Douglas County plotting course to be recreation oriented community at Tahoe

By Kathryn Reed

STATELINE – Outdoor fun and buildings that match the natural beauty are the goals of Douglas County's South Shore Area Plan.

"Our overall objective is to transform the casino area to recreation," Brandy McMahon, senior planner with Douglas County, said at a meeting March 1. "We want to provide a wide-range of recreation in walking distance."

It means making a seamless connection between Van Sickle Bi-State Park to the Stateline-to-Stateline bike route that is partially built at Rabe Meadow and will extend to Round Hill Pines later this year, to providing beach access via Edgewood when the lodge is developed, to getting people to Kahle Community Center.



Rabe Meadow in Stateline is part of the vision to develop a more recreation-focused community. Photo/LTN file

While the vision for the South Shore from Kahle Drive in Stateline to Ski Run Boulevard in South Lake Tahoe has been the subject of many intense discussions for more than a year, each jurisdiction must define its own vision. While they do so, the respective planning departments are conferring with each other to create similar design standards.

Douglas County has three community plans and 30 residential plan areas on the books. With the adoption in December of the Regional Plan by the Governing Board of the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency, the five counties and one city in the Lake Tahoe Basin are tasked with creating area plans. In many ways they are like the community plans, but updated.

The South Shore plan for Douglas combines what was the Casino Core and Lower Kingsbury community plans.

A change for Douglas County is that the commissioners at a meeting in February agreed to take over permitting for residential construction. As of 2012, at the lake Douglas County has 102 vacant parcels. If nine building allocations are give out annually by the TRPA, this would mean those lots could be built out in a dozen years.

Only two single-family residences have been identified in the South Shore Area Plan. Those are on the Edgewood site. Today no one resides in them. And they are slated to be demolished when the lodge is built in the coming years.

This means it is commercial, recreation, public lands and multifamily housing units that will be affected by the South Shore Area Plan.

Paying attention to the various thresholds within the TRPA guidelines is critical to all the area plans, as well as looking at ways to reduce pollutants reaching Lake Tahoe.

Today, the Stateline area has not attained the scenic threshold because of its outdated built environment.

Douglas County contributes a negligible amount of fine sediment into Lake Tahoe – 3 percent of the total – or 125,000 pounds per year, according to the Lake Tahoe Total Maximum Daily Load Technical Report.

The mandate is to reduce that amount by 10 percent by 2016.

All documents related to the South Shore Area Plan are expected to be put on the county's website as they become available. Comments are being sought and should be sent to Brandy McMahon at mbcmahon@co.douglas.nv.us.

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Dates to know:

• March 12, 5:30-8pm South Shore Area Plan workshop at TRPA, 128 Market St., Stateline.

• March 20, 6-9pm South Lake Tahoe is hosting a public workshop on the Tourist Core Area Plan, formerly known as the Stateline/Ski Run Community Plan, at Lake Tahoe Airport.

• April 9, 1pm Douglas County Planning Commission meeting in Minden. All documents related to the South Shore Area Plan area expected to be discussed, with action likely.

• May, Douglas County commissioners expected to vote on plan.

• June, TRPA Governing Board may hear Douglas' plan.

Tahoe Tails – Adoptable Pets in South Lake Tahoe

Wormie is an affectionate, super high energy Jack Russell mixed with poodle. At least that's our best guess.



He weighs about 20 pounds and he likes well behaved children. He is crate trained, and would like a very active owner. He would probably do very well at agility or flyball.

And he is looking forward to receiving a new name.

Wormie is neutered, microchipped, and vaccinated. He is at the El Dorado County Animal Services shelter in Meyers, along with many other dogs and cats who are waiting for their new homes. Go online to see photos and description of all pets at the shelter.

Call (530) 573.7925 for directions, hours, and other information on adopting a pet.

For spay-neuter assistance for South Tahoe residents, go online.

– Karen Kuentz

Letter: Tahoe events need to

be in tobacco-free venues

To the community,

I would gladly help to support events like the Sierra Nevada Alliance's film festival, but I have chronic bronchitis and asthma which makes it impossible for me to enter a smoke-filled casino, let alone attend the film festival.

How can you hold this event in a toxic, smoke-filled casino? It is discrimination against people who have respiratory illnesses, heart conditions, and even people who just want to live a healthy life without exposing themselves to the 63 known cancer causing carcinogens, 4,000 to 8,000 toxic chemicals, and 619 deadly additives that are in secondhand tobacco smoke. There is a reason that the Surgeon General has stated "there is no safe level of exposure to tobacco smoke."



It has been proven that secondhand smoke causes permanent heart and lung damage with even a small amount of exposure.

Why not hold this event in a clean, healthy, non-toxic environment like Heavenly Village Cinema? Or the community college?

There is no excuse for holding an environmentally friendly film festival in a venue filled with toxic air.

According to my friend who worked as head of research for the third largest tobacco company in the world, "If the tobacco industry were forced to list the ingredients on a package of cigarettes or cigars, you would not legally be able to throw

them into a landfill.”

Each cigarette is a miniature toxic waste dump containing cadmium (battery acid), formaldehyde, hydrogen cyanide (used to kill people in gas chambers during the war!), benzene, acetone, arsenic (rat poison), polonium 210 (radioactive), and nicotine (poison) to name just a few ingredients.

So why are you forcing all of your film-goers to attend a film festival in a toxic smoke-filled casino? Simply separating a room within a building is completely useless. The ventilation system carries all the gaseous matter throughout the entire building.

If you truly care about the environment, stop holding events in the toxic smoke-filled casinos. At the very least, you can encourage the casinos to go smoke-free along with the rest of the world. Entire countries are now smoke-free in all indoor areas including casinos. Yet here in Tahoe, all it takes is a bit of blood money from the murdering tobacco companies (aka the Gaming Association, etc.) and everyone ignores the fact that over 600,000 Americans died of smoking last year and 63,000 died prematurely from secondhand smoke last year.

Stop patronizing businesses that promote tobacco. Tobacco kills more people each year than all other causes of death. Please move the film festival to a place where everyone can go and see it. A non-smoking venue.

Diana Woodbury, South Lake Tahoe

California lawmakers accept fewer freebies

By Jim Sanders, Sacramento Bee

California lawmakers accepted food, travel, tickets and other gifts totaling more than a half-million dollars last year, ranging from a $14,000 trip to Brazil to a $1.89 Coca Cola drink with straw.

Gift-giving to the Senate and Assembly totaled about $500,500 – roughly $171,500 in gift items and $329,000 in travel, according to annual financial disclosure statements released Saturday.

The total represents a belt-tightening from 2011, when lawmakers accepted more than $750,000 in gifts of all kinds, including travel. The bottom line was about $520,000 in 2010.

A key reason for the lower total last year, however, is that it represents records of current legislators, including 39 rookies, not veterans who were termed out or not re-elected last December.

Unusual gifts to lawmakers last year included a $5 reusable bag, $5 handkerchief, $7.50 stuffed animal, a $90 desk pen, $20 in Big Foot beer and $110 in first aid kits.

Sports and entertainment tickets were a hot item, with lawmakers receiving thousands of dollars' worth for football, baseball, basketball, Disneyland, SeaWorld, musical concerts and Rose Bowl-related events.

Lawmakers also took numerous trips bankrolled by Capitol interests, nonprofits or foreign groups. Hawaii, Brazil, China and Korea were among destinations last year.

Assembly Speaker John A. Pérez topped the Legislature by

accepting $8,000 in gift items. The Los Angeles Democrat also received more than $9,800 in travel assistance, including $836 from the Association of Life and Health Insurance Cos. to attend a Pebble Beach event.

The Senate leader, Darrell Steinberg of Sacramento, reported receiving $2,297 in gift items and $2,116 in travel. He also attended the Pebble Beach event, receiving $959 from the insurance group.

Gifts to Pérez included nearly $700 in cigars or cigar boxes, more than $500 in crystal ducks (he collects ducks), a $250 UC Berkeley football helmet and two bobblehead dolls worth $53 and $40, respectively.

By comparison, Gov. Jerry Brown reported receiving $2,500 in gifts. He also accepted travel valued at more than $3,700 from a business-backed nonprofit group, the California State Protocol Foundation.

The Legislature's top recipients of gift items included Assemblyman Das Williams, D-Santa Barbara, $5,274; Assemblywoman Bonnie Lowenthal, D-Long Beach, $4,348; and Assemblyman Curt Hagman, R-Chino Hills, $4,332.

Sen. Alex Padilla, D-Los Angeles, and Assemblyman Luis Alejo, D-Watsonville, reported receiving $6,572 and $5,495 in gift items, respectively, but many of the freebies were wedding presents.

The Assembly leader in free travel was Norma Torres, D-Pomona, who accepted $20,000 in trip aid, including $10,811 from the American Israel Education Foundation.

Sen. Anthony Cannella, R-Ceres, was the Senate's top recipient of travel gifts, $18,979, including a Brazil trip underwritten by the California Foundation on the Environment and the Economy.

State law permitted legislators to accept gifts valued at up to $420 from a single source in 2012.

No dollar limit is imposed for travel provided by foreign governments or by nonprofit groups if the trip is for a governmental, legislative or policy purpose.

Motorcyclist who died on Geiger Grade ID’d

Update: March 3 8:55pm:

Kyle Banko, 24, of Carson City died Saturday while riding his motorcycle on the Geiger Grade.



A motorcyclist died March 2 on the Geiger Grade. Photo/NHP

Nevada Highway Patrol officials say on March 2 at approximately 1:58pm the sport bike traveling north on Highway 431 toward Reno in a no-passing zone passed a silver Subaru Outback traveling in the same direction. The motorcycle struck the left side of the Subaru and the rider was ejected, troopers said.

Banko died at Renown Medical Center in Reno where he had been airlifted.

The occupants in the Subaru, a 28-year-old Gardnerville woman and her two children, ages 4 years and 3 months, were not injured.

The highway was closed for approximately 30 minutes. The highway was completely opened at 6:26pm.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Easy to escape the masses at snowshoe park atop Colorado ski resort

By Kathryn Reed

BEAVER CREEK – Debris is falling from high up in the tree, creating a mess of sorts at the base. That was the work of a porcupine, that while not easily seen, was obviously sitting high atop a branch in what she thought was an isolated spot.

On this particular Friday a group of snowshoers is taking in a small slice of the 32 kilometers of trails through Beaver Creek's McCoy Park Nordic Center. We don't seem to interrupt the chomping above us.

Guide Laurie Hardmeyer points out other signs of wildlife.



Naked aspens provide a surreal landscape at Beaver Creek on a cloudy day. Photos/Kathryn Reed

Coyotes, fox and black bears call this terrain at 10,000 feet home. So do ermine, which are part of the weasel family. We see their tracks in the couple inches of fresh snow that has fallen overnight.

“They dive under the snow and eat their weight in mice and voles every day,” Hardmeyer says. “Under the snowfall there is this ecosystem.”

Our leader says she saw eight ptarmigan (a medium-size bird) on the trail earlier in the season, which she said was unusual.

Elk chew on the aspens that fill the landscape. It’s a natural analgesic. She jokes that if we get sore on our trek, we can start gnawing on one of the trees. No one tries. After all, we know soon enough there will be plenty of wine to be had to ease any aches.

This excursion is part of the annual Beaver Creek Food + Wine event. (Alex Seidel was the featured chef with Grouse Mountain Grill Executive Chef Gutowski at the Snowshoe & Gourmet Lunch at Gutowski’s restaurant inside the Pines Lodge.)

This land wasn’t always about luxury. Early settlers grew vegetables in the mountains. McCoy, after whom the park is

named, was a lettuce grower.

The Nordic center is all about getting people on snowshoes, cross country skis or skate skis. Equipment may be rented, lessons taken or day passes bought for those who come equipped. The trails are accessed via Beaver Creek’s Strawberry Park Express chairlift.

Hardmeyer talks about the views that a sunny day would provide. But there is no evidence of the Sawatch Range, Gore Range or back bowls of Vail. Instead, we are treated to what appears to be a mystic fog that floats through the barren aspens.

Besides the aspens, groves of mostly lodgepole pine dot the landscape. Colorado blue spruce and Engelmann spruce are part of the mix.

“When you need peace and quiet, this is the place to come,” Hardmeyer says.

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Snowshoe event at Van Sickle Bi-State Park

There will be a guided snowshoe hike at Van Sickle Bi-State Park on March 9 from 10am-1pm offered through Explore Tahoe:

An Urban Trailhead and the Tahoe Rim Trail Association.

The distance of the snowshoe is 2-3 miles and is rated as moderate in terms of difficulty.

Meet at the Heavenly Village parking garage at 10am. Refreshments will be served at the end of the program at Explore Tahoe.

Dry West spurs worries of drought, wildfires



Snow has been scarce in the Lake Tahoe Basin in 2013. Photo/Kathryn Reed

By Jack Healy, New York Times

DENVER – After enduring last summer's destructive drought, farmers, ranchers and officials across the parched Western states had hoped that plentiful winter snows would replenish the ground and refill their rivers, breaking the grip of one of the worst dry spells in American history. No such luck.

Lakes are half full and mountain snows are thin, omens of another summer of drought and wildfire. Complicating matters, many of the worst-hit states have even less water on hand than a year ago, raising the specter of shortages and rationing that could inflict another year of losses on struggling farms.

Reservoir levels have fallen sharply in Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico and Nevada. The soil is drier than normal. And while a few recent snowstorms have cheered skiers, the snowpack is so thin in parts of Colorado that the government has declared an "extreme drought" around the ski havens of Vail and Aspen.

"We're worse off than we were a year ago," said Brian Fuchs, a climatologist at the National Drought Mitigation Center.

Last week's blizzard brought a measure of relief to the Plains when it dumped more than a foot of snow. But it did not change the basic calculus for forecasters and officials in the drought-scarred West. Ranchers are straining to find hay – it is scarce and expensive – to feed cattle. And farmers are fretting about whether they will have enough water to irrigate their fields.

"It's approaching a critical situation," said Mike Hungenberg, who grows carrots and cabbage on a 3,000-acre farm in northern Colorado. There is so little water available this year, he said, that he may scale back his planting by a third, and sow less thirsty crops, like beans.

"A year ago we went into the spring season with most of the reservoirs full," Hungenberg said. "This year, you're going in with basically everything empty."

National and state forecasters – some of whom now end phone calls by saying, "Pray for snow" – do have some hope. An especially wet springtime could still spare the Western plains and mountains and prime the soil for planting. But forecasts are murky: They predict warmer weather and less precipitation across the West over the next three months but say the Midwest

could see more rain than usual.

Water experts get more nervous with each passing day.

“We’re running out of time,” said Andy Pineda of the Northern Colorado Water Conservancy District. “We only have a month or two, and we are so far behind it’s going to take storms of epic amounts just to get us back to what we would think of as normal.”

Parts of Montana, the Pacific Northwest and Utah have benefited from a snowy winter. But across Colorado, the snowpack was just 72 percent of average as of Feb. 1, which means less water to dampen hillsides and mountains vulnerable to fire, less water for farms to use on early season crops, and less to fill lakes and reservoirs that ultimately trickle down into millions of toilets, taps and swimming pools across the state.

Heavy rains and snow have recently brought some hope to the parched states of Iowa, Minnesota and Missouri, where the drought is easing. But 55.8 percent of the United States remains locked in drought, according to the government’s latest assessments. And states like Nebraska and Oklahoma are facing precipitation deficits of as much as 16 inches.

Without damp soil, many wheat crops will have trouble growing come March and April when they should be in full bloom, and corn and soybeans could be stunted after they are planted this spring. In a year when farmers are planning another record planting, some might be forced to sow fewer seeds because there is not enough soil moisture to go around.

In southwestern Kansas, Gary Millershaski said the wheat on his 3,000 acres was as dry as it had ever been after two years of drought. But as snow fell around him, he was smiling, a guarded optimist for this year’s planting. “If we get above average rainfall from here on, we’re going to raise a wheat crop,” he said. “But what are the odds of that?”

Sen. Mark Udall, Democrat of Colorado, put it this way: “Mother Nature is testing us.”

But Washington is also posing a challenge.

Udall, Sen. Michael Bennet, a Democrat, and other members of Colorado’s Congressional delegation are seeking $20 million in emergency funds to help restore watersheds in Colorado ravaged by last year’s wildfires. So far, there has been little action on the measure. Western politicians are also urging the Forest Service to move more quickly to modernize the shrinking and aging fleet of tanker planes it uses to douse wildfires.

With the across-the-board budget cuts taking effect March 1, financing for the Forest Service’s Wildland Fire Management program was be cut by $134 million. As many as 200,000 acres — an area about the size of Kansas City, Mo. — will not be treated to remove dry brush, dead wood and other tinder for wildfires.

In dry states like Colorado, officials are already preparing for the worst. Wildfires did $538 million in damage last year, burning hundreds of homes and driving away summer tourists. As late as December, when the high country should be blanketed by snow, a 4,000-acre fire continued to burn in Rocky Mountain National Park. To some officials, it was a harbinger of longer, fiercer fire seasons that may come with climate change. “It’s just so dry here,” said Tom Grady, the emergency manager in Aspen and the surrounding county, which is already meeting to fine-tune its fire plans for the summer.

Denver Water, which serves 1.3 million people, depleted many of its reservoirs after last year’s dry winter and an unrelenting spree of 90- and 100-degree summer days. Those basins never fully recovered, and are now an average of 63 percent full. The agency has already idled one water treatment plant to conserve its reservoir supplies, and officials say they are likely to declare a Stage 2 drought, limiting when

people can water their lawns.

In northern Colorado, a combination of drought and wildfire is shutting off the spigot for scores of farmers. Cities are worried about ash and sediment flowing from the burn areas into the rivers that supply their water, so they are holding onto every drop possible this year and not selling any water to local farmers.

In 2011, the northern Colorado city of Greeley alone leased enough water to irrigate 13,000 acres of farmland – representing millions of dollars in wages for farmhands, seed money, fertilizer sales and profits for farmers. Every year, just after midnight on Jan. 1, farmers start calling the city to sign up to lease the surplus water. This year, Greeley had to call them all back to say there was none to be had.

Eldon Ackerman, who grows sugar beets, pinto beans and alfalfa on his farm in Wellington, said he had water supplies for only about one-third of his fields. He was praying the spring snow and rains would come to save him. If they do not, he said he might have to let 1,000 acres lie fallow this year.

“There isn’t any more water to get,” Ackerman said.

K’s Kitchen: Easy dip keeps guests happy

By Kathryn Reed

It’s always a challenge for me to think of something quick to serve as a post-play day snack for guests.

Cheese and crackers, chips and salsa – those are always easy

and enjoyable. But sometimes it’s nice to have other things to put out.



After a day of skiing last weekend I knew I wouldn’t want to come home and spend hours in the kitchen while everyone else was soaking in the hot tub. So the recipe below is what I whipped up and was able to take outside to the guests in the hot water.

I had not made this before, but my sister is always open to being my guinea pig. The four of us enjoyed it – so much so that she asked for the recipe. The recipe is from the March issue of *Bon Appétit.*

I didn’t have sherry vinegar so I used regular sherry. I also didn’t want to deal with pomegranate seeds, so I used dried cranberries.

Making it again, I would mix more of the mint and cranberries into the dip. Both added great flavor and texture.

While the magazine says it can be served with pita chips or crudités, I had flatbread crackers and the Wheat Thin Stix. Treat this as you would any hummus when it comes to what to dip into it.

Chickpea-Yogurt Dip

Puree 1 small garlic clove, two 15-ounce cans chick peas (rinsed), ½ C plain 2 percent Greek yogurt, 3 T olive oil, 2 tsp sherry vinegar, and a large pinch of ground cumin; season with kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper. Top with olive oil, pomegranate seeds, and coarsely chopped fresh mint.

Makes about 1½ cups.

California policy allows nonlethal response to mountain lion problems

By Matt Weiser, Sacramento Bee

For the first time, California state wildlife officials have clear rules in place to deal with problem mountain lions short of killing them.

On Friday, the California Department of Fish and Wildlife released a revised policy to respond to mountain lions that show up in urban areas, for example, and appear to pose a danger to the public. In the past, the department's only position in such incidents has been to eliminate the problem by killing the cougar.



Now, if a mountain lion has not already threatened or attacked a person or domestic animal, it will be considered a "potential human conflict" incident that allows a range of nonlethal responses.

The policy change follows an incident in Half Moon Bay on Dec. 1 in which state wildlife officers killed two mountain lion kittens that were hiding under a deck in a residential area. Necropsies later determined the two kittens were 4 months old, weighed only about 13 pounds, and had no food in their stomachs.

“With these new guidelines, they’ve added a whole new category where it gives them the option to slow down and take some other course,” said Tim Dunbar, executive director of the Mountain Lion Foundation, a Sacramento-based nonprofit. “This is a good step forward. We believe it’s something that’s been needed for some time.”

California is unique in the nation in its management of mountain lions, thanks to a 1990 ballot measure, Proposition 117, in which state voters declared cougars a protected species exempt from hunting.

Since then, mountain lions have been killed only when they pose a danger to people or domestic animals.

Since 1910, there have been 15 verified attacks by mountain lions against people in California. Of those, five have been fatal.

The revised policy still states that mountain lions may be killed if they threaten or kill people or domestic animals. This is done under a “depredation” permit issued by the Department of Fish and Wildlife, which is limited in time and geography.

Now, the policy defines “potential human conflict” incidents as those “that could reasonably be perceived as having potential to cause severe injury or death to humans.”

In such cases, state wildlife officials now have the leeway to respond by hazing the cougar with rubber bullets; a beanbag, Taser or tranquilizer gun; pepper spray; or trained dogs. They also may capture, rehabilitate and relocate problem mountain lions.

“This gives responders a better understanding of what to do and how to deal with it,” said Jordan Traverso, a spokeswoman for the Department of Fish and Wildlife.

The policy notes that state law does not authorize the department to rehabilitate mountain lions or to work with nonprofit groups for that purpose or to capture or haze mountain lions.

For that reason, Traverso said, the policy is considered a draft that will be amended if state law grants new powers.

A bill introduced in January by Sen. Jerry Hill, D-San Mateo, would do just that. The bill, SB132, would allow the department to work with other government agencies, universities and nonprofits on nonlethal means to manage mountain lions.