Reno fire far from contained; homes remain threatened

Publisher's note: ***South Lake Tahoe firefighters have been sent to Reno.***

By Reno Gazette-Journal

9:30pm: Containment for the Caughlin Fire was at zero percent Friday night, and 2,000 homes remained threatened. A cause had not been determined. About 2,300 customers remained without power as the result of the fire reported at 12:22am.

8:45pm: About 455 firefighters are on duty – including 150 overnight – looking for hot spots, contain fire and assess the damage. Thirty fire engines are to remain on patrol overnight. About,2000 homes remain threatened.



Firefighters struggle to contain the Reno blaze. Photo/Reno Gazette-Journal

8:15pm: Blaze stands at 2,000 acres with 0% containment at Caughlin Fire. No cause yet for the fire. The Caughlin Fire stands at about 2,000 acres with 21 structures damaged. No

cause of the for the fire determined, fire officials said.

7:30pm: Areas where homes were lost or damaged include Gibraltar Drive, Pioneer Drive, Quiet Meadows Court, Meadow Valley Lane and Lakeridge Shores West, officials said. Residents in the area also reported homes on Alpine Creek Road had been burned.

6:40pm: Officials said they did not expect to begin allowing evacuated residents to return home until about noon Saturday. Affected homeowners were urged to contact authorities for updates on evacuation status.

6:10pm: Firefighters said they saved 4,000 or more homes from a late-season wildfire that burned about 2,000 acres and could have been far worse.

Read the whole story

TRPA trying to be less like Big Brother

The Regional Plan Update Committee of the TRPA Governing Board took a step forward this week in moving toward a different permitting system at Tahoe where regulations would shift to local county or city governments.

The concept would leave local planning, zoning and development codes to each jurisdiction as long as environmental standards are followed. Large-scale projects may still fall under the permitting authority of TRPA. Details of this proposal are still under review.

The Regional Plan Update Committee endorsed the general

concept for this shift and the full board will consider the change as part of the plan update process in 2012.

The TRPA Governing Board adopted an updated Code of Ordinances that has improved clarity and added user-friendly diagrams to improve the public's understanding of Tahoe regulations.

Beer & Food Fest at Truckee restaurant

It's being billed as a Beer & Food Festival – the combination of six Lagunita's Brewing Company specialty beers paired with food from Dragonfly.

The Dec. 1 event is from 6 to 9pm at the Truckee restaurant. Attendees can stop in anytime during the evening and roam the food and beer stations. Cost is $32.

Beer & Food Fest participants will have a chance to meet the people from the brewery and taste two of Lagunita's limited specialty beers.

To make reservation or for more info, call (530) 587.0557.

Dragonfly is located upstairs at 10118 Donner Pass Road.

Sola Rosa at MontBleu

Sola Rosa will be playing at MontBleu in Stateline on Dec. 3

at 8pm.

They blend sounds of hip hop, reggae, Latin, jazz, soul and funk.

This one of 10 stops on their North American tour.

MontBleu Holiday Extravaganza

The 17th annual MontBleu Holiday Extravaganza is Dec. 14 and Dec. 15, starting at 7pm each night.

Students in grades 3-12 in the various Lake Tahoe Unified School District choirs are the stars of the show.

Tickets are $10 for adults and $5 for seniors/students. Tickets are available at the door.

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2 people die at Colorado ski resorts

By Kieran Nicholson, Denver Post

Two people were killed today in accidents on Colorado ski slopes.

A 62-year-old man was killed during opening day on Vail Mountain. The *Summit Daily News* reported the man died this morning in an accident while skiing on Gitalong Road, a beginner trail.

Meanwhile, a 20-year-old snowboarder died at Breckenridge Medical Center after he hit a tree at an intermediate run at Breckenridge Ski Resort.

The snowboarder was identified by the Summit County Coroner as Evan Massini, a CU-Boulder student from Westbrook, Conn.

Read the whole story

Ash from woodstoves start small fires off Pioneer Trail

U.S. Forest Service and Lake Valley firefighters recently quickly doused two fires of less than a quarter acre each off Pioneer Trail.

Both were caused by people dumping hot ashes from a woodstove or fireplace in the woods. One was Nov. 3 and the other Nov. 16.

“The change in our weather doesn’t mean we can stop paying attention to fire prevention,” LTBMU fire prevention officer Beth Brady said in a statement. “Woodstove ashes can retain enough heat to start a fire in your home or surrounding forest for many days after you think your fire’s out.”

Officials said neither house had defensible space, and the resulting wildfires could have destroyed the home or adjacent structures. Residents can be cited for “negligently placing any material that could start a fire,” which carries a $350

fine. They also can be held responsible for the costs of fire suppression.

State and local fire agencies recommend placing ashes in a metal container, which should not be stored in the house or garage, or on any flammable surface, such as a deck. The ashes should cool for at least four days before final disposal, and any hot spots doused with water.

Opinion: Questioning logic of controlled burn

Publisher's note: ***This letter was sent to the U.S. Forest Service office and then to Lake Tahoe News on Nov. 18.***

I'm not sure who to direct this comment to, and although I did not lose my home in the Angora fire, it started 4 streets up from us and we were evacuated for 3 days. Last night driving home, with the gusty winds and seeing the whole hillside on fire was like a nightmare being awake. (expected to conduct operations on a total of approximately 40 acres near Mule Deer Circle)

How can these fires remain under control under these windy conditions? There is no control over Mother Nature. Did anyone actually check the weather?

I don't think that the timing, planning and weather conditions were thought out very well with this set of "controlled" burns.

I really hope that nothing happens. I work with a number of people that did lose their homes and I know that they are

afraid every time you burn over there. It would be tragic for anything else to happen after they have lost everything once and are re-building their lives, in their new homes.

This is just my opinion.

Terrified,

Sierra Soleta, South Lake Tahoe

Winds wreak havoc, destroy one South Lake Tahoe house

By Kathryn Reed

This particular Christmas tree will not have any presents under it next month. No children will fill the four twin beds upstairs.

That’s because this house on Anita Avenue in South Lake Tahoe has been condemned.

Greg Falkner got a call from a neighbor at 6am Friday saying a tree had gone through the house. He drove up from Alameda and this afternoon was moving belongings to more secure areas of the home.

It’s so bad he doesn’t plan to show his wife any pictures.



No one was home when a tree crashed into a bedroom of a house on Anita Avenue. Photos/Kathryn Reed

“Last weekend people were sleeping in there,” Falkner says of the room with the twin beds. Three beds are next to the wall and below the roof where much of the damage occurred.

Someone easily could have been impaled had they been sleeping there. Tree limbs are on the floor. The beds are sunken into the garage below.

The house has been in Falkner’s family for 36 years. Last summer he bought it from his parents. He spent six months fixing it up. It may take longer than that this time around.

General contractor Tony Piscitelli was on site helping clean up the mess. Next step was to take the dormer off and seal the holes on the house with plywood for the winter.



The house has

been condemned.

Piscitelli estimates the Jeffery pine was 80-feet tall and 3½ feet in diameter. Ed Cook was at the house about 8am taking away the tree that was rotten on the inside.

Houses on both sides of the Falkner's also sustained damage, but are livable.

The National Weather Service said the highest wind gust clocked at Lake Tahoe Airport was 56 mph early Friday morning. Ridge tops had gusts of more than 100 mph.

The U.S. Coast Guard reported swells on the lake at 4 feet. Lake Tahoe continues to be a sea of white caps. The wind advisory is in effect until 4pm Nov. 18.

"It's mainly a cold and windy storm," said Jessica Kielhorn, meteorology technician with the National Weather Service in Reno. "It's a very quick moving storm."

Snow started falling on the North Shore in the late morning, with flurries being spit out on the South Shore by the afternoon. Snow totals aren't expected to be much – 1-3 inches at lake level by Saturday morning, 4-6 inches at the higher elevations.

Winds were strong enough to prevent Heavenly Mountain Resort from opening Friday. This is the third consecutive year Mother Nature has delayed the opening. The gondola is slated to open Nov. 19 at 8:30am.



White caps on Lake Tahoe, with 4-foot waves spotted on the North Shore.

Liberty Energy said the storm has kept crews busy, but not with major problems. Branches on power lines and sporadic outages have affected customers.

NV Energy did not return a call, though they are working with significant power issues related to the devastating Reno fire.

Sgt. Shannon Laney with the South Lake Tahoe Police Department said a tree on Chonokis fell in the street and was cleared, a power line fell on Apache, wires were hanging on Seneca and part of the traffic signal at Al Tahoe was damaged.

Mostly it was burglar alarms that kept officers busy. Winds trigger them.

Kielhorn said most of the snow would come overnight. The cold will stay through Saturday with a high on both ends of the lake expected to be in the low 30s and the overnight low for Friday and Saturday in the teens.

State puts hold on contract with NDOT liaison

By Sean Whaley, Nevada News Bureau

CARSON CITY – A 23-month, $280,000 contract approved by the

Nevada Department of Transportation for a private sector individual to work as a liaison between the agency and contractors seeking work has been put on hold because of concerns expressed by Gov. Brian Sandoval and other members of the NDOT Board of Directors.

The contract with William “Buzz” Harris to serve as an ombudsman between the agency and bidders on contracts was approved by the agency in September, but NDOT Director Susan Martinovich said it will be put on hold while concerns raised at the board meeting this week are resolved.

The board was told the $280,000 is the amount that can be spent on the services provided by Harris from August through June 2013, but is not guaranteed. Harris, who was selected after a request for proposals was issued by the agency, would be paid $100 an hour under the contract, which would include most of his expenses.

But Sandoval, who serves as chairman of the NDOT board of directors, noted the potential contract cost is well in excess of what even he earns as governor.

Other members of the board also raised questions about the contract, including Lt. Gov. Brian Krolicki, who said such positions are usually filled internally by an agency rather that bringing in someone from the outside.

Attorney General Catherine Cortez Masto, also a member of the board, asked for information about who submitted proposals for the contract.

“My understanding is historically and traditionally an ombudsman position is contained within the respective department, and that person would have an encyclopedic knowledge of the operation,” Sandoval said. “With an external ombudsman, that person will in turn have to get a hold of somebody who is within the office to perhaps respond to those questions.”

There are a lot of unanswered questions that need to be answered in regard to the contract, including the cost, he said.

Harris is a former assistant executive director at the Nevada Associated General Contractors.

Assistant Transportation Director Richard Nelson, said the purpose of the contract is to provide a problem solver and facilitator for contractors seeking to do business with the agency. Harris has a good working knowledge of the contracting business and NDOT, he said.

Reporting on the success of the program to NDOT is part of the contract as well, Nelson said.

“There is a lot of nuance to dealing with the department,” he said. “And a lot of times these new contractors don’t know what questions they should be asking. And we don’t want to see any contractor go under because they get balled up in the bureaucracy.”