El Dorado County woman stricken with West Nile Virus

A 51-year-old El Dorado County woman has tested positive for West Nile virus. According to health officials, she is the first human case of West Nile Virus in El Dorado County this year.

Health officials have conducted a case investigation and it appears the woman may have acquired the virus outside of the state. As of Sept. 24, West Nile virus activity in El Dorado County includes one human case and eight West Nile virus positive birds. No West Nile virus positive horses or mosquito pools have been reported in El Dorado County so far this year.

Statewide, there have been 52 confirmed human cases of West Nile virus and 41 counties have reported West Nile virus activity in 2009.

Effective strategies for preventing mosquito bites include taking extra precautions during dawn and dusk when mosquitoes are most active, wearing long sleeved pants and shirts, and using mosquito repellent containing DEET or picardin. It is also important to remove standing water sources around homes to discourage mosquito breeding.

People with symptoms such as high fever, confusion, a stiff neck or muscle weakness should seek immediate medical attention.

Local information about West Nile virus activity can be found at the El Dorado County West Nile virus hotlines – (530) 573.3405 and (530) 642.4968. Additional information about West Nile virus is available at www.westnile.ca.gov and www.edcgov.us/emd.

Teen court in SLT needs volunteers

El Dorado County high school students are invited to take an active role in the juvenile justice system through the â€œTeen Courtâ€ Program. Volunteer training for students will be conducted for the South Lake Tahoe Teen Court on Oct. 1 from 5-6:30pm in El Dorado County Superior Court, 1354 Johnson Blvd. in South Lake Tahoe.

Upon completion of this mandatory training, teens will serve as the court personnel for real cases in which an offense has been committed by a minor, the minor has admitted to the offense, and has chosen to be judged by his/her peers.

â€œThis is a unique opportunity for students in our community,â€ said Tiffany Ellis, Teen Court coordinator, in a press release. â€œStudents manage almost every aspect of Teen Court. Except for the judge, all other participants are students: the prosecuting and defense attorneys, court clerk, bailiff, and jury. Superior Court Judge Steven C. Bailey presides over Teen Court in Tahoe, and volunteer attorneys from the community aid student attorneys in developing their cases. Students come away with a real understanding of the juvenile justice system, and their interest and enthusiasm ensures that all defendants who appear receive a fair and appropriate sentence.â€

The Teen Court program began in 1992 in El Dorado County and is funded through the El Dorado County Health Services Department, Alcohol and Drug Programs. Cases are referred and managed by the El Dorado County Probation Department; in addition, the county Superior Court judges and sheriffâ€™s

office are partners in the program.

Teen Court hearings in South Lake Tahoe will begin on Oct. 29 and continue through May 2010. Hearings will generally be the third Thursday of each month at Superior Court on Johnson Boulevard in South Lake Tahoe. Participants arrive at 4:45pm in preparation for the hearings, which begin promptly at 5pm.

For more information about Teen Court, contact Ellis at (530) 573.4372.

City to keep eye on state parks

Mayor and Council:

Of course the news that state parks will remain open is good for us in the Basin. We will keep our focus and attention on this issue in advance of the January 2010 state budget discussion.

I know that city government and many allied agencies and organizations in the Basin opposed park closures because of the devastating impact these closures, along with a poor economy, would have on our tourist industry. Collectively, we and other park advocates across the state made a difference, and we will continue to make a difference when we stand together and stand strong.

Thanks to you for your strong opposition to the state park closure proposal.

Dave Jinkens, South Lake Tahoe city manager

Sheriff’s group provides seniors with Bingo system

The Washoe County Honorary Deputy Sheriffâ€™s Association donated approximately $4,500 toward the purchase of a Bingo system for the Sun Valley Senior Citizenâ€™s Center. On Sept. 24, Sheriff Mike Haley and Pat Dolan, president of the Honorary Deputies Association arrived at the Senior Center and made the announcement to the group, just having finished with that mornings Bingo game.

Dolan had previously read an article about the Senior Centerâ€™s attempt to raise money for a new electronic Bingo system and brought it to Haley, suggesting the Honorary Deputy Association help with the funding.

â€œWe were happy to help with this project,â€ Haley said in a statement. â€œTo make a difference and improve the quality of life for the citizenâ€™s of Washoe County is always our goal. â€œ

The Washoe County Honorary Deputy Sheriffâ€™s Association Inc. is a nonprofit association composed of civic minded business and community leaders dedicated to supporting the goals and mission of the Washoe County Sheriff’s Office. They also support children in the community by funding Shop with a Sheriff and other childrenâ€™s programs.

Super Walmart in Gardnerville?

The design review of a 151,495-square-foot Super Walmart will be before Gardnerville's Town Board Oct. 6 at 4:30pm.

Dozen of people protested the plans at the board's Sept. 1 meeting.

The store would occupy about 20 acres on Highway 395 in the Carson Valley of Nevada.

After the Gardnerville board takes up the matter, the Douglas County Community Development board is expected to make a decision by makes a decision Oct. 21.

Building parks in South Tahoe gaining traction

By Kathryn Reed

Neighborhood parks. They are a priority of South Lake Tahoeâ€™s Parks Department.

Called pocket parks â€“ they are usually between two-thirds and 2 acres in size. The amenities ideally cater to the people living in the area who would use it. A half-court basketball facility, dog park, picnic tables, grass, pad for skateboarding, bicycle racks or a combination of those and other things could be included.

Talk of developing these facilities was an agenda item at a parks commission meeting this summer.

Gary Moore, parks director, said his department has been discussing with Safeway Corp. about the L shape piece of property it owns on Ski Run Boulevard as a possible park.

â€œI said we want you to give it to us. Weâ€™ll call it Safeway Park,â€ Moore said at the meeting.

His department calls the Y area of South Lake Tahoe â€œpark deprivedâ€ except for Tahoe Valley Elementary School. Part of the Tahoe Valley Community Plan could include a park. Another possibility is using the parcel owned by the California Tahoe Conservancy near the overflow parking lot for the old City Council chambers as a park.

Sierra Tract is another area being talked about to have a pocket park. Commissioners talked about acquiring some of houses that have been foreclosed and turning the property into a park.

Another consideration is to have a park tie into the stalled Meyers to Stateline bike path. This would have the South Shore resemble the American River Bike Trail that has one park after another along it.

Other areas of town have also been identified as needing a pocket park.

Parks and rec realizes the way to make the pocket parks come to fruition is public-private partnerships â€“ something it is working on.

State to release grant funds to LTUSD

The state will be releasing the first $6 million for the auto-construction CTE building at South Tahoe High School this fall. This is part of the matching fund dollars the state owes Lake Tahoe Unified. The money was frozen because of the budget brouhaha in Sacramento.

The infusion of cash will allow the district to move ahead with Phase I of the technology and infrastructure plans which have been on hold. The master plan calls for $100,000 in upgrades to Sierra House and Bijou elementary schools, including more SmartBoards and additional carts for grades 2-5.

Festival of Trees and Lights



Santa is on his was to the South Shore. Photo/Barton Health

Denise Sloan Smart, Barton Health

A holiday festival is in the works and the fun begins now. The Barton Foundation is hosting its first â€œFestival of Trees and Lightsâ€ Dec. 3-6 at MontBleu casino in Stateline and the community can join the fun before winter sets in.

Volunteer opportunities abound: Santaâ€™s helpers, childrenâ€™s face painters, helpers to write letters to Santa, storytellers, concert staff, tree delivery staff and much more are need to make this event a Tahoe tradition.

This family-friendly holiday festival offers something for everyone in South Lake Tahoe and the neighboring communities, as well as for visitors to the area.

The festival will feature hundreds of trees decorated by local designers, nonprofits and schools; visits with Santa Claus; Polar Express rides and story; a special hands-on childrenâ€™s activity area; a concert with the Cheeseballs; and a community performance stage.

In addition, Bartonâ€™s black-tie event, The Gala, will move to Dec. 5.

Proceeds from this yearâ€™s â€œFestival of Trees and Lightsâ€ will directly benefit the Barton Community Clinic which provides medical care to our community, especially for those patients without health insurance.

Tree decorating design workshops will soon be scheduled in which the public can also become involved.

Learn more about the â€œFestival of Tree and Lightsâ€ by calling (530) 543.5612 or go to http://www.festivaloftreeslaketahoe.com.

Residents likely to feel financial burden of water meters



Sprinklers may be a thing of the past if water bills go up with meters.

By Kathryn Reed

The 163 water meters to be installed this year is a drop in the bucket considering South Tahoe Public Utility District needs to put in 10,000 in the next 16 years.

Federal stimulus money ($4.5 million) is paying for 1,500 meters. Based on the strings attached to the cash, the district had to show progress on the project by this fall. That is why STPUD is seeking bids until 2pm Sept. 29.

Another component of the grant is that it's for low income segments of the community – all but the Tahoe Keys qualifies. The district is going to put in meters where it is doing water

line work – Ski Run, Al Tahoe and parts of Gardner Mountain are targeted in the first round.

Metered water systems are in the future for all Californians because of legislation passed in 2004. By 2025 every urban water supplier, which is defined as a district with more than 3,000 connections, must have meters installed.

“We are still seeking through the state Legislature a little bit of flexibility with the 2025 deadline because there is only X number of dollars we can raise from 14,000 customers,” said Dennis Cocking, STPUD spokesman. “Our challenge is we don’t disagree meters are important. We said the primary threat in the basin is fire and we are not going to take money away from replacing water lines to put in meters. That is not responsible to our community.”

The board formed an ad hoc committee at its Aug. 20 meeting. Their job is to figure out how to pay for the meters. Grants are being sought, but ratepayers are likely to foot part of the bill.

South Tahoe PUD tried to get out of the regulations altogether by explaining to Sacramento that the district in not part of the California watershed – it is part of Nevada’s. This is because Lake Tahoe flows into the Truckee River toward Nevada, which flows into Pyramid Lake in the Silver State.

California denied STPUD that exemption. The district is still waiting to see if the 2025 deadline can be extended.

“What is driving this is water is becoming a more and more contentious issue in this state,” Cocking said.

That’s why desalinization projects are being talked about again, as well as conservation and recycled water.

Recycled water is not allowed in the Lake Tahoe Basin because of the Porter Cologne Water Quality Control Act. It wasn’t

until this year that California had a formal recycled water policy.

“I think the fact of the matter is at some point in time recycled water within certain parameters might be acceptable in the Tahoe basin. It might be a decade or more. It will have to be tightly monitored,” Cocking said.

Of the nearly 650 commercial connections STPUD has, all have been metered for a couple decades. About 3,000 of the 14,000 residential customers are metered. However, the residential ones have not been read – instead customers are charged a flat rate like everyone else.

Starting in 2011 those metered customers along with the ones being put in via the federal stimulus money, will be billed based on the meter reading.

“The trick is to try to develop a rate so the average customer on metered rate or flat is very similar. That will be the real challenge,” Cocking said.

The district is using 2010 to gather information from the meters to gauge water use; and to educate those with meters.

The cost of water is in the infrastructure – extracting water, purifying it, delivering it. That accounts for about 85 percent of a bill, while the other 15 percent is consumption, according to Cocking.

The impetus behind meters is when people have control over how much they spend on a commodity; they’ll do what they can to reduce the cost – in this case, using less water.

With second homeowners currently paying what full-time residents pay, they are in affect subsidizing those who live here. It would seem inevitable that water bills will spike dramatically when the metered system is in place.

The district hopes to install 600-800 meters a year. The total

cost is estimated at $20 million.

Meters are read by driving down a street using a radio signal that emits information. This beats the old days of having to locate the meter through mounds of snow or overgrown brush. Technology is being developed where in the future water use might be transmitted electronically to a computer without anyone driving by a house.

Most likely residents in the city limits of South Lake Tahoe will have meters first. This is because that is where the oldest water lines are – some as small as 2 inches. Much of El Dorado County has 6-inch lines or larger.

This is the third construction season that STPUD has put in meter vaults as it replaces water lines.

Many of the water line projects have been funded through the Lake Tahoe Restoration Act, which is expected to be introduced this session for re-authorization by Congress.

North Shore deer concern residents

SOS Glenshire is trying to raise $65,000 so the California Department of Fish & Game will study the Verdi subunit of the Loyalton-Truckee deer herd.

The group advocates responsible development that doesn’t hinder the migration corridor of wildlife in the area.

The deer tend to summer in the Martis Valley and winter near Verdi.

The last time the deer herd was studied was in 1982.

For more information, go to www.sosglenshire.org.