Snowpack reduces risk of wildfires in Sierra – for now

By Jeff Delong, Reno Gazette-Journal

A hefty mountain snowpack and a cool, moist spring will reduce risks of major wildfires in Northern Nevada and the Sierra through June, fire experts said Thursday.

Fire danger will be a little greater this month in a drier Southern Nevada, while grass crops nourished by wet weather could make for active fires in the north later in the season and next year.

“There will be a late start to the fire season. We’ll probably skip most of the entire month of June,” Fred Svetz, fire weather program manager for the U.S. Bureau of Land Management in Reno, said of the situation in the Reno-Tahoe area.

June fire forecasts released by the Western Great Basin Coordinating Center and the National Interagency Fire Center in Boise cited a below-normal fire potential in both Northern Nevada and Northern California.

Read the whole story

Carson City to celebrate Old West heritage

The 28th annual Carson City Rendezvous, the area’s largest special event, returns June 10–12 to celebrate the Wild West and Civil War era history.

The 150th anniversary of President Abraham Lincoln’s presidential inauguration is one of many new events for the free three-day Civil War-era living history set at Mills Park.

The opening ceremony will be a special re-enactment of the inauguration of Abraham Lincoln, the nation’s 16th president, at Mills Park that Saturday at 10am.

To commemorate the Lincoln presidency, Rendezvous participants and encampments will join in a pageant of costume and theater, followed by a special swearing in of U.S. citizens by the U.S. Naturalization and Immigration Department. The opening ceremony will feature a special re-enactment of the inauguration Abraham Lincoln.

The Rendezvous is noted for portraying the lifestyle of early Nevada settlers, complete with gun skirmishes, mountain man encampments and trapping demonstrations. Organizers this year have moved the famous Civil War-era gun battles from afternoon to dusk, to capture the backdrop of live-fire, flash-bang rounds exploded from muskets.

The event is where the authentic and re-enactment collide, whether it’s the lingering smell of gunpowder after musket battle demonstrations, the boom of Civil War-era cannons or the taste of beans and bacon cooked in cast-iron dutch ovens over an open fire.

The all-ages event runs Friday from noon-9pm, Saturday from 10am-9pm and Sunday, 10am-5pm.

For more information, go online or call (775) 687.7410.

Opinion: Governor all wrong to raise taxes

By Ted Gaines

Every May the governor releases an updated version of his January budget proposal. This year's "May Revise" shows that Gov. Jerry Brown is dead set on growing government and raising taxes.

The new budget proposal has bits of good news. California's economy is so massive that even our weak economic recovery is generating an unexpected $6.6 billion in additional tax revenue this year. Gov. Brown has wisely chosen to use some of the money to pay down debt. He is also proposing to eliminate some deadweight state boards and 5,500 government employee positions.



Ted Gaines

The good news ends there. Remarkably, when the state is buckling under massive deficits year after year, Gov. Brown's detached-from-reality plan proposes increasing government spending 27 percent over the next three years.

To pay for his plan the governor wants to take an extra $58 billion in new taxes from families and businesses through a five-year extension of the historic 2009 "temporary" tax increase that is set to expire this month. He has embraced these higher taxes and will not let them go, even though the

voters overwhelmingly rejected even a three-year extension just two years ago.

I do not support higher taxes on Californians. I want businesses to be able to keep their money and invest it, to expand and create jobs. I want families to keep more of their money to pay their bills, buy school clothes, take vacations and determine their own spending priorities.

The nation is struggling through the slowest economic recovery from any recession since World War II. California's recovery is slower still, and our unemployment rate is around 12 percent. Only a wildly out-of-touch political class could think about forcing families to break out their wallets and pay another $1,000 a year to support an oversized state government.

Now is the time to be questioning why it costs California nearly $50,000 a year to house a prisoner. Why does California have around 12 percent of the nation's population but a third of its welfare cases? Why did a survey of business leaders just rank California the worst state to do business – for the seventh year in a row?

California needs a government that provides basic public services at a price that taxpayers can afford. To suggest growing the public sector and raising taxes now, Brown's May Revise shows he is ignoring any meaningful reform and is intent on implementing the same tax-and-spend agenda that created our permanent budget crisis.

Ted Gaines represents Lake Tahoe in the California Senate.

Shuttered South Tahoe hotel may be turned into park

By Kathryn Reed

Edgewood Companies will have the rooms it needs to build a lodge on its Stateline golf course and South Lake Tahoe will have a park to replace a blighted, boarded up hotel.

That's the proposal on the table. The City Council is scheduled to make the final decision when it meets Tuesday at 9am at Lake Tahoe Airport.

City Manager Tony O'Rourke and Edgewood's project manager Brandon Hill separately told *Lake Tahoe News* the agreement is an excellent example of a public-private partnership that benefits the South Shore community aesthetically and economically.



The proposed Bonanza Park. Rendering/Design Workshop

What the council has to decide June 7 is if the development rights Edgewood has regarding tourist accommodation units in the city can be transferred to Stateline.

Because the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency has set an arbitrary number for how many hotel rooms can ever be built in

the basin, these TAUs are now a commodity. It also means to be able to build something a developer needs to secure the TAUs before permitting would be allowed.

Edgewood is in the process of creating a hotel on its Stateline golf course. It has 194 TAUs in the city limits. One hundred forty-four of those have already been approved for transfer. They come from Redevelopment Area 3, a Ski Run project and the old Colony Inn. The remaining 50 are before the council. They are from the C&M Lodge on Bonanza Avenue.

Edgewood bought that property near the Y (nearest cross street is D Street) in November for $850,000 with the sole purpose of wanting the TAUs.

O’Rourke said a long-term benefit to the city is the Edgewood Lodge guests – who are expected to be at an income level not often seen on the South Shore – are projected to bring in more than $2 million in sales tax over a 30-year period.

To sweeten the deal Edgewood is proposing to pay for the demolition of the hotel that still sits on the nearly 1-acre parcel and turn it into a park.



The defunct hotel on Bonanza Avenue may become a park. Photo/LTN

The company has met with stakeholders, including the city’s

Sustainability, Parks and Recreation, and Latino Affairs commissions. Then they went to the neighbors. This area is really a residential area, with apartment complexes and single-family residences.

“We invited over 200 people to the two outreach events in May and over 100 participated in the feedback process. Two-thirds of the participants were actual residents from the Bonanza neighborhood,” Hill said. “The process we used was, with the help of Design Workshop, a very hands-on approach. We sat, we listened, we gathered people around tables and asked them to draw what they would like to see in the park based on the following success factors: a) it would be well used; b) it could be implemented this year; c) it would use sustainable strategies; d) it would be cost-effective to maintain.”

What Edgewood proposes to build is a park that includes a children’s play area, grass play area, picnic pods, half-court basketball court, and a fenced-in dog park area.

The city for a number of years has talked about creating pocket parks so residents have a place within walking distance for gathering and limited recreation. Available land and the cost of creating them have stalled the process.

This would be the first one – and at no cost to the city except for eventual upkeep.

O’Rourke estimates it will cost the city about $7,000 a year to maintain what is being called Bonanza Park.

Hill expects it to cost his company about $200,000 to build the park. The plan is start demolition on the hotel as soon as the council gives the go-ahead. The goal is the park will be ready to be used before next winter.

“Upon completion of the park improvements, the land and park improvements will be dedicated or conveyed to the city,” Hill said.

Zoval pleads not guilty to wire fraud

By Jessie Marchesseau

At a hearing Friday before a federal court judge, Lori Zoval pleaded not guilty to charges of wire fraud. A jury trial date is set for Sept. 13.

Zoval, a South Lake Tahoe woman indicted in July 2010 on three charges of wire fraud stemming from an alleged investment fraud scheme in 2005-06, was working as an investment banker in Folsom at the time.

The U.S. Attorney's Office offered Zoval a plea agreement in February. She decided not to take it.

"They submitted an offer that was just a little high," Zoval's attorney, Mark Reichel, told *Lake Tahoe News*. "But they've only heard one side of the story."

Reichel said that even though the potential sentence for the charges against Zoval are relatively low, additional time can be added on for what is known as uncharged relevant conduct. This means that Zoval's sentence could be increased for behavior for which she is not formally charged, something reflected in the plea agreement.

"The way I see it, there's a lot of equities in (Zoval's) corner," Reichel said. "Not every time money is lost, does it mean a crime was committed."

Lake Tahoe News reported in February about Zoval's alleged involvement in another investment scheme while employed by Holly's Place, a South Lake Tahoe vacation resort. The FBI has

been in contact with the owners of Holly's Place. However, no charges have been brought against Zoval concerning her interactions there.

The prosecuting attorney, Assistant U.S. Attorney Camil Skipper, could not be reached for comment.

A trial confirmation hearing is set for Aug. 26.

Landscape workshops for Spanish speakers

Tahoe Green Landscaper Workshop series will focus on conservation landscaping techniques for Spanish speaking landscapers and contractors.

Topics include: soils, irrigation, integrated pest management and more.

The dates are June 21-23 and June 28-30. The first week is from 4:30-6:30pm, the second is from 4:30-7:30pm.

To register or to get more information, go online.

Ritz at Northstar under new ownership

By Jason Hildago, Reno Gazette-Journal

The Ritz-Carlton, Lake Tahoe will end its court-appointed receivership later this month as the luxury resort gets new ownership.

The resort at mid-mountain at Northstar-at-Tahoe is scheduled to have its official ownership change on June 27, according to Steven Holt, Ritz-Carlton, Lake Tahoe public relations director.



The Ritz at Northstar is under new ownership. Photo/LTN file

Holt said the name of the resort's new owner will also be announced on that date, and the property will continue to be managed under the Ritz-Carlton brand.

"The Ritz-Carlton never owned the property," he said. "We've always been a management company."

The new ownership marks the end of a rocky period in the new resort's history, which was at risk for foreclosure after Bank of America filed a notice of default against the property's developer, Avon, Colo.-based East West Resort Development, on March 31, 2010.

Read the whole story

Block owner arrested in Vegas; Tahoe wants him extradited

By Kathryn Reed

Eneliko “Sean” Smith, former owner of the boarded up Block Hotel in South Lake Tahoe, was arrested June 2 in Las Vegas on driving under the influence charges.

Smith, 40, was being held without bail at Clark County Detention Facility. He is also being held on a warrant out of El Dorado County for a probation violation. South Lake Tahoe officials plan to extradite Smith back to El Dorado County to face charges.



Eneliko
“Sean” Smith

Even though it has been well documented Smith was living in Las Vegas and attempting to start an airline there, local officials never had him picked up. And it was in Las Vegas where Smith was arrested in September 2008 on the initial charges out of South Lake Tahoe.

He owes the city more than $100,000 in unpaid taxes.

In March 2008 the South Lake Tahoe Police Department began an investigation into Smith's failure to pay the transient occupancy tax for the hotel on Cedar Avenue. During the investigation, which also involved other city staff, Smith's Cedar Lodge was also found to be in arrears in paying the hotel tax.

A lien was eventually placed on the properties and Smith was charged with felony embezzlement of public funds.

Both properties were closed by the city in 2008.

Smith pleaded guilty to one count of grand theft and was placed on probation with a condition to reimburse the city the money it was owed. Smith violated probation by failing to keep his probation officer up to date as to where he lived and he never paid a dime. Thus the reasons for the current warrant.

The Block opened in the mid-1990s as a hotel designed for snowboarders. Pro snowboarder Marc Franc Montoya opened it with his brother-in-law Smith.



The Block in South Lake Tahoe on June 3, 2011. Photo/LTN

"All of our rooms include items like cordless phones, CD players, PS2/XBOX, board up racks and free Wi-Fi. Other amenities include free beer, energy drinks, gift bags, popcorn, Internet cafe, and rooftop hot tub," the promotions

said.

The Block was happening in its brief heyday. The parking lot was full. The parties were legendary among the younger snowboarding crowd. A reality TV show on G4 was launched in 2007.

Now the hotel is boarded up, with a chain link fence around the perimeter and graffiti in some locations. It sits behind the bankrupt would-have, could-have been convention center property.

Plein air art event in Markleeville

Fifteen artists from the area are going to Alpine County to capture some of our local beauty in their paintings.

From June 21-25 the public is invited to the Markleeville Plein Air Event. “En plein air” is a French term meaning “in the open air” or out-of-doors.

While many artists make sketches while outdoors and use photographs to work from, the plein air artist sets up an easel in a desirable spot and works each of the many steps involved right there. All of the artists at this event will be capturing landscapes while dealing with winds, heat or cold, wildlife, changes in sun and shadow, and people watching over their shoulders.

Host and organizer Evelyn Yonker will help people find the artists at various key locations in the county. She will have a map and information available at the Markleeville Art

Gallery, 14841 Highway 89, next to the Markleeville Post Office.

Location information will also be posted online.

Many artists prefer the light conditions of early morning or evening, as that light lends more color than the noon sun.

Some of the spots will be Hope Valley and Woodfords Canyon, the East Fork of the Carson River, Markleeville Falls near Grover Hot Springs, and downtown Markleeville. Artists may choose any spot any day, except Saturday morning when all artists will be working in the town of Markleeville.

On June 25 from 2-4pm, there will be a reception at the Stone Fly Restaurant in downtown Markleeville with the artists and art collectors. The cost is $25 and space is limited. Call (530) 694.2787 to make a reservation.

All artwork produced will be for sale through the Markleeville Art Gallery. The gallery will exhibit the finished paintings to the public on June 25t from 6-9pm. The artwork will be at the gallery until July 31.

The gallery will be open daily from 10am until 6pm throughout the summer and fall.

All 15 artists are: Charles Muench, Thaleia Georgiades, Randall Tillery, Michael Bagdonas, Lady Jill Mueller, Bonita Paulis, Ray Freeman, Ron Schlorff, Sandy Baenen, Peter Chope, Kit Night, Ida Glazier, Erik Holland, Emma Auriemma-McKay and Greg Drinkwine.

Public hearing to address basin fees in El Dorado County

El Dorado County Board of Supervisors is scheduled to vote on a series of fees affecting Lake Tahoe Basin residents at the June 21 9am meeting.

The mosquito abatement and snow removal fees are not changing. The $6 and $20, respective, fees are the same annual charge property owners pay now. The board has to have a public hearing about them each year.

Neither fee has increased for about a decade or more.

The one fee that is slated to go up is garbage rates for people living in the Tahoma area. Per the franchise agreement, Tahoe Truckee Sierra Disposal is seeking to increase the monthly price by 5 percent. Most residents are on the 32-gallon can pickup at the current rate of $23.28/month. It’s proposed to go to $24.44/month.

The meeting is at 330 Fair Lane in Placerville.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report