Allergy season blowing into Tahoe with a vengeance



By Kathryn Reed

Does that sniffling sound from friends, family members and co-workers seem louder, more constant and earlier than years past?

Allergy season is here – in the Lake Tahoe Basin, Carson Valley and seemingly everywhere else.

Physicians' offices affiliated with Barton Health have seen a 27 percent rise in allergy shots for the first quarter of this year compared to 2009.

In the first quarter of 2009, 169 cases of allergic rhinitis were diagnosed compared to 200 cases in the first three months of 2010. This is a 30 percent increase.

Allergic rhinitis is an inflammation of the nasal passages, usually associated with watery nasal discharge and itching of the nose and eyes – in other words, the basic reaction to what you are allergic to.

Reports state 20 percent of the population has allergies. They are caused by an overreaction of the body's immune system.

Veronica Scola, an allergy technician with Alpine Family Practice in South Lake Tahoe, said she started seeing people with seasonal allergy issues last month on the few warm days of April.

"I do think (allergies) are going to be much worse this year," Scola said. "It's a little bit worse than normal because of

the weather patterns.”

She said the back and forth spring-winter-spring cycle makes pollen worse.

Flora contributing to the problem includes: pines, ash, birch, juniper, alfalfa, grasses, rabbit brush and sagebrush. Trees pollinate in early spring, grasses in summer and weeds in the fall. Allergy season in the basin is from the time the snow melts until it starts to fall again.

As soon as people start raking pine needles from their lawns it stirs up components they may be allergic to.

Michelle Feeney, a family nurse practitioner with Barton Family Medicine, recommends over the counter saline irrigation to her patients.

“You get pollen on your hands, your face, you breath it in,” Feeney said. “The more important thing is to stay indoors on windy days. Wear a mask if you are really susceptible to allergies.”

She said a lot of people forget eyes are affected by allergens and they often water, get itchy and turn red. Some people think they have pink eye, when what they have is allergies.

Scola is a not a big proponent of allergy medicines. She recommends people with persistent allergies to get tested and then possibly get weekly allergy shots.

For a regional pollen report, click here. The pollen hotline is (775) 359.5010, ext. 35.

For a pollen forecast by ZIP code, click here.

Blood drive at LTCC

Alpha Gamma Sigma honor society will be hosting its tri-annual blood drive June 10 in the Aspen Room, next to the library, from 10am-3pm at Lake Tahoe Community College.

No appointments needed.

LTCC is located at One College Drive in South Lake Tahoe.

For more information, or questions, contact BloodSource at 800.995.4420.

North Tahoe business expo looking for vendors

Showcase your business to hundreds of local residents and meet new customers at the North Lake Tahoe Chamber of Commerce’s 24th Annual Business Expo on June 2 from 5-7:30pm at the North Tahoe Event Center, 8318 North Tahoe Blvd., Kings Beach.

Booth fees are waived for restaurants and caterers serving food.

Prizes, raffles and merchandise values will be available at this interactive community event. The expo also offers free admission, along with free parking, for attendees, food and beverages, and is open to both chamber and non-chamber members.

Booths fees are $195 for an inner booth, $245 for a wall booth, $125 for a nonprofit inner booth and $175 for a nonprofit wall booth. Registration fees include electricity,

Internet access, parking, 6-foot table, table linen and skirting, and signage.

Deadline to register is May 20. To download a registration form, click to www.NorthLakeTahoeChamber.com, and then Programs and Documents.

For more information about the event, call Kym Fabel, North Lake Tahoe Chamber of Commerce manager, at (530) 581.8764 or kym@puretahoenorth.com.

Marketing seminar for South Shore businesses

Smart Marketing Strategies for Tough Times No. 2 is May 21 from noon-2pm at MontBleu in Stateline. The lunch will be followed by an optional social media workshop, from 2-3:30pm at no extra charge for any businesses interested in one-on-one help with Facebook and Twitter.

Featured guest speaker, David Thiemann, returns for a second installment of last year's Smart Marketing Strategies for Tough Times with Digital Marketing Demystified. Attendees will learn how to take advantage of interactive ways to target customers, including social media marketing, video, online advertising and directories, search, mobile, email blasts, e-newsletters and more.

Thiemann is publisher for Windsor Now and Sales & Marketing Director for Northern Colorado Communications Group based in Greely, Colo.

Reservations are required by May 14. Fees are $30 for Lake

Tahoe South Shore Chamber of Commerce members and $45 for non-members (materials and lunch included). To make reservations, call (775) 588.1728 or go to www.tahoechamber.org.

Prescribed burn for Kings Beach area

U.S. Forest Service fuels management crews expect to conduct prescribed fire operations near Kings Beach beginning May 10.

The project would continue through May 12 if favorable weather conditions persist, with the goal of completing 5 acres.

State and local fire management agencies may also be conducting prescribed fire work during this period.

Residents and travelers can expect to see smoke from prescribed fire project areas.

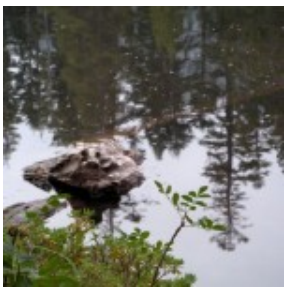
This and other prescribed fire projects are designed to reduce wildfire risks to communities and critical resources. Smoke management is part of every prescribed fire burn plan, and efforts will be taken to reduce actual or potential smoke impacts on community areas.

Trek to top of Mt. Tallac opens up another world

By Kathryn Reed

Something about Mount Tallac calls to people – more so in the summer than now.

Still covered in snow, the icon of the South Shore of Lake Tahoe that seems to be present no matter where one is, now requires an ice ax, crampons and an appreciation for Mother Nature if one is to trek to the top.



Floating Island Lake

Soon, though, as the temperature begins to consistently rise, the snow will disappear – though not always completely. There have been years where splotches, sometimes even the cross, are evident until the snow begins to fly again.

Last August I made my second ascent of the 9,735-foot mountain. Though it's not the highest in the basin, it is one of the most beautiful. It's not even the most difficult to hike. (I don't need to slog up Freel Peak again.)

Tallac, though, is worth the climb. And worth doing multiple times.

It is just one of the many peaks people bag each year in the 63,960 acres called Desolation Wilderness.

Unfortunately, on this particular Friday the basin is socked in with smoke from some now forgotten wildfire outside the area. Still, the trail is full of hikers destined for the rocky summit.

Access to the trailhead can be obtained from a few areas off Highway 89. This time Sue and I opted to go in from Cathedral Road.



Sue Wood along the trail near Fallen Leaf Lake.

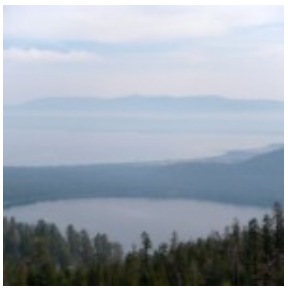
Not far in are some charred trees. They linger from a fire a few years ago (before the 2007 Angora Fire) that burned some of the area. The last time Sue was there she had a notebook in her hand and fire officials telling her she wasn't supposed to be there. Then a bit of fire retardant drifted toward her – staining her clothes for posterity.

This day was about enjoying the hike, the scenery and being one with nature. But even on Friday the trail is well used. Several people have stopped to snack at Floating and Cathedral lakes. The stillness of the water transforms them into reflecting pools.

A group from the Student Conservation Association is working with the U.S. Forest Service – which maintains Desolation Wilderness – to make part of the trail a little less steep. The work was to be completed last October.

Even though the trail (5 miles one way) is full of people, it’s not anywhere as congested as Half Dome in Yosemite. On this Friday it was full of locals. Though a couple cousins from Maryland seemed to be sprinting up the mountain.

Unfortunately, people were able to get cell phone reception at the top. Somehow this seemed to negate the point – to get away from life below.



Fallen Leaf Lake and Lake Tahoe are covered by smoke in August 2009. Photos/Kathryn Reed

What little wind there was (usually the wind is significant at the top) just filled the senses with smoke instead of the usual clean mountain air.

Chipmunks scurry from one group of people to the next at the top in hopes of crumbs being left over.

Along the way birds chirp. Sage grouse hide in the brush, trying to avoid having their picture taken. We didn’t know what it was until we looked it up at home. We thought it was a prehistoric chicken.



Sage Grouse

Normally, the views of Lake Tahoe are breathtaking from the summit. Today the smoke obscures the azure water. Fallen Leaf is also buried in the haze.

I guess it just means I need to get my hiking legs in shape to make the trek this summer – under sunny, clear skies.

State parks-motor fee headed to November ballot



By Paul Rogers, Santa Cruz Sentinel

A plan to charge California motorists $18 a year to shore up the state parks system’s financial troubles took another step toward the November ballot on Monday when environmental groups submitted about 760,000 signatures to election officials.

Under state law, the campaign needs 433,931 valid signatures of registered California voters to qualify the initiative. Elections officials have until June 24 to certify the measure.

If approved by a simple majority of state voters on Nov. 2, the measure would increase annual vehicle registration fees for California motorists by $18 a year, and allow any car with California license plates free admission to the state's 278 parks, which currently range from about $6 to $15 per visit. State parks include redwoods forests such as Big Basin in Santa Cruz County, historic sites such as Marshall Gold Discovery park in El Dorado County and beaches like Malibu Creek near Los Angeles.

Read the whole story

Time to create defensible space

To the community,

Please clear all combustible vegetation at least 30 feet from around your house. Install a fire safe roof, and clean the pine needles from the roof and eaves. Trim tree limbs back 10 feet from your chimney and remove any branches hanging over the house. Stack woodpiles at least 30 feet from buildings and remove any vegetation and com-bustible material from beneath your deck.

If you have any questions concerning defensible space, please call us at (530) 542.6160.

Sallie Ross-Filgo, South Lake Tahoe Fire Department

USFS gearing up to open seasonal rec sites in Tahoe

With the arrival of spring temperatures and snow quickly diminishing, the U.S. Forest Service, Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit will begin the annual process of opening recreational facilities around the Lake Tahoe Basin. Many facilities, including campgrounds and day use areasm will formally open in mid-May, weather permitting.

The Taylor Creek Visitor Center and Tallac Historic Site traditionally open near Memorial Day weekend.

Before facilities can open, the Forest Service must complete the hiring of crews to staff and manage the sites, clean up from winter, remove safety hazards, and wait for the danger of a freeze to pass before turning on water systems.

As a reminder, until recreation areas officially open, there is no parking, trash removal, or restroom facilities available. Park your vehicle off the roadway and do not block access gates. All trash must be packed out and where pets are allowed, you must clean up after your animal.

For a complete list of projected opening dates, visit the Campground and Day Use Area Opening webpage at http://fs.usda.gov/goto/ltbmu/RecAreaOpenings or call the Forest Supervisor’s office to ask about the status of a specific site at (530) 543.2694.

Carson River Aquatic Trail about to expand

For the first time, boaters have a developed area to put into the Carson River at Morgan Mill Road in Carson City. The area offers a concrete launching ramp, paved parking, picnic tables and a restroom, and similarly improved facilities to take out of the river at Santa Maria Ranch in Dayton.

The unveiling by Carson City and Lyon County officials will be May 22.

This stretch of the river opens new boating facilities for whitewater rafting and kayaking that have opened on the Carson River Aquatic Trail between Carson City and Dayton.

The public is invited to attend the ceremony at 10am and tour new Morgan Mill facilities, just upstream of the Bureau of Land Management offices at Deer Run and Morgan Mill roads, south of Highway 50. The Carson River Aquatic Trail has two segments:

The 3.3-mile Upper River Class I float is a peaceful 1.5- to 2-hour ride from Carson River Park through cottonwood and willow-lined riverbanks, concluding at Morgan Mill. It is suitable for beginners.

The 9.3-mile, 2.5- to 3-hour Lower River Class III ride for experienced floaters puts in at Morgan Mill and offers exciting, challenging rapids in scenic Carson River Canyon with wildflowers, historic rock walls, mill sites and other relics from the old V&T Railroad and Comstock mining era. It terminates at Lyon County’s newly redesigned Santa Maria Ranch River Park in Dayton, next to the Santa Maria subdivision on Highway 50 in Dayton. It now includes parking, restrooms and a river-access beach for rafters and kayakers.