Placer supervisors to hear appeal regarding Homewood

The Placer County Board of Supervisors is meeting at the Granlibakken Conference Center and Lodge in Tahoe City on Nov. 15 at 9:15am to discuss the Homewood Mountain Resort proposed project.

The County's Community Development Resource Agency's Planning Division will bring the project forward. Supervisors will be asked to consider a third-party appeal of the Planning Commission's action to approve a conditional use permit, planned development permit and the vesting tentative subdivision map for the project.

The Homewood project agenda item is scheduled for 9:30am and is a public hearing.

U.S. reaching out to foreign travel market

By Richard N. Velotta, Las Vegas Sun

Seeking to change travel trends of fewer foreigners visiting the United States, a public-private partnership launched Brand USA today, the nation's first tourism marketing campaign.

Led by Las Vegas resort executive Stephen Cloobeck, the Corporation for Travel Promotion unveiled the campaign on a world stage with an event at London's British Academy of Film and Television Arts and a press conference at the four-day World Travel Market at London's ExCeL convention center.

The campaign is important to Las Vegas because the city wants to attract more international visitors.

Las Vegas is one of the U.S.’s most desired destinations for foreign visitors, not only because of its reputation as a world-class entertainment and gaming destination but because of its proximity to Grand Canyon National Park.

The Brand USA launch is the first step in developing a marketing and advertising campaign designed to convince foreign travelers to visit the United States. The first ads are expected to be aired in the spring.

The United States has been one of the few industrialized nations without a coordinated international tourism marketing message. In the past 10 years, the world travel market increased by 60 million people, yet visitation to the United States was flat. Experts estimate the United States lost a potential global market share of 78 million visitors over 10 years, at an estimated value of $606 billion in spending.

The number of visitors from the United States’ largest overseas market, Great Britain, has declined since a record 4.7 million visited in 2000.

The competition is fierce from other countries marketing their attractions, led by Mexico, which annually spends $173.8 million advertising the country. Other tourism budgets include Great Britain, $160 million; Australia, $107.6 million; and Turkey, $98.6 million.

Read the whole story

Drive-By Truckers

Drive-By Truckers at Harrah's Lake Tahoe on March 17 at 7pm. Robert Ellis will open.

Tickets are $29.

Must be 21 to attend.

For more information, call 800.786.8208.

Report: Dirts roads more problematic than logging for erosion

By Matt Weiser, Sacramento Bee

Dirt roads, not logging clear-cuts, are likely the largest source of erosion that may threaten salmon restoration in Battle Creek, an important Sacramento River tributary.



That is the conclusion of a new report by a special state task force, presented Wednesday at a meeting of the California Board of Forestry.

The so-called "rapid assessment" report was ordered by the administration of Gov. Jerry Brown after a Bee investigation published June 19. The article highlighted conflicts between the state's simultaneous approval of clear-cut logging and its

support for the $128 million restoration project.

The state has contributed $56 million toward the restoration. It involves removing or modifying numerous small Pacific Gas and Electric Co. dams to return endangered salmon and steelhead to 42 miles of habitat. The restoration is about halfway complete.

Relatively little work has been done, however, to assess habitat conditions once spawning access is restored. Sierra Pacific Industries owns 82 percent of the private timberland in the watershed, and has logged about 20,000 acres since 1997, according to the report.

Read the whole story

Whittell, Truckee volleyball teams to contend for state title

Whittell High will battle for the state volleyball Division 2A title this morning at 10 against Yerington.

The girls beat Calvary Chapel 3-1 in the semifinals Friday in Las Vegas.

Truckee High will vie for the state Division 3A title on Saturday at 4pm after beating Churchill County 3-1. Truckee will take on Boulder City, who defeated South Tahoe High in a 3-2 nail-biter (25-23, 25-18, 20-25, 23-25, 20-18).

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

History: Roots of skiing run deep in Echo Summit area

Publisher's note: ***The following is from the January 1976 Lake Tahoe Historical Society newsletter.***

At the Society meeting of November 25, 1975, Haven Jorgenson, one-time manager of the Sierra Club Lodge on old Highway 40, shared his experiences as owner of Echo Chalet and one of the first ski areas in the Sierra Nevada.

Having seen Echo Chalet once on a casual summer trip, Haven purchased the place when he saw it for the second time, half-buried in the snows of January 1946. He started operations on February 1 with one 200 ft. rope tow, with a 75 ft. vertical rise from the foot to the top of the road. The tow was operated electrically with the help of an old Dodge transmission. There were no power lines into the area at the time, but Haven's own hydroplant produced the electricity required for his needs, including the heating of the Chalet. However, whenever the ski tow was operated, it was necessary to disconnect the heater.

Among the services provided was transportation from the highway parking lot up to the Chalet. Purchasing several old crank-type phones from the telephone company for $2.00, he set these up in the parking lot, with a wire which lay in the snow and was connected to another instrument up at the Chalet. When a guest arrived at the parking lot, he cranked up the phone and someone would come down to take him up to the lodge on a sled pulled by a tractor.

He recalled the early day ski areas in the Echo Summit vicinity, which were several. Nebelhorn, built in 1947 by Gordon Stang and Vic West who pioneered junior skiing with the Nebelhornets and the location of the first Far West Junior Championships on the West Coast. Audrain Lodge just below Echo Lake road. A dormitory was operated with a little tow in back at Vade. Tamarack Pines built about that same time by Vern Sprock who provided lodging and meals sometime before he took over Sierra Ski Ranch from the Barnett brothers. One of the first lifts in the area was built by Otto Schaeffer on the north side of the highway at Camp Sacramento. This was eventually taken over by Edelweiss which expanded and put the lifts on the opposite side of the highway. There was also a tow in the area of Strawberry Lodge, which was a very popular place, especially for evening entertainment.

After a successful first winter and learning the ropes of running a boat service during the summer, Haven built a 1000 ft. long tow to the top of the hill the following autumn and detailed his experiences in an era of doing everything for one's self.

His operation was primarily dormitory style at $4.50 per day with three meals, but "bring your own sleeping bag." Six rooms in the main building were rented as hotel accommodations at $13.50 for two including three meals. He later built several little cabins with kitchen facilities which rented for $7.00 per day, $45.00 per week for two but no meals. $1.50 bought an all day ticket for ski tow and learn-to-ski lessons were free.

Haven described the early days when snow seldom came by Thanksgiving, but sometimes waited until February. Grooming of the hills was unknown. The manner and style of skiing was different than today an the well-dressed skier of those early days wore considerably less sophisticated attire than seen on the slopes in 1975.

He also recalled adventures of 1950's "big rains" which came

down on 22 inches of snow in November. Water ran over the road at Camp Sacramento cutting a 20 ft. trench that closed the highway for several weeks. Also, he remembered the heavy winter of 1952 as well as avalanches where occurred with loss of life at Echo Lake during 1948.

He closed his presentation with a showing of photographs and slides of snow and skiing in the Echo area and displayed a collection of ski posters, a menu from Strawberry Lodge, his old skis with bear trap bindings, and other memorabilia.

California revenues down $1.5 billion – midyear cuts loom

By Kevin Yamamura, Sacramento Bee

California has fallen $1.5 billion behind in revenue through the first four months of the fiscal year, state Controller John Chiang said Thursday, amplifying fears the state will impose deeper budget cuts this winter.

For October, Chiang said, California was $810.5 million behind what was expected, or 16.3 percent. Notably, the state missed its personal income tax estimate by $451 million, or 12.9 percent, which the Franchise Tax Board attributed to lower withholdings and estimated tax payments.

The state also faced spending pressures through the first four months of the year. Chiang reported that California spent $1.7 billion more than budget writers expected.

Under the budget deal Gov. Jerry Brown signed in June, the state will automatically cut a variety of programs depending

on how deep budget analysts determine the revenue shortfall will be.

Read the whole story

Caltrans: How to stay safe on the roads in the winter

Caltrans crews are taking the necessary measures to prepare for major rain and snowstorms throughout the season, including winterizing construction projects, and mobilizing the necessary equipment and personnel. Caltrans is also encouraging motorists to be fully prepared for winter driving conditions, particularly in snowy conditions in the Sierra.



“Winter driving on roads and highways can present some hazards for motorists,” said Jody Jones, Caltrans District 3 director. “Our goal is to help motorists be safe on the roadways and provide them with as much information as possible to ensure a wonderful winter driving experience.”

Caltrans is offering motorists the following winter driving tips:

Winterize your vehicle

This means:

• Checking antifreeze and making sure it is properly filled and formulated for winter conditions.

• Checking tires for proper tire pressure and tread.

• Replacing wiper blades and filling the windshield wiper reservoir; a wiper reservoir winter formula is available to help de-ice windshields.

• Checking tire chains to ensure they are the proper size for your tires and in good working order.

Carry a travel kit

This means:

• Expecting the worst possible weather conditions and having an emergency kit for your car that includes warm blankets, extra clothing, water and snacks, extra towels, a shovel, a flashlight with extra batteries, an ice scraper, sand, and other pertinent items.

Understand chain controls

This means:

• Recognizing R1, R2 or R3 chain control requirements.

• R1 means chains or snow tires are required; R2 means chains are required on all vehicles except four-wheel drive or all-wheel drive vehicles equipped with snow tires; R3 is a mandatory chain requirement for all vehicles. R-1 and R-2 are the most common chain controls. The highway will usually be closed before an R-3 control is imposed (whiteout condition).

• Knowing that failure to abide by the chain requirement can lead to a fine from the California Highway Patrol.

• Recognize that speed limits range between 25 – 35 MPH when chains are required.

Check conditions frequently

This means:

• Being aware of inclement weather and potential snowstorms

• Tune in to Caltrans radio to receive brief and informative updates: changeable message boards (CMS) will list the radio frequency.

Anticipate delays and closures

This means:

• Understanding that winter weather and road conditions can change rapidly and allowing for extra time.

– Caltrans

DCSO SWAT officers win at regional competition

Deputies of the Douglas County Sheriff's Office Special Weapons and Tactics Team recently won top honors at the Northern Nevada SWAT Team competition in Washoe County.

Eight agencies competed in the event: Lyon County Sheriff's Office, Washoe County Sheriff's Office, Reno Police Department, Sparks Police Department, Douglas County Sheriff's Office, Fallon Naval Air Station Security Forces, Washoe County Disaster Recovery Team, and Reno Tactical Emergency Medical Response Team.

The competition consisted of 21 events. The events are designed to test abilities in team organization, tactical skills, firearms proficiency and physical fitness all while negotiating various scenarios and courses of fire.

DCSO took first in the elite team category, consisting of a three-person team comprised of deputies Geoff Marshall, Rick

Koontz Jr. and Marshall Flagg. It took this team just more than 2.5 hours to complete the course.

In the mixed team event, deputies Tyler Jones and Ryan Grant took third place.

In addition to winning the elite category, DCSO's team had the best score and time during the firearms competition.

S. Tahoe backpedals on some vacation rental policies

By Kathryn Reed

Google "South Lake Tahoe vacation rentals" and about 319,000 results show up. While there are nowhere near that many residences of any kind in the city limits, it proves this is big business.

And in some ways it has not been a tightly regulated market, with some people suggesting the city is losing six figures a year on uncollected transient occupancy tax from owners renting their property as lodging.

A meeting Wednesday morning geared toward property management companies was said to be the first time the city had asked them to a meeting other than when the contentious vacation home rental ordinance was written about seven years ago and any tweaking to it since then.

Earlier this year the council divided the responsibilities of vacation rentals between the police and finance departments.

Prior to that the finance department had sole jurisdiction. Now the police oversee everything but TOT.

Community service officers Bob Albertazzi, Dannelle Spaeth and Janet Inglis led the 90-minute meeting Nov. 9.

“We want to see if there are things we can do to make it more efficient,” Albertazzi told the more than dozen people at the meeting.

Jim Morris with Lake Tahoe Accommodations is a regular at meetings concerning vacation rentals and often vocal. Wednesday was no different, as he did the most talking by those in attendance.

“I think we are embarking on a whole new era,” Morris said. “I think all of us want to see taxes collected. We need permit numbers posted on websites. I think maybe 10 percent are on there.”

The point of the permit number on the website is then city staff can track TOT that comes in. Calendars on rental sites are an indicator of when a property was rented. However, it was said loud and clear that blocked dates could mean the house was occupied by the owners or their friends.

Spaeth said she recently checked on 10 vacation rentals by owners that someone believed were operating illegally. Eight had valid permits, and the other two have come into compliance.

“We have collected more than $1,000 in fines from people who were not permitted or (had a closed account) and were still renting,” Spaeth said. That’s just in the few months the PD has taken things over.

Albertazzi said they are trying to figure out how to get back taxes from people who are found to be renting without paying TOT. He said one person just paid about four months worth of

TOT.

But if a person is not reporting the income to the IRS, it would be hard to prove a paying customer had been there on which nights.

MaryAnne Brand, accounting manager with the city, said the law is the city could only collect three years worth of delinquent TOT. She said the city deals with between 600 and 700 vacation home rentals each quarter. (Vacation homes pay TOT quarterly, while hotels/motels pay monthly.)

While suggestions were made and emotions escalated at times, by the end of the workday, long after the meeting had ended, city staff met among themselves. Change, as a result of what was said at that meeting and letters sent to staff, is coming.

To counter the outrage expressed by vacation rental owners to report to the city all of the names and contact information of renters, the city is doing away with that requirement. That will be evident on the monthly forms that go out in December.

Also erased from the form is the line that says, “Under penalty of perjury I swear that all the information supplied in this form is true and accurate.”

Morris bragged at the meeting about having a role in getting that language on the form. He was instrumental in the added paperwork being asked of vacation rental homeowners to fill out. But no individual renter was ever at the meetings orchestrated by the finance department that created the policy changes.

“We could have done a better job reaching out to the vacation home rental group,” Nancy Kerry, spokeswoman for the city, told *Lake Tahoe News*. “We are getting input after the fact. Next time we will reach out ahead of time.”

Kerry said the form has been modified to achieve the original

goals – to allow the finance department to do quick audits.

Julie Lucksinger with Lake Valley Properties at the morning meeting said many of her clients believe the information being sought would be a violation of privacy. She was not alone in that sentiment.

Brand said hotels collect private information that can be reviewed at any time the city wants and she at the time saw this as no different. But the difference would have been having to turn guest information over each month to the city and to sign the disclaimer.

No one at the city could recall a time when a hotel's guest list was reviewed.

Kerry said going forward "confidential" can be written as who the occupant is. She added, what's important is the number of nights the property was rented, not who was in it. Changes do not negate the property owners from maintaining records outlined in the ordinance that city staff could review with 10 days notice.

An item that may bring the group back together is on the Nov. 15 City Council agenda. The five are slated to discuss raising the $144 annual vacation rental permit by 40 percent. The meeting starts at 9am at Lake Tahoe Airport. This will not be an action item.

Delinquent permit payments were part of Wednesday's discussion. Spaeth, with the city, said since her department has taken over, those numbers have decreased and more people are complying.

To keep better track and avoid double or no payment, a property agent suggested putting on the form whether it's the owner or property manager responsible for paying the permit fee. Albertazzi said they'd look into that.