is chair of the Road Charge Technical Advisory Committee and California Transportation Commission member.

‘Group tours’ being rebranded as ‘guided vacations’

By Catharine Hamm, Los Angeles Times

My first group tour was a four-city trip to China in 2001. We breezed by the highlights in Beijing, Shanghai, Suzhou and Hangzhou, had abominable buffet food and got herded to lots of silk and jewelry stores.

Sometime during those nine days, I decided it was My. Last. Group. Tour. Ever.

That may have been a bit premature.

Thanks to the emphasis on authentic and cultural experiences, the group tour has experienced a rebirth, starting with its name. They're now called "escorted tours" or "guided vacations," thank you very much.

Look for the upgraded group – er, escorted tour, said Colleen Clark, managing editor of JetSetter.com, a travel website that offers curated selections of hotels and travel deals.

Enter the reinventors.

Read the whole story

5 hurt in 2-vehicle accident on Hwy. 267

A head-on collision on Highway 267 injured five people Sunday.

Maxwell Edward Jones, 19, of Sutter Creek was driving near Tahoe Vista at about 6:30am Jan. 24 when his vehicle crossed the center line, striking a vehicle head-on.

Jones was flown to Renown Medical Center in Reno with major injuries. The family of four in the other vehicle was taken to Renown by ambulance

Treasa Marie Larrabee, 55, and Eric Larrabee, 52, sustained major injuries, while two 13-year-olds had minor injuries. The family is from Durham.

According to the California Highway Patrol, alcohol and drugs were not a factor in the collision.

Report: Most Nev. households mired in financial hole

By Eli Segall, Las Vegas Sun

Despite the slowly improving U.S. economy, more than half of Nevada households are locked in “perpetual financial insecurity,” says a new report, as the state remains near the bottom of the pack nationally for residents’ financial health.

Nevada has some of the highest rates of bankruptcy filings, underemployment, delinquent mortgages, uninsured residents and student-loan defaults, according to the nonprofit Corporation for Enterprise Development, or CFED.

The state also has some of the lowest rates of high school graduation, residents with college degrees, early childhood education enrollment, strong consumer-credit scores and small-business ownership.

Read the whole story