

Study: Cleared ski runs recover the best

By Kat Kerlin, Davis Enterprise

What happens to the land when a ski run is abandoned? Not much, if the run was previously graded, according to a study from UC Davis.

The study, published online Wednesday in the Journal of Applied Ecology, evaluated six abandoned ski areas in the Northern Sierra region of California and Nevada. It found that runs that were graded showed no predictable recovery even 40 years after abandonment.

The sites ranged from 10 to 43 years since abandonment and, like many ski areas in the Western United States, most had operated under a special-use permit on U.S. Forest Service lands. The study included the Lake Tahoe area sites of Powder Bowl, Plavada, Tannenbaum, Edelweiss, Iron Mountain and Echo Summit.

With graded runs, heavy machinery is used to remove vegetation, boulders and, consequently, much of the topsoil and seed bank during construction.

In contrast, "cleared" runs, in which trees and shrubs were cut with their roots left in the ground, consistently recovered to blend in with the surrounding forest, the study found. Trees and other vegetation grew back over time, and bare ground and visible soil erosion decreased, protecting water quality.

Read the whole story

Nov. extends global record warm streak

By MalcooIm Ritter, AP

Last month was the globe's warmest November on record, the seventh consecutive month to reach a new high.

A climate update Thursday from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration also noted a record-warm average temperature for January through November as a whole. NOAA scientist Jake Crouch said it's "virtually certain" that 2015 will be the warmest year globally since record-keeping began in 1880.

The agency also said it's been the warmest autumn on record for the continental U.S., with an average temperature of 56.8 F (13.8 C) for September through November.

Crouch said the warmth has come from climate change, a strong El Nino and some other short-term influences.

The forecast through March calls for an easing of drought in California and Nevada.

EDC creates health related

website

El Dorado County has created a **website** with the latest health statistics as well as how the county compares to other counties across the state and nation? The

The database includes more than 90 indicators relating to the health and demographics of El Dorado County, such as obesity, cancer and diabetes rates; information on public transportation and walkability; and the availability of healthy foods and much more.

In addition to accessing health data, residents can also share promising practices and post announcements for things like community wellness events and trainings.

For more information, contact Olivia Byron-Cooper at 530.621.6374.

Study: Rising lake temps may worsen algae blooms

By John Flesher, AP

TRAVERSE CITY, Mich. – Some of the world's biggest temperature jumps are happening in lakes – an ominous sign that suggests problems such as harmful algae blooms and low-oxygen zones hazardous to fish will get worse, says a scientific report.

An analysis of 235 lakes that together hold more than half the earth's fresh surface water found they have warmed an average

of 0.61 degrees Fahrenheit or 0.34 degrees Celsius per decade, the report said. While seemingly insignificant, the increase is bigger than those recorded in the oceans or the atmosphere.

Such rapid swings can affect aquatic ecosystems in profound ways, raising concerns about the quality of waters that people rely on for drinking supplies, crop irrigation and energy production.



A combination of satellite data and ground measurements, such as from instrumented buoys like this one in Lake Tahoe, were used to provide a comprehensive view of changing lake temperatures worldwide. The buoy measures the water temperature from above and below. Photo/Limnotech

“The message we’re getting from our lakes is that they’re getting more and more stressed,” Catherine O’Reilly, an Illinois State University geologist who led the study, said Thursday. “With these rates of warming, the problems we’re seeing will become increasingly common.”

Dozens of scientists in six continents took part in the project, funded partly by NASA and the National Science

Foundation. The results, made public this week during a meeting of the American Geophysical Union in San Francisco, were based on a first-of-its-kind combination of temperature data from satellites and ground measurements over 25 years. They are being published in the group's journal, Geophysical Research Letters.

Lakes warming at the average worldwide rate or higher were widespread, including the Dead Sea, Lake Tahoe, Lake Baikal in Siberia and Lake Fracksjon in Sweden. But deep lakes in cold regions had the most rapid changes, said John Lenters of LimnoTech, a water science consulting firm in Ann Arbor, Mich.

They included four of the five U.S. Great Lakes – Superior, Huron, Michigan and Ontario. Only Lake Erie, the shallowest and warmest of the Great Lakes, was below average. Superior, the deepest and coldest, warmed three times faster than the global average.

In addition to rising air temperatures, factors causing lakes to warm vary among regions, scientists said. The Great Lakes and others in northern climates are losing winter ice earlier, and some areas are getting less cloud cover, exposing their surfaces to more sunlight.

Algae blooms flourish in warmer waters. The report predicted a 20 percent boost in lake algae over the next century, including a 5 percent increase in blooms that are toxic to fish and animals. An outbreak of toxic algae left more than 400,000 residents of Toledo, Ohio, and southeastern Michigan without usable tap water for two days in August 2014.

Such an increase would expand “dead zones” with so little oxygen that fish cannot survive, O'Reilly said. It also would boost emissions of methane, a greenhouse gas even more potent than carbon dioxide, the leading cause of climate change.

Warming causes a different problem for some lakes. In eastern Africa, Lake Tanganyika is less able to blend warm water near

the surface with colder layers farther down, reducing distribution of nutrients for algae on which fish feed.

Donald Uzarski, director of the Institute for Great Lakes Research at Central Michigan University, who was not involved with the study, said its findings were consistent with other water temperature measurements in places such as the Great Lakes and Poyang Lake in China.

Other likely results of warmer lakes, he said, include lower lake levels, damaged coastal wetlands and exotic species invasions.

“What seems to be nothing more than a small change in water temperature produces a domino effect that drastically impacts the ecosystem,” Uzarski said.

Moving rocks at Lake Tahoe comes with \$5,000 fine

Moving rocks in Lake Tahoe so they would not scrape kayaks and creating an 8-foot-wide path 4 feet into the water as well as a rock line path in the sand cost Martis Camp Club \$5,000.

The Tahoe Regional Planning Agency Governing Board approved the settlement agreement on Dec. 16.

The Beach Shack is located on the North Shore.

About 50 yards of shoreline was impacted.

The fine will be put in a trust for special research projects and other directed purposes. It is not used for general TRPA operating expenses.

Snippets about Lake Tahoe



- Sierra-at-Tahoe's avi dogs will be at the Solstice Plaza from 2-4pm on Dec. 19.
 - The SnowSport Safety Foundation has ranked area ski resorts for safety. The results are **online**.
 - Tahoe Douglas Fire Protection District is sharing this **video** about Christmas tree fires.
 - Lisa Carbonell, an obgyn, has joined Barton Women's Health.
 - The Douglas County Community Services Foundation is trying to raise money for Douglas County Community and Senior Center by auctioning a 1967 Mustang. The highest and final bid takes the vehicle home Dec. 31. To place a bid, call 775.782.9829.
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U.S. drug overdose deaths surge 7%

By Associated Press

Drug overdoses rose again last year, driven by surges in deaths from heroin and powerful prescription painkillers, according to new federal statistics.

Overdose deaths in the U.S. surpassed 47,000 – up 7 percent from the previous year.

Many of the deaths were due to a group of powerful opioid painkillers, which have long been the leading cause of fatal overdoses. But the number had been stable recently.

Last year, the count rose to nearly 19,000 deaths, an increase of 16 percent.

Heroin deaths continued to climb, by 28 percent to about 10,500.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention posted the numbers this week. They are based on death certificates.

The federal agency is analyzing the drug numbers to determine what caused last year's increases, said CDC Director Dr. Tom Frieden.

But clearly, he added, the nation's drug overdose problem "is not getting better."

Opioid pain relievers, including OxyContin and Vicodin, have been the focus of a government campaign to reduce overdose deaths. The CDC is working on new guidelines for doctors about how to more carefully prescribe such drugs.

But CDC officials believe at least some of the increase in

painkiller deaths last year may be due to illegally made fentanyl, which is a synthetic form of morphine. Some medical examiners classify fentanyl deaths in the prescription painkiller category, Frieden said.

Report: Lake Tahoe's economy sputtering

By Kathryn Reed

Lake Tahoe's economy is not thriving.

That was the message delivered this week by three members of the Tahoe Prosperity Center.

"We need to make it a less difficult place to make a living," Heidi Hill Drum, executive director of TPC, told a group of near two dozen people at Lake Tahoe Community College on Dec. 16. She was joined on the panel by board members Jesse Walker and B Gorman. It was Gorman who spearheaded the TPC in 2011 as a way to have a single entity delving into the regional economic issues.

Earlier this fall the center released a report titled **Measuring for Prosperity**.



B Gorman, right, makes a point about Tahoe's economy as Heidi Hill Drum and Jesse Walker listen. Photo/LTN

Highlights include:

- The Lake Tahoe Basin had a \$4.7 billion economy in 2010, with tourism being responsible for two-thirds of that total.
- Tourism-related jobs went from 50 percent of the overall work force in 2003 to 44 percent in 2013. This could in large part be a result in the dramatic decline in casino jobs.
- 2013 was the first time population in the basin increased in years. It's too soon to know if this is a blip or a trend.
- Hotel tax revenue is increasing in the basin, but not at the same pace as it is throughout California. With Monterey, Napa and Sonoma being Tahoe's competitors, this is a concern that people in Northern California are choosing to vacation places other than Tahoe. However, with the tax rate being different in each locale, it's not a true apples to apples comparison.
- There has been a significant loss in the 25-44 age group.

- Housing costs continue to outpace income levels.
- Unemployment is above average compared to California and Nevada.

“Generally household incomes are low in the basin and they are continuing to decline,” Walker said. “They are not keeping up with inflation.”

A chart showed North Lake Tahoe incomes the highest in the basin – averaging more than \$35,000 a year, while in South Lake Tahoe they are below \$25,000.

“We’ve got problems that are exacerbated by the income trend going down and housing going up,” Walker said.

Carl Ribaud with Strategy Marketing Group said it’s time to look at unconventional, smaller housing options such as cargo containers or two houses on one lot.

TPC’s next project in partnership with chambers of commerce on both ends of the lake is going to be looking at the work force. Gorman said having enough workers to fill jobs is going to be a critical issue in the coming decade. She mentioned how businesses in the area are already having a hard time finding qualified candidates for jobs that aren’t entry level, service industry positions.

Opinion: Too much high school football

By Joe Mathews

How many state champions does California need?

There's a new answer to this question: 13. That's how many state football champions California will crown this weekend during five state bowl games at Sacramento State's Hornet Stadium and eight other games around the state. That's a big increase from the five state champions we had in 2014—and 13 more than we had before the state bowl games were launched a decade ago.



Joe Mathews

Even in the largest football-crazy state of this football-crazy country, that's an awful lot of football. Indeed, California's ever-expanding high school football season now starts the last week of August and extends into the winter holiday break. And some teams seeking state titles this weekend will be playing their 16th games—the same number the pros in the National Football League play each year.

You may be surprised to read this, especially if you've listened to recent news stories and medical studies about the need to protect young bodies and brains from concussions and other injuries. Last year, the California enacted a law that imposed new limits on physical contact for school football teams; they can't have full-contact practices during the off-season, and can hold only two full contact, 90-minute practices a week during the season.

But those rules didn't cover games. And so California's high school football industry—with its coaches and players and even cable TV sports networks—continues to grow more rapidly than the state's pension obligations.

To be fair, it isn't merely the will to win driving this expansion. It's also about the well-intentioned desire to include everyone. This latest expansion was fueled by complaints that the state bowl games included only a fraction of the state's 50 sectional champions. So this year, the CIF voted to include all 50 champs in bowl games. Those state playoffs culminate this weekend with 13 games between the top teams from north and south in 13 different competitive levels.

For football fans, that may sound like an exciting weekend full of possibilities. But California high school football is highly predictable. Most of the same high schools dominate year after year, in part because thousands of students routinely use liberal transfer rules to move to the schools with the best sports programs.

In this way, high school football has been decoupled from local communities, with elite teams dominated by ringers from other places. Private schools often have a big advantage in this high school free agent market, and many of them are national powers that play games against teams from out of state. These days, it is big news when a public high school led by players from its own community ends up competing for a championship.

Tellingly, this weekend's signature game—the Open Division bowl game between the De La Salle High School Spartans, a Catholic school in Concord and the Centennial High Huskies of Corona—is a rematch of last year's title game. Indeed, De La Salle may be America's greatest football factory, having won five of the last six Open Division championships.

This year's state playoff expansion comes at an interesting time. A new film on football concussions, starring Will Smith, whose son Trey was recently a star player at an elite football high school in Southern California, hits theaters on Christmas. The film dramatizes the story of doctor Bennet Omalu, who made discoveries about the impact of contact sports

on the brain.

Omalu, now the chief medical examiner of San Joaquin County and a professor at UC Davis, recently questioned whether kids should play at all, given the evidence that football and other contact sports cause brain damage. In the *New York Times*, he also suggested that the law establish an age of consent for playing football: “We have a legal age for drinking alcohol, for joining the military, for voting, for smoking, for driving, and for consenting to have sex. We must have the same when it comes to protecting the organ that defines who we are as a human being.”

In the context of that sober warning, 13 state championship bowl games sounds like an unlucky number. The 50 schools in the state playoffs are already champions, of their sections. Is it really necessary to expose them to more risk in the name of more championships?

Would California really be diminished if it had no state football champions? Yes, there are schedules in place to hold this huge round of state bowl games through 2017. But if Californians let these unnecessary games go on for even another year, we all ought to have our heads examined.

Joe Mathews is California and innovation editor for Zócalo Public Square, for which he writes the Connecting California column.

Amateur athletes using hypoxic tools to train

By Erin Beresini, Outside

Altitude training—it's not just for elite athletes anymore. What with the rise of altitude chambers and hypoxic workout rooms in your local gym, oxygen-deprivation hypoxicator masks, and even hypoxic bed chambers (Michael Phelps slept in one in his run-up to the 2012 London Olympics), amateur athletes are now using these tools to try and train just as well as their professional idols.

"The 'us and them' division is slowly being eroded away," says Richard Pullan, founder of London's hypoxic gym, The Altitude Centre, which works with Hypoxico (the leading manufacturer of all things hypoxic) and has about 60 members who train daily in its 2,700 meters and 14.9 percent oxygen environment. "Increasingly, amateur athletes are styling their training around that of elite athletes. And many want to see how good they can be if they have access to the same tools that elites and professionals do."

Yet despite the availability of new hypoxic toys, most recreational athletes have yet to really transcend the level of elite times that altitude training would seem to suggest is possible. And much of the reason for this has to do with how hypoxia is used at the amateur and professional levels.

Read the whole story