

Paving the way to lake clarity

By Andrea Buxton

Keeping roads in good condition in the Lake Tahoe Basin has always been a struggle, especially when winters wreak havoc on the asphalt surface.

While diligently removing snow so that we may all travel safely, heavy snow removal equipment with large tires covered in hefty chains chew up the surface of the road. Road sand, critical in keeping vehicles from sliding on icy roads, combined with normal vehicular traffic, also grind and crush the pavement surface. The frequent freeze-and-thaw process contributes to asphalt cracking. Dodging pot holes is a requirement for driving safely in the Tahoe Basin. In turn, poor road conditions damage vehicles, increasing the cost of vehicle maintenance.

“Vehicle wear such as popped tires and worn shocks and struts are costs the public pays for inadvertently, and may be greater than or equal to the cost of investing in improving the road surface,” says Russ Wigart, storm water program coordinator with El Dorado County.

It is obvious that poor road conditions lead to more dangerous driving and cycling conditions, unsightly roads, more wear and tear on vehicles, and higher maintenance costs. However, there is a new reason to care about the condition of our roads—water quality. Degrading pavement contributes to an increase in fine sediment particle concentration in storm water runoff. Fine sediment particles are the leading cause of lake clarity decline.

When the pavement surface gets destroyed by heavy equipment, chains, and normal vehicular traffic, the degraded asphalt

gradually gets ground into smaller and smaller particles, resulting in very small sediment particles. When these tiny particles get into Lake Tahoe via storm water runoff, they stay suspended in the water column because gravity is not strong enough to settle them to the bottom, making the lake look cloudy.

A recent study, conducted by El Dorado County, UC Davis, and Texas Southern University collected storm water samples from two roads in South Lake Tahoe to identify the major sources of clarity-reducing fine sediment particles in urban runoff. Molecular markers were used to calculate the fraction of fine sediment particles that came from each source. The major sources were roadside soil, pavement wear, and traction abrasives (road sand). There were no significant differences between the two sampling sites.

“The results of our study suggest that pavement wear is the second largest source of fine sediment in urban storm water runoff and fine sediment directly affects Lake Tahoe’s clarity,” says Wigart.

Depending on the time of year and type of precipitation, the contribution of fine sediment particles to urban stormwater runoff from roadside soil ranged from 20 to 70 percent, pavement wear ranged from 18 to 53 percent, and traction abrasives ranged from 7 to 21 percent.

Additionally, a smooth road in good condition is much easier to sweep. Road-sweeping machines are much more effective at picking up fine sediment if the road surface is not covered in cracks and potholes that retain sediment.

Asphalt mix design has come a long way in the last decade and is now engineered for better durability. Adding polymers to the mix increases surface elasticity, allowing the road surface to better resist temperature changes and wear and tear from tire chains and heavy equipment. This mix not only limits

the production of fine sediment particles from the road surface, but reduces the cost of road upkeep as well. The city of South Lake Tahoe has been using polymer-based asphalt for the last several years, but it is estimated that less than 10 miles of roads have been repaved with the new mix to date.

These findings imply that maintaining pavement in good condition not only improves public safety and decreases vehicle damage, but could positively impact urban storm water quality and ultimately lake clarity. El Dorado County and the Tahoe Resource Conservation District would like to continue investigating the relationship between high-quality roads and reduced fine-sediment particles in urban storm water runoff.

“Our ultimate goal is to get good pavement condition recognized as a best management practice for improving urban storm water quality in the Lake Tahoe Basin,” says Wigart. “The results would be a win for lake clarity and a win for public safety. Combining better roads with responsible snow removal and sanding operations could be the future for improving driving experience, reducing vehicle wear, and improving lake clarity.”

*Andrea Buxton is the storm water program manager at the Tahoe Resource Conservation District and has worked on storm water research and policy in the Tahoe basin for 16 years. This article is republished from the winter 2017 edition of **Tahoe In Depth**.*

Future of 3 parcels on

Riverside Ave. undetermined

Parking vs. affordable housing. That is likely to be the battle over three properties on Riverside Avenue in South Lake Tahoe.

The city is going forward with purchasing the lots at the corner of Merced Avenue that were once part of the Redevelopment Agency.

Two appraisals, the last being in March, values the land at \$225,000. The city must purchase it at fair market value. The money will come from unassigned reserves.

While staff has been talking to business owners in the Harrison Avenue area about what they would like done with the land, it isn't up to them. It will be the City Council's decision. Business owners want parking. They have learned the hard way that by not having paid parking in the area like the city originally planned means people leave their vehicle for hours, but aren't necessarily spending money at their places.

Parking would require amendments to planning documents.

Some on the council want the parcels to be turned into affordable housing. Combined they could fit five units, individually one unit each.

Housing is an allowable use.

The council in early 2018 is expected to make a decision about how to develop the land. Other options could be brought forward from the public, electeds or staff.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

California suffering unusually dry winter

By Rong-gong Lin II, Los Angeles Times

California's dismally dry autumn paints a bleak outlook for the state's rainy season, unless the weather this winter makes a big about-face.

The situation is a major turnaround from last year, when Northern California was battered by a series of "atmospheric river" storms that helped end the state's five-year drought. When it was over, California's northern Sierra Nevada experienced the wettest winter on record, with some ski resorts staying open through the summer.

The dry conditions are partly to blame for the worst fire season on record in California. Low humidity and lack of rain coupled with high winds fueled destructive wildfires from Mendocino down to San Diego this fall. In wine country, more than 40 people died and more than 10,000 homes were lost. To the south, the Thomas fire in Ventura and Santa Barbara counties became the largest wildfire on record in California.

Read the whole story

Yellow-jacket boom: Experts puzzled by insect's cycles

By Adam Jensen

Predicting snowfall is a guessing game each winter. A spring

equivalent is guessing how many yellow jackets will invade the Sierra.

Cold and dry conditions in the winter of 2015-16 likely contributed to a boom in 2016. While the winter of 2016-17 knocked down populations at higher elevations in 2017, it led to monster populations in the Central Valley, said Lynn Kimsey, a professor of entomology at UC Davis.

Exactly what conditions make for a population explosion like 2016 remain a mystery. The size of the 2018 yellow jacket population at Lake Tahoe is unclear.

"We don't really know why they have this boom-bust population thing," said Kimsey, who spoke at the UC Davis Tahoe Environmental Research Center evening lecture series this fall.

There are several species of wasps in the Sierra Nevada, but yellow jackets are a nuisance to humans because they scavenge for sugar, protein, and fat, while the other species survive on live insects.

"We make life good for them," Kimsey said of the yellow jackets, noting they like much of the same food people do.

Kimsey encouraged people to feed their pets indoors, dispose of any fruit that falls from trees, and be mindful of potential food sources like bird feeders. Hanging up yellow jacket traps early is also important. "If you wait until mid-summer, it's too late," Kimsey said.

Yellow jackets build large nests in many locations, including logs and building crevices. Kimsey recommends anyone who disturbs a nest to run away and don't stop.

"Holding still will not prevent them from stinging you," Kimsey said.

If you're stung once, antihistamines and a cold compress are

likely suitable treatments, but multiple stings will probably require a visit to a medical professional, she added. And take heart, it could be worse. Wasps rank a two out of four on the Schmidt Insect Sting Pain Index, a relative pain scale developed by entomologist Justin O. Schmidt, Kimsey said. The scale ranks the bullet ant, native to Central America and South America, as having the most painful sting. In an article in *Business Insider*, Schmidt described the sting as “pure, intense, brilliant pain. ... Like walking over flaming charcoal with a 3-inch nail embedded in your heel.”

This article is republished from the winter 2017 edition of Tahoe In Depth.

Feds aim to find deposits of critical minerals in Nev.

By Gary Martin, Las Vegas Review-Journal

WASHINGTON – Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke launched a campaign Thursday to identify deposits of critical minerals in Nevada and other states to break dependence on foreign supplies of raw materials needed for military equipment and consumer goods like cellphones and computers.

Zinke said the campaign would focus on a mapping, much of it aerial, to find the minerals, increase geological data, and streamline the application process to expedite domestic mining and production.

Read the whole story

Time to fill out application for LTUSD magnet school

After the holiday break, the magnet school in Meyers will begin taking names for the fall '18 line-up of kindergartners.

Lake Tahoe Environmental Science Magnet School needs parents of a child who will turn 5 on or before Sept. 1, 2018, to fill out a kindergarten enrollment request form.

If the child turns 5 after Sept. 1, the transitional kinder program at Tahoe Valley School is an option.

Enrollment at LTESMS is based on a lottery. Forms are due March 23.

For more info, email mtruszcwski@ltusd.org.

Lawsuit alleges price fixing by snow removal firms

By Kathryn Reed

Thousands of Tahoe Donner residents could have been the victims of a price fixing scheme involving two snow removal companies in Truckee.

A lawsuit was filed in Nevada County Superior Court last week

against Elements Mountain Company – Jamie LeGare – formerly known as Jamie Waltman, Joanne Waltman and Matthew Warren.

Ten counts have been listed in the suit. Allegations are that from 2008-17, Snowtech and Waltman companies were in collusion regarding how much they would charge people for snow removal in the Truckee subdivision. In March 2017, the companies merged and became Elements Mountain. The individuals named above worked for the companies.

“I think this case is quite straight forward and more so than most price fixing cases I’ve been involved in,” Stuart Gross with the Gross & Klein law firm in San Francisco told *Lake Tahoe News*. “Fundamentally this case is about ensuring basic principles that govern fair competition are protected.”

No one from Elements Mountain Company returned a phone call.

Michael Cramer and Brian Paddock are the named plaintiffs in this class-action lawsuit. Between 5,000 and 7,000 people in this housing development may have been victims during the time span stated. The lawsuit alleges the infractions occurred from April 2010-March 13, 2017.

Included in the court documents are emails between the individual companies.

In an email dated April 26, 2010, Warren who was the principal at Snowtech and became the new company’s secretary, wrote, “In the interest of placating homeowners on pricing, we’d be willing to take a \$30 price increase if you took a \$25 price increase. This gives the perception that there is a little bit of competitive pricing happening in TD. We will still maintain our Price Guarantee policy.” This was sent to Jamie Waltman, who was the president of Waltman and is president of the merged company.

The lawsuit contends that starting in 2011 the defendants met in person to decide on the prices.

“When the agreed pricing and services were memorialized in a bullet-point list, the list would be destroyed after being used for this purpose,” the lawsuit alleges.

The two companies are also accused of keeping out competition, which further allowed them to set prices. Those prices are alleged to be much higher than other locations in the greater Truckee-Tahoe area.

“In some ways price fixing is quite simple. This case is a good example of that. We have explicit agreements between these two competitors to fix the minimum price and then how to calculate it for other customers,” Gross said.

The lawsuit claims violation of the Cartwright Act, which deals with fair competition; false advertising; breach of contract; intentional interference with the contract; unfair competition; and aiding and abetting.

The plaintiffs are seeking monetary damages—hoping to “recover compensatory, punitive, and threefold the damages determined to have been sustained by them as a result of the conduct of defendants,” the suit states.

Editorial: Can Calif. afford not to fix dams?

Publisher's note: *This editorial is from the Dec. 11, 2017, Sacramento Bee.*

California's dam inspectors appear to be doing their jobs well. Unfortunately, too many dam operators are falling down on the job, and could be placing the public at risk.

That's the message of a report by The Sacramento Bee's Ryan Sabalow and Dale Kasler. It's also a part of life in California. As vast swaths of Southern California smolder from the unusual late-season fires this dry December, people naturally are focusing less on rain, potential flooding or dam safety.

But as climate changes and the Santa Ana winds to the south and the Diablo winds in our region become more pronounced, Californians will have no choice but to invest in flood control and other water-related public works.

Read the whole story

Laws to change Jan. 1 for Calif. employers

By Dan Eaton, San Diego Union-Tribune

In exactly one week, 2018 begins. Those who manage California businesses should take the following steps during this shortened last workweek of the year.

Starting Jan. 1, applications for employment in California may no longer ask applicants to disclose their criminal history or their salary history.

The reason to "ban the box" asking whether an applicant has a criminal record is to avoid perpetuating the stigma of prior convictions and the premature disqualification of applicants who otherwise may have the right credentials for a particular job.

The reason to ban discussion of an applicant's prior salary,

unless the applicant volunteers the information, is to avoid perpetuating past salary levels that may have been influenced by gender.

Read the whole story

Casualties of the cashless society – seasonal tips

By Douglas Quenqua, New York Times

As 2018 looms, the dawn of a cashless society feels at hand. Don't believe it? Try throwing a couple \$20 bills on the table next time you're splitting the check. Or better yet, ask anyone not standing behind a cash register to break a \$10 bill.

While the rise of Venmo, Uber, Seamless and Bitcoin et al have made it practically gauche in certain circles to flash a wallet thick with bills, there are many urban workers for whom the shift away from cash represents a serious financial problem. Doormen, elevator operators, manicurists – any employee who relies on small, spontaneous cash tips – are finding themselves left out in the cold by an increasingly cashless world.

"These guys, they don't tip like they used to, because they don't have the cash in their pockets like they used to," said Mark, an elevator operator at an upscale Manhattan co-op, talking about his building's tenants. He asked to use only his first name because his union and employer forbid him from talking to the press.

Read the whole story