El Dorado County, small farmers find compromise

By Cathy Locke, Sacramento Bee

An advocate of grass-roots family farming says a newly adopted El Dorado County ordinance is a compromise, but it boosts efforts to reduce state and federal restrictions on small agricultural operations.

“The big thing for me is it has established the family farm as having a valued place,” said Pattie Chelseth, co-owner of the 10-acre My Sisters’ Farm in Shingle Springs. “It needs to be cherished and nurtured.”

Chelseth earlier this year sought the Board of Supervisors’ backing for a campaign against regulations that hurt small farmers.

This month the board adopted a “local food and community self-governance” ordinance, which prohibits the county from establishing licensing and inspection requirements on what are termed “family farms.”

The county counsel’s staff report notes that the definition of family farms is quite restrictive. It essentially means a farm that maintains only a one-to-one relationship with its patrons.

The definition excludes farms that have commercial aspects to their operations, or that sell to anyone for resale.

Chelseth sought the board’s support for the rights of small farmers after she was issued a cease and desist order by the California Department of Food and Agriculture. She was selling shares of cows on her farm in an attempt to deal with rules that prohibited her from selling raw milk directly to

consumers.

Fifteen people own shares of two cows that she keeps on her property, but to comply with state regulations, Chelseth said, those people would have to consume the milk on her property.

Chelseth is part of a group that is working on state legislation to create a home dairy exemption for operations with three cows or fewer.

The El Dorado County ordinance, adopted Dec. 18, does not exempt family farms from general licensing and inspection requirements, such as those associated with zoning, building and business license codes.

The staff report also stresses that it does not affect the applicability of state or federal law in the county, and county personnel will continue to carry out their functions and duties to enforce such laws.

The ordinance states, however, that the county may, but is not obligated to, challenge legislation or regulations in court in appropriate cases.

Ski report: Last chance to ski this year

Celebrate the end the year on the slopes with the great conditions.

Here is the Dec. 31 ski report.

— Curtis Fong

Snippets about Lake Tahoe



• January is Train Your Dog Month.

• Campo Mammoth is chef Mark Estee's lastest project. The chef-owner of Campo Reno has partnered with Levy Restaurants, which owns Spiaggia in Chicago, to open the Mammoth eatery.

• Want to join a community book club on the South Shore? More info is online.

• Friends of the West Shore has become an independent nonprofit corporation and therefore no longer needs to be sponsored by Sierra Nevada Alliance.

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

Tahoe Tails – Adoptable Pets in South Lake Tahoe

Gigi is a pretty and friendly 4-year-old orange cat who ended up at the shelter because her owner became allergic to her.



Gigi is a great mouser, but she still enjoys sitting on laps and being petted.

Gigi is spayed, microchipped, and vaccinated. She 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

Opinion: Advocating for ignition interlocks for convicted drunken drivers

By Nancy White

WASHINGTON -– As Americans prepare for holiday celebrations, AAA reminds drivers and passengers alike of the dangers on the roads this New Year's Day, which consistently ranks as the year's deadliest day for alcohol-related fatalities.

To strengthen efforts to protect the public against drunken drivers and reduce alcohol-related traffic deaths, AAA is announcing its support of ignition interlocks for all convicted DUI offenders, and offers important safety advice to partygoers.

"AAA is not alone in its concern about impaired driving or strong support for tough policies for convicted drunk drivers," said AAA Traffic Safety Advocacy Director Jake Nelson.

According to the 2012 Traffic Safety Culture Index conducted by the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety, more than nine in 10 drivers consider it a serious threat to their personal safety when others drink and drive, and nearly all (97 percent) surveyed find it unacceptable for a driver to get behind the wheel when they have had too much to drink. To prevent these dangers, nearly eight in 10 Americans support requiring ignition interlocks for all convicted DUI offenders, even if it's their first conviction.

Research has identified ignition interlock devices as a proven way to save lives. AAA's recommendation to require the use of IIDs for all convicted offenders is grounded in research.

“Evidence clearly shows that IIDs are more effective than other methods at reducing re-arrest among convicted drunk drivers and keeping them off the road,” said Nelson.

AAA is reaching out to motorists on the heels of a recent National Transportation Safety Board decision to support laws requiring IID use for all first-time DUI offenders – one of several new recommendations issued to help curb alcohol-related traffic injury and death.

“I commend AAA for stepping up for safety,” said NTSB Chairman Deborah Hersman. “Technologies, such as ignition interlocks, will reduce alcohol-related crashes on our nation’s roadways. We look forward to working alongside AAA and its clubs to eliminate the nation’s top killer on our roadways – impaired driving.”

Preventing drinking and driving is a shared responsibility to save lives. While AAA advocates expanding IID use to all persons convicted of drunken driving, New Year’s Eve partygoers can do their part by heeding the following advice:

Always plan ahead to designate a non-drinking driver before any party or celebration begins;

Never get behind the wheel of a car when you’ve been drinking alcohol – even after just one drink;

Never ride as a passenger in a car driven by someone who has been drinking alcohol – even after just one drink;

Do not hesitate to take the keys from friends or family members who may be impaired;

Call a taxi for a friend in need;

Be a responsible host in reminding guests to stay safe and always offer alcohol-free beverages;

If you encounter an impaired driver on the road, keep a safe

distance and ask a passenger to call 911 (or pull over to a safe location to make the call yourself)

Remember: prescription, over-the-counter medications and illegal drugs also can impair your ability to drive safely.

Nancy White works for AAA.

Kirkwood ski resort still evolving at age 40

By Kathryn Reed

It was 40 years ago that a dream came true for Dick Reuter and Bud Klein. The ski pioneers created Kirkwood Mountain Resort.

Today, the ski resort celebrates its roots without its founders. Reuter and Klein both died in 2011 – both in their 80s. But what they have left is a legacy, a mountain that often gets the most snow in the greater Lake Tahoe area, a place that isn't for the meek, a place that embraces its ruggedness as well as its place along Highway 88 that isn't always easy to get to no matter the direction one approaches from.

The Reut chairlift is named after Reuter.

"From the beginning, Kirkwood was a special place and it still is. Our task is to maintain that," Blaise Carrig, president of Mountain Operations for Vail Resorts, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Kirkwood's



Kirkwood Mountain Resort opened 40 years ago. Photo/Kathryn Reed

Dec. 31 anniversary events

2pm

Torchlight parade tickets on sale at Guest Services (tbc)
2-6pm
DJ Village Plaza – DJ Berkmon
4pm
Lifts close
5:15pm and 5:45pm
Fire performances in Village Plaza
5:30–6pm
Torchlight parade skiers are loading chair
6–6:30pm
Torchlight parade
6:30–7pm
Fire performance – Village

Plaza
7–7:30pm
Speeches – Kirkwood Past, Present & Future
7:30–7:45pm
Fireworks
7:45pm
Fire dancers lead guests to party at Red Cliffs
8pm–1am
After Party at Red Cliffs – (full bar plus appetizers available)
8pm–1am
DJ – SMURKO
9pm–12:30am
Gogo dancers
10pm
Aerial performance at Party
Midnight
Countdown in Red Cliffs
12:05am
Aerial performance at Party
1am

The Colorado-based company bought Kirkwood earlier this year for $18 million from Mountain Springs Kirkwood.

Carrig said the goal of the new owners is to retain the passion and spirit Reuter and Klein had for the area.

“Kirkwood is about great skiing and it’s about the special landscape,” Carrig said.

When Klein and Reuter developed the resort that is mostly in Amador and Alpine counties, but has a slice in El Dorado County, too, the land was undeveloped and cows were grazing in the meadow.

“I flew over it a couple times. I could taste it, smell it,” Klein told this reporter on the 35th anniversary of the resort of what Kirkwood would become.

Klein was at the resort for the groundbreaking of Expedition Lodge. He never got to see that come to fruition. The recession derailed the project.

Kirkwood Mountain Development retained most of the rights to the real estate assets, while Vail Resorts has the mountain to operate.

“Looking ahead, I am extremely excited to work with the very talented and committed staff of Kirkwood to kick-off the next 40 years. The mountain is incredible, the snow is unbelievable and the possibilities are many. My priority is to get behind the scenes to understand where the opportunities are to provide the best experiences for our guests,” Casey Blann, general manager of Kirkwood, told *Lake Tahoe News.* “While I won’t be around to see the entire next 40 years, I can at least get the ball rolling toward improvements which we hope will resonate with our both our guests, as well as staff.”

Vail Resorts is still in the process of assessing what

improvements to make first.

Better lift service – Kirkwood has two high-speed quads, with one being on a beginner run – is a big goal. Carrig said looking at alleviating choke points would be on the priority list.

More food service on the mountain is also likely to be forthcoming.

Today, various events will take place to commemorate the resort turning 40, as noted above.

“We want to honor those individuals who had the vision and the passion to make Kirkwood a reality. Without their dedication and rugged determination; Kirkwood would not have persevered and prospered for all these years,” Blann said.

Fine print limits nonprofits’ access to grant funds for state parks

By Matt Weiser, Sacramento Bee

The grand act of atonement that state leaders signed into law to correct a financial scandal at the California parks

department may not turn out to be the healing gesture it first appeared to be.

The new law signed by Gov. Jerry Brown in September, AB1478, allocates $10 million to provide “dollar-for-dollar” matching grants for private donations to the state parks system. The intent, in part, was to reassure wary parks supporters that at least some of the $54 million in “hidden money” discovered in the scandal would go back to the parks and not be diverted for some other government purpose.

The $10 million was appropriated from the State Parks and Recreation Fund, one of two special funds where California Department of Parks and Recreation officials were found to be hiding the $54 million for many years. (Another $10 million, and other money, are targeted to cover operating and capital costs.)

This vast amount of hidden money, first reported by the *Bee* on July 20, would have been more than adequate to cover the $22 million in budget cuts that required the state to close 70 parks. Yet department leaders kept the money hidden even as they signed complex and unprecedented contracts with local governments and small nonprofits that agreed to operate the threatened parks.

Many of those groups viewed AB1478 as a reprieve – a chance to use some of the hidden money to cover the enormous costs they incurred by agreeing to rescue the parks.

But none of the $10 million will be given to them in cash. The state’s lawyers determined that doing so amounts to a “gift of state funds” that would violate the California Constitution.

Instead, rules released by state parks on Nov. 13 specify that grants will be provided only “in kind” – meaning use of state employees or services – to match a financial donation.

“My position is it’s going to undermine the partnerships, for

obvious reasons," said Caryl Hart, director of Sonoma County Regional Parks, which took over Annadel State Park near Santa Rosa when it was threatened with closure. "We need a dollar-for-dollar match to pay our staff to operate the parks."

In many cases, she said, rather than easing the financial burden of operating a park, the rules may require a nonprofit to invest more money.

"They should operate the parks themselves if they have the staff," Hart said of the state's rules.

The troubling fine print is a reminder that the scandal engulfing America's largest state parks system is far from over. The state still has a lot of damage control to do – and big questions to answer – before California's legion of park lovers are again ready for a group hug.

The new director of the state parks system, former Marine Corps Maj. Gen. Anthony L. Jackson, seems to understand this.

"We know we're going to take a beating," Jackson said in a recent meeting with the *Bee*'s editorial board. "In the next year, we're going to earn your trust back and we're going to do some really good things out in the parks."

Separate investigations by the state controller's office and the Department of Finance, released in December, came with a list of reforms proposed for state parks. Jackson said most of these have already been adopted.

Those investigations also found $3.9 million in additional unallocated funds, as well as potentially tens of thousands more that was inappropriately paid to employees working outside their job classifications.

Two more investigations are expected early in 2013: One by the state auditor, and another by the attorney general's office. The latter is expected to outline whether any laws were

broken, and may finally explain why the department hid so much money for so long.

Amid all the tumult, one fact has been overlooked: Today, despite financial scandals and budget cuts, only one of the state's 278 parks is closed to the public.

Closures were avoided at all the rest because local and federal governments, dozens of nonprofit groups and even private businesses stepped forward to keep parks open when the state could not.

"We want to keep these facilities available to the public," said Ted Schlosser, who with his wife Karen now operates Brannan Island State Recreation Area in Sacramento County as employees of American Land & Leisure, a Utah company that signed an operating agreement with the state. "We as a company are tickled that we have the opportunity to come in and show the state what we can do with the same resources."

Another provision of AB1478, signed into law after the "hidden funds" discovery, mandates that no state parks will be closed through July 1, 2014.

The department now maintains a status list on its website of the 70 parks formerly slated for closure. Of those, 42 are open with reduced services or some form of partnership agreement, 23 are open with agreements in progress, and five are still seeking partners.

Only Providence Mountains State Recreation Area is closed. Possibly the most remote of all the state parks – 16 miles off Interstate 40, deep in the Mojave Desert – it actually closed before the July 1 deadline because it was crippled by maintenance problems.

And Providence soon suffered a fate that advocates feared would befall other closed parks: Thieves used bolt cutters to enter a locked gate, steal equipment and vandalize park

buildings.

“I felt very sad,” said Dennis Casebier, of the Mojave Desert Heritage and Cultural Association. “The state promised they’d take care of it, and they didn’t.”

Many state park advocacy groups would like to get their share of the $10 million in grants to save their local park from the neglect that occurred at Providence.

Brian Cahill, the department’s assistant deputy director of park operations, acknowledges the constitutional limitation on spending that money is a concern. But he does not foresee any problem distributing all $10 million.

“The interest is tremendous,” Cahill said. “I think they’d prefer cash. But from where I sit, it’s not even negotiable. We’re just trying to be very creative on what we offer in kind.”

The first such deal was signed Dec. 19 to support Henry Coe State Park, near Gilroy. The state agreed to match $279,000 donated by the Coe Park Preservation Fund earlier this year to prevent the park from closing.

The deal was relatively simple, as state parks will commit an equal amount of money to pay its staff to keep operating the park, essentially saving the preservation fund from having to raise more money.

Friends of China Camp is another group that hopes to benefit. It is operating China Camp State Park in Marin County by using volunteers to collect visitor fees. It then uses that money to pay the salaries of six state park employees – rangers and maintenance staff – who do much of the heavy lifting to keep the park running.

“I think there’s a reasonable chance we’ll get matching funds,” said Ernest Chung, chairman of Friends of China Camp.

“Because we can just use the money to pay for state employees we already have contracted, we have a very easy way of utilizing the money. Most other people have not been able to figure out how they can use the funds.”

Brannan Island represents yet another operating model in the brave new world of state park survival.

The Schlossers, both in their 70s, are the park’s caretakers now. They retired from earlier professional careers to travel full time in their motor home. It still serves as home — parked behind a service building at Brannan Island.

The couple has worked for American Land & Leisure for four years. The company operates more than 450 parks and campgrounds in 13 states, mainly under contract with the U.S. Forest Service.

Now, it also operates Brannan Island and two other California state parks: Turlock Lake and Woodson Bridge.

The contract is a first for the company and for state parks. California has never before allowed a private business to operate an entire state park, though it has always had concession agreements with businesses to provide specific park services, such as kayak rentals and horseback rides.

“All the reports we’ve had say it’s working fine,” said Cahill. “Most of these companies that operate a park have been a park concession business, so they know the background. They know how to operate a park and not just sell widgets.”

On a recent tour of Brannan Island, the only full-service state park in the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta, Ted Schlosser described some of the challenges.

Recent storms toppled a number of willow trees, and the company doesn’t have a chain saw big enough to handle them. Schlosser plans to bring in a California Conservation Corps

crew to deal with that, along with larger park vegetation cleanup issues.

The park's 10-lane boat launch ramp – the biggest public ramp in all of the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta – is perpetually clogged by drifting water hyacinth, an invasive weed.

Schlosser tries to keep two lanes clear, but it's a daily battle. He has to use a tractor to clear the launch ramp, then haul pickup-truck loads of the weed to a disposal area in a remote corner of the park.

Recent visitation has been scarce. This is not surprising during the holidays, but it has the Schlossers wondering how the park will cover expenses.

On the day before Christmas, only two of the park's more than 100 campsites were occupied. One of these campers paid no fees because he qualified for a special disabled veteran state parks pass.

In late summer when the Schlossers arrived, however, the park was busy. One weekend day, for instance, the campground was bustling and the park was simultaneously hosting a wedding, a baptism and a Boy Scout troop.

Based on its experience running hundreds of other campgrounds, and data on annual visitation at the park, the company is confident it will make enough money to operate Brannan Island using existing revenue sources.

It does not plan to seek any of the new grant funds.

Prior to American Land & Leisure taking over, the park had been reduced to weekend operation only due to state budget cuts.

Now the campground, launch ramp, fishing areas and other amenities are back open seven days a week.

“We’ve got an awful lot of public that are real happy we are here,” Karen Schlosser said. “There’s a lot to be learned, and we’ve pretty well got a handle on it. We just take it day by day.”

AB 1478 was the first major effort by the state’s political leaders to clean up a financial scandal within the California Department of Parks and Recreation.

A major thrust of the law is to allocate $20.5 million from the State Parks and Recreation Fund for new purposes. This money is part of the $53.5 million in “hidden funds” discovered at the parks agency.

The fate of the remaining $33 million, which resides in the Off Highway Vehicle Fund, has yet to be decided but will likely be settled in coming months by the Legislature.

The new law provides for:

• $10 million for “dollar-for-dollar” grants to match private-sector donations to state parks. (State lawyers later ruled that matching donations with cash is a “gift of state funds,” which violates the California Constitution. So parks officials instead will match donations only with in-kind services provided by state parks employees.)

• Another $10 million to cover routine state parks operating costs, helping close the gap caused by recent budget cuts.

• As much as $500,000 for the department to pay for ongoing audits and investigations as directed by the Joint Legislative Audit Committee, the attorney general’s office, the Department of Finance or other state agency.

• Another $10 million from the Safe Drinking Water, Water Quality and Water Supply, Flood Control, River and Coastal Protection Bond Act of 2006, to pay for capital projects in state parks.

• An existing program at state parks to enhance revenue through new fee-collection systems is required to preserve half of the new revenue in the local park district where it is generated (an increase from 40 percent). Additional accountability measures are imposed on this program.

• The department shall not close, or propose to close, a state park in the 2012-13 or 2013-14 fiscal year.

SnowGlobe neighbors change their tune from a year ago

For most people, SnowGlobe is going on and they don’t even know it.

Snow on the ground to help absorb the sound, turning the stage 180 degrees, lowering the maximum decibel level and enforcing the maximum level allowed, and not allowing bands to play past the designated ending time are contributing to a better experience for neighbors of the venue.

“Around 4pm (Saturday), Day 1 of the event, I turned to my husband and said, ‘Snowglobe must be delayed because I don’t hear anything.’ My kids even went outside and they were upset

they didn’t hear anything! It was great; we had dinner without the windows shaking, we could hear ourselves speak, I wasn’t going out of my mind, it was awesome!,” Gia Schraubens told *Lake Tahoe News*. “I don’t know if it’s the snowload absorbing the bass, changing direction of the stage, the guy walking around monitoring the decibel level, the city employees and SnowGlobe employees working diligently or what it is, perhaps a combination of everything, but it’s great and all is good in Al Tahoe this year!”



Wiz Khalifa, one of the headliners, wows the audience Dec. 29. Photos/Bron Fong

Instead of bothering with going to all three days of the South Lake Tahoe music festival, a group of women from Southern California were enjoying a Sunday of skiing at Heavenly Mountain Resort.

The event on the grounds of the ball fields next to Lake Tahoe Community College is attracting a diverse crowd from all over the country. Ages are from teens to their grandparents’ ages. But most appear to be thirtysomething.

Sunday’s event will at 10pm, like the night before. Monday’s

festivities will conclude with fireworks after the music ends at 12:30am New Year’s Day.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Placer County has new judge

By Ed Fletcher, Sacramento Bee

Gov. Jerry Brown on Thursday filled three Northern California judgeships, appointing a former assemblywoman and two area lawyers – all Democrats – to fill court vacancies.

Former Assemblywoman Alyson Huber, 40, was appointed to a seat on the Sacramento Superior Court bench. Huber, of El Dorado Hills, completed her second term in November. Amid personal and financial issues stemming for her divorce proceedings, she abandoned plans to move to Rancho Cordova to seek a third term.

Folsom attorney Michael W. Jones was appointed to the Placer County bench. Jones, 56, was a senior partner at Hansen Kohls Jones Sommer and Jacob LLP. He previously served in various capacities in the Shasta and Los Angeles county district attorney’s offices.

Linda Sloven, 58, of Nevada City was appointed to the Superior Court in Nevada County. She has run a private law practice since 1994.

The salary for Superior Court judges is $178,789.

Rescued bobcat being taught to toughen up to survive the wild

By Peter Hecht, Sacramento Bee

Since last summer, when she emerged as an orphaned kitten who affectionately introduced herself to crews battling a major wildfire in Plumas County, Chips the bobcat has been diagnosed with an attitude problem.

She’s too nice for a bobcat.

And so, in her second of two rehabilitation assignments, volunteers for a Placerville animal rescue group are working to “wild her up” for her return to nature.

She is getting some tough love in a private pen from retired postal worker Jill Tripoli, 56, a longtime volunteer wildlife trainer for Sierra Wildlife Rescue. She’s been introduced to some male rescue mates, Tuffy and Sierra, who have no trouble hissing at humans and revealing their fangs and claws in anger.

“If you have a friendly bobcat in the wild, that’s not going to work,” said Tripoli, who will give Chips a squirt from a water bottle if she even thinks of buddying up to a human.

But Chips is here, successfully on the mend, for doing just

that.

The orphaned bobcat, then a kitten barely 3 or 4 weeks old, emerged from smoldering brush Aug. 25 during the monthlong 75,000-acre Chips Fire in the Plumas National Forest. Fire crews found her lethargic, wandering in circles near a road eight miles from the town of Chester. She warmed to them.

Chips followed the firefighters, in particular a Mad River Ranger District hand crew member, Charles “Tad” Hair.

Every time Hair and the crew would stop, she nuzzled up to his boot, snuggling his chaps. He picked her up. She had second-degree burns on her paws. Her eyes were full of soot and pus.

“Tad just took pity on her,” said Nan Powers, another volunteer for Sierra Wildlife Rescue, a Placerville group that helps orphaned or injured animals, from squirrels to coyotes, to recover and return to the wild. “He gathered her up and flushed her eyes out.

“Some girls have all the luck.”

John Heil, a Forest Service spokesman, said the bobcat survived “in an area where the fire burned pretty intensely.

“How it survived with the fire passing through is miraculous,” he said.

Firefighters conducted a search to see if there was a bobcat mother to be found. After realizing the cub was long abandoned, they took Chips to the rescue shelter of Lake Tahoe Wildlife Care in South Lake Tahoe.

A veterinarian cleaned away burned tissue and treated and wrapped her paws. She got a soft bed and a recovery diet of pulverized mice.

Chips healed up nicely. And on Nov. 1 she was brought to an enclosed pen in Placerville.

She was introduced to Tuffy, a snarly bobcat who got his fractured elbow repaired by a local vet after getting hit by a car in El Dorado County, and to Sierra, who was left by his mother near the Sierra Army Depot, southeast of Susanville, and wasn’t about to warm to any human.

So now there’s no more cuddling for Chips, no more soft bed. She’s having to chase down her own live mice, and occasionally a rabbit, with Tuffy and Sierra. Only on special days does she get some ready-made roadkill squirrel.

And now she’s getting an attitude, hiding under an enclosure when humans approach. But generally, unlike her pen mates, she’ll still stick her head out to take a peek.

The three bobcats are due to be released into the wild next spring. Meanwhile, Sierra Wildlife Rescue is seeking donations to pay for the 3 pounds of food a day the animals consume.

People seeking information or interested in contributing to the bobcats may call Sierra Wildlife at (530) 621.4661.