

Yosemite to expand by 400 acres

By Louis Sahagun, Los Angeles Times

In its biggest expansion in decades, Yosemite National Park on Wednesday broadened its western boundary by adding 400 acres of lush meadowlands edged with cedars and ponderosa pines that provide habitat for some of California's most threatened wildlife.

The nonprofit Trust for Public Land purchased Ackerson Meadow from private owners for \$2.3 million this year and donated it Wednesday to the National Park Service, marking Yosemite National Park's largest addition of untrammelled wilderness in seven decades. Yosemite now stands at roughly 750,000 acres.

The meadows, home to the federally endangered southwestern willow flycatcher and a geographically isolated and genetically distinct clan of roughly 200 great gray owls, were spared by the Rim Fire that scorched a huge swath of the surrounding Sierra Nevada forests in 2013.

[Read the whole story](#)

Scuba diver who died at Tahoe was from Sac

The scuba diver who died at Lake Tahoe over Labor Day weekend has been identified as Michael Stephen Majewski.

The 63-year-old Sacramento man was diving with friends on

Sept. 5 near Glenbrook when for unknown reasons he made an emergency ascent. He was unconscious when he surfaced.

The investigation is continuing by Douglas County sheriff's investigators. The cause of death is pending autopsy and toxicology results.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Calif. may ban property seizures from non-criminals

By Glen Martin, CALmatters

She is known by the pseudonym of Elizabeth James – a retiree from the phone company who was contemplating a cross-country trip with her machinist husband. They had worked for decades raising two children and caring for her disabled sister, who lived in a home the couple had bought and remodeled in East Palo Alto. Then police raided the sister's home and arrested the Jameses' son, who had been living in a back room, for drug-dealing.

Although Elizabeth James was never charged with a crime – she insisted she didn't know what her son was doing – city police worked with federal authorities who evicted her sister and seized the house under a process known as civil asset forfeiture.

More than 220 California law enforcement agencies have partnered with federal prosecutors to instigate civil asset forfeiture, allowing them to seize and liquidate the assets of people who weren't convicted or even charged with crimes.

The goal: to deny drug dealers working capital and divert the value of their assets to crime-fighting efforts. But critics have condemned it as “policing for profit,” arguing that it strips citizens of their goods without due process.

After overcoming objections from some in law enforcement, a bill to curtail the practice cleared the Legislature by a wide margin and is awaiting Gov. Jerry Brown’s signature.

“SB443 isn’t the platinum reform standard for civil asset forfeiture, but it’s still a very good bill,” said Lee McGrath, legislative counsel for the Institute for Justice. “More to the point, this is a California bill. When California does something, everybody in the nation pays attention.”

State law already prevents civil asset forfeiture in most state cases – an exception being large bundles of cash – unless the owner is convicted. But it allows state and local police to collaborate on drug cases with the federal government, which not only doesn’t require convictions for civil asset forfeiture, but rewards cooperating agencies with up to 80 percent of the assets’ worth.

The result has been a big surge in the federal variety. A state Senate bill analysis indicates that the amount California agencies collected under the federal program in 2014 was \$77 million.

The bill’s biggest impact: It would ban local and state police from reaping the gains of federal civil asset forfeiture unless the owner of the assets is convicted of a crime. It also would bolster existing protections under state law by raising the threshold for the forfeiture of cash absent a conviction from \$25,000 to \$40,000, and requiring a conviction before the government can claim property such as boats and cars.

Even if SB443 becomes law, it will be too late for Elizabeth James. Her lawyer recommended a deal: Their son pleaded guilty

and the government would drop all claims to the house – although it would not reimburse the couple for legal fees or home damage from the raid.

Her case illustrates “why I think civil asset forfeiture is tantamount to theft,” said her attorney, James Cooper. He maintained James’ son was a “low-level dealer” and that “the house was in no way germane to the case,” he said. The U.S. Attorney’s Office and East Palo Alto police did not respond to questions about the 2009 case.

But Mica Doctoroff of the American Civil Liberties Union called it “a prime example of people not guilty of doing anything wrong getting swept up in asset forfeiture.”

Still, support for California’s SB443, sponsored by state Sen. Holly Mitchell, D-Los Angeles, and Assemblyman David Hadley, R-Manhattan Beach, wasn’t unanimous.

“My argument is that it’s just as important to take down the small-time dealers as the kingpins,” said Assemblyman Jim Cooper. “I served 30 years in the (Sacramento County) sheriff’s department, and worked 10 years in narcotics and gangs. I spent years undercover, buying drugs from ‘small-time’ dealers. I see what they do.”

The way to hobble drug traffickers, he says, “is to hit them in the pocketbook, and asset forfeiture is the most effective way to do that.”

But critics – from the conservative Heritage Foundation to the liberal ACLU – say more Jameses are being ensnared than El Chapos or Pablo Escobars. Examples:

- The immigrant landlord in Anaheim whose modest commercial building was seized because his tenants included not just a dentist and an insurance company, but also a marijuana dispensary.
- The taco truck operator who had \$10,000 in cash

confiscated after he was stopped by the Los Angeles Sheriff's Department.

- The Los Angeles music promoter who had to battle for the return of \$13,000 cash seized in a Shasta County traffic stop – the door receipts from his Mexican music concerts.

In each instance, the property owner was not arrested. Sometimes they got their property back, but only after a costly legal battle.

Ventura Police Chief Ken Corney, president of the California Police Chiefs Association, said the bill strikes a balance.

"There are many times when it may not be possible to apprehend or convict a trafficker. Many would rather abandon their money or property than be held accountable for their acts. So denying them resources can at least inhibit some of their future activities, and helps us keep the pressure on them."

Besides, he said, people can always go to court to get their property back.

"Most of the people who are caught up in this are poor and are often people of color, people who are struggling to get by under the best of circumstances," countered Shillinger. "They may not speak English. They're intimidated by the courts, they often can't take time off from work to go through lengthy judicial proceedings, and they usually don't have the wherewithal to hire an attorney. So they tend to just suffer their losses and walk away."

"And the police count on that."

Squaw Valley becoming Bavarian village for a day

The 14th annual Oktoberfest at Squaw Valley is Sept. 24.

The village will transform into a miniature Bavaria featuring authentic German beer and food, Bavarian music and performances, and competitive Oktoberfest games.

All proceeds from beer sales benefit the High Sierra Lacrosse Foundation, a nonprofit organization that supports student athletes developing in the sport of lacrosse. Last year's festival raised more than \$14,000 for High Sierra Lacrosse.

Entry into the 2-6pm event is free. Festival goers must be 21 years or older with a valid ID to purchase beer. Lederhosen and dirndls are encouraged.

Uphill battle to keep Mt. Rose locally owned

By Benjamin Spillman, Reno Gazette-Journal

A series of Facebook posts under the name One Reno make a locavore pitch for the future of Mt. Rose Ski Tahoe, the longtime Reno-area ski resort.

"KEEP MOUNT ROSE LOCALLY OWNED," one all caps post screams.

In the comments under another post announcing a crowdfunding effort One Reno makes a pledge aimed at local skiers and

riders who like the down-home feeling of the resort overlooking Reno which management announced in January was for sale.

“We will keep the Mountain locally owned, and never allow it to become McSki-Resort,” One Reno posted in response to a commenter who asked about development plans.

One Reno is the brainchild of Govind Davis, a Reno resident with a background in technology who co-founded a consulting firm called MCF Technology before moving to Nevada.

Davis, who has no ski industry experience, is nonetheless seeking to put together a deal he says would put locals in control of charting a future for Mt. Rose.

Read the whole story

Snippets about Lake Tahoe

- Wildfires have burned more than a quarter million acres of National Forest lands in California this year.
- There will be a daylong transportation summit Sept. 14 at the Olympic Village Lodge to discuss what is going on at the North Shore. To RSVP and more info, go **online**.
- There will be a free talk Sept. 21 about how technology can be used to better connect communities to their government. The talk is from noon-1:30pm at Lake Tahoe Community College's board room.
- The 14th annual Drug Store Project will be April 4 at Lake Tahoe Community College. The program teaches sixth-graders about the dangers of drug use. Volunteers are being

lined up now. Go **online** to sign up to volunteer.

• There are multiple bicycle events this month, so be on the lookout for riders: Sept. 11 – Tour De Tahoe – about 1,800 bikes riding clockwise around the lake with traffic; Sept. 18 – Edible Pedal – about 200 bikes going counterclockwise with traffic; Sept. 25 – OATBRAN, 50 bikes going counterclockwise with traffic.

Significant progress on Cave Rock upgrades

Expect work zones on Highway 50 to be changing rapidly as crews clean up the Glenbrook area and begin moving traffic back and forth between the eastbound and westbound tunnels at night for paving and lighting work.

This month construction crews will finish placing concrete blocks at the Glenbrook worksite.

Near Cave Rock the focus is on lighting and aesthetics, with some final paving work to be completed. Asphalt paving began through the westbound tunnel, in the ditch south of Cave Rock.

Most of the new concrete barrier rail near Glenbrook has been constructed, the small remaining sections will be completed shortly.

The drainage pipes beneath the roadway up near Glenbrook have been installed, while the existing ones were repaired with pipe liners.

The aesthetic work on the exterior of the new tunnel has begun.

Truckee recognizing 15th anniversary of 9/11

Truckee is hosting a communitywide Sept. 11 commemoration on Sept. 11 at 11:30am at Truckee Regional Park

This is an opportunity for the community to come together to remember and honor those who died and those who served during the attacks 15 years ago.

Recognition of local public safety first responders will occur as well.

Speakers will include community leaders from the Truckee Town Council, Police Chief Adam McGill, representatives from the Truckee Fire Protection District, and the Tahoe Truckee Unified School District. Boy Scout Troop 267 will present the colors and a group from the Truckee Tahoe Community Chorus will lead singing.

This event is graciously being organized and sponsored by the Truckee Lutheran Presbyterian Church and is open to everyone.

Calstar merger brings changes for members

By Susan Wood

Dan Gross of Roseville knows just how critical his Calstar air ambulance annual membership is when he recalls his snowmobiling adventure in April 2009.

Gross was riding around Highland Lakes in the Bear Valley area backcountry when he slipped off his sled, crashed and landed in a pile of rocks. Although injured, he was forced to drive the snowmobile for nearly 30 miles back to the Bear Valley fire station where Calstar picked him up. The math was against him – three people, three snowmobiles.

He could only drive it 10mph because of the pain.

“I didn’t break any bones, but I tore muscles in my lower abdomen. It was causing so much pain, I thought I was bleeding internally,” said the Bay Area former emergency medical technician, who did a mini assessment of himself at the time.

“It was pretty scary,” he told *Lake Tahoe News*.

It would have taken almost two hours to get him by ground to Sutter Hospital in Roseville.

Calstar, which awaits a finalized purchase in the coming weeks by Air Medical Group Holdings, got him there in 33 minutes.



Calstar pilot Heiko Kafton is enjoying the new helicopters that are more technologically advanced. Photo Copyright 2016 Carolyn E. Wright

His \$50 annual household membership for the air ambulance service picked up \$18,000 of the \$38,000 bill – with his Blue Cross health care plan absorbing the remaining \$20,000. It is not required for Calstar members to have insurance.

“I don’t know many people who could write a check for \$18,000 for an ambulance ride. I think everybody should be a member,” Gross said.

So when presented with the prospect of a different corporation owning Calstar, he carefully considered the impact of the parent company change.

“I don’t see it as a big deal,” he said, adding it appears the coverage area will be expanded through the West Plains, Mo., conglomerate.

The decade-old Air Medical Group provides access to more than 240 air ambulance locations across 32 states.

AirMed's for-profit organization, Reach Air Medical, served as a quasi competitor to Calstar in some areas. The merger means Calstar – which locally operates out of Lake Tahoe Airport – loses its nonprofit tax status and can't accept any donations.

Calstar members received a letter announcing the merger. Household membership is expected to rise to \$65 under the expansive AirMedCare Network.

The crew will remain intact on the operations side affecting pilots, mechanics and flight nurses.

"I believe that the acquisition by AMGH will actually be beneficial for Calstar as an organization in that we will now be part of a larger company focused on air medical transport and the resources that come with it," Tahoe's chief flight nurse Bryan Pond told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Layoffs will occur at Calstar's McClellan Park headquarters in Sacramento in mainly the development and outreach department. Director of Development and Outreach Mike Nichols is among the group receiving a pink slip.

"We don't need a satellite membership office. But overall, it's going to be better. Services will be more efficient and effective with Calstar and Reach as partners, not competitors," Nichols insisted. "We hear from folks that Calstar has made a difference in saving their life or making the recovery better."

Such is the case for Gross, who lives in the greater Sacramento area but often recreates in the Sierra Nevada Mountain Range.



Medical helicopters are like being on a flying hospital. Photo Copyright 2016 Carolyn E. Wright

Calstar also operates bases in Auburn, Ukiah, Gilroy, Concord, Salinas and Santa Maria. It's been stationed on the South Shore since October 2001. On any given day, the choppers can be seen flying over the lake, in and out of the wilderness as well as landing at Barton Memorial Hospital's helipad.

Each county operates under its own guidelines for emergency air medical transports. First responders determine if an air

ambulance is necessary.

In respect to specifically having an air ambulance membership at Lake Tahoe, Nichols mentioned that one might consider buying two club cards with Calstar and the Care Flight service – which operates out of the Truckee Airport and the Minden Airport and is based in Reno. That's because at this moment the merger does not include the reciprocal agreement with Care Flight.

The understanding between the two providers, which is not a formal contract, results in the two ambulance services picking up each other's patients when the other is busy.

Memberships for Care Flight – which also operates out of Chico, Boise and Spokane – run \$55 – which means having both could cost more than \$100.

Nonetheless, Nichols noted there's a good chance a comparable reciprocal agreement will be made with Care Flight before the buyout takes place. The companies are in negotiations.



The fleet was going to change even without the merger. Calstar now uses an Airbus H135/P3, with colors that make it look like its the Miami Dolphins charter helicopter. Photo Copyright 2016 Carolyn E. Wright

“There are a lot of unknowns,” Care Flight spokesman J.W. Hodge said.

For now, when one air ambulance service covering Lake Tahoe is not available, “we call on the next closest resources,” Hodge added.

In respect to the Calstar merger with Reach through the AirMedCare Network, Care Flight joins Calstar in wanting to make the change as seamless as possible, Hodge insisted.

That’s comforting to longtime active South Shore residents Paul and Lisa Huard.

“I’d still do it in a heartbeat,” Lisa Huard said of joining Calstar’s membership.

She recalled the time when her husband suffered from a heart condition in November 2012. He passed out and hit his chest on the granite tile.

“When he came to he didn’t know what was going on,” she said.

A crew took him to Barton where tests were run before a recommendation was made to transport him via air ambulance to Reno – a \$35,000 ride that took 20 minutes.

“In Paul’s case, he would have been fine (to transport by other means). But in other cases, every minute counts,” she said. “Calstar was so thorough. They told me what to expect, and I felt safer.”

Huard insisted she would pay more for membership.

“There shouldn’t be any question. Look, we pay \$10 for a Tylenol at the hospital – no problem,” she said.

TY&FS partnering with Suicide Prevention Network

Tahoe Youth & Family Services this fall will begin contracting with Suicide Prevention Network of Douglas County to bring suicide prevention education and resources to residents of South Lake Tahoe.

Tahoe Youth & Family Services and Suicide Prevention Network will provide communitywide awareness programs and mental health stigma reduction outreach. Suicide survivor grief support groups will also begin at the Tahoe Youth & Family Services’ counseling office in South Lake Tahoe.

Funding for the program comes from an El Dorado County Mental Health Services Act grant.

Suicide Prevention Network is a nonprofit agency that provides the resources for the community to receive help, hope, comfort, understanding, and support in a confidential environment. They will offer trainings and presentations to any agencies, groups, first responders and caregivers. They also offer a SOS (Survivors of Suicide) support group the first Thursday of every month at 6:30pm at 1625 Highway 88, Suite 203, Minden.