Ski report: Get your green on



Another storm tomorrow, so get out there today.

Here is the ski report from Curtis Fong, the Guy from Tahoe.

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19 teams competing in Tour of California named

The 2011 field of professional cycling teams has been named for Amgen Tour of California that begins in Stateline May 15.

The lineup of teams includes 19 elite international and domestic squads for the sixth-annual event, May 15-22. Fourteen have participated before.

The teams are:

* Sky ProCycling (GBR)

* Rabobank Cycling Team (NED)

* Team Garmin-Cervélo (USA)

* HTC-Highroad (USA)

* Team RadioShack (USA)

* Liquigas-Cannondale (ITA)

* Saxo Bank Sungard (DEN)

* Leopard Trek (LUX)

* BMC Racing Team (USA)

* Team NetApp (GER)

* Team Type 1-sanofi aventis (USA)

* Team Spidertech Powered By C10 (CAN)

* UnitedHealthcare Pro Cycling (USA)

* Movistar Team (COL)

* Jamis-Sutter Home (USA)

* Kelly Benefit Strategies – Optum Health (USA)

* Bissell Pro Cycling (USA)

* Jelly Belly p/b Kenda (USA)

* Kenda/5-Hour Energy Pro Cycling p/b Geargrinder (USA).

Irish-Americans have been celebrating heritage for centuries

Originally a religious holiday to honor St. Patrick, who introduced Christianity to Ireland in the fifth century, St. Patrick’s Day has evolved into a celebration for all things

Irish.



The world's first St. Patrick's Day parade occurred March 17, 1762, in New York City, featuring Irish soldiers serving in the English military. This parade became an annual event, with President Harry S Truman attending in 1948.

Congress proclaimed March as Irish-American Heritage Month in 1995.

The number of U.S. residents who claimed Irish ancestry in 2009 was 36.9 million. This number was more than eight times the population of Ireland itself (4.5 million).

Irish was the nation's second most frequently reported ancestry, trailing only German, in 2009 reports.

Twenty-four percent of Massachusetts' residents in 2009 said they were of Irish ancestry. This compares with a rate of 12 percent for the nation as a whole.

Disappearance of minnows from Tahoe concerns scientists

By Jeff Delong, Reno Gazette-Journal

Lake Tahoe's native minnows appear to be dropping significantly in number, with declining water clarity and predation by non-native warm water fish possible factors in the population crash.

Densities of minnows surveyed at 26 sites around the lake

declined by 58 percent between 1988 and 2009, according to new research by scientists at University of Nevada, Reno and Ohio's Miami University.

"That's not good. That's bad news," said Sudeep Chandra, a UNR fisheries expert.

"I was surprised the decline was that much," Chandra said. "The interesting question is what will be the future?"

Chandra and colleagues surveyed native fish populations in the shallow depths of Tahoe's near shore, home to minnows such as Lahontan redside shiners and speckled dace.

Minnow numbers dropped significantly since the last such survey more than 20 years ago, with populations of redside shiners alone dropping between 24 percent and 100 percent in 42 percent of surveyed locations.

"I would say that yes, they are in trouble," said Christine Ka Lai Ngai, another UNR researcher in the fish study. "And if we don't do anything about it, they will be in more trouble."

One possible contributor to the minnows' decline is competition or predation by non-native warm water fish including largemouth bass and bluegill.

Read the whole story

Opinion: Solar cookers making a difference in Darfur

By Mandy Kendall

In these economic times it is often hard to imagine what difference we can make, especially when there seems so little to go around to those nearest and dearest to us. However, sometimes it takes the plight of others to realize just how lucky we are.

Consider the horrors of the genocide in Darfur, a region of the Sudan, and the adversity of the refugees who have had to flee their homes. Since 2003, black Africans have been driven out of their villages and it is estimated that at least 400,000 people are dead and 2.7 million people have been displaced. About 250,000 refugees live across the border from Sudan in Chad, with 80 percent of them being women and children.

Like you, the Soroptimist International of Tahoe Sierra are all about peace and, together with the Jewish World Watch, we are raising funds to protect refugee women and children from rape, beatings, and other forms of violence. Women and girls who have fled the genocide in Darfur, Sudan are particularly vulnerable while performing the critical task of collecting firewood for cooking. Our mission is to reduce the frequency of these heinous crimes by providing women in refugee camps with an alternative cooking option: the solar cooker.

Usually, to cook a meal, the women and children leave the safety of the refugee camps to collect wood. As firewood is depleted, the walk to obtain it greatly increases, also increasing the risk or attack, rape and even death. Providing women with a Solar Cooker Kit can enable them to prepare meals without risking their safety.

Each kit includes two solar cookers, two pots, two pot holders, a year’s supply of plastic cooking bags and skills training for refugee women and children.

The Solar Cookers also provide more than safety. Two solar cookers can save one ton of firewood each year, which also

reduces greenhouse gases and as there is no need to tend a fire, women are free to do other tasks in safety and caring for their children. The solar cookers create an environmentally sustainable solution using renewal energy of the sun. There are also health benefits related to reducing smoke produced by a fire including respiratory issues.

The Solar Cooker Project also has an income-generating aspect as well for the women. Raw materials are sent to the camps and refugee women are hired to assemble them on site. Others train the women and children over 15 years of age in the cooker's proper use. After a camp is trained, a maintenance program is instituted to repair and replace cookers as needed.

One woman's story

Imani now lives in the Iridimi refugee camp in Chad. After her harrowing escape from her village in Darfur, where she witnessed the murder of her husband and two sisters, she hid for days from the savage Janjaweed militia and survived with only water in the unforgiving sun. Imani walked over 300 miles until crossing the border into Chad, finally arriving at the Iridimi refugee camp. Without sufficient fuel to cook her meals, she had to leave the relative safety of the camp to collect firewood. At the refugee camp, she learned to use a simple sun-cooker to prepare her meals and no longer has to risk her safety. Imani told us that because she no longer has to leave the camp she now feels protected and secure.

We can't stop the political problems of their country, but we can make it safer for them through their struggles. Soroptimist International of Tahoe Sierra is doing all it can to buy as many solar cookers as possible to send to the women of Darfur.

One solar cooker kit costs $30.

The Junior S Club girls at South Tahoe Middle School is helping with a collection at the school, planning to spend

their lunchtimes over the next two weeks encouraging fellow students to donate any of their spare change. They are calling it Small Change for a Big Change.

Consider purchasing a solar cooker kit as a gift on behalf of a loved one’s birthday, or a combined gift from the whole family for Mother’s Day, Father’s Day, Easter, or whatever days you celebrate for a special occasion. You will receive a gift card outlining the Solar Cooker project that you can give to that ‘special someone’ to show them the gift that you made on their behalf.

Mandy Kendall is a member of Soroptimist International Tahoe Sierra. Contact her about donations before April 1 at SolarCookerDonation@gmail.com.

Learn about restoration of sugar pines

The Sugar Pine Foundation will share the agency’s collaborative strategy to preserve the White Pines currently plagued by a nonnative fungus as part of the Explore Tahoe Winter Speaker Series on March 24 at 6pm. Learn how you can help restore the Sugar Pines.

Explore Tahoe: An Urban Trailhead is located in the Heavenly Village next to North Face at 4114 Lake Tahoe Blvd., South Lake Tahoe.

Parking garage special rate of $5 flat fee after 4pm.

For more information, contact (530) 542.4637.

STPUD board leaning toward sewer rate hike this summer

By Kathryn Reed

Although a decision is not likely until mid-May, the South Tahoe Public Utility District board this month expressed a willingness to increase sewer rates by 3 percent starting July 1, with no change to water rates except for those on meters.

Board member Mary Lou Mosbacher missed last week's budget and meter rate workshops.

A decision had to be made by the board last week regarding any potential rate increase so customers could be notified per state law. Any increase the board may institute cannot be higher than what is sent out on the notification. Public hearings will be conducted so people have ample opportunity to voice their opinions.



Paul Sciuto, assistant general manager at STPUD, talks about the proposed

budget.
Photo/Kathryn
Reed

During the two-hour budget workshop last week, the staff report presented by Chief Financial Officer Paul Hughes and Assistant General Manager Paul Sciuto did not contain a rate hike. Hughes pointed out this did not necessarily reflect staff's recommendation.

A concern he brought up that was later echoed by the majority of the board is without increasing sewer rates, the district would have to borrow money and therefore incur debt that in the long run could cost ratepayers more.

In the handouts were quarterly sewer and water rate comparisons to others in the Lake Tahoe Basin. They include:

2011-12 quarterly sewer rates –

• STPUD – $87.24

• Incline Village – $105.09

• North Tahoe – $133.68

• Kingsbury – $161.25

• Tahoe City – $163.89.

2011-12 quarterly water rates –

• Incline Village – $102.87

• STPUD – $119.89

• Tahoe City – $183.23

• Kingsbury – $195

• North Tahoe –$195.81

• Cave Rock – $607.38.

If STPUD raises sewer rates by 3 percent, it would increase the average residential customers' bill by less than $1 a month.

The board members squabbled among themselves about whether it's better to go with an increase now and pay as they go for things, or wait to hit ratepayers later, incur debt and perhaps let the infrastructure be taxed longer without repair.

Per their regular stances, board President Dale Rise is not a strong proponent of rate increases, while board member Jim Jones never believes what is agreed to is enough.

Jones was adamant he would not vote for a budget that does not include a rate increase.

"There is never a good year to raise rates," Jones said. But he added he wouldn't stand by and let the system disintegrate.

Sciuto told the board, "We are doing a good job of managing our assets, but there is risk. I like redundancy and we don't have that."

This was in regards to the Al Tahoe main as well as the lines services the North Upper Truckee area. If something happens to either one, he is worried it will cause problems throughout much of the system.

Board member Chris Cefalu, who will be one of the water meter customers to have uncertain future bills, said he is adamant about not raising water rates while the billing is in a state of flux.

The nearly 5,000 STPUD customers with meters represent about 34 percent of the ratepayers. The district per state law this year has to start charging them based on consumption. The goal is the rate structure will have the average consumer paying what flat rate customers pay.

However, those not using much water are likely to see rates decrease and those with lots of landscaping or families doing multiple loads of laundry a week could see the rates increase.

The budget contains no increases for salaries or benefits. However, the district's CalPERS rate is increasing 2.43 percent. It will be shared equally between the district and employees.

Besides working on the next fiscal budget that begins July 1, the district is always working on a 10-year budget. The decline in assessed property valued for this fiscal year means a $7 million hit on the 10-year forecast for property taxes.

In the next fiscal year it is anticipated the district will use the remainder of the nearly $2.3 million in the MTBE account.

South Tahoe Public Utility District won a $69 million judgment (though about half of that went to attorneys and other expenses) when it successfully sued oil companies when it proved methyl tertiary butyl ether, a fuel additive, contaminated groundwater and posed problems for bodies of water like Lake Tahoe.

The money has been used to treat the 14 wells on the South Shore contaminated with MTBE.

Senators want safety review of Calif. nuke plants

By Foon Rhee, Sacramento Bee

As Japan struggles with nuclear reactors crippled by the

earthquake and tsunami, California's two U.S. senators called on federal regulators today to make sure the state's two commercial nuclear power plants are safe.

Sens. Dianne Feinstein and Barbara Boxer pointed out that about 7.4 million people live within 50 miles of the San Onofre plant in San Diego County and about 424,000 live within 50 miles of the Diablo Canyon plant near San Luis Obispo.

Read the whole story

Clean Tahoe gives old hotel items a second life

Recycling took on new meaning this week as items from C&M Lodge in South Lake Tahoe were given to Clean Tahoe for redistribution.

Edgewood Companies, which owns the C&M Lodge on Bonanza Drive, is working with Clean Tahoe and other nonprofits on the South Shore to place the items for community benefit.



Jeff Pollitt and Lou Graves of Clean Tahoe on March 14 load up

furniture.
Photo/Provided

“Clean Tahoe’s Dinner Table Project serves our community by providing recycled furniture to those receiving assistance or who are in programs with the South Lake Tahoe Women’s Center, Tahoe Youth & Family Service and Child Protective Services,” explained Ellen Nunes, program director for Clean Tahoe. “Many of these families are in crisis and transition, and some without any belongings. The Dinner Table Project acquires its furniture through private donations from the community and through Clean Tahoe’s daily mission of keeping the city and county clean.”

It also means saving money on dump fees and not filling up landfills.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Miranda Lambert in Stateline

Harveys Lake Tahoe and Another Planet Entertainment are bringing country music star Miranda Lambert to the Lake Tahoe Summer Concert Series at Harveys Outdoor Arena on Aug. 19 at 7:30pm.

Also appearing with Miranda Lambert is country vocal quartet Little Big Town.

Tickets are $39.50, $59.50, $69.50, $89.50 and $125.50, plus applicable fees.