Sensors put more eyes on Sierra snowpack

By Mark Grossi, Fresno Bee

As five blizzards pounded California's high country last week, people across the state tracked the swiftly growing snowpack without leaving their offices or homes.

A remarkably accurate network of sensors fed estimates to state officials who posted them on a Web page that the public can easily use to track the snowpack, California's biggest source of water.

Read the whole story

Official route for Rubicon Trail adopted

By Cathy Locke, Sacramento Bee

El Dorado County officials this week took a critical step toward resolving recreational and environmental management problems that have plagued the historic Rubicon Trail.

The Board of Supervisors this week designated an official route for an approximately eight-mile stretch of the 22-mile trail that extends from Georgetown in El Dorado County to Tahoma at Lake Tahoe in Placer County.

Read the whole story

El Dorado Savings Bank posts profit

By Mark Glover, Sacramento Bee

While loan loss provisions cut into the profits of other regional banks, Placerville-based El Dorado Savings Bank kept humming right along in 2009.

The bank this week reported a profit of $10.7 million in 2009, a 12 percent increase over $9.5 million in 2008. For the fourth quarter, ended Dec. 31, it had net income of $2.1 million, up from $553,703 in the year-ago period.

Read the whole story

USFS interpretive tours at Heavenly

Join a Forest Service ranger for an interpretive tour over the snow at Heavenly Mountain Resort.

The “Ski with a Ranger Program” meets at the top of the Heavenly Gondola and is offered on Mondays and Fridays at 10am and 1pm.

This program is a partnership between the Forest Service and Heavenly.

The tour explores the natural cultural history of the Lake Tahoe Basin, highlighting topics such as water quality, watershed restoration, habitat improvement, fire and fuels management and responsible recreation. The program is free and welcomes intermediate level skiers and snowboarders.

To get a preview or learn more about the program, USFS Forestry Technician and program leader Tara McCarthy will present a slide show about the Ski with a Ranger Program on Feb. 11 at 6pm, at the Explore Tahoe Visitor Center in South Lake Tahoe. The presentation is free and refreshments will be served.

For more information, contact Tara McCarthy at (530) 307.9610 or email tmccarthy@fs.fed.us.

Troubled Intrawest sells Squaw Village to ski resort

By Kathryn Reed

Intrawest unloaded its third property in two months on Friday with the sale of the Village at Squaw Valley to Squaw Valley Ski Corp.

“It is something that has been ongoing for a while and is not related whatsoever to what our parent company is going through,” Ian Galbraith, spokesman for Vancouver, British Columbia-based Intrawest, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Intrawest built the North Lake Tahoe village, with the first phase opening in February 2002 and the second phase opening in December 2003.



The Village at Squaw Valley was sold Jan. 29. Photo/Kathryn Reed

This will be the first time in more than 30 years that the ski resort has owned a lodging facility. With the village come 285 one-, two- and three-bedroom condos, 20 retail shops, six restaurants and a spa. Click map to see the layout of the village.

No officials from the ski resort or the village returned calls Friday.

Nancy Cushing, CEO of the resort, said in a press release, “When we opened in 1949 we ran a small 50-room lodge that was occupied during the Olympics in 1960; it grew in size but our operation of this property ceased in 1979. And so, the acquisition of the Village represents an exciting and greatly anticipated opportunity.”

None of the managers at various businesses at Squaw Village wanted to go on the record Friday.

On the Granite Chief Sport Shop website a post from Dec. 29 says, “We’ve been aware that the talks between Intrawest and Squaw started up again in October, but wholly smokes, this time the lid was kept on pretty tight. I’ve had my nose all over the valley trying to sniff out some details and I got nothing.

“As many of you know Granite Chief had been cleared to move to a better location in the village, then all of a sudden everything stopped. At first we all thought things with Intrawest had stalled because everyone was working on the Copper Mtn. deal, [Intrawest owned Copper sold to Powder Corp]. As it turned out the brakes were put on bringing all future plans for Village merchants to a screeching halt because Squaw Valley Ski Corp reopened negotiations to purchase the Intrawest Village. The word; it’s a done deal. What isn’t clear is when Squaw will take over operations. Some say February but the most recent scuttlebutt points to January.

“Well, we all knew it was going to happen, but the big surprise is that the talks hit the table so soon after last spring’s negotiation fell apart.

“I think most merchants had a good relationship with the Intrawest team so on one hand we are sorry to see them go. On the other hand we all want to be a part of a growing Squaw Valley. This could be a very good New Year!”

The store is not saying who posted the information.

Squaw Valley Ski Corp. has not always had a great reputation. Some merchants worry the village will begin to look like other buildings the resort owns – like Olympic House, Gold Coast, High Camp and the Cornice Cantina.

“I really don’t see any good (in the sale). They aren’t known for putting money into anything,” one manager told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Squaw Valley and Intrawest are privately held companies and therefore the dollar value of the transaction is not being disclosed.

Galbraith said the deal with Squaw is part of Intrawest’s philosophy to own villages where it owns resorts. Intrawest

owns eight ski resorts and a beach-golf resort in Florida.

Intrawest, owner of Whistler Village and Whistler Blackcomb the site of many of next month's Olympic alpine ski events as well as the luge-bobsled-skeleton events and Whistler Village, made headlines last week when it was revealed the company's assets will be auctioned off Feb. 19 if a deal with its lenders is not struck.

When news broke Intrawest issued a press release Jan. 20 saying it's "business as usual" at all of its resorts.

Galbraith restated that message on Friday, adding, there are a lot of rumors and speculation circulating that are not necessarily true. But he did not elaborate.

The fact remains that Intrawest is financially unstable.

Intrawest had to refinance a $1.7 billion loan in October 2008. An extension was offered last October. The current troubles for Intrawest involve missing a $524 million loan payment.

"Refinancing discussions are still ongoing with lending groups," Galbraith said.

Intrawest was founded in 1976.

"On October 26, 2006, private equity funds managed by affiliates of Fortress Investment Group LLC (NYSE:FIG) successfully completed the acquisition of Intrawest. The total value of the transaction, including the existing debt of Intrawest, was approximately US$2.8 billion," Intrawest's website says. "Intrawest's shares were de-listed from the New York Stock Exchange (NYSE: IDR) and the Toronto Stock Exchange (TSX: ITW) as a result of the acquisition and the subsequent privatization of the company. Currently, Intrawest is a portfolio company controlled primarily by private equity funds managed by affiliates of Fortress Investment Group LLC."

This all transpired at the peak of the real estate market.

On Thursday, it was announced that Intrawest sold Panorama Mountain Village resort in British Columbia to Panorama Mountain Village Inc., a new company run by developer Rick Jensen. The price was not disclosed, but reports are that it was less than the $100 million Powdr Corp. of Utah paid Intrawest for Copper Mountain in November.

“There are no other sales in the works that I’m aware of,” Intrawest’s Galbraith said.

U.S. Ski-Boarding teams go stainless

New Wave Enviro Products is now the exclusive provider of stainless steel water bottles for the U.S. Ski Team and U.S. Snowboarding.

The U.S. Ski Team and U.S. Snowboarding logos will be available on all of New Wave Enviro Products stainless steel bottles starting in February.

Duet fundraiser at LTCC

Mark Williams, Lake Tahoe Community College music instructor, will be singing duets with some of the areaâ€™s best divas to raise money for a concert grand piano for the collegeâ€™s music department. â€œIt Takes Two: A Broadway Valentineâ€

will be Feb. 6 at 8pm in the Duke Theatre.

Tickets will be a $20 donation.

â€œIn trying to think of an idea for a fundraiser, I thought it might be fun to do an evening of duets with lots of my female friends with whom I have performed over the years,â€ Williams said. â€œI contacted 16 ladies from South Lake Tahoe, Gardnerville, Minden, Carson City, Reno, and Incline Village, the majority of whom have been my leading ladies in a show, or have performed leading roles in shows for which I have done the musical direction.â€

Susan Boulanger â€œIt Takes Twoâ€ (Into the Woods)

Sharon Kerrigan â€œAs Long as Youâ€™re Mineâ€ (Wicked)

Michelle Sennings â€œCome What Mayâ€ (Moulin Rouge)

Joanie San Agustin â€œThe Last Night of the Worldâ€ (Miss Saigon) Dan Lancaster, alto saxophone

Cindy Sabatini â€œAll I Ask of Youâ€ (Phantom of the Opera)

Moe Leonard Accompanist

Diana Evans â€œBaby, Itâ€™s Cold Outsideâ€ (For the Boys)

Stephanie Grigsby â€œIt Couldnâ€™t Please Me Moreâ€ (Cabaret)

Catherine Cook â€œSue Meâ€ (Guys and Dolls)

Liz Niven â€œHow Could I Ever Knowâ€ (The Secret Garden)

Ania Helwing â€œTonightâ€ (West Side Story)

Salli Parker Accompanist

Olivia Hakel â€œMake Believeâ€ (Show Boat)

Carolyn Lancaster â€œIf I Loved Youâ€ (Carousel)

Suzie Tagayev â€œWe Kiss in a Shadowâ€ (The King and I)

Saundra Whitt â€œYou and Iâ€ (Chess)

Sarah Pennebaker â€œYou are my Homeâ€ (The Scarlet Pimpernel)

Stephanie Williams â€œTake Me as I Amâ€ (Jekyll and Hyde)

Cindy Sabatini Accompanist

Finale (Company): There’s No Business Like Show Business (Annie Get Your Gun)

Google guru keynote speaker at Nevada tourism conference

Google strategist Ryan Denny will reveal 10 quick ways to succeed in online advertising when he addresses the Nevada Commission on Tourismâ€™s 20th annual Rural Roundup conference in Winnemucca March 24-26.

Denny, a travel industry advertising expert for the online search engine giant Google, is keynote speaker March 25 at the three-day conference in the Winnemucca Convention Center. He will provide quick and easy ideas for creating and measuring successful, big-impact online advertising.

â€œOnline advertising strategies are a hot topic for the tourism industry, and rural Nevada communities that don’t have the luxury of an online marketing department will benefit from sessions on how best to utilize 21st century technology to achieve their goals,â€ said Brian Krolicki, Nevada lieutenant governor and NCOT chair, in a press release.

Delegates will learn how to: evaluate their websites, fill out a winning application for an NCOT rural grant, build itineraries that promote local attractions, appeal to international visitors, make the most of social media, search engines and Web surfing, maximize a return on marketing dollars, develop a visitor profile and follow up leads for new business.

Concluding a daylong series of workshops, Roger Brooks, an internationally recognized expert on how communities can attract more visitors, will describe what works best for â€œThe New Age of Rural Tourism.â€ Brooks, of Destination Development International, has analyzed and guided more than 800 communities, including many in rural Nevada.

NCOT will present the annual VolunTourism Awards for outstanding achievement in each of the six tourism â€œterritoriesâ€ at the annual Rural Roundup awards dinner March 25.

DCSD superintendent search forum

Douglas County School Districtâ€™s Superintendent Public Forum at Whittell High School.

Valentine’s chamber mixer at Marcus Ashley Galleries

The Lake Tahoe South Shore Chamber of Commerce and Marcus Ashley Galleries’ Sweet HeART Business After Hours Mixer is Feb. 11 from 5:30-7:30pm.

In honor of the upcoming holiday, the Sweet HeART BAHM will feature a Special Aphrodisiac Menu of champagne, shrimp cocktail, chocolate covered strawberries and much more.

Marcus Ashley Galleries is located at 4000 Lake Tahoe Blvd, Ste. 23, South Lake Tahoe.

For more information, visit www.tahoechamber.org or call (775) 588.1728.