Geothermal plant may threaten Mammoth groundwater

By Chris Clarke, KCET

A 33-megawatt geothermal power plant approved in August by the Bureau of Land Management and U.S. Forest Service has the town of Mammoth Lakes worried about its drinking water supply.

Ormat Technologies' Casa Diablo IV Geothermal Energy Project would draw 29,000 acre-feet of extremely hot water per year from deep within the rock layers of the tectonically active region, using up to 16 newly drilled wells.

But that geothermally heated aquifer lies beneath the cold water aquifer from which Mammoth Lakes draws its drinking water, and locals are worried that the Ormat's pumping could draw down the cold water aquifer: a troubling prospect in this drought as locals become increasingly dependent on groundwater.

Most of the water pumped by Ormat will be reinjected into the geothermal aquifer, so that aside from losses to steam and leakage, the actual volume of water in the hot aquifer may not change by much. But the reinjected geothermal water will be much cooler. The Mammoth Community Water District (MCWD), which serves the resort town of 8,000 or so residents with drinking water and wastewater services, has expressed concerns that reinjecting cooler water into the geothermal aquifer might reduce pressure in that aquifer, resulting in a drawdown of the cold water aquifer above it.

That would mean less potable groundwater within reach of MCWD's wells. And that's a problem. For the last two years, with spring snowmelt much reduced, the water district has been forced to increase its reliance on pumping as its surface water sources like Mammoth Creek have dwindled.

Read the whole story

Dog found 20 months after being lost in forest

By News 10-TV

FORESTHILL – In what would be an amazing story of survival, an El Dorado Hills family hopes a golden retriever found wandering through a campground in the Tahoe National Forest is the dog they lost while camping more than a year and a half ago.

Murphy, a 5-year-old female, was separated from Nathan Braun during a camping trip at Hell Hole Reservoir in October 2012. The family posted ads and flyers and never gave up hope that Murphy would one day be found.

Then a couple of weeks ago, the family was notified that a stray golden retriever had been spotted at a campground on French Meadows Reservoir – about 11 miles from where Murphy disappeared.

The family drove up on June 7 with Murphy's blanket and a ball cap belonging to Nathan.

Camp host Jason Smith said he placed the items on the ground at his campsite and was stunned by what happened next.

Read the whole story

SLT putting investment action plan together

By Kathryn Reed

While South Lake Tahoe's financial viability is precarious, the City Council on Tuesday agreed that investing in recreation must happen if the city is going to be on stable footing.

City Manager Nancy Kerry started a 3½ -hour workshop on June 17 by outlining where the city is today in regards to income/expenses. The city is headed for the red because expenses are outpacing revenues. Much of the drain is from health care costs for current and retired employees.

But pension expenses also add to the problem. PERS – Public Employee Retirement System – costs are expected to increase 7 percent each year. And with PERS recently recalculating fees, South Lake Tahoe must pay an additional $300,000.



The city will need more public-private partnerships like the one for Harrison Avenue in order to make improvements. Photo/LTN

While employees have not gotten a raise in the last five

years, retiree benefits keep increasing. PERS puts in a cost of living adjustment no matter the economic situation. In the last five years, retiree payouts have increased by 12 percent. This means California public employee retirees can't say they are on a fixed income.

South Lake Tahoe has 165 employees, but 800 people receive health benefits. This is because until 2001 dependents could be covered on the health plan of retirees for the rest of their lives. Starting with those hired in 2008 retiree health care was no longer an option.

In a 10-year period from 2009-18 the city forecasts needing $44.3 million to fund health care. If changes are not made, that figure could grow to $60 million or more, according to Kerry, based on health care costs rising and more people entering the program.

"The city can't grow to $6 million a year or we'll never fund recreation," Kerry said. The current annual health care cost is about $4 million.

That $6 million is the same amount of cash the city receives in property taxes each year.

South Lake Tahoe under Kerry's leadership wiped out a $20 million year liability by mandating qualified retirees join Medicare. This is something that should have been done under any previous city manager.

The city is negotiating with each of its bargaining units to make changes to the benefits plan.

"The system is the problem. Information was not brought to the council about how bad things were getting," Kerry said.

In the mid-1980s it cost the city $1,200 a year for a family's health plan. Today it costs $1,500 per month.

It is not known if any other city administrator ever proposed

capping the amount of money the city would pay per employee or retiree, but it never happened.

Going forward

Kerry told the council if the city doesn't continue investing in infrastructure, it will have what it has now – crumbling streets. She said the community needs between $15 million and $20 million each year to be able to compete. This would be a mix of public and private money.

She didn't hesitate to expound upon Tahoe's major industry being tourism and the need to have quality amenities.



Overhauling South Tahoe's pool complex could cost $13.7 million. Photos/LTN file

The city has put in $30 million in infrastructure improvements in the last four years.

Part of Tuesday's discussion was about what else the city should invest in. The council is open to spending the $1 million in excess reserves on projects. This money is in addition to the city's 25 percent reserves.

Staff will come back soon with recommendations about how to spend the money. Part is likely to go toward finalizing some planning and design work for projects, some could go toward the bike park in Bijou Community Park, and maybe some for

hookups at Campground by the Lake.

Jim Marino, assistant public works director, went over staff recommendations for what should be capital improvement plan priorities. He prefers CIP mean community investment plan.

Upgrading the recreation center at an estimated cost of $13. 7 million and revamping Regan Beach to the tune of $4.2 million top the list. An aquatic center could be built, perhaps a second story, definite energy upgrades would be included to the rec center. At the beach the steel bulkhead would be removed and the building gutted.

While the council agreed to the priorities, there is no money for these endeavors. An outdoor amphitheater also is of interest to the council.



The field at Lake Tahoe Community College needs replacing.

However, the return on investment for all three would likely be rather immediate.

But with definitive goals, then partnerships can be formed and grants sought, as well as money put away for the big projects.

Playing to the recreation theme, the city is saving money from Measure S/R to replace the community ball field at Lake Tahoe Community College. It’s likely to cost $500,000. Marino said at 9-years-old the field has reached its life expectancy.

Replacing it, he said, “directly supports sports tourism,

which I believe is underleveraged.”

The council collectively agreed the community deserves more action and less talk.

When it comes to figuring out how to come up with more money to invest in the community, the council agreed to form a community task force that will be a partnership with other stakeholders – which includes agencies, government entities, residents and business owners – who want to work on ways to bring investors to town.

Of the seven people who spoke at the meeting, most agreed the city needs to invest in itself, with some saying go after little things, others saying shoot for the moon. Of the 21 letters, nearly all lobbied on behalf of the bike park.

The bike park advocates have $350,000 in cash and in-kind donations, with $100,000 more needed to complete the project. It is in the planning stages and could come to the council later this summer.

But it was also pointed out that residents would be asked what they are willing to do when it comes to investing in the community because the city can’t do it alone.

Letter: LTCC helps at Bread & Broth

To the community,

“Outstanding meal! Outstanding staff! Outstanding experience!” was the consensus of the four Lake Tahoe Community College leadership team volunteers at Bread & Broth’s dinner on June

9.

During a lull in the serving line, Alba Morales, administrative assistant to the dean; Sue Saia-Gochis, dean of students and academic support service; and her husband, Peter Gochis and their daughter, Courtney Sais, all agreed that they were having a wonderful time serving a hot, nutritious meal to all of the guests at B&B's dinner.

In addition to thanking this fun-loving and hard working sponsor volunteer group, B&B would like to thank the LTCC leadership team for donating $250 for sponsoring their second Adopt A Day of Nourishment this year. As a nonprofit, all volunteer program, Bread & Broth receives its funding from the many Adopt A Day sponsors and anonymous donors who generously give so that B&B is able to provide a full-course dinner every Monday at St. Theresa Church's Grace Hall and a soup/pasta meal every Friday at Lake Tahoe Community Presbyterian Church.

On June 9, 92 guests attended B&B's dinner of roast beef, green beans, mashed potatoes, green salad and a variety of desserts. Twenty-six guests came back for seconds and many "to go" cartons were handed out. All of this was the gift of the Lake Tahoe Community Colleges leadership team and the many B&B volunteers who all share their concern for the less fortunate of our community.

For more B&B information, go online or find us on Facebook.

Carol Gerard, Bread & Broth

Novasel, Curtzwiler to vie for EDC supe seat



Sue Novasel and Kenny Curtzwiler move on to the November election for El Dorado County supervisor.

It's official – either Sue Novasel or Kenny Curtzwiler will be supervisor of El Dorado County District 5.

The June 3 election results were finalized June 17. Now the two Meyers residents meet in November.

A mere 14 votes separate fourth from second place. While Kevin Brown was in second on election night, he came out fourth in the end.

"I don't see any reason to go back and recount," Brown told *Lake Tahoe News.* He said with the county doing its own recount and the attention to detail with the provisional ballots, he believes the results are accurate.

He now plans to run to retain his seat on the El Dorado Union High School District in November.

Angela Swanson finished third. She was not available for comment. Her term on the South Lake Tahoe City Council ends this fall, though she could run for a second term.

Curtzwiler said he wouldn’t talk until he knows if there will be a recount.

“I am committed to being a strong advocate and representative for all of District V,” Novasel told *Lake Tahoe News*. “I look forward to the next five months of campaigning and plan to meet and listen to the needs and concerns of district 5 citizens.”

The numbers:

Novasel – 1,557 votes, 28.47 percent

Curtzwiler – 977, 17.87 percent

Swanson – 967, 17.68 percent

Brown – 963, 17.61 percent

Gerri Grego – 682, 12.7 percent

Teresa Piper – 308, 5.63 percent.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

S. Tahoe delays expanding plastic bag ban

By Kathryn Reed

The South Lake Tahoe City Council remains confused regarding its vision about the use of plastic bags in town.

On Tuesday the council on a 3-2 vote decided to delay implementation of the plastic bag ban for retailers. It was

supposed to go into effect Oct. 15. It has been delayed for a year.

Restaurants were never included in that group. But it did include dry cleaners, in addition to clothing outlets, hardware stores and other businesses deemed retail.

Of the more than 3,000 business licenses in the city, 800 are considered retail.

Councilmembers Brooke Laine and Angela Swanson wanted to go forward with the ban this year – as has been their stance from the get-go. Councilmembers Tom Davis and JoAnn Conner have been against the ban all along. Mayor Hal Cole has consistently been the swing vote. On June 17 he cast the deciding vote to delay the ban.

While Cole said his big issue is the number of plastic bags ending up in landfills, he is also concerned with mandating what he called "mom and pop businesses" to eliminate plastic as an option to bag goods.

Paper bags cost retailers more to buy than plastic. But plastic is said to be worse environmentally, which is an overriding reason why cities are banning those bags.

Earlier this year grocery stores in South Lake Tahoe had to stop handing out the single-use bags.

Six people spoke at the meeting – most in support of going forward with expanding the bag ban to other businesses. Of the five letters the city received, three favored the ban.

Not a single business owner – small or large – was at the meeting asking the council to rescind or delay the expanded bag ban, or change what is in place now.

In July, the council will officially revise the current ordinance to reflect the delayed implementation for retail establishments. There is always the possibility there could be

another delay or some other change to the use of plastic bags in South Lake Tahoe – especially since there will be a new council in a matter of months.

In other action:

• A consultant told the council at this time it is safe to stick with not having district elections. This is not the route Lake Tahoe Community College and Lake Tahoe Unified School District took. In November the education entities will switch to district elections. But their boundaries are different than the city's.

Alpine County bucks trend with nearly 70% voting

By Seema Mehta, Los Angeles Times

MARKLEEVILLE – Tess Castle, drinking a mid-afternoon pint at the Wolf Creek Restaurant & Bar on a recent afternoon, admitted something she had never told anyone before: She doesn't vote.

"Shame on you. I didn't know that," said bartender Danea McAvoy, 51, after selling lottery tickets to tourists passing through this bucolic town of 210 residents. "Shame on you."



There is more wilderness than people in Alpine County. Photo/LTN

The reaction may seem sharp, but it’s because Castle, 28, is in a distinct minority in this picturesque county seat of tiny Alpine County.

Nearly everyone in this community makes their mark on election day. On June 3, in one of the least compelling gubernatorial primary elections in memory, nearly 70 percent of voters cast ballots, the largest turnout per capita in the state.

California as a whole is on track to hit a record of a more dubious nature – 18.3 percent of voters cast ballots through election day on June 3. Absentee and provisional ballots are still being counted, but voting experts expect the state to end up with a turnout of 22 percent to 23 percent – far less than any in recent history – when the tally is finalized in early July.

That’s a roughly 10-point drop from the last gubernatorial primary, part of a long-term trend in California, where fewer voters are casting ballots in primary elections as more choose not to affiliate with a political party.

Read the whole story

Special election set to fill Nutting's seat

There will be a special election Sept. 9 to fill the seat of Ray Nutting; the El Dorado County supervisor ousted from office because of his conviction related how he raised bail money.

A judge on June 6 ruled Nutting should be removed from office. On June 17 the Board of Supervisors set the special election.

Estimated cost for the special election is between $80,000 and $100,000.

Candidates for supervisor must be registered voters of district two for at least 30 days immediately preceding the July 29 filing deadline. The nomination period will open June 30.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Water sports quickly burn calories

By Molly Hucklebridge

The warm summer air and refreshing water of Lake Tahoe beckon you to play. Did you know that you could burn calories faster and tone up quicker in the water than in an air-conditioned gym?

Consider these outdoor water activities for fun and healthy

fitness adventures.

Water calisthenics: Burn more calories faster

Swimming and water aerobics are forms of resistance training. You don’t have to be an experienced swimmer to see fitness results. Water aerobics is ideal for any age or fitness ability. Water’s buoyancy helps protect your knees and joints. Another perk: The American Exercise Association (AEA) suggests exercise in water burns more calories than walking on land at a moderate pace.

For a great underwater workout, try scissor kicks, jogging in place, or hopping from side to side.

Standup paddleboarding

You may not know what it’s called, but you have definitely seen it in action. Standup paddleboarding is a new, popular water sport for calmer waters. It takes some balance and coordination, but you may surprise yourself how laid back it can be. On the South Shore, rentals are available at Kayak Tahoe, South Tahoe Standup Paddle, and SUP Tahoe. Once you’ve fine-tuned your skills, try standup paddle yoga with Lake Tahoe Yoga, or glide into the Wednesday Night SUP Races, which claim to be “America’s best standup paddleboard race.” Races launch every Wednesday in the summer from El Dorado Beach in South Lake Tahoe.

Kayak or canoe on the lake

One of the most exciting ways to experience the lake and test your fitness is simply to paddle. Kayaking and canoeing engage your core and, depending on your fitness level and exertion, can get your heart pumping. Boats can be launched on most public shorelines, and kayak rental options are abundant. Always wear a personal flotation device, and check ahead for inclement weather.

For the ambitious water chasers, Emerald Bay State Park's boat-in campground, only accessible by boat or on foot, is an overnight option. Extreme adventure seekers should consider the 72-mile Lake Tahoe Water Trail – the lake's answer to the Tahoe Rim Trail. Break it up into smaller trips or camp on public beaches and tackle the whole lake. Safety note: Conditions can be rough and trips should be planned with caution. For maps and information, visit laketahoewatertrail.org and make State Park reservations at reserveamerica.com.

A workout for the brain

While splashing around or engaging in a water fight is fun for the kids, it also plays an important role in their development. Water play is a sensory experience that can help children with motor skills, stimulate language skills, increase social skills, and can reinforce science and mathematical concepts.

Beyond the lake

In late spring, the snowmelt hits just the right flow on the East Fork of the Carson River. Rafters and kayakers jump on this opportunity to paddle down a designated Wild and Scenic River stretch through snow-covered mountains in the Carson-Iceberg Wilderness. Rafting outfitters offer one- or two-day trips, which include family friendly rapids, breathtaking scenery, and an option to soak in the area's hot springs.

For a more leisurely float, paddle a 5-mile stretch down the Truckee River. Self-guided options start in Tahoe City.

Molly Hucklebridge is the communications specialist for Barton Health.

Snippets about Lake Tahoe



• Placer County Planning Commission will have a public hearing on the Northstar Mountain Master Plan on June 26 at 10:20am at the North Tahoe Event Center in Kings Beach.

• Brenda Knox, a financial adviser with Waddell & Reed Inc., is putting on a retirement seminar for business owners on June 26 at 6pm, with wine and cheese reception at 5:30pm at Tahoe Mountain Labs, 1048 Ski Run Blvd., South Lake Tahoe. RSVP by June 25 to 775.827.0555 or bknox@wradvisors.com.

• Tahoe Donner's fourth annual Waterpalooza is a two-day summer celebration of water-themed fun and games, a mega slip-n-slide and more. It all happens at Tahoe Donner's driving range in Truckee on July 19-20 and Aug. 9-10, 11am-4pm. Cost is $15 for an unlimited wristband or $1 per ticket; food, games and ride ticket prices vary. For more information, call 530.587.9437.

• Tahoe Donner Public Utility District is having a garden party and seminar June 24 from 5-8pm at the Patricia S. Sutton Conservation Garden, 11570 Donner Pass Road, Truckee. For more info, call 530. 582.39391.

• The June 24 Water and the Squaw Valley Village Expansion panel discussion has been canceled.