Unmanned aircraft being used to fight wildfires

By Kimberlie Nitti, Emergency Management

A wildfire's thick black smoke blots out the sun, cloaking the area in a premature dusk. Glowing embers spiral up through the haze. A small camera-equipped aircraft skirts a wall of flames on a dangerous mission to record hot spots and track the fire's progression.

That is, it would be dangerous if an actual pilot was on board. But this is an unmanned aircraft, capable of venturing into areas too remote or deadly to risk human life. The pilotless plane, also known as an unmanned aircraft system (UAS) or unmanned aerial vehicle, transmits collected sensor data to emergency response teams on the ground that use the information to strategically allocate fire fighting resources.

Unmanned aircraft are revolutionizing the aerospace industry. No longer solely for military use, UASs have increasing potential for civilian and commercial applications, particularly with regard to emergency response and relief efforts. They can be used for environmental research, law enforcement, border surveillance, search and rescue operations, damage assessment, and recovery efforts following natural disasters. Ideal for situations where it's too dangerous or difficult to use manned aircraft, unmanned aircraft often cost less and can stay in the air longer – as long as four days without refueling.

"Resources are always at a premium in an emergency situation," said retired Los Angeles firefighter David Badgett. "Sometimes it's best to drop water with a manned helicopter. Other times it's better to send in a UAS for observation. Unmanned aircraft give incident commanders more options, so they can

select the most appropriate tool for any given mission.”

Already in use in some states, UASs successfully performed search and rescue missions in Louisiana and Texas during the 2008 hurricanes. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration uses them to hunt down hurricanes and communicate data to the National Hurricane Center in Florida. Police departments in Houston and Miami have tested law enforcement programs using the systems. In California, NASA scientists developed an unmanned aircraft, called the Ikhana, which has proven useful in battling wildfires. Special heat sensors installed in the Ikhana map fire locations by temperature and transmit hot spot information to multiagency coordination centers and firefighters on the ground.

Read the whole story

Boomers transform the business world

By Cathie Gandel, AARP Bulletin

From age-defying beauty serums to tummy tucks and a penchant for sushi, boomers have made billion-dollar industries out of countless products and services that barely existed when the first of the 78 million-strong generation was born in 1946.

Just as they transformed society in the 1960s, creative boomer entrepreneurs and big-spending boomer consumers have dramatically overhauled the marketplace. In 2009 alone, Americans ages 50 to 65 laid out an average $42,600 per person on products and services, half of all consumer spending, according to the financial services website Bundle.

That spending cut into savings, and now the generation turning 65 is wondering if all those dollars should have been salted away for retirement, especially since many boomers can expect to live into their 90s. Their fallback nest eggs – home equity, 401(k)s, investments, personal savings – were hammered by the long recession.

In fact, there is a $6.6 trillion shortfall between what Americans need to retire and what they will have, according to a 2010 study by the Center for Retirement Research at Boston College for Retirement USA, a coalition of labor and pension rights advocates.

“Many boomers have not saved enough,” says Olivia S. Mitchell, director of the Boettner Center for Pensions and Retirement Research at the University of Pennsylvania’s Wharton School, “particularly if they intend to retire before 70.”

But maybe boomers will do what they’re good at and reinvent retirement – just as they reinvented much of the marketplace.

Read the whole story

Opinion: Region must set realistic goals for development

By Chuck Alvey

What are we now and what do we want to become as an economic region? One of those is an important question and the other is a critical answer.

I recenty attended DCI Summit 2011 in New York City, a two-day roundtable hosted by Development Counsellors International, the firm that handles national media relations for the Economic Development Authority of Western Nevada.

CEOs from six economic development organizations from throughout the U.S. met with 12 site consultants – executives who represent companies looking to relocate or expand. We shared ideas and trends in site location, industries and marketing.

What we are now is an important answer because it is how such corporate site selection experts perceive Nevada as a potential place to do business. About 30 percent of company expansions and relocations are managed by independent experts. EDAWN has worked for years to develop and maintain relationships with these consultants.

At Summit 2011 they indicated they like to receive information from communities like Greater Reno-Tahoe, but they emphasized the information should be actual, not aspirational. Often communities and states will claim what type of economic sector they want to become rather than reporting what they are. Aspirational messages don't help site consultants or companies build confidence in considering operating in Nevada (the consultants indicated EDAWN sends actual, not aspirational, messages).

Chuck Alvey is president and CEO of EDAWN – Economic Development Authority of Western Nevada.

Read the whole story

Fishing season in Lake Tahoe lures locals and tourists

By Susan Wood

With a whale of a fish already caught in Emerald Bay this spring, the 2011 fishing season may turn out to be a memorable one for Lake Tahoe enthusiasts and guides.

The little tykes and younger set have received a boost from the state and the El Dorado County community because Sawmill Pond will be stocked with plenty of fish. The formal season for the popular family fishing hole where Lake Tahoe Boulevard and Sawmill Road intersect starts April 30, though people were out there April 10.

Last year, California was unable to contribute to stocking the pond, sending the community scrambling to secure private funds for the venture.



Fishing is free and only for those 14 and younger at Sawmill Pond on the South Shore. Photo/Kathryn Reed

This spring, the California Department of Fish & Game intends to supply the pond with 250 pounds of Lahontan cutthroat trout – the native fish that is mandated, but was unavailable to the state in great numbers from hatcheries last year.

Private groups already came through this winter with their donations – including two Tahoe rotary clubs contributing $8,500 for the effort. About $15,000 is needed to get the pond up to par for the annual Sawmill Pond Kid's Fishing Derby put on by the Optimist Club on June 11, El Dorado County Fish and Game Commissioner Victor Babbitt indicated. The derby is open to children ages 14 and younger.

Babbitt, who runs Tahoe Fly Fishing Outfitters in South Lake Tahoe, predicts 2011 to be a good year for fishing in the rivers and lakes.

During drought years, it's tougher for fish to survive with less flow in the waterways. They won't have that problem with the high flows and phenomenal runoff expected this year. Whitewater blankets the American River.

However, it may be harder early on for those who fish to negotiate their spots.

"We'll still have high flows right up to the opener," Babbitt said.

Even ice fishing may last longer with the big winter in the Sierra Nevada.

Among other places, Babbitt sends fishing enthusiasts to Indian Creek Reservoir and Cave Rock if they're venturing onto Lake Tahoe. The limit on the lake is five, with no more than two Mackinaw trout, according to California Fish & Game regulations.

On the Carson River, the East Fork is always closed to fishing above Carson Falls. Below them, it is allowed all year.

All the tributaries leading into the lake remain closed until July 1. For the season opener, one may fish 1,000 feet below the Lake Tahoe outlet dam on the Truckee River. The minimum size requirement is 14 inches. Only artificial lures with barbless hooks may be used.

Winter is fair game on the lake



Gene St. Denis holds an 11-pound, 4-ounce German brown trout caught in Lake Tahoe. Photo/Provided

Chuck Lane got a jump on the fishing season by braving 29-degree, blustery weather a few weeks ago to catch a mega German brown trout in Emerald Bay with his Lake Tahoe guide Gene St. Denis of Blue Ribbon Fishing.

“We were the only boat out there. Emerald Bay was howling,” said St. Denis, who logs at least 200 days on the water. The trout they hauled in St. Denis considered “rare.”

The fish weighing 11 pounds, 4 ounces and measuring 32 inches took a lot of fishing line from the Morgan Hill man, but he expected a longer fight.

“He didn’t fight that much in the cold. If I had caught him in the summertime, I don’t how long it would have taken,” Lane said. He agreed with his wife, Barbara, who called it a

“bucket list” venture.

“I’ve always had a big desire to catch a German brown. I’ve become enamored with it. It’s a beautiful fish, and it tastes really good,” Lane said while at Harrah’s Reno for a bowling tournament. The fish meat is considered rich.

Lane took the fish to the casino kitchen to cook it. He got one serving and treated the cooking staff to the rest.

As a decade-long ritual, Lane comes up to Tahoe from the Bay Area to fish and ski. With his luck, some may wonder if he should hit the tables.

‘Tahoe Beneath the Surface’ lecture in Incline

Author Scott Lankford will present a public lecture from 6-7pm June 1 at the Tahoe Center for Environmental Sciences about what lurks beneath the surface of Lake Tahoe.

The event will be in the assembly room 139, 291 Country Club Drive, Incline Village.

Tickets are $10 for the general public and no charge for students with valid student identification.

“Tahoe Beneath the Surface” brings the hidden history of America’s largest mountain lake to life through the stories of its most celebrated residents and visitors over the last ten thousand years. It mixes local Washoe Indian legends with tales of murderous Mafia dons, and Rat Pack tunes with Steinbeck novels. It establishes Tahoe as one of America s literary hot spots by tracing the steps of more than a dozen

authors including Bertrand Russell, Maxine Hong Kingston, and Michael Ondaatje.

“Tahoe beneath the Surface” reveals how the lake transformed the lives of conservationists like John Muir, humorists like Mark Twain, and Hollywood icons like Frank Sinatra. It even touches upon some of the darker aspects of American history, including anti-Chinese racism and the Kennedy assassination.

Despite the impact Lake Tahoe has had on America, environmental threats loom large, and Tahoe Blue a term that Lankford uses to encompass the whole range of life, beauty, and meaning the lake represents grows increasingly vulnerable. In “Tahoe beneath the Surface,” human history and natural history combine in a most engaging way, one that will both inform and inspire all who would keep Tahoe blue.

Pyramid Lake trying to get handle on invasive species

By Jeff Delong, Reno Gazette-Journal

Potential danger to Pyramid Lake from invading mollusks has the attention of the Pyramid Lake Paiute Tribe, which is taking steps to avoid a problem that could come with dire environmental and economic damage.

The Tribal Council recently approved regulatory changes which, among other things, will begin a boater education program and the voluntary inspection of some boats launching into the desert lake.

The effort is designed to avoid the possible infestation of

quagga mussels, which tribal officials acknowledge would be a disaster.

“These mussels could absolutely destroy all the hard work that’s been done,” said Scott Carey, tribal planner.

Read the whole story

South Tahoe blood drives

Barton Auxiliary blood drive dates are June 6, Aug. 1, Oct. 3 and Dec. 5. They are at the El Dorado County Library in South Lake Tahoe from 11am-6pm.

For more information, contact Dan Kerr at (775) 781.5354.

Paul Revere & The Raiders

Paul Revere & The Raiders at Harrah’s Lake Tahoe on May 28 at 7:30pm. Tickets are $37.50.

For more South Shore Room information, call 800.786.8208.

Independence Lake meetings

The Nature Conservancy is welcoming public ideas and feedback about the recreation and access management plan currently under way for Independence Lake located in Northern California in the Sierra Nevada mountains.

The Nature Conservancy is offering several ways for the public to provide input. The first method will be two public meetings.

* April 18 at the Loyalton Social Hall – Open House 5:30, 6pm meeting, 105 Beckwith St., Loyalton.

* April 19 at the Truckee Town Hall – Open House 5:30, 6pm meeting, 10183 Truckee Airport Road, Truckee.

Additionally, the Nature Conservancy has set up an online survey to collect input on specific strategies related to management issues. To ensure each person may only fill out the survey once, sign-in is required.

An independent blog has also been set up to provide information about the issues and public outreach process.

The Nature Conservancy acquired property around Independence Lake in spring 2010 and is currently working with partners, including the Truckee Donner Land Trust to:

· Preserve critical habitat for native fish and wildlife

· Reduce the risk of introduction of aquatic invasive plants and animals

· Implement forest management strategies to decrease the risk of wildfire

· Allow visitors to access the lake and enjoy the property in ways that are compatible with the conservation of this

precious resource.

El Dorado County Fair

The 2011 El Dorado County Fair, themed “Rockin’ & Wranglin’”, will take place June 16 to 19 in Placerville.

Exhibitors of livestock and still exhibits may download entry packets from the fair’s website. The website also has details about the four-day fair.