

OHV programs in Nevada to be upgraded

The Nevada Commission on Off-Highway Vehicles has awarded \$1,290,293 to 28 off-highway vehicle projects and initiatives in the state.

Funding comes from the registration fees of off-highway vehicles in Nevada. The program provides grants to fund OHV related projects throughout Nevada, including trail improvements, mapping, signage, law enforcement, education, safety training, restoration, and other projects.

Projects funded in 2018 include:

- Avalanche training, statewide;
 - Signing of motorized trails in Gold Butte National Monument, Clark County, and in the Boundary Peak area, Esmeralda County;
 - OHV management plans for Prison Hill in Carson City, and Shoshone Trail south of Battle Mountain, Lander County;
 - Trail maintenance and signing throughout the Ruby Mountains, and near Jarbidge and Mountain City, Elko County, as well as the Ranger Trail in the Schell Creek Range, White Pine County;
 - Studies and reconstruction of the flood damaged Kings Canyon Road, Carson City, in partnership with federal funding;
 - Multiple law enforcement, search and rescue, and education grants throughout Nevada.
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Liberty working to bring solar to customers

Liberty Utilities will host a free solar for homeowners and small businesses workshop next month to provide information on solar energy as well as its solar incentive program.

The workshop will be April 5 from 6-7pm at BaseCamp Conference Center in Olympic Valley.

Utility representatives will be available to discuss various aspects of installing and using solar energy for residential and small business facilities. Anyone may attend, but only Liberty Utilities customers are eligible to apply for the utility's solar program. The program provides cash incentives to offset the cost of installing solar panels. Schools within Liberty's service territory are also eligible.

Representatives will also discuss energy efficiency options available through Liberty Utilities, including free energy audits to identify ways homeowners and businesses can save on energy use and costs.

Fire chief worries about safety of S. Lake Tahoe

Publisher's note: *This is the second of two stories about the South Lake Tahoe Fire Department.*

By Kathryn Reed

Fire – it's going to happen. Where? When? How destructive?

Those are unknowns. But the reality is the resources are lacking in the city, the basin, California, Nevada and throughout the west.

“Mutual aid” has been talked about at all levels of the fire service for eons, but it wasn’t until the deadly Wine Country fires last fall that the issue started making headlines.

Locally, the need for outside resources has been played out over and over again. Look at all the different fire trucks that often arrive at an event of any consequence. It’s not just an event like the Angora Fire that demonstrates the cooperative nature and need of fire resources, it’s much smaller blazes as well.

South Lake Tahoe Fire Chief Jeff Meston was in Sacramento last month testifying before a legislative committee about the need to improve the state’s mutual aid system. He is the president-elect of the California Fire Chief’s Association.

Outside help didn’t come to Santa Rosa last fall until six hours after it was requested. Help would take even longer to get to Tahoe.

Fire officials are lobbying the state to mobilize resources when there are red flag days or other threats like flooding and mudslides. This way the people and equipment are already deployed, so the destruction and loss of life would be less.

Meston’s attention is also focused on local issues.

He is in the process of putting together a study called the Standards of Cover. It is an in depth look at all the safety issues in the city. Every dwelling in the city is being recorded – including the type of siding, construction materials and vegetation.

He had hoped to have it ready to be presented to the City Council in May, but that could be delayed since he now has the

added role of being acting city manager. Still, he wants it before the council before budget discussions. It is more than three-quarters completed.

Meston believes the Standards of Cover, which the city has never had, should be the guiding document for decision-making for the fire department.

In the past the ISO (Insurance Service Organization) rating was something fire departments coveted.

"They don't verify any information. They say whatever the chief says is good enough for us," Meston said of the ISO process.

The city's last ISO rating from a couple years ago was a 4 (scale is 1-10, with 1 the best). Meston commented how that is the same score as the previous rating and that the on-duty resources have been cut significantly in that time.

Today SLTFD has eight people on duty at any given time. There are two three-person engines, one person in a squad and a battalion chief.

"Two issues really affect fire loss – how quickly you get there, and how many people you get there with to do the job," Meston told *Lake Tahoe News*. "The national standard is 17 and we send eight."

He said the document he is creating will not sugar coat the "terrible" response times, staffing issues and the consequences – both real and potential.

"What has happened is our homes are far more combustible than the 1960s because of plastics, coverings," Meston said. "We reach flash-over, when a fire consumes a great majority of oxygen and people in the house no longer survive; we reach it quicker than in the 1960s. So it matters how fast we get there to minimize the loss of life and property."

The purpose of the document is to give elected officials facts to use when it comes to making decisions about the fire department. Meston will also include recommendations in the document.

“We need to have a discussion about priorities; about priorities citywide. We are trying to be everything to everybody and we can’t be,” Meston said.

Opinion: Forest mismanagement bad for everyone

By Larry Weitzman

Recently several large wildfires burned up thousands of acres of coastal forests in several areas of California. While this is a disaster in and of itself, it also killed many people and burned down thousands of homes. The damages were so great that some insurers have chosen to leave the home and fire insurance business as losses were in the billions of dollars. Homeowners in the aftermath were left scrambling to acquire new insurance even if their homes were not in dangerous areas.

There are two issues. The first is maintaining safe forests and the second is the risk of building homes in “unsafe” fire areas and maintaining property in a safe manner. It’s like building homes in areas of flooding where rivers have a history of flooding and the continued rebuilding in those very areas that flooded so they can flood again with the same attendant damages for which the federal government, meaning you and I get to pay for again through heavily subsidized federal flood insurance and FEMA grants.



Larry Weitzman

But we have tied our own hands in handling this fire problem whether the main fuel is from oak trees or pine trees. We have passed laws “protecting” them; mostly the result of tree hugger types perhaps thinking if they save a tree, they will live forever. How does a tree hugger ever justify mowing their own grass? There are state laws, local ordinances and even an El Dorado County General Plan policy (7.4.2.8, sometimes known as the Oak Resources Management Plan and Oak Woodland Management Plan) that “protects” oak trees and costs you lots of money.

These laws and ordinances place a large and expensive burden and restrictions on your property. If you have property of an acre or more, it can cost you tens of thousands of dollars in oak tree hoops you will have to jump through to develop your property, with the filing of forms, hiring of experts, mitigations costs and the list goes on. If you violate the law, the penalties can be horrendous, running into the tens of thousands of dollars. We probably lost more oak trees in the last year from fires than private property owners could ever cut down in 20 years.

But let's look at what saving the oak trees has cost us in just the last year. According to CalFire, these fires which appear to be naturally caused, burning over dense underbrush and wild grasses which eventually ignite the dense oak trees. The oak trees then “crown” or the tops of the trees explode with fire. And then the worst happens, the spread of the fire by “crowning” oak trees as their embers from the leaves travel in the fire created windstorm and ignite fires miles away.

This kind of fire recently burned through the Wine Country area of California including hundreds of homes in Santa Rosa. The damages from these northern coastal California fires last year are reported to exceed \$9.4 billion in insurance claims alone (many people were underinsured) with some estimates going as high as \$180 billion in total economic losses. And I haven't even discussed billions of dollars in losses and damages from the Southern California Thomas Fire of nearly 300,000 acres.

Residential properties reported about 6,000 total losses and almost 20,000 homes received some damage. The over 6,000 vehicles destroyed are mere pocket change. And then there were the mudslides. It was a horrendous event. And I haven't even touched on the loss of life, human and animal and the destruction of the lives of those who survived.

And we spent several billion dollars in fighting these fires and lost some brave firefighters in the process. One more "cost" that is never talked about is the release of uncontrolled pollution. We spend billions on smog checks and equipment for our automobiles (over \$40 billion annually) and one big fire wipes out any gains. "Carbon banking" through trees has huge risks.

And the main fuels for these fires are brush, weeds and oak trees. The very trees we protect in which oak trees take on more importance than people.

Forest mismanagement has been a problem in this country and is similar to the Endangered Species Act, which has been used to hurt humans. Some "scientists" considered the small pox virus an endangered species. Our forests, whether pine or oak, have been burning as a result of this mismanagement for decades. Any forester worth his photosynthesis will tell you there are too many trees in our forests, double and triple a fire safe amount. But we pass laws to prevent their harvesting and pass laws making property owners pay huge fees to remove them. As a

result, we have big deadly and damaging fires and a dead lumber industry. Brilliant.

Larry Weitzman is a resident of Rescue.

Federal court will hold first-ever hearing on climate change science

By Stuart Leavenworth, McClatchy

WASHINGTON — A federal judge in San Francisco has ordered parties in a landmark global warming lawsuit to hold what could be the first-ever U.S. court hearing on the science of climate change.

The proceeding, scheduled for March 21 by U.S. District Court Judge William Alsup, will feature lawyers for Exxon, BP, Chevron and other oil companies pitted against those for San Francisco and Oakland — California cities that have accused fossil fuel interests of covering up their role in contributing to global warming.

“This will be the closest that we have seen to a trial on climate science in the United States, to date,” said Michael Burger, a lawyer who heads the Sabin Center for Climate Change Law at Columbia University.

Read the whole story

Sandoval to create task force for school safety

By Meghan Delaney, Las Vegas Review-Journal

Nevada Gov. Brian Sandoval announced Monday that he will create a task force to recommend a series of school safety initiatives for inclusion in the final state budget prepared on his watch.

"I have the benefit of building the next budget, which will be hopefully completed by the end of August," he said. "This is a priority for me that I want to see go into the budget."

Sandoval, who is in the final year as governor, announced the move after a two-hour meeting with school superintendents to discuss school safety in the aftermath of the shooting at a Parkland, Florida, high school last month that left 17 dead.

Read the whole story

McClintock rival files despite promise not to

By Emily Cadei, Sacramento Bee

In early January, Democratic congressional candidate Regina Bateson was unequivocal. If the state party endorsed someone else in her race, she would end her campaign so Democrats

could focus on unseating Republican Rep. Tom McClintock.

“If someone else gets endorsed, I will not continue to run as an ‘unendorsed Democrat,’ because I think that would be counter-productive and jeopardize the end goal of beating McClintock,” Bateson, one of three Democrats running in the district, e-mailed the chairs of the Tahoe Truckee Democratic Club on Jan. 7.

Yet on Friday, Bateson’s campaign filed the paperwork to get her name on the ballot for California’s June 5 “top-two” primary, despite the fact that the state party endorsed fellow Democrat Jessica Morse last month.

Read the whole story

Most of \$10B bet on March Madness will be illegal

By Richard N. Velotta, Las Vegas Review-Journal

The American Gaming Association believes \$10 billion will be bet on the NCAA men’s basketball tournament, and only 3 percent of that will be wagered legally.

Most of the betting money that will change hands as 68 teams vie for a national championship beginning Tuesday night will occur in office pools and bracket contests that are illegal in most states.

But the association representing the \$240 billion casino industry used the kickoff of March Madness to highlight its fight to repeal the federal Professional and Amateur Sports Protection Act and legalize sports wagering nationwide.

Read the whole story

Nevada's horse giveaway plan under fire

By Benjamin Spillman, Reno Gazette-Journal

Opponents of Nevada's plan to give away nearly 3,000 publicly owned, free range horses in the mountains east of Reno are cranking up the legal, political and financial pressure against the plan.

On Monday Lance Gilman, a Storey County Commissioner who helped recruit Walmart, Tesla, Google and others to the industrial park he founded in the horses' habitat, made an impassioned plea to Gov. Brian Sandoval to tell the state's agriculture department to abandon the idea

Read the whole story

Snippets about Lake Tahoe

- South Lake Tahoe is asking people to take **this survey** about changing Columbus Day to Indigenous Peoples Day.
- To help teachers and parents teach healthy habits to children before age 5, University of Nevada Cooperative Extension recently launched the Healthy Kids Resource Center **website**.

- The Grouch plus Pure Powers and ZP Ratik, and DJ Van Gloryus have been rescheduled for March 30 at Whiskey Dicks in South Lake Tahoe. Doors open at 9pm. Must be 21 to attend. Tickets are \$25.

- The Truckee Planning Commission on March 27 will hear the draft cannabis regulations at 6pm at the town hall.