Record dry year for Lake Tahoe Basin



Lack of moisture means there is more beach area surrounding Lake Tahoe. Photo/Kathryn Reed

By Kathryn Reed

Lake Tahoe and many parts of California and Nevada are setting records for being so dry.

Tahoe City receives on average 31.55 inches of precipitation each year. It has received 8.08 inches for 2013. Records date to 1910.

The last significantly dry year was in 1976 when 9.34 inches of precip fell.

South Lake Tahoe's numbers are not as old and are not as detailed. But the entire basin, Truckee, Reno and Carson areas all in the same dry predicament.

"The high pressure could leave us in a dry pattern in the Sierra for another week or two," Jessica Kielhorn, meteorologist technician with the National Weather Service in Reno, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

That ridge of high pressure is just sitting off the California coast, which is causing the dry spell. Storms keep going north and northeast of here.



Source: National Weather Service

Statewide electronic readings show the snowpack water content is 20 percent of normal for the date. The first manual reading of the season near the entrance to Sierra-at-Tahoe is Friday. A year ago the snowpack was 150 percent of normal for this time of year.

The official water year ends June 30, so there is time for the water year to be salvaged.

However, the lack of moisture throughout California and Nevada makes this the third year in a row for below normal precipitation.

Snowpack provides for about one-third of California's drinking and irrigation water.

Normally the hills in the Bay Area and land in the Sacramento Valley are a vibrant green at the start of a new year. That won't be the case for 2014. They aren't even the golden brown of summer. The land is barren; not even suitable for grazing.

Department of Water Resources Director Mark Cowin on Dec. 13 mobilized a drought management team "to offset potentially devastating impacts to citizen health, well-being and our

economy.” Four days later, Gov. Jerry Brown set up a Drought Task Force. Drought conditions are being felt in 94.25 percent of California, according to the U.S. Drought Monitor.

For now, farmers are likely to receive 5 percent of the water they expected. This means some fields will be fallow, while plantings will be scaled back elsewhere. This in turn affects produce prices and unemployment numbers. Both will increase.

The lack of snow is clearly impacting the Lake Tahoe Basin when it comes to tourism. Usually it’s near impossible to get a hotel room this week. But there are several vacancy signs along Highway 50 in South Lake Tahoe.

While ski resorts are open, the bulk of the slopes are covered with man-made snow. Even then, no resort has 100 percent of its terrain open.

If the snow and rain stays away, the other threat to worry about will be wildfires.

Letter: South Tahoe’s priorities are upside down

To the community,

Some things are upside down in our city. For instance, the city recently raised the cost of having a telephone with charging an annual fee for 911 service. It doesn’t matter if a person ever dials 911 or not. The fee is really a general tax. If it were a fee, it would be for using the service.



Bill Crawford

And the city has put parking meters around town, which is a real user fee. You pay to park. But the city has been less than truthful about why parking meters. First, the revenue would be for hiring two cops that the city claims are needed. Now it’s said by a council member that the revenue is needed for things like toilet paper for places like Regan Beach. Really, I kid you not.

What’s the point? What’s upside down? Heavenly pays next to nothing for operating the gondola in the city. There’s no tax on ticket sales. Heavenly gets off scot-free.

The city puts the bite on locals and visitors with a fee for parking. And the city takes another bite out of local pocketbooks with a tax on telephones. And the city’s less than honest about where the money will go. But the city will not go for a tax on Heavenly’s operations in the city.

On taxation, locals really are first in the city. The tax base is upside down.

Also, the city is a minimum wage town for too many in the work force. But the city manager and city attorney’s salaries are in the top 5 percent of earners in the nation, which may not be upside down, but it’s whacky in a city with a population of under 25,000. Why? At best it’s excessive. At worst it’s a rip off. Another example the division between the haves and the have nots.

Bill Crawford, South Lake Tahoe

Vonn may not race before Olympics

By Nick Zaccardi, NBC

No date has been set for Lindsey Vonn‘s return to competition after her surgically repaired right knee swelled up after skiing out of a downhill race in Val d’Isere, France, on Dec. 21.

Vonn is working with her own team and medical staff to get the swelling under control, U.S. Ski Team coach Alex Hoedlmoser told The Associated Press.

“There is no decision yet if, or where she is going to race ahead of the Olympics,” Hoedlmoser told the Associated Press.

Read the whole story

Learn care giving skills from Elder Options

Introduction to Care Giving Skills is a class being offered by Elder Options.

It is designed to help people understand the issues around getting older, how to be safe, physically active, maintain good health and dietary habits as well as recognize the independent spirit within or with others you’re working with.

It is geared toward the older individual, adults who are helping to provide the care, and individuals wanting to learn more about the growing field of older adults.

The first class will b at Cameron Park CSD, 2502 Cameron Park Drive, Cameron Park on Jan. 21 from 5:30-9pm.

Cost is $35.

Register by calling (530) 350.4655. Class is limited to 20 participants.

For more information, call (530) 626.6939 or (916) 391.8083.

Study: Words make an economic difference

By NPR

In the early 1990s, a team of researchers decided to follow about 40 volunteer families – some poor, some middle class, some rich – during the first three years of their new children's lives. Every month, the researchers recorded an hour of sound from the families' homes. Later in the lab, the team listened back and painstakingly tallied up the total number of words spoken in each household.

What they found came to be known as the "word gap."

It turned out, by the age of 3, children born into low-income families heard roughly 30 million fewer words than their more

affluent peers.

Research since then has revealed that the “word gap” factors into a compounding achievement gap between the poor and the better-off in school and life.

Read the whole story

Carson City woman dies after Heavenly ski accident

A 56-year-old Carson City woman died from the injuries she sustained while skiing at Heavenly Mountain Resort.

Dana Tuttle died Dec. 22 at Renown Medical Center in Reno one day after the accident.

Heavenly on Dec. 30 said the woman was found unresponsive on Tamarack Return at 10:26am Dec. 21. Ski patrol provided advanced life support until CalStar arrived to fly her from the mountain to Renown.

Tuttle was not wearing a helmet, according to the resort. However, a Heavenly spokeswoman had no further details as to what led to Tuttle being injured.

— Lake Tahoe News staff report

Fire destroys 2 residences at Granlibakken

By Kathryn Reed

A father of five escaped with minor injuries when a fire swept through their Granlibakken home in Tahoe City.

Gabrielle Cuevas was trying to help his kids about 4:30am Dec. 30 when he was burned on his hands and suffered smoke inhalation. He was treated at Renown Medical Center in Reno.

North Tahoe Fire Protection District crews were still on the scene late Monday afternoon trying to determine the cause of the blaze. No dollar amount has been put on the loss of the structure or personal belongings. The family lost everything, including just opened Christmas gifts.



A father saved four children from a fire at their Granlibakken home Dec. 30. Photo/Provided

Granlibakken and North Tahoe firefighters are going to Toys for Tots in Reno on Tuesday to find toys to replace some of what was destroyed. The Red Cross is also helping the family.

The father and four children ranging in age from 5 to 10 were at home. A 2-year-old was elsewhere for the night. A couple

who lived next door is also in need of other living arrangements.

“It’s what they call the dormitory. It’s an older building where some of the workers stay,” Dave Zaski with North Tahoe Fire told *Lake Tahoe News*. Cuevas is a maintenance worker at the resort.

Zaski said the good thing is his department worked with the resort a few years ago to make sure there were smoke detectors in all structures. The other thing that helped the family is the children had been taught by local firefighters about how to stay low to the ground when there is smoke and to change the battery in the smoke detectors.

Granlibakken is open for business. A spokeswoman did not return a call.

Donations of clothes and money for the family may be dropped off at Granlibakken or the fire station at 222 Fairway Drive, Tahoe City.

Technology infiltrates into all aspects of travel

By Amy Farley, Travel + Leisure

For our annual forecast of the trends that will define travel for the coming year, Travel + Leisure looked at the big changes in store for air travel, hotels, websites, and gadgets.

Airports will become more enjoyable.

Tech gadgets will continue to shrink and get smarter: phalets (smartphone-tablet hybrids), smartwatches, and digitally enabled glasses from Google and other gear will top travelers' Wish Lists next year.

New websites, such as the private dinner-party finder EatWith, will allow you to connect with destinations on a profoundly local level.

Read the whole story

Nev. makes another bid to name cove after Twain

By Martin Griffith, AP

RENO — Nevada officials have launched a new bid to give Mark Twain recognition in the state where he assumed his pen name 150 years ago, but it doesn't come without opposition.

The Nevada State Board on Geographic Names is again pushing a proposal to name a scenic Lake Tahoe cove for Samuel Clemens, Twain's real name.

But it no longer maintains the inlet should be named for Twain because he actually camped there in 1861.

The board's national counterpart rejected the request two years ago in a 5-4 vote, citing as a factor doubt about whether Twain camped at the spot.

Nevada board members now say they want to name the cove for Twain merely because of his association with Tahoe and the lack of a geographic feature in the state named for him. His

book “Roughing It” put Nevada on the map and included an oft-quoted poetic phrase about Lake Tahoe.

“Whether or not the cove was Mark Twain’s campsite does not matter in the national scheme to put a name to that cove,” Bob Stewart, a member of the state board, told the Associated Press. “The very fact that he was associated with the Nevada shore of Lake Tahoe makes an unnamed point on Tahoe eligible for naming for him.”

But Stewart, a historical researcher and former U.S. Bureau of Land Management employee, said he still believes Twain camped at the cove near Incline Village.

“Personally, I’m totally comfortable that this is the campsite, but this is not the point of this nomination,” he said.

David Antonucci, of Homewood, a civil engineer and history writer, maintains Twain camped on the California side of the lake. He has pledged to fight the new bid. His opposition was cited as a factor in the earlier decision by the U.S. Board on Geographic Names.

“It’s just a backdoor attempt to accomplish what was earlier rejected by the national board,” he said. “I don’t think they’re fooling anyone. You’d have to be naive to think if it was named Samuel Clemens Cove that the proponents would not promote that as the site where he camped.”

The request also should be rejected because Lake Tahoe is the ancestral homeland of some Nevada tribes and Twain made racist statements against American Indians, said Antonucci, author of “Fairest Picture: Mark Twain at Lake Tahoe.”

The national board also cited opposition by the U.S. Forest Service as a factor in its decision. But the agency has since sent a letter to the state saying it would not take a position on the new request.

While Twain wrote adoringly about Lake Tahoe, the Forest Service noted that “his legacy also is that he carelessly started a forest fire” at his camp there.

Twain accidentally started the wildfire in September 1861 while preparing to cook dinner. He and a companion staked a timber claim there, weeks after he arrived in Carson City, with his brother, Orion, then secretary of Nevada Territory. Twain later assumed his pen name as a newspaper reporter in Virginia City.

That first trip to Lake Tahoe inspired Twain to write the famous lines: “As it lay there with the shadows of the mountains brilliantly photographed upon its still surface, I thought it must surely be the fairest picture the whole earth affords.”

The state board will take final action on the proposal after holding hearings in January and May. The national board is expected to act on the request sometime next summer in advance of Nevada’s 150th anniversary of statehood on Oct. 31.

Schumacher injury brings off-piste skiing dangers to light

By Tom de Castella, BBC

Former F1 champion Michael Schumacher is fighting for his life in a French hospital after suffering a head injury in an off-piste skiing accident.

How dangerous is off-piste skiing?

Schumacher was wearing a helmet, which experts say may have

prevented him dying in the immediate aftermath.

Skiing itself is far safer than cycling or swimming, per million participants, says Dr. Mike Langran, a GP who founded the website ski-injury.com. The risk is “in the order of two to four injuries per 1,000 days spent on the slopes,” he says.

But is venturing off-piste more dangerous? There are no comprehensive statistics as it’s impossible to know how many people are skiing off-piste at any one time, experts say. Off-piste refers to any area not marked out and maintained for use by skiers.

Off-piste slopes are not groomed by snowplows, so rocks, precipices and cliffs may not be easy to spot, especially in poor visibility. But the biggest risk is avalanches.

In the past two days alone, seven people have died in the Alps from avalanches.

Read the whole story