

Opinion: Monitoring drought, El Niño's affect on Tahoe

Publisher's note: *This originally was published in the TERC newsletter and is reprinted with permission.*

By Geoff Schladow

It seems that every conversation about Lake Tahoe this year made reference initially to the ongoing drought, and more recently to El Niño. What is certain is that we are in a long and historical drought. What is also certain is that there exists a band of very warm water across the equatorial Pacific Ocean – the condition known as El Niño. Whether the El Niño conditions will have a significant impact on the drought, particularly in the northern Sierra, is largely unknown.



Geoff Schladow

Historical precedents are relatively few in number, and the data are divided between El Niño years when the northern Sierra received above average precipitation and years of below average precipitation. More certain is the likelihood that temperatures will be above average, increasing the chances of rain at the expense of snow, whatever the total precipitation may be.

What does all this mean for the lake? This year the lake fell to more than 18 inches below its natural rim. While that does not seem very much, the very low slopes in some parts of the

lake meant that the water's edge receded many hundreds of yards exposing brown mud and rocks, and shrubs started growing and flowering in previously submerged areas. With the lack of nutrients and erosion products washing into the lake, it has also been far clearer and bluer during the drought.

Will the lake refill this year? With an average precipitation year, the lake will rise slightly above the natural rim next spring, and the Truckee River will flow once more. With summer evaporation, however, the lake level will fall and the flow will cease. It will take more than one wet year to overcome the consequences of the drought.

Extreme events such as droughts can teach us a lot about our efforts to restore Lake Tahoe. During this period we have seen how many feet of clarity improvement are achievable in a single year; that the lake's blueness is reflected in our ability to control nutrients; and that the attached algae on rocks has fallen to relatively low levels. While scientific measurements are recording these changes, it is the detailed research that we undertake that provides the understanding of what is driving change, and that understanding allows us to construct predictive tools that can guide future restoration. That understanding does not always come quickly or easily, but through the efforts of many we are moving forward.

To all who have contributed to our accomplishments this year, I am truly grateful. This includes our incredibly hard-working staff, our volunteer docents, the many students and interns that work at TERC, our partners in other research institutes and our colleagues in the various Tahoe agencies, those who visit our education centers, and those of you who have helped fund our research and education programs and partnered with us in unique ways.

I wish you all a safe and peaceful holiday season, and look forward to hearing how the lake refilled far quicker than I predicted.

Geoff Schladow is director of the UC Davis Tahoe Environmental Research Center.

Voters may have say in Calif. death penalty

By Bob Egelko, San Francisco Chronicle

Opponents of California's death penalty began an initiative campaign Monday to repeal the state's capital punishment law at the polls in November and said they've lined up some conservative support and \$2 million in financial backing.

The measure, if it qualifies, would be on the ballot four years after another initiative to repeal the death penalty received 48 percent of the statewide vote. Sponsors said they hope to succeed this time as new reports in several states have surfaced of onetime Death Row inmates found to be innocent, leading to a decline in public support for capital punishment.

The measure may face competition on the ballot in the form of an initiative proposed by death-penalty supporters to speed up executions in California, where appeals by condemned prisoners typically take two decades or more. The rival measure would set strict deadlines for filing appeals and for rulings by the state Supreme Court, and would seek to expand the pool of death-penalty lawyers to include all attorneys who accept court appointments to represent impoverished defendants.

Read the whole story

Snippets about Lake Tahoe



- Truckee Fire Protection District is hosting a community meeting Jan. 14 to discuss the wildfire protection plan. It will be from 6-9pm at the Truckee Town Hall.
- The California controller has update the Government Compensation in California **website** to include 2014 self-reported data for cities and counties. The data covers 602,377 positions and more than \$36 billion in wages in 2014 for 54 counties and 468 cities.
- Truckee Police Department is asking residents to take this community **survey**.
- Phil Horan has been appointed to the Incline Village General Improvement District seat that was vacated by Bill Devine.
- Consumer finance site NerdWallet has released the second edition of its report, "Best Places for Young Families in Northern California," and out of 202 places, Truckee ranked 23.

Ballot measure could re-

establish tiered water pricing

By Taylor Goldenstein, Los Angeles Times

A coalition of groups representing cities, counties and water agencies filed a proposed ballot measure Monday that would allow water providers to reestablish so-called tiered pricing as a means of encouraging conservation.

Backers submitted the California Water Conservation, Flood Control and Stormwater Management Act of 2016 to the attorney general's office. The measure would appear on next November's state ballot as a proposed constitutional amendment if enough signatures are collected.

The measure was crafted after a state appeals court ruled last spring that the tiered water rate structure used by the city of San Juan Capistrano was unconstitutional because it violated voter-approved Proposition 218, which prohibits government agencies from charging more for a service than it costs to provide it.

[Read the whole story](#)

El Dorado County's top lawyer resigns

Sixteen months after coming on board as El Dorado County's chief lawyer Robyn Drivon is leaving.

The Board of Supervisors accepted her resignation on Dec. 15.



Robyn Drivon

Drivon started as El Dorado's county counsel in September 2014. Her last day is Jan. 8. She is going to work for Sacramento County starting Jan. 10 as their county counsel. She will be making \$215,043 plus benefits of \$80,944 for a total of \$295,987.

Because the two counties are in different retirement systems Drivon is actually retiring from El Dorado County. She is eligible for double dipping, like interim CAO Larry Combs. She will get about \$100,000 from the Public Employees Retirement System while getting paid by Sac County.

Drivon's annual salary in El Dorado County is \$196,560.

Michael Ciccozzi, deputy county counsel, will be the interim county counsel. Currently he is acting assistant chief administrative officer. Combs is recruiting for a permanent assistant CAO.

The departure adds to the **county's vacancies** at the upper echelon.

Per state law, county counsels serve four-year terms.

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*

Boreal makes strides to reduce carbon footprint

By investing in energy efficiency, green building, alternative fuels, renewable energy and waste reduction Boreal Mountain Resort has reduced its carbon footprint by 72 tons between 2014-2015,

The ski resort is on track to increase that number in 2016.

Boreal's changes include: a snowmaking cooling system, HVAC in shop, airlock door in loading bay, washable dishes at camp and restaurant, 100 percent purchasing of electricity through renewable energy credits.

Another successful initiative is Protect Your Playground, which exists to empower and inspire individuals to identify and develop solutions for environmental issues that affect their local natural playgrounds.

The resort's efforts also tie into Truckee's Climate Action Plan.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

South Tahoe Action Team members sought

The South Lake Tahoe Fire Department is accepting applications for the next session of STAT: South Tahoe Action Teams.

This program is for community members to be trained by the

South Lake Tahoe Fire Department as responders during times of crisis.

Curriculum will include nine hours of instruction taught by members of the South Lake Tahoe Fire Department. Applicants will be expected to commit their time and will be called upon in times of natural disaster, large scale emergencies and times of need in the South Lake Tahoe area.

STAT team members to be well versed in command structure, emergency first aid, lifting/moving techniques, use of extinguishers, flood safety and building collapse.

Classes are Wednesdays from 6-9pm, Jan. 13, 20, 27.

Applications are available **online** and are due Jan. 6.

White House pushes water conservation

By Carolyn Lochhead, San Francisco Chronicle

WASHINGTON – The White House followed Sunday's landmark climate pact in Paris with a push Tuesday on water conservation and efficiency, as top administration officials warned that water shortages are among the biggest consequences of rising global temperatures.

White House science adviser John Holdren and Interior Secretary Sally Jewell said the plan is to find ways to squeeze more water from existing systems through new technologies.

Congress is no longer funding the giant dams like those built

in the last century that led to the development of the West, Jewell said, while Holdren warned that climate change is reducing the available freshwater supply even as higher temperatures increase demand.

Read the whole story

Embezzlement cases ends with prison term

An El Dorado County man is headed for prison for 30 months for embezzling nearly a half million dollars from a company that was doing business in Placer and Sacramento counties.

Jeffrey Lamson, 51, of El Dorado Hills was sentenced Dec. 15. In addition to prison Lamson must pay more than \$400,000 in restitution.

Court documents show that from at least 2009 through 2011 Lamson embezzled the money while he was controller of the company. He used company funds to make unauthorized payments to himself and others and made payments to a fictitious vendor, controlled by Lamson, for services that were never performed.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Snippets about Lake Tahoe



- Snow removal operations and periods of heavy snow can make it difficult for firefighters to find and use the nearest fire hydrant. Officials encourage residents to voluntarily clear snow from neighborhood hydrants.
- California Tahoe Conservancy and Lake Tahoe Community College will host an open house Jan. 7 from 6-8pm in the LTCC board room to offer the public an opportunity to discuss the next phase of the South Lake Tahoe Greenway Shared Use Trail between Glenwood Way and Sierra Boulevard.
- South Lake Tahoe Fire Department is collecting new or like-new condition used toys for Christmas Cheer barrels. Barrels are at each station.
- An 800-pound boulder fell onto Interstate 80 near the California-Nevada border on Dec. 13, requiring traffic to be stopped as Caltrans pushed it to the side of the road. No one was hurt.