Supreme Court to hear Sierra Nevada forest case

By Michael Doyle, Miami Herald

WASHINGTON — A long-running Sierra Nevada forest planning dispute will now be settled by the Supreme Court in what could shape up as a crucial public lands case.

On Monday, the court agreed to referee the dispute pitting environmentalists with the Portland-based Pacific Rivers Council against the U.S. Forest Service over decision-making that dates back to the second Bush administration. While the specific case involves 11 Sierra Nevada forests, the eventual outcome could shape everything from who gets to file lawsuits to the scope of future environmental studies.

“Definitely, throughout the West, this could have huge impacts on the moving of projects forward,” Dustin Van Liew, executive director of the conservative Public Lands Council in Washington, D.C., said in an interview Monday.

One key question confronting the court will be whether environmentalists have the “standing” to sue against a general forest plan, as opposed to a specific project proposal, by virtue of their making recreational use of the national forests. To gain standing in federal court, individuals must show they’ve been injured or face imminent injury.



The court case involves the Eldorado National Forest. Photo/LTN file

A second major question is how extensively detailed the Forest Service must be when preparing overarching management plans, such as the one governing the 11 Sierra Nevada forests.

“The only role for a court is to insure that the agency has taken a ‘hard look’ at the environmental consequences of its proposed action,” Pacific Rivers Council’s attorneys said in a legal brief, adding that “agencies cannot take a ‘hard look’ unless they have reasonably identified the consequences of their actions.”

Underscoring the case’s potential significance, the Public Lands Council and the affiliated National Cattlemen’s Beef Association secured Supreme Court permission Monday to file a brief opposing the environmental group. Many more briefs, from both sides, are sure to come.

The court’s decision to hear the Sierra Nevada case, sometime during the 2013 term that starts in October, means that at least four of the court’s nine justices agreed to reconsider a 9th Circuit Court of Appeals decision from last year in which environmentalists prevailed.

In that 2-1 appellate court decision, the 9th Circuit panel concluded the Forest Service in 2004 failed to adequately study the effect of dramatically revised forest plans on Sierra Nevada fish populations.

“The Forest Service provided no analysis despite the fact that the 2004 (plan) allows much more logging, burning, road construction and grazing,” Judge William A. Fletcher wrote for the appellate panel.

The planning, and required federal environmental impact statements, cover nearly 11.5 million acres of Forest Service

land stretching from Southern California to the California-Oregon border. Taken together, the Sequoia, Inyo, Sierra, Stanislaus, Humboldt-Toiyabe, Eldorado, Tahoe, Plumas, Lassen and Modoc national forests, and the Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit, encompass more than 5 percent of all land managed by the Forest Service nationwide.

“My first Sierra Nevada backpacking trip was to the Mineral King area in 2000, during which time I also fished,” Pacific Rivers Council Chairman Bob Anderson, a South Lake Tahoe resident, said in a court declaration used to establish injury and standing. “I plan to continue these activities as long as the management of Sierra Nevada national forests does not prevent me from doing so.”

When presidents have changed, so have the Sierra Nevada forest plans.

The Clinton administration issued one Sierra Nevada plan in January 2001, about a week before President Bill Clinton left office. The George W. Bush administration then scrapped that plan, and issued another in 2004.

The 2004 Bush plan called for harvesting 4.9 billion more board-feet of timber than under the 2001 Clinton plan. The Bush plan also called for constructing 90 more miles of new roads, reconstruction of 855 more miles of existing roads and a loosening of restrictions on grazing. Bush’s supporters in the timber and cattle industries, among others, supported the changes, while environmentalists warned of the dangers.

Letter: Irish dinner benefits South Shore

To the community,

So proud of our community when organizations get together for a special event or holiday that helps the underprivileged or children’s programs get ahead.

During this St. Patrick’s Day weekend there have been numerous celebrations all over town for St. Paddy’s Day and that Irish charm. One corned beef, cabbage, and potatoes dinner was done by the Knights of Columbus at St. Theresa’s Catholic Church Saturday. All the festive activities included a raffle/prizes and the real Irish coffee.

The highlight was Emeritus Father John Grace in his own Grace Hall, partaking in dinner with us all.

Hats off to all the Knights of Columbus and volunteers making this all work. With special recognition to Tom Finn, Al Toster, George Westinghouse, Gary Brand, others members, etc.

The elementary school at St. Theresa’s will have the children benefit from these ongoing education programs. No wonder the cliche is “Erin go Bragh, or simply Luck of the Irish.”

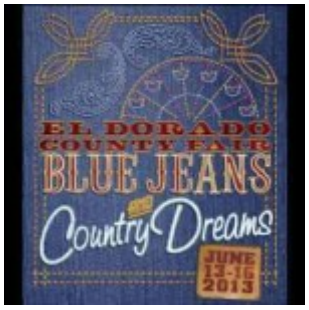
Ron Zehren, South Lake Tahoe

Drug Store Project rehearsal

Freshmen in South Tahoe High School’s AVID program practice their parts for the Drug Store Project. Teacher Julia Russell plays the part of the police officer. Drug Store Project is April 2 at Lake Tahoe Community College.

El Dorado County Fair revamping contests

El Dorado County is changing some of divisions for various competitions for June 13-16 event.



For example, not all professional photography needs to be framed, there will be classes for framed and non-framed work for pro, and with moving into a larger building, there is no longer a photography entry limitation. In addition, the computer section has been completely revised to include many graphic design classes, blogs, WordPress, mobile aps, JavaScript programming and more. We’ve added new divisions in the baking and confections category including Ugliest Cake Decorating and Men’s Only Baking. In the preserved foods category, there is a new division called Sassy Sauce, where exhibitors can enter their sassiest and most prized recipes with “Sassy” in the title. The Wine Label competition was revised to include Classical, Label Series, Whimsical, Artistic And Painted/Etched Bottle classes.

Enter in one of the divisions listed above or check out the

entry guide online for more options.

Entry deadline for this year's fair is May 22. South Lake Tahoe residents may drop off entry forms and entries at the South Lake Tahoe Library the week of May 13 during library hours.

Entry forms are available online.

The 2013 El Dorado Country Fair theme is Blue Jeans and Country Dreams.

Local governments pay big to influence Sacramento

By Anthony York, Los Angeles Times

SACRAMENTO – Although many of California's cities and counties have been struggling financially, putting off road repairs, cutting back library hours and reducing police patrols, there is one way in which they have not held back: hiring Sacramento lobbyists.

Local governments' spending on advocacy in the Capitol has surged in recent years, topping $96 million during the two-year legislative session that ended last fall – an increase of nearly 50 percent from a decade ago.

The sum dwarfs the lobbying bills of the state's largest labor unions, big oil companies and other energy interests combined, according to the California secretary of state's office. No sector spends nearly as much trying to influence government in California as government.

One reason is more than two decades of term limits. Turnover in the Capitol and in some local offices has weakened relationships between state and local officials. Many lobbyists work in Sacramento for decades, are more knowledgeable about policy details and intricate funding formulas than sitting lawmakers, and have long-standing relationships with Capitol staffers.

Another is the state budget crises of the last decade, which have taken an ever larger bite out of allocations to local governments, putting municipal and state leaders at loggerheads.

With tens of millions of local dollars going to capital insiders “at a time when cities and counties are cutting back essential services, it’s worth asking whether this spending is the best use of taxpayer money,” said Phillip Ung, a spokesman for the watchdog group California Common Cause.

Local officials say the lobbying expenses are a small price to pay to protect their share of exponentially larger state dollars. The right advocate can steer some state funds in one direction or another, and these days, a lobbyist’s blessing for a policy proposal can carry more weight in the Capitol than a legislator’s endorsement.

Lobbyists may be retained as a defensive measure against decisions made in the Capitol that could adversely affect local communities. They may be asked to help secure state contracts or bond money, or to arrange meetings with leaders of the Legislature and other top government officials.

Orange County officials credited their Sacramento lobbyists, Platinum Advisors, for arranging a meeting last summer with Assembly Speaker John Pérez, D-Los Angeles, that led to last-minute legislation restoring $48 million to the county budget.

The city and county of Los Angeles both have full-time staffs dedicated to monitoring the Capitol, but they seek additional

help from several Sacramento-based firms. The two entities paid external lobbyists a combined $5.3 million over the last two years, according to spending reports filed with the state.

The city of Los Angeles paid the Sacramento firm of Shaw/Yoder/Antwih more than $251,000 in 2011 and 2012 combined – part of the more than $3.3 million spent on outside lobbying during those two years. The firm helped secure millions of state bond dollars for city projects and helped defeat legislation that could have required the city to spend as much as $2 billion to repair damaged sidewalks, said Juan Rodriguez, director of state relations for the city.

Other big spenders include the counties of Alameda, San Bernardino and Orange, which each devote more than $1 million annually on outside advocates. But some of the big money comes from small cities.

Anthony Gonsalves, the son of a former assemblyman, runs a lobbying firm with his two sons that specializes in representing cities with populations of 50,000 to 100,000 and budgets to match.

The firm’s three Sacramento lobbyists did nearly $5 million in business during the last two-year session of the Legislature, according to records that lobbyists must file with the state. Most of that business came from the 60 municipalities on its roster.

The cities paid the firm as much as $8,000 per month, often to lobby on legislation that Gonsalves was being paid to address by other clients as well, according to his firm’s state filings. Such fees can be hefty for a small municipality, but the cost of not having such a lobbyist can be much higher, said Alan Kapanicas, city manager of Beaumont in Riverside County, which Gonsalves represents.

Like much municipal funding, most of the city’s budget passes through Sacramento, Kapanicas said, and lawmakers have cut

those funds deeply over the last decade. The elimination of redevelopment agencies, for example, deducted billions of dollars from city budgets. The governor and Legislature also transferred responsibility for many low-level criminals from prisons to local jails, straining county budgets.

“The state is always coming up with new ways to take money away from us,” he said. “We need to have some protection” in Sacramento against those efforts.

The city, with slightly more than 16,000 residents and an annual budget of $28.7 million, paid Gonsalves more than $73,000 over the last two years to “be our eyes and ears in Sacramento,” Kapanicas said.

Gonsalves said he offers connections that local officials need in the Capitol and may not be able to make through the legislators from their area. “We are a conduit,” he said. “We have the relationships.”

Many contracts are approved with little or no public scrutiny. Some are arranged by city managers and approved pro forma by council members, without public discussion. Some have come under criticism.

A January report from City Controller Wendy Greuel found that the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power approved four no-bid contracts totaling $480,000 to Sacramento advocacy firms. None of the contracts had been advertised publicly or required regular updates from the lobbyists on their work.

In Malibu, officials raised concerns about potential conflicts of interest in the way their work was being handled by a firm called California Strategies, which the city has paid $150,000 a year since 2004 for state government advocacy. The firm simultaneously represented U2 guitarist David Evans, better known as the Edge, in his 2009 quest to build five homes on the bluffs overlooking the Malibu coastline – an effort some members of the City Council opposed.

“It made me uneasy, because the lobbying firm [was] representing something the city may not be happy with,” said Jefferson Wagner, who sat on the City Council from 2008 until mid-2012. Wagner was opposed to the development and told the city’s advocate, California Strategies’ Ted Harris, that the firm’s work on the project “made it awkward for me.”

Jason Kinney, a spokesman for the firm, said its partners determined there was no conflict in accepting Evans as a client because the necessary permits were dispensed by the California Coastal Commission, not the Malibu City Council. The Coastal Commission ultimately rejected the project.

Sometimes there are personal ties between local governments and their lobbyists. The Yucaipa Valley Water District paid more than $110,000 to Platinum Advisors during the last two-year legislative session. One of the firm’s lobbyists, Brett Granlund, is the brother of district board member Bruce Granlund and ex-husband of another member, Lonni Granlund.

Joseph Zoba, general manager of the Yucaipa Valley Water District, said the Granlunds recused themselves from the vote on hiring a lobbyist.

“Brett is a former city councilman and assemblyman from Yucaipa. He has a great working knowledge of Yucaipa,” Zoba said. “Most people don’t even know where we are on the map. Having someone like Brett really helps out.”

Study: Cutbacks impact

quality of news

By David Bauder, AP

NEW YORK — Years of newsroom cutbacks have had a demonstrable impact on the quality of digital, newspaper and television news and in how consumers view that work, a study released Monday found.

Nearly one-third of consumers surveyed by the Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism said they have abandoned a news outlet because it no longer gave them what they had counted on, either with fewer or less complete stories.

Pew's annual State of the News Media report delivered what has become a common litany of grim business statistics. Television news viewership is down. Newsroom employment at newspapers is down 30 percent since a peak in 2000 and has gone below 40,000 people for the first time since 1978. *Newsweek* shut its print edition and *Time* magazine is cutting staff.

"These cutbacks are real," said Amy Mitchell, the project's acting director. "And based on the data that we've collected, they are having an effect."

Government coverage on local television news has been cut in half since 2005, the study said. Sports, weather and traffic now account for 40 percent of the content on these broadcasts; yet that's just the sort of information readily available elsewhere. That's a recipe for future erosion, Mitchell said.

Forty-two percent of adults under age 30 counted themselves as regular local news viewers in 2006; last year that was down to 28 percent, the study found.

Cable news is increasingly cable talk, although it's difficult to conclude whether that is because of financial

considerations or the sense among executives of what viewers want. Over the last five years, CNN has sharply cut back on produced story packages and live event coverage, the study found.

During the presidential campaign, reporters increasingly acted as megaphones instead of investigators, Pew said. More stories are simply reporting verbatim what candidates or partisans were saying, rather than using those statements as a starting-off point to explore an issue.

There are many more places that people can go for news or information now. The question is whether consumers are leaving prominent news organizations because they are not getting what they want, or whether these outlets can no longer afford to give them more because consumers are leaving, said David Westin, former ABC News president.

“Increasingly, it’s not just a question of what people want,” said Westin, who presided over an era of cutbacks at ABC News. “It’s what people are willing to pay for.”

More organizations are experimenting with charging for digital content, which Mitchell called a positive sign. The Pew report said 450 of the nation’s 1,380 daily newspapers have started or announced plans for some kind of paid subscription model. Partly as a result, newspaper circulation stayed steady in 2012 after years of decline. Revenue continued to go down, though.

With newsroom cutbacks, some news organizations supplement their reporting through work funded through other sources, like ProPublica and the Kaiser Family Foundation’s service for reporting health news. When he was at ABC, Westin said the network accepted a grant from the Gates Foundation for reporting on subjects like the water supply in Africa it otherwise would not have been able to afford.

Pew’s survey of 2,000 consumers taken earlier this year

revealed that a majority of people had little or no awareness that the news industry has financial problems. The people aware of the problems are the ones more likely to abandon a news outlet because they weren't getting what they wanted.

Of the people who left a news outlet, 61 percent said that the stories were less complete than they had been, Pew said.

"We are at a point where we have to get back to quality and think about what we are giving people," Mitchell said.

Barton offers regular grief support group

Barton Hospice's Reflections of Life and Loss is a grief support group on the first and third Thursday of each month from 5 to 6pm.

Meetings are at 2092 Lake Tahoe Blvd., Ste. 600, South Lake Tahoe.

Barton Hospice encourages people who have experienced the loss of a loved one or have endured a significant, life-altering event to attend.

The benefits of a bereavement group include sharing emotional connections with others when many cannot find peace with friends and family. This grief support group also helps teach attendees how to cope with certain situations and provides an opportunity and comfortable atmosphere to release emotions they may otherwise keep to themselves.

For more information or to RSVP, call Barton Hospice at (530) 543.5581.

Ski report: Lots of sun today

Spring conditions continue. Keep your fingers crossed for snow Tuesday into Wednesday.

Here is the March 18 ski report.

— *Curtis Fong*

Snippets about Lake Tahoe

• There is a Relay for Life meeting March 20 at 5:30pm at Kahle Community Center in Stateline.

• The Banff Mountain Film Festival comes to the MontBleu Theatre in Stateline on April 1 at 7pm, doors open at 6pm.

• Lake Tahoe Wildlife Care's volunteer training is May18-19. Sign up online.

• Here is the Caltrans El Dorado-Tahoe roadwork schedule for the week.

• A Little League team in Illinois is raffling off an AR-15 as a fundraiser and defends that decision in this video

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League brings awareness to Tahoe storm pipes

By Kathryn Reed

A whole lot of brown gunk is coming out of storm pipes that flow into Lake Tahoe. While that isn't news, greater awareness is being brought to the issue.

The League to Save Lake Tahoe has identified 50 pipes in the basin carrying runoff water, but believes there are more. One of the problems is there is not just one agency responsible for knowing where the pipes are, what is coming through them and where that water originated from.

Most of the identified pipes go into the lake, with a couple taking water to the Upper Truckee River.



The Venice Drive pipe on the edge of the Upper Truckee River is dry March 17, but

that is likely to change when the storm rolls through the basin this week. Photo/Kathryn Reed

It is hard to identify pipes in Nevada because of the different rules when it comes to public-private property at the water's edge.

In October, the League implemented a pilot program where nine volunteers adopted a pipe. Their job is to get samples of water during storm events, take pictures and write notes of what they see. To date, 250 water samples have been collected.

"We wanted to create a program where the community could do something and get dirty. Something so they could take the issue into their own hands," explained Darcie Goodman Collins, executive director of the League. "The key message is get involved."

A couple dozen people attended a meeting last week at Lake Tahoe Community College to learn more about the Pipe Keepers and to hear what the results were of the initial data collection.

"We just want to know if the pipe is a problem and if it's being taken care of," explained Nicole Gergans of the League.

Turbidity, or the cloudiness of water, is measured in NTUs, which stands for nephelometric turbidity unit. For Lake Tahoe, the NTU in shallow water is supposed to be no more than 1 NTU or up to 3 NTU near a drain, according to the League.

Here are the average measurements as of mid-March since the program started for this rain-snow season:

• Kaspian Point Pipe – 181 NTU

• Lardin Avenue Pipe – 170 NTU (On Jan. 21, the water was too

turbid to measure, which means it was more than 1,000 NTU, the League reported.)

• Meeks Bay Pipe – 21.6 NTU

• Venice Drive Pipe – 181 NTU

• Sunnyside Pipe – 59 NTU

• Upper Truckee River-Highway 50 Pipe – 500 NTU

• Fremont Avenue Pipe – 63.4 NTU.

Besides the League giving out info, Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board, Tahoe Regional Planning Agency, Tahoe Resource Conservation District and the Environmental Protection Agency had folks in the room as members of the audience.

Bob Larsen with Lahontan spoke a bit to the group; in large part about how fine sediment is clouding the lake.

“Go upstream of the pipe. That’s where a lot of solutions lie,” Larsen said.

Kristi Boosman with TRPA said collaboration is good and so is identifying all of the pipes.

The League is looking for more people to be part of the Pipe Keepers. For more information, call (530) 541.5388 or email Emily@keeptahoeblue.org.