Drones a threat to firefighters

By Keith Ridler, AP

BOISE, Idaho – Drones flying over wildfires could lead to firefighter injuries and force retardant bombers to be called off, wildfire managers say.

At least three drones have flown within or near restricted airspace intended for wildfire fighting aircraft so far this year, the National Interagency Fire Center in Boise announced Friday. That's up from one incident last year.

"We're seeing an increase in people wanting to film from a distance with hobby aircraft," said spokesman Mike Ferris, noting wildfires are often buzzing with low-flying planes and helicopters. "If you had one of these would you fly it near an airport?"

In June, a drone was spotted at the Two Bulls Fire near Bend in central Oregon. Drones have also been spotted at a fire in Washington state that destroyed hundreds of homes, and another that went aloft at a Northern California wildfire.

"Anytime that that happens, folks working these fires are going to feel compromised and they're not going to want to fly until they're sure the airspace is safe to fly in," said Aitor Bidaburu, chair of the National Multi-Agency Coordinating Group at the center. "We have enough hazards on the ground."

Managers said tankers trying to make drops to protect firefighters or homes might have to turn away if a drone is in the area.

The Federal Aviation Administration allows hobbyists to use model aircraft or small drones as long as they keep them away

from airports, fly them under 400 feet and keep the aircraft within sight of the remote-controlling operator at all times.

However, wildfires typically have temporary flight restrictions that extend up and out from the fire so helicopters and retardant aircraft can do drops without worrying about other aircraft. The restrictions include small drones.

“If they’re going to be flying these things, they need to educate themselves,” Ferris said.

Those seeking to fly drones near wildfires might be able to do so legally, but they would first need permission from wildfire managers. The center said individuals using drones that interfere with firefighting efforts could face civil penalties and criminal prosecution.

Center spokesman Randy Eardley said some state agencies fly drones over fires to find hotspots, but the operators are communicating with wildfire managers.

“The problem with these hobbyists and recreationists is we have no communication with them,” he said.

Snippets about Lake Tahoe

• South Lake Tahoe officials are asking people to take this survey about Regan Beach.
• The Genoa Well in Douglas County won the contest and title of the Best Tasting Water in Nevada at the 2014 Nevada Rural Water Association Training and Technical Conference at the Grand Sierra Resort in Reno.

• The Butterfly Effect Stand-up/Kayak/Canoe event is Sept. 6 at Lakeview Commons in South Lake Tahoe. It is a worldwide movement to empower and inspire women on water. For more info, click here.
• Kiwanis 12th annual SeptOberfest is Sept. 25 from 5-10pm at the MontBleu. Tickets are $40. Call 530.318.9197.
• Here are the El Dorado Tahoe and Sierra roadwork schedules for the week from Caltrans.

U.S. rethinks giving excess military gear to police

By Tami Abdollah and Eric Tucker, AP

WASHINGTON — After a decade of sending military equipment to civilian police departments across the country, federal officials are reconsidering the idea in light of the violence in Ferguson, Missouri.

The public has absorbed images of heavily armed police, snipers trained on protesters and tear gas plumes. Against that backdrop, Attorney General Eric Holder said that when police and citizens need to restore calm, "I am deeply concerned that the deployment of military equipment and vehicles sends a conflicting message."

Sen. Claire McCaskill, D-Mo., said police responses like that in Ferguson have "become the problem instead of the solution." Rep. Hank Johnson, D-Ga., said he will introduce legislation to reverse police militarization.

Sen. Carl Levin, D-Mich., chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, said his committee will review the program

to determine if the Defense Department’s surplus equipment is being used as intended.

One night after the violence that accompanied the presence of military-style equipment in Ferguson, tensions eased when a police captain, unprotected and shaking hands, walked through a crowd in a gesture of reconciliation. The contrast added to perception that the tanks and tear gas had done more harm than good.

As the country concludes its longest wartime period, the military has turned over thousands of surplus weapons and armored trucks to local police who often trained alongside the military.

A report by the American Civil Liberties Union in June said police agencies had become “excessively militarized,” with officers using training and equipment designed for the battlefield on city streets. The report found the amount of goods transferred through the military surplus program rose from $1 million in 1990 to nearly $450 million in 2013.

“Every police force of any size in this country has access to those kinds of weapons now,” said David Harris, a police expert at the University of Pittsburgh law school. “It makes it more likely to be used (and) is an escalation all by itself.”

In Louisiana, masked police in full body armor carrying AR-15 assault rifles raided a nightclub without a warrant, looking not for terrorists but underage drinkers and fire-code violations. Officers in California train using the same counterinsurgency tactics as those used in Afghanistan.

“They’re not coming in like we’re innocent until proven guilty,” said Quinn Eaker. SWAT teams last August raided his organic farm and community, the Garden of Eden, in Arlington, Texas. “They’re coming in like: ‘We’re gonna kill you if you move a finger.'”

Police found no drugs or weapons and filed no charges after their search, which authorities said followed standard procedure.

In 1990, Congress authorized the Pentagon to give surplus equipment to police to help fight drugs, which then gave way to the fight against terrorism. Though violent crime nationwide is at its lowest level in generations and wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have largely concluded, the military transfers have increased.

Police say the equipment, which includes free body armor, night vision goggles and scopes, keeps officers safe and prepares them for the worst case.

“A lot evolved from the military, no question,” said Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Chief Bill McSweeney, who heads the detective division. “Is it smart for them to use that stuff and perhaps look like soldiers from Iraq going into a place? Is that smart or over the top? I’d say generally that’s smart. Now, if you use that every time a guy is writing bad checks, that’s getting rather extreme.”

The U.S. has provided 610 mine-resistant armored trucks, known as MRAPs, across the country, nearly all since August 2013, including at least nine in Los Angeles County, according to Michelle McCaskill, a spokeswoman for the Defense Logistics Agency.

In rural western Maine, the Oxford County Sheriff’s Office, which had not reported a murder in more than 20 years, asked for an MRAP. Cpl. George Cayer, wrote in his request that Maine’s western foothills face a “previously unimaginable threat from terrorist activities.”

In Orange County, Florida, masked officers in tactical gear helped state inspectors raid barber shops in 2010 to find people cutting hair without a license. Using a mini battering ram and pry bar at times, police arrested dozens of people.

Officials said they found illegal items such as drugs and a weapon.

McSweeney said it’s hard to argue that police shouldn’t use the best equipment available.

“It’s tempting to say, ‘Shouldn’t we wear these things? Shouldn’t we approach this as if we could get shot?'” he said. “How do you say no to that question?”

Nick Gragnani, executive director of the St. Louis Area Regional Response System, said such supplies have proved essential in hurricane relief efforts and other disaster responses.

“The shame of it will be … if somebody does a brushstroke and takes out all the funding and then we can no longer be prepared for that big incident,” he said.

The LAPD’s deputy chief, Michael Downing, who heads the department’s counterterrorism and special operations bureau, said officers are dealing with “an adversary who is more sophisticated, more tactically trained.”

Downing emphasized that though police might train with soldiers, they’re not warriors with a mission to kill but public servants with no “enemies.”

“In police work there are times we have to become soldiers and control through force and fear,” Downing said. “But we have to come back to being a public servant as quick as we can to establish that normality and that ethical stature with communities, because they’re the ones who give us the authority to do our police work.”

1 dead, 1 hurt in Placerville plane crash

One person died and another was seriously injured when the plane they were in was trying to land Saturday night at a Placerville airport.

The Starduster biplane was headed for Swansboro Airport just before 7pm Aug. 16. El Dorado County sheriff's deputies said after circling the airport once the aircraft disappeared out of sight. The plane with its two male occupants was found a short ways from the airport. The airport is 4.5 miles north of Placerville

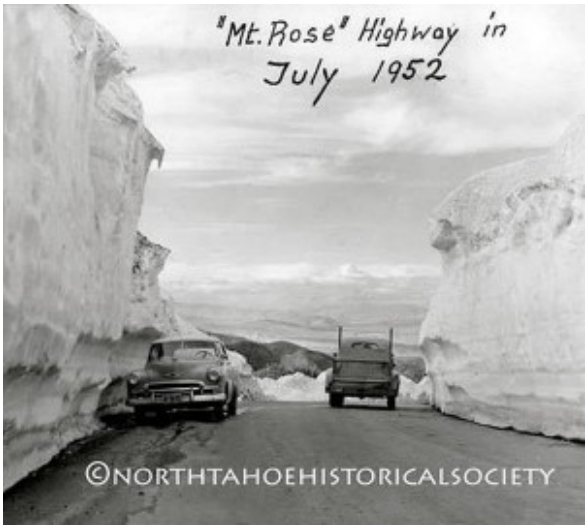
One person was pronounced dead at the scene, while the other was flown to Sutter Roseville Medical Center. The names of the pilot and passenger have not been released.

The National Transportation Safety Board and Federal Aviation Administration are investigating.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Then and now: The winter that would never end

By Jan. 1, 1952, more than 20 feet of snow had fallen on the Sierra Nevada since October. Starting on Jan. 10, another 12-plus feet fell within a week.



Mt. Rose Highway in July 1952. Photo/North Lake Tahoe Historical Society

Total snow depth that winter topped 50 feet at Donner Summit, and about 20 feet at South Shore. Interstate 80 did not exist yet. Road travel to Truckee and North Shore was via old two-lane Highway 40 which remained closed for a month. Access to South Shore was possible sometimes via Highway 50, but cause for wintertime travel to Tahoe was minimal in 1952.

The Southern Pacific Railroad streamliner City of San Francisco, which was headed west with 222 passengers, was stalled at Donner Pass snow for three days. Click here for a classic newsreel account.

Meanwhile, on the Nevada side of the Sierra, the Mt. Rose Highway in July 1952 had snow towering above vehicles six months after the big storms.



This is what Mt. Rose Highway looked like in July 2014. Photo/Bill Kingman

In the photo above it is possible to see the broadcast tower on Slide Mountain on the south side of the highway.

– Bill Kingman

Mountaintop dinner complements scenery



Wining and dining at Homewood. Photos/Kathryn Reed

By Kathryn Reed

HOMEWOOD – Lakeview dining at Tahoe just got elevated – to about 7,000 feet. And the food will have you rethinking your opinion about ski resort fare.

This is no ordinary mountaintop dinner. It's five courses with a different wine with each dish. And it's an opportunity to mingle with the people responsible for creating the edibles and liquid refreshments.

Homewood Mountain Resort for the second summer is hosting the Farm to Peak Dinner Series. Chefs and vintners create food and pour wine at the top of the Quail chairlift. Seated at long tables with crisp white linens, guests have a sprawling view of Lake Tahoe for their eyes to feast upon.

Skiers know this resort as being the one place in the Lake Tahoe Basin where it feels like you are about to land in the water as you schuss down the mountain. Dining atop the mountain was not adrenaline pumping, but the setting for this

meal far outshines anyplace I've eaten in Tahoe.

"We are taking baby steps to make it a year-round resort," Paul Raymore, spokesman for Homewood, told *Lake Tahoe News*. "The mountaintop is one of our prime assets. Unless you ski or ride, you don't have a chance to ride the chairlift."

Homewood hopes to bring the West Shore resort into the 21st century by modernizing lodges, adding lodging and creating a year-round destination. Legal issues are delaying that, but Raymore said owners hope construction could begin in 2016.

For now, though, the resort is hosting a few Farm to Peak Dinners each summer.



Axel Schug tells guests about his wines.

Guests on Aug. 9 arrived at the South Lodge where Axel Schug was pouring a 2013 Sauvignon Blanc. Schug and his wife, Kristine, own Schug Carneros Estate in Sonoma. They have a home in Tahoma, and he used to live in Incline Village when he

worked in food and beverage at the Hyatt in the late 1980s.

They worked with guest chef Grog Verbeck of Hey Chef! in Truckee to ensure the wines would pair well with his concoctions. Kristine Schug handles the food at the winery. She contributed herbs from her garden to the meal.

Verbeck provides private chef services in Truckee, Tahoe and east to the Reno area.



Burgundy Braised Brisket

The Schug winery has deep roots in the business. Walter Schug established it in 1980 after having been the founding winemaker for Joseph Phelps Vineyards in the 1970s. Schug grew up among the vineyards of Germany.

When he left Phelps he did so with the winery's permission to use his label for what was then their Pinot Noir. It is that delicate red varietal that is Schug's signature wine.

The 2012 Pinot was paired with the main course – Burgundy Braised Brisket with Chimmichurri and Summer's Best Vegetable Succotash.

Sue said the meat was cooked perfectly, a little peppery, but not overbearing. Shawn simply said it was "delicious."

I had portabella mushrooms substituted for the brisket.

"My god, that's like a steak," Sue said of the mushroom. I had

to agree. It was one of the best portabellas I have ever had. It was cooked perfectly; and the marinade – well – it was as good as the view.

Both entrees were braised in the Pinot we were drinking.



Wild Mushrooms and Smoked Fontina

Overall, though, Steve and I thought our entrees were a bit on the salty side. The onion ring on top in particular needed a chaser of water to be able to swallow.

But considering one of the challenges to cooking this meal is that part of it is done in the lodge below and part on the mountain, quality control can be hard to manage. Even Chef Robert Irvine of “Dinner Impossible” fame might find this dual cooking arrangement for more than 100 people a challenge.

Still, as the plates went back to the tent, there was nothing left on them.

We started our food venture at the lodge with a Wild Mushroom and Smoked Fontina Phyllo Purse. For someone who loves mushrooms, I could have filled up on these. The pastry was flaky, a perfect complement to the warm, smooth mushroom-cheese filling.



Four spreads

The appetizer made the fruitiness of the Sauvignon Blanc stand out even more. This combo was perfect on a late summer afternoon.

With wine glasses in hand, we then boarded the chairlift.

The second course came served totally Tahoe-style – on a round that in other locales would be used as a stepping stone. It was a creative presentation for the four spreads that were served with bread.

The farm cheese was the favorite of those seated around us. I also particularly liked the pickled onions. So often anything pickled can taste too vinegary – not so with these. The fig and tomato jam tasted just like a sweet jam, which was disappointing to Shawn and me. We were expecting something spicy, with more tomato flavor.



Salad of Heirloom Cucumbers

The Rouge de Noirs Brut was the least favorite of the wines for those seated by us. As much as winemakers keep professing how wonderful roses are, I’m not buying it.

The Salad of Heirloom Cucumbers, Toasted Almonds, Goat Cheese and Cress Oil was the favorite of the night for Debbie. “The cucumbers exploded,” she said.

They tasted so fresh I would have been surprised if they had not been picked that day. “The salad tastes wild and fresh,” I wrote that night.

On top of many of the plates was a spring of lavender – which some found a bit foreboding to taste. But no chef who is going to stay in business puts food on a plate that is not edible.



Chef Grog Verbeck

“The lavender flower counteracts the garlic. And there is a little bit of lavender in the dressing,” Chef Verbeck told his guests.

The 2012 Chardonnay was liked, but not everyone thought it went well with the salad. Debbie said no to the pairing, while Shawn thought they were a nice combo.



The Schug Pinot Noir was the star of the night.

“It’s oaky, but it’s still crisp,” Shawn said of the wine. Fifteen percent of the barrels the Chardonnay is processed in are new oak.

“We go easy on the oak,” Axel Schug said.

Wrapping up the dinner was a Hazelnut Dacquoise and Vanilla Bean Ice Cream Cake with Chocolate Ganache and Peach Compote that was paired with a 2012 Late Harvest Riesling.

Sue and Shawn said this was a perfect pairing. Just the peaches and ice cream would have been fine with me – and the wine.

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Notes:

• Chef Jessica Stutz of Coastal Culinary personal chef service will be doing the cooking Aug. 30.
• For reservations, call 530.584.6849 or go online.
• Cost is $150 per person.

Letter: Leash laws should be enforced

To the community,

There is a reason for the leash law.

A couple days ago, I was riding my bike on one of our beautiful mountain bike trails and when coming around a blind corner I encountered two dogs off leash that caused me to flip head over landing on my shoulder.



Bob Sweatt

I recall hearing a crunch, crunch, and crunch. Upon rolling over and sitting up, one of the dogs was lunging and barking at me and I thought I was now going to be bit.

After pulling the dog away, the owner of the dogs asked me if I was OK. Being in shock and in pain I didn’t know what to say other than I told her she should have had her dogs on leash. She came back at me with, “I always ride slowly down this hill.”

Well, I don’t think I was going that fast because I was holding a piece of bark in my hand for carving and I don’t think it would have mattered anyway because the dogs would have done the same thing.

She continued on her way with her dogs and I just sat there.

After gaining my composure, I got up, picked up my bike and because my backpack was so heavy, I put it on my handle bars and started walking up the steep hill to my truck. Naturally, the straps on the backpack got tangled in the spokes which made it that much harder and a continual adjustment was necessary. After getting back to the truck I had to lift the bike up into the bed, which was not fun. Then, I just stood there for a while. Before getting into the truck, I noticed the lady was walking back the other direction with her dogs now on leash. I sure could have used her help with my bike. She again blurted out “are you OK?” To which I responded a quivery I don’t know.

Well, upon going to the emergency and getting an X-ray, I found out I had a fractured humeral bone in my shoulder. The doctor gave me some Percocet for the pain, put my arm in a sling and sent me on my way.

I guess I am writing this to bring awareness to the need of having dogs on leash when you are sharing a trail that is narrow and has blind corners. I understand why people let their dogs have more independence when out in the open, but I now truly understand why we have the law and am now a firm believer in using a leash.

I hope this article will bring awareness and if it keeps one person from injury like me, it will be worth it.

Bob Sweatt, South Lake Tahoe

Exercise helps us tolerate pain

By Gretchen Reynolds, New York Times

Regular exercise may alter how a person experiences pain, according to a study. The longer we continue to work out, the new findings suggest, the greater our tolerance for discomfort can grow.

For some time, scientists have known that strenuous exercise briefly and acutely dulls pain. As muscles begin to ache during a prolonged workout, scientists have found, the body typically releases natural opiates, such as endorphins, and other substances that can slightly dampen the discomfort. This effect, which scientists refer to as exercise-induced hypoalgesia, usually begins during the workout and lingers for perhaps 20 or 30 minutes afterward.

But whether exercise alters the body's response to pain over the long term and, more pressing for most of us, whether such changes will develop if people engage in moderate, less draining workouts, have been unclear.

So for the study, which was published this month in Medicine & Science in Sports & Exercise, researchers at the University of New South Wales and Neuroscience Research Australia, both in Sydney, recruited 12 young and healthy but inactive adults who expressed interest in exercising, and another 12 who were similar in age and activity levels but preferred not to exercise. They then brought all of them into the lab to determine how they reacted to pain.

Pain response is highly individual and depends on our pain threshold, which is the point at which we start to feel pain, and pain tolerance, or the amount of time that we can withstand the aching, before we cease doing whatever is

causing it.

Read the whole story

K’s Kitchen: Chilled tomato soup

By Kathryn Reed

Chilled soup has never been one of my favorite meals. I think it’s more psychological than anything else. It probably has to do with hot soups that are served lukewarm don’t taste great so how could a soup purposefully served cold taste good?

I know there are plenty of good soups out there designed to be served chilled. I finally made one.

What is great about the recipe below is that the stove never has to come on. This is perfect for warm days when the last thing you want to do is heat up the house via the kitchen.

The longer you blend the ingredients, the finer it will be. So, I recommend starting slow. You might like more texture and some chunkiness from the tomatoes.

**Chilled Tomato Soup**

¾ C fat free buttermilk
¼ C fresh basil leaves
2 T olive oil
2 T fresh lemon juice
½ tsp kosher salt
¼ tsp pepper
3 medium beefsteak tomatoes, cored and quartered
1 small onion, quartered
3 garlic cloves
Greek yogurt, optional
Basil leaves for garnish, optional

Combine the first nine ingredients in a blender until smooth. Season to taste.

Serve with dollop of yogurt and basil sprig.

Congressional support for Tahoe funding iffy

By Michael Doyle, McClatchy News Service

WASHINGTON – Capitol Hill and courthouse shadows will cloud

the Lake Tahoe Summit that convenes Tuesday.

No doubt, the political A-listers gathering for the 18th annual summit have much to celebrate, starting with the spectacular views from the location near South Lake Tahoe. They also have their work cut out for them.

“We have our challenges, environmentally,” Amy Berry, CEO of the Tahoe Fund, said in an interview. “There’s a lot more to be done.”

Little time, for instance, remains for the current Congress to finish Lake Tahoe restoration bills introduced in both the House of Representatives and the Senate. The Lake Tahoe Restoration Act would authorize $415 million over 10 years for forest fuels management, watershed restoration, storm-water management and other projects. It would continue an earlier law passed in 2000 but that expired in 2010.

The House version introduced last October has not yet had a hearing.

Underscoring the political challenge, the House bill is not co-sponsored by Republican Rep. Tom McClintock, whose district spans California’s share of the 191-square-mile lake. In the Senate, where members of the minority party can easily erect roadblocks, four Republicans voted against the Senate’s version in committee in June.

Brian Baluta, spokesman for the House bill’s author, Rep. Mark Amodei, R-Nev., said, “We hope to get a hearing by the end of this Congress.”

Read the whole story