

Fire funding fix comes with environmental rollbacks

By Jessica Kutz, High Country News

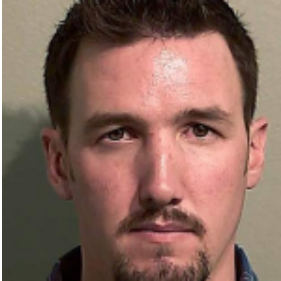
Congress accomplished something unprecedented last week: They passed a bipartisan solution to a knotty budget issue that has hobbled the U.S. Forest Service's ability to do restoration and fire-prevention work in Western forests. The \$1.3 trillion federal spending package, signed into law by President Trump, included a long-sought funding fix for wildfire response. Starting in 2020, the Forest Service will be able to access over \$2 billion a year outside of its regular fire suppression budget.

Some conservation groups question whether the fix was worth the compromises included in the bill, which could undermine environmental protections for forests and wildlife. The bill includes two riders that concern them. The first will allow logging projects less than 3,000 acres in size to move forward with little environmental review, so long as the goal of those projects is to reduce heavy fuel loads that increase fire risk.

A second provision could delay habitat protections for newly listed threatened and endangered species.

Read the whole story

Truckee man pleads no contest in rape case



James Russell
Ferrigno

A Truckee man could be sent to prison for six years after pleading no contest to charges of drugging and raping a woman.

James Russell Ferrigno, 32, entered the plea earlier this month. He was arrested in October, 2017.

Investigators said the victim was renting a room from Ferrigno. She told police she suspected Ferrigno of putting a substance in her drink at night, which led her to set up a camera in the kitchen.

Sentencing is scheduled for May 8. Upon release from prison Ferrigno would have to register as a sex offender for the rest of his life.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Stewart Indian School subject of talk

The Future of the Stewart Indian School will be the topic of a talk on April 10.

Lake Tahoe Historical Society is bring Sherry Rupert, executive director of the Nevada Indian Commission, for a narration of the past and future of the Stewart Indian School that was established in 1890.

The talk begins at 7pm at Camp Richardson Hotel on the South Shore.

It is free for members and \$3 for nonmembers.

Jim Greenwood – 1954-2018



Jim Greenwood

South Tahoe High School graduate Jim Greenwood died March 13, 2018. He was 63.

Born James Gregory Greenwood on May 22, 1954, in Inglewood to James R. and Betty Jean Greenwood, he had one brother, Robert Vincent, who predeceased him.

Jim's family moved to South Lake Tahoe in 1969. He forged many lifelong friendships during his school years and throughout his life. Much of his time was spent in Tahoe—his backyard playground for adventures.

Graduating in 1974 from STHS, Jim continued his education at UC Davis where he earned a bachelor's of science degree in marine biology. He entered a training program for account executives at Dean Witter in San Francisco. In 1982, Jim became a stockbroker for Dean Witter in Reno. He worked for Dean Witter, Wedbush and A.G. Edwards.

An active member of the Reno Jaycees in the 1990s, Jim dedicated countless hours serving the community. As a member of the leadership team, as vice president of individual development, Jim spoke throughout the state. Jim's gregarious persona won him the Nevada Jaycees Professional Speaker of the Quarter and Speaker of the Year. He continued to day trade following his retirement from brokering. Jim then launched a second career in healthcare. He enjoyed helping others and spent many years traveling around California conducting public health screenings for diabetes, bone density and heart disease at retail pharmacies.

In his spare time Jim and his beloved dog, Oreo, hiked in and around the Tahoe basin and Desolation Wilderness counting rare birds for the USFS.

Jim married his high school sweetheart, Kathy Hollingsworth, in 1980 in South Lake Tahoe. Jim and Kathy moved to Truckee in 1982. They had two children, Ashley Lorraine born in 1987 and Erik James in 1991. Sharing adventures with his small children in tow, he could be seen riding an ATV with one upfront and one on his back.

Jim is survived by his father, Bob Greenwood; daughter Ashley Connor (Justin Connor); son Erik Greenwood; grandchildren Ava and Jace Connor.

A celebration of Jim's life will be May 6 from 2-4pm at the Camp Richardson Boathouse Marina, 1900 Jameson Beach Road, South Lake Tahoe.

In lieu of flowers, donations made in Jim's memory can be sent to: Monterey Bay Labrador Retriever Rescue, PO Box 269, Pebble Beach, CA 93953.

Potential danger for start of rafting season

By Tom Stienstra, San Francisco Chronicle

"Stay out and stay alive."

That's the message a state ranger has for anyone planning a little fun in the sun at Northern California rivers this weekend.

Warming temperatures in the 70s together with a late-season snow can make for a deadly mix in the upper reaches of the American River – a popular destination for white water rafters – as swift rapids, unseen undertows and frigid temperatures in the 50s can overwhelm even the most experienced swimmers.

Read the whole story

NHP going after distracted drivers

Law enforcement agencies throughout Nevada will be focusing on distracted drivers from April 1-15.

The Nevada Highway Patrol will be working to urge motorists to keep their eyes on the road and put away cell phones or other items that cause distractions. On average, texting takes your eyes off the road for 4.6 seconds. When traveling at 55 mph, that is enough time to cover the length of a football field.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration said deaths reached 3,477 in 2015 due to distracted driving. Distracted driving is any activity that diverts your attention from driving, including talking or texting on your phone, eating, drinking, talking to people in your vehicle, fiddling with the stereo, entertainment or navigation system.

Snippets about Lake Tahoe

- Based on recent precipitation, the annual closure of dirt roads in Eldorado National Forest has been extended to April 15.

- To help celebrate National Library Week, Amelia Bedelia will be at the Douglas County Public Library in Minden on April 14 at 11am. Bedelia is a very literal literary character, and she is often up to mischief. Families are invited to watch her wacky antics as she tries to “change” the towels and “dust” the furniture. Carol Nageotte will perform as this children’s book character.

- Douglas County Public Library in Minden is having a children's book swap April 14 from 10am-3pm. Children may bring a gently used book from home and trade it for another book in the swap.

- Liberty Utilities' business offices in Tahoe Vista and South Lake Tahoe will be closed April 10 so employees may attend customer service training.

- Douglas County is having an open house April 11 from 6-8pm at the commissioners' chambers in Minden to preview the new election equipment and electronic poll books.

SLT's financial future on precarious ground

By Kathryn Reed

South Lake Tahoe's finances are stable today. Look again in November and it may be a completely different story.

That will be one of the messages delivered Tuesday by Debbie McIntyre, the city's finance director, when she goes over the midyear budget with the City Council.

What could change in seven months for the city is the potential ballot initiative that would ban vacation home rentals everywhere but the tourist core.

"We could create our own depression in our own city because of the initiative," McIntyre told *Lake Tahoe News*.

The hotel tax is one of three main revenue streams for the city, with property and sales taxes being the other. If that

income were to suddenly go away, so would services and staff.

The other concern is what the VHR ban would do to the real estate market, and therefore property taxes. That's a scenario that frightens those who are looking at it from a financial standpoint.

The first thing being hit is the new recreation center. Voters approved Measure P in November 2016 which raised the TOT by 2 percentage points. The added cash is to be dedicated solely toward recreation. That includes what is supposed to be a state-of-the-art recreation center to replace the dilapidated one from the 1970s, improvements to Regan Beach and other items.

The rec center started out at \$25 million, went to \$40 million and now has a price tag of \$33 million. The problem is there is only \$2.5 million in the bank. Without stable TOT, the city doesn't know what it would have for debt service on the rec center.

The council will receive an update about the rec center in late April or in May.

Complicating the matter is that the rec center was used as collateral for the 2006 bonds that the city took out. Now the D Street building and Fire Station No. 1 are the collateral, which means the D Street site can't be sold until the bonds are paid off in 2026.

This makes it more imperative to finish the D Street project so that site can be used by the city. It is one of the projects, which includes relocating the city's corporation yard, that is being recommended by staff to be funded by undesignated reserves.

The city has more than \$10.27 million in the undesignated reserves account. Of that, about \$1.5 million is being recommended to be spent on midyear expense adjustments.

McIntyre is proposing then spending about half of the remaining \$8.8 million on one-time expenses.

Her other suggestions include:

- Fully funding the retiree health insurance commitment for the remaining two years
- Police building remodel
- Police, fire, public works radio system
- City vehicle and equipment replacement.

It will be up to the electeds if they want to spend any of that money and then to decide how to do so.

The staff report for the April 3 meeting says, "The finance department did a comprehensive revenue study of the major revenues encompassing the past three years, and determined that TOT budgets should be increased upward but only to the extent actual collections in 2015-16."

Revenues at midyear (the city's fiscal year starts Oct. 1) are up nearly \$2 million. Much of this is TOT and property taxes. Expenses, though, are at more than \$3.2 million. This is why the cash from undesignated reserves is being requested.

Some of the larger additional expenses include:

- \$1.159 million one-time costs for employees per contracts that were recently agreed to;
- \$500,000 to account for salary adjustments;
- \$220,000 for city attorney contract;
- \$200,000 for snow removal from the 2016-17 season;
- \$160,000 three new firefighters.

What isn't in the report is any compensation for Fire Chief

Jeff Meston for taking over as acting city manager. Nor is there money for an interim to take over. The budget is being adjusted by \$140,000 to pay out former City Manager Nancy Kerry for her sick and vacation time. The city manager budget stays the same to reflect Kerry's payout of nine months' worth of salary. The report notes it is not anticipated to have a new city manager until after Sept. 30, at least as far as budgeting goes.

There also isn't any money for roads. This is usually when that budget is adjusted.

The line item capital improvement projects are \$100,000 for the stream environmental restoration at the Whole Foods site and \$85,381 for new equipment in council chambers.

A change going forward is that the city is likely to return to where it has a more comprehensive budget process in the fall, and the midyear would have fewer alterations. McIntyre said this is easier on her department. Doing it the current way, she said, is like preparing two budgets. For department heads, it will mean being more precise at the get-go. That doesn't mean there won't be a midyear budget adjustment, it will just be less robust because of the change.

Opinion: Calif. fishing industry drying up

By Brian Hines, Sacramento Bee

When I was 10, I taught myself how to fish in California's redwood-lined Russian River, once a world-renowned wild steelhead rainbow trout sport fishery. Today, as a veteran

trout and salmon sport angler I see how climate change threatens our wild trout and salmon populations and our outdoor traditions.

California is home to 31 kinds of salmon and trout. Of those, 23 are at risk of going extinct over the next century. Many factors affect the health of California fisheries, including water diversions and pollution, forestry practices, mining, and dams. Climate change, which leads to extreme drought, reduced snowpack, increased wild fires, ocean acidification, and warmer stream waters, compounds the threat to our cold-water fisheries.

Read the whole story

U.N. chief: Climate change biggest threat to humanity

By Somini Sengupta, New York Times

UNITED NATIONS — Nuclear weapons? Famine? Civil war? Nope.

The United Nations secretary general, António Guterres, on Thursday called climate change “the most systemic threat to humankind” and urged world leaders to curb their countries’ greenhouse gas emissions.

He didn’t say much, though, about the one world leader who had pulled out of the landmark United Nations climate change agreement: President Trump.

Instead, Guterres suggested that Trump’s withdrawal from the Paris accord nearly a year ago didn’t matter much. The American people, he said, were doing plenty.

Read the whole story