NV leaders work hard to pass NV Energy bill

By Andrew Doughman, Las Vegas Sun

NV Energy's plan to shut down coal plants in Nevada moved forward Friday with strong support from some of Nevada's most influential politicians and business interests.

Republican Gov. Brian Sandoval, Democratic U.S. Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, the casino and resort industry, labor unions and state legislators supported a third version of Senate Bill 123, which the utility calls "NVision."

"The benefits of this for Nevadans are great," said Sandoval and Reid in a joint statement.

Following a flurry of private negotiations, the state's power brokers reached a deal earlier this week.



Gov. Brian Sandoval and Sen. Harry Reid are lobbying hard for the NV Energy bill. Photo/LTN file

A legislative committee unanimously passed the negotiated version of the bill out of committee May 17, the first move toward making NVision the law.

Under the bill, the utility would divest from 800 megawatts of coal by 2019 with the controversial Reid Gardner coal plant in Clark County closing by 2017.

The utility's latest iteration of its plan mandates an accelerated exit from the coal market in exchange for the utility reserving the right to own and operate 550 megawatts of new power generation, which would help the utility's profit margins.

The Legislature would also mandate NV Energy to construct, acquire or contract for 350 megawatts of renewable energy, which would count toward the state's Renewable Portfolio Standard, another legislative mandate requiring the state to derive 25 percent of its power from renewable sources by 2025.

For years, the environmental community, Reid's office, and the nearby Moapa Band of Paiutes has hounded the utility to close the Reid Gardner coal plant. The Paiutes have brought a lawsuit alleging that pollution from the plant has harmed the health of the group.

"Retiring coal plants while developing new, renewable energy projects is right for Nevada," Reid said in a statement.

Although three of the Reid Gardner units rarely operate, the bill would call for their official closure by the end of 2014. The larger and newer fourth unit would close by 2017 after the utility buys out a California stakeholder.

Sen. Kelvin Atkinson, D-North Las Vegas, said NV Energy, casino representatives, the governor's office, Reid's office, and labor unions worked for countless hours to craft this compromise.

"It was a lot of people that came together," he said.

Legislators generally seemed pleased with the compromise in which the Public Utilities Commission would exercise more

oversight over the utility than in previous versions of the bill.

The amendment also significantly decreases the amount of power generation the utility would construct, own or acquire in exchange for replacing coal. The first version of the bill had 2,600 megawatts of replacement capacity. The latest version has 900 megawatts.

This essentially means that the bill will result in a lower rate increase for consumers than originally forecast.

Although the committee did not take testimony during a rushed work session on the bill, Atkinson did invite the utility, supportive gaming representatives, and energy regulators to the testify on the bill.

The Public Utilities Commission, the body that regulates NV Energy, told legislators that one provision of the bill involving rate mitigation could actually let the company earn more by capping rate increases at 5 percent.

The utility would get to charge interest on the balance of a rate increase above 5 percent, meaning that the company could collect more over time from ratepayers than it would under a straight rate increase.

Otherwise, the commission would now have more authority to decide when the utility would build new power generation. It would also get to modify the utility’s plans to build new power generation.

The bill now heads for a vote on the Senate floor. It then faces another full hearing in the Assembly Commerce and Labor committee, where supporters and opposition will have another chance to spar.

But it may be difficult to defeat the bill with support from Reid, powerful utility and gaming lobbyists, and the unusually

strong support from Sandoval.

While Sandoval normally does not comment on legislation because it could change before it reaches his desk, he earlier endorsed this proposal in its second iteration and has maintained support through significant changes in the third and current version.

“I look forward to working with the Legislature on this important public policy and urge the Legislature’s support so that I can sign it into law,” he said.

The Legislature has just over two weeks to pass the bill and get it to the governor within the 120-day legislative session, which ends June 3.

Red Hawk’s deal with state goes to Assembly

SACRAMENTO – The state Senate has approved a revised agreement with the Indian tribe that owns the struggling Red Hawk Casino.

Gov. Jerry Brown negotiated the new compact last fall with the Shingle Springs Band of Miwok Indians. The tribe owns the Red Hawk Casino, which officially opened in December 2008 just as the national recession began.

Sen. Ted Gaines, R-Rocklin, said his bill will let the tribe restructure and refinance its debt while retaining about 1,400 jobs in El Dorado County.

AB1267 would let the tribe reduce its payments for several years before requiring that it eventually pay the state 15

percent of the casino’s net winnings.

The bill passed unanimously and without debate Thursday, and now goes to the Assembly.

— AP

Gear up for the annual Tahoe Bike Challenge

The 8th annual Tahoe Bike Challenge is June 1 (Tahoe Bike Day) through June 14.

This annual two-week event challenges everyone to ride their bike to work, school, play and for daily errands in an effort to reduce the region’s carbon footprint. For every mile ridden on a bicycle (a Green Mile) 1.9 pounds of carbon dioxide and other gases are prevented from being emitted into the atmosphere.

This year’s carbon reduction goal is 20,000 tons.

For more information and to register as an individual or as a team, go online.

There is no fee to participate. The Challenge is not a competition, but could be among friends and colleagues.

West Slope road closure planned

El Dorado County will close both directions of Bass Lake Road between Silver Dove Way and City Lights Drive on May 31 at 6pm until June 3 at 6am.

Closure times may change depending on weather and progress of the planned work.

The closure to replace a culvert on Bass Lake Road.

During the closure, motorists will be detoured to Serrano Parkway and El Dorado Hills Boulevard to provide access to and from Highway 50.

Questions regarding this temporary closure should be directed to Dave Spiegelberg at (530) 957.3521.

Doc to talk about hip issues

Causes and Treatment of Hip Pain is the topic of Robert Rupp’s June 5 lecture.

The Barton doctor will discuss hip tendinitis, bursitis and arthritis, along with sciatic nerve compression and treatment options such as hip arthroscopy and anterior hip replacement.

The free talk is from 6-7pm at Kahle Community Center, 236 Kingsbury Grade, Stateline.

Douglas County's Tahoe area plan nearly complete

By Kathryn Reed

STATELINE – While the South Shore Area Plan for Douglas County doesn't come with a project per se; it is the map for which one could seek approval.

Area plans are the latest requirement by the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency per the updated Regional Plan. They will replace jurisdictions' community plans.

The Douglas County Commission on May 16 heard a presentation from Brandy McMahon, the county's senior planner, about the Tahoe plan. The county Planning Commission earlier this month approved the plan. The commissioners are expected to vote June 20. From there the TRPA Governing Board must adopt it.



Douglas County is close to finalizing the South Shore Area Plan. Photo/LTN file

Area plans are in theory supposed to give the five counties and one city in the Lake Tahoe Basin more control over development within their boundaries. Big projects – something

like the Edgewood Lodge – would still require TRPA board approval.

Douglas County updated its master plan in 2011. Much of what is contained in the area plan is in the master plan. A big difference is that the land use element needs to be updated.

Much of the plan will address redevelopment because Douglas County – and the basin as a whole – is near build-out. The county has 102 vacant lots at the lake, with an expectation they could all be built on in 17 years.

Area plans, per TRPA, must take into consideration erosion control issues. These are part of the stormwater load reduction principles.

Douglas County has 18 percent of the basin's shoreline and contributes 3 percent of the fine sediment that reaches the lake. It is that fine sediment that scientists say is degrading the clarity of Lake Tahoe.

McMahon said the goal is redevelopment projects will have a water quality component that will mean less sediment reaching the lake with the new building compared to what is on the land today.

Best management practices – or personal and commercial erosion control measures – is something a rep from the League to Save Lake Tahoe told the commissioners it is keeping a close watch on.

"One of the remaining issues is BMP enforcement and who will be taking that on," Shannon Eckmeyer with the League said.

McMahon told the commissioners, "Douglas County has the highest BMP compliance rate in the Tahoe basin."

Attorney Lew Feldman praised the plan.

Tom Hall, whose family has owned property on Kingsbury Grade

for decades, also praised the plan even though his property straddles the two Tahoe plans – of which only one is being formulated. The county said down the road that issue would be addressed.

(Those were the only members of the public to speak Thursday.)

The South Shore Area Plan essentially mimics the area that was outlined in the South Shore Vision Plan. Richard Shaw, who works out of the Aspen office of Design Workshop and the key player of that plan, will be at the commission's June meeting.

Something that was not considered in TRPA's previous Regional Plan was economics and how land use decisions have a dollar value – even a negative value.

McMahon pointed out how in the Tahoe area of Douglas County gaming revenue decreased 38 percent from 2004 to 2011; employment at the casinos fell 52 percent from 2001 to 2011; the population dropped by 22 percent in the decade starting in 2000; school enrollment is down nearly 50 percent from 1990 to 2010; and half the homes are owned by out-of-towners.

"These are troubling trends we would like to reverse," she said.

Planners – at TRPA and the county – as well as others believe area plans will be the tool for which redevelopment will go forward in the Lake Tahoe Basin, which in turn will be a financial stimulus with the construction, as well as sustained economic growth via providing a more attractive place to live and visit.

7 performances of ‘Rent’ at LTCC

The Pulitzer Prize and Tony Award-winning musical “Rent” is coming to Lake Tahoe Community College.

Shows are June 14, 15, 20, 21, 22 at 8pm, with 2m shows on June 16 and 23.

Set in New York City’s East Village, “Rent” follows the lives of a group of impoverished young artists and musicians as they struggle to survive and create in Manhattan’s Lower East Side during the thriving days of Bohemian Alphabet City, and under the shadow of the AIDS epidemic. With music ranging from pulsating rock to gospel style ballads, “Rent” is a pop culture phenomenon about love, friendship, finding your voice, and living for today.

“We have a remarkable cast for this production,” Susan Boulanger, LTCC’s theater director, said in a press release. “Not only are they talented, but their connection to the material takes the show to an incredible level.”

Tickets for “Rent” are $15 for general admission, $12 for seniors, groups of eight or more, students with a valid student ID and children under 13. Tickets may be purchased in advance at LTCC’s bookstore Monday through Thursday, 9:30am to 7:30pm., and Friday, 9:30am to 2:30pm starting June 3. The Box Office will be open for ticket sales one hour prior to performances. Seating is limited, so advanced ticket purchases are recommended.

This show is for mature audiences only and not recommended for children under 18.

For information, call (530) 541.4660, ext. 207.

Letter: Fallen Leaf Lake boat wash not adequate

Publisher's note: ***This letter was originally sent to members of the Fallen Leaf Lake Community Services District board and others in that South Shore community. It is reprinted with permission. Since it was sent, the board has agreed to place the topic on the May 25 board agenda. The board meets at 9am at the FLL Fire Department.***

To the community,

On May 15 an announcement was made that the New Zealand mud snail had been found in the Truckee River. Per this article it was most likely introduced by a kayak or canoe being launched into the river. They have confirmed approximately one mile between samples found in the river, this is very scary.

New Zealand mud snail can be from about the size of a grain of sand all the way up to one-eighth inch in diameter.



Fallen Leaf Lake's boat wash at the marina. Photo/LTN file

For the most part they “cannot be seen by the human eye”. They can populate a square yard with up to 900,000 snails. They can also have a severe impact on the ecosystem within lakes and streams as well as causing problems on lake front areas and beach with dead snail shells. There is a large potential for financial impact as they will get into pumps, water pipes, and water tanks leaving them unusable. Very serious.

When I started our boat wash program many years ago, the intention was to decontaminate each vessel before being launched into Fallen Leaf Lake. This would help to ensure the pristine waters of Fallen Leaf Lake would be maintained for future generations to enjoy. It has recently come to my attention that someone has changed the requirements of the program. Apparently if a boat comes in with a tag from Tahoe (only an inspection required), the attendants at the launch ramp will perform a visual inspection and if it looks good, they will let the boat be launched.

Please don’t forget many of these AIS [aquatic invasive species] cannot be seen by the human eye. The people at the launch ramp indicated that the existing boat wash system is now not considered strong enough per TRPA.

Has anyone looked into an upgrade? Has anyone tried to raise funds to purchase the upgraded pressure washer? Leaving the responsibility of keeping our lake healthy for our children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren in the hands of people who have already allowed Tahoe to be infected with Eurasian water milfoil, curley leaf pondweed, Asian clams, and now the New Zealand mud snail is irresponsible on our part.

We can make a difference. The fact that Fallen Leaf Lake is still presumed to be clean proves it.

The Fallen Leaf Lake Protection Association and the CSD needs to get it together. Why has this program been allowed to change from the strict requirements previously set? There are

now four potential AIS in our back yard, the program standards need to be up held as originally written. Although we have been unable to get the USFS to participate in the protection of our lake, there is no reason as a community we can not get together and hold our standards higher to protect the lake as much as we possibly can.

I would like to request a response from both the FLLPA and the CSD on this matter. This has the potential of impacting our entire community and the reduced protection that has been allowed for our lake is unacceptable, especially with the increased threat.

Mike Kraft, Fallen Leaf Lake U.S. Forest Service land leasee and creator of the now nearly 9-year-old FLL boat wash program

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Veterans Resource Day in Truckee

Rep. Tom McClintock's office will join with representatives from Nevada and Placer counties to conduct a Veterans Resource Day in Truckee on May 22 from 11am to 2pm.

The event will be at the Truckee Town Hall, 2nd floor, Eastwing Conference Room, 10183 Truckee Airport Road, Truckee.

The event will provide veterans with the information they need to access benefits from the Veterans Affairs Administration. Representatives from the American Legion and the Veterans of Foreign Wars will also be on hand to assist active-duty military, wounded warriors and military families.

Veterans advocacy groups or related organizations that are

interested in participating in the event should contact Joel Scott at (916) 786.5560.

Chips the bobcat

During the Chips Fire on the Plumas National Forest, a baby bobcat was orphaned. While the Forest Service restored the forest, the bobcat then known as Chips, recovered at Lake Tahoe Wildlife Care. Recently, Chips was returned to the wild.