CTC looking at how best to manage its lands

By Kathryn Reed

In a meeting that was more about reports than decision-making, the California Tahoe Conservancy board was updated last week about the Upper Truckee Marsh, lands the state agency owns and what the adoption of the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency's Regional Plan means.

While the environmental documents for the Upper Truckee Marsh may be released at the end of next month, a comprehensive workshop about restoration along the Upper Truckee River is not slated until April or May.

Penny Stewart with the California Tahoe Conservancy told the board at the Dec. 14 meeting the idea is to bring experts from various disciplines together to talk about restoring the river – what has happened, what is in the works and what is planned. River restoration is part of the marsh project.

Nancy Gibson, U.S. Forest Service chief in the Lake Tahoe Basin and a non-voting member of the CTC board, said she supports the education component of such a meeting to explain the why here and why now questions. However, she said funding is in place for the reach of the river the Forest Service is responsible for and would hate to have that money threatened as the CTC takes this new global approach.



The Upper Truckee Marsh, which borders the Tahoe Keys, is an area the California Tahoe Conservancy wants to restore. Photo/AECOM

“I’m cautious about undermining decisions that have already been made,” Gibson said.

Lynne Paulson, who is concerned with what is going on at Washoe Meadows State Park and Lake Valley Recreation Area, said the panel discussion should happen sooner. The river runs through those parcels.

Les Wright, a member of South Lake Tahoe Recreation Commission, advocated for including a boardwalk across the meadow from the Al Tahoe neighborhood to the Tahoe Keys area.

Asset lands

Property that has some financial value to the CTC comes under the category of asset lands. They could potentially be sold and developed.

The 332 parcels that have been identified as such amount to 223.56 acres. Patrick Wright, CTC executive director, said it is not the intent to start unloading them all.

Bruce Eisner with the CTC said about 20 of those would likely be put on the market in the next five years. He said those are mostly in the commercial core areas. This would mean filling

in open space in high traffic areas and getting rid of parcels that don’t fit the Conservancy’s goals.

Nine of the parcels are in Meyers near highways 89 and 50.

“These were acquired as a possible multi-agency visitors center,” Eisner explained. He said as Meyers moves forward with its area plan that these parcels might be of interest to planners, especially since the agencies have abandoned the idea of such a center.

The Conservancy’s current policy to sell land requires requests for proposals be sent out in a competitive bid process instead of the conventional route of using a real estate agent. Eisner suggested looking at revising that policy in order to offer flexibility.

Regional Plan impacts

With passage of the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency Regional Plan it means changes to land coverage issues involving the CTC and other marketable rights.

The ability to use excess coverage mitigation fees across hydrologic area boundaries is seen as a positive by the CTC.

The CTC hopes the incentives to transfer residential development rights from sensitive land to town centers will jump-start the agency’s ability to purchase developed land, like old motels, that were built in stream environmental zones.

Another change with the Regional Plan is that Van Sickle Bi-State Park, a CTC and Nevada State Parks project on the South Shore, is now designated recreation instead of conservation.

The CTC will also benefit from how bike and walking trails are exempt when it comes to coverage issues.

In other action:

• Wright said it’s likely Sen. Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif., will reintroduce the Lake Tahoe Restoration Act. This would mean money for various Tahoe groups for projects under the environmental improvement program that was established after then-President Bill Clinton came to Tahoe in 1997.

Game maker Zynga wants Nevada gambling license

By Gerry Shih, Reuters

Social games maker Zynga Inc. has filed a preliminary application to run real-money gambling games in Nevada, a significant step in cracking a complex but potentially massive new market that could resuscitate its faltering business.

The Nevada Gaming Control Board will now examine whether Zynga is fit to hold a gaming license that would allow gamblers in the state to bet real money on the San Francisco-based company’s popular games like Zynga Poker, which currently involve only virtual chips with no monetary value.

Zynga is hoping that a lucrative real-money market could make up for a steep slide in revenue from its games like “FarmVille” and other fading titles that still generate the bulk of its sales.

“We anticipate that the process will take approximately 12 to 18 months to complete,” Zynga Chief Revenue Officer Barry Cottle said in a statement. “As we’ve said previously, the

broader U.S. market is an opportunity that’s further out on the horizon based on legislative developments, but we are preparing for a regulated market.”

Zynga, along with many major gaming industry players, is hoping that a tide of proposed legislation to regulate gaming could sweep through states across the U.S. and open a massive new online market.

Nevada, Delaware and New Jersey are among the states that have moved or are moving toward interactive gaming after the U.S. Justice Department last year declared that only online betting on sporting contests was unlawful, presenting the opportunity for states to legalize some forms of online gambling, from lotteries to poker.

Although widespread legalization of online gaming in the United States appears years away at the minimum, obtaining a license in Nevada would be a meaningful foot in the door for Zynga’s nationwide aspirations.

Zynga has told investors in recent quarters that a concerted move into real-money gaming could represent a hefty – and badly needed – source of new revenue for the company, which has seen revenues sag and its stock plummet by more than three-quarters in the past year as gamers abandoned titles like “CityVille.”

In October, the company slashed its 2012 full-year earnings outlook for the second time and laid off employees to trim costs, while CEO Mark Pincus implored investors to give him time to turn around the company by pursuing initiatives like real-money gaming.

That month, Zynga struck a deal with bwin.party, a Gibraltar-based gaming company, to provide real money casino games like poker and slots in the United Kingdom beginning in the first half of 2013.

Snippets about Lake Tahoe



• Karen Borges is president of the Lake Tahoe Community College board for the next year.

• Nordic Fest on the North Shore is rescheduled for Feb. 8-10.

• The South Lake Tahoe Rec Center is offering a special Kids Night Out on Dec. 31. More information is available at (530) 542.6056.

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

• Tahoe Maritime Museum is Homewood this winter is offering free admission to Tahoe area residents on the second Saturday of each month.

Cold storm with lots of snow headed for Tahoe

A winter weather advisory is in effect for Lake Tahoe from now through 10pm Monday.

Six to 12 inches of snow are expected at the lake, with 10 to 18 inches above 7,000 feet.

Winds will be picking up, so much so that lake waves could be 3 to 6 feet high. Ridge gusts may reach 110 mph.



More snow should cover all Tahoe beaches this week. Photo/LTN

There will be a break in the weather Tuesday and Wednesday, with snow expected to return Thursday.

Bundle up because the overnight low on Tuesday in South Lake Tahoe is expected to hit minus 1.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Coconut craze straining the supply chain

By Krista Mahr, Time

Under a metal roof in Dandagamuwa, in western Sri Lanka, a line of seated men and women swing their small axes in sharp, neat strokes. Chips of brown coconut husk fly into the muggy October air, thick with the ripe smell of fermenting fruit. In seven or eight swift flicks of the wrist, the hatcheters render each coconut into a smooth white globe that they pass

on to be shredded, dried and pressed into oil. At the end of the line, pallets of neatly labeled mason jars wait, ready to be shipped.

The destination: a Los Angeles warehouse some 9,300 miles away — and eventually, the shelves of natural-food stores across the U.S. The coconut is becoming America's latest trendy exotic edible, following the path of the pomegranate and the acai berry. The hottest part of the market is coconut water, the clear, slightly sweet liquid inside the fruit: sales of coconut-water drinks in the U.S. and Europe have doubled to more than $265 million in 2011 and are expected to double again in the U.S. this year, according to New Nutrition Business, a consulting group in London. "Coconut water is the fastest growing beverage category in the world," says Julian Mellentin, director of New Nutrition Business. "It's growing even faster than energy drinks."

Other parts of the coconut are in demand too. Coconut oil, once demonized for its high saturated-fat content, has been rehabilitated by research extolling its health benefits and by the popularity of vegan baking. The organic, fair-trade virgin coconut oil produced in Dandagamuwa for the Dr. Bronner's brand can be used as a substitute for butter.

It has all the makings of a health-food success story, but growers and processors are worried that the coconut craze may not be sustainable. The supply chain is efficient globally but not locally. Coconuts are grown mainly by small farmers from Brazil to Kenya to Indonesia, who often sell their output to middlemen. In many places, that means the sudden popularity of coconuts is not yet translating into higher prices for farmers. There is plenty of fruit now, but as producers work through existing supply, they worry that future supplies may be unreliable. For years, many farmers in Asia have been selling their crops without replanting because the prices they get are too low to justify increasing production. Fair-trade programs have not yet reached as far into the coconut trade as

they have with other commodities, like coffee. For an industry in a growth spurt, that’s trouble.

Down on the farm

Unlike most supermarket produce, coconuts are typically grown by smallholders, farmers who own or rent less than a dozen acres of land. They frequently sell their fruit to middlemen, who in turn sell it to factories that produce dried coconut meat, coconut husk, coconut oil and – more and more – coconut water. In their native areas, coconut trees grow abundantly without much tending, and farmers often don’t earn enough to afford chemical fertilizers. That’s a boon for companies selling the “natural” appeal of coconuts, since prices can be low and many coconut estates are organic by default.

The rise in demand has been dramatic. In the Philippines, the world’s second largest coconut producer after Indonesia, the government estimates that coconut-water exports quadrupled in the first quarter of 2012 compared with the same period in 2011. Across Asia, coconut-oil exports to the U.S. have grown 3.3 percent annually over the past five years, according to the Asian and Pacific Coconut Community (APCC), a Jakarta-based industry group.

But in many cases, the middlemen are grabbing more of the profit – and passing on little to the growers. In Asia, middlemen are paid 25 percent to 50 percent more per coconut than what they pay farmers. In Sri Lanka, companies that make desiccated coconut, or copra, from which oil is extracted, pay middlemen about 23 per nut, while middlemen pay growers as little as 17. Because of a shortage, prices in Sri Lanka are up, but in Thailand, where supply is flush, prices have dropped to 5 per pounds from 19 per pounds last year, according to the APCC. As a result, struggling farmers continue to harvest their trees but don’t plant new ones.

To avoid bottlenecks, processors are looking beyond their

original source countries. Dr. Bronner's, which uses coconut oil in soaps and for food-grade oil, used to buy its coconut oil from the Philippines before setting up its fair-trade operation in Sri Lanka in 2007. The company has built a new factory in Kenya and is considering another in Mexico. Vita Coco, one of the dominant coconut-water brands in the U.S., once bought coconuts only from Brazil, using a local company to produce, flash-pasteurize and ship the juice out in Tetra Paks. Because it had only one source, "demand was increasing faster than we could produce," says Arthur Gallego, Vita Coco's spokesman. "There were multiple times that Vita Coco had to turn down major retail partners because the product wasn't going to be available." The company found new suppliers in Sri Lanka, the Philippines and Mexico, and those countries now provide a significant share of its coconuts.

A serious warning

Some farmers facing stagnant prices are already giving up. Coconut plantations across Asia aren't getting any bigger, and in some cases they're getting smaller as farmers sell their land or convert it to more profitable crops like palm oil. As demand pushes up prices, coconut farming will become more attractive, but until the market adjusts and young trees mature, producers are scrambling. "It's a really serious warning to business players," says Amrizal Idroes, the APCC's market-development officer. Companies will eventually have to offer higher prices, he says, to fortify growers' commitment—and their own supply.

A few producers are thinking ahead by making the farmer an integral and better-compensated part of the supply chain. When Harmless Harvest started producing coconut water in 2011, the craze was in full swing. To differentiate their brand, founders Justin Guilbert and Douglas Riboud designed production so that raw, fresh juice would be bottled within hours of harvest, deep-frozen, processed without heat treatment and shipped to the U.S. in a few weeks. They tried

and failed to set up this tricky system in Brazil, Mexico and Sri Lanka before finding a partner in Thailand. Harmless Harvest pays to get farmers' crops certified as organic and buys those coconuts for as much as double the price of conventional coconuts. "It's in my best interest that a farmer … gets the best advantage out of my experience with them," says Guilbert.

Investing in relationships with farmers has a long-term payoff too. Serendipol, Dr. Bronner's partner in Sri Lanka, spent months visiting farmers, explaining how switching to organic methods could help raise their yields and incomes. "We built up credibility by offering them a better price, buying consistently and paying immediately," says managing director Gordon De Silva. J.M. Gunarathbanda, a bespectacled 62-year-old, has been supplying coconuts to Dr. Bronner's through Serendipol since 2008. Standing under a heavy, palm-fringed canopy, he says his 600 trees have borne more fruit after he started using compost and he's making more money than when he sold his crop to other factories. He is dismayed, though, that his neighbors have built on their land instead of planting more trees. "Exporting is better," he says. "It's good for the country."

Squaw Valley Institute to host outdoor authors

A professional surfer who achieves her dreams in despite of a shark attack that resulted in the loss of an arm, and a *New York Times* bestselling author chronicles the impetus and discoveries on an 1,100-mile journey along the Pacific Crest Trail.

These are the topics of upcoming Squaw Valley Institute events.

The celebrities behind the stories appearing at these lectures include Soul Surfer Bethany Hamilton, on Dec. 22 at Olympic Village Lodge in Squaw Valley, and author of “Wild”, Cheryl Strayed, on Jan. 13 at PlumpJack Squaw Valley Inn.

Both lectures include a book or DVD signing; tickets are are available online.

Help LTN feed people in Tahoe

Lake Tahoe News is continuing its quest to give back to the community with each paid subscription we receive. (Here is a copy of a subscriber form.)

Plenty of worthy causes are out there. We are focusing on putting food into people’s stomachs.

Beside becoming a paid subscriber and knowing *LTN* is helping, people can buy a Food for Families bag at Raley’s for $10 and the story will donate $20 worth of goods locally. You can also buy a bag online – no need to go to the store.

Tahoe Community Church in Stateline needs tuna, peanut butter, cereal, rice, mac and cheese, canned vegetable and fruit.

Any donations of food can be dropped off at the church office (corner of Daggett and Kingsbury Grade) Tuesday through Thursday between 11am-2pm or Friday afternoons at the Tahoe

Community Church multipurpose room between 12:30-4:30pm.

Letter: Money for library carpet a waste of funds

To the community,

I belong to the El Dorado County Library System. I live in Pollock Pines. I support libraries, but not the following.

My library is 1,242 square feet. How come their expenses for the carpet project cost $5,000. (And why didn’t the county pay for it or at least help? It’s a county building.)

I’m running out of people to tell. I think all Friends of the Library money should be frozen by the FOL corp before they spend it all. And why did it go the the director as a donation from our branch?

They claim that the people in our town wanted this. Not the people I know. Not this much money for a library that has little parking. Our food lines up here are just getting longer with the mill closed and forest problems.

I support the $900 they spent on the children’s program. They should have given the children’s librarian more.

Fran Duchamp, Pollock Pines

Fleeting season makes pomegranates worth the effort

By Chris Macias, Sacramento Bee

Oh pomegranate, you can be such a pain. Extracting your juicy seeds can be so messy, turning a white T-shirt into an impromptu tie-dye. Yet, pomegranate, you are so darn delicious and healthy, and perfect for cooking or simply munching the seeds as a sweet snack.

Pomegranate ranks as an especially high-maintenance fruit, but get past its staining properties and trickiness in extracting the seeds, and you'll find plenty of payoffs in the kitchen. Sprinkle pomegranate seeds (also known as arils) over a salad to add some fruity snap, and use its rich juice in sauces and marinades.

We're now in the thick of pomegranate season, which generally starts in November and lasts through January. While the pomegranate is native to Western Asia – Iran and Iraq in particular – this sweet and tangy fruit has also found a home in California. Pomegranate trees thrive in areas with dry, sunny summers and cool winters, much like California's Central Valley and nearby Placer County.

According to the California Pomegranate Council, 4.5 million cases of pomegranates are shipped annually from the state's growers. Pomegranates are increasingly popular. In 2011, California was home to 30,000 acres of pomegranates – up from about 12,000 acres in 2006.

Some of that pomegranate winds up with Elaine Baker. She's one of the Sacramento area's most prominent pastry chefs, now working at Hawks in Granite Bay. One of her latest creations: a bittersweet chocolate baton with gingerbread purée, pomegranate sauce and pomegranate seeds.

“It’s a beautiful fruit, just the seeds themselves,” said Baker. “That’s why I like to use it on desserts. It’s a bit of a pain to use, but if you can keep it nice and clear there’s a beautiful, deep red color.”

But before we get into pomegranate reduction sauces and such, what’s the best way to deseed the darn thing? For starters, when shopping for a pomegranate, look for a fruit that boasts smooth skin and a rich red color. A mature pomegranate may also have a cracked skin, which for some folks marks the optimal time for eating.

“When they get that little crack, that’s the peak of good,” said Ralene Snow of Snow’s Citrus Court, which grows pomegranates in Placer County.

Deseeding the pomegranate is the tricky part, and can also stain your countertop if you’re not careful. Here’s one method:

1. Cut the crown off the fruit.

2. Cut through the skin in quadrants.

3. Break the fruit into four pieces.

4. With the seeds facing down into a bowl, bonk the top of the pomegranate with a wooden spoon to release the seeds.

5. Rinse the seeds in a colander and enjoy.

A typical fruit usually yields 1/2 to 3/4 of a cup of seeds. Then, the fun can begin.

Pomegranates usually are out of season by the end of January. The seeds, however, can be frozen if you’re interested in making a sorbet or granita for a future day.

Mancuso’s 6th place the best of any U.S. woman in GS

By USSA

COURCHEVEL, France – Julia Mancuso (Squaw Valley) and Mikaela Shiffrin (Vail) combined for top 10 finishes in an Audi FIS Alpine World Cup giant slalom in Courchevel on Dec. 16.

Mancuso was sixth and Shiffrin ninth as Tina Maze of Slovenia continued her dominance, winning her fourth straight GS.

“It’s a step in the right direction for my GS. I was happy to come down second and end up sixth,” Mancuso said. “It’s a pretty tricky course – really turny first run and more difficult than the second run. They had to inject because it snowed meters the week before in order to make sure we had a race they put in a lot of water and it wasa really rough. After scraping off the snow there was glare ice, but I thought it turned out pretty well. It was a good decision.”

The finish matched Shiffrin’s career best ninth set last month at the Aspen Winternational.

Mancuso moved to fifth in the Audi FIS World Cup overall, one spot behind Lindsey Vonn (Vail), who went out in the first run.

Maze leads the World Cup 799-468 over Germany’s Maria Hoefl-Riesch.