Realtors meeting about TRPA Regional Plan

The South Tahoe Association of Realtors' Government Affairs Director Hayley Williamson will give a presentation on Tahoe Regional Planning Agency's draft Regional Plan update and how changes impact homeowners and the real estate community at an April 3 lunch.

Those interested in attending should call (530) 541.7007 or send an email to STAOR@STAOR.org.

The lunch meeting is from 11:3am-1:30pm at Harveys in Stateline. Cost is $10 for STAR members, $15 for non-members.

Winter skipped much of North America

By Wynne Parry, LiveScience

For parts of North America, this winter was the winter that nearly wasn't.

January ranked as the fourth-warmest for the 48 U.S. states on record since 1895. December, too, was above average, although not as significantly. Weather watchers expect last month to rank above average temperature-wise as well.



Not much snow has falle in Lake Tahoe, but cold temps have created ice formations. Photo/LTN

Of course, this year hasn’t brought early beach weather for everyone; just ask residents of Alaska and Europe, where a frigid cold snap is blamed for hundreds of deaths. And the warmth has been blamed for contributing to the slew of devastating tornadoes that hit the Midwest and southern U.S. on March 2.

While scientists have said that global warming will cause an uptick in extreme weather, they are hesitant to link any one event or even an unusual season to climate change. Even so, they say, global warming may play a role in the weird winter weather.

Read the whole story

Opinion: We must be aware of

planet’s plight

By Conrad Anker

Ten years ago, the percentage of Americans who believed in anthropogenic global warming stood at 75 percent. Fast-forward a decade to 2011 and the number dropped to 44 percent. Has the amount of CO2 in the atmosphere decreased 31 percent in 10 years? The poll, conducted by Harris Interactive, is indicative of the battle being waged over climate change.

Lee Atwater, Republican strategist, coined the phrase, “Perception is reality.” We believe what is comforting. While soothing, it might not necessarily be factual. Build into this the persuasive power of advertising, and it is easy to understand why climate change and the related facts are less important to citizens of the United States. Where, as perception can vary according to one’s views, certain empirical measurements, based on the principle of scientific observation, are fact.

Drought, by any measure, isn’t fun. While we enjoyed a robust winter in southwest Montana last year, the paucity of snow is this winter’s opening line to many conversations. While low snow affects winter recreation, the greater concern is water available for domestic and agricultural needs. The intense two-week cold snap, a signature Montana event straight out of an Ivan Doig novel with 40-below temperatures, has not been part of the current winter. The ease of not having to warm up the car and being able to maintain comfort in the house with a lower energy bill are obvious benefits. The same ease also benefits the pine bark beetle. The colder temperatures needed to keep the bugs at bay are absent. For the regional forests this translates into more standing dead timber, which coupled with a dry summer, equates to a greater risk of wildfire.

On a global level, 2011 was the 10th warmest year on record

and saw an unprecedented level of extreme weather events. From the flooding in Australia, Thailand and Mississippi, to the heat waves in Russia and Texas, to the devastation of Hurricane Irene in New England and southern Canada, climate chaos has created a fair amount of hardship and in turn economic duress. The general warming trend has continued unabated. Thirteen of the warmest years since 1880 have occurred in the past 15 years. The World Meteorological Organization will publish the final figures for 2011 weather events in the coming weeks.

Conrad Anker is a mountaineer and author. He lives with his family in Bozeman.

Read the whole story

DA investigating El Dorado County fire chief's credit card habits

By CBS13

CBS13 has learned that Garden Valley Fire Chief Bill Dekker is under investigation by the El Dorado County District Attorney's Office.

In an interview with CBS13, District Attorney Vern Pierson told On The Money he has opened a criminal investigation focusing on the fire chief's purchases on the fire department's credit card.

CBS13 has obtained copies of the questionable credit card billings, which include $3,400 in charges to something called

Willingness to Change – a drug and alcohol treatment center – according to the website.

The billings came from Bill Dekker, on the Garden Valley Fire Department's credit card.

"I've never seen anything like that in my 17 years as county auditor," said Joe Harn, El Dorado County's fiscal watchdog.

Harn has been scrutinizing the Garden Valley Fire Protection District's spending and credit card purchases.

"I don't understand why it would be the burden of the taxpayers in Garden Valley to pick up this $3,400 charge for alcohol and or drug counseling," Harn told CBS 13.

Read the whole story

3-day event trains TRTA trail and crew leaders

The Tahoe Rim Trail Association's 7th annual Trail Construction and Crew Leader Workshop will be at Washoe County's Galena Creek Regional Park in May 18-20.

Participants may choose from the following courses: Trail Design and Layout (Friday), Fundamentals of Trail Construction (Saturday and Sunday), Crew Leadership (Saturday and Sunday) and Advanced Trail Theory (Saturday and Sunday).

This training is partially grant funded by the Nevada Recreational Trails Program and the Humboldt Toiyabe National

Forest and supported by Washoe County Regional Parks and Open Space.

Participants pay a fee of $150 (for three days), $100 (weekend) or $50 (Friday) to cover instruction, park lodging, food, training materials and transportation to class sites. Discounts are available for TRTA members and volunteers.

For more information and registration materials, go online or contact visit or contact Teresa Crimmens at (775) 298.0232 or teresac@tahoerimtrail.org.

Lake Valley may absorb South Lake Tahoe Fire Department

By Kathryn Reed

South Lake Tahoe residents may no longer have a fire department to call their own. That is because talks are under way for the city department to be run by Lake Valley Fire Protection District.

Lake Valley, which is overseen by a five-member board, voted this month to proceed with a consolidation feasibility study of the two fire departments. South Lake Tahoe City Council members are slated to vote March 20 to go forward with the same study.

Lake Tahoe News furnished a slew of questions to both entities. Both agencies said they would not answer those questions until the council votes Tuesday and/or until the study progresses.

“We are probably looking at least a four- to six-month process to study the pros and cons of this,” City Manager Tony O’Rourke said.

Financial issues

Lake Valley has three sources of revenue – property taxes, developer fees and Measure M. The latter is a June 1986 voter approved tax that charges property owners $10 or $20 per year depending on whether a structure is on the parcel.

If the merger goes through, it is unknown how the new LVFPD would be funded, or how the discrepancy of some members of the service district being taxed and others not being taxed would be rectified.

Property taxes are the department’s primary source of income.

City residents don’t have a separate fire tax or fee. The fire department’s annual budget is $5.7 million, according to the city’s website. This comes out of the general fund, which gets its dollars primarily from property, sales and hotel taxes.

Lake Valley Fire Chief Gareth Harris in a letter dated March 8 to the City Council proposes the city use property tax dollars to fund its share of fire services for its residents to the tune of $6.526 million.

What the additional $800,000 the city would pay for compared to what is in this year’s budget is unknown because Lake Valley and the city are not answering questions. Nor is it known what other services might be cut by the city to make up

this difference.

The city, though, is saving money this fiscal year by having the police chief take on the roll of fire chief, too. The council also eliminated the three battalion chief positions and is contracting with Lake Valley for fire marshal services.

Harris in his letter says he came up with the figure by taking 16.7 percent of 1 percent of the 2011-12 assessed tax roll of city properties that total $3,903,077,660.

Harris' budget outline in his letter says to cover the city's fire expenses it would take $6,999,5000.

What isn't known is if the city were to pay $6.526 million as Harris suggests, if county residents are then subsidizing city fire costs to the tune of nearly a half million dollars.

Some particulars

O'Rourke told *Lake Tahoe News*, "We are looking also at different spectrums from contracting to a JPA to a full consolidation. We are going to look at it from multiple angles."

However, the letter from Harris, which is included in the city's fire consolidation staff report, has some specific details about how his department would be taking over the city department. He goes so far as to detail how the city would need to pay one-time startup costs of $787,000 that would pay for new uniforms for city firefighters, stationery, station signage and vehicle insignias.

The bulk of that figure – $534,000 – would be to buy out city employees' sick, comp and vacation time.

In that total figure is $5,000 for public relations; what that entails is a mystery as well.

It is also not known where that one-time fee would come from.

Equipment upgrades are part of what's being talked about.

Harris' letter states, "This proposal also includes the replacement of two of the city's first out fire engines and the ladder truck. This will be accomplished by a financed lease/purchase of the apparatus. In addition, both Station 3 and Station 2 will be remodeled and updated to accommodate the new ladder truck and meet current fire station design codes and requirements."

The board of directors, according to Harris' letter, would remain intact, with "residents of South Lake Tahoe … eligible to run for a seat on the board of directors at the next fire district election just like any other resident in the unincorporated county area."

According to a clearly not updated Lake Valley fire website, the board of directors and their terms are:

• Dave Huber, Dec. 1, 2006-Dec. 3, 2010

• Robert Bettencourt, Dec. 5, 2008-Dec. 7-2012

• Gregory Herback, Dec. 5-2008-Dec. 3, 2010

• Robert Rossi, June 10, 2010-Dec. 3, 2010

• Ryan Wagoner, Dec. 5-2008-Dec. 7, 2012.

A little history

Lake Valley fire has been in existence since 1947. Most people think of it as the area serving Meyers. It covers approximately 83 square miles.

South Lake Tahoe's department was formed in 1965 when the city was incorporated.

"They actually wanted to be part of the city. They were in the city boundaries at the time," Laurel Ames said of the firefighters.

Ames was one of six members on the city's incorporation committee. (The others were Wink Ames, Tom and Betty Mitchell, and Vaughn and Mary Burlingham.)

"When we incorporated we were controlled by very strict state incorporation laws," Ames told *Lake Tahoe News*.

The only real leeway was with the boundaries. With no money to pay a surveyor, known landmarks were used. But it took court action (Ames v. County of El Dorado) and precedent setting law to figure out how to count landowners.

Ames said the ruling came out in their favor which said whoever was legally allowed to sign for all the other members became in name the landowner of the lot for incorporation purposes.

Another person involved with the early years of South Lake Tahoe said a reason to incorporate was to "control our own destiny". Incorporation was tried three times – though not all came to a vote – before it was approved.

Now the destiny may change without the voters having a say.

That's another of those unanswered questions – if the voters of either jurisdiction would have a say in the fire department consolidations or if the two governing boards have ultimate authority.

California candidates set to battle in new political landscape

By Jean Merl, Los Angeles Times

Filing has closed, the candidate lists are final and the curtain has risen on California's reconstructed political stage, where the contests for 153 congressional and legislative seats will play out for the first time under new rules and in altered districts.

Look for intraparty fights that will last into the November runoffs, a likely lack of third-party candidates on the fall ballot and, possibly, a larger number of contested seats, compliments of a new primary system and a redrawing of political maps that did not seek to protect incumbents.

Voters authorized the two new wrinkles in this year's elections. In 2010 they approved Proposition 14, which requires that all candidates, regardless of party, appear on a single ballot received by all voters. Only the candidates who finish first and second in the June 5 primary will move on to the Nov. 6 general election, all but eliminating the chances of most third-party candidates, who used to be granted a spot on the runoff ballot no matter how poorly they fared in the primary.

In 2008, voters stripped the Legislature of the responsibility for redrawing political boundaries for state Senate, Assembly and Board of Equalization seats and gave the job to an independent citizens commission. Two years later, voters added California congressional districts to the commission's task.

The citizens group was charged with adjusting boundaries for population shifts since the previous census, and was

prohibited from taking into account a lawmaker's home and voter registration – rules aimed at eliminating the gerrymandering that the Legislature had done to protect incumbents.

Read the whole story

Sac County man dies at Sierra, avalanche injures Kirkwood skier

Updated: 9:45pm March 18, 2012

By Kathryn Reed

One person died and another was seriously injured at two Lake Tahoe area ski resorts March 18.

Yiwei Hu, 54, of Gold River died at Sierra-at-Tahoe, according to El Dorado County sheriff's deputies, after he fell into a deep hole created by an underflow of water in the Castle Creek area.

"When patrol arrived (at 1:20pm) they initiated life-saving procedures, but were unable to resuscitate the skier," Sierra spokesman Steve Hemphill told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Castle Creek is in the trees off Castle run, which is accessed from the Grandview chairlift.

While Tahoe resorts have received multiple feet of snow in less than a week, tree skiing has been sketchy at best until now. It has been snowing all day at Sierra.

At Kirkwood Mountain Resort an avalanche occurred in Sentinel Bowl at 2:14pm. This area is in-bounds. One person was able to ride out to alert ski patrol of the slide, while his friend was trapped.

With snow falling all day, helicopter transport was not an option. Lake Valley paramedics brought the person, whose name is not being released, to Barton Memorial Hospital. Alpine County Sheriff's Department said they would not release details until Monday.

Michael Dalzell, spokesman for Kirkwood, said he does not have details on the slide and it has not been classified.

The Sierra Avalanche Center rated the slide danger as moderate for Sunday.

Dalzell said Chair 6 was closed as soon as the avalanche was reported. Crews worked in the area to test the snow stability, with the all clear coming at 4:33pm.

Kirkwood in the last 24 hours received between 12 and 18 inches of snow, with nearly 5 feet in the last week.

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6 weeks of classes for aging population

A series of six-week classes will cover a variety of topics designed to inform and educate the aging population, and offer practical knowledge and guidance to caregivers.

Each class will feature professionals in their field of

expertise. Classes will begin April 2 and continue for six consecutive Mondays through May 7.

El Dorado County Family Caregiver Support Program is putting on the Spring Caregiver Series 2012 in collaboration with Senior Health Education Program, Senior Legal Services of El Dorado County, Barton Home Health and Hospice, and Alzheimer's Association of Northern California and Nevada.

All classes will be at the Embassy Suites Lake Tahoe Resort, 4130 Lake Tahoe Blvd., South Lake Tahoe.

To register, contact Tammy Bragg at (530) 621.6151.

El Dorado County needs grand jurors

The 2012-13 El Dorado County Grand Jury is looking for members.

Applicants must be U.S. citizens, at least 18 years of age, have resided in the county for at least one year at the time of the swearing-in date, and cannot hold an elected office.

Judges of the Superior Court shall select names from those submitted, as well as other nominees, and currently seated grand jurors who wish to be held over, to be put into the jury pool. Nineteen jurors are then selected in a random drawing from this pool. Final selection will take place in late June. Jurors are expected to be present. Jurors serve for a period of one year, commencing July 1.

The El Dorado Civil Grand Jury is an investigatory body created for the protection of society and the enforcement of

the law.

Jurors can typically expect to serve a minimum of six hours over two days per week. Investigative committee chairs and the foreperson may expect to serve 10-20 hours per week.

Meetings are compensated at the maximum rate of $15 per day of meeting; mileage is compensated at the rate payable to employees of El Dorado County for each mile actually and necessarily traveled for purposes of said sessions or committee work. No other compensation is provided.

Qualified citizens who have an interest may pick up an application form at the Superior Court, 495 Main St., Placerville or call (530) 621.6451. The deadline to apply is May 11.