Report: Taxes, fees needed to close Calif. water funding gap

By Jeremy B. White, Sacramento Bee

California will need to find billions of dollars annually to improve its water system, according to a Public Policy Institute of California report.

Lawmakers are currently debating several water bond proposals for the 2014 ballot, but the report cautions that the state cannot rely on uncertain bond money to improve water management. It advocates a "broader mix of funding sources" that includes new taxes and fees.

"Although this is a fixable problem," the report says, "it will not happen without a bold, concerted effort on the part of California's state and local leaders, who must convince California's residents to support the necessary changes with their votes and their pocketbooks."

Read the whole story

Phone records reveal more than you think

By Patricia Yollin, KQED-TV

In November, two computer science graduate students at Stanford University began a study of phone metadata privacy.

They figured that this kind of information could be extremely sensitive, but they didn’t expect to find much evidence one way or the other.

They were wrong.

The two grad students identified the participants’ contacts by matching phone numbers against Yelp and Google Place directories to see who was receiving calls. The participants contacted 33,688 unique numbers. Of those, 18 percent – or 6,107 – were identified.

The computer scientists analyzed individual calls to numbers that could be deemed sensitive – anything a person might not want to be public, such as political or religious affiliation, health status, gun ownership or finances. They created 11 sensitive categories in the study, and then they analyzed patterns of calls.

Read the whole story

AG backs reduced sentence for some drug offenders

By Scott Neuman, NPR

Attorney General Eric Holder is backing a proposal to shorten sentences for nonviolent drug dealers in an effort reduce federal spending on prisons.

Holder appeared before the United States Sentencing Commission on Thursday to announce his support of the panel’s

recommendations to trim federal guidelines for sentencing of drug traffickers to 51 months from 62 months.

“This overreliance on incarceration is not just financially unsustainable, it comes with human and moral costs that are impossible to calculate,” Holder said, adding that the harshest penalties should be reserved for “dangerous and violent drug traffickers.”

Read the whole story

No-tip restaurants gaining in popularity

By Charles Passy, MarketWatch

Is the no-tip movement at restaurants reaching, well, a tipping point?

In recent years, such renowned restaurants as Thomas Keller’s Per Se in New York and French Laundry in Yountville, Alice Waters’ Chez Panisse in Berkeley, and Grant Achatz’s Alinea in Chicago have put no-tip policies in place. So did the recently closed Linkery restaurant in San Diego.

Perhaps the policies at these establishments shouldn’t come as a surprise, since restaurant patrons are increasingly saying they don’t like to play the tipping game. A solid majority of Americans – 75 percent – say they tip less than the customary 20 percent when dining out, according to a new survey by vouchercloud.net, which researches consumer spending habits. Additionally, the website reports that 46 percent of Americans say they are tipping less in general than they did five years

ago.

Read the whole story

Nevada ranchers taking on NDOW

By Will Stone, NPR

When the Nevada Department of Wildlife gave its comments on sage grouse, Ron Torell says the agency threw the livestock industry under the bus.

“We had to get their attention somehow. This did it.”

Torell is president of the Nevada Cattlemen’s Association and says NDOW’s stance on sage grouse could spell the demise for family ranches across the state. That includes the department’s support of a Bureau of Land Management plan for dealing with the possible listing of the bird as endangered. He says they handpick data and ignore the reality on the ground.

Read the whole story

Californians relying less on

personal vehicles

Californians are walking, biking, or using public transportation twice as much as they did in 2000.

Nearly 23 percent of household trips were taken by walking, biking, and public transportation. In 2000, that share was only 11 percent, according to the California Household Travel Survey.

“Based on this research, we can make good decisions about transportation that will improve mobility, air quality, and travel choices for all Californians and make our state a better place to live and work,” Caltrans Director Malcolm Dougherty said in a statement.

The 2012 study provides a snapshot of the travel behavior of approximately 109,000 people from more than 42,000 households in 58 California counties. This included parents driving to work or kids biking to school.

The average number of trips for a household was 9.2, while the average number of trips per person was 3.6.

Last year, legislation was approved creating California’s $129 million Active Transportation Program, which distributes funding for human-powered transportation projects and programs to increase the proportion of trips accomplished by biking and walking.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Nevada County tax collector coming to Truckee

Nevada County Treasurer and Tax Collector Tina Vernon will be setting up office in the Truckee area to serve residents during peak property tax season.

Second tax installments are due no later than April 10, 2014.

The seasonal office will be located at the Truckee Sheriff Substation at 10879 Donner Pass Road, Suite A. The tax collector will be available April 7-9 from 9am to 4pm, and is encouraging residents to pay their property taxes, ask questions, or to just say “hello”.

Payments can also be made by mail, postmarked no later than April 10 and sent to P.O. Box 128, Nevada City, CA 95959-0128.

U.S. second in World Cup team competition

By USSA

LENZERHEIDE, Switzerland – The U.S. Ski Team, captained by Mikaela Shiffrin (Eagle-Vail), Julia Mancuso (Squaw Valley), David Chodounsky (Crested Butte, Colo.) and Tim Jitloff (Reno), powered to second in the Audi FIS Alpine World Cup Finals Nations team event Friday.

Anchored by Shiffrin and Chodounsky, who won every dual on the faster blue course, the team rolled past France in the opening round and Austria in the semifinal before losing on a tie

break to Switzerland in the final.

The tie break was decided by the fastest run in the final, which went to Switzerland's Reto Schmidiger with a time of 25.78, a mere 0.15 faster than Chodounsky's final run time.

Austria defeated Italy in the small final to finish third.

Overhaul of Kingsbury Grade likely to create traffic nightmare throughout the summer

By Kathryn Reed

Construction this summer on Kingsbury Grade is going to require patience from drivers, businesses and residents. Expect the roadway to be torn up until just before July 4, 2015.

If the weather holds, the work could begin before May 1.

This stretch of road that connects Lake Tahoe to the Carson Valley has been worked on since 2009. That was a water quality project, while this is more about the road surface and making other improvements.

"Ultimately, the contractor did not complete all of the contracted work. The current project will construct improvements to realize the final goals and objectives of the

earlier project as well as reconstruct the roadway pavement and make safety improvements," Meg Ragonese, with the Nevada Department of Transportation, told *Lake Tahoe News*.



The sun is setting on Kingsbury Grade being an easy commute. Photo/Kathryn Reed

Last year NDOT told *LTN* this project would cost $7.5 million. Now the price tag is $14,877,619. Bonds, state funds and federal dollars are financing it. Q&D Construction out of Reno is the contractor.

"The goal is to take the opportunity to incorporate as many needed road enhancements as possible into this project. The project team conducted detailed analysis of the pavement design and constructability and identified issues that were not anticipated in the initial scope of this project," Ragonese said.

Additions from the original plans include:

• Subsurface water mitigation of natural springs located directly beneath the pavement at three locations along Kingsbury Grade.

• Improving poor site distance at Tramway Drive. A left turn lane and advance warning flashing lights will be placed at Tramway alerting drivers that there is vehicle movement at

this intersection.

• Luminaries will be placed at the existing crosswalks to enhance pedestrian visibility.

• Sidewalk and ramps will be improved to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act.

At the end drivers will be left with what will essentially be a brand new road that will be constructed to a depth of 13 inches. This should last 20 years. However, it’s possible that repaving could be needed in 10 to 15 years. That is largely dependent on the weather. The freeze-thaw cycle at Tahoe is extremely detrimental to roads.

Here is the current work schedule:

• May: Roadway reconstruction from Pine Ridge to Katherine and drainage improvements from Pine Ridge to Buchanan.

Work will be around the clock Monday-Saturday.

Kingsbury Grade will be closed to through traffic near the summit, just east of Tramway Drive. Residences and businesses located on Kingsbury Grade between the closure and Highway 50 will only be accessible by Highway 50 at Tahoe.

• June-August: Roadway reconstruction from Highway 50 to Pine Ridge and drainage improvements from Buchanan to the summit.

Work will be nights only Monday-Friday.

One lane will be closed from Pine Ridge Drive to Highway 50 every day, every hour. This will still leave one lane of traffic open in each direction with no flagger controls.

Flagger controls with one-way alternating traffic only during night shifts.

Road will be open with one lane in each direction for days, weekends, and holidays.

• September-October: Roadway reconstruction from Katherine to Buchanan and drainage improvements from Pine Ridge to Buchanan.

Work will be 24 hours per day, Monday-Saturday.

• Following the Labor Day holiday: Kingsbury Grade will be closed to through traffic near the summit, just east of Tramway Drive. Residences and businesses located on Kingsbury Grade between the closure and Highway 50 will only be accessible by Highway 50.

• May 2015: Roadway reconstruction from Buchanan to the Summit. Work will be 24 hours per day Monday-Saturday. One lane will be closed with flagger controls during this period.

“The amount of traffic will dictate how long the delays will be. The anticipated maximum delays before Memorial Day and after Labor Day are 30 minutes,” Ragonese said. “The anticipated delays during the nighttime work between Memorial Day and Labor Day are 30 minutes. During the day between Memorial Day and Labor Day, there will be one lane of traffic open in each direction with no flagger controls.”

NDOT says between 9,000 and 14,000 vehicles a day on average pass through the intersection of Highway 50 and Kingsbury Grade. This compares to the 4,300 vehicles on the Grade at Foothill Road. At Daggett Summit the average is 10,000 vehicles a day.

People will have access to businesses and residences the entire time. It just might take a while to get anywhere, though.

Ridge Tahoe officials did not return multiple calls, so it’s not known what they plan to do for their guests. The Ridge is at the very top of Kingsbury Grade. South Lake Tahoe and Douglas County officials said they are working with NDOT and others to help alleviate problems.

“The intersection of U.S. 50 and Kingsbury Grade will be monitored and flaggers will be utilized throughout the project to better handle and direct traffic. If backups on U.S. 50 persist, the group will reconvene and work together until a solution is found,” Ragonese said.

NDOT is recommending people use Highway 50 – Spooner Summit – as an alternative to Kingsbury Grade.

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Notes:

• Go online to sign up for email updates on the project.

• March 19 is the first Kingsbury Grade Pavement Reconstruction Project public information meeting. It’s at the Ridge Tahoe, 400 Ridge Club Drive, Stateline. March 20 there is a meeting at Douglas High School, 1670 Highway 88, Minden. Both meetings will provide the same information and will be in an open format from 4-7pm. A project presentation will be given at 5:30pm.

• Comments may be made until April 4 to info@dot.state.nv.us.

• Lake Tahoe South Shore Chamber of Commerce is taking a survey to collect information on how many people would utilize a commuter bus if available.

Opinion: Bears waking from

winter slumber

By Carl Lackey

Mid-March is the time for black bears to emerge from their dens and begin their annual search for food. The first bears to emerge are usually males and females who do not have cubs.

Females with cubs usually emerge from the den later in the spring, from mid-April to early May.

The bears are ready to eat as they emerge from their long winter's nap. They will eat emergent grasses and forbs and will also key in on the carrion of dead and decaying animals that died over the winter period.

Bears in the Lake Tahoe Basin will also be looking toward human garbage as a source of food.

Every year, the first bears to get into trouble are the young males, many of whom are generational garbage bears. These bears are born to females who have taught them that humans are a source of food.

The old warnings from past years are still valid. If you live in bear country, do not allow bears access to garbage. Keep garage doors shut, car doors locked and keep all food sources away from bears.

Another potential problem is people deliberately feeding the bears by placing bird seed, vegetables or other plant matter out in places near their homes. Nevada has a law against feeding big game animals and last year, a person in Incline Village was warned for deliberately feeding the bears.

We had to humanely euthanize a bear last year that was being deliberately fed by humans. The bear had become a threat to public safety. The bear's behavior was disturbing because it had no fear of humans. The person or persons feeding the bear,

through their actions, acclimated it to humans as a source of food and the bear ended up paying the ultimate price for their actions.

Since March 1, NDOW has captured three bears, all young males. An injured bear at Heavenly Mountain Resort was captured and turned over to California authorities for care. On March 7, another injured bear in Incline Village was captured. The nature of the bear's injuries were not obvious, but the bear had to be euthanized. A third male bear was caught on the west side of Carson City over the weekend while raiding garbage cans. It was tranquilized and later released in the mountains south of Carson City.

Because of the ongoing drought conditions, we are expecting a very busy nuisance bear year. People in bear country need to be ready to do all they can to keep the bears wild and away from human sources of food.

Anyone wishing to report illegal activity can call the Operation Game Thief Hotline at 800.992.3030. The OGT Hotline is a place where persons concerned about the illegal feeding of bears can provide information to NDOW game wardens anonymously.

Carl Lackey is a biologist with the Nevada Department of Wildlife.