

Effort under way to overhaul California State Parks

By Matt Weiser, Sacramento Bee

California officials on Monday launched a new program to analyze and overhaul the state parks system, to be led by a volunteer commission.

Called Parks Forward, the effort is required by the California State Parks Stewardship Act, passed last year in the wake of a financial scandal that upended the leadership ranks at state parks headquarters.

The system has been under scrutiny since the Bee revealed last year that top officials at the Department of Parks and Recreation hid \$20 million in "surplus" money even as they set about closing 70 parks due to budget cuts.

Among its other troubles, the department has a deferred maintenance backlog at its 280 parks that exceeds \$1 billion.

That is partly because the state general fund subsidy for parks has declined over the past 20 years, and revenues from visitor fees have not filled the gap.

California Natural Resources Secretary John Laird said Monday that Parks Forward aims to make the parks department "sustainable" over the next century.

"We would like to get to a point where we are not deferring maintenance and we are adequately funding the stewardship of the parks," he said.

Laird will appoint the commission members, to include park users as well as experts on conservation and finance. The only commissioner named so far is Lance Conn, a venture capitalist and former investor for Microsoft co-founder Paul Allen.

Conn vowed to confront the “brutal facts” about state parks operations and funding. He said the commission will produce a report by the end of next year. The process will be public and will draw from examples of park management around the nation and world.

“I love California parks, and I love tough problems,” Conn said. “We’re not going to toss the report over a wall and sneak away under cover of darkness. We’re going to stick around and see that the measures are implemented.”

Many of the problems confronting California’s parks system have been studied for years and are well understood.

The Parks Forward initiative, for instance, follows a Little Hoover Commission report released in March that recommended a number of operational changes. Among them was the idea of divesting some parks, to reduce operating expenses, and turning them over to other entities, such as local governments.

Carrying out such ideas, however, is fraught with controversy.

“I don’t know that any of us know the right steps to get us there,” said Carolyn Schoff, president of the California League of Park Associations, a coalition of nonprofits that assist individual parks. “But I think all of us know there needs to be a paradigm shift.”

Parks Forward will be funded by grants from the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, the S.D. Bechtel Jr. Foundation, the James Irvine Foundation and others, under the auspices of the Resources Legacy Fund.

Truckee group putting on guided hikes

By Barbara Barte Osborn, Sacramento Bee

Truckee's Mountain Area Preservation organization is inviting the public to join its members on three guided hikes this summer – June 15, July 12 and Aug. 11.

The three- to five-hour hikes will explore some of the areas the group has helped preserve in the Truckee area.

The hikes are free for members. Non-members are asked to make a small donation of any amount, "which makes them a member," said Alexis Ollar, Mountain Area Preservation's executive director.

The grass-roots, nonprofit environmental organization formed in 1987 and has since worked with land trusts and others to keep many scenic meadows, valleys and ridges from development and accessible for the public.

The June 15 hike, from 9:30am to 12:30pm, will be to Lower Sagehen Creek.

A six-mile walk on flat terrain suitable for beginners, it will include woods and wildflower meadows near Sagehen Reservoir.

A moderate-level hike to Frog Lake Cliffs, near Castle Peak, will be from 9am to 2pm July 12.

It includes some steep forested climbs, wildflower meadows and panoramic views.

The last hike, an eight-mile moderate trek on Royal Gorge land, will be from 9am to 2pm Aug. 11.

The hike will involve a steep downslope to a small river crossing and a trek along the side of Palisade Peak.

Views will include Point Mariah and Devil's Peak and spectacular overlooks of Royal Gorge land and the American River.

Hikers should bring water, lunch, hats and sunscreen.

To sign up for a hike, call (530) 582.6751 or email alexis@mapf.org.

More information on the hikes and parking directions are online.

Kiwanis recognizes achievements of local youth

A fifth-grade student from each elementary school in Lake Tahoe Unified School District was recently honored by the Kiwanis of Lake Tahoe with the Hope of America award.

Each year Kiwanis Clubs across the country bestow this honor on the youth in their community.

The teachers and principals from each school selected their nominee based on: excellence in leadership; ethical and moral character; outstanding citizenship; and academic accomplishments.

The recipients were recognized at a lunch attended by their family, teacher, principal, and Kiwanis members. Each received

a \$50 gift certificate and plaque.

Food, wine event benefits LTCC Foundation

Taste of Gold – Lake Tahoe Community College Foundation's biggest fundraiser – is July 13.

It will be from 6-9pm in the college's Demonstration Garden.

Taste of Gold brings together El Dorado County wines and cuisine from some of the best restaurants in the Lake Tahoe Basin.

Proceeds support student success and academic programs at LTCC.

For more information, contact Peter Bostic at Bostic@ltcc.edu or (530) 541.4660, ext. 245.

LTUSD board wants a handle on STHS' club debt

By Kathryn Reed

When the Lake Tahoe Unified School District board of education meets later this month, the five electeds will be asked to decide how to deal with the debt incurred by South Tahoe High School's Associated Student Body and what the future policy

will be.

Consultant Terri Ryland gave a presentation last week about the audit she did regarding the continued deficit. This has been a multi-year problem. (Board member Sue Novasel was not at the May 28 meeting.) The total balance from the various clubs that make up the ASB account is negative \$20,892. Plus, the yearbook has a loan from the district totaling \$30,397.

"No one wanted to see the kids go without. I think that is what started the negative balances," Ryland told the board.



LTUSD is studying the books for South Tahoe High's clubs. Photo/LTN file

One of her recommendations is no club or individual class can spend money until it is in the account. Today it's OK to fund raise after the fact or after the event has been planned and deposits made. This is partly what has led to the debt because the money raised has not always met the expenses.

The classes of 2010, 2011 and 2012 all graduated and left a negative balance in their respective accounts. There are no consequences for having done so.

An issue that was brought up by Roy Benavidez, who heads the ASB, is that ASB is responsible for paying the salaries of the adults who are tasked with doing the bookkeeping.

Ryland said she did a check and could not find a single

instance where any other ASB was saddled with the entire bookkeeping expense. Most districts incur the cost, with some charging a percentage to the ASB.

Twenty hours a week – just for the ASB books – have been allocated and is what the student group must pay. The position was supposed to be for 15 hours, but 20 is what it turned out to be.

“Prior to 2010, several positions at the high school performed various parts of the ASB bookkeeping function. Costs for approximately 11 hours per week were \$27,000-\$34,000,” Ryland wrote in her presentation.

STHS Principal Ivone Larson pointed out that if the district were to incur the expense of the salaries from the last two years for the bookkeeper, then that would essentially wipe out the debt that is on the books.

CF0 Deb Yates told *Lake Tahoe News* after the meeting, “I’ll recommend we bring it in house to assess how many hours are really needed (for bookkeeping.)” (It will be on the board agenda June 25.)

It will be up to the board if the debt is paid off through general fund dollars or some other way and if policy as to how ASB is managed in the future is changed.

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On the June 11 agenda is the hiring of administrative intern Cindy Martinez as interim principal at Bijou Community School for 2013-14.

The meetings start at 6pm in the district office on Al Tahoe Boulevard.

Young writers workshop in Carson City

The Ventana Sierra Advanced Writers Workshop at Western Nevada College in Carson City is designed for young writers.

The free, daylong workshop on June 15 is for those ages 18 and younger. It is to help improve and promote writing through safe and social networking.

Four award-winning authors, including Ellen Hopkins, and a literary agent will lead separate topic sessions.

Grants from the Nevada Arts Council are enabling the teens to attend the 8am-4pm workshop at no cost.

Optional one-on-one critiques also are available to the young writers at a manuscript review rate of \$100.

Topics will include "Keeping It Real: Making Fiction Believable When All (or none) of It Is Made Up," "Building a Safe Social Networking Platform," "Creating Compelling Characters," "Create a Scene," and "Humor 'em: Spice Your Writing With Humor."

Register and learn more about the one-day youth writing workshop online, as well as the three-day advanced writers' workshop June 14-16.

Memorial services supersede LTCC visioning session

Lake Tahoe Community College's 2020 Vision Session planned for this Saturday has been postponed out of respect for the loss of two former instructors.

An announcement with a new date and time will come soon.

A celebration of life will be June 8 for former LTCC instructor Kathy Bluethman at Whittell High School on the football field at 10am. In lieu of flowers, the family asks that donations be made to the George Whittell Athletic Department, P.O. Box 677, Zephyr Cove, NV 89448.

A memorial service for former LTCC instructor Carl Young will also be June 8. It will be at noon at McFarlane Mortuary, 887 Emerald Bay Road. His family asks that donations in his memory be sent to the Ventana Wildlife Society.

Important to make sure animals aren't overheated

June is getting off to one of its hottest starts in a long while and Washoe County Regional Animal Services is using the rising temperatures to raise awareness that leaving a pet in an enclosed vehicle, even for a short time, can be a deadly mistake.

Temperatures inside a closed automobile can easily rise to 20 degrees or warmer than outside temperatures. This could prove deadly to a pet.

Nevada Revised Statute 574.195 is aimed at the prevention of cruelty to animals and makes it illegal for a person to “allow a cat or dog to remain unattended in a parked or standing motor vehicle during a period of extreme heat or cold or in any other manner that endangers the health or safety of the cat or dog.”

The law also allows that designated responders “may use any force that is reasonable and necessary under the circumstances” to remove an unattended and endangered dog or cat from the vehicle.

When it gets to the point where an animal’s well-being is threatened, Animal Control Officers will take the necessary steps, as obligated by the law, to save the endangered animal by removing it from the vehicle. Even if the officer needs to break a window to do it.

The public is encouraged to report distressed animals locked in hot cars immediately by calling (775) 322.3647.

Study: Calif. needs the most water infrastructure upgrades

By Bettina Boxall, Los Angeles Times

California could use \$44.5 billion to fix aging water systems over the next two decades, according to a federal survey that placed the state at the top of a national list of water infrastructure needs.

Texas, at nearly \$34 billion, and New York, with about \$22 billion, were next in line.

The assessment, conducted by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency in 2011 and released Tuesday, is used to document the capital investment needs of public drinking water systems across the country. The EPA relies on the results to allocate grants through the Drinking Water State Revolving Fund.

All told, the survey revealed a \$384-billion wish list of infrastructure projects through 2030 – \$4.5 billion more than in the 2007 assessment.

In California and elsewhere, the biggest need was for repairing and upgrading water transmission and distribution lines. That will come as no surprise to residents of Los Angeles, where old mains routinely break, sending gushers of water flooding city streets. Treatment projects were next on the list.

“The nation’s water systems have entered a rehabilitation and replacement era in which much of the existing infrastructure has reached, or is approaching, the end of its useful life,” EPA acting Administrator Robert Perciasepe said in a statement. “This is a major issue that must be addressed so that American families continue to have the access they need to clean and healthy water sources.”

In April, the regional EPA administrator sent a letter of noncompliance to the California Department of Public Health, complaining that the state had failed to spend \$455 million of federal money in another state revolving fund used to improve drinking-water quality in small rural communities with contaminated wells or other problems.

The EPA said the state had set much of the funding aside for projects that were not shovel ready, while other, ready-to-go projects languished.

Blood drive in South Lake Tahoe

There will be a blood drive in South Lake Tahoe on June 10.

Barton Memorial Hospital Auxiliary is sponsoring the event from noon-6pm at Lake Tahoe Resort Hotel. Parking will be validated.

For more information, call Dan Kerr at (775) 781.5343.

Bring a photo ID, and eat and drink before donating.