Lake Tahoe ski report, March 9



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

Prescribed fire on West Shore

USFS Fuels Management crews are planning a small prescribed fire project in the Glenridge area along the West Shore on March 9. This project is 1 acre.

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.

Ski magazine takes a ride through steeps at Sierra

By Paul Tolme, SKI

My pulse quickens as I exit Gate 5 and traverse the ridge above Huckleberry Canyon, 320 acres of steep and deep terrain just beyond the ropes at Sierra-at-Tahoe. Until recently, only a few ski patrollers and brave locals ventured into this former out-of-bounds area. There was always avalanche danger —”not to mention the overhanging cornices and narrow rock chutes. Now, following years of planning, Huckleberry is going public. The U.S. Forest Service has incorporated it into Sierra-at-Tahoe’s boundaries, allowing the resort to do avalanche control and make the new terrain a whole lot safer. Huckleberry is a headlining addition — it’s Sierra’s first expansion ever for a low-key area that gets overshadowed by South Shore behemoth Heavenly and extreme-skiing capital Kirkwood. “Huckleberry is an amazing area, a locals’ secret if you will,” says general manager John Rice. “Opening it up adds a whole new dimension to skiing here.”

Read the whole story

Fallen Leaf Lake board member speaks out

Dear Fallen Leaf Community,

As your publicly elected official, I believe that it is important to be transparent and to let you know the reasons behind my actions regarding the contract for the Fallen Leaf Lake store and marina. Therefore, I would like to share my thoughts and endeavor to explain my decisions of the last year. This will also give you some context for where the Community Services District (CSD) is now. I will try and be brief, and, as always, I am willing to answer any questions you may have.

Last April 25, 2009, I voted with the rest of the board to execute a publicly (CSD) run facility at our community area. That included the store, cafe and marina. Much work had gone into creating a request for proposals (RFP) over the previous year. The CSD only received one proposal from the RFP and it did not meet the criteria identified in the RFP.

The CSD board president asked a group of advisers to put together an alternative that would meet the criteria that the CSD board had originally agreed to. Fallen Leaf Landing asked the board to make a decision on the operation of the community area beginning with the 2010 season before Memorial Day 2009 so they could plan how to best run their operation during the 2009 season. The board made this request their goal.

I voted for this CSD-run alternative as the best alternative for the long-term viability of the Fallen Leaf Lake assets.

The May 23, 2009, meeting brought out a lively group of the public, and it became clear that the community was concerned about the CSD-run model.

Dana Clark and Steve Malley were authorized to proceed with discussions with Fallen Leaf Landing on the terms of a contract at the July 4, 2009, meeting. I had seconded this motion and was supportive, as a majority of the community appeared to want the board to work a contract out with Fallen Leaf Landing.

On Aug. 6, 2009, our general manager, Lee Vestal, resigned. This was the first time the community had hired a general manager, as a recent California law required. He had been important to the boardâ€™s awareness of activities and information exchange on the ground. His resignation email quotes, â€œâ€¦ I have never been treated so poorly by a small but vocal and influential group of people â€¦ community members with significant influence seem to be intent on misrepresenting me.â€

A new contract with Fallen Leaf Landing was submitted at the Aug. 15, 2009, meeting. I supported the Fallen Leaf Landing contract and made a motion to accept it, but there was no second to my motion. I altered my motion to better suit the other directors. It again died for the lack of a second.

At the Sept. 5, 2009, meeting Director Mike Kraft, Steve Malley, John and Ruth Rich and I were identified to negotiate Director Kraftâ€™s concerns with the August contract. If we were not able to do so, the CSD would proceed with the CSD-run model.

I seconded that motion and it was passed. I voted for this motion because the protracted discussions had diminished our opportunity to resolve the matter in a timely manner. If we didnâ€™t have a contract with Fallen Leaf Landing, we needed to move on with the CSD-run alternative. The negotiations were reinitiated but ultimately failed. Therefore, the CSD-run model was again selected by the board.

Following that meeting, a group of Fallen Leaf residents

presented a referendum to the board essentially saying that either the Board rescind their motions of April 25 and Sept. 5 or take the issue to a public vote. At the Oct. 18, 2009, board meeting board members discussed the complications this would incur, and instead, the board unanimously rescinded its April 25 and Sept. 5 motions regarding the operational models for the marina and store/cafÃ©. President Dana Clark agreed to incorporate other director comments into the draft Fallen Leaf Landing contract.

At the Jan. 9, 2010, meeting, President Dana Clark identified 12 points that he required Fallen Leaf Landing to agree to before he would sign the contract. Only 10 of those points were able to reach negotiation. The two remaining points were regarding: 1) the distribution of compensation to the CSD of marina fees, and 2) the ability to stage heavy equipment onsite and work in the CSD community area after the season was completed. These issues were to be part of an ongoing negotiation for the February meeting.

At the same meeting Mr. Rick Firkins was first identified as a possible bid that was coming to the CSD for the store/cafe. No motions were made.

Jan. 18, 2010, the board president, Dana Clark, resigned. The concluding statement of his resignation letter stated, â€œFor a place so beautiful, I am amazed at the level of harassment, contempt, ridicule and hostility that has been directed at a volunteer board that the community elected. With that in mind, I have chosen to invest my time in the many positive events happening in my life.â€

I knew at the Feb. 6, 2010, meeting that time was of the essence in order to have a store/marina/cafe next summer. I thoughtfully considered how to approach the management of the store/cafe. I had been a member of the RFP committee, and heard all the discussions around the original contract included in the RFP. It was a thoughtful and lengthy process.

Since the January meeting, I had spent much time rethinking everything in light of future generations at the lake. The time had come to think of the contract in light of the big picture.

I identified a decision-making methodology to employ at the February meeting. I thought through this process in the manner I use in my professional work, with the national parks and the Presidio, during planning efforts. I identified six criteria to use:

1. What will be best for the community of Fallen Leaf Lake?

2. How well the concessionaire displays he/she will work with the board, who is elected by the people of Fallen Leaf, and with the board's representative on the ground, the general manager.

3. How can the decision satisfy the time frame for having a store/marina operation this summer, which I believe is our duty as a Board?

4. What will ensure financial solvency?

5. To what degree does the concessionaire comply with and respond to the intent, processes and objectives in the RFP?

6. How does the contract help in a long-term perspective?

At the Feb. 6 meeting I assessed how things developed using the above criteria, to decide how to vote. It went like this:

1. First, approach the draft Fallen Leaf Landing contract terms in a way that, in my professional judgment, is best. In light of Dana's resignation and the Firkins proposal, I wanted to first attempt to ensure that the Fallen Leaf Landing (John's) terms were the final ones that he would accept, and see if he would be willing to modify his terms in order to make his proposal more compelling in light of the new alternative on the table. My approach was to negotiate with

Fallen Leaf Landing on the spot to see if they could accept the conditions that I thought important. I mentioned these in the discussion prior to the motion. Following that discussion I reviewed the criteria based on the existing terms, that Jennifer presented, and my existing knowledge of Fallen Leaf Landing, in regards to the criteria I had identified.

2. I listened to the Rick Firkins proposal, and the modifications to the existing RFP which I knew intimately, having worked on the committee to create it. I was happy to see that he was willing to have a two-year contract so that we could all see if this was a workable alternative for everyone, and go out with another search next year if it was not. His responses to questions that addressed my criteria were positive. It was confirmed that a background check was completed, and that it was acceptable. The background check was not made available to the full board. I took Director Kraftâ€™s word that it was acceptable.

3. I listened to Director Kraftâ€™s proposal for the running of the marina, and added a contract option into the mix. The motion that passed included the possibility for an independent contractor or a CSD-run marina. I believe the final motion was the best considering my criteria.

One of the major responsibilities that, in my judgment, we have as elected officials of the district is to ensure that we have a cafe, store and marina for the community of Fallen Leaf, and the public at large. Splitting the vote on Feb. 6 would have left these community services in jeopardy for this summer.

With an election in August, and still not knowing the outcome of a vote for Fallen Leaf Landing, we risked the very real possibility of not having the amenities listed above. Therefore, I was true to the criteria and continued to refer to it throughout the meeting in order for all of us to be able to move forward.

Approximately a week after the meeting, certain information regarding Mr. Firkinâ€™s background was disclosed. He was questioned and responded to the questions, through his attorney.

Mr. Firkins withdrew on Febr. 26, 2010. He stated, â€œI have concluded that the Fallen Leaf venture would cause irreparable damage to my business, my family and most probably, my sanityâ€¦. The campaign to undermine my ability to do business on an even playing field is impossible with the current level of vitriolic hostility.â€

Now the CSD board must, once again, begin the process anew to secure a concessionaire for the store/cafÃ© while concurrently moving forward to actively recruit and appoint a highly qualified candidate for our currently vacant position of fire chief.

To that end, my intent and focus are to serve and ensure what I believe to be the best interests of our community, the ecology of the lake, and the quality of life that Fallen Leaf Lake provides. That includes the maintenance of a professionally led and highly trained volunteer fire protection service and re-establishing a commercially viable cafe, store and marina that both serves the needs of the community and supports our essential programs through a fair and transparent profit-sharing agreement.

I urge the community of Fallen Leaf Lake to work together for our quality of life and support the, now urgent, effort to find a new fire chief, and an acceptable concessionaire, or other manner, to ensure a store, cafÃ© and marina operation for this summer. With your assistance and support, I will aggressively work towards the accomplishment of these objectives.

Sincerely,

Terri Thomas, board member FLL Community Services District

Bleak numbers force tourism officials to rethink message

By Kathryn Reed

A $300 million decline in gaming revenue at Stateline from 1990 to 2009; the number of employees on the South Shore from 1990 to 2008 going from 13,000 to 7,000; hotel occupancy on both sides of the state line dropping from 57 percent to 43 percent between 2006 and 2009 – these are just some of the facts and figures officials on the South Shore must contend with when looking at the local economy and what to do to turn the rising tide of bad news.

The PowerPoint presentation was prepared by the Tahoe Douglas Visitors Authority with the help of Ward Bullard who works for Harveys-Harrah's casinos at the lake. It was first shown to the Douglas County Commission, with the South Lake Tahoe City Council shown the slides this month.



Tourism officials plan to promote the outdoors of Lake Tahoe, with less emphasis on

gaming.
Photo/Kathryn
Reed

Carol Chaplin, executive director of Lake Tahoe Visitors Authority, gave the presentation to the council along with her annual report.

With many of the Stateline casino workers living in South Lake Tahoe, what the casinos are doing directly impacts employment levels of city residents and social agencies they may lean on for help.

“In case you think we’re unique here, the same thing is going on at tribal casinos,” Chaplin told the council.

She talked about layoffs at the Indian casinos just west of Lake Tahoe, how their market is shrinking, that they are fighting each other for the same customer, and how their buses to import customers are not working well.

Chaplin said the area that may prove to be a greater threat to the South Shore in the near term is Las Vegas.

“From the Bay Area you can hop on a plane and get a room for less than $100 a night. You didn’t have that a couple years ago,” Chaplin said.

Still, it wasn’t all doom and gloom from the region’s tourism leader.

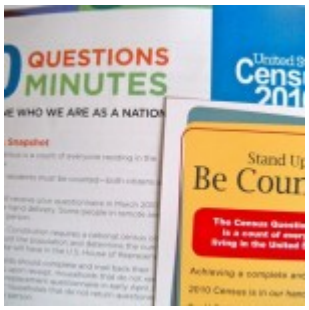
In Chaplin’s report about how the LTVA did in the last fiscal year, she pointed to the 16 percent increase in attendance at July’s annual celebrity golf tournament, 11 percent increase in traffic to the visitors centers, securing a Nevada Commission on Tourism grant, public relations having a 40-to1 return on investment, and ending the year with 1,000 bucks in the bank.

As the summer advertising rolls out, it will have more to do with promoting the passion of locals, the events that attract young at heart adults and families of all ages, and the South Shore more holistically than it has been done in the past.

Chaplin pointed to the number of amenities Lake Tahoe has that other destinations can never have – the lake itself as one, and the varied experiences available in a relatively small area.

“We recognize our iconic location,” Chaplin said. “We need to capitalize to let people know how much we love this place and that they can too. Gaming is still important, but it’s going through a metamorphosis. We need to broaden our appeal beyond skiing and gaming.”

Census takers out in force gathering information



By Kathryn Reed

Census workers are making the rounds in Lake Tahoe and throughout the United States.

Itâ€™s that every 10-year thing where households are asked 10 questions.

Those coming by verify your address, the type of residence

(single family or something else), the ZIP code, and if you get your mail at a post office box.

Then they hand you an envelope with 10 questions for each person living in the residence.

The Census has been going on since 1790. It was started to figure out how many men (because women didnâ€™t have such positions back then) from each state would be in the House of Representatives.

Thatâ€™s still a main reason the Census is conducted. But the results also have a monetary value.

â€œEvery year, the federal government allocates more than $400 billion to states and communities based, in part, on Census data,â€ Census literature states. â€œCensus data are used to determine location for retail stores, schools, hospitals, new housing developments and other community facilities. Census data determine boundaries for state and local legislative and congressional districts.â€

The Census Bureau protects people who are not here legally. It is important for everyone to fill out the forms so the services needed in a particular area can be provided based on the populations living there.

Beyond the 10 questions, a small percentage of the population will be asked more detailed socio-economic questions.

All of the questionnaires are to be mailed back by April 1 â€“ known as Census Day. (No joke.)

For the households that donâ€™t send the form back, Census takers will knock on their door in May, June and July.

The Census Bureau has until the end of the year to give the president the results. A year from now the Census Bureau will give states information about redistricting.

For more information about the Census, click here.

Meyers kindergarten applications are out

Lake Tahoe Environmental Science Magnet School in Meyers is accepting applications for the 2010 Kindergarten lineup.

A lottery will be conducted during the second week of April to determine acceptance.

Stop by the school office at 1095 San Bernardino Ave. in Meyers before March 31 to fill out a short form. Your child must turn 5 before Dec. 2, 2010, to be eligible for kindergarten.

The annual Kindergarten Round-up Registration will take place sometime in April or May.

Snowshoe photo tour in Hope Valley

Slide show and photo tour with Mark Vollmer, an award-winning outdoor photographer, instructor and freelance writer based in Reno.

March 19 meet at the Starlight Lodge, Woodfords.

(530) 694.9691

6pm Artist’s Reception

7pm Slide show and photo display.

March 20 at 9:30am is the Snowshoe Photo Tour. Meet at the Yurt in Hope Valley, the junction of highway 88 and 89.

(530) 694.2266

South Tahoe elementary makes list of low-performing schools

By Diana Lambert, Sacramento Bee

Four Sacramento-area schools have made the list of the state’s lowest-performing schools.

The California Department of Education released the list of roughly 200 schools this morning. The schools on the register are in the bottom 5 percent of the state’s lowest-performing schools, based on how students have scored on state tests, and will have to undergo dramatic reforms.

In Sacramento County, they are Oak Ridge Elementary in Sacramento City Unified and Natomas High School in Natomas Unified. Woodland Senior High School in Woodland Joint Unified in Yolo County and Bijou Community School in Lake Tahoe Unified in El Dorado County also are on the list.

Read the whole story

South Tahoe Chamber chili fund raiser

Coyote Grill near the Safeway in Round Hill will be raising money March 11 starting at 5pm for South Tahoe Chamber of Commerce through its chili sales.