

Memorial Day travel to rise for fourth straight year

By Reuters

U.S. travelers will hit the roads, rails and airports this Memorial Day Weekend by the largest numbers in more than a decade, despite the highest gasoline prices in four years, the nation's largest automotive advocacy group said on Monday.

More than 41.5 million Americans will travel 50 miles over Memorial Day weekend, the highest travel volume since 2005, when there were some 44 million travelers, according to the AAA, or American Automobile Association.

The holiday period, which traditionally marks the start of U.S. summer vacations, is defined this year as May 24-28.

Read the whole story

Van life to be showcased in Tahoe City

Lake Tahoe's first-ever Van Life Rally has been added to the Alpenglöw Mountain Festival.

It will be June 22 from 9am-2pm in the heart of Tahoe City.

Whether you're living life on the road in your own tricked out rig, looking for a way to break into the van lifestyle, searching for new ideas to expand your current setup, or just curious about the ways of van-dwellers, this is the event for

you. The event is free.

Alpenglow Sports will take over the parking lot behind the shop (415 North Lake Blvd, Tahoe City) to showcase the build-outs of Tahoe locals, as well as the tricked out Sprinter Van from Sufferfest Beer Company. Representatives from Trail Kitchen, creators of innovative products that enhance the mobile outdoor lifestyle, will also join the event and resident Mountain Festival photographer Scott Rokis, who quit his corporate job to live in his Sprinter chasing the adventure lifestyle, will also be on hand.

Don't own a van? Walk on in and see what all the fuss is about. Come with your curiosities, questions, and imagination for travel and the open road.

If you have a custom van and would like to participate, email info@alpenglowsports.com for more information on how you can showcase your rig.

Letter: LTWC says thank you

To the community,

On behalf of our present board of directors, our past board members, all of our volunteers and all of the wildlife Lake Tahoe Wildlife Care has cared for in the past 40 years, I would like to say "thank you" to all those people who showed up last Sunday when we celebrated the 40th anniversary.

We had a very nice turnout from the community at Revive Coffee and Wine starting at 2pm and we recognized those people who have served and are serving on our board since 1978. In addition, we recognized the various agencies who have been our

partners, including, but not limited to, city of SLT Police, El Dorado County Animal Control, El Dorado County Sheriff, Douglas County Sheriff, California Highway Patrol and California Department of Fish and Wildlife (formerly Game).

The weather was cool, but dry and it was just a very nice time for like-minded people to sit and talk about friendships, wildlife problems (and solutions) they have encountered over the years and to help celebrate 40 years of this organization which started with the idea of "Giving Mother Nature a Helping Hand!"

Tom Millham, secretary and co-founder Lake Tahoe Wildlife Care

Amtrak releases update on battered passenger found near Truckee

By Sam Gross, Reno Gazette-Journal

An update from national rail carrier Amtrak on Thursday evening answered few questions about its investigation into how one of its passengers ended up severely injured beside train tracks in Truckee.

Aaron Salazar, a 22-year-old college student traveling by rail from Colorado to Oregon, was found battered, burned and unconscious just feet from the train tracks on the east edge of Truckee on May 15.

His family believes he was attacked, a victim of a hate crime because he is gay.

But Amtrak maintains its police force has found “nothing to suggest criminal intent.”

Read the whole story

Debate turns ugly as Tahoe snowmobilers fear forest closures

By Benjamin Spillman, Reno Gazette-Journal

The debate over snowmobile access in the Tahoe National Forest has taken an ugly turn with a spate of emails, social media posts and online comments filled with foul and abusive language.

Several people pushing for more restrictions on snowmobiles in the 800,000-acre forest that straddles the Sierra Crest have been the targets of online abuse.

The problem has gotten bad enough that Forest Service officials disabled a portion of the online comment system when they suspected people used it to target other commenters with nasty emails.

Read the whole story

Robbery at S. Lake Tahoe credit union



Police are looking for this man.

Police are looking for a man who on Thursday robbed the Sierra Central Credit Union in South Lake Tahoe.

The crime occurred at 5:30pm May 24.

Officers said the suspect is a white male adult, wearing a fake beard and a black pinstripe suit.

If has not been disclosed if the man left with money, and if so, how much.

Anyone with information is asked to call, 530.542.6100.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

16 contractors caught in

South Shore sting

The California Contractors State License Board (CSLB) teamed with the Nevada State Contractors Board (NCSB) on two undercover sting operations, as well as a sweep of job sites in the South Lake Tahoe area that snared 16 unlicensed contractors.

NCSB staff were on-site at CSLB's sting in South Lake Tahoe on May 16. CSLB staff joined NCSB for their sting the following day in Zephyr Cove. Investigators posed as a homeowner and solicited home improvement bids from alleged unlicensed contractors.

In the California sting, 10 people were caught and now face a misdemeanor charge of contracting without a state license. Bids ranged from \$1,100 for tile to \$20,000 for installation of concrete pavers. It is against California law to contract for home improvement or construction jobs valued at \$500 or more for labor and materials combined without a state-issued contractor license. Penalties for first-time unlicensed contracting convictions include up to six months in jail and/or up to \$5,000 in fines.

Eight of the 10 suspects were also given a notice to appear in court for illegal advertising. California contracting law requires unlicensed contractors to state in all advertising that they are not licensed.

Three of the 10 brought workers with them to the sting house and were given stop orders and cited for not having workers' compensation insurance for those workers; two of the 10 could face charge for requesting an illegally large down payment. In California, down payments for home improvement jobs cannot total more than \$1,000 or 10 percent of the contract price, whichever amount is less.

Investigators also swept through 31 jobs sites in the South

Lake Tahoe area. The sweep will result in three cases being referred to the El Dorado County District Attorney's Office. Two will be referred for contracting without a license; the third for a worker's compensation insurance violation. Three stop orders and one administrative citation also were issued.

Six people were caught in the Nevada sting. Four were cited for contracting without a license; two of those were also cited for advertising without a license. Two others were cited only for advertising without a license.

A Nevada state contractor's license is needed for all home improvement jobs that exceed \$1,000 in labor and material, require a building permit, involve plumbing, electrical, heating or air conditioning, or changes the aesthetic appearance or structural components of a building or property grounds.

The two states also have a reciprocity agreement, making it easier for a contractor licensed in one state, to get a contractor's license in the other.

The suspects listed below, who were caught in the California sting, are scheduled to appear on July 18 in El Dorado County Superior Court in South Lake Tahoe.

California Sting Operation

Suspect name City of residence	License classification	Alleged violation(s)
Andrew James Davis Carson City	C-15 Flooring Contractor	Contracting w/o a License Illegal Advertising
Symon Cleonvernier Sears Carson City	C-15 Flooring Contractor	Contracting w/o a License Illegal Advertising

Eduardo Martinezf-Medina Sparks	C-54 Tile Contractor	Contracting w/o a License Illegal Advertising
Carlos Romero Sun Valley	C-61/D-6 Concrete Related Services Contractor	Contracting w/o a License Illegal Advertising
Frank Anthony Euronis Reno	C-13 Fencing Contractor	Contracting w/o a License No Workers' Compensation Insurance
Shawn Brown South Lake Tahoe	C-13 Fencing Contractor	Contracting w/o a License
Alberto Ruiz- Lopez Carson City	C-61/D-6 Concrete Related Services Contractor	Contracting w/o a License Illegal Advertising Illegally Large Down Payment No Workers' Compensation Insurance
James Raymond Williams III South Lake Tahoe	C-33 Painting Contractor	Contracting w/o a License Illegal Advertising No Workers' Compensation Insurance
Steven Anthony Nichols South Lake Tahoe	C-61/D-49 Tree Service Contractor	Contracting w/o a License Illegal Advertising

Leo James Pasquarello Sparks	C-61/D-6 Concrete Related Services Contractor	Contracting w/o a License Illegal Advertising Illegally Large Down Payment
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Nevada Sting Operation

Suspect name City of residence	Work class	Alleged violation(s)
Alberto Ruiz- Lopez Carson City	Multiple	Advertising w/o a License
Rigoberto Gonzalez Incline Village	Painting	Contracting w/o a License
Javier Tinoco Incline Village	Painting	Contracting w/o a License
Elmer Vazquez Sparks	Painting	Contracting w/o a License Advertising w/o a License
Steven Rose Carson City	Painting	Advertising w/o a License
Gershon BenChaim Reno/Sparks	Garage Door	Contracting w/o a License Advertising w/o a License

Snippets about Lake Tahoe



The following students were recognized:

LTCC – Hannah Brown, Robert Gutknecht, Mika Klitsch, Farrah Kuenzi, Jennifer Lenches, Tristy Medina, Morgan Montoya, Thorne Saunders, Kathryn Spence, Lakin Smith, Kyle Sullivan; STHS – Briana Alamilla, Halle Alvarez, Abby Burns, Jakob Costley, David Holmes, Annika Johnson, Shelby Lyon, Barbara Rivas, Theresa Sandborn; WHS – Dylan Kixmiller, Gabriela Trachsel.

- Soroptimist International of South Lake Tahoe recently hosted its annual Rewards for Excellence Scholarship program where \$21,000 in scholarships were awarded to 22 students from Lake Tahoe Community College, South Tahoe High School, and Whittell High School.

- North Tahoe's Clean Up Day is June 2 from 9am-1pm in Kings Beach, Crystal Bay, Carnelian Bay, and Tahoe Vista. Registration starts at 9am at Community House located at 265

Bear St. in Kings Beach.

- Sierra Nevada College's Summer Gala takes place June 15 at the Lakeside Ballroom of the Hyatt in Incline Village. Go **online** to buy tickets.

- Douglas County Public Library is providing a Summer Reading Program for adults from June 11-Aug 4. Adults ages 18 and older may register at the Minden Library or Zephyr Cove Library.

- Solid Gold Soul opens June 14 for a summer-long run through Sept. 3 at the South Shore Room at Harrah's Lake Tahoe.

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Proposed Squaw-Alpine gondola raises concerns about environmental threats, avalanche devices

By Kathryn Reed

KINGS BEACH – While the proximity to Granite Chief Wilderness Area has been a dominate argument for not building the gondola that would link Squaw Valley and Alpine Meadows ski resorts, on Thursday neighbors raised the issue of the proposed avalanche control devices as another concern.

Heather Beckman, senior planner for Placer County, acknowledged at the end of the public comment that the Gazex devices have emerged as an issue.

“It’s definitely something we will be researching and addressing in the final document,” Beckman told the county Planning Commission.

Commissioners on May 24 received an update on the project and took public comment. This was Commissioner Anders Hauge’s first meeting, having been sworn in that day.

Placer County and the U.S. Forest Service (Tahoe National Forest) have the final say over approving the project. Together they have released the EIR and EIS.

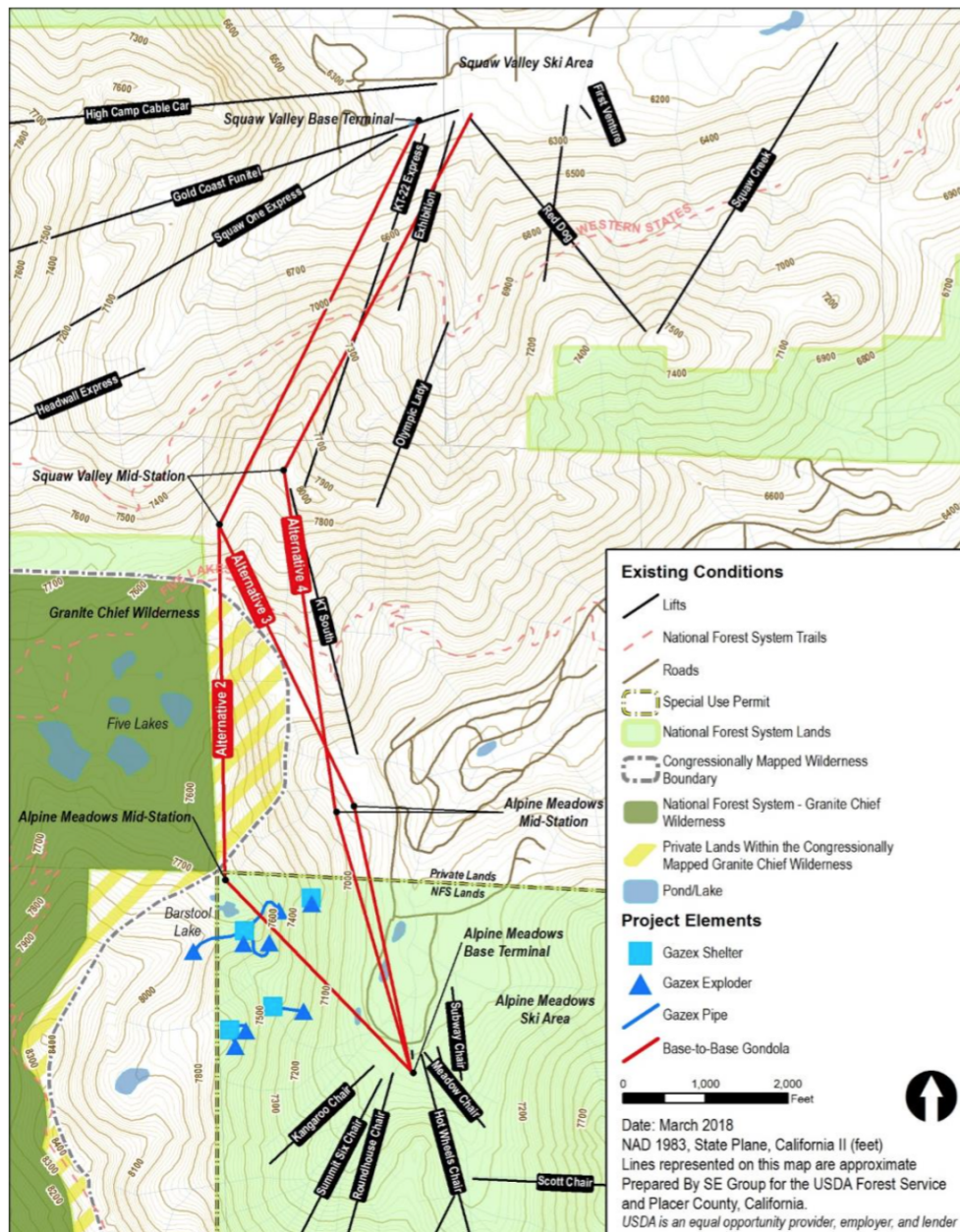


Figure 1: Gondola alternatives; land ownership and designations

Red lines are possible gondola routes from Squaw (top) to Alpine (bottom). Source: Placer County

The eight-person gondola would link the base areas of the two resorts, taking 1,400 passengers an hour in each direction. The ride would take 16 minutes.

Beckman said it will not open new terrain, but will provide better access to some terrain. It will be possible to load/unload at the midstation. The gondola would only be operational during the ski season.

Beckman said the gondola is expected to have a mild impact on skier visits the first year; with a projected increase of 1.4 percent or 12,400 skier visits the first year, then tapering off by year five.

This, according to the county, could equate to an increase of 422 vehicle trips, which will impact Highway 89 the most and the left turn lane onto Alpine Meadows Road.

The ski resort owner wants alternative 2, which is the closest to the Granite Chief Wilderness Area. Alternatives 3 and 4 are farther away and would have fewer environmental impacts.

Nine people spoke during the meeting at North Tahoe Event Center, with most having concerns about the proposed project.

Craig Hamilton lives on Alpine Meadows Road, which is prone to avalanches. The resort is now using Gazex devices to manage that area.

"The shockwave force feels like the house has been hit by a bomb," Hamilton said. He called it a "terrifying event."

While he said he loves the idea of the gondola, he and others don't like the Gazex machines that are already visible from the **5 Lakes Trail**. The trail is in the wilderness area, while the machines are not. A wilderness area by definition is not open to machinery, not even mountain bikes are allowed in these federal lands.

A representative from Sierra Watch said his group's main concerns center on the gondola's proximity to the wilderness area, the impact on wildlife – the endangered yellow-legged frog that has been found at Barstool Lake, and intensification of development. The latter is a concern in terms congestion on Highway 89 and the roads leading to the resorts, as well as the plans Troy Caldwell has with his 460-acres.

Part of the gondola infrastructure would be on Caldwell's

property. He has talked about developing some of his land and tying it into one of the midway stations of the gondola.

That is why some people want the powers that be to look at cumulative effects of projects and not each one in a silo.

Ron Cohen, deputy general counsel for Alterra Mountain Company who is also interim COO at Squaw Valley Ski Holdings, was the lone voice in support of the gondola. Alterra is now the parent company of Squaw and Alpine.

"We are trying to address the issues raised by the project," Cohen told the commissioners. He said his people are working with the environmental community, adding that the company cares about the wilderness area and the endangered yellow-legged frog.

The commissioners had no comments.

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Notes:

- The environmental document is available **online**.
- The deadline to comment is June 11 at 5pm.

Opinion: Not all EDC candidates are equal

By Larry Weitzman

Our form of government would work much better if the people in it were not so self-serving. Most politicians (and bureaucrats) fall into this category, thinking or saying

anything to get elected, whether factual or not. That is the case with two of the candidates on the current ballot, Mike Owen and Norma Santiago, who have made statements that are absolute poppy-cock.

It was April 30, at the weekly morning meeting of the Taxpayers Association of El Dorado County. Maybe 7:30am was too early for one of the candidates both of whom were CPAs running for the El Dorado County elected position of auditor-controller. One candidate was the current auditor-controller, Joe Harn, who first won election in 1994 and the other candidate was Mike Owen.



Larry Weitzman

While I am not a CPA, I did earn a degree in accounting from the UCLA School of Business and during undergraduate and graduate school worked as a “junior” accountant for several CPAs and know their “psyche.” All the CPAs I knew were always accurate and precise when talking about numbers. In obtaining financial information from the current auditor for many of my columns, Harn’s information was always extremely precise and accurate.

It was midway into their opening statements when Owen made my jaw drop when he started becoming fast and loose with El Dorado County numbers (like I wrote above, maybe it was too early for Owen). Owen said that there was about a \$250 million General Fund budget for our county government. Actually, the General Fund portion is a bit more, but close enough for government work. But according to our competent CAO the

discretionary part is only about \$150 million. Then Owen said by paying vendor bills early (and taking early pay discounts or negotiating vendors bills down with early payment) he could save the county 10 percent with those discounts or about \$25 million annually. If accounting was plumbing, it would be called a "pipe dream."

Taking discounts for early pay in some cases could add up to 10 percent or more on an annualized basis. But many if not almost all vendors don't offer terms like that as it is an expensive form of financing and competition has reduced profit margins. On top of that, many of county purchases are made with credit cards. But that's not the real rub here.

Anyone running for office should know something about the "County Fisc," especially a CPA or someone running for a countywide financial position. It's obvious Owen knows next to nothing, CPA credential or not. Of our \$250 million plus county General Fund budget, about \$150 million as above is discretionary and of that about \$100 million is salary and benefits. No employee in the county is giving any discount on their paychecks. That means the discretionary, non-salary and benefits portion is about \$50 million. If anyone could get early pay discounts on even half of that number it would amount to a \$2.5 million savings, not \$25 million as Owen claimed. But that wouldn't be possible either.

In this era of cheap interest rates, discounts are unlikely as contracts are done by bidding or by request for proposals (RFPs) and are negotiated before services and products are purchased. On top of that many county purchases are made through "buying groups" that get large, pre-negotiated discounts. There are no significant or substantial early pay discounts available, leaving the amount of early discount payables possible as negligible, effectively zip, zero, nada.

Owen has claimed that the county doesn't pay its bills on time of which he has produced no evidence of any such occurrence.

However, recent El Dorado County filings on Owen's alleged "successful" businesses of Crystal Basin Cellars showed two of several unpaid property tax bills as demonstrated by the filing of two certificate of lien for unsecured property tax. Why the tax liens? Maybe Owen doesn't pay his bills on time. Maybe his businesses are not so "successful." Owen has even been penalized for late campaign filing requirements. Why? He didn't pay these bills on time, too? Even Owen's CPA license was delinquent for non-payment of licensing fees during which time it was unlawful to identify himself as a CPA, which Owen did notwithstanding him not having a valid license. As to the claim of Crystal Basin Cellars and businesses being successful, Owen, who is a partner, should produce the financial records, but that might prove embarrassing. Maybe Owen needs this "job."

Owen has some other ethical dings such as being fined at least \$600 by the Fair Political Practices Commission.

Santiago has other issues the first being her statement saying Don Ashton is doing a great job (he is) and that "Terry Daly also performed well." Though Daly was accused of costing the county a lot of money, Santiago defended her, highlighting Daly's belief in "investing wisely while remaining fiscally conservative." There is an oxymoron. Daly gave away the county store in her 15 percent countywide pay raise recommendation which the Board of Supervisors blindly followed (Santiago voted for it). It has already cost the county upwards of \$100 million when you factor in pension benefits.

Her love of Daly may also extend to the fact that Daly, in violation of her severance agreement, wrote a written declaration with the Superior Court saying Santiago was entitled to back pay in Santiago's and ex-supervisor Ron Briggs lawsuit against the county for back pay. Any second-year law student could have told her that her suit was without merit and barred by the language of the California Constitution. I wrote at least two columns with respect to the

lawsuit and explaining why the suit was without merit. As to the other candidates running for District 5, I have no opinion as your choices are slim, maybe a write-in might be a better choice.

Larry Weitzman is a resident of Rescue.