

Snippets about Lake Tahoe

- Cindy Gustafson of the Tahoe City Public Utility District was named general manager of the year by the California Special Districts Association.
- Ellen Raynor, founder and CEO of KeepOnMovin', will explore the why and how of hiring and working with contract developers, provide tips and tricks, and will compare options using case studies in startups, small businesses and large companies. The talk is Jan. 9 from 6-8pm at Tahoe Silicon Mountain in Truckee. For more info, email tahoesiliconmountain@gmail.com.
- Wynonna Judd will be at TJ's Corral at the Carson Valley Inn on April 29 at 7pm. Go **online** for tickets.
- Part of a nationwide movement by writers to reclaim democracy, The Biggest Little Protest Reading on Jan. 15 from 2-5pm will include readings by local poets and writers, including a multi-participant reading of James Baldwin and an all-ages open mic session. The event is free at the Holland Project, 140 Vesta St., Reno.
- The Douglas County Public Library will be showing "The Magnificent Seven" (rated PG-13) on Jan. 14 at 10:30am in the Minden Library meeting room. This movie is geared toward adults and teens. Coffee and doughnuts will be provided.

Innovation helps keep harmful

stormwater from Tahoe

By Zack Bradford, Tahoe In Depth

Winter snow is a welcome sight at Lake Tahoe, particularly since four of the last five winters were exceptionally dry. But as much as we all enjoy skiing or riding and as much as our towns depend on winter tourists to keep our economy going, there is a hidden cost to a return to winter: stormwater, and the pollution that it transports into Lake Tahoe.

Lake Tahoe is designated an outstanding national resource water by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, affording it protections that most lakes its size don't have. EPA, however, also lists Tahoe as "impaired" by fine sediment pollution and an excess of the nutrients nitrogen and phosphorus. Both are carried into Lake Tahoe when rain and snow washes off Tahoe's roads and parking lots. Unlike grains of sand, which sink, fine sediment particles – each smaller than the width of a human hair – remain suspended in the lake, reducing its clarity. Plants need nutrients to grow, but excessive nutrients fuel the growth of algae.

Under federal law, Tahoe's special status requires agencies in the basin to reduce the inputs of these contaminants and restore Lake Tahoe to its historic clarity. When Charles Goldman began dropping the Secchi disk in the lake in the 1950s, clarity reached over 100 feet in depth. It worsened over the decades, but for the past four years, the Tahoe Environmental Research Center's clarity measurements at the center of Tahoe have been better than any other year in the previous decade. It's no coincidence that these same four years were a record drought.



Many Tahoe agencies have begun to change the treatment they use to treat snowy roads. Illustration/League to Save Lake Tahoe

So, what can we expect when Tahoe again experiences above-average winters, with accompanying stormwater transporting these pollutants to the lake? Many agencies at Tahoe have been preparing for that scenario.

From engineered stormwater “infiltration basins” on the South Shore, to curb and gutter projects on the West Shore, agencies have been acting to reduce the amount of fine sediment coming off our urban streets, roads, and developments. But the biggest impact, perhaps, has been made by agencies modifying their road sanding practices.

Scientists have found that road traction abrasives, or road sands, are responsible for the vast majority of fine sediment ending up in Lake Tahoe. Road managers apply abrasives in the winter for public safety to provide traction for vehicles traveling on snowy roads. These traction materials are crushed

by our car tires and ground into clarity-degrading fine sediment.

Staff from state and local public works departments balance public safety and the environment by monitoring and analyzing storms, applying road salts at precise times, and spreading road sands in precise locations before temperatures drop. They also sweep up road sands after storms. The improvements they've made over the past decade have been challenging.

One major change has been to switch, over the past five years, from a material known as "volcanic cinders" to "Washoe sand." The cinders are a brittle volcanic rock that cars easily crush into an ash-like dust, while the sturdy grains of Washoe sands can withstand more abuse. Washed into a body of water, more of the finely crushed cinders remain suspended, while the larger and heavier grains of Washoe sand sink harmlessly to the bottom.

Research conducted by El Dorado County and Caltrans showed that switching to Washoe sand could reduce ultra-fine particles, those most responsible for clarity loss, by as much as 90 percent.

Agencies have also taken steps to improve efficiency in applying these road abrasives.

"Our drivers now focus on spot sanding at key intersections, steep areas, and critical public safety areas," said Jason Burke with the city of South Lake Tahoe. Caltrans now relies more heavily on weather forecasts, and has installed vehicle sensors to measure road temperature. Both Caltrans and El Dorado County have also begun treating roads with a brine solution, which lowers the freezing point of the road, as a potent ice-prevention step before storms arrive.

"The brine technology allows the county to prevent ice buildup, use less salt, and be strategic in placement of road sand," said Russ Wigart, stormwater coordinator for El Dorado

County.

South Lake Tahoe also engages in what Burke calls a “combined effort of refined sand application and enhanced street sweeping after storm events to recover traction materials as soon as feasible.” The city recently purchased new spreaders to enable the use of brine on city streets for the first time this winter.

“Brine use reduces the bounce and scatter typical when dropping dry sand onto the roadway,” said Burke, allowing the city to reduce the amount of sand it needs to apply by 30 percent.

Nevada public works officials are also using the best available technology, from road temperature sensors to high efficiency street sweepers, to combat the fine sediment runoff problem.

The results of some of these changes have been encouraging. Caltrans’ Sean Cross reports that “water quality monitoring and testing have shown reductions to fine sediment particles,” while Wigart said “the concentrations of fine sediments in urban runoff appear much cleaner.” The real impact though, may not be known for several years, as it takes time for sediment to reach the center of the lake where TERC takes its clarity readings.

So, what can community members like you do to protect Lake Tahoe?

Slow down when driving in winter conditions and bring your vehicle to the car wash more frequently to reduce the spread of roads sands trapped under your car. Residents and business owners can also use less salt, and encourage private snow removal companies to switch to Washoe sand instead of cinders.

Reducing the number of cars on the road can reduce the fine sediment pollution that threatens Lake Tahoe’s clarity.

Community members can help by carpooling, and riding the bus and ski shuttles. Little steps add up, and together our actions can help protect Lake Tahoe.

*Zack Bradford is the natural resources manager for the League to Save Lake Tahoe. He manages Pipe Keepers, a community-based volunteer monitoring program that examines stormwater entering Lake Tahoe and its tributaries, and Eyes on the Lake, a volunteer program to help prevent the spread of aquatic invasive plants in Tahoe's waters. This article first appeared in **Tahoe In Depth**.*

Tahoe-area effluent spilled into Carson River

By Benjamin Spillman, Reno Gazette-Journal

An unknown amount of wastewater effluent spilled into the Carson River Tuesday and Wednesday.

That's according to the Douglas County Sewer Improvement District which operates a pipeline that moves treated wastewater from Stateline-area casinos, businesses and homes to agricultural land in the Carson Valley.

Rob Hopkins, general manager of the sewer district, said officials noticed the rupture at about 11am Tuesday. The break was repaired by about 11:35am Wednesday, he said.

Read the whole story

Storm cuts power, affects schools, clogs roads

Updated 10:55am:

The heavy, wet snow that has been falling in the Tahoe basin was finally too much for power lines.

Power is out in various locations. Liberty Utilities has had outages in most of Meyers, including the Sky Line area, much of the West Shore around Tahoma, and the Glenshire area of Truckee. The lights came back on in Meyers at 7:25am after being out for about two hours.

However, there is a tree down at the end of Christmas Valley that has caused about 100 customers to be without power. It could be noon before power is restored.

At 10am NV Energy had no estimated time when the 76 Stateline customers will have power. Most of the 100 customers in Incline Village should have power by noon.

"We have been having them all night," Randy Kelly of Liberty said of the outages. He also told *Lake Tahoe News*, "We have heard of a broken pole too; that could be a tree breaking off with this heavy snow."

As of 10:55am, Liberty had no estimated time when power would be restored to Tahoe Vista, Carnelian Bay, Tahoe City, Homewood, Tahoma, Squaw Valley and Truckee. There are 240 customers without power in those areas.

Snapped poles, trees on wires, downed wires have caused three circuits to go out.

In El Dorado County, 3,451 customers are affected; in Placer County there are 175. In the Stateline line area, 77 customers are without power.

The snow has also canceled classes in Truckee Unified School District. Incline Village schools are on a two-hour delay.

Roads are a mess in most locations. For up-to-date conditions, click on the state icons on *Lake Tahoe News'* home page.

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*

South Shore women ready to rally to be heard

By Kathryn Reed

“We walk in peaceful resistance to the negative rhetoric of the past election cycle.”

That is the message a group of South Shore women want to convey as they march Jan. 21 in solidarity with the thousands, if not millions, of other women throughout the United States on that day.

A woman in Hawaii initiated the Washington march after the Nov. 8 election. From there, people in communities in nearly every state have been organizing marches to take place on that Saturday. The impetus is to give a voice to women's issues that many believe have been trampled upon by President elect-Donald Trump.

The marches will occur the day after he becomes president and takes up residence in the White House.

Locally, it was Del Laine, Brooke Laine and Vicki Gonzales who spearheaded the event. Now about 20 people are behind the Tahoe brigade. Soroptimist International of South Lake Tahoe is the financial backer.

“This is not a demonstration just for women. It is for unity; it is for tolerance. It’s also recognizing we are paying attention and we are going to stay educated locally and act nationally when necessary,” Brooke Laine told *Lake Tahoe News*.

The local march could be the only bi-state event in the United States. Organizers plan to convene in the parking lot at Hard Rock in Stateline, walk along Highway 50 to Lakeview Commons and gather there as a group.

Two women of different generations are expected give short speeches. The proclamation the group came up with will likely be read as well.

The procession will start at 11am no matter the weather. Sponsors are expecting between 200 and 500 people – and not just women. Other organizations have expressed a desire to be part of this march, which to date is the only one planned in the basin.

Laine and others hope that out of this gathering people will unite to form a sustaining group that will have its own identity rooted in the bigger cause, with action taken locally.

A **Facebook page** has been created to provide more information about the Tahoe march.

Opinion: Frugality a necessity in EDC

By Larry Weitzman

On Dec. 28, the El Dorado County Board of Supervisors gave its residents a huge, new obligation of about \$2.3 million annually.

EDC is borrowing about \$57 million to pay for the building of new sheriff's facility on some land off of Missouri Flat Road in Placerville which was purchased about a year ago, at a cost of about \$2.7 million for this specific purpose. There is little question that a new sheriff's facility is needed, but at what cost? Whether it would be \$30 million or \$60 million, there is no question of the need.



Larry Weitzman

What appears to be the problem is how are we going to pay for it? There is no question that this is a very low cost loan deal at a 2.38 APR with a 40-year amortization term when compared to current home loan interest rates which have "ballooned" to 4.5 percent recently. If this deal, which was approved at this BOS meeting by a 5-0 vote, had gone into next year, the loan rate would have increased by a full percentage point. The BOS was advised at the meeting that this increase would cost EDC another \$600,000 a year annually in interest and a total cost of \$24 million over the life of the 40-year loan. Actually, because it is a fully amortized loan, while

the first year might cost an additional \$600,000, the last year it would be almost zero, so the total additional interest cost would be about \$12 million.

The problem is how is EDC going to pay for this? The budget is already stretched to the limit if not already underwater. But with this new loan simultaneously also comes a new, even greater obligation foisted upon us by CalPERS, which is the administrator of EDC's retirement system.

With our \$600 million plus retirement account came the bad, but more realistic move by CalPERS last month of lowering of the "discount" rate (from 7.5 to 7 percent) which is the projected rate of return of EDC's retirement fund. This is the result of at least two very bad years where the actual rate of return fell to 2 percent and then to 0.6 percent. Many experts think the discount rate should be reduced to at least 6.5 percent or even 6 percent. But the effect of the one-half percent lowering of the rate alone will equate to an additional \$3 million annual cost to EDC's annual expenditure starting in a couple of years. This is on top of the \$2.3 million created by the new EDC long term obligation, but CalPERS additional funding spending was already going to increase by a total of \$61 million over the next six years which now becomes more like \$75 million of additional spending over the next six years. Up until now, EDC had no long-term debt. Now it will have an additional annual expenditure of over \$5 million.

But wait, there is more significant future obligations coming due. First are the long-term county obligations of funding the health care costs of county retirees. Nothing has been set aside for these known costs and the unfunded liability is estimated to be approaching \$63 million, a bill that is coming due and which is unplanned for.

Also, unaccounted for are the fiscally failing rural fire districts. While El Dorado Hills Fire is sitting in fat city

and flush with money, mostly because of their initially generous Assembly Bill 8 rate, the rest of the 10 or so districts are in dire straits (no offense to the rock group of the same name who sang "Money for nothing"). El Dorado County Fire is sustaining itself via cutbacks, but the other small, rural districts have bleak futures without EDC involvement. Where will those millions of dollars come from?

More unplanned for expenditures are deferred EDC maintenance of its facilities. And then there is road maintenance of EDC's over 1,000 miles of county maintained roads. In the past, this obligation has been funded by General Fund money of \$1 million to \$3 million a year, but with a BOS edict recommended by prior CAO Larry Combs, General Fund road maintenance was suspended by the BOS. While it has been reinstated, it was done so in name only by the current BOS as their plan is to take \$2 million from the MC & FP which will be difficult at best as described in a prior column. Combs also said in the recruitment bulletin for the new CAO that EDC was in strong financial condition and that the F/Y 2015-16 budget was structurally balanced. That's what you get when you hire a carpetbagger who has no interest in our county and a CAO (Combs) that the BOS doesn't vet.

All of these fiscal problems, issues and more were laid out in a four-page letter dated Dec. 28, 2016, and made part of the hearing's public record to the BOS from the county watchdog and head accountant, Joe Harn. It can be seen and read on the Legistar for the meeting.

BOS members said the usual platitudes about taking on this new EDC obligation, Supervisor Brian Veerkamp saying, "We will be up against the wall in other areas;" "Kick the can down the road Ranalli" did kick the can by saying "Harder decisions will have to be made in the future." Maybe Supervisor Michael Ranalli should be trying out as a punter for the 49er's (no offense meant regarding their already dismal season). Supervisor Sue Novasel made the brilliant remark, "The way we

can grow is by growing the revenue.” No suggestions were made of cutting the red tape for business, however. The BOS’s true fiscal conservative, Shiva Frentzen, remarked that “...must watch every penny we will spend. I will be even more frugal.” We will have to see what newly elected Supervisor John Hidahl will do.

Newly minted CAO Don Ashton perhaps summarized the situation best when he said we all know we need a new sheriff’s facility, but “this loan ... will make things difficult ... and some will be painful decisions. We are paying for prior decisions, it’s a situation we all inherited because of (a prior) failure to plan and save money.”

While CAO Ashton is saddled with the here and now, it was the BOS’ failure to direct prior administrative staff for more austerity. They had plenty of warning not only from my columns over the past three years, but from the Auditor-Controller who continually said for at least the past three and a half years that there was going to be a painful, fiscal train wreck. Three and a half years ago, EDC ended the fiscal year with a \$54 million cash balance, almost the exact amount of this new loan.

Ashton knows what to do; spending must be cut. The BOS should direct the CAO to do what is necessary to make EDC fiscally sound with the least detrimental effect on EDC residents. It can be done as in the city of South Lake Tahoe recently. Residents should feel no pain because of the BOS’ bad prior decisions.

Larry Weitzman is a resident of Rescue.

Court: Calif. cities' private lawyers' bills can go public

By Bob Egelko, San Francisco Chronicle

Local governments in California must release records of the amounts they've been billed by private lawyers for cases they handled, a divided state Supreme Court ruled Thursday.

In a 4-3 decision, the court said the attorney-client privilege – which makes most communications with lawyers confidential – doesn't apply to a public agency's financial dealings with private attorneys in cases that have been concluded. The ruling was at least a partial victory for advocacy groups and media organizations seeking more public disclosure of government records.

Cities and counties turn to private attorneys to handle legal proceedings that require resources or specialized personnel that the government agencies lack.

Read the whole story

Sierra roads horrid, nasty weather not stopping

By Lake Tahoe News

Don't drive. That is the message being delivered by nearly every agency dealing with roads in and around Lake Tahoe.

This was the South Lake Tahoe's message on Jan. 4, "Stay home.

If you really don't have to go out, don't. Even if you can drive well in the snow, not everyone else can. Don't tempt fate: If you don't have somewhere you have to be, watch the snow from indoors."

Caltrans has no estimate when Interstate 80 will open. It's been closed since Wednesday afternoon. Traffic was preventing snow removal teams from being able to clear the road.

Motorists using cable (ladder) chains may be turned around on Highway 267 at the Northstar and Kings Beach chain control checkpoints. Although cable chains are legal traction devices, they've proven to be ineffective when attempting to drive over Brockway Summit during heavy snow storms, according to Caltrans.

All the summits have been having issues because of the wet snow. Not all drivers are prepared or know how to drive in the conditions.

With Kingsbury Grade closed for what could be weeks because of a sink hole, drivers have to go over Luther Pass or Spooner Summit.

It took Amanda Adams 1½ hours to get from Gardnerville to the Y on Wednesday night.

"There are multiple cars stopped on the pass, some are putting on chains in the road, others are parked without anyone inside the vehicle (maybe they are doing some back country skiing). The road condition isn't horrible, just packed snow with a few areas of deep ruts. But they should have chain control check point in Hope Valley. There were a couple 2WD cars without chains or spinning out trying to go up the road," she posted on *Lake Tahoe News'* Facebook page.

While it was mostly rain in South Lake Tahoe at lake level on Jan. 4, it had been snowing in Incline and there are reports of multiple feet of snow at the top of Kingsbury Grade.

Both state transportation agencies expect the delays to continue as the snow keeps falling.

The National Weather Service in Reno is predicting up to 2 feet of snow for summit passes and continued snowfall for the mountains and at lake level on Thursday. Whiteout conditions may occur.

An atmospheric river is headed toward Tahoe. Flooding is possible in the basin, with Douglas County already issuing a flood alert. The next major storm will arrive Saturday, with the brunt coming Sunday and Monday.

The Weather Service warns, "A flood watch has been issued for the Sierra and western Nevada this weekend. Rising snow levels and the potential to receive 6-12 inches of rain in the Sierra will create serious flooding concerns. If you have interests near creeks, streams, rivers or flood prone areas now is the time to prepare."

Most of the ski resorts are rejoicing about the snow, though some have had rain and avalanche danger is a huge concern.

"This storm has been incredible. Five feet of snow has piled up over the past couple of days, and it's continuing to fall fast this afternoon," said Mike Pierce, director of marketing at Mt. Rose Ski Tahoe, said in a statement. "This system and those forecast to come behind it are setting us up for an incredible winter season, and one of the snowiest Januarys in years."

Nev. 9th most popular moving destination in U.S.

By Jason Hidalgo, Reno Gazette-Journal

A lot of folks decided to make the move to the Silver State last year.

Nevada was the ninth most popular destination for movers in 2016, according to the latest United Van Lines National Movers Study.

The ranking represents a slight drop from 2015, when Nevada was ranked eighth in the nation. Nevada also fell from third to fourth place among states in the Pacific and Mountain West, behind Oregon, Idaho and Washington.

Read the whole story

21 arrests at Stateline during New Year holiday

Douglas County sheriff's deputies made 21 arrests in the Stateline area during the New Year holiday.

The department considered the holiday weekend from Dec. 30 at 6pm to Jan. 2 at 6pm.

In addition to the arrests at the lake at that time, five people were arrested in Carson Valley. Most of these were misdemeanor domestic battery, disorderly conduct, minor consuming alcohol and trespassing.

The two most serious arrests included a felony domestic battery, and a second arrest for DUI causing substantial bodily harm. The department would not provide further details.

Highway 50 was closed in the casino corridor for about 30 minutes as revelers filled the area to ring in the new year. The road was open by 12:15am Jan. 1.

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*