

Swine flu outbreak test

Washoe County sheriff's officials will spend Monday morning doing a table top exercise to walk through a scenario depicting a large scale breakout of the H1N1 (swine flu) virus in the Detention Center.

The exercise is designed to run through the alternatives available should such an outbreak occur. Participants will be assigned specific duties as if involved in an incident, evaluating possibilities and making decisions, so staff is fully prepared in case of an actual outbreak.

Other organizations invited include Washoe County Health Department, District Attorney's Office and Court Services along with Prison Health Services, the 2nd Judicial District Court, ICE and the Northern Nevada Counter Terrorism Center.

This event is not open to the public.

Feds approve money for USFS projects

By Ann Westling, US Forest Service

NEVADA CITY â€” Several projects in the Tahoe National Forest will receive funding from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA). Funded projects include road maintenance and watershed restoration; fuel reduction and forest health; reclamation of abandoned mine features; and recreation facility and trail maintenance stated Forest Supervisor Tom Quinn.

More than \$6 million has been received for these Tahoe National Forest projects in the last several months.

“This funding will accomplish important work on the ground for the National Forest resources and provide greater safety for the public. The projects will also put people to work as the majority will be contracted out to private businesses,” stated Quinn.

Contractors interested in bidding on ARRA projects can check www.FedBizOps.gov for more information.

Watershed Restoration/Road Maintenance

The watershed/roads projects are located in Sierra County at Perazzo Meadows, midway between Sierraville and Truckee (west of Highway 89) and in Davies/Merrill watersheds, north of Stampede Reservoir, northeast of Truckee. These projects will include road maintenance or road relocation to improve hydrologic interaction between the roads and the watershed as well as other watershed restoration work.

“Both of these projects will extend work already in progress to restore these beautiful and important meadow ecosystems in Sierra County,” stated Quinn.

For Perazzo Meadows, a multi-phase project was designed to restore the meadow ecosystem, relocate the stream channel to its original location and enhance aquatic habitat. Previous funding was used to plan, design, and assess the project. Work is occurring at the site now. This is a joint project between the Tahoe National Forest and the Truckee River Watershed Council.

For the Davies/Merrill Watershed project, 13 sites were identified as needing work to restore the hydrologic function of the watershed which was heavily impacted by early day road construction, railroad logging and grazing. Economic Recovery funding will be used to finish the work on the last three

sites. This will include improving the drainages along the roads adjacent to the meadows by installing culverts, water crossings, and water bars. It will also remove old railroad grades which have acted like dams constricting the water flow. Economic recovery funding will also be used to gravel road surfaces, reducing sedimentation and to revegetate several sites.

Hazardous Fuel Reduction

Four projects were funded in Sierra County and will be completed through contracts to private companies. The ARRA funding for these four projects will increase the capacity to treat hazardous fuels in Sierra County which could reduce the intensity of a wildfire moving toward the communities of Loyalton Pines, Alleghany and Forest. Work on these projects could begin this fall.

On the Sierraville Ranger District, a 370-acre project will include hand thinning and piling of hazardous fuels adjacent to the small, rural community of Loyalton Pines at the base of a steep, thickly vegetated hillside. The Scraps Defensible Fuel Profile Zone and Mastication projects will thin and remove hazardous fuels on 700 acres along key forest roads on the eastern side of the Ranger District. Defensible Fuel Profile Zones are designed to extend the fuel break benefits of the roads into the forest, to slow a fast moving wildfire and to provide safer places to fight the fires.

On the Yuba River Ranger District, a project, along the Pliocene Ridge Road between Alleghany and Forest, will reduce the fuels through a variety of treatments on 500 acres. Thinning of small trees, mastication of brush, and chipping and mulching will be used along with hand cutting and piling near the historic Town of Forest.

Abandoned Mine Projects

Fourteen abandoned mine feature reclamation projects have been

funded: three in Placer County; four in Nevada County; and seven in Sierra County – in remote areas of the TNF. These projects will address hazardous mine openings by closing adits or shafts or installing bat friendly grates if bats could use them as habitat. Abandoned and unusable equipment will be removed along with any hazardous materials if found.

Crews will also be removing any physical safety hazards such as dangerous structures and restoring steep erosive slopes. For one project, hazardous mine tailings containing lead, arsenic, and mercury will be dug up and removed to a hazardous materials repository. It is expected that these projects will be initiated next field season.

Recreation and Trails Facilities

Funding has also been approved for a variety of recreation maintenance projects including: campground water systems in Yuba and Sierra counties; improving picnic and campground sites in Yuba and Sierra counties; maintaining trails in the Granite Chief Wilderness in Placer County; and removal of a minimally used picnic area in Nevada County. An additional project will repair the septic system at the Emergency Command Center in Nevada County.

Additional Projects to Improve Forest Health

Several projects have been very recently approved for funding to improve forest health through thinning, mastication of brush and small trees, hand cutting and piling, and mistletoe pruning in Sierra and Placer counties. On the American River Ranger District, near the Placer Big Trees Grove east of Foresthill, over 600 acres will be thinned of brush and small trees. Near the Sugar Pine area north of Foresthill, 1,400 acres of brush and small trees will be removed via mastication. On the Sierraville Ranger District, a 21-acre project will remove trees infected with dwarf mistletoe in the old Cottonwood burn. On the Yuba River Ranger District, north

of Downieville, 120 acres of thinning and biomass removal will occur in the old Cap Fire area plus 150 acres of precommercial thinning will occur along Morristown Ridge.

In addition, along the 25 Road, north of Highway 49, 158 acres will be masticated to reduce the fuels. Hazardous vegetation will be hand piled for future burning on an additional 25 acres along the 25 road. Work on the ground is expected to begin next field season.

Marriott cuts Tahoe sales staff



Marriott, which has two properties in the Heavenly Village, laid off most of its sales staff and terminated an agreement with the city that will put a \$55,000 red line in South Lake Tahoe's next budget.

Jan Vandermade, the local Marriott general manager, deferred comment to corporate offices in Florida. Those folks didn't return phone calls.

An employee of the Marriott Grand Residence Club confirmed the sales department has been closed, but added that a couple sales associates are still on-site.

The Grand Residence and Timber Lodge are both time-share operations with ownership available in different increments.

About four years ago Marriott and South Lake Tahoe signed a deal where the lodging facility could operate an informational

cart near the fountain in the village. The city owns all of the open space and can charge money for anyone using the area. At one time Marriott had two booths.

Vandermade sent the city a letter saying it would not be renewing the lease after it expired in August. Marriott had already stopped providing sales material and other information about Heavenly Village via the cart.

The city used the \$55,000 to help pay the annual Park Avenue Development Maintenance Association fee that runs about \$120,000/year. Redevelopment agencies per state law cannot use their revenue sources to pay ongoing fees like that. This is why the \$55,000 will likely come out of an already shrinking general fund when the 2009-10 budget is approved in the next few days.

Governor: State parks will not close

Matt Weiser, Sacramento Bee

A new scheme to save money at state parks means none of them will have to close completely, according to an announcement today by Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger.

The plan reduces ongoing maintenance and eliminates all major equipment purchases for the balance of the current fiscal year, saving \$12.1 million. Another \$2.1 million will be saved by opening some parks only on weekends and holidays, by closing physical areas in some parks, and by extending seasonal closures at some parks that are already closed for part of each year.

“This is fantastic news for all Californians,” the governor said in a statement.

No specifics were provided on which parks will see schedule reductions, or what maintenance projects will be put off.

For the complete story

Snippets about Lake Tahoe

North Lake Tahoe Fire Protection District this fall is celebrating 50 years of service to the Incline Village/Crystal Bay areas.

Jessica Ramirez has been hired by Big Brothers Big Sisters of Nevada County and North Lake Tahoe as customer relations specialist and program assistant.

John Singlaub is back among the employed. He traded in his executive director title at Tahoe Regional Planning Agency early this year to take on the same role this fall at Sierra Business Council – a nonprofit with more than 750 members whose mission is to promote sustainability in the Sierra Nevada.

Caltrans is planning to build Class II bike lanes between Dollar Hill and Kings Beach and at least 4-foot wide shoulders from Dollar Hill to Tahoe City.

New restrooms will be built at El Dorado Beach in South Tahoe with a \$520,000 grant from the state Department of Boating and Waterways.

Kayak donation helps at-risk youths

Outdoor Intervention Program in Douglas County has five new tandem kayaks thanks to Rick and Brenda Rogers, who own Sierra Sports Rental in Zephyr Cove.

The program, now in its 29th year, is run by the county's juvenile probation department.

The wilderness program works with at-risk youths, students in the Gang Resistance Education and Training program and Safe Schools ambassadors.

For information or to make a donation, call (775) 782.9814 or (775) 782.9811.

Tahoe death ruled accidental

Nevada Appeal

A Stateline man who was found dead at Ski Run Marina last week likely accidentally drowned, El Dorado County Deputy Coroner Larry Olsen said Thursday.

An autopsy on the body of Roy Ricord, 31, did not reveal any signs of trauma, and foul play has been ruled out as a cause of death, Olsen said.

Ricord's death was not witnessed, and exactly how Ricord came

to be in the water is unknown, Olsen said.

For more of the story

Marathon to tie-up Hwy. 89 Sunday

Expect delays on Highway 89 between South Lake Tahoe and Tahoe City on Sunday during the Lake Tahoe Marathon.

Runners start the 26.2 miles at 8am in Tahoe City, and continue along the West Shore until hitting Camp Richardson.

The highway will be closed three miles north of Camp Richardson at Spring Creek Road from 7am-1:30pm. The southbound lane will be open, but delays are inevitable.

Luther Pass improvements a boon for cyclists



By Kathryn Reed

Four-foot wide shoulders “at a minimum” is what will be

installed along Highway 89 starting at the intersection of Highway 50 in El Dorado County and extending to the Alpine County line.

“It will provide safety for cyclists. It will give them more room. Part of this project is to encourage cycling,” said Rochelle Jenkins, Caltrans spokeswoman.

The \$25 million undertaking is the only Caltrans project in the Lake Tahoe Basin to receive federal stimulus money.

Preliminary work started this month. The bulk of the construction will be between April 2010 and fall 2011.

It is considered an environmental improvement project – meaning reducing the amount of sediment and runoff from the highway that reaches tributaries of Lake Tahoe. Caltrans did not have projections for how much sediment is likely to be contained.

Curb and gutter systems will be installed throughout the roadway to help divert the runoff.

“We are going to rehabilitate and construct a new drainage facility. We are going to put in traps and drains. Those are cleaned every year,” Jenkins explained.

Rock energy dissipaters, which help to prevent ruts in the road from developing, are part of the equation, too.

The other project in El Dorado County to garner federal dollars is Highway 49 improvements. The \$7.5 million project that is under way should be completed next fall. It goes from Highway 50 in Placerville toward Amador County.

Clarity lacking in why council wants to ax city attorney

By Kathryn Reed

It was a 3-2 vote in closed session earlier this month by the South Lake Tahoe City Council that put City Attorney Jacqueline Mittelstadt on non-disciplinary paid leave.

"You inquired about the hearing. All I can really say at this point is that I don't feel my job in Tahoe will be complete until the truth is told," Mittelstadt said Thursday.

Sources have told Lake Tahoe News that Mittelstadt has requested a formal hearing before the council. Mittelstadt did not elaborate about the hearing in her voicemail.

To this day none of the councilmembers is saying why he or she is dissatisfied with Mittelstadt. Mittelstadt and Assistant (now interim) City Attorney Patrick Enright came on board in June.

Councilman Hal Cole doesn't return calls. Councilman Bruce Grego does, but connections were not made in time for publication. Councilwoman Kathay Lovell won't talk about things that happen in closed session.

Mayor Jerry Birdwell sought legal opinion about disclosing information about the vote.

"My understanding is anytime a vote is made in closed session, it should be made public. I think to err on the side of good government, that anytime a vote is made in closed session it should be made public," Birdwell said.

He said he voted against beginning the process to terminate

Mittelstadt. Councilman Bill Crawford said he was the other vote against the proposal.

Sources tied to the city tell Lake Tahoe News that a number of city employees have filed complaints with the Employer's Resource Management Association – known as ERMA complaints.

If an employee has filed an ERMA complaint, it must be resolved before that employee could be fired.

It has not been decided if the council does fire Mittelstadt, if a second attorney would be hired.

For now, Mittelstadt is being paid more than \$10,000 a month with taxpayer money to do nothing per the council's request – the same council which hired her on a 5-0 vote – and the same council that won't tell the public why this is happening.

The next City Council meeting is Oct. 6, so it's too soon to know what might be on that closed session agenda.