

Snowpack water content more than triples in a month



Alec Bowman enjoys the powder at Sierra-at-Tahoe. Photo/Brian Walker

By Amy Graff, San Francisco Chronicle

A series of supercharged storms that blasted the Sierra in March has bolstered the snowpack that was alarmingly low before the start of the month.

The National Weather Service in Sacramento tweeted Saturday that the water content of the snowpack has more than tripled in the past month.

On Feb. 22, an average of 4.6 inches was measured and on March 23 an average of 15.5 inches was recorded, going from 16 percent to 56 percent of the April 1 average.

Read the whole story

The tools you need to prevent disease

By Health and Life

Health care in the United States historically has been focused on treating the symptoms of sickness. The scientific accomplishments in this area are truly astonishing, but despite these advances, the American population as a whole isn't healthier. In fact, chronic diseases are on the rise.



Greg Bergner

To combat this in our own community, Barton Health will soon be offering the Complete Health Improvement Program (CHIP), a national program proven to improve health and wellness. CHIP is designed to help people reduce their risk for disease through better health habits and lifestyle changes. *Health and Life* spoke with Gregory Bergner, Barton Health medical director of lifestyle and wellness, to learn more about this program and who it can help.

Health and Life: *Why is it so important to focus on chronic diseases?*

Bergner: Chronic diseases rob us of function, reduce our quality of life, and usually result in premature death. Examples include heart disease, diabetes, hypertension, and obesity. These chronic diseases are now responsible for more than 75 percent of health care costs. And physical diseases

aren't the only conditions keeping us from reaching our full potential. Mental conditions such as stress, depression, or lacking a sense of purpose in life also take their toll.

Health and Life: *So how do we reverse this sobering trend?*

Bergner: There is hope in dealing with these health conditions. What many people don't realize is that these diseases are preventable, or can be slowed—and even reversed—with simple, inexpensive changes in our lifestyles. Mounting scientific evidence backs this up.

Health and Life: *How is Barton Health working to improve the health of our own population?*

Bergner: Promoting wellness in our community is the foundation of the new Barton Center for Orthopedics & Wellness. We're excited to be offering innovative wellness programs based on four pillars of good health: Nutrition, Exercise, Stress Management, and Having a Sense of Purpose in Life. We're combining conventional medicine with evidence-based alternative therapies to support a "whole-person approach" to better health.

CHIP is one example of how we're doing this. This nationally recognized program focuses on those four pillars. It's an intensive educational program with 18 sessions running over three months. Participants are guided through the stages of lifestyle change. They learn how to make positive changes—such as exercising more often—and then learn to maintain them. The group setting provides support to help people stick with their new health habits and build accountability. The goal is to lower cholesterol, reduce hypertension and blood sugar levels, and reduce excess weight.

Tahoe Tails – Adoptable Pets in South Lake Tahoe



Quinn

Quinn is an 18-month-old German shepherd mix. She is a very sweet and energetic puppy, and she loves the snow and going for walks.

Quinn is spayed, microchipped, tested for heart worm, and vaccinated. She is at the El Dorado County Animal Services shelter in Meyers, along with many other dogs and cats who are waiting for their new homes. Go to the Tahoe animal shelter's Facebook page to see photos and descriptions of all pets at the shelter.

Call 530.573.7925 for directions, hours, and other information on adopting a pet.

For spay-neuter assistance for South Tahoe residents, go **online**.

– Karen Kuentz

EDC wants help in dealing with homelessness

By Kathryn Reed

El Dorado County is trying to get a handle on homelessness by creating a continuum of care for those in need.

Daniel Del Monte, deputy director of the Community Services Division of the county's Health and Human Services Agency, was at last week's South Lake Tahoe City Council meeting painting a bleak picture about housing and homelessness.

He spoke about the desire to create a homeless coordinator position. While a dollar amount was not talked about at the March 21 meeting, it will be on a future council agenda.

Barton and Marshall hospitals, the cities of South Lake Tahoe and Placerville, and El Dorado County are each being asked to contribute \$20,000 a year for the homeless coordinator position. The hospitals have said yes. The county wants a two-year commitment from every entity.

Hospitals suffer financially when homeless people choose to use the emergency room when a doctor would suffice, or if when what they really need is mental health services, or even a warm place to stay.

"The primary purpose of the homeless coordinator is to provide proper administrative support, strategic planning, HMIS administration and capacity building for our partners. Counties who invest in their continuum of care receive significantly more money than El Dorado County has received," El Dorado County CAO Don Ashton told *Lake Tahoe News*. "If

successful, funding the homeless coordinator will bring in more federal money to manage the homeless population. By establishing a multi-agency MOU and partnership with the county, city of Placerville, Marshall Hospital, Barton and the city of South Lake Tahoe, we could share the cost and share in the benefit. We haven't discussed specific deal points, but conceptually any additional funding the county realizes as a result of the homeless coordinator would be shared based on a formula between the West Slope and East Slope."

Del Monte pointed out how California has about 40 million residents, with housing for 25 million.

"From 2007 to 2015 was the lowest eight-year economic development period in the last 60 years. It comes at a time when the state population is at its highest," Del Monte said.

On one slide in the PowerPoint presentation De Monte posed the question: What can be done to increase person centered housing options?

The answers:

- Regions strive to create system responses to housing crises.
- Responses that can help to prevent individual from becoming homeless.
- Responses that maximize the ability to get homeless individuals rehoused with needed supports.
- One that maximizes self-sufficiency for each individual based upon their unique needs.
- One that produces the best results for the individual and the community.

However, how to accomplish those goals was never revealed. Nor were they explained further to get through the government-

speak. And the council members, other than Mayor Wendy David, were not very engaged in the presentation.

The thrust behind the continuum of care is to find housing quickly and then provide the support network so the person doesn't return to the street.

Del Monte said in El Dorado County it costs \$47 a day for supportive housing, up to \$155 for a detox facility, \$115 for jail, \$850 for a bed in a psychiatric facility, and \$4,000 a day at Barton Memorial Hospital for a 24-hour psych stay.

A continuum care approach is supposed to lower the costs of helping someone – and provide them with actual help.

Del Monte said the homeless coordinator would be used to leverage state and federal money. He said that person would manage the system.

He admitted, "Ultimately we will need more housing and more services."

Opinion: Could open government movement shut the door on Freedom of Information?

**By Suzanne J. Piotrowski, Alex Ingrams and Daniel Berliner,
The Conversation**

For democracy to work, citizens need to know what their government is doing. Then they can hold government officials

and institutions accountable.

Over the last 50 years, Freedom of Information – or FOI – laws have been one of the most useful methods for citizens to learn what government is doing. These state and federal laws give people the power to request, and get, government documents. From everyday citizens to journalists, FOI laws have proven a powerful way to uncover the often-secret workings of government.

But a potential threat is emerging – from an unexpected place – to FOI laws.

We are scholars of government administration, ethics and transparency. And our research leads us to believe that while FOI laws have always faced many challenges, including resistance, evasion, and poor implementation and enforcement, the last decade has brought a different kind of challenge in the form of a new approach to transparency.

Technology rules

The new kid on the block is the open government movement. And despite the fact that it shares a fundamental goal with the more established FOI movement – government transparency – the open government movement threatens to harm FOI by cornering the already limited public and private funding and government staffing available for transparency work.

The open government movement is driven by technology and seeks to make government operate in the open in as many ways as possible.

This includes not just letting citizens request information, as in FOI, but by making online information release an everyday routine of government. It also tries to open up government by including citizens more in designing solutions to public policy problems.

One example of this hands-on approach is through participatory budgeting initiatives, which allows citizens to help decide, via online and in-person information sharing and meetings, how part of the public budget is spent. Thus, while open government and FOI advocates both want government transparency, open government is a broader concept that relies more on technology and encourages more public participation and collaboration.

One type of open government initiative is data portals, such as Data.gov. Governments post lots of data that anyone can access and download for free on topics such as the environment, education and public safety.

Another popular open government reform is crowdsourcing. Crowdsourcing asks the general public to come up with ideas to solve government problems or collect data for government projects. Two popular crowdsourcing initiatives in the U.S. are Challenge.gov and citizen science projects, such as the ones for Environmental Protection Agency where citizens are testing water quality.

Advocates of FOI and open government talk about them in similar ways and indeed participate in many of the same initiatives such as the Open Government Partnership. That initiative is a global partnership of countries that develop multiple types of open government practices like anti-corruption programs, open budgets or crowdsourcing events.

Movements complement each other

The open government movement could help FOI implementation. Government information posted online, which is a core goal of open government advocates, can reduce the number of FOI requests. Open government initiatives can explicitly promote FOI by encouraging the passage of FOI laws, offering more training for officials who fill FOI requests, and developing technologies to make it easier to process and track FOI

requests.

There's a lot to the Freedom of Information Act. U.S. Department of Justice

On the other hand, the relationship between open government and FOI may not always be positive in practice.

First, as with all kinds of public policy issues, resources – both money and political attention – are inherently scarce. Government officials now have to divide their attention between FOI and other open government initiatives. And funders now have to divide their financial resources between FOI and other open government initiatives.

Second, the open government reform movement as well as the FOI movement have long depended on nonprofit advocacy groups – from the National Freedom of Information Coalition and its state affiliates to the Sunlight Foundation – to obtain and disseminate government information. This means that the financial stability of those nonprofit groups is crucial. But their efforts, as they grow, may each only get a shrinking portion of the total amount of grant money available. Freedominfo.org, a website for gathering and comparing information on FOI laws around the world, had to suspend its operations in 2017 due to resources drying up.

We believe that priorities among government officials and good government advocates may also shift away from FOI. At a time when open data is “hot,” FOI programs could get squeezed as a result of this competition. Further, by allowing governments to claim credit for more politically convenient reforms such as online data portals, the open government agenda may create a false sense of transparency – there's a lot more government information that isn't available in those portals.

This criticism was leveled recently against Kenya, whose government launched a high-profile open data portal for publishing data on government performance and activities in

2011, yet delayed passage of an FOI law until 2016.

Similarly, in the United Kingdom, one government minister said in 2012, "I'd like to make Freedom of Information redundant, by pushing out so much data that people won't have to ask for it."

Open data, no substitute for FOI

But the World Wide Web Foundation, the founder of the global open data ranking system called the Open Data Barometer, reported in 2015 that the United Kingdom government was using its first place ranking in the Barometer to "justify a (government) mandate to review, and allegedly limit, the Freedom of Information Act."

Open government programs not mandated by law are easier to roll back than legislatively mandated FOI programs. In the U.S., the Trump administration took down the White House open data portal. The move was immediately condemned by open government advocates, to no avail. In other cases, new open government efforts could hinder existing FOI implementation due to a limited number of staff members assigned to transparency work.

One indication of this is a 2015 Mexican reform that increased the categories of information that government agencies were required to post in the online Portal de Obligaciones de Transparencia.

But the job of identifying and digitizing this information was given to agencies' existing FOI response units – without any additional staff or resources. This led to severe administrative burdens and, in some cases, slower response times to FOI requests. Meanwhile, the updated portal was criticized for a complicated interface and unreliable or missing information.

Is it possible for open government and FOI to avoid the

mistakes seen in the Mexican case? Some experts are optimistic. Beth Simone Noveck, who served as the first United States deputy chief technology officer and director of the White House Open Government Initiative from 2009 to 2011, suggests that “in the long term, FOIA and open data may themselves converge as we move to a future where all government data sits in a secure but readily-accessible cloud.”

Such a happy convergence would require a commitment by government to have any new or merged systems reflect the goals of both FOI and open government. That would mean a system that both supported existing avenues for transparency while also adding new ones. As scholars, we are unclear which direction government will take and thus, whether the public interest will ultimately be served.

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Federal wildlife protection board stuffed with trophy hunters

By Michael Biesecker, Jake Pearson and Jeff Horwitz, AP

WASHINGTON — A new U.S. advisory board created to help rewrite federal rules for importing the heads and hides of African

elephants, lions and rhinos is stacked with trophy hunters, including some members with direct ties to President Trump and his family.

A review by the *Associated Press* of the backgrounds and social media posts of the 16 board members appointed by Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke indicates they will agree with his position that the best way to protect critically threatened or endangered species is by encouraging wealthy Americans to shoot some of them.

One appointee co-owns a private New York hunting preserve with Trump's adult sons. The oldest son, Donald Trump Jr., drew the ire of animal rights activists after a 2011 photo emerged of him holding a bloody knife and the severed tail of an elephant he killed in Zimbabwe.

Read the whole story

Most Calif. cannabis growers don't have licenses

By Riley McDermid, San Francisco Business Times

A report has found that less than 1 percent of California's cannabis growers have registered with the state's new legal licensing system, because the costs associated with new regulations and a host of local laws banning grows are too prohibitive.

The massive 38-page report from the California Growers Association, titled "An Emerging Crisis: Barriers To Entry In California Cannabis," warns that many of the regulations and

zoning laws put in place by California towns have put a deep freeze on the industry going legal, because growers must register with their local municipalities before they can receive state licenses.

Read the whole story

Comments being taken on NV Energy proposal

The Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest has released the NV Energy Bordertown to California 120 kV transmission line project draft record of decision and final environmental impact statement for a formal objection period until the end of April.

Objections will be accepted only from people who have previously submitted specific written comments regarding the proposed project during scoping or other designated comment periods.

The purpose of the NV Energy project is to construct an electrical transmission line which will provide backup service to the west Reno/Verdi area in Nevada. Installing a power line between the Bordertown and California substations will allow NV Energy to provide the power needed to meet reliability requirements of their electrical system.

The draft ROD and final EIS for this project are available **online**.

Calif. housing problems spilling across its borders

By **Conor Dougherty, New York Times**

A growing homelessness crisis. Complaints about traffic congestion. Worries that the economy is becoming dominated by a wealthy elite.

Those sound like California's problems in a nutshell. But now they are also among California's leading exports.

Just ask the citizens of this city, where growing numbers of Californians and companies like Tesla have migrated to take advantage of cheap land and comparatively low home prices. A four-hour drive from Silicon Valley, across a mountain range and a state line, Reno is finding that imported growth is accompanied by imported problems.

Read the whole story

Calif. billionaire to spend big bucks on Nev. races

By **James DeHaven, Reno Gazette-Journal**

Democratic megadonor Tom Steyer says a closely watched U.S. Senate race and a much-anticipated governor's race will be the top targets of his new multimillion-dollar push to get young

Nevadans to the polls.

The San Francisco-based hedge fund tycoon said Thursday that the \$2 million millennial-focused voter turnout effort will look to oust vulnerable Sen. Dean Heller, R-Nev., and keep Republican Attorney General Adam Laxalt out of the governor's mansion.

Read the whole story