

With ski season almost over, now what will you do in Tahoe?

Habitat loss impacting deer in California

By Matt Weiser, Sacramento Bee

An estimated 445,000 deer live in California, or about equal to the city of Sacramento's human population. Which sounds like a lot, until you realize the deer are spread over the entire state: 99 million acres.

If there were only 445,000 people in California, how long would it take you to find somebody you really wanted to hang out with?

Such is the plight of the state's deer population, our most iconic emblem of the forest. Without much notice, the species has declined slowly but relentlessly in virtually every corner of the state.

The decline has been almost too small to see on an annual basis. But since 1990, California has lost nearly half its deer population, according to the state Department of Fish and Game.

"Our deer are surviving, they're not thriving," said Craig Stowers, deer program manager at Fish and Game. "Quite frankly, until people start taking this seriously, we're going

to continue to experience these types of declines.”

This forest icon is on the wane mainly for one simple reason: habitat loss.

Read the whole story

Opinion: Arizona is wrong to mess with free speech

By Rachel Alexander

You and I may not use profanity in our Facebook posts, but what about that crazy relative who puts up the funniest posts that sometimes cross the line? Almost no one approves of swearing, but with the exception of broadcasting during daytime TV and radio, it is not illegal. Now new legislation in Arizona would effectively make swearing on the Internet a crime.

Sponsored by Democrats and liberal Republicans, Arizona House Bill 2549 passed both the House and Senate almost unanimously last week, and has gone back to the House for a minor change before being sent to Gov. Jan Brewer to sign. The relevant part states: “It is unlawful for any person, with intent to terrify, intimidate, threaten, harass, annoy or offend, to use any electronic or digital device and use any obscene, lewd or profane language or suggest any lewd or lascivious act, or threaten to inflict physical harm to the person or property of any person.”

It expands Arizona anti-harassment laws beyond telephones and to the Internet. The problem with this is that one person

specifically telephoning another person is not the same thing as an anonymous comment on the Internet. This kind of behavior goes on all the time on the Internet. Every day on political blogs and news sites, some commenters get a little out of hand, and most website editors handle the problem by stepping in and deleting the offensive comments or leaving a comment warning people to tame their comments.

Words like "annoy" and "offend" are vague and could be interpreted broadly to prevent someone from simply engaging in political debate. What one person considers profanity another might not. Is the word "sucks" a swear word? What about "b.s.?" Plenty of families find those acceptable, while others do not. Even anonymous commenters could be liable, if an Internet provider produces records tracing their IP address.

There is no way this legislation will survive a First Amendment challenge in court. The government cannot flat out ban all swear words, which is effectively what this legislation does in the Internet realm. The courts have already carefully decided when and under what circumstances the FCC may prohibit swear words on broadcast TV and radio, and even those restrictions are now being reconsidered. Consider all the swear words on TV and in movies. Then think of what a mammoth task it would be policing the entire Internet for swear words that reportedly annoy or offend someone, and to come up with the additional resources necessary to prosecute them. Anyone could get into a political debate with someone on a political website, use one swear word in their comments, and be considered violating the law. My own political website, IntellectualConservative.com, is technically full of violators. This is troubling since political debate is the bedrock of our country, Constitution and the First Amendment.

Political analysts are already predicting Republicans are going to lose Arizona legislative seats this election, and will lose at least one of the two Houses. Nanny state bills

like this, where Republicans do not appear to be any different than Democrats, will do them in. Voters are not going to be happy when the state ends up spending thousands of dollars defending against a lawsuit everyone has predicted it will lose.

Media Coalition is leading the opposition to the bill, and hopefully the legislature will listen to reason and back down from this atrocious infringement on free speech. Opponents have created a mocking form to report these Internet crimes, and are calling upon Arizona's Governor Jan Brewer to veto it. One of the bill's sponsors, Rep. Vic Williams (Tucson), a liberal Republican, defends it by calling his opponents "crackpots and conspiracy theorists."

Internet trolls have become the scourge of the Internet. But just because we do not like someone else's free speech does not mean it should be made illegal. That is what the core of the First Amendment is about. Internet trolls are to the Internet like TV advertisements are to watching television. If you do not like someone's behavior towards you on the Internet, get a restraining order against them. I did. There are already laws in place against harassment and stalking. It is not necessary to add a duplicate layer of law that will result in the suppression of innocent political debate, and that will inevitably be used for political vendettas. It may be disguised as a nanny, but it is really Big Brother.

Rachel Alexander is the editor of the Intellectual Conservative.

Whittell test scores going down; 4-day week intact

By Kathryn Reed

ZEPHYR COVE – School board members in Douglas County on Tuesday received enough information to convince them the four-day school week is not the reason test scores at Whittell High School are going down.

After WHS Principal Crespin Esquivel gave a sobering account of how students are doing at his facility, the next part of the April 10 discussion centered on whether the 7-12 school should continue with the Monday-Thursday schedule that began in fall 2009.

The board on a 7-0 vote agreed for the next three years to keep Whittell on the four-day schedule.



Whittell
Principal
Crespin
Esquivel
listens to the
board talk
about his
school.

Photo/Kathryn
Reed

Board member Randy Green said five years of data is needed before true conclusions can be made.

"I don't think we can tell if the results are the four-day week or site specific," board member Tom Moore said of the test data. "I do firmly believe it is one of the two."

Superintendent Lisa Noonan said she is convinced "we can't blame it on the four-day week."

Statistics presented by consultant Steve Mulvenon, who was tasked with compiling a report to the board about four-day school weeks and how other districts are coping as well as to assess specifics about Whittell, showed that reducing the days in the classroom does not negatively impact test scores, nor does it save districts money.

When proponents of the Whittell four-day school week first presented their idea, one of the overriding reasons was to decrease absences because so many extracurricular events are on Fridays, which was pulling students from the classroom. The number of class periods missed dropped from 27,972 in 2008-09 to 16,984 in 2009-10 and 17,589 in 2010-11.

While the perception of parents, teachers and students – who all had the opportunity to take similar surveys – was that academic performance is better with the four-day week, the principal's report showed a different reality.

Part of the discrepancy could be that the survey questions were broad in nature and parents may have just thought about their child's individual test scores or semester grade. Esquivel on Tuesday was talking standardized tests that affect several grade levels, as well as the ACT that college-bound students take.

"We do have a trend that is heading down. We are trying to implement good things, but we won't see results for two to three years," Esquivel told the board.

The data shows almost across the board in every grade level and subject tested (reading, math, science, language arts) students are doing worse than their predecessors.

Esquivel has no definitive reasons why. By incorporating the data Mulvenon presented the blame cannot be put on enrollment – it has been steady for at least three years, the ethnicity of the student body has not changed dramatically (28 Hispanics in 2006-07 compared to 42 in 2011-12), and reduced or free lunches have not spiked (37 students in 2006-07 and 48 in 2011-12).

“In 2008 Whittell had 25 percent of students take the ACT. In 2011 68 percent took it,” Mulvenon said. “The more students who take standardized tests the more likely the average (score) gravitates to the mean.”

It was stressed by several people that with Whittell having such a small student body it only takes a few students to change the percentage in test scores. For example Douglas High has a graduating class of about 400, which is nearly double Whittell’s entire population. So, to have a 10 percent drop in scores, it could mean five students doing poorly at Whittell, while it would take 40 from Whittell’s senior class.

A bright spot is 90 percent of Whittell’s class of 2011 graduated. And students in the class of 2012 have been accepted to a variety of universities including a full ride to Georgia Tech, an athletic scholarship to Oregon State, one to Baylor, another to Tulane, more than 15 to UNR to name a few.

The concern is if the test scores continue to decline that graduation rates will drop and post-secondary options won’t be there for tomorrow’s Warriors.

The board and staff are also worried that as new state mandates come into being the stakes will be higher and thresholds harder to meet.

Esquivel admitted the collaboration between Whittell seventh-grade teachers and Zephyr Cove's sixth-grade teachers needs a 180-degree improvement. Mentoring programs are also going to be implemented.

The board was also assured the superintendent and principal would be meeting to come up with a more definitive plan of action.

FBI asking questions about Nevada bear hunt

By Jeff DeLong, Reno Gazette-Journal

Controversy over Nevada's black bear hunt took a new twist Tuesday, with American Indians opposed to the hunt saying they've been questioned over the matter by the FBI.

Representatives of the American Indian Movement who spoke out against killing Nevada's bears on religious grounds last month are claiming their rights were violated by questioning by an agent of the FBI's Joint Terrorism Task Force.

"It's a civil rights violation. We did nothing wrong," said Lisa Bonta, a member of the Reno-Sparks Indian Colony and a founding member of AIM's newly formed Northern Nevada chapter.

Bonta said she and her husband Johnny were questioned April 2 at her Reno apartment by George Cholico, a Washoe County detective attached to the FBI's terrorism task force in Reno.

Cholico declined to discuss the matter with the Reno Gazette-Journal, referring questions to the FBI's Las Vegas office. FBI spokesman Patrick Turner said in an e-mail statement that the bureau was investigating a citizens complaint, "conducted an assessment and determined no further investigation was warranted at this time."

Read the whole story

Quinoa goes from staple in Andean culture to U.S. superfood

By Jean Friedman-Rudovsky, Time

As a child, Benjamin Huarachi, 55, ate quinoa almost every day, as a matter of practicality. The crop is one of few that thrive on Bolivia's high plains, 13,000 ft. (4,000 m) above sea level, explains the farmer. His impoverished family had no idea that the colorful tall tufts yield one of the healthiest foods on the planet. Nor did Huarachi imagine that his childhood staple would one day bring economic success. "Quinoa was always comida para los indios [food for Indians]," he says, almost laughing, "Today it's food for the world's

richest.”

Over the past decade, the “Andean superfood” has become a pinnacle product for First World foodies. Often mistaken for a grain, quinoa is actually a chenopod (cousin to a beet); rich in minerals, it’s the only vegetable that’s a complete protein. To the added delight of politically correct health nuts, it’s produced by small-scale Andean farmers like Huarachi who reap direct benefits of its international popularity. Recently, those benefits have skyrocketed: quinoa’s price has tripled since 2006, triggering a boom in the poorest region of South America’s poorest country. “Now we’ve got tractors for our fields and parabolic antennas for our homes,” says Huarachi, who’s also a board member of Bolivia’s largest quinoa-growers association, ANAPQUI.

Growers relish in the moment and the attendant prosperity. “My quinoa sells like hotcakes,” says Fidencia Huayllas, grinning. She’s spent her boom cash on expanding her mud-and-brick home. Seventy percent of the region’s high school graduates can now afford to attend university, Huarachi says, “thanks to quinoa.” He leans forward, face brightening: “In 1983, 100 lb. of quinoa sold for 25 bolivianos – the price a T-shirt. Now that sack goes for \$100 [700 bolivianos]. That’s a lot of T-shirts.”

But the windfall could become a double-edged sword. In February, violence over prime quinoa-growing territory left dozens injured, and land conflict is spreading. “Sure, the price of quinoa is increasing,” says Carlos Nina, a local leader in Bolivia’s quinoa heartland, “but so are our problems.” Apart from increasing feuds over property rights, these include the collapse of the traditional relationship between llama herding and soil fertilization, with potentially disastrous consequences of quinoa’s “organic” status, and the ironic twist that the children of newly prosperous farmers no

longer like eating quinoa, contributing to dietary problems.

According to historians, quinoa cultivation originated in the Altiplano around 3,000 B.C. Legend says it was a gift from the gods to the indigenous Aymara: a highly nutritious crop as small compensation for being saddled with one of earth's harshest climates. (It's an easy story to believe, since only divine intervention seems to explain how anything could sprout from the high plateau's rocky, sandy soil.)

The present from the heavens has always been a base of the Andean diet, but only recently did the crop begin its international journey. In 1993, NASA researchers recommended it as part of a potential space-colony diet. Over the following decade, the food gained wider appeal, going from hippie hype to Costco convenient practically overnight. "Quinoa was in the eye of the storm," says Bolivian-born Sergio Núñez del Arco, founder of Andean Naturals, the U.S.'s largest quinoa importer, explaining that the product fit almost every recent health craze: whole grain, gluten-free, fair trade, organic.

Read the whole story

Does Sierra snow study buck fears of warming?

By Mark Robison, Reno Gazette-Journal

John Christy says his new study of Sierra Nevada snowfall shows global warming is not the dire threat many make it out

to be.

“In general, it depends on what religion you have,” Christy said when asked about the reaction to his paper. “If you believe Man is doing horrible things to the planet, then you can’t believe this report. If you believe the other way, then this is a chapter in your bible.”

Climate change skeptics have seized on the report published by the peer-reviewed Journal of Hydrometeorology.

James Taylor – who is not a scientist and is affiliated with the Heartland Institute, which challenges global warming – penned a blog for Forbes.com that said, “Alarmists were asserting with near unity that global warming was responsible for winters with below average snowfall. Christy’s study shows that as far as the Sierra Nevada mountains are concerned, the alarmists are wrong on both counts – there is no trend one way or the other.”

Christy’s climatology colleagues say not so fast.

David Pierce said Christy is going beyond the data in his study, which shows steady snowfall since 1878 in the Sierra, and is making conclusions he hasn’t proven.

Global warming models predict snowfall will decrease as temperatures rise toward the end of this century, not now, said Pierce, a researcher at the Scripps Institution of Oceanography in La Jolla, where he studies the effects of climate change on ocean temperatures and water resources – including snow – in the Western United States.

Pierce takes exception to Christy making such claims in the media instead of in his study, adding this “is unfortunate because peer-review is the process that filters out unsupported personal opinion from what is backed by evidence.”

Read the whole story

Parks urge caution as bears come out of hibernation

By Chuck Raasch, USA Today

Yellowstone National Park rangers are preparing for the upcoming tourist season by updating bear-warning signs and stepping up grizzly-awareness education after two hikers died in separate grizzly attacks in the park last summer.

The deaths of men from Michigan and California, the first in 25 years, reflect a rising trend of human-bear encounters in North America, as the populations of grizzlies and black bears have increased and as humans have encroached on their habitat.

Yellowstone officials had contemplated making it mandatory that hikers travel in groups and carry bear-repellant pepper spray, park spokesman Dan Hottle says, but enforcement would have been difficult, so Yellowstone officials are updating bear-warning signs, and park publications feature ways to avoid confrontations. Rangers will conduct bear-spray demonstrations.

"Encounters are most definitely a fact of life" as the grizzly population grows, Hottle says.

These encounters are not just in wild places anymore. Wildlife officials from New Jersey to California will meet Monday in Missoula, Mont., to discuss how cities, states and parks can deal with growing bear populations.

"What we can do as managers to minimize those conflicts is to educate people how to live with bears," says organizer Chris Servheen, grizzly bear recovery coordinator for the U.S. Fish

and Wildlife Service.

Read the whole story

El Dorado 1 of 18 California counties losing residents

By Phillip Reese, Sacramento Bee

Once-booming El Dorado County lost residents last year, one of 18 California counties that saw its population shrink from 2010 to 2011, according to new U.S. Census Bureau estimates.

The loss was minuscule – 210 people, or one-tenth of one percent – but it represents a reversal for a county that averaged 3.5 percent annual population growth during the past four decades.

Two factors explain the drop: low birth rates and more residents leaving the county than coming. Last year, El Dorado County saw about 9 births for every 1,000 residents – 35 percent below the statewide average. About 500 more residents left the county last year than came to it.

Read the whole story

NTSB makes 7 recommendations

for Reno Air Races

By Martha Bellisle, Reno Gazette-Journal

The National Transportation Safety Board has not yet determined what caused last year's deadly crash at the Reno National Championship Air Races, but its chairwoman recommended on Tuesday seven changes she said would make the races safer for pilots and spectators.

The pilots should receive special G-force training and perhaps wear G-suits to help them deal with race conditions, NTSB chairwoman Deborah Hersman said during a press conference. The course should also be changed to keep spectators away from the flight path, she said.

Hersman also said the Federal Aviation Administration needs to fix its rules to clarify whether spectators must be 500 feet from the flight path, or 1,000 feet. Race officials need to change their system to make sure that problems found during prerace technical inspections are fixed and documented. And the aircraft should undergo an engineering evaluation that to show that the plane can handle the race stress, she said.

"Our investigation revealed that this pilot in this airplane had never flown at this speed on this course," Hersman said. "We are issuing a safety recommendation to ensure that pilots and their modified airplanes are put through their paces prior to race day."

The pilot and 10 people on the ground were killed in the crash of the Galloping Ghost on Sept. 16, and at least 70 people were injured. Many suffered amputations and severe lacerations from flying shrapnel.

Read the whole story