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California closer to mandating youths wear ski helmets



By Derek Wilson, Times-Herald

When her boys wanted to start skiing, the first thing Vallejo's Jake Souza did was to put helmets on their heads. Now, two Northern California lawmakers would like to do the same for all minors.

A fatal skiing accident at a Northern California ski resort received international attention in February, sparking legislators to consider stricter safety rules for California ski resorts.

"My kids never fought me on the helmet thing," Jake Souza said. "I've seen so many bad head injuries and I've seen a lot of kids' lives saved by helmets."

Danny Souza, a junior at St. Patrick-St. Vincent High School,

knows the risks of not wearing a helmet – and the benefits they offer.

Read the whole story

Northstar's Ritz on financial fritz

By Mark Anderson, Sacramento Business Journal

Bank of America has filed a notice of default against the Ritz-Carlton Highlands Lake Tahoe, a luxury resort that opened just four months ago.

The notice of default, filed at the end of March, claims the Highlands Hotel Co. LLC is $18.6 million in default on the hotel and a neighboring parcel. The default involves two loans totaling

Ritz-Carlton
at Northstar

$157 million.

Read the whole story

Lake Tahoe ski report, April 24



Bring the sunscreen if you are headed for the slopes. Here is the ski report from Curtis Fong, the Guy from Tahoe.

Carrig leaving Heavenly in Vail restructure

By Kathryn Reed

Vail Resorts is undergoing an upper management shuffle that is sending Heavenly's Blaise Carrig to Colorado.

Carrig was brought in to be chief operating officer of the South Shore resort when Vail bought the ski area in 2002.



Blaise Carrig

He and John Garnsey are co-presidents of the Mountain Division. Neither will have every day responsibilities at any resort. Carrig will work in Broomfield with oversight still of

Heavenly, Keystone and Breckenridge. Garnsey will oversee Beaver Creek and Vail from his office in Avon.

Carrig is on vacation and was not available for comment Friday.

CEO Robert Katz made the announcement Thursday.

“As we continue to look toward our future, I am announcing some changes to our organizational structure that will better position our company for future growth, both within our existing resorts and as we pursue new opportunities,” Katz said in an email to employees. “These changes will allow some of our key leaders to have greater capacity to participate in our strategic efforts, and will give opportunities for other individuals to take on new and larger roles within the company.”

A general manager will be hired to run Heavenly and one to run Beaver Creek. To begin with those jobs are only open to current Vail Resorts staff. Heavenly has eight people on its senior management team.

Russ Pecoraro, spokesman for Heavenly, said a time line has not been established to hire the general manager. He said the plan is to replace whoever is promoted from within.

No jobs are being lost or layoffs incurred from the change in structure, Pecoraro said.

Other changes will occur in the human resources and finance departments, but none directly impacting staff at the Lake Tahoe resort.

Heavenly Mountain Resort wraps up its season Sunday, days after the corporate office reported skier visits are up 2.3 percent and lift-ticket revenue up 4.6 percent for the 2009-10 compared to last season.

Fine sediment clouds future of Washoe Meadow State Park

By Kathryn Reed

MEYERS – “Parklands are for the entire state, not just one community.”

That was the overriding message of Pam Armas, superintendent of the Sierra District of the California State Parks. She was one of many park officials dressed in their trademark green uniforms at Thursday night’s open house at Lake Tahoe Golf Course.

The golf course in Meyers sits on land that is part of the Lake Valley State Recreation Area, adjacent to the Washoe Meadow State Park. Both are part of the State Park system. Many people, even locals, don’t know this is one of the 17 parks in the Sierra District. It made the news in 2007 when nearly 20 acres of the more than 700-acre park burned in the Angora Fire.

America Golf is the concessionaire of the golf course and will continue to have a month-to-month contract until a decision is made about the future of the links, the park and the river that runs through it.



Celio dairy barn in Washoe Meadow State Park. Photos/Kathryn Reed

This undeveloped park is ideal for snowshoeing and cross country skiing in the winter, hiking and mountain biking in drier conditions. The old Celio dairy barn is an iconic relic of days gone by.

Trails traverse alongside and across the meandering Upper Truckee River.

A mix of meadows and forest dot the landscape.

Snowmobiling is the most common issue Brian Barton and other park law officials handle. It's not allowed in the park. In the summer it's dogs – especially ones off leash. They are only allowed on drivable roads.

Maria Mircheva, executive director of the Sugar Pine Foundation, was dispensing information about blister rust and how it affects the sugar, white bark and Western white pines in the Lake Tahoe Basin.

"We donate sugar pines to the State Parks and they plant it in the upland areas where they see fit," Mircheva said. "We brought them two boxes (tonight)."

El Dorado County had a table set up to talk about issues such as the Sawmill Bike Path that will go through Washoe Meadow State Park property.

Earth Day was an opportunity for the parks department to showcase Washoe Meadow, to answer questions about animal habitat, plants, forest fuels management, blister rust, law enforcement issues, and re-routing the Upper Truckee River.

Like most reaches of the Upper Truckee River, the one in the park is being studied to potentially re-route it so it would follow its natural path. The draft EIR and EIS should be out this summer. It will include five alternatives. A 60-day comment period will follow. Park officials did not give a time line for when the final documents would be released.



Upper Truckee River in the state park.

The reason to mess with the river is to reduce the amount of fine sediment that reaches Lake Tahoe. The theory is stream restoration also allows for better plant management, flooding into meadows and other environmental benefits.

But what has people like Krissi Russell, who is part of the Washoe Meadows Community, concerned it the potential relocation of some of the holes from the golf course into the undeveloped area of the park.

This grass-roots organization of 200 people formed in 2006. Mostly it’s people who live in the area or use the park. She said her group also is worried about the logging going on in the park.

Piles of felled trees are sitting in the park waiting to be hauled off when the ground is dry.

“I wonder if the logging is to prepare to move the golf course,” Russell said. “It will fragment the park.”

Her group has made several Public Records Act requests to Armas' office. The superintendent, after the last request, invited representatives of the group to Tahoe City to look at whatever documents they want.



Pam Armas, Sierra District parks superintendent, talks April 22 about Washoe Meadow State Park.

Armas said she is trying to be as transparent as possible and keep communication open with the public.

Rich Adams, a forester with State Parks, said the goal of his department is to return the area to pre-settlement conditions. This has necessitated removing trees that are more than 100 years old.

He said the problem is fire suppression has created an unnatural environment. Removing trees by hand and machine is being done, as is chipping the material, burning slash piles, having contractors haul away the lumber and having prescribed fires. Some material is sold as lumber, some to cogeneration plants, some to composting companies.

"We want a variety of vegetation structures," Adams said. "We think having a variety of structure is good for wildlife."

This means larger trees will be 30-feet apart, while some stands will be more dense.

Lisa Fields, environmental scientist with State Parks, said, “Anything living in this park is comfortable with people.”

This is because the park is surrounded by development.

The golf course is an Audubon certified course – which means it provides substantial bird habitat.

Fields said a study from the state Department of Fish & Game and Caltrans came out this month saying most animals travel around the valley the park is situated in by migrating via the nearby ridges.

Click here for more information about the Upper Truckee River restoration project.

Douglas County introduces Reverse 911

Douglas County 911 Emergency Services has established a self-registration portal (SRP) for the Reverse 911 emergency notification system.

This will provide the department a proactive means for gathering contact information from the community-at-large, ultimately improving communications during all types of emergencies.

The SRP is a simple-to-access web tool that allows residents of Douglas and Alpine counties to sign up to receive alerts issued by Douglas County 911 Emergency Services. Click here.

Click the “911” link on the left column of the page, then the “On the Alert” link that connects you to the SRP; read the terms and conditions and follow the instructions for registration.

The latitude and longitude of the individual’s address are calculated, with the location quickly appearing on a digital, street-level display. If the position is incorrect, perhaps due to a typographical error, simply move a pin to correct it. Participants may also update their personal contact information, physical address and other items as often as necessary in order to keep the data current.

This information is seamlessly geo-coded into the address database utilized by the Reverse 911 emergency notification system on a scheduled basis.

Do not register your traditional land line telephone as that number is already in the database.

You may register three cell phones or VOIP phones per address.

The opt-out date can be any future date you no longer want to receive alerts for the address you are registering; this can be changed at any time by logging into your account.

Questions should be directed to 911 Manager Ron Sagen at (775) 782-9977 or Operations Supervisor Maggie Jensen at (775) 782-9978.

Placer County moves

Engineering Division to Tahoe Vista

The Placer County Department of Public Works' Tahoe Engineering Division is moving its staff from Truckee to north Lake Tahoe this weekend. The move will put the Tahoe staff closer to constituents and customers.

The move, to a commercial office building in Tahoe Vista, means the office won't be open until Tuesday.

The office is located at 7717 North Lake Blvd., Tahoe Vista. It formerly housed the California State Automobile Association. CSAA built the building in 1990. It includes parking and has easy access to highways 28 and 267.

Placer County acquired the 3,344-square-foot building in March for $860,000. Prior to occupying, the county upgraded the building's energy management system and data networks, and will also be upgrading stormwater best management practices.

The Tahoe Engineering Division has 11 staff members.

Shuttle delivers travelers from Sac airport to South Tahoe

Adventure travelers and wine lovers can now enjoy an easier way to travel to and from Sacramento

International Airport.

The Gateway Express Shuttle provides direct ground transportation service to South Lake Tahoe and the Napa Valley. The schedule includes four trips per day to the Wine Country and two to Tahoe.

Gateway Express Shuttle service is part of the airport's commitment to serve as the gateway to Northern California. Napa and Tahoe bound passengers no longer need to rent a car to reach the two destinations. Napa Valley and South Lake Tahoe and residents can leave their cars behind when traveling for business or pleasure.

For more information on the new shuttle service, click here.

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Ultrasonic monitors may be answer to better snow surveys

By Mark Grossi, Fresno Bee

Farmers and water officials throughout California wait anxiously each year for forecasts about snowmelt roaring down the Sierra's granite canyons – precious water for the long summer.

But the forecasts are only estimates, based on averages of past seasons, snow-sensor readings and monthly measurements from key mountain meadows above big rivers. The forecast sometimes is wrong, leaving farmers with too much or too little water later in the growing season.

One big reason: Nobody measures snow around jagged ridges, plunging ravines and deep forests in the 400-mile-long Sierra. That’s a huge swath of the high country where the size of the snowpack is unknown. As the climate warms and snowfall dwindles this century, officials will need to measure more of the Sierra to improve runoff forecasts for farmers and the growing population, say scientists at the University of California at Merced.

Read the whole story