Letter: Ridgeline development a disaster in the making

To the community,

During a recent District 5 constituent gathering in Supervisor Jennifer Montgomery's office in Tahoe City, Fire Chief Michael Schwartz stated: "On average, we put out a fire a day around here."

One day – likely a windy day – one of these fires is sure get out of hand, or some monster will blow in from elsewhere .I've been in the midst of a wind-blown, out-of-control, 100,000-acre wildfire.

Harrowing and life threatening only begin to express the terror. The ground was so hot I could feel the heat through the soles of my shoes. The wind was blowing embers more than a mile ahead of where we were trying to find safety. Simply breathing was an exercise in pain management, and it didn't matter how many showers I took, I stunk of smoke for days afterward. Those who live on the North Shore know that we're already at or near capacity with summer traffic that routinely gridlocks for a mile or more on highways 28 and 89. Weekday construction traffic entering and leaving Martis Camp backs up Highway 267 for miles, morning and evening. Kings Beach has experienced ever-growing congestion for years, but it has recently worsened with the narrow, single lane roads in each direction, no pedestrian control, and roundabout "improvements."

Now, imagine the additional impact of the proposed ridgeline projects comprised of the 550-site Brockway Campground, 760-home Martis Valley West Project, and acres of commercial amenities. These new developments, with 25-year building permits would be accessed from Highway 267. On a daily basis,

there would be hundreds of additional cars and RVs – some towing boats and other toys – logging trucks, and construction vehicles up and down Highway 267, congesting traffic for miles in either direction. Can anyone reasonably argue or defend the likelihood of something other than a gridlocked death trap within the basin and along Highway 267 during an emergency evacuation?

Recently, on Southern California's I-15 freeway between Los Angeles and Las Vegas, dozens of vehicles were overtaken and trapped by a fast-moving wildfire. Drivers and passengers were forced to abandon their vehicles and run for their lives. If this occurred on a four-lane freeway during routine traffic conditions, imagine what Highway 267 would look like with thousands of residents and visitors attempting to flee to safety.

There are many issues that I find disconcerting about these two developments in addition to the assured traffic congestion/public safety issues they will create. What about the added exhaust pollution trapped in the basin, and the resulting impact on the health of our residents, the lake, and forests? Where will the water come from to support these developments, and how will it affect the quality of water provided by local utilities in the basin? Which agency will provide first responder services to a new "Kings Beach-sized" community far from existing infrastructure? Will this be only the first ridgetop development to push its way into the Tahoe basin, forever destroying our unspoiled ridgelines and our uncompromised nighttime celestial views?

The list is endless.

Landowners have a limited right to find the highest and best use of their land. Conversely, as a check and balance, citizens' elected or appointed representatives need to exercise their moral and ethical responsibility to protect and safeguard their communities and constituents in order to

maintain a balance for the common good. As citizens, we must be observant and informed in order to effectively participate and protect our rights, our environment, our community, and our treasured Lake Tahoe. I can attest firsthand that in a wildfire few things go according to plan, especially evacuations. Many lives are at risk if North Shore residents and visitors simply can't get to safety. I've yet to hear any sound arguments to convince me that the two ridgeline developments, and the hundreds of additional vehicles they will assuredly bring, will do anything but jeopardize public safety.

Robert Heinz, retired Realtor/investor and 18-year North Shore resident

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Class covers more than safe hunting

By Benjamin Spillman, Reno Gazette-Journal

On a recent Sunday the classroom in the Verdi library was filled with people who wanted to go hunting in Nevada.

But it took the story of an African lion hunt from the 1960s to illustrate how when it comes to hunting there's an incredibly fine line between success and disaster.

The story was a recollection from Gary Speegle, a volunteer hunting safety instructor for the Nevada Department of Wildlife.

Speegle, whose family lived in Ethiopia from 1955-65, recalled it during a portion of the class that entails learning the

myriad parts of a firearm and how they work together before and after a shooter pulls the trigger.

Read the whole story

When Americans understood weather was connected to larger forces

By Sean Munger

Two hundred years ago this week, the Great September Gale struck New England. The “gale” swamped the coastlines of five states with storm surges up to 15 feet. It reduced dozens of ships in Boston, Providence, and other harbors to matchsticks, and destroyed houses, churches, and barns from Long Island to New Hampshire. Forests were leveled, with trees torn up at the roots. High winds hurled broken glass, bricks, and slate roof tiles through the streets of urban areas. The storm bent the steeple of Old South Church in Boston. Most modern sources record the death toll at 38, but it could have been considerably higher.

Though people didn’t use the word “hurricane” much back then, it assuredly was one, most likely a Category 4. The Great September Gale was the second major hurricane to strike New England since the coming of white settlers, and since that time, only the famous “Long Island Express” hurricane of 1938 is believed to have been more destructive.

I came upon the Great September Gale while I was researching Americans’ perceptions of climate during the 1810s. This

decade is particularly interesting because the climate all around the world temporarily cooled for about a decade. And at the same time, many social institutions, including science, were in significant transition. The September Gale is one of numerous weather and climate events that people remembered and recorded, especially in their diaries. Some peoples' descriptions of the 1815 gale took me back to a tornado I experienced as a teenager in Nebraska in 1988. After that storm, the streets of Omaha filled with branches and bricks, much like Boston's after the gale. When I read a newspaper account, the centuries just telescoped into a common moment in time.

Hurricanes have loomed large in our consciousness lately. Last month, the nation observed the 10th anniversary of Hurricane Katrina, an event whose meaning and legacy we are still quite painfully trying to evaluate. Unlike Katrina, the New England hurricane of September 1815 did not cause significant demographic shifts or provoke hard questions about our responsibilities to care for each other in disaster situations, but it does provide an opportunity to consider Americans' attitudes toward storms—and our climate—then and now.

In 1815, most New Englanders called events of this size and intensity a "gale" or "tempest." In an era before detailed weather forecasting became widespread, people tended to view extreme weather events as simply a natural feature of the places where they lived. Their understanding of weather and scientific phenomena came from the kind of earthy knowledge, colored by folklore and astrology, found in popular farmers' almanacs. For example, the Boston-published Physician's Almanac for June 1817 is a dizzying jumble of planetary and zodiac symbols and precise notations of tides and solar positions. Simple advice such as, "Good weather for vegetation, if not too cold," and "Look for much rain," is interspersed with platitudes and sayings such as, "Weakness is

the only incorrigible fault men have."

Americans' views about weather and climate in the 1810s were more holistic than ours today. Gales and tempests were related, many people thought, to phenomena like lightning, volcanism, and earthquakes. The 1815 storm occurred only a few years after the powerful New Madrid earthquakes in Missouri commanded public attention, and less than a year before the bizarre climate anomalies of the "Year Without Summer" (1816)—which involved snowstorms in June and killing frosts in the dog days of August. In the 1810s, the idea of an "electric fluid" surrounding and suffusing the world—disturbances in which manifested themselves as earthquakes, waterspouts, hurricanes, and thunderstorms—was quite mainstream. "[A]ll observation convinces us," wrote one author in an 1812 article in the *Port-Folio*, referring to this electric fluid, "that these phenomena are marked by its presence and arise from its agency." For most people the Earth, the oceans, atmosphere and the heavens above it were all interconnected systems like those of a human body.

We ask very different kinds of questions today about the weather—and they mostly concern the future. Is that tropical depression going to become a hurricane? How strong is it going to be? Where will it come ashore? Many of the factors that made Katrina such a painful experience involved this future dimension, centering upon questions about what authorities should have known or done in advance of the storm's landfall. It's right that we ask these questions; the people of Boston and Providence could not prepare for the 1815 gale in advance. When they talked about weather, their preoccupations centered mostly on agricultural concerns: when to plant your winter wheat and when frosts could be expected that might damage your corn. Their conception of future weather was vague and mostly cyclical, tethered very tightly to natural rhythms observed in previous seasons. For them, the most important weather was that of the past.

Our current emphasis on weather in the future tense—and our reliance upon minutely specialized fields of expertise to explain scientific questions—has made it harder for us to appreciate specific weather events as part of a global ecosystem. Hurricanes are not a singular phenomenon. They are powered by warm sea surface temperatures and set in motion by wind patterns. The scientific consensus is that industries and other human activity are affecting these processes, driving up sea surface temperatures, increasing the intensity of hurricanes. Yet the connection between climate change and hurricanes is somewhat murky in public consciousness because it's impossible to prove that this individual hurricane or that one was "caused" by global warming. The compartmentalization and specialization of modern scientific disciplines has greatly increased our overall scientific understanding, but sometimes it makes it harder for us to see the forest for the trees.

For many New Englanders in 1815, it was intuitively obvious that everything in the sky, and most everything on the ground, was connected somehow to everything else. It would have come as no surprise to vintners in 1815 New England that wine grapes harvested in the aftermath of the Great September Gale tasted like salt. Some took the interconnectedness a step further, seeing in it a higher meaning. Shortly after the gale, a deeply religious young woman wrote in her diary, "[W]ho can tell what providence has designed by this judgment? We cannot think 'tis sent for nothing."

In 2015, we obviously know much more about hurricanes than we did 200 years ago, but looking back closely and carefully can be useful, too. History is more than a laundry list of problems or mistakes that we keep solely so we can avoid repeating them. Sometimes it's a reminder that the view from the present can be more narrow and restrictive than the view from the past.

Sean Munger is a doctoral candidate at the University of

Oregon in environmental history. He is studying environmental history during the "Cold Decade," a period of temporary climate change between 1810 and 1820.

Snippets about Lake Tahoe

· Fall Food Fest, a fundraiser for the Lake Tahoe Educational Foundation, is Oct. 10 from 6-9:30pm at Hard Rock Casino. Tickets are $50. For more information, email nrollston@sbcglobal.net or call Nancy Rollston at 530.314.9101.

· The Village at Squaw will transform into a Bavarian biergarten on Sept. 26 from 2-6pm.

· Sustainable Forestry Initiative with the support of volunteers from across the U.S. and Canada, officially set a Guinness World Record for the most trees planted in one hour by small teams, planting a total of 202,935 trees. Taking place on May 20, the successful effort involved 29 teams from across North America, including the Sugar Pine Foundation. Volunteers planted 69 trees at the Tahoe Donner Association Trails in Truckee.

· Twenty-two divers from Project AWARE Foundation removed 250 pounds of garbage from the Zephyr Cove area last weekend as part of the annual Sierra River Cleanup day. One item – a gangway from a boat – weighed 150 pounds.

Feds reject endangered status for sage grouse

By Rich Landers, Spokesman-Review

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has determined after a four year-study that the greater sage-grouse does not warrant protection under the Endangered Species Act as long as states and ranchers work to improve the plight of the bird on 60 million acres of sagebrush lands across 11 western states.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's decision to give state and federal conservation efforts an opportunity to save the sage grouse and its habitat offers a reprieve from stifling restrictions that could have been inflicted on ranchers and local economies that depend on this Western landscape.

Interior Secretary Sally Jewell made the announcement today backed by state governors at the Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge near Denver. Federal officials say the greater sage grouse won't need the protections of the Endangered Species Act because of the safeguards in state and federal conservation plans and work by private landowners.

Read the whole story

Vail employees spend day

volunteering around Tahoe

On Sept. 19, more than 400 employees from Heavenly Mountain Resort, Northstar and Kirkwood Mountain Resort gathered to breathe new life into the North and South Lake Tahoe Boys & Girls Club locations, as well as help with various trail maintenance projects on Sawtooth Trail and throughout the Martis Valley in partnership with the Truckee Trails Foundation.

These volunteers represent a portion of the 2,000 Vail Resorts employees who gave back to their communities as part of Vail Resorts' annual EpicPromise Day.

Established in 2010, EpicPromise Day brings together employees, their friends and families, to support a local community need. Since its founding, the annual EpicPromise Day has allowed more than 6,700 volunteers to give nearly 26,000 hours of time to local projects.

Volunteers updated classrooms and buildings at the Boys & Girls Clubs of North and South Lake Tahoe by deep cleaning, applying 29 gallons of fresh paint to the locations, installing and refurbishing cubbies, disposing 8 tons of debris, crafting a sandbox and assisting in landscaping that created a beautiful memorial garden where students can read and study outdoors.

Volunteers also were able to trim overgrowth and remove debris and loose rocks from the Sawtooth Trail and repair a boardwalk running through Martis Valley, aiding in trail maintenance as well as erosion and water quality efforts.

Flu vaccine expected to be better this year

By Victoria Colliver, San Francisco Chronicle

Federal health officials are urging Americans to start getting their influenza shots and emphasized that, unlike last year, this year's vaccine appears to be a good match with the strains of flu they expect to hit the U.S.

More than 170 million doses of the vaccine are being produced, 40 million of which have already been distributed to doctors' offices and pharmacies. No shortages are predicted.

Global and national health experts hope to avoid a repeat of last year's debacle when the predominant strain of flu – a variation of Type A, subtype H3N2 – had mutated from what scientists initially thought it would be. By that time, it was too late to create a new vaccine, which takes about six months to develop. By the time a new vaccine would have been created and distributed, the flu season, which generally runs from December through early spring, would have already begun.

Read the whole story

Letter: Looking for input on sales tax hike idea

To the community,

The Placer County Transportation Planning Agency is strongly considering asking the voters to increase the sales tax

countywide by 0.5 percent (half cent) in 2016 in order to fund transportation related projects such as roads, trails, and transit. It would require a two-thirds majority to pass, and funds would be dedicated to transportation improvements within the county.

Funds collected specifically in the North Lake Tahoe region would only be used for transportation improvements in our region, totaling approximately $1,200,000 annually. This increase would also allow Placer County to be eligible to obtain additional funding from federal and state programs.

Your input on this very short survey will help the local leaders to identify how to best spend those funds should this proposal move forward to the ballot in 2016. Thank you for your time and input and don’t hesitate to contact me if you have any questions.

Click here for the survey. Please reply by Sept. 30.

Sandy Evans Hall, CEO/executive director North Lake Tahoe Resort Association

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Pesticide protester making rounds at council meetings

By Anjeanette Damon, Reno Gazette-Journal

The agitated man wearing a red sweat shirt who rushed into the Washoe County Commission chambers on Monday and began pacing in the lobby was already familiar to Reno City Council members.



Ross Tisevich

After the man pulled a Roundup bottle out of his shirt and started to drink from it during public comment, police tackled him, handcuffed him and led him out of building.

“It’s a joke! It’s a joke,” he shouted. “It’s just water.”

Ross Tisevich, who goes by Ross Tisarich on social media, had been to Reno City Council meetings before to protest the city’s pesticide use. He was at the South Lake Tahoe City Council meeting last week doing the same.

Read the whole story

Night bike ride competition set for this weekend

Night Series will conclude with the final races of the season on Sept. 26.

These family-friendly cross country night bike races feature a custom illuminated course that runs
through the Lake Tahoe Golf Course, over fairways, into the rough, through sand traps and over
bridges with the occasional cart path. The course is

approximately 3 miles per lap, with most classes riding two laps.

Tahoe Game Bike Night is free to attend, with a $15 competitors entry fee. Registration will open at 7pm. Races will begin at 9pm with three heats based on respective classes and age groups.

In addition to the top three riders for each class, awards will be given out to the “Most Awesome” and “Best Glow.” An after party with food and drink specials and disc jockey will keep the festivities going inside the clubhouse.