

Another NorCal reservoir overflows

By Joseph Serna, Los Angeles Times

The milestones marking California's wettest year in decades continue to pile up, as state water officials said a reservoir high up in the Sierra Nevada has exceeded capacity for the first time in 21 years.

Lake Davis began overflowing onto its earth-and-rock spillway Wednesday after a couple of light rainstorms this week, Department of Water Resources officials said.

"While DWR does not anticipate problems downstream of the reservoir near Portola, flows below the lake could exceed what residents, businesses and anglers have experienced over the past three decades," the agency said Thursday.

Read the whole story

USFS looking for ideas regarding trail maintenance

The public is being asked to help identify trails that the U.S. Forest Service will address regarding maintenance.

Nationwide, the Forest Service will select nine to 15 priority areas among its nine regions where a backlog in trail maintenance has contributed to reduced access, potential harm to natural resources or trail users and/or has the potential for increased future deferred maintenance costs.

Region 5 manages more than 16,000 miles of trails.

To provide ideas and suggestions on potential priority areas and approaches for incorporating increased trail maintenance assistance from partners and volunteers, contact the Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit, Mike Gabor or Jacob Quinn at 530.543.2600, by April 7.

\$2 million surplus in Douglas County budget

As Douglas County begins working on its 2017-18 budget, commissioners have some leeway with funding based of what is anticipated to be a \$2 million surplus.

Staff and commissioners came up with a slew of priorities this week. Next week there will be public hearings Monday-Thursday at 3pm in Minden where the public can voice their opinions.

The commissioners talked about using the money for raises, a storm water program and deputy county manager. Staff also recommended part of the money be used on employees.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Lake Tahoe Airport noise

monitoring to change

By Kathryn Reed

Military helicopters are the No. 1 noise problem at Lake Tahoe Airport and there is nothing city officials can do about it.

With the city having taken millions of dollars in grants from the Federal Aviation Administration, it is obligated to allow military aircraft to access the airport. It is often used as a high elevation training airport for the various branches.

Noise at the airport – specifically how to monitor it – was a topic at a council meeting this month. The five decided to push a decision to later this spring.

Things have been rather lackadaisical since the 20-year 1992 settlement agreement expired. That document was the result of a lawsuit against the city filed by TRPA and the League to Save Lake Tahoe. With commercial airliners no longer coming to Tahoe and jets becoming much quieter, the issue is barely an issue today.

The airport receives on average 12 noise complaints a year. It's the military and planes associated with the celebrity golf tournament that generate the bulk of the calls.



Military aircraft are regularly flying into Lake Tahoe Airport. Photo/LTN

“Lake Tahoe Airport under federal and state regulations is not required to have noise requirements. It is strictly voluntary for our customers,” airport manager Mark Gibbs told the council.

Still, that does not mean monitoring can just go away. The Tahoe Regional Planning Agency is a huge player. The bi-state regulatory agency reviews its thresholds every four years and would like the city to be in alignment with its schedule.

This spring TRPA hopes to “identify priority threshold standards to work on and update.” The criteria are for them to be SMART – specific, measurable, agreed upon, realistic, time-related.

“The city’s proposed approach to the noise exposure contour mapping and validation will happen every four years, not annually. It’s my understanding the city agreed to recommend to move forward with a four-year mapping/validation cycle to help meet TRPA’s threshold evaluation reporting requirements,” Tom Lotshaw, spokesman for TRPA, told *Lake Tahoe News*. While

that was the recommendation in the original staff report, it could change next go-round.

What the council will have to decide at a future meeting is what if any standards it wants to abide by.

Gibbs told *Lake Tahoe News* one option "is to develop a noise exposure map showing cumulative noise impacts based on the state of California standard for calculating and producing an aviation noise impact metric for public consumption. The TRPA also has a CNEL (community noise equivalent level) cumulative impact standard for the airport impact on residential areas. This standard is 60 CNEL."

CNEL measures decibels at a location over time.

Gibbs said the state and FAA have determined cumulative noise event reporting is "the best means of quantifying and reporting aviation noise to the public."

If the city goes this route, in all likelihood data from single noise events would not be collected.

CNEL doesn't address the problem of a plane flying over a person's house at 85 decibels once a day because once those numbers are averaged in to show the CNEL level that one incident is just a blip.

The TRPA, though, is not completely on board with only having cumulative data.

"In regards to the single-event noise monitoring, we're going to evaluate and determine how best to proceed on that front," Lotshaw said. "In the past, we used noise monitoring equipment at Barton Beach to monitor both shore zone noise events and airport-related noise events in the flight path. So a situation like that might be the best way to monitor for multiple needs with one piece of equipment, given limited funding and resources."

The agreement the city had with BridgeNet International to collect noise information from six monitoring locations and report the findings expired earlier this year. The agreement with Versadial Inc. also expired this year. That firm provided airport aviation radio recording services in regards to aircraft noise.

It is the ending of these contracts that is allowing the city to rethink how it monitors noise. Gibbs is proposing using a computer model developed by the FAA that is used in other resort locations like Aspen, Colo., and Jackson Hole, Wyo.

Opinion: Bay Area's fast train to Wasco

By Joe Mathews

Dear Bay Area,

Welcome to Wasco.



Joe Mathews

You may never have heard of this city of 25,000 in the San Joaquin Valley. You probably can't pronounce it (it's WAW-skoh).

But you and Wasco share a future.

You could be connected—at least temporarily—by the most expensive infrastructure project in state history.

Your Wasco connection is a byproduct of problems with high-speed rail's first phase from San Francisco to Los Angeles. The financial and engineering challenges of tunneling the Tehachapi Mountains have delayed construction to L.A. And the project is short by \$2 billion to build it to Bakersfield, the hometown of U.S. House Majority Leader Kevin McCarthy, a fierce opponent of funding high-speed rail.

Unless the money materializes, high-speed rail will start by connecting the Silicon Valley to the Central Valley—from San Jose to a temporary station in Wasco, a little northwest of Bakersfield.

Wasco might seem too small to play such a big transportation role. But when you visit, I hope you'll agree with me that a fast train from America's wealthiest metropolitan area to the best darn town in northern Kern County is kismet.

Wasco will be ready for Bay Area arrivals. The town is expert at processing heavy volumes of visitors; the Wasco State Prison, which accounts for about 5,000 of the town's population, is a "reception center" for people entering the state prison system. You can start preparing for your visit by listening to country songs, from Merle Haggard's "Radiator Man from Wasco" to Jaime Wyatt's "Wasco," about picking up her boyfriend from prison.

This time of year, you'll be greeted in Wasco by spectacular views of coastal mountains to the west, Sierra to the east, and blossoming almond trees. If you arrive hungry, you'll find stick-to-your-ribs options you might not see in San Francisco. Head first to Hoyett's Sandwich Shop, a centerpiece of Wasco life since 1948, with terrific char burgers and chili. If Hoyett's is closed, it's a short stroll to Teresa's for chile

verde or to La Canasta for shrimp cocktail.

Bring your bike, Bay Area types: the city is adding lanes. Or walk: Wasco's new meandering sidewalks make the city more pedestrian-friendly. While Uber and Lyft won't work here, the city's Dial-A-Ride service will take you anywhere within Wasco's 9.4-square-mile city limits for \$1.75, and outside town—paved roads only, please—for \$2.

No stop in Wasco is complete without a visit to the Wasco Union High School auditorium. No joke. The 1928 Renaissance Revival auditorium, one of California's most beautiful buildings, is on the National Register of Historic Places. And Wasco is great at putting on special events, like the spectacular Festival of Roses in September. But for Bay Area types, the best thing about Wasco may be the slower pace. The local parks are large and leafy. During hot valley summers, you can pay \$1 and swim all day in the public pool. And you can take your pets to Wasco without worry. The local vet is trusted by animal owners all over the southern San Joaquin Valley.

If you need a hotel, the best bet is the new Best Western on Highway 46. Or maybe you could rent a place from well-to-do locals who spend weekends in cabins in the Greenhorn Mountains.

If you decide to settle in, for just \$189,000, you can buy a terrific four-bedroom, two-bath home with a two-car garage and, according to the listing, a driveway large enough for an RV.

Wasco's central location also makes it a great starting point for trips around the region. In the Wasco vicinity, you can watch drag strip racing in Famoso, raft the Kern River, or rent a houseboat on Lake Success. You can even hire a limo to take you to Paso Robles wine country.

Wasco has a very different economy from San Francisco's, but

you'll see lots of solar panels and a start-up, Sweetwater Technology Resources, that develops ways to clean water from the oil industry. And if you're one of those stalwarts of Bay Area politics, drop by the Wasco City Hall, where the City Council boasts a higher percentage of ethnic minorities than the San Francisco Board of Supervisors.

At the council, you'll discover one irony about the potential Bay-to-Wasco connection: The city officially opposes high-speed rail because of concerns that businesses in its path, like the almond processor SunnyGem, will be forced to relocate.

But perhaps things will work out, and you Bay Area folks will soon be dancing at Mr. and Mrs. Nightclub. When you step outside for some air, you'll see how the lights on Wasco's beautiful water tower change color with the seasons. The tower bears the city logo, featuring a rose and Wasco's welcoming motto, one big enough for all California:

"Grow With Us."

All aboard,

Joe Mathews

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

4 homeless SLT men involved in stabbing

An argument over cigarettes led to four people being transported to Barton Memorial Hospital with stab wounds.

The names of the South Lake Tahoe men have not been released by police. Nor is it known how they might know each other.

It started as a verbal argument on March 24 just before 5pm near the transit center at the Y. Officers said all four were hanging out for a couple hours before the nearby warm room opened.

A 45-year-old allegedly pulled out a knife and stabbed a 48-year-old in the chest. A 26-year-old man and a fourth male, age 46, jumped into the fight to try and disarm the suspect, according to officers.

The youngest person sustained cuts to his hands while getting the knife away from the suspect. The 46-year-old sustained a blunt force injury to his chest.

The initial stabbing victim was transported to Barton Memorial Hospital with life threatening injuries. He is out of surgery and was expected to survive, according to officers. The 45-year-old was in stable condition. The condition of the 26-year-old was unknown after being treated in the emergency room. The 46-year-old was treated and released.

This was the eighth call this month to the South Y Transit Center involving homeless people. The calls have been for fighting, public intoxication and disturbing the peace.

Anyone with information related to this case is asked to call 530.542.6100.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Teen stimulant of choice – smart phones, not drugs

By Matt Richtel, New York Times

Amid an opioid epidemic, the rise of deadly synthetic drugs and the widening legalization of marijuana, a curious bright spot has emerged in the youth drug culture: American teenagers are growing less likely to try or regularly use drugs, including alcohol.

With minor fits and starts, the trend has been building for a decade, with no clear understanding as to why. Some experts theorize that falling cigarette-smoking rates are cutting into a key gateway to drugs, or that antidrug education campaigns, long a largely failed enterprise, have finally taken hold.

But researchers are starting to ponder an intriguing question: Are teenagers using drugs less in part because they are constantly stimulated and entertained by their computers and phones?

Read the whole story

Travelers concerned about terrorism

By Beth J. Harpaz, AP

Turkey. France. Belgium. Now London. As yet another destination is hit by terror, travelers are sighing with dismay and thinking carefully about personal safety, even

while saying the latest attack won't keep them home.

"I don't want to be afraid, but I also have this extra layer of being on heightened alert," said Nikki Stephens, 26, of Dallas, who's planning her first trip to London next month. She's been thinking about precautions like always knowing where exits are and walking on the inside of roads, away from cars. That said, she added, "We can't quit our lives and run from terror. I am going to London and plan on having a wonderful time."

A report issued Tuesday by the World Travel & Tourism Council showed that tourism dropped in destinations hit by terrorism in 2016, decreasing 4 percent in Belgium, 7 percent in France and 22 percent in Turkey. At the same time, WTTC said, tourism is growing in Portugal, Spain and Eastern Europe as travelers seek destinations they perceive as safer.

Read the whole story

China embarking on a skiing revolution

By Kade Krichko, Powder

The sun hasn't yet made it over the dusty city skyline, but human friction offsets the morning chill as businessmen, students, and errand-runners ebb and flow to the singsong commands drifting from the concrete rafters of the Beijing subway station. Three stops down Line 13, a ski bus waits to shuttle groups of giggling teenagers to Nanshan Ski, the closest ski resort to China's capital city. On this platform, I'm struggling to find breathing room amid a city of 21

million.

Skiing is not a new phenomenon in China. The sport has been traced back over 10,000 years to semi-nomadic tribes in the country's Tian Shan Range—the first skiers in the world, according to many historians.

Yet it took until two decades ago, and the start of China's free market explosion, for the public to show interest in the sport. After years of poverty and oppression, Chinese skiing began as a symbol of prosperity and status, a Western practice in a country full of newfound wealth.

Read the whole story

Douglas County may expand VHRs to valley

Douglas County is contemplating allowing vacation home rentals in the valley.

Today VHRs are only allowed at the lake.

Commissioners discussed the topic March 21. A revision to the 2005 ordinance will be brought back later this spring.

It's possible the fees will be amended, which would affect the nearly 400 Lake Tahoe homeowners renting out their properties on a short-term basis. The current initial application fee is \$100, with the renewal fee being \$75.

— Lake Tahoe News staff report