Vail infusing cash into Whistler ski resort

By Natalie Obiko Pearson, Bloomberg

Last fall, in a record-setting deal, Vail Resorts paid $1 billion to acquire Whistler Blackcomb, betting it could improve upon the resort's already abundant selling points.

"It's a game changer for our company. We've just added, arguably, the crown jewel of the ski industry," says Pete Sonntag, Whistler's new chief operating officer, who previously ran Vail's Lake Tahoe operations.

In the next seven years, Vail will invest $276 million in capital improvements at Whistler, on and off the mountain. This season, Vail's EpicMix app will allow skiers to compare lift lines in real time—minimizing concerns about Whistler's increasingly large crowds. Vail is also opening a new après-ski spot at the renovated Roundhouse Lodge, that has a heated, open-deck bar with views across the valley.

Read the whole story

Quarterly gains posted by El Dorado Savings Bank

El Dorado Savings Bank's third quarter profits increased $876,717 from 2016 to $3,696,981.

"The continued strong profits reflect the strong performance of the loan and investment portfolios," CEO George L. Cook Jr.

said in a statement.

The bank operates 35 branches, including in South Lake Tahoe.

El Dorado ended the quarter with $2.178 billion in total assets and savings deposits of $1.94 billion.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

What happens to fire retardant-soaked crops?

By Julie Cart, CALmatters

The full extent of the damage from the northern California wildfires that killed 43 people and destroyed 8,400 homes is still being tallied. The devastation left an obvious scar, but not all the damage is visible.

Among the assessments still to be made is what impact millions of gallons of fire retardant—essentially a potent fertilizer—may have on carefully tended plants and soils.

Saved by timing, nearly 80 percent of the renowned wine region's grapes had been harvested when the multiple fires started in early October. And for the most part, the blazes did not linger at the vineyards, which are kept free of grasses and other fire-devouring fuels.

But there was collateral damage: bright red slathers of fire retardant dropped from the state's fleet of supertankers. In one week, more than 2 million gallons of retardant were

dropped in California—a record, according to Cal Fire, the state firefighting agency.

“We are always mindful of where we are trying to drop aerial fire retardant,” said Chris Jurasek, the CalFire aviation supervisor who directed many of the drops. “It’s always in our mind to try and alleviate contacting anything other than fire.”

CalFire has the largest aerial firefighting fleet in the world. As planes become increasingly central to fighting fires in California, more and more retardant is served up.

On one day during the recent fires, Oct. 12, crews loaded nearly 700 gallons of retardant a minute from dawn to dusk to help slow the fire, according to CalFire.

By way of comparison: The state’s largest aviation facility, near Sacramento, pumped 1.7 million gallons of retardant into firefighting tankers in 2016. The base has already used more than 4 million gallons so far this year.

The retardant, called Phos-Chek, contains ammonium phosphate, a fertilizer. It also includes chemicals to regulate how the slurry drops, emulsifiers that render it gooey so it sticks to targets, and a coloring agent so air crews can track what they’ve dropped. For the most part, the ingredients are disclosed to CalFire by the Phos-Chekmanufacturer, ICL-Performance Products, LP.

But the entire formula is not made public. George Matousek, an ICL chemist who helped formulate the retardant, said the precise recipe is a trade secret but “all products in Phos-Chek are food-grade or better.”

The chemicals are mixed with water and are generally harmless to humans and most animals, according to the company. But retardants are known to be toxic to fish, so state and national fire-fighting agencies prohibit drops within 300 feet

of water sources.

But as Western wildfires increasingly move out of forests and into developed areas, firefighters have less wiggle room to target their drops.

When a converted 747 jetliner is lining up to release nearly 20,000 gallons of retardant, there's no guarantee of precision. Pilots are often guided away from water sources and landscapes containing plants that are endangered or otherwise protected by law, using retardant avoidance maps published by the U.S. Forest Service.

It's an issue that's taken seriously by fire-fighting agencies. Biologists say that a sudden dump of nutrients in soils can encourage the growth of non-native or invasive plants.

"There is a precedent for concern about soil chemistry," said Andy Stahl, executive director of Forest Service Employees for Environmental Ethics, a watchdog group made up of Forest Service employees and others.

Improving soil productivity "would allow invasive plants that are better able to utilize these nutrients (to) crowd out natives."How those interactions might play out in carefully curated vineyards is not known. Winemakers are famously fussy about soil: It's what imparts the terroir that gives wines their unique characteristics.

Some vintners choose not to use fertilizers of any kind.

"A lot of time and effort is put into that soil," said Andrew Walker, a geneticist at the University of California, Davis' Department of Viticulture and Enology, which is devoted to all things wine-making. Fertilizers may be altogether undesirable, he said.

North Coast vintners "make expensive wines. They work on

quality rather than quantity. They don’t necessarily want excessive vine growth.”

Walker said not much is known about potential effects of retardants on commercial crops. Previous blazes have raced out of wildlands and into agricultural lands, destroying fruit and nut orchards, hay fields and, increasingly, California’s highly lucrative cannabis plantations. Farmers of such crops have specific guidelines for fertilizing their plants.

Academics and researchers are beginning to study the issue—a good thing, Matousek said. “It’s something that’s going to come up more often.”The Napa County Agricultural Commissioner did not return phone calls for comment.

The Wine Institute, an advocacy group for 1,000 wineries and business in California, declined to comment. A representative of a regional cannabis-growing association did not respond to a request for comment.

But the Napa County Health and Human Services Agency posted an online warning earlier this month. It stated that although there is little danger in ingesting produce when retardant is present, it’s to be avoided.

“Individuals are advised against consuming fruits and vegetables from home gardens to which retardant may have been applied, or from areas in wildlands where residues are visible,” the agency said.

“In addition to avoiding consuming food items with visible residues, the fertilizer component of the retardants may lead to temporary increases in the nitrate content of soils in areas of application.” Walker said plants take in chemicals in soils, but they also can absorb some chemicals to no ill effect.

Still, Dennis Hulbert, a retired regional aviation manager for the U.S. Forest Service who oversaw firefighting action in

California, said retardants are relied upon too much by overwhelmed fire managers.

Hulbert said he spent 39 years ordering retardant drops without knowing much about the potential long-term implications. “This is 50-year-old technology,” he said. “I’m not sure it’s a good thing.”

Cal Fire’s Jurasek, for his part, said the tankers and their loads of retardant were instrumental in quenching the recent fires. The wineries will recover, he said. As for the possibility of lingering problems in soils and plants, he said, “I do not have any concerns.”

CALmatters.org is a nonprofit, nonpartisan media venture explaining California policies and politics.

Pile burning set for South Shore locations

California State Parks, Lake Valley, North Lake Tahoe and Tahoe Douglas fire protection districts and the U.S. Forest Service are scheduled to conduct prescribed fire operations.

Weather permitting, operations are scheduled to take place at D.L. Bliss State Park, the west side of Incline Village and west of the First Creek drainage, upper and lower Kingsbury Grade, off Pioneer Trail near Marshall Trail and Powerline Road, north of Lake Tahoe Airport and south of Christmas Valley.

Fall and winter bring cooler temperatures and precipitation, which favor prescribed burning.

Smoke from prescribed fire operations is normal and may continue for several days after an ignition depending on the project size and environmental conditions.

Snippets about Lake Tahoe

· According to the League of American Bicyclists, California is the third most bike-friendly state in the country.

· Douglas County libraries in Minden and Zephyr Cove will be closed Nov. 10-11 in observance of Veterans Day.

· Placer County is building another TART bus shelter in Kings Beach near the public parking lot on the south side of the highway between Coon and Fox streets.

· Banjoist Noam Pikelny will be at The Loft in South Lake Tahoe on Nov. 18 at 9pm. Tickets are available **online**.

· Here are the **El Dorado-Tahoe** and **Sierra** roadwork schedules from Caltrans for the coming week.

Kirkwood looking for power supplier

By Kathryn Reed

Kirkwood – the residents, resort and other commercial entities

– may soon have a new provider of power.

For years the area straddling Alpine, Amador and El Dorado counties had a diesel plant. That all changed three years ago this month when Kirkwood Meadows Public Utility District completed the construction of a transmission line connecting Kirkwood to the CAISO-controlled electric grid at PG&E's Salt Springs substation.

"Power is purchased through an independent energy supplier based on load forecasts provided by KMPUD, with actual usage monitored by CAISO," Brandi Benson, assistant manager of operations for KMPUD, told *Lake Tahoe News.*

KMPUD is in the process of soliciting bids for "a single counter-party to provide a full array of energy wholesale services including, but not limited to: power procurement, trading and hedging; load forecasting and scheduling; and CAISO interface, SC services and settlement activities."

KMPUD has 730 customers, with the largest being the ski resort. It owns the 28.8-mile power line connecting the distribution system to the transmission system at Salt Springs.

Kirkwood Meadows still maintains a diesel plant as backup.

KMPUD also provides the community's water supply, waste water, fire services, mosquito abatement, propane service, solid waste management, parks and recreational facilities, and snow removal.

General aviation in rural Nevada an economic driver



Minden’s airport continues to grow. Photo/LTN file

By Megg Mueller, Nevada Magazine

Nevada is the land of wide-open space. Miles of highway, endless valleys, and vistas are the stuff roadtrippers dream about. Some travelers to the Silver State, however, don’t need any roads. Certain intrepid sightseers prefer to do their traveling with a little altitude.

Sure, there’s McCarran International Airport in Las Vegas, Reno-Tahoe International in Reno, and Elko Regional Airport in Elko, but because there are only three airports to offer commercial service in and out of the state, that leaves a lot of ground to cover.

For small aircraft owners—those who fly in what is called the general aviation (GA) category—there are 47 public-use airports in Nevada, with many other private airports and landing strips spread across the state. That is a lot of access to Nevada’s great wide open.

Read the whole story

Nevada to mull regulating antler collecting

By Ben Botkin, Las Vegas Review Journal

Hunters scour the Nevada wild, looking for fresh antlers that deer and elk have outgrown and shed.

The activity attracts everyone from hobbyists to commercial collectors hoping to discover a complete pair of elk antlers, which can sell for about $14 a pound.

“It’s like the world’s biggest Easter egg hunt,” said Tyler Turnipseed, Nevada’s chief game warden.

Read the whole story

Kings Beach duo suspects in Truckee crimes

Two Kings Beach residents were arrested Oct. 31 on myriad charges following the burglary of a home on Olympic Boulevard in Truckee the prior weekend.

Stewart DeVaney, 21, and Simon Wyss, 19, were arrested by Truckee police detectives at their home on charges including striking a woman across her forehead with the butt of a rifle, causing a serious laceration that needed more 25 staples to close, burglary, being armed in the commission of a felony,

possession of stolen property, armed robbery, and narcotics charges.

On Oct. 28, a woman arrived at a friend's home on Olympic Boulevard in Truckee where she was confronted by two men wearing ski masks and armed with rifles, according to officers. One of the men struck her with the butt of a rifle causing the laceration to her head. The two men then fled from the home, which appears to have contained a marijuana grow.

Police believe the suspects wanted to steal marijuana.

During the search of the suspects' residence, detectives located one of the rifles that is believed to have been used in the assault. This rifle had been stolen in an earlier residential burglary. Jewelry, money, and narcotics that are suspected to have been stolen from the home were also located and seized as evidence.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Get ready to fall back one hour

Don't forget to set your clocks back an hour tonight before you go to bed.

At 2am Nov. 5 it's time to return to standard time.

The whole reason for this, according to the federal government, is energy and fuel savings.