USFS planning for controlled burns in basin

U.S. Forest Service fuels management crews will continue to conduct prescribed fire operations in various locations around the Lake Tahoe Basin the week of March 30.

Possible locations include Slaughterhouse Canyon on the East Shore, the Luther Pass Campground off of Highway 89, the west side of Highway 89 near Tahoma, and near D.L. Bliss State Park.

Operations are ongoing and depend on weather, staffing, and conditions. Locations could vary due to changing conditions.

Forest Service staff will post road signs around the areas affected by the prescribed fire, send email notifications, and update the local fire information line at 530.543.2600, No. 6. To receive prescribed fire notifications, send an email to pa_ltbmu@fs.fed.us.

Survey: Families a growing segment of tourism

By Scott Sonner, AP

Visitors to the Reno-Lake Tahoe area stayed longer, spent more money and brought their children along more often last year than they did two years earlier, according to a new tourism survey that suggests targeting families in future marketing efforts.

The tourists with kids spent more than groups with only adults and stayed nearly twice as long in 2013 – averaging 6.2 days compared to 3.2 days, officials for the Reno-Sparks Convention and Visitors Authority said Thursday.

While gambling "remains the core visitor activity, other events and activities are drawing visitors and their dollars," concludes a report on the survey being presented Thursday to the authority's board of directors.

"Families are identified in the data as an exciting opportunity for growth. More adults brought their children with them to the area compared with 2011. They stayed longer, spent more and left wanting to return," it said.

The share of families traveling with children under age 21 increased from 27 percent in 2011 to 35 percent last year. On average, they spent $773 while adults-only visitors spent $637, the survey found.

"It not only shows that the region is doing a phenomenal job of retaining loyal customers, but it also proves that the message of Reno-Tahoe as a family friendly destination is drawing a new group of multigenerational visitors," said Christopher Baum, the visitor authority's president and CEO.

Individual visitor spending increased 9 percent to $685 last year, about one-third of that on gambling. About one-fifth of them came for the day and didn't stay overnight. Those who stayed averaged 4.3 days in 2013, up from 3.5 in 2011.

Carlton Geer, president and CEO of the JA Nugget hotel-casino in Sparks, said the results are consistent with the private market research affiliates of Global Gaming & Hospitality conducted before purchasing the former John Ascuaga's Nugget late last year.

"Our research showed the economy was improving in Northern California, the Reno-Sparks area's main feeder market," said

Geer, who has launched a $50 million renovation of the casino with two hotel towers. He said Northern California's economic outlook is the "single best indicator of future success" in the Reno-Sparks area.

Seattle-based EMC Research conducted the Internet-based survey of 2,000 visitors to Washoe County in 2013. Although they also could have visited other parts of Lake Tahoe, to be included in the survey they must have visited within the month prior the North Shore towns of Incline Village or Crystal Bay, or Reno or Sparks.

For the first time among Californians, visitation from Los Angeles equaled visitation from the San Francisco Bay Area – 31 percent from L.A. and 32 percent from the Bay Area, which is within the survey's margin of error of plus or minus 2.2 percent. Two years ago 27 percent came from L.A. Tourism authority spokesman Ben McDonald said Thursday they still are sifting through the data to pinpoint the reason for that uptick.

The biggest visitor "types" remain gamblers (20 percent) and those visiting family and friends (17 percent), followed by about 12 percent each for recreation, sightseeing vacation and vacation in general.

Overall the survey concluded half visited primarily for "fun" (vacation/recreation). Those who do visit mainly to gamble are the biggest spenders as a group, averaging $1,049 in 2013, while those in the "fun" category spent $659.

Rick Murdock, vice president of casino marketing at the Eldorado Resort Casino in Reno, said it reflects their guests' increased interests in outdoor recreation and entertainment.

Eighty-two percent of the visitors surveyed said they had a good or excellent experience. Half said they definitely will return and another quarter said it was very likely.

Caesars seeks to sell 7 million shares

By Howard Stutz, Las Vegas Review-Journal

Caesars Entertainment Corp. filed paperwork with the Securities and Exchange Commission Thursday to sell an additional 7 million shares of stock.

Based on Thursday's closing price on the Nasdaq Global Select, the company would raise almost $148 million.

No date was given for the proposed sale. Caesars and it private equity owners, TPG Capital and Apollo Global Management, agreed to a 60-day lock-up period after the date of the prospectus filing in which they wouldn't sell any of their wholly owned shares.

Caesars has undertaken several efforts recently to repair its balance sheet, which has a gaming-industry-high $23 billion in debt.

Read the whole story

Brown wants disgraced lawmakers to resign

By Chris Megerian, Los Angeles Times

SACRAMENTO – Gov. Jerry Brown called on three scandal-plagued state senators to resign on Friday, speaking out for the first time on a series of criminal cases that have sapped Democrats' power in the Capitol and tarnished the Legislature's image.

Brown's statement comes hours after the Senate voted to suspend Sens. Leland Yee (D-San Francisco), Ronald S. Calderon (D-Montebello) and Roderick D. Wright (D-Inglewood).

Friday's vote was the first time the Senate suspended its own members, and the first time Brown called for their resignations.

Read the whole story

Harrah's-Harveys participating in Earth Hour

Tonight between 8:30 and 9:30, Harrah's and Harveys Lake Tahoe will participate in Earth Hour to bring awareness to climate change.

This is the sixth consecutive year that the two Stateline casinos will encourage guests and employees to turn off all non-essential interior lighting, while the resorts' lighted exteriors, electronic marquees and non-essential lighting are shut off for the hour.

Sponsored by the World Wildlife Fund, Earth Hour has grown to involve hundreds of millions of people across 7,000 cities and 154 countries in a collective statement of concern about climate change.

Tahoe elementary to be mountain academy

By Kathryn Reed

Sierra House Elementary School is taking the federal Let's Move initiative a step further.

Principal Ryan Galles this week told the Lake Tahoe Unified School District about his goal of transforming the K-5 school into the Sierra House Mountain Academy.

"I envision a physical transformation," Galles said.

The goal is fitness, health and mountain sports will be emphasized.



Sierra House is being transformed into a mountain academy. Photo/LTN

The initial Health and Fitness Night will be May 1.

The first phase is in place, so the transition to the themed school will not be difficult. It helped that the field was replaced last summer. A grant from Vail Echo had all second-

graders at SHES on the slopes this winter. Third- and fourth-graders ride at Sierra-at-Tahoe. The ice rink allowed students to skate in a morning fitness program.

But it's not just about doing things off campus.

Galles told *Lake Tahoe News* it's about creating a more rigorous fitness based physical education program. This will in large part fall on the shoulders of Seth Martin.

"When you are exercising, even as short as 20 minutes, you have a better connection in the brain," Martin told the school board. He is a physical education specialist for the district, with this being his first year exclusively at SHES.

In 2010, the Governor's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports named Martin physical education teacher of the year. When Martin was at Tahoe Valley Elementary School in 2011 he had the students try to set a world record for jumping jacks. In 2012, he was instrumental in Lake Tahoe Community College and Barton's Tahoe Center for Orthopedics team sports performance summer camps.

The March 25 staff report says, "Research on fitness and the brain indicates that, increased levels of activity stimulates brain activity and increases student achievement. Fitness activities also provide improved attention span, memory and learning, thus reducing stress and the effects of ADHD."

The goals of the academy are:

• Re-orient to a fitness-based physical education program

• Bring in schoolwide fitness and health events

• Provide access to mountain sports

• Increase parent involvement/communication

• Promote healthy lifestyles, cooperative skills, critical

thinking and problems solving.

The next phase is to get the growing dome installed. That could be a reality this spring. Approvals from the state are still needed as well as some coverage issues need to be ironed out.

Last March when Galles was before the board he said the dome would have multiple educational purposes. For one, it would be a hands-on science lab where students would be growing vegetables year-round. It would complement the composting program. It would show kids that food comes from someplace else before it reaches a grocery story. And it will give them something healthy to eat. The state has curriculum in its Garden in Every School program that could be used.

Staff members are going to Truckee in May to visit the dome there and find out about how best to use it as a teaching tool.

A walking path around the school will be the third phase. This will allow for more activities when students are at recess.

Fitness stations and a traverse wall will be in the final phase.

In other action:

• The board delayed action on the proposed preschool center at the former Al Tahoe Elementary School. This would be for transitional kindergarten. It would help with the overcrowding issue at Bijou and Sierra House elementary schools. But parents of little ones are not thrilled with the idea and want more info. The board said more outreach is needed. The topic should be on the April 22 agenda.

Opinion: Tahoe can’t afford fireworks lawsuit

By Nancy Kerry

As we all know, the economy and our environment are fundamentally intertwined. If we ever doubted the connection, those doubts should have been erased through the impacts of the great recession on our local economy. We need revenue from tourism to sustain our economy, which in turn helps to fund environmental projects that protect the natural beauty, which draws millions of visitors every year. We cannot have a thriving economy without protecting the environment and we cannot have a beautiful natural environment without money to protect and properly sustain it.

Mr. and Mrs. [Joe and Joan] Truxler recently sued the Lake Tahoe Visitors Authority for “failing to obtain a National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permit” for the fireworks shows that occur each July and Labor Day. An NPDES permit, if required, would be issued by Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board on the California side or the Nevada Department of Environmental Protection if the show were on the Nevada side of the lake.



Nancy Kerry

Ten years ago, Lahontan determined an NPDES permit was not required after monitoring fireworks shows because any impacts dissipated within 24 hours and posed no environmental threat

to the clarity of our beautiful Lake Tahoe. The Nevada Department of Environmental Protection issued a letter to LTVA in December 2013 indicating neither an NPDES permit nor oversight of the fireworks show was necessary. Therefore, both agencies in California and Nevada with a duty to oversee environmental protections in Lake Tahoe have determined an NPDES permit is not required or necessary.

Lake clarity has not been negatively impacted by fireworks debris. The evidence of that statement is lake clarity has improved during the 35 years the fireworks shows have been produced. The issue of debris can be resolved through better clean up, community involvement and enforcement against illegal fireworks, but not through a protracted lawsuit. The fireworks show already has both surface and subsurface clean-up procedures in place with a great track record, with the exception of last year. If the show is cancelled, illegal firework use will likely increase, a scary scenario on the heels of the driest winter of record.

We can’t control when Mother Nature doesn’t cooperate, but a manmade impact of this magnitude is simply inconsiderate of the consequences. If the fireworks show were canceled because of this lawsuit, the economic impact to our community would be staggering. Hardest hit would be the underemployed who rely on tips and service jobs to survive. Our city’s General Fund relies primarily on bed tax to fund police, fire and other essential services, and cancellation of the largest summer event will adversely impact the city’s budget.

The city of South Lake Tahoe, while not a party to the lawsuit, has been actively working to facilitate both short- and long-term solutions to this issue. I have spoken to the Truxlers and believe they are seeking reasonable solutions to the issue of debris. However, I have also spoken to their lawyer and believe his efforts to extract excessive fees are unreasonable and could preclude a resolution to the case. At the LTVA’s emergency meeting Thursday, there was unwavering

and unanimous support calling on the Truxlers to work with the community and not against it by agreeing to solutions for the debris and withdrawing the lawsuit so the show can go on. We need to immediately commence another spectacular show in time for July 4, 2014.

Nancy Kerry is the city manager of South Lake Tahoe.

Social media may negatively impact self-esteem

By Jodie Gummow, AlterNet

In this technological age, social media has become a primary gateway to connect with friends and the world around us as part of our daily ritual. Yet what often begins as a harmless virtual habit for some can fast-track into a damaging, narcissism-fueled habit which negatively impacts our self-worth and the way we perceive others.

Studies show that up to two-thirds of people find it hard to relax or sleep after spending time on social networks. Of 298 users, 50 percent said social media made their lives and their self-esteem worse. So just what exactly is it about social media that allows it to affect our self-worth?

According to psychotherapist Sherrie Campbell, social media can give us a false sense of belonging and connecting that is not built on real-life exchanges. This makes it increasingly easy to lose oneself to cyberspace connections and give them more weight than they deserve.

Read the whole story

Egyptian scholar to give talk in Incline

Zahi Hawass, a world-renowned archaeologist and the former minister of Antiquities in Egypt and the director of ongoing excavations at Giza, Saqqara, and the Valley of the Kings, will give a talk March 31 at Sierra Nevada College.

He is a distinguished scholar of residence at the Incline Village institution.

His presentation will be from 6-7:30pm on campus in room 139/141. Hawass will talk about Egypt past and present.

Nevadans face higher flood insurance

By Scott Sonner, AP

Washoe County emergency manager Aaron Kenneston has known since Hurricane Katrina slammed into New Orleans and Superstorm Sandy wreaked havoc on the East Coast that Nevada homeowners and businesses eventually would face higher premiums for federal flood insurance.

“It’s unfortunate that you have to balance these major superstorms on the backs of taxpayers who don’t live anywhere near the Gulf Coast or Hurricane Alley,” Kenneston said.

Nearly 1,300 Nevada residents will see such premium increases in the coming years due to changes in the National Flood Insurance Program.

For years, the federal government subsidized flood insurance on homes and businesses built in the days before flood zones were created. But premiums collected haven't covered the payouts, leaving the National Flood Insurance Program $24 billion in debt.

President Obama last week signed a relief bill that erases the immediate pain of dramatic flood insurance hikes included in a 2012 bill passed by Congress that was meant to reflect the true risk of flooding and end subsidies. Still, policyholders are facing large, repeated rate hikes over the years.

In Nevada, 1,299 flood insurance policies will see double-digit increases. Of those, more than 900 homeowners will see their premiums rise by up to 18 percent each year, and nearly 400 businesses and owners of second homes will see increases of 25 percent annually.

Washoe County, Reno and especially Sparks are among the areas that could feel the sting of rate hikes along the banks of the flood-prone Truckee River, according to an Associated Press review of records from the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

The analysis shows more than one-third of the 383 owners of subsidized policies in Sparks can expect 25 percent increases in their premiums. About one-fourth of the 1,161 policyholders in Reno and one-fifth of the 1,014 in rural Washoe County face increases of up to 18 percent each year.

"I'm concerned we could start to price people out of the market who really should have flood insurance," Kenneston said.

Kenneston and insurance agents said it's hard to persuade

people to buy flood insurance if it’s not required by a mortgage lender.

“Nobody wants to buy it until after they have a flood,” said Tom Wilkins, a longtime Reno insurance salesman.

The Reno-Sparks area has experienced significant floods at least once a decade since the 1950s – the biggest a New Year’s Day flood in 1997 that caused $1 billion in damage across six counties, $700 million in Washoe County alone.

“It is a citywide concern,” Sparks city spokesman Adam Mayberry said. “The 100-year flood seems to come around every 10 years.”

The effects of the rate increases won’t be clear until FEMA adopts regulations to implement the changes, but the association of Nevada Independent Insurance Agents is starting to hear concerns and plans to launch a series of classes to help educate its members.

The impact will vary across Nevada, where 14,871 policyholders paid collectively $8.9 million for $3.46 billion worth of federal flood insurance in 2012.

For example, unincorporated areas of Clark County had 3,675 federal flood insurance policies in place on Dec. 31, 2012, but only 100 of them were receiving the discounted rates and will be subject to increases.

In Douglas County, 129 of the 1,115 – or 12 percent – were receiving the subsidy in 2012 and now will be subject to similar increases. The same for 96 of 644 in Carson City (15 percent), 63 of 158 in Fallon (40 percent), 54 of 167 in Lander County (32 percent) and 43 of 77 in Elko County (56 percent).

Wilkins said most people who need flood insurance don’t find the cost to be prohibitive, typically about $500 annually for

a homeowner.

“It seems like a whole lot of money if you never use it but it’s really not as expensive as a lot of people think it is,” Wilkins said.

After the 1997 flood, he said his company paid a $500,000 claim to one Sparks business that had an annual premium of $2,300 and a $1 million claim to another that paid about $6,000 a year.

“You could spend about $30,000 over 10 years and get a half-million dollars back,” he said. “Because it is a guarantee the river is going to flood.”