

Wyoming wind could save California water

By Mead Gruver, AP

CHEYENNE — California regulators could achieve savings in water use, electricity rates and greenhouse emissions by turning to Wyoming wind power to help offset the natural ups and downs of wind and solar power in their state, according to a University of Wyoming report released Monday.

The reason: Wyoming's wind patterns tend to be opposite of those in California.

The wind in Wyoming tends to blow more during the winter and afternoon. California tends to be windier during the summer and at night, according to the report for the Wyoming Infrastructure Authority by Jonathan Naughton of the university's Wind Energy Research Center.

That the wind doesn't blow all the time and the sun doesn't shine at night or on cloudy days are two of the biggest shortcomings of those renewable energy sources. But spreading renewable power out across the grid can make renewable energy generally more viable.

Chances are, if the wind isn't blowing in one region, it's gusty somewhere else.

The study compared wind patterns at California wind farms to those at sites with wind potential in Wyoming, including an approximately 1,000-turbine wind farm in south-central Wyoming that the Denver-based Anschutz Corp. plans to build to export electricity to California.

Naughton said using Wyoming wind could help California save water: as much as 1.2 billion gallons a year as California

relied less on power plants fueled by nuclear energy and fossil fuels.

Hard Rock pool seepage less than first reported

Lake Tahoe Hard Rock's pool could not immediately be drained to deal with the leak because the water in it is a reserve source in case of a fire.

Tahoe Douglas Fire Protection District on July 28 gave the authorization for the pool to be emptied.

"We have a plan in place we can hook into to grab water from nearby water sources," Eric Guevin with the fire department told *Lake Tahoe News*.

The investigation involving the leak at the Stateline property has revealed the loss of water is closer to 5,000 gallons per day instead of the originally reported 20,000 gallons.

Nevada Division of Environmental Protection workers were on site Tuesday. On Wednesday a contractor will use sonar with the goal of pinpointing the source of the leak.

JoAnn Kittrell with the state agency said it could take some time to know if there are any environmental issues pertaining to the pool water seeping into the groundwater.

Jen Eastwood, spokeswoman for the hotel-casino, told *Lake Tahoe News* there is no time line for when the pool and hot tub will reopen. The 200,000 gallon pool has been **closed since July 24.**

The leak needs to be identified and then officials will determine how to fix it.

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*

Drug prices soar, prompting calls for justification

By Andrew Pollack, New York Times

As complaints grow about exorbitant drug prices, pharmaceutical companies are coming under pressure to disclose the development costs and profits of those medicines and the rationale for charging what they do.

So-called pharmaceutical cost transparency bills have been introduced in at least six state legislatures in the last year, aiming to make drug companies justify their prices, which are often attributed to high research and development costs.

“If a prescription drug demands an outrageous price tag, the public, insurers and federal, state and local governments should have access to the information that supposedly justifies the cost,” says the preamble of a bill introduced in the New York State Senate in May.

Read the whole story

Breckenridge, Vail battling over proposed lift ticket tax

By Jason Blevins, Denver Post

Breckenridge voters will decide on a lift-ticket tax to cover for parking and transit upgrades after the town and Vail Resorts failed to reach an agreement on funding.

Town leaders wanted the resort operator to support a town-wide transit plan that includes a parking garage, pedestrian access, road improvements and employee parking lots. That plan carries an annual operating budget of \$4 million to \$6 million. Vail Resorts said it was only willing to cover the majority of the cost of a new parking structure – either on its own land near the gondola or at the downtown F-Lot.

The impasse led Breckenridge to say on Monday that it will ask voters to approve an “admissions tax” – similar to the 4 percent parking and transit tax the Town of Vail charges on lift ticket sales – to fund the transit plan.

Read the whole story

El Niño growing into monster

By Mike Moffitt, San Francisco Chronicle

New computer models suggest that the current El Niño formation brewing in the Pacific could become the strongest in recorded history.

The broad swath of warmer-than-usual seawater is spreading and

deepening. The two largest concentrations are off the coast of Peru, where water is 4 degrees Centigrade warmer than usual, and just west of Vancouver and Seattle – 3 degrees warmer.

If this El Niño continues to grow, it could surpass the modern record-setting 1997-98 El Niño event, which inundated the Bay Area and the rest of California for months, causing flooding, mudslides and subsidences, and heavy snowfalls in the Sierra.

Read the whole story

Seasonal fire crew moves into permanent quarters

Tahoe Douglas Fire Department's Zephyr Crew finally has permanent quarters.

Gone are the temporary modular structures the more than 30 firefighters have used for years.

"This will help the department because we were spending a lot of funds. It didn't have full sewer so we had to pump that and the weather would damage the temporary buildings," Eric Guevin with Tahoe Douglas fire told *Lake Tahoe News*. "It will be a cost-savings to the taxpayers because they will be permanent buildings."

A shop is equipped with the tools so the seasonal firefighters can maintain their vehicles.

The new office is at 205 Kingsbury Grade in Stateline. It used to be a communications building.

While the crew doesn't spend the night, equipment and other

items will be there all the time. A crew boss and others will use it year-round as an office.

“Their primary objective is fighting fires,” Guevin said of the Zephyr Crew. “Secondary, is fuels reduction throughout the Tahoe Douglas district.”

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*

Stateline casino revenue skyrockets

While the state gaming totals for Nevada declined, the Stateline casinos showed a substantial gain in June compared to 2014.

Throughout Nevada the revenue was down 8.37 percent to \$830.9 million. On the South Shore the win was up 44 percent, or \$17.6 million.

The Gaming Control Board released the figures today.

The state was dragged down by the Las Vegas Strip casinos where revenue was off 16.31 percent compared to a year ago.

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*

Hot weather to test firefighters in NorCal

By Bill Lindelof, Sacramento Bee

Firefighters will be battling the weather as well as flames and smoke for the next four days in wild fires that sprouted up last week and continue to burn.

Even in the Sierra, where the Lowell Fire in Nevada County, and the Kyburz Fire, are still being suppressed by legions of helmeted firefighters in heavy, flame resistant jackets, temperatures are expected to be around 100 degrees.

The Lowell Fire in Nevada County has destroyed 1,700 acres and is 25 percent contained. The fire, which began Saturday west of Alta and forced evacuations. The high temperature today in Grass Valley is expected to be 95 degrees.

Read the whole story

Calif. officials tracking deer near Truckee

The California Department of Fish and Wildlife has deemed its deer capture project involving the Loyalton-Truckee mule deer herd a success.

This purpose of the capture and study is to help researchers better understand deer migration patterns and reduce the high number of automobile/deer collisions on a busy 25-mile stretch of Highway 89 outside the Lake Tahoe Basin.

Using tranquilizer darts, CDFW wildlife biologists captured 13 does and fitted them with global positioning satellite collars. Blood and hair samples were taken, length and weight measurements were recorded and general health inspections were conducted on each animal.

The GPS collars will record the location and send the information to researchers through a satellite. This will allow scientists to track the deer as they move from summer to winter ranges throughout the year often crossing Highway 89. Caltrans carcass data have confirmed that more than 1,000 deer have been killed along this busy road in the last 30 years.

The Loyalton-Truckee mule deer are a migratory herd inside the Tahoe National Forest. It is estimated that more than 2,000 deer occupy this area.

Ex-supervisor wants back pay from EDC

Ron Briggs v. El Dorado County



By Kathryn Reed

Former El Dorado County Supervisor Ron Briggs believes he is owed nearly \$93,000 in back wages.

The claim he filed against the county has been rejected. He expects the formal lawsuit to be processed in the coming months.

Briggs served on the board for eight years, having left in January when the incoming electeds were seated.

He claims that starting in 2000 the Board of Supervisors adopted four resolutions tying the supervisors' rate of pay to what the unions and other electeds received. It wasn't until 2013 that Briggs said he became aware of this.

However, there is an ordinance on the books that says supervisors set their own wages, that it must be heard twice in public – as is the norm for all ordinances.

Supervisors receive about \$76,000 a year, plus benefits. Briggs contends had the raises occurred, he would have been making – as would the current board – closer to \$93,000 annually.

"Ron Briggs was paid the same as every other county supervisor and in accordance with the rules and direction established by the Board of Supervisors before Ron took office," Joe Harn,

county auditor-controller, told *Lake Tahoe News*. "Ron never complained to my office about his salary while he was in office for eight years."

The county has hired outside legal counsel to deal with the threat of litigation. Through May, about \$12,000 has been spent. That number could skyrocket if a prolonged court case ensues.

"Ron's threatened litigation against the county is another waste of the public's money," Harn said.

State law allows Briggs to seek three year's worth of wages. That is how the \$92,346.84 was derived.

"To tell the county counsel and CAO I need a pay increase ... it was uncomfortable. I waited until I got out," Briggs told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Briggs said in 2013 he was in favor of reducing how other electeds were paid. So much so that he and other supes cut the pay of the sheriff, auditor and others.

(However, none of the supervisors broached the subject of reducing their own pay.)

In November 2014, after the election, supervisors voted 3-2 to restore the pay. Briggs and Supervisor Shiva Frentzen were it the minority. The majority believed the electeds should make more than the subordinates. Without restoring the pay, this would not have been the case.

Briggs said, "It's an out of hand pay system the county has for its electeds. The reason why salaries and benefits keep rising and rising is because we keep firing all our department heads. Every time you raise department heads' pay it affects the entire organizational chart. Every time an elected gets a pay raise, then the second and third (in charge) wants a raise and it gets out of control."

The potential litigation, he said, is his way to make the point that the pay structure as it relates to elected officials in the county needs revamping.