

Opinion: California optimism on the rise

By Jonathan Lansner, Orange County Register

It's apparently not just the fine weather that makes Californians smile.

California's consumers are the most optimistic among eight large U.S. states, according to the widely watched Consumer Confidence Index. My trusty spreadsheet tells me it's the first time the Golden State has been the confidence king in nine years.

An intriguing slice of the Conference Board's monthly index is a benchmark of shopper psyche for eight big states. The confidence index is compiled from ongoing consumer surveys and offers a regular peek into the financial thinking of American households.

The latest index results put California confidence at 100.7 for April, up from 99.9 in March but down from 106.4 a year ago. Any of those scores look good when you note that California confidence index has averaged 71 since 2007, when the eight-state breakout began.

Read the whole story

Snippets about Lake Tahoe

• Cats at El Dorado County Animal Services shelters may be adopted on Fridays and Saturdays for \$20 throughout May. The shelter in Meyers is located at 1120 Shakori Drive and is

open from 9:30am-noon and 1-4:30pm.

- There will be a free mental health first aid class on May 31 from 8:30am-4:30pm in South Lake Tahoe. This course introduces common mental health challenges, different stages of mental health issues, and how to help people in crisis and non-crisis situations. Sign up **online** under Mental Health First Aid.

- The U.S. Forest Service is providing the recently restored Sardine Lookout on the Sierraville Ranger District of the Tahoe National Forest for public use at no charge from June 1-Oct. 30. The limit per reservation is two nights and one reservation per household during the 2016 season.

- A Julia Morgan designed lakefront estate in Stateline sold for \$8.5 million, marking the largest residential real estate sale in nearly a decade on the South Shore. The home was built in 1928 and includes a 2,750-square-foot main house with an 864-square-foot guesthouse, 1.65 acres with more than 180 feet of beach, a pier, and buoy.

- Truckee High School's senior fashion show is May 15 at 5pm at the Truckee Recreation Center.

Drought, beetles take toll on Tahoe trees

By Terra Breeden

INCLINE VILLAGE – Take a drive around Lake Tahoe and you'll notice red and brown trees jutting out of the evergreen forests, their brittle pine needles dropping off dead

branches. Since the snow melted, hundreds of dying trees have been exposed. They are everywhere, from Spooner Summit to Crystal Bay. Dead trees stand forlornly on the roadside, in brick-colored clusters in the meadows, and in huge swaths on the mountain slopes.



Patricia
Maloney

Forest ecologist and conservation biologist Patricia Maloney explained the scourge of recent tree deaths in the Lake Tahoe Basin at a May 10 presentation at Sierra Nevada College.

According to Maloney, the prolonged California drought has weakened the trees' natural defenses to pests and disease. When there is a lack of water, Lake Tahoe's trees are susceptible to attacks from bark beetles, forest pathogens – native and invasive – and stress caused by human activity.

"I've been studying why trees die for over 20 years," Maloney said. "I know what's going on and it's an important issue."

Maloney studies tree mortality in the Lake Tahoe Basin by examining the forests and extracting core samples from dead and healthy trees.

"Part of my work is to take a physiological study on drought-stressed trees in the Lake Tahoe Basin," Maloney said. "I take a core sample and can go back over a 100 years to see how these trees are affected by drought."

The results are not pretty. Although Maloney is still

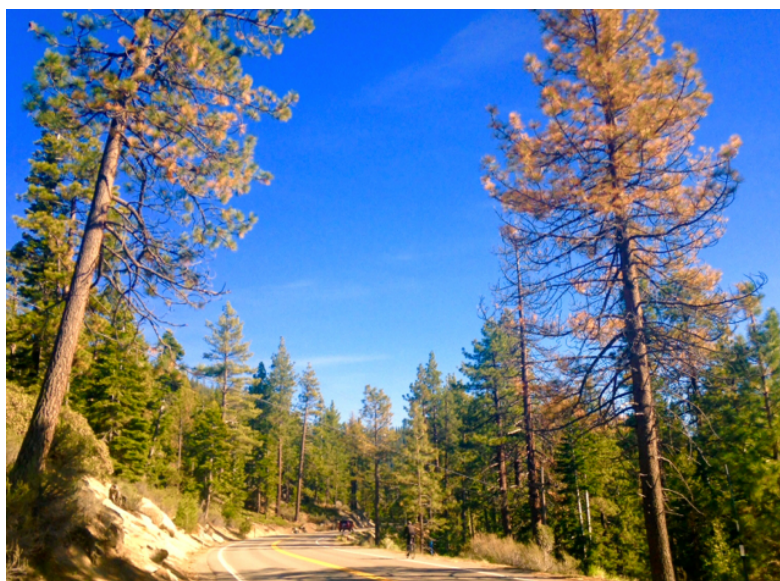
conducting her research, she's noticed that the drought has led to increased bark beetle populations.

"In droughts you get elevated bark beetle activity," Maloney said. "When there's competition for resources – especially water – everything is aggravated."

Three types of bark beetles are indigenous to the Sierra Nevada: mountain pine beetles, Jeffrey pine beetles, and fir engraver beetles. As their names imply, each species feeds on specific types of trees, with the mountain pine beetle being the most aggressive.

Usually, trees defend themselves from a bark beetle onslaught by secreting a sticky sap called a pitch tube, which stops beetles from burrowing under the bark. However, in times of drought, many trees simply can't retain enough fluid to halt a beetle attack.

"Unfortunately, we are seeing no evidence of pitch tubes. The trees' tanks are empty," Maloney said. "We're seeing everything from massive trees to little seedlings die. The trees are so stressed out by the drought that it doesn't take many beetles to kill them."



Tree mortality is a growing concern throughout the Lake Tahoe Basin.

Photo/Terra Breeden

Another cause of tree death in the Tahoe basin is the spread of forest pathogens like dwarf mistletoe and white pine blister rust. Dwarf mistletoe is a native plant, but white pine blister rust, named for the scab-like eruptions that form on infected trees, is invasive and has recently wiped out many trees in North Lake Tahoe.

“White pine blister rust was introduced to the U.S. by white pine seedlings in the early 1900s, and probably entered the basin area in the 1940s,” Maloney said.

According to Maloney, 65 percent of the white bark pine trees on Rifle Peak are infected with blister rust.

This winter, frequent snow removal has put salt in the wound of drought-stricken trees along roadsides surrounding the lake. Quite literally, the brine that’s been slung across the road with every snowstorm is killing trees. Maloney calls this “salt stress.”

“Essentially, the salt binds with water and is absorbed by the tree, scorching the leaves,” Maloney said. “Salt stress affects trees up to 60 feet along roadsides. But in this case, public safety trumps tree health.”

Lake Tahoe isn’t the only area affected by a high rate of tree deaths this year. The U.S. Forest Service conducted a statewide survey of forest health in California and concluded that since 2015 more than 10 million trees have died. Most of the tree deaths are in the Southern Sierra where last year, temperatures and mountain pine beetle populations skyrocketed.

But Maloney insists that it’s not all doom and gloom; forests recover from droughts. It can take several years, but healthy young saplings will grow and replace the dead stands of trees. Maloney and her team of biologists speed up the forest recovery process by replanting trees in the areas most

affected.

“I have 500 seedlings that we are planting from Tunnel Creek to Sand Harbor,” Maloney said.

Maloney also questions whether tree thinning, a practice that’s been utilized around the lake to reduce the risk of wildfire, is actually good for forest health. She thinks that maybe leaving forests dense and un-thinned will give more trees a fighting chance in drought years, even though it increases the threat of wildfire.

As Maloney continues to study tree mortality In Lake Tahoe, she has more questions.

“I’m a conservative optimist,” Maloney said. “Tree mortality is alarming and I’m concerned. But there’s also a lot we don’t understand. What I’m trying to do is find out why some trees die and some don’t.”

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Notes:

· El Dorado County and Georgetown Divide resources conservation districts, CalFire and Society of American Foresters are co-sponsoring a workshop on tree mortality on June 17 from 8:30am-3pm at the El Dorado Board of Supervisors’ chambers in Placerville.

TTD puts promises about loop road in writing

By Kathryn Reed

STATELINE – The Tahoe Transportation District board on Friday took action regarding the proposed loop road in an attempt to avoid creating more blight in an already blighted area.

In other words, board members don't want another Ta-hole as was created with the Chateau project when it went belly up because financing hadn't actually been secured and a consolidated parcel map was never filed.

The board, with little discussion, on May 13 unanimously approved what it calls principles.

Before doing so the board learned there is already money in the pipeline for acquisition of property. The district is promised \$1,109,333 through the Federal Transportation Improvement Program. This is nearly \$900,000 less than was requested, though it's routine to get less funding than desired.

Key principles include:

- Starting road construction after all rights-of-way are secured and replacement housing is established.
- Not demolishing anything until the project is fully funded.
- Keeping the current highway open until the new highway is finished.

The loop road is designed to route Highway 50 near the state line behind the casinos starting near Pioneer Trail and coming out at Lake Parkway. The current highway would then become a city-county street.

Some of the other principles are:

- Using eminent domain by the district only to complete the needed right-of-way. (Other jurisdictions like South Lake Tahoe and Caltrans could still use eminent domain.)
- Having new deed-restricted affordable housing constructed or acquired as deed-restricted, which means the amount someone may charge for rent or resale is limited by the deed and any buyers or renters must meet the financial criteria.
- The priority option for new deed-restricted housing will remain in the project area.
- The majority of funding for all project elements will come from federal and state sources.
- Utility location will be included as part of the project costs.

The draft environmental documents are expected to be released later this year.

Decision in Santiago, Briggs case nears

It's still unknown if El Dorado County taxpayers will be cutting another check to former supervisors Norma Santiago and Ron Briggs.



Norma Santiago

Their attorney as well as special counsel for the county was in Placer County Superior Court on May 13 pleading their respective cases. The dispute is being heard in Auburn because El Dorado County judges said they have a conflict.

The county hired outside counsel because most members of the county counsel's office have represented the former supervisors on various matters in the past.

The former elected officials contend they are owed back pay to the tune of about \$90,000. Each was termed out in January 2015. At no time during their tenure did they say they should be paid more money.

The California Constitution states that county supervisors' salaries must be set by ordinance. It is the county's position that Santiago and Briggs were paid in accordance with the county ordinance.

Both sides have seven days to turn in additional written arguments and evidence to the judge. He will then make a ruling.

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*

BLM boss: Wild horse program faces \$1B budget crisis

By Scott Sonner, AP

The head of the U.S. Bureau of Land Management says his agency has a billion-dollar problem.

Neil Kornze says the BLM is fighting an uphill battle to protect federal rangeland across the West while managing tens of thousands of wild horses and caring for tens of thousands more already rounded up in government corals.

Kornze told The Associated Press the agency may not have done as well as it could have in recent years to underscore the environmental and budgetary crisis looming in its wild horse and burro program.

He estimates \$1 billion will be needed to care for the 46,000 wild horses and burros currently in U.S. holding facilities over their lifetime, combined with future efforts to shrink the population of the record-67,000 now roaming public lands in 10 western states.

North Tahoe conducting clean up day

On June 4, volunteers in Kings Beach, Tahoe Vista, Carnelian Bay and Crystal Bay will take to the streets to pick up trash prior to the busy summer season.

Registration for the clean up day is at 9am at Community

House, 265 Bear St., Kings Beach. This registration location is for Carnelian Bay, Tahoe Vista, Kings Beach and Crystal Bay. Or pick up supplies June 1-3, 8am-5:30pm by appointment by calling 530.546.9000.

Volunteers will be assigned specific locations; and will be provided with gloves, bags, and volunteer appreciation goodies, while supplies last.

Last year, more than 2,300 pounds of garbage was collected.

Deepwater Horizon oil spill subject of talk

On April 20, 2010, one of the largest accidental marine oil spills in the history of petroleum industry occurred, the Deepwater Horizon oil spill. It is estimated that 210 million gallons were discharged and multiple efforts to contain the flow failed.

Ronald Tjeerdema counseled on the response to the spill and its aftermath and will discuss what happened behind the scenes at a talk at Sierra Nevada College in Incline Village on May 19.

Tjeerdema has a focus on marine and freshwater systems. His areas of expertise range from chemical fate in the environment, sensitive lifestage bioassays and biochemical mechanisms of toxicity, and he has worked extensively with pesticides, petroleum hydrocarbons, dispersants and marine algal toxins. He has pioneered the new field of environmental metabolomics via the use of nuclear magnetic resonance, and his research on oil spills and dispersants resulted in the

development of the widely-used standardized CROSERF methods for toxicity assessment.

The program will begin at 6pm, with refreshments and no-host bar from 5:30-6pm.

Seating is open at 5:30pm to guests who have pre-registered, open seating starts at 5:50pm. A \$5 donation will be collected at the door. Register **online**.

Failed deadline may cost EDC taxpayers millions

By Kathryn Reed

Even though the funding for El Dorado County's new public safety headquarters in Placerville has not been secured, the price has escalated by millions of dollars, all because of inaction by the chief administrative officer.

Supervisor Shiva Frentzen wrote a letter to her colleagues and then read it into the record at the May 10 board meeting. In part it talks about how she requested an agenda item for that day's meeting about the debt service on the facility.

"This request was to address Sheriff [John] D'Agostini's concern about the \$2.2 million annual debt service for the public safety facility based on the 2.875 percent APR. The verbal update that I received from assistant CAO stated that the county will miss the deadline to lock in at rate of 2.875 percent APR resulting in a possible rate of 3.5 percent APR. Failure to lock in at 2.875 percent APR could cost the El Dorado County taxpayers an additional \$10 million over the

next three to four decades," Frantzen said.

She wanted time to discuss this revelation. She was denied the opportunity to do so in a formal manner, and the other board members had little to say after she read the letter.

Frantzen, before Tuesday, even suggested a special meeting should be called just to discuss this issue. It never happened.

CAO Larry Combs, who is an interim leader working part time, sent a letter May 9 to the board and sheriff saying a comprehensive presentation about the facility is set for June 14. That discussion, he said, will include "construction plan including possible phasing, updated costs, likely financing terms within the USDA loan, and related repayment/budgeting options."

(Combs didn't check D'Agostini's availability for that date. The sheriff will be out of town regarding a federal subpoena.)

The discrepancy in interest rates is because the county is unable to make a June 1 deadline to seek federal financing.

Combs' letter goes on to say, "Staff convened a meeting of the Facility Finance Committee on March 30, 2016, to seek a recommendation, for board approval, to proceed with the USDA financing option. At that time it was believed that there was a possibility that, if all components of the application came together in time, the county may be able to meet the USDA's June 1, 2016, deadline to receive the second quarter interest rate of 2.875 percent. However, upon subsequent discussions with USDA representatives in April, a number of actions were identified as needing to occur prior to final application submittal, which precluded staff from being able to submit a complete application by June 1. The current 2.875 percent interest rate expires June 30, 2016. A new interest rate will be announced at that time. Given the current market, it is unlikely that the quoted interest rate will vary

significantly.”

No matter the interest rate, the 2016-17 budget presented by Combs to the supervisors does not include the debt service for the facility. Combs has said, “Current debt payment estimates for a loan of \$50 million and a term of 40 years equal approximately \$2.2 million per year.”

D’Agostini took issue with Combs’ letter, firing back a response to the Auburn resident as well as to the supervisors.

“The \$2-plus million to purchase the property was monies from the sheriff’s office’s prior year fund balance that was specifically set aside for such purpose,” the sheriff wrote. “Arch Nexus (the design firm) and the sheriff’s office will have the necessary information for the loan application ready by the deadline.”

He disagreed with the CAO’s assessment that the architect had a role in delaying the process.

D’Agostini stressed the need for time lines and more factual information from the CAO’s office.

CHP helicopter aids rescue on American Canyon Trail

By Cathy Locke, Sacramento Bee

A California Highway Patrol helicopter crew aided in the rescue of three people Thursday morning after their small utility vehicle rolled down an embankment along the American Canyon Trail near the El Dorado County community of Cool.

As crew members of CHP Helicopter 20 were flying over the Folsom Lake area about 9:30am, they monitored a call reported a utility that a utility vehicle had gone over the side of a canyon and people were injured.

It was reported that trail maintenance personnel were riding in the utility vehicle along the trail when it rolled over, down a 40-foot embankment, ejecting all the occupants.

Read the whole story