Opinion: Water data is for fighting

By Joe Mathews

If you thought California's famously bitter water wars were hard-fought, just wait until you see our water data wars.

Digital tools have expanded the ability of governments, companies and nonprofits to measure the uses of California water, and build more water-efficient products, boost water conservation, and replace expensive and inefficient infrastructure.



Joe Mathews

But the abundance of water data—in combination with the scarcity of water—effectively makes every piece of land and every drop of water in California the subject of measurement—and potential conflict. The data also exposes the fragmentation and deficiencies of California's system of water management.

The state's new conservation requirements add to the stakes of the arguments over data. As Californians struggled to save every drop of water during the recent five-year drought, the state for the first time imposed mandatory restrictions on water use—requiring that 400 local water agencies figure out how to reduce usage by 25 percent in 2015. That shift, which followed 2009 legislation setting a goal of reducing per

capita water use in urban areas by 20 percent by 2020, is changing the way that Californians fight over water—away from historic battles over dams and infrastructure, and toward new battles over how to maximize the water we already have.

Among the questions to which new data is being applied: What incentives will convince most people to remove their grass lawns and, if they do, how much water do those removals save? How much water do efficient toilets and appliances really save? Exactly how much water are we losing to leaks—and where can we make the most efficient investments to stop them?

And these questions are small compared to a bigger-picture quandary: can data help us to integrate our water use with our electricity and gas use—making ourselves so efficient that we effectively mitigate the effects of climate change?

The good news is that there is data—from governments, universities, nonprofits and private researchers—to begin answering such questions. The bad news is that there is not yet enough such data, and there are all kinds of questions about the accuracy of the data we do have. How precisely are we measuring, for example, evapotranspiration—the process by which water is transferred from the land to the atmosphere both by evaporation from soil and by transpiration from plants?

Another question is whether we are accurately able to measure land, say with landscaping or dry brush on it, to determine how much could be replaced by more water-efficient plantings.

This is not easy work. When a state pilot project tried to measure landscape, it found that among 20 water agencies, there was no consensus on defining landscape areas or how to calculate them.

These issues are not petty—they are also questions of justice. How much water savings can we demand from farm worker housing that draws on groundwater in the fields? Or how do you measure

the right use of water on a large public park with multiple water meters?

In this context, the highly publicized controversy over the California Water Fix—Gov. Jerry's Brown proposal to build tunnels under the Delta to convey water to the San Joaquin Valley and Southern California —feels like an anachronistic repeat of decades-old dramas about dams and peripheral canals. Instead, California's water world is more likely to divide over who controls the data and what it justifies. The state government and statewide interests, like the environmental lobbies, want more centralized control, while local water agencies want to use data to enhance local flexibility.

The state vs. local tensions are playing out in an ongoing fight over two related pieces of legislation—SB606 and AB1668—that seek to establish a management regime to realize the governor's framework for "making water conservation a California way of life."

The legislative battle has offered an opening for tech-savvy enterprises—including nonprofits led by younger water war combatants. One L.A.-based nonprofit, ARGO, argues that much of the data undergirding California water use is old or faulty.

In an open letter to Brown this summer, ARGO's Patrick Atwater pointed out that California is watering mostly blind. State water agencies don't have accurate land use information, don't have landscape area definitions, and don't have accurate service area boundaries for local water retailers.

"There is an urgent need to modernize how California's water agencies manage data," Atwater wrote. ARGO called for a one-year task force to address these issues, with an emphasis on open-source data gathering, a centralized data repository, and more local control of both water management and data gathering.

This sounds hopeful, but it also begs the question: whose data and whose standards?

Soon we may be re-litigating virtually every piece of California's already well-litigated water system. In the long run, perhaps it could lead to a major restructuring—including consolidation of agencies.

But for now, disruption means war. Leave your guns at home, please, but bring your data.

Joe Mathews writes the Connecting California column for Zócalo Public Square.

Voters say no to South Tahoe's Measure C

By Kathryn Reed

While the majority of voters said yes to Measure C, that was not enough support for the South Lake Tahoe roads measure to pass.

The sales tax initiative required two-thirds of the voters to cast yes ballots.

With all the votes counted on Nov. 7, El Dorado County Elections Department is reporting the measure received 1,194 yes votes (54 percent) and 1,017 no votes (46 percent.)

The low voter turnout (22 percent) was expected with this being the only item on the ballot.

The ballot measure asked the residents of South Lake Tahoe to

raise the sales tax from 7.75 percent to 8.25 percent. The $2.5 million that was projected to be raised annually could only have been spent on roads.

There are zero dollars for roads in the 2017-18 South Lake Tahoe budget. The City Council of late has funded roads at the mid-year budget review. However, not a single road was paved in 2000, 2002, 2004, 2005, 2011 and 2016.

With a projected deficit coming in the next few years based on revenues leveling out and expenses – retiree costs in particular – increasing, the mid-year cash infusion into roads is likely to go away.

The council will have the option to continue to not make roads a priority in the budget or cut something else to clear the way for pavement projects.

While the City Council on Tuesday appointed members to a roads authority management board, those people need to look for another way to be civically involved. They were to have had oversight of the projects.

Neither City Manager Nancy Kerry nor Mayor Austin Sass returned *Lake Tahoe News'* calls, nor did Measure C opposition spokesman Bruce Grego.

Experts: Calif. ripe for massive flooding

By Tim Craig, Washington Post

Even living on the West Coast, Marion Townsend decided to act as floods ravaged Texas and hurricanes pounded the Caribbean

in recent weeks.

Her Sacramento neighborhood slopes downward from a levee that separates it from the American River, in an area that officials concede never should have been settled but is home to 100,000 residents.

After seeing images of boat rescues in Houston and frantic evacuations in Miami, Townsend began repositioning important documents, photographs, jewelry and her sentimental quilts up onto shelves.

Townsend needs to be reaching even higher.

Models show a levee failure could submerge parts of this inland metropolis under as much as 20 feet of water. As Northern Californians are recovering from wildfires and sifting through homes reduced to ash, officials in the state's capital are struggling to prevent another type of natural disaster.

Read the whole story

Grant to help with DUI prosecution in EDC

El Dorado County District Attorney's Office has received a $195,677 grant from the California Office of Traffic Safety to target repeat DUI offenders.

The grant to the will fund a vertical prosecution team that will work cases from arrest through conviction and sentencing.

In 2014 there were 13 deaths and 45 serious injuries as a

result of driving under the influence crashes in El Dorado County.

Prosecution team members will work with California's Traffic Safety Resource Prosecutor Training Network to expand knowledge and resources by obtaining and delivering specialized training, including the emerging problem of drug-impaired driving. Team members will share information with peers and law enforcement throughout the county and state.

SLT limits VHRs to 1,400 in residential areas

By Kathryn Reed

Fourteen hundred. That's the maximum number of vacation home rentals South Lake Tahoe will allow.

After another meeting of the City Council on Nov. 7 where short-term rentals dominated the discussion, it's possible the electeds might let the ink dry on the latest ordinance before revising it yet again. But no promises because already Councilman Jason Collin broached the idea of reducing that number even further. He even wants to revisit this whole topic every six months if not more often.

On a 3-1 vote Tuesday, the first reading of the newest ordinance passed. The second reading is slated for Nov. 21. Then the ordinance takes effect 30 days later. Until then the law of the land is the urgency ordinance approved last month, which called for an immediate moratorium on VHRs.

All of the changes only pertain to the non-tourist core area.

Councilman Tom Davis recused himself from the discussion because of his stake in Tahoe Keys Resort. Councilman Austin Sass voted against the ordinance, stating the only dissatisfaction being the 1,400 number. He preferred the limit be 1,200.

The latest numbers show there are 1,397 VHRs outside the tourist area.

Before that vote was taken Sass was able to bully his way into making sure no new permits are issued until the new ordinance takes effect. Before the council was an agenda item asking to allow the 93 permits that had been submitted to go through the approval process. At previous meetings that was the sentiment of the majority, but it was not written into the urgency ordinance. Tuesday's measure was in essence a clarification of council's wishes. It required a fourth-fifths vote, but with one councilmember unable to vote, it really had to be a unanimous decision. That didn't happen. The motion failed on a 3-1 vote.

Sass said to allow the permitting process to proceed would be "hypocritical" when his goal was to reduce VHRs.

"We have changed the rules on them halfway through," Councilwoman Brooke Laine said of the applicants. "It's lights out. We didn't intend that."

Laine, Collin and Councilwoman Wendy David were adamant in not wanting to hurt the people who had been going through the process in good faith.

Between 15 and 20 VHR owners choose not to renew their permit each month, so about 200-250 go off the market each year. Of course new ones take their place.

And new ones will still be allowed – just not more than 1,400, and not until Jan. 21.

The current applicants will remain in the pool if they want to be; or they can ask to have the application pulled and be issued a refund. (It costs more than $500 for a VHR permit.) They will all have to abide by the ordinance that was approved Tuesday.

Some of the key rules in the ordinance include:

· Mandatory bear box, with number of cans based on square footage.

· Occupancy being two per bedroom, plus four.

· No use of hot tub between 10pm and 8am.

· No special treatment for applicants in escrow.

· No zoning administration hearing.

· No notification of neighbors of a new VHR in the area.

· No warnings will be issued; only citations.

· Three violations in 24 months and the permit is revoked.

· Five community service officers will be hired. (One is employed now.)

· Fines of $1,000 will be issued to renters and owners for each violation.

· Owners will be subject to VHR rules.

· Shared rentals are not part of the ordinance, meaning they don’t have to be permitted or pay transient occupancy tax. This topic will be discussed on its own at a future meeting.

Nev. gets low marks for inmate health spending

By Ben Botkin, Las Vegas Review-Journal

State spending on inmate health care in Nevada is among the lowest in the U.S., according to a national Pew study released recently.

The study also ranks the state’s rate of health care staffing as the fourth-lowest out of 43 states surveyed. But the study highlighted the Nevada Department of Corrections for gathering data on its health care delivery system to measure outcomes and effectiveness.

The 140-page study by the Pew Charitable Trusts sheds light on Nevada’s system.

Read the whole story

Collection of EDC veterans stories to be published



"For Them, By Us" is the first published collection of writing from the Veterans' Voices writing workshops, a program of El Dorado Arts Council.

This workshop series established in 2014 provides a setting for vets to explore the creative process through writing on any subject, in any form – fiction, memoir, poetry, drama.

Workshop participants who contributed to this anthology came with a range of writing experience. Some had little to no experience with composition, some had professional writing experience, and others had a longstanding interest in writing or had works in progress. What they shared at the outset was having served the country in the military and an interest in developing their own writing skills. What they have gained over the last year is confidence in their ability to communicate, and a camaraderie in a mutually supportive atmosphere. Some even found a voice after decades of silence.

Investigative writer Weston DeWalt leads the Veterans' Voices workshops. DeWalt is coauthor of the *New York Times* bestseller "The Climb," a nonfiction book about a 1996 disaster on Mount Everest. A former acquisitions editor for New York publisher John Wiley & Sons, DeWalt has also worked as a documentary filmmaker, a cold case investigator and as a university teacher of writing and publishing.

The stories collected reflect many experiences and points of view. There are personal reflections on the events of Sept.

11, a return to a family home after a long absence, and a childhood memory of an introduction to coffee. A former cop describes a haunting experience with a traffic accident. A Vietnam vet describes a firefight and its disarming aftermath. There is humor as well, including an imagined scenario of an encounter between a sitting U.S. president and his successor.

The anthologies will be available in December. To obtain a copy, go **online**.

Boy Scouts having food drive at American Legion

South Lake Tahoe's Boy Scout Troop 594 is partnering with American Legion Post 795 for the 2017 Scouting for Food Collection.

People are asked to bring food items to the American Legion at 2748 Lake Tahoe Blvd., South Lake Tahoe on Nov. 11 between 10-11am. This collection will be just before the annual Veterans Day ceremony at 11am.

Donations should *not* include glass containers or perishable food.

Snippets about Lake Tahoe

· Zawadisha's Holiday Bazaar is Dec. 3 from 10am-3pm at the Landing Resort in South Lake Tahoe.

· Mount Rose Ski Resort is officially open for the season. Boreal opens Nov. 8.

· Barton Health’s annual Festival of Trees and Lights is Nov. 30-Dec. 3 at MontBleu in Stateline.

· Veterans and active-duty military may ski for free at Mammoth on Veterans Day.

· Byson Olson of Truckee finished second at the Jet Ski World Championships this fall.

U.S. climate report forecasts shrinking snowpacks

By Don Jenkins, Capital Press

Snowpacks in California, Oregon, Idaho and Washington are expected be much smaller by mid-century if greenhouse gas emissions continue to rise, according to federal projections released Friday.

The Fourth National Climate Assessment, completed once every four years, asserts that the mild winter of 2014-15 may have foreshadowed the future.

“As a harbinger, the unusually low Western U.S. snowpack of 2015 may become the norm,” according to the report.

Read the whole story