Opinion: A blue Tahoe means a clear shore

By Rochelle Nason

We received disturbing news last week that deepwater clarity at Lake Tahoe has dropped nearly 4 feet. Scientists also confirmed that clarity near the shore is worse than it is a mile off shore.

One of Lake Tahoe's greatest assets is its beautiful shoreline. When we wade into its crisp water, we can often see clear down to our toes. When we swim, we may spot white sand and boulders 20 or 30 feet down. A vast majority of people enjoy the lake's clarity from shallow areas.

Tahoe's shoreline beauty is deteriorating rapidly. More and more, we see algae blooms, water weeds and silt along the shoreline. These are signs that the shoreline ecosystem is rapidly changing. Public concern is rising.



Rochelle Nason

State leaders who gathered this week for the Tahoe Summit should be on alert that Tahoe's shoreline environment is threatened. Protecting shoreline clarity is essential for a healthy ecosystem and economy. The League to Save Lake Tahoe, also known as "Keep Tahoe Blue," is committed to working with policy makers to find and implement solutions.

What are the culprits?

Scientists are still getting a handle on what is causing shoreline deterioration. We know invasive species like Asian clams thrive on nutrients, then produce waste that causes algae blooms. Scientists are examining how boat pollution may remain more concentrated near the shore and cause nutrient spikes. Invasive plants, animal waste, fertilizer runoff and sediment are also concerns. And sadly, old drainage pipes still spew urban runoff directly onto Tahoe's beaches.

An obvious culprit could be the thousands of tons of road sand applied during the winter season. Cars grind up sand into fine particles and, as the snow melts, this silt hitches a ride to the lake.

What is being done?

To keep that sand out of Tahoe, a simple solution is better street sweeping. Some of Tahoe's old street sweepers stir up more dust than they collect. The League has been urging jurisdictions to use low-nutrient sand, reduce sand application, use better street sweepers, and sweep more often.

In addition, Tahoe's boat inspection program must remain strong. Inspections are critical to preventing aquatic invasive species that could permanently disrupt Tahoe's shoreline ecosystem. The threat is now closer than ever, as reservoirs near Reno have tested positive for destructive quagga mussels.

The League is also urging policymakers to create comprehensive shoreline protection programs. These programs should include clear standards, practicable solutions and a measured strategy for success. Finally, restoring Tahoe's watershed is the key to protecting its water quality. Policy makers should retain strong limits on building footprints, and ensure property owners install runoff control measures. Tahoe also needs continued federal and state funding to upgrade old drainage

infrastructure and restore disturbed wetlands.

Thousands of people a year are drawn to Tahoe to enjoy its shoreline beauty. Restoring deepwater clarity and protecting Tahoe's shore must go hand in hand. A blue Tahoe means a clear shore.

Rochelle Nason is executive director of the League to Save Lake Tahoe.

South Tahoe may layoff 2 dozen to close $5.2 mil. deficit

Publisher's note: *This is the first of two stories about South Lake Tahoe's fiscal situation.*

By Kathryn Reed

South Lake Tahoe has 43 days to figure out how to close a $5.2 million budget deficit. That's the start of the next fiscal – Oct. 1. The reality is the deadline is 25 days from now because the City Council is expected to approve the 2011-12 budget Sept. 13.

What seems to be a constantly increasing ledger of red has to do with the potential loss of $1.3 million a year depending on the outcome with the state regarding redevelopment agencies, property taxes and the associated income from this source like vehicle license fees continuing to drop below expectations, and the bulk of the bargaining units not making concessions to their pension and health care benefits as hoped and budgeted for in the five-year financial plan approved earlier this

year.



As a tourist destination, South Lake Tahoe's economy is expected to recover more slowly than other regions. While economists argue whether the nation is about to enter another recession, many locals don't believe the Lake Tahoe Basin ever emerged from the one that began three years ago.

The South Shore is in a worse state than the nation as a whole. Unemployment is near 17 percent, the value of single-family residences has declined by 35 percent since 2006, about 40 percent of the houses on the market are in foreclosure, and hotel occupancy is at 23 percent.

Considering property and hotel taxes are two of the three largest revenue sources for South Lake Tahoe, the above paragraph points to two of the reasons why the general fund is not healthy.

With sixty-seven cents of every dollar in the general fund going toward employee salaries and benefits, this is another large component of what is hurting the city's financial health.

Looking at city figures, some of which are provided in the Aug. 23 staff report, the combined property tax, transient occupancy tax and sales tax from 2008-09 compared to the next fiscal year has dropped by 3 percent. Those are the three main revenue sources for South Lake Tahoe.

And even though the city's workforce has decreased by 42 positions or 17 percent since fiscal year 2009, the employees are still the biggest drain on the general fund. But that is the case for most organizations and is not unique to South Lake Tahoe.

On the Aug. 23 City Council agenda is the five-year financial

plan’s quarterly update. While the staff report by Finance Director Christine Vuletich says, “The City’s General Fund revenues are estimated to grow slowly, at approximately 1.5 percent annually over the next five years,” it doesn’t mention the nearly two dozen employees who are likely to add to the 16.7 percent unemployment rate when they are terminated next month if city employees don’t make concessions.

Of the city’s seven bargaining units, only the fire association has come to the table, with the intent of agreeing to the concessions asked for by the city. This also ensures their jobs are intact.

It has been this administration and council’s philosophy that frontline staff should have their jobs preserved while middle management positions are flattened.

That scenario is one that is being playing out across the country – though mostly in the private sector.

The general services group is the only bargaining unit that must negotiate this year because its contract is up at the end of September. But they only started negotiating in the last couple weeks after having become part of the Teamsters.

Aug. 23 is only the second time this year that in closed the council will have discussed labor negotiations. That is not because the council has not wanted to move forward, but because the employees have been dragging their feet.

This council has made it known it will not dip into reserves to make ends meet – which is what employees are used to.

What is being asked of employees is for them to pay their share of their pension costs as well as part of their health care expenses.

Even if employees were to agree to the proposals by the city that would save $1.5 million through pension and health care

changes, layoffs would be necessary because of the ever-increasing budget deficit.

It has been known for months if the employee groups don't help defray costs – $1 million a year in savings if they pay their PERS and $500,000 with health care changes – jobs will be lost.

Of the nearly two-dozen positions that may be axed, three are definitely going away, according to O'Rourke. Those are the division chiefs in the fire department. The three are in an associatin by themselves and are technically at impasse with the city.

Sources have told *Lake Tahoe News* the nine captains will be asked to do more, and that eliminating the three division chiefs will be part of the budget plan the council will vote on next month no matter what.

Other jobs going away are the captain's position in the police department when Martin Hewlett retires early next year. The department will run with five sergeants instead of seven.

The police chief for the next year is also the fire chief.

Who else will be in the unemployment line remains to be seen. It's still possible through collective bargaining jobs will be saved.

At several council meetings the topic of privatization of entities besides the ice rink has been broached. If that goes forward, positions could be eliminated that way.

Another issue on the table, according to employee groups, is the elimination of incentive pay.

"Educational degrees and state certification programs were the largest factors for the incentive programs so that the PD would be made up of seasoned and well trained cops and full of rookies. I would suspect that public works had similar things

to strive for such as master mechanics or other technical degrees an employee could secure and then be paid for their experience gained," a former police officer said in an email obtained by *Lake Tahoe News*.

It is not known how much this would save the city if this were to be enacted.

El Dorado County supervisorial districts up for a vote

El Dorado County supervisors are expected to vote Sept. 13 on the redistricting plan, with the first reading Aug. 23.

On the agenda for next week is having the current district that encompasses the South Shore expanding west. It would have the district now represented by Norma Santiago include the entire basin.

Some of the earlier proposals called for splitting the Lake Tahoe portion of El Dorado County into two supervisorial districts as had been done in the past.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Residents assess damage from Ray May Fire; containment expected Friday

Updated: 8:30pm Aug. 18

By Jeff Delong, Reno Gazette-Journal

Making good progress against a wildfire raging in Douglas County's Pine Nut Mountains, fire officials said Thursday they expect to have the blaze fully surrounded by fire lines by 6pm Friday.

The Ray May Fire was reported 70 percent contained Thursday after burning more than 3,600 acres or nearly six square miles.

"We're slowly corralling the fire," said Keith Barker, incident commander for the U.S. Bureau of Land Management. "We're getting a lot of good work done."

The fire was started Tuesday by two 15-year-old boys who had built an illegal campfire at a makeshift fort near the southern Douglas County community of Pine View Estates, authorities said. The pair is charged with felony arson.

One unoccupied home near the fire's origin burned Tuesday, and as the fire rocketed through tinder-dry pinon-juniper forests Wednesday, it destroyed a guest house and five outbuildings to the northeast in the Ruby Mine area near Pine Nut Creek. Two firefighters suffered injuries.

Musician David John, who fled advancing flames before dawn Wednesday, returned home Thursday to find his guest house, garage and a greenhouse destroyed. His home survived the fire.

"That's what happens with forest fires, I guess," John said.

“They saved the house, I’m happy to say.”

John was more upset over the skeletonized moonscape that used to be the forest he loved.

“It ain’t too pretty up here anymore,” said John, who has lost a home before to a fire. “It’s all burnt. All those trees are gone. They won’t ever again look like they did in my lifetime.”

Some remote structures, less than 20, remained in danger, Barker said.

“We’ve got people that are out there off the grid,” Barker said. “They are very remote homesteads, very isolated.”

While the fire is expected to be fully contained late Friday, “it’s certainly going to be a few days” before it is fully controlled and all interior fire extinguished, Barker said.

The fire burned in particularly dense stands of pinon-juniper that had not burned in a long time, Barker said.

Read the whole story

Opinion: Another round of McCarthyism

By Stephen D. Foster Jr., Addicting Info

Get ready for another round of McCarthyism. Mitt Romney, Michele Bachmann, and Rick Santorum have all signed a pledge to form a commission to investigate the LGBT community if elected President.

This pledge was created by the National Organization For Marriage, and they have a history of extreme views against homosexuals and anyone who votes to extend marriage rights to them.

The pledge reads as follows.

I, [candidate name], pledge to the American people that if elected President, I will:

[…] establish a presidential commission on religious liberty to investigate and document reports of Americans who have been harassed or threatened for exercising key civil rights to organize, to speak, to donate or to vote for marriage and to propose new protections, if needed.

In other words, the extreme right wing is going to persecute homosexuals on a whole new level if they have power after the 2012 Election. Homosexuals and supporters of marriage equality will be intimidated, interrogated, and stripped of their right to speak freely. The religious right wing has been allowed to push their un-American and unconstitutional agenda for far too long. Americans must push back. If we continue to do nothing, we could all be persecuted by this fanatical group.

Wine event for Can Do MS

Wine lovers can enjoy early fall in the Sierra at the 23rd annual Alpen Wine Festival on Sept. 4 from 2-5pm at the Village at Squaw Valley.

All proceeds from the festival benefit Can Do Multiple Sclerosis, a national nonprofit organization sponsoring lifestyle empowerment programs for people with MS and their

support partners.

For a $40 donation, guests can enjoy wine from more than 40 Northern California vineyards as live jazz from the Jackie Landrum Band and the Tristan Selzler Trio is played.

Guests can peruse the silent auction and raffle, which includes Squaw Valley lodging packages, shopping sprees, restaurant gift certificates, lift tickets, art and unique wines by the bottle and case.

Last year the Alpen Wine Festival raised more than $25,000 for Can Do MS.

Tickets for the event will be available on site at 1pm. The majority of wines served at the event will be available for purchase at Uncorked at Squaw in the Village at Squaw Valley.

Farmers market in S. Tahoe for people needing food assistance

The Food Bank of El Dorado County, in partnership with California Emergency FoodLink, will provide its first free farmers market of the season Aug. 19 at 1:30pm n South Lake Tahoe.

This event takes place at Saint Theresa Church at 1041 Lyons Ave.

This market will provide fresh produce to El Dorado County residents who are currently in need of emergency food assistance.

This outreach is a collaborative effort between the Food Bank of El Dorado County and California Emergency Foodlink of Sacramento. To meet the demanding needs in current tough economic times, both the Food Bank and Foodlink have reached out to growers from as far away as the Central Valley this season to acquire a great quantity of quality produce that will be distributed in three regional events over the two months.

For more information, call Mike Sproull at the Food Bank at (530) 621.9950.

Volunteers needed for annual Forest Stewardship Day

The 2011 Tahoe Forest Stewardship Day is partnering with the Incline Village General Improvement District to focus on fuel reduction, native vegetation rehabilitation, trail and stream restoration, biomass cleanup and educational outreach.

The 14th annual event is Sept. 10 from 9am-2pm in Incline Village. It is open to all ages.

Wear sturdy shoes, long pants and bring water and snacks. Tools are provided.

Orientation is at 8:30am at the Village Green Park, 960 Lakeshore Blvd., Incline.

For more information, call (530) 541.5388.

Placerville mayor arrested on perjury, conspiracy allegations

By Carlos Alcalá, Sacramento Bee

Placerville Mayor David J. Machado has been arrested on allegations of perjury and conspiracy in connection with his interest in property within the Placerville Redevelopment Zone.

Machado failed to disclose his interest in the property and tried to conceal evidence while voting to approve the zone and taking actions on behalf of the property, according to a criminal complaint issued by the El Dorado County District Attorney.

Read the whole story

Weekend of golf helps military members hurt or killed in action

For Patriot Golf Day 2011, Old Greenwood and the Golf Club at Gray’s Crossing have planned a Labor Day weekend of events to raise money in support of families of military persons who were killed or disabled while in service. A portion of all

proceeds will go to The Folds of Honor Foundation.

Patriot Golf Day is the flagship fundraiser for the Folds of Honor Foundation, a nonprofit organization that provides post secondary educational scholarships for the children and spouses of military men and women disabled or killed while serving. The Patriot Golf Day campaign is jointly supported by the PGA of America and the United States Golf Association.

In honor of Patriot Day Sept. 1-5 green fees are $100 at both courses; twilight rate is $75. For a tee time, general information and a complete listing of 2011 season rates, go online. Golf reservations may be made up to 30 days in advance. Special NCGA rates are available. Or call (530) 550.5800 for Gray’s Crossing and (530) 550.7010 for Old Greenwood.

Patriot Golf Day has raised more than $8 million in the past four years, and the Folds of Honor Foundation has awarded more than 2,100 scholarships.