Lahontan disagrees with EPA bacteria standards

By Kathryn Reed

California is looking at creating a one-size-fits-all approach to handling bacteria in the state's water bodies.

Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board isn't sure that is the correct approach because it would make the rules the same for the ocean, Lake Tahoe and lakes in Desolation Wilderness.

Lauri Kemper, assistant executive director for Lahontan, spoke at this month's Tahoe Area Sierra Club about bacteria standards and protecting recreation uses.



Lauri Kemper with Lahontan talks about bacteria regulations. Photo/LTN

"We believe in diversity because we have a diverse region," she told the group. Much of the water in Lahontan's jurisdiction is used for drinking, except for Mono Lake.

The EPA set the national standard for fecal coliform in water at 200 fecal coliform per 100 milliliters. That is the amount deemed safe to swim in. Lahontan's standard is 20fc/100ml.

“Fecal coliform is an indicator of bacteria and sometimes that something more harmful is present,” Kemper said. “When fecal coliform is in the water it doesn’t necessarily mean it will cause you harm.”

She gave the example of how people may get ill drinking water in another country, but the locals are just fine. It proves “tainted” water takes some getting used to and won’t harm everyone.

Kemper said the reason bacteria standards are being looked it is because it’s an easy way to test for E. coli. Since 2008 Lahontan has been taking E. coli and fecal coliform samples.

“We are seeing a connection between the two,” she said.

The highest concentrations are found where there is grazing. This is in part why Lahontan told the U.S. Forest Service that grazing in Big and Meiss meadows was no longer allowed.

Lahontan is worried that if the state adopts a policy that is less restrictive than what is in place, that grazing could return and tributaries of Lake Tahoe could be negatively impacted.

The EPA is recommending the State Water Board allow 126 E. coli per 100 milliliters. The risk is 35 illnesses per 1,000 swimmers.

Lahontan prefers E. coli limits of 17 per 100 milliliters so the risk of illness is 35 out of every 100,000 swimmers.

“The EPA standard is just swimming, but we have people drinking it,” Kemper said.

Several water purveyors on the Nevada side use Lake Tahoe for drinking water. A filter or chlorine is used as a disinfectant. Beyond that it is not treated because Tahoe’s water is so pristine.

The cabins at Echo Lake rely on springs for their water. It is not treated.

The State Water Board will be conducting scoping on the standards in April. But the listening sessions are by invite only. Public comment and workshops are likely to take place next winter.

Tahoe Tails – Adoptable Pets in South Lake Tahoe



Chanel

Chanel is perhaps not as sophisticated as her name, but she sure is friendly. Her tail never stops wagging.

Chanel is a 2-year-old Border Collie/Lab mix who is a bit portly now, and she is looking forward to going for lots of walks with her new owner to slim down.

Chanel is spayed, microchipped, tested for heartworm, and

vaccinated. She is at the El Dorado County Animal Services shelter in Meyers, along with many other dogs and cats who are waiting for their new homes.

Go online or to the Tahoe animal shelter's Facebook page to see photos and descriptions of all pets at the shelter.

Call (530) 573.7925 for directions, hours, and other information on adopting a pet.

For spay-neuter assistance for South Tahoe residents, go online.

– Karen Kuentz

Bottle collector to give talk in S. Tahoe

Mark S. Morris, collector and historian, has a vast bottle collection and will speak about collecting.

Hewill have copies of his book, "Mark's Bottles: 50 Years of Collecting" on April 12 at Lake Tahoe Museum in South Lake Tahoe.

Reservations are required as space is limited – 530.541.5458. Leave your name and phone number. The 2-4pm event is free for members, $3 for non-members.

If you have a bottle and would like to know its past, bring it. One per guest.

Opinion: 1 complaint not worth destroying 30-plus year Lake Tahoe fireworks tradition

By Carol Chaplin

Since 1986, the Lake Tahoe Visitors Authority has supported the tourism industry on the South Shore. Events, such as the July 4 and Labor Day fireworks are included in our strategy to increase visitation. During the 30-year tradition of fireworks, we have no history of complaints.

Pyro Spectaculars is one of the best fireworks companies and has gained us national recognition for our display. Their strict clean-up protocol includes a boat sweep with nets and a diver sweep that extends well past the shoot zone the following days. This protocol is not mandated by any regulatory authority and efforts typically result in 20 bags of trash, most of which has nothing to do with fireworks.



Carol Chaplin

After this past July display, we were contacted by the [Tahoe Regional Planning Agency] alerting us to a possible anomaly to

the usual debris-free display. Events Manager Mike Frye, who coordinates the pre-event safety meetings with our partner law enforcement agencies, began extensive conversations with Pyro and with residents who contacted us directly. No contact with the Truxlers was received. Mike engaged with the Tahoe Douglas Fire Protection District several times to implement a more stringent strategy for the Labor Day fireworks. In his discussions with Tahoe Douglas, officials indicated that most of the fireworks debris was not from our show.

On Tuesday following the Labor Day festivities, we confirmed that TRPA and LTVA had received no complaints. However, more than 72 hours later, we were contacted by a Nevada Beach area resident who alerted us to a debris situation. No communication from the Truxlers was received. Mike organized LTVA staff, spending hours combing Nevada Beach and cleaning up everything including bottles, cans, bags, etc.

The notice of intent to sue was received immediately after Labor Day, so our assumption is that conversations with attorneys began long before. In my mind, any non-litigious negotiations were likely never contemplated. Our settlement effort was to emphasize LTVA is committed to working with the community to assure impacts from fireworks are mitigated. Our outreach was not fruitful. Subsequent mediation efforts were not successful, and the litigation threatens over $70 million in penalties. Our funds are sourced through lodging tax with the purpose of helping this community thrive after recession and marginal winters. It is a sober and serious consideration the board is faced with to continue draining resources meant for promotion in the direction of contentious and punitive litigation that will ultimately not serve any of us.

The accusation that we have violated the Clean Water Act is one that no other legal body has wanted to consider. Our request for Nevada Department of Environmental Protection to issue a permit was directed back by that agency as a matter for local oversight. The TRPA has not indicated that it is the

appropriate agency, nor has Lahontan Water Quality Control Board. In fact, Lahontan released a water quality study in 2001 with no significant results that informed a permit strategy. While regulatory oversight was what the Truxlers requested, the agency governing oversight disagreed with their contention. It is evident the Truxlers feel that neither Pyro, the LTVA nor the community, for that matter, can be trusted. We disagree.

The March 27 LTVA board meeting was attended by over 100 prominent elected officials, residents and business owners. All were impressive in their impassioned support and echoed the same themes: our community finds resolution through cooperation; our already fragile economy will be crippled by the event cancellation; and the solution is for the Truxlers to find reasonableness and trust and return to the table for productive conversations that result in a lawsuit dismissal and a satisfying remedy to debris on the beach.

How proud I was of our residents. I was reminded how spirited this environment makes us here. We play and work hard. We sacrifice salary and amenities for the rural mountain environment. We are scrappy and happy because of it. Thank you for giving up your personal time to join in the discussion. One speaker asked a telling question: “Who here will help clean the beaches after the fireworks?” All hands were raised. We will all clean the beaches. Because we always have. We clean the trails we run and hike, we teach our children the same. But, perhaps – and this is the silver lining to this mess – we will do it as a unified community and in our own unique Tahoe South way, we’ll make a party of it.

The good news is that Monday finds us back in mediation. The better news would be that we make an agreement to love this lake enough to strike the deal. And that deal will allow our economy to hum strong, our fireworks to burst bright and our beaches to be swept clean. See you all on the beach. I can’t wait.

Carol Chaplin is executive director of Lake Tahoe Visitors Authority.

Survey: Calif. voters support water bond

By Patricia Yollin, KQED-TV

Almost all of the state's residents have cut their water use because of the drought, half of likely voters will support an $11.1 billion bond for state water projects and a record-high share of Californians, 55 percent, say the water supply is a big problem where they live.

These were among the highlights of a statewide survey by the Public Policy Institute of California, released Wednesday.

The Legislature is considering several new water bond measures for the November ballot, all of them pared back from the $11.1 billion proposal, which has been pulled from the ballot twice because of the state's fiscal problems.

The revised bond measures are more limited than the expansive 2010 measure and would cost less, with proposals ranging from $5 billion to $9 billion. The PPIC survey found that support for a water bond would increase to 59 percent of likely voters if the measure was for a lower amount.

Read the whole story

Snippets about Lake Tahoe



• McDonald's restaurants – including South Lake Tahoe, Tahoe City and Truckee – are offering a free small coffee during breakfast hours from March 31-April 13.

• Carson Tahoe Regional Medical Center has recently earned Joint Commission's Gold Seal of Approval. The Joint Commission is the leading accreditor of health care organizations in the United States.

• The Virginia City Wine Tour is the first Saturday of each month from 11am to 4pm April 5-Aug. 2. Tickets purchased in advance are $15 or $20 week of the event. Admission includes access to 18 merchants, a commemorative stemless wine glass and a map.

• Here are the weekly roadwork schedules from Caltrans for El Dorado-Tahoe and Sierra.

• The South Lake Tahoe library has a monthly gathering of knitters and crocheters. Crafters of all ages and experience are welcome on the first Saturday of the month at 1pm. The free event is at 1000 Rufus Allen Blvd., South Lake Tahoe.

Stagnation could result in unemployment

By Lauren Weber, Wall Street Journal

It’s become conventional wisdom that many of today’s workers will see their jobs replaced or transformed by ever-smarter machines. Who needs bus drivers and truckers when self-driving vehicles take over the road – and what happens to the thousands of body-shop workers who won’t be needed to repair dents when the sensors in these new vehicles head off fender benders?

A recent paper from Oxford University suggested that 47 percent of U.S. jobs are at high risk of being computerized in the next few decades, with potentially frightening consequences for workers.

Such concerns have raised urgent questions about the skills individuals need to survive in the workforce of the future. Not only is technology displacing workers, as it has in every economic transformation, but it is changing so rapidly that workers and employers are finding themselves unable to keep up, a situation that creates the paradox of a skills gap amid high unemployment.

Read the whole story

Comstock Muckfest coming to Virginia City

Comstock Muckfest in Virginia City is a celebration of Nevada’s mining history.

On June 7 people may take the trolley around town to see demonstrations of how the miners of the 1800s worked and learn about modern mining; tour local museums and learn about the history of Virginia City and the important role mining had on

Nevada becoming a state.

For more info, call 775.847.7500.

Squaw to host 2-day film festival

The Wild & Scenic Film Festival returns to Squaw Valley April 11-12.

The festival will feature 16 films that focus on environmental concerns, as well as celebrate the beauty of nature. The event is all part of the Tahoe Truckee Earth Day, which is April 19.

Festival doors open at 6 each night, with screenings beginning at 7pm. General admission is $12 for adults, and $5 for students and all Tahoe area ski resort employees. The festival also features live music, food, and beer and wine.

Attendees may choose from several different packages of films, with all screening venues located in The Village at Squaw Valley.

To see movie trailers, and for festival information, go online.

Northern Nevada casinos betting property upgrades will keep tourists' interest

By Rob Sabo, AP

Casino operators in the greater Tahoe-Reno area are doubling down on their properties.

The more than $100 million spent or tabbed for renovations at regional hotel-casinos includes $50 million at JA Nugget, $20 million at Boomtown, $30 million at Grand Sierra Resort, $20 million at the Hyatt Regency Lake Tahoe in Incline Village and more than $40 million at the Horizon at Stateline.

Casino operators are bullish on Northern Nevada for any number of reasons, says Carlton Geer, president and chief executive officer of JA Nugget. First and foremost, Geer says, is the significant rise in year-over-year gaming revenue at large casino properties in northern Nevada.

"If you look at the Nevada Gaming Control Board revenue reports, large casinos in Northern Nevada gained about 6 percent year-over-year through December in gaming win," Geer says.

That, coupled with other tangible signs that the economy in Northern Nevada has found its legs – solid movement in the residential and industrial construction markets, a rise in revenues from room rates at properties in Washoe County, continued signs of economic recovery from neighboring California – has casino operators scrambling to upgrade their properties to capture greater market share.

"We have a real economic recovery in northern Nevada; it is tangible, we can see it," Geer says. "And we have the recovery

of the northern California economy. We want to deploy capital to reposition ourselves to become more competitive."

In addition to the regional economic recovery, there's a continued migration of California residents to Northern Nevada that's bolstering casino revenues, said Dean DiLullo, chief executive officer of M1 Gaming, which owns Boomtown.

Northern Nevada is a safe bet for casino operators, he adds, because it's a relatively easy place to run a gambling operation. Reno in particular has tremendous upside because of its proximity to California's huge population base.

Drawing guests from northern California is a key aspect of the many changes taking places at Grand Sierra, says General Manager Dan Uonites. The property recently unveiled LEX, its new $15 million, 25,000-square-foot nightclub, one of the final pieces of a completely renovated casino floor.

The GSR is banking on the allure of the upscale nightclub experience to pull visitors from the Sacramento Valley and greater San Francisco Bay Area.

"We added this nightclub to attract individuals coming over from the Bay," Uonites says. "If you look @ Vegas over the course of the years, it started to buy into the entertainment concept. It was about nightclubs, bottle service, and all these different amenities. It worked. They tapped into this new customer base, and that is what our goal is."

In addition to the extensive renovations, Grand Sierra Resort placed a renewed emphasis on strategic marketing. The combination of those efforts, Uonites says, has better positioned the property for near- and long-term success.

The Horizon on the South Shore is following a similar path. Jon Park, managing member of NevaOne LLC, owner of the Horizon, says repositioning the property built in 1965 isn't without risk.

However, the Lake Tahoe gaming market still is quite viable – total revenues at South Shore properties increased by $6.2 million to $349.7 million in 2013, the Gaming Control Board reports in its annual Gaming Abstract.

The end goal of the renovation plan is to create a destination with a diverse choice of resort-style amenities, Park says. The property will have multiple restaurant and dining options, as well as upscale bar, lounge and entertainment options similar to competing properties on the other side of Highway 50.

Sometimes upgrades are just a necessary course of business. The Nugget, Geer says, is 58 years old and requires substantial capital expenditure for routine and deferred maintenance that had been delayed over the years.

JA Nugget will paint the entire property in coming months and upgrade behind-the-scenes functions such as its HVAC and mechanical and plumbing systems to increase the property's airflow and energy efficiency.

In addition to the large-scale renovations, JA Nugget plans to add a new country bar, upgrade its bingo operations and move bingo, gift shop, deli and sports book operations to the main casino floor – all part of a sweeping effort to gain an edge in a crowded marketplace.

The final piece of the puzzle, DiLullo says, is that Northern Nevada continues to be a place where people want to be. Reno-Sparks will never shed its small town roots, but it's changing and maturing into a more eclectic and vibrant city. DiLullo cites the many small businesses cropping up in Midtown as but one example.

As for Boomtown, DiLullo says the 50-year-old property nine miles west of Reno functions best as a complete package – and that means bringing a truck stop back to the site.

Truckers for decades stopped at Boomtown before passing over the Sierra, but lost that option when Cabela's opened in early 2008. DiLullo says adding a truck stop component at Boomtown is a near-term goal.

"We are working to put the pieces of Boomtown back," DiLullo says. "We would like to see the truck stop added back. If we do that, the 700 trucks that park on I-80 during a snowstorm will have somewhere to park, fuel, gamble and stay."

DiLullo says M1 Gaming currently is reviewing legal and developmental aspects of adding a truck stop to the property. M1 Gaming owns 100 acres at the site and also is mulling plans to develop parcels fronting the Truckee River.

"I could see mixed use development or a riverwalk happing here," DiLullo says.