Then and now: Fire lookout still stands tall



Fire lookout in the 1930s.
Photo/USFS

The U.S. Forest Service photo from about 1932 is of the Zephyr Point fire lookout.



The fire look out today.
Photo/Lee Vestal

The photo below is from the same angle today.

Among the changes in the surroundings is the added cellular telephone site tower and equipment, left of the building near the tree. Interestingly, while some cell sites are disguised as trees in forested areas (such as on Pioneer Trail near Susquehanna), this one is not.

– Bill Kingman

Expanding N. Shore electric lines being studied



Proposed route changes to Liberty Utilities' North Shore lines.

By Kathryn Reed

Five routes for a massive electrical line on the North Shore are being studied in the environmental documents that were released in November.

CalPeco – short for California Pacific Electric Company – wants to strengthen its ability to provide power to that area.

CalPeco is the parent company of Liberty Utilities, the electric company for the California side of the Lake Tahoe Basin, Truckee and Alpine County.

For Northstar to be able to grow it needs to be able to tap into more power. These upgrades would allow for the ski resort to grow as outlined in its master plan.

CalPeco officials had expected the process to move faster.

The draft environmental documents that are out for circulation are a joint effort between the U.S. Forest Service, Tahoe Regional Planning Agency and California Public Utilities Commission. Much of the land involved with the project is on Forest Service property.

The project also includes Truckee, Kings Beach, Tahoe City, Martis Creek Lake Recreation Area and Burton Creek State Park, as well as private property.

The existing lines run in a northeast-southwest direction between Kings Beach and Tahoe City and then parallel to Highway 267 form Truckee to Kings Beach.

CalPeco wants to remove that first segment and replace it with a higher voltage line. The second line would be realigned. Where exactly will be determined through the environmental analysis. Six substations on the Truckee-Kings Beach route could be upgraded or eliminated.

The current lines are 60 kilovolts and new ones would be 120 kilovolts. Substations would also be upgraded to the increased voltage.

“These improvements would increase the ability to maintain the current maximum system loads during an outage on any of the four key power lines within the North Lake Tahoe Transmission System, increasing the system’s reliability,” according to the three entities that released the draft EIR/EIS.

A year ago this month planners didn't now if the line would require Tahoe Regional Planning Agency approval – it does.

The Advisory Planning Commission of TRPA will hear the proposal Dec. 4, with the Governing Board discussing it Dec. 18. Public comment will be taken at both meetings. These meetings were pushed back from earlier this fall because of the federal government shutdown.

Informational meetings are set for Dec. 10 from 2-4pm at the Tahoe National Forest Truckee Ranger District Office at 10811 Stockcrest Springs Road, Truckee and Dec. 10 from 6-8pm at the North Tahoe Events Center, 8318 North Tahoe Blvd., Kings Beach.

The 971-page draft environmental impact report and draft environmental impact statement are available online. Public comment is being accepted until Jan. 7.

Opinion: Feds need to extend prison overcrowding deadline

By Darrell Steinberg

For most of her adult life, a 31-year-old San Francisco violinist had been ravaged by debilitating mental illness. Newspaper accounts chronicled the compelling journey of Kim Knoble, who was caught in a cycle of shelters and homelessness, lack of self-control and aberrant behavior. It culminated in Knoble's arrest for assaulting an older passenger on a city bus.

Yet that arrest led to Knoble regaining stability and dignity

with the intervention of San Francisco's innovative Behavioral Health Court. The judge's conditions? Avoid jail time by agreeing to mandatory, intensive mental health treatment. After many ups and downs, Kim is safe, stable and playing music again.



Darrell Steinberg

One life saved. So many more at risk.

In the complex and contentious process in which the U.S. District Court three-judge panel deals with California's overcrowded prisons, thousands of lives like Kim's are at stake. Here is why.

The governor and the Legislature faced a key choice in response to the court's order in June to reduce the prison population by 10,000 inmates. We could either spend $730 million to transfer those inmates to jails in and out of state, or we could gain an extension of what was then the Dec. 31 deadline to invest in mental health and substance-abuse treatment to reduce recidivism. The current 65 percent recidivism rate is the unacceptable reality that perpetuates prison overcrowding.

Our compromise in September, reflected in my bill, SB105, put that choice before the three-judge panel, which has since granted two short extensions to allow further negotiations on a durable solution. If the court ultimately agrees to push back the deadline for two to three more years, a significant portion of the $730 million (and more in succeeding years)

must be spent on mental health care, substance-abuse treatment and other strategies to help keep people who leave prison from ever returning.

The stakes could not be higher.

In California's overcrowded prisons, thousands of lives like that of the young violinist are hanging in the balance, waiting for a lasting solution. Prison and jail cells have become de facto holding pens for Californians in need of mental health and substance-abuse treatment. Correctional officers and physicians agree that a criminal sentence is woefully ineffective in getting drug addicts and mentally ill individuals back on a path to wellness.

The court's decision will come on the heels of the turnaround in California's budget. For the first time in modern state history, the single largest increase in the budget other than for education was for mental health: $142 million for 2,000 crisis-stabilization beds to ease the pressure on jails and emergency rooms; $60 million for new crisis caseworkers; $100 million to add mental health care and substance-abuse treatment for an additional 1.4 million Californians under the Affordable Care Act.

These investments are on top of existing funding that helps people like Kim Knoble. California's one-of-a-kind Mental Health Services Act, formed under Proposition 63, generates $1 billion a year for "whatever it takes" to help the most severely mentally ill. For example, Prop. 63 money partially funds Citywide Forensics, a full-service partnership that provides client services for San Francisco's Behavioral Health Court.

Long-term sentencing reform is key to reducing prison overcrowding. But reform alone, like simply building more jail and prison beds, is insufficient. Changing sentencing laws doesn't directly reduce crime and its effect on communities,

nor does it break the cycle for addicts and the mentally ill who complete their sentences only to be released with no hope and no future.

Now is the time to make fundamental change in California's correctional system. Under SB105, the less money we spend on prison beds, the more money is earmarked to reduce recidivism. The longer the court extends the deadline to reduce the prison population, the more mental health and substance-abuse courts we can fund. The longer the extension, the more evidence-based services these courts can connect with offenders who leave the gates.

Kim Knoble could be anyone's daughter, sister, mother, wife or co-worker. Her story is not uncommon. In this moment, the federal court, working together with state and local government, can help save many more like her.

Darrell Steinberg, D-Sacramento, is the president pro temp of the state Senate.

Ganong 24th in downhill

By USSA

LAKE LOUISE, Alberta –- The Audi FIS Alpine World Cup had its men's downhill opener Saturday amid cloudy skies and challenging flat-light conditions on Saturday. Two-time World Cup overall champion Bode Miller (Franconia, N.H.) posted the top U.S. Ski Team result in 16th, while Italian Dominik Paris carved up the icy and bumpy course to take the victory.

Sunday the men race a super G before returning to America for the Audi Birds of Prey race week in Beaver Creek.

Also earning World Cup points were U.S. Ski Team members Steven Nyman (Sundance, Utah) finishing in 19th, Travis Ganong (Squaw Valley) 24th and Erik Fisher (Middleton, Idaho) 26th.

Miller is returning to the racing circuit after a year absence and showing promising results with two top-20 finishes in a row, including Saturday and the Soelden World Cup giant slalom in late October.

Snippets about Lake Tahoe



• Lake Tahoe South Shore Chamber of Commerce's Winter Wine Walk is Dec. 12 from 5:30-7:30pm at the Shops at Heavenly Village. Tickets are $10 for members and $20 for non-members. Buy tickets online.

• Here are the El Dorado-Tahoe and Sierra roadwork schedules for the week from Caltrans.

• On Dec. 14 there will be a full moon ski and snowshoe tour with dinner at Tahoe Donner Cross Country Ski Center. For more info, call (530) 587.9494.

• El Dorado County Board of Supervisors on Dec. 10 is expected to consider temporarily reducing building permit fees by 25 percent for projects including garages, granny flats, decks, additions and remodels. The fees would be effective 60 days later. The meeting is at 9am in Placerville.

• Liesl Kenney has been hired at Heavenly Mountain Resort at the PR coordinator.

Long-term forecast: Dry in California

By Matt Weiser, Sacramento Bee

Despite a hint of rain and snow in the forecast next week, the region and California as a whole can expect a third dry winter ahead.

That's according to an "experimental" long-range forecast released this week by the California Department of Water Resources. The forecast covers the 2014 water year, which runs from Oct. 1, 2013, through Sept. 30, 2014. It calls for "mostly dry conditions for most of California," with dry conditions being especially likely in the south state.



While moisture is in the forecast next week for Tahoe, it may be a dry winter overall. Photo/Susan Wood

The forecast was done for the state by Klaus Wolter, a Ph.D.

meteorologist and research associate at the Cooperative Institute for Research in Environmental Sciences, at the University of Colorado, Boulder.

Wolter made a similar dry prediction for the state last year, which at first appeared “destined for failure,” he said.

In a hint that suggests a similar outcome this year, the near-term forecast calls for a major change in the weather for Lake Tahoe and Northern California on Monday. A storm is expected to drop out of the Pacific Northwest, bringing a chance of rain to the Valley through Wednesday and snow in the Sierra Nevada through Thursday.

Read the whole story

U.S. women mediocre in super G in Colo.

By USSA

BEAVER CREEK -– Swiss Lara Gut set the speed pace for the 2015 FIS Alpine World Ski Championships with victory in the both the Nature Valley Raptor downhill and super G.

Leanne Smith (N. Conway, N.H.) earned the best result for the U.S. Ski Team with 23rd, which came as perfect weather Saturday blanketed the thousands on hand in Beaver Creek for the second straight day of Audi FIS Alpine World Cup racing.

Stacey Cook (Mammoth Mountain) and Julia Mancuso (Squaw Valley) also earned World Cup points with 28th and 29th, respectively.

“We should have done better here as a group. I think we are better than this, and I think when we get back on the courses that we are a little more familiar with and we can get into our normal pattern again, we’ll start bringing the results we brought last year,” Cook said.

Giant slalom will close the women’s weekend on Sunday with slalom World Champion Mikaela Shiffrin (Eagle-Vail, Colo.) taking to the Raptor slope for the first time since training on the hill last spring.

Tahoe Players star in ‘Shrek the Musical’

Tahoe Players will put on “Shrek the Musical” on Dec. 14 at 2pm and 7pm.

Local actors, singers, and dancers will perform alongside a live orchestra.

The shows are at John Ascuaga’s Nugget, 1100 Nugget Ave., Sparks, NV 89431

Cost is $18.

Placerville’s hangtown dummy goes missing

By Anjali Hemphill, CBS-13

PLACERVILLE – Placerville’s hangtown dummy slipped his noose for a few hours and ended up at a nearby bar, and police are wondering who helped him escape.

Police say he was stolen late Wednesday night as the Liar’s Bench Bar next door closed. People at the bar say he was later found lying in front of city hall.

By the next morning, the dummy some call Willie had made his way to the Liar’s Bench.

“They had him standing over there with his hand on the counter, looking out the window so he had a view of Main Street,” said bar patron Dave Hasal.

Read the whole story

Calif. lawmakers receive pay hike Monday

By Patrick McGreevy, Los Angeles Times

SACRAMENTO – California lawmakers are set to receive a 5.3 percent pay raise Monday, but a dozen say they won’t accept it in the wake of a tax hike approved last November and while many residents are still struggling to recover from the recent recession.

The raises were approved by the citizen panel that determines state officials’ compensation. The base salary for most legislators will go from $90,526 to $95,291 – still below the $116,208 that lawmakers received in 2007, before their pay was cut during California’s budget crises.

Many rank-and-file state workers will receive pay hikes of 4.5 percent phased in through July 2015, but some lawmakers note that many in the private sector are hurting.

Read the whole story