Sandoval not ready to commit to TRPA

By Sandra Chereb, AP

Nevada Gov. Brian Sandoval favors keeping alive the threat to leave the bi-state Tahoe Regional Planning Agency Compact, a decades-old agreement that has governed environmental controls and development in the basin , a legislative committee was told Tuesday.

But conservation groups said given more cooperation with California, environmental groups and business interests, repealing Nevada's threat would show the state's commitment to collaboration and tackling the lake's environmental challenges.



Gov. Brian Sandoval wants to keep Nevada's options open regarding inclusion in TRPA. Photo/LTN file

No action was taken April 2 by the Senate Committee on Natural Resources on SB229, which would repeal the 2011 withdrawal legislation.

Steve Robinson, Sandoval's designee to the TRPA, said SB271 passed by the 2011 Legislature authorizing possible withdrawal

from TRPA was “essential” to jumpstarting negotiations and updating a regional plan for the first time since the late 1980s.

But he cautioned that a lawsuit filed in federal court in Sacramento by two environmental groups over the Regional Plan adopted in December “could be stopped in its tracks,” depending on how the court rules.

Additionally, the regional plan has yet to be fully implemented, and local governments now must come up with their own guidelines for overseeing some development activities.

“Looming over all of these … are the threat of litigation,” Robinson said.

SB229 would repeal a law passed in 2011 that paved the way for Nevada to leave TRPA and instead regulate environmental protections and development within its boundaries.

Nevada lawmakers blamed their California counterparts for favoring tough environmental standards that they said were hindering development and the economy.

TRPA in December approved an updated Regional Plan that gives local governments more control over some decisions.

Sen. David Parks, D-Las Vegas and sponsor of the latest measure, said last year’s law was successful in bringing all parties to the table and an updated plan. But leaving it in effect would be a mistake.

“For this collaboration to continue … it’s essential that Nevada recommit to the compact” by passing legislation this session repealing it, he said.

Kyle Davis with the Nevada Conservation League agreed, saying repeal of the withdrawal bill is “the top priority” of the state’s conservation community.

“I think lack of action by Nevada during this session will have a negative effect,” Davis said.

He said a perception that Nevada still wants to hold back would send “a pretty bad message” about its willingness to continue talks and work collaboratively.

Leo Drozdoff, director of the Nevada Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, reiterated Sandoval’s opposition to repeal – a sign committee chairman, Sen. Aaron Ford, D-Las Vegas, acknowledged was a hurdle for bill sponsors.

“We believe this bill is premature,” Drozdoff said, adding existing law sets a 2015 timeline for withdrawal and gives the governor the option to extend that deadline for another two years.

Business groups, including Tahoe resorts, also opposed the bill and urged the committee to allow more time, keeping the hammer of withdrawal in place.

But Parks disagreed.

“I think the important thing to bear in mind is time is of the essence,” he said. Given that Nevada lawmakers meet every two years, they won’t be able to consider repeal again until 2015.

“We’ll be at the eleventh hour,” he said.

Parents using electronics to

muffle kids

By Nick Bilton, New York Times

I recently watched my sister perform an act of magic.

We were sitting in a restaurant, trying to have a conversation, but her children, 4-year-old Willow and 7-year-old Luca, would not stop fighting. The arguments — over a fork, or who had more water in a glass — were unrelenting.

Like a magician quieting a group of children by pulling a rabbit out of a hat, my sister reached into her purse and produced two shiny Apple iPads, handing one to each child. Suddenly, the two were quiet. Eerily so. They sat playing games and watching videos, and we continued with our conversation.

After our meal, as we stuffed the iPads back into their magic storage bag, my sister felt slightly guilty.

“I don’t want to give them the iPads at the dinner table, but if it keeps them occupied for an hour so we can eat in peace, and more importantly not disturb other people in the restaurant, I often just hand it over,” she told me. Then she asked: “Do you think it’s bad for them? I do worry that it is setting them up to think it’s OK to use electronics at the dinner table in the future.”

I did not have an answer, and although some people might have opinions, no one has a true scientific understanding of what the future might hold for a generation raised on portable screens.

“We really don’t know the full neurological effects of these technologies yet,” said Gary Small, director of the Longevity Center at UCLA, and author of “iBrain: Surviving the Technological Alteration of the Modern Mind.” “Children, like

adults, vary quite a lot, and some are more sensitive than others to an abundance of screen time.”

But Small says we do know that the brain is highly sensitive to stimuli, like iPads and smartphone screens, and if people spend too much time with one technology, and less time interacting with people like parents at the dinner table, that could hinder the development of certain communications skills.

So will a child who plays with crayons at dinner rather than a coloring application on an iPad be a more socialized person?

Ozlem Ayduk, an associate professor in the Relationships and Social Cognition Lab at UC Berkeley, said children sitting at the dinner table with a print book or crayons were not as engaged with the people around them, either. “There are value-based lessons for children to talk to the people during a meal,” she said. “It’s not so much about the iPad versus nonelectronics.”

Parents who have little choice but to hand over their iPad can at least control what a child does on those devices.

A report published last week by the Millennium Cohort Study, a long-term study group in Britain that has been following 19,000 children born in 2000 and 2001, found that those who watched more than three hours of television, videos or DVDs a day had a higher chance of conduct problems, emotional symptoms and relationship problems by the time they were 7 than children who did not. The study, of a sample of 11,000 children, found that children who played video games — often age-appropriate games — for the same amount of time did not show any signs of negative behavioral changes by the same age.

Which brings us back to the dinner table with my niece and nephew. While they sat happily staring into those shiny screens, they were not engaged in any type of conversation, or staring off into space thinking, as my sister and I did as children when our parents were talking. And that is where the

risks are apparent.

“Conversations with each other are the way children learn to have conversations with themselves, and learn how to be alone,” said Sherry Turkle, a professor of science, technology and society at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and author of the book “Alone Together: Why We Expect More From Technology and Less From Each Other.” “Learning about solitude and being alone is the bedrock of early development, and you don’t want your kids to miss out on that because you’re pacifying them with a device.”

Turkle has interviewed parents, teenagers and children about the use of gadgets during early development, and says she fears that children who do not learn real interactions, which often have flaws and imperfections, will come to know a world where perfect, shiny screens give them a false sense of intimacy without risk.

And they need to be able to think independently of a device. “They need to be able to explore their imagination. To be able to gather themselves and know who they are. So someday they can form a relationship with another person without a panic of being alone,” she said. “If you don’t teach your children to be alone, they’ll only know how to be lonely.”

Snippets about Lake Tahoe



• Caesars Entertainment, parent company of Harrah’s Lake Tahoe and Harveys, has received a 100 percent score on the Human Rights Campaign’s Corporate Equality Index six years in a row.

• A slew of meetings in April are designed to figure out the future of Truckee Tahoe Airport. More info is online.

• Old Brockway Golf Course in Kings Beach broke a record from 1995 when it opened March 16. The earliest opening date had been March 24.

• Ryan Sheltra is now vice chairman of the Nevada Commission on Tourism.

• Bijou Golf Course is open. The April 1 opening is the earliest opening date in the South Lake Tahoe links' history.

1,000-home development proposed for Shingle Springs

By Richard Chang, Sacramento Bee

Shingle Springs residents are gearing up for a showdown over a proposed 1,000-home mega development off Mother Lode Drive.

The project, named San Stino, will have 1.6 units per acre over a 645-acre tract. Developer Joel Korotkin of San Stino LLP estimates the build-out could take several years, depending on market conditions.

But neighbors are launching a grass-roots effort to stop the proposal. They say the project is too dense and will threaten their rural lifestyle.

"The development is so large it will affect almost all Shingle Springs residents," said Frank Verdin, an organizer for No San

Stino, one of two grass-roots groups opposing the development.

No San Stino and the Shingle Springs Community Alliance are asking the El Dorado County Board of Supervisors to halt review of the plan and for the developer to go back to the drawing board.

The county is in the process of preparing an environmental impact review, which will assess the project in terms of traffic, infrastructure and other factors. But officials caution that final approval is still far away.

“For this many lots, you’re looking at 10 years or more before you achieve a full build-out,” said Pierre Rivas, the county’s principal planner.

The stiff opposition from the community has the developer on the defensive.

“We’ve been very open from the beginning,” Korotkin said, noting that San Stino has already been scaled down from the original 1,300 houses proposed two years ago.

“If you think this is going to affect you, we want you to write a comment setting forth your concerns,” he said.

El Dorado County’s elected leaders are taking note of the growing chorus of criticism.

Supervisor Ray Nutting, who represents Shingle Springs, said he is “very aware” of the constituent backlash against the project.

“I’m very skeptical of the numbers,” Nutting said. “My hope is that those numbers come way down. The developer needs to build trust with the community.”

Korotkin said that he has followed the application process from the beginning and that the county had previously designated the land as an area for growth in the 2004 General

Plan.

The site has historically been a grazing ground for farm animals and is currently zoned as one home for every 5 acres.

Many in Shingle Springs live on plots of 1 acre or more, according to data from the county planning department. Community leaders have expressed concern that the large influx of people could upend the area's rural lifestyle.

"If you take 1,000 homes and multiply that by two, you're looking at 2,000 cars," said Verdin, whose home sits on 8 acres and is 400 feet from the development site. "Traffic is a huge concern. People have to drive because it's rural."

But Korotkin contends that he has made ample provisions to allow San Stino to fit in with the community, including creating a new road to minimize traffic and setting aside 42 percent of the land, or 270 acres, toward open space.

"It's a challenge, but I believe we can do this in a way that doesn't hurt Shingle Springs," he said.

The 30-day public comment period for the environmental impact report ended Friday.

The report is likely to be released by next spring.

Rivas, the county planner, doesn't expect the Board of Supervisors to vote on the project until mid-2014.

"You're looking at years off into the future," he said. "But the project tells me there is a positive outlook in the future of the economy."

Pinning ceremony for South Tahoe firefighters

South Lake Tahoe Fire Department is hosting a Badge Pinning Ceremony on April 4 at 4pm in the City Council chambers located at 1901 Airport Road.

The following fire fighters will be recognized:

- Kenin Fairley on his promotion to shift commander
- Doug Bailey on his promotion to fire engineer
- Dylan Fuchs on being hired as a firefighter-paramedic
- Mike Taormina on being hired as a firefighter-paramedic.

This ceremony is open to the public.

‘Motherhood Out Loud’ launches Valhalla’s season

“Motherhood Out Loud” received its triumphant premiers in New York, Los Angeles and Connecticut. Now it comes to the South Shore via the Tahoe Tallac Association.

The three performances are May 9 and May 10 at 7:30pm and May 12 at 3pm.

The Mother’s Day performance includes a glass of Champagne or sparkling cider for every mom.

The play opens the Valhalla Festival of Arts and Theatre 2013 season.

Each show is at MontBleu in Stateline. Tickets are $20/adult.

(This is not recommended for young children due to language.) Purchase tickets online, by phone at (530) 541.4975, at the casino box office, or at the door.

Ski report: Season is winding down

Spring conditions have returned.

Most resorts will remain open through April 14.

Here is the April 2 ski report.

– Curtis Fong

Turn in prescription drugs in Tahoe area

There will be a free Medication Take Back Day on April 27 in Truckee and Tahoe City.

Drop off unneeded or expired prescription and over-the-counter medications safely, effectively, and anonymously between 9am and 1pm at Gateway Shopping Center in front of Safeway, 11290 Donner Pass Road, Truckee, and North Tahoe Fire Protection District, Station No. 51, 222 Fairway Drive, Tahoe City.

Mark out personal info on Rx bottles.

For information email FWDD@ttcf.net or call (530) 546.1924.

Guard takes role in Drug Store Project seriously

Publisher's note: ***This is the 10th anniversary of the Drug Store Project. Today's event at Lake Tahoe Community College is designed to teach sixth-graders that they have choices and what can happen if they choose to use drugs.***

By John K. Holihan Jr.

The California National Guard's Drug Demand Reduction Team mission is to coordinate statewide the utilization of National Guard resources and personnel in direct support of community based organizations, law enforcement agencies, and educational institutions in their illegal drug awareness and prevention efforts-programs, such as the Drug Store Project in South Lake Tahoe.

California National Guard's DDR members act as role models, mentors, student guides, and setup and tear down crew for the Drug Store Project.

The California National Guard's Drug Demand Reduction members

are a part of the community. Our children face the same challenges that all California youth face with bullying, self-esteem and alcohol and drugs.

The California National Guard DDR has been partnering with Lisa Huard's Drug Store Project for the past 10 years. The Tahoe program has been the model that other cities and Arizona's National Guard's DDR program has used to develop their own Drug Store Project.

Some of the youth who attended Tahoe's first Drug Store Project are now volunteers who help with the Drug Store Project. They talk to the youth about how the project has impacted their life.

The students who participate in the Drug Store Project are given a pre-test and post-test to document the effect the Drug Store message and what valuable information the youth have gained. The goal is for the youth to remember what they have learned and put it into practice should they be faced with a similar situation.

With the lack of funding for drug awareness and with state budget issues, things like this are threatened in terms of potentially not being able to participate in the future.

John K. Holihan Jr. is a master sergeant with the California National Guard.

Hyatt property at Northstar changes owners

The Hyatt Residence Club near the Village at Northstar has traded hands.

For an undisclosed sum, Welk Resorts took over the 23 remaining unsold whole ownership and fractional residential units, along with two adjacent vacant parcels for future development.

Those parcels are zoned for an additional 67 units totaling 102,619-square-feet.

The first 34 two- and three-bedroom units were completed in 2008.

LTMR Properties had owned the property.

The property, known as Northstar Lodge, is to the right of the ski resort village. It is a private ski-in/ski-out club. It is close to the gondola that takes passengers to the Ritz-Carlton at mid-mountain.

The Northstar Lodge in Truckee joins Welk Resorts San Diego, Welk Resorts Branson, Welk Resorts Desert Oasis, Welk Resorts Sirena Del Mar, Cabo San Lucas, as well as land held for future resort development in Breckenridge, Colo., and the newly acquired Poipu, Kauai property.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report