Conservation nonprofits squeezed as economy shrinks budgets

By Matt Weiser, Sacramento Bee

Nonprofit conservation groups have preserved tens of thousands of acres of land in California – wild places where both hikers and animals roam. Now, some of them say the economic slump could force them to scale back.

Others say lean budgets make it harder for them to scrutinize land use proposals for environmental effects – a key role such groups play in the state's push-pull development process.

Most groups don't like to talk about their financial difficulties, but one, the American River Conservancy, recently took the unusual step of going public. In an email to members and supporters, the group confessed that "times are hard" and it needs to raise $250,000 by year-end or it will be forced to cut programs in 2012.

"What is happening to our organization is happening to a lot of organizations. We're just being honest about it," said Alan Ehrgott, the conservancy's executive director.

Read the whole story

October is fire prevention

month

The month of October is fire prevention and awareness month.



This month, city fire crews will be visiting all the elementary schools to provide kids with hands-on practice of what to do if your clothes catch on fire, how to escape a burning building, dialing 911 for emergencies, and an introduction to some of the department's apparatus and equipment.

So now is a good time to review fire safety plans with your family, check for working smoke detectors in your home, and establish a meeting area for your family in case of a fire.

– Sallie Ross-Filgo, SLTFD

LTVA finalizing website, ready to promote winter on S. Shore

By Kathryn Reed

STATELINE – A mountain biker navigating the thin Flume Trail with Sand Harbor in the background – that's the type of image South Shore tourism officials want people to think of when they are planning their next trip to Tahoe.

Recreation – it's the mantra they are embracing, with gaming taking a back seat.

With nearly $300,000 spent overhauling Lake Tahoe Visitor Centers' website, the final tweaks are being made so it is ready to go live by Dec. 1. The LTVA board was given an update on the site at Thursday's meeting, with the folks from Duncan/Channon phoning in the presentation, but able to manipulate the screen from their San Francisco offices.



LTVA wants the new website to focus on recreation.

Play, Sleep, Eat, Events, Deals, Blog – those are the categories on the website. But not all board members think they are the best.

John Koster, Harrah's-Harveys rep on the board, said, "Sleep seems incredibly boring."

Sleep, he said, is not the word that comes to his mind when thinking about lodging.

Mindi Befu, who is on the LTVA's marketing committee, said it is important to pick words that people intuitively understand as well as that help with search engine optimization.

The board does want to see what the final photo selections are because they were not thrilled with some of the placeholders – like the one of Emerald Bay that had a dead tree in the foreground.

"I want photos that you can't duplicate elsewhere," Koster

said.

Carol Chaplin, executive director of LTVA, after the Oct. 13 meeting told *Lake Tahoe News* what people will notice most with the new site compared to the current site is more continuous fresh content, outstanding photography and video, and a look that is more current.

Noble Studios in Reno will be adding the content. Blogs will be in place for people to write about their passions.

“It will be more dynamic overall,” Chaplin said.



The logo LTVA will use to promote the South Shore.

The board also agreed to the logo changes, with the T in Tahoe not being straight across as the main change from previous versions.

Open meeting law violation

The winter ad campaign was not on the posted agenda, but was added by the board members at the meeting. The same scenario transpired regarding discussing sending a letter supporting alternative 2 for the Washoe Meadows golf course-Upper Truckee River proposal.

Board member Tom Davis, South Lake Tahoe’s rep to the board, said he thought doing so would violate the Brown Act – which even though LTVA is based in Nevada, must still adhere to

because of receiving California dollars and doing business in the state. To that, board President Pat Ronan, the South Lake Tahoe Lodging Association's LTVA rep, said, "We've done it before."

The board's conclusion is they could add things to the agenda, discuss them, but not take action. But they took action on both items – so the Brown Act was violated because the public was not informed of the agenda items 72 hours in advance of the meeting as is required per the law. Even discussing the add-ons is a violation.

This could invalidate the decisions regarding the winter ad campaign and sending the letter.

Winter ad campaign

While the LTVA has not had its own winter ad campaign in years, it is going to this year. Through its affiliation with Ski Lake Tahoe, LTVA has had a voice in the past. Plus, the individual ski resorts are out in force touting their slopes.



Boarding often involves chilling, especially at Sierra -- a message LTVA will convey. Photo/LTN file

With about $200,000 in carryover dollars for advertising, the

board agreed to buy a billboard ad in San Francisco for January-February-March. This will use about half those dollars.

Tied to that billboard will likely be a promotional campaign with a Bay Area radio station that will include give-aways to the South Shore.

Laura Davis, with Duncan/Channon, told LTVA that billboard receives 756,000 impressions a week.

In changing policy with having a winter campaign, Chaplin said, “We felt we hadn’t talked to those people directly in a long time. We feel a need to do our own thing year-round.”

Drawing Nevada’s political boundaries coming down to the wire

By Sean Whaley, Nevada News Bureau

CARSON CITY – The business of drawing new political boundaries will now get under way by three court-appointed special masters following two days of public hearings on what Nevada’s legislative and congressional districts should look like for the next decade.

The clock is ticking.

The special masters, Carson City Clerk-Recorder Alan Glover, Las Vegas attorney Thomas Sheets and former legislative Research Director Bob Erickson, have until then end of next week to draw four congressional and 63 legislative districts

based on the 2010 U.S. Census data as directed by Carson City District Judge James Todd Russell last month.

Russell will receive the maps on Oct. 21 and release them to the public. By mid-November he will decide whether to accept them or send them back to the special masters for refinement.

All this is happening as the 2012 election season moves ever closer. A number of people have announced they are running for one of the four congressional seats even though there are no districts yet to run in.

The redistricting process outlined by Russell will continue even as the Nevada Supreme Court has decided to weigh in on the issue, which ended up in the courts after the Democrat-controlled Legislature failed to reach a compromise with Republicans on new district lines.

Gov. Brian Sandoval, who vetoed two Democrat-sponsored redistricting bills in the 2011 legislative session, weighed in on the controversy again today when asked, saying there is no reason to call the Legislature back into session to approve new maps. On Monday he said he had not had any conversations with lawmakers about calling them back to deal with redistricting.

“There are no facts and circumstances at this time that would justify calling a special session,” he said.

Sandoval said he has faith in the judicial system, and the process outlined by Russell, to resolve the impasse.

While the Supreme Court has scheduled oral arguments for Nov. 14 on questions raised by Secretary of State Ross Miller, it did not stop the process set up by Russell to develop new maps. In his petition filed with the court, Miller argues the state constitution makes it clear that it is the responsibility of the Legislature to draw the political boundaries, not the courts.

Because the court refused to block the process outlined by Russell, the special masters heard public testimony Monday in Las Vegas and Tuesday in Carson City on how the maps should be drawn. Twenty-two speakers testified in Las Vegas. Only a handful participated in Carson City.

One major issue for the special masters is whether to draw an urban Las Vegas congressional district that would include much of the Hispanic community. Democrats in their proposed maps split the Hispanic vote among three congressional districts, while Republicans are advocating for creating a single district with a large percentage of Hispanic voters.

At the hearing in Carson City, Democrat Forrest Darby presented a new set of maps for the masters to consider, saying the Southern Nevada congressional districts included in the plan would allow either the Republicans or Democrats to win any or all of the three.

“We really believe this is a fair map,” he said.

Darby said he has also petitioned Russell to reconsider his requirement that the four congressional seats have virtually no population deviation. A slight deviation would make for cleaner and more logical districts, he said.

“You cannot get down to one person,” Darby said. “If you do you will have horrible, ugly boundary lines, period.”

Also testifying was state Sen. James Settelmeyer, R-Gardnerville, who recommended that the special masters look at Assembly Bill 570, the measure creating the 13 new political boundaries for the Nevada System of Higher Education Board of Regents, as a starting point to draw congressional and legislative districts. The bill passed both houses of the Legislature unanimously and was signed into law by Sandoval, he said.

“I voted for it. For me it preserved the communities of

interest, it did not pack individuals, it also created a situation where the deviation was only 0.37 percent in the creation of those 13 districts," Settelmeyer said.

Former Assemblyman Bernie Anderson, a Democrat from Sparks, said the special masters are qualified to address the issue, but that redistricting is not a responsibility of the court system.

"I am of the opinion, however, that you do not have the authority to do this," he said. "And I believe it is a question of separation of powers. And my base view is I want to make sure that does get into the record. That this is a legislative issue and should be left to the Legislature to take care of."

Sheets asked what the answer is to resolving the redistricting issue when the Legislature cannot agree.

"I guess we are an imperfect solution to this problem that seems to have no other resolution if you have intractable parties," he said.

Rotary provides ZCES climbing wall for gym

Tahoe Douglas Rotary recently provided a donation to Zephyr Cove Elementary School for a climbing wall in the gym.

"The climbing wall supports physical activities for our local youth and is a natural fit with the outdoor environment that we live in here at the Lake," Keith Byer, a member of Tahoe Douglas Rotary, said. "Support like this is just one of the

many ways our club helps strengthen our local schools and community.”

Tahoe Douglas Rotary Club has made significant contributions to the Lake Tahoe South Shore and surrounding communities for more than 45 years, including raising more than $200,000 for local programs since 2000.

STPUD revives turf buy-back program

Turf is one of the most water intensive landscapes and requires substantial maintenance. Non-functional lawns – ones that are rarely used – waste water and represent an ongoing cost in time and resources for the home and business owner.



From an environmental perspective, lawns tend to be overfertilized and overwatered. With porous Tahoe soils, this combination can push nutrients intended for the lawn into the watershed where they eventually make their way into Lake Tahoe. Once there, they provide nutrients for algal growth that can affect the clarity of the Lake.

The Turf Buy-Back Program has been very successful: in 2008-09 more than 120,000 square feet of turf was “bought back.” In 2009, the program was closed due to lack of funding. However, South Tahoe PUD was recently approved for grant funding to reinstate the turf program.

Starting in spring 2012 applications will be accepted. Replace existing irrigated lawn with Tahoe friendly landscaping and

get paid $1.50 per square foot of turf removed. A minimum of 400 square feet of turf must be replaced and your healthy, irrigated lawn must be verified by South Tahoe PUD water conservation staff prior to turf removal. This program is available to all South Tahoe PUD water customers and is first come, first served, terms and conditions apply. Funds are limited.

To be placed on the waiting list or for more information, contact Sarah Jones at (530) 543.6268 or sjones@stpud.dst.ca.us.

Perimenopause lecture

The next 2011 Barton Health & Wellness Lecture is Oct. 26 from 6:30 to 7:30pm with Allison Steinmetz from Barton Internal Medicine.

The free event is at Lake Tahoe Community College's board room, 1 College Drive, South Lake Tahoe.

The doctor will discusses perimenopause, which is the process of change that leads up to menopause. She will provide remedy options, natural and hormonal for menopause. Steinmetz believes if women know what to expect, it can ease them into this new phase of life.

For more information, call (530) 543.5656.

Treat Street

Trick or treat with Tahoe Regional Young Professionals at KRLT's annual Treat Street on Oct. 31 from 5-8pm.

Every Halloween KRLT takes over a local motel and fills rooms with local businesses and nonprofits to hand out candy to kids in a safe, controlled environment. Thousands of children attend decked out as superheroes, princesses, magicians, monsters or in some creative creation at Pine Cone Acre Motel (735 Emerald Bay Road, South Lake Tahoe).

TRYP members and volunteers will be passing out candy, serving hot cocoa and s'mores – in and around the haunted house. TRYP needs volunteers from 4-6pm and 7-10pm. Email TahoeTRYP@gmail.com to volunteer, to donate candy deliver bags to to Brandi Ledbetter-Brown at Tahoe Production House, on Highway 50 near Tahoe Keys Café and the car wash.

Identity theft workshop in Tahoe Vista

As part of its Chamber EDucation program, the North Lake Tahoe Chamber of Commerce in partnership with the Sierra Economic Development Corporation is hosting a Business Identity Theft Compliance Workshop on Oct. 26, noon to 1:30pm, at Mourelatos Lakeshore Resort, 6834 North Lake Blvd., Tahoe Vista.

Deadline to register is Oct. 24.

Attendees will learn about identity theft laws and how they affect businesses, business liability when there is a breach,

the types of identity theft and behavior awareness, as well as tools for creating a policy to protect their business.

The cost is $55/person, and participants need to bring their lunch. To register, call the Sierra Economic Development Corporation at (530) 823.4703 or email info@sedcorp.biz.

Kingsbury Grade improvements overbudget, overdue

By Brooke Boone, KRNV-TV

STATELINE – A road construction project in South Lake Tahoe moving into its fourth year is costing tax payers millions and giving neighbors' headaches.

"It's really been a burden on our community from day one," says longtime Kingsbury Grade Resident Linda Bronken. "A lot of people have moved off because never ending construction."

The erosion control project along Kingsbury Grade began in 2009. It was slated for two years. Now in its third year the project remains incomplete.

According to Construction Manager Greg Frehner, they were unable to follow the schedule from day one due to unforeseen problems. What were those problems? "It's an old road. There are a lot of things under there," says Frehner. "The first year only ten percent complete."

According to state law, Nevada Department of Transportation has to go with the lowest responsible bidder. Out of eight, Las Vegas based Peek Construction Company came in with the lowest bid at $6.8 million dollars.

Read the whole story