El Dorado County tree growers become fish-friendly

By Debbie Arrington, Sacramento Bee

Some fresh-cut Christmas trees come with dividends downstream.

In their annual search for the perfect fir or cedar, visitors to the Sierra foothills may notice something different this holiday season. Some farms have joined California's "fish-friendly" movement and have posted their smiling salmon signs proudly.

These farms follow environmental practices to preserve water quality and be kind to wildlife. They're part of the same trends that bring us "slow food" and river-friendly landscaping. But instead of farm-to-fork, their product is farm to floor.

"We started talking about it five years ago," said Dee Kobervig, co-owner of Crystal Creek Tree Farm in Camino. "We got certified fish-friendly this year. We've got three tree farms so far in the program – all family farms. It helps keep our area rural. If people can't make a living farming, we lose those farms."

Also selling fish-friendly trees this season are Carson Ridge Evergreens and McGee's Christmas Tree Farm, both in Placerville.

Their customers will be folks who want to know where their tree grew – and that it helped wildlife and not hurt it.

"We're seeing a new demographic among our customers," said Kobervig, who also serves as president of the El Dorado County Christmas Tree Growers Association. "They want to start a new tradition, but they want to know what they're buying and where

it came from. They want to support local businesses, but they also want to be assured about how that product was grown."

El Dorado County's fish-friendly farming program was modeled after a similar one in Napa. As in wine country, it started with vineyards.

"I was so inspired by what people were already doing," said Fred Hunt, who works with the El Dorado County and Georgetown Divide Resource Conservation Districts. "It was really neat to see how many people are actually doing this as part of their everyday business plan."

So far, 44 sites in El Dorado County have joined the Fish-Friendly Farm program, Hunt said. Altogether, they encompass 2,755 acres including 14.3 miles of creeks. Part of the American River watershed, those little creeks affect the quality of water that flows down to the Valley and everything that uses that water – including fish and people.

"We have Christmas tree farms, a lot of vineyards, tree fruit orchards," Hunt said. "We've been very proactive. We want to assure people that water leaving here is as pure as it can be."

As part of a voluntary program run through the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service, farms get intensive surveys of their property plus the advice to correct any issues.

"The goal is to keep your water – and what's in it – on your property," Kobervig said. "They started with an aerial view of our farm. We got a bird's-eye view of our whole place – every slope, road, streambed on our 20 acres. Then, we came up with a plan."

That plan included sediment ponds to catch runoff, erosion control on slopes, integrated pest management to fight bugs naturally, nesting boxes for birds and mulch to keep down

weeds.

Said Hunt, “What people are getting at no cost is a detailed plan for their property. We’re being good stewards of the land.”

With new grant money expected for 2013, the program is ready to expand. Hunt is accepting inquiries from farms and property owners; reach him at (530) 295-5638.

“We’re hoping to open it up to cattle ground, traditional rangeland,” Hunt said. “We could reach 10,000 to 15,000 acres.

“We’ve done quite a lot already, and it’s only going to get better,” he added. “That’s what’s really neat.”

As for the trees, this year’s crop should be wonderful.

“Last year and this year have been just phenomenal,” Kobervig said. “The warm weather (in October) actually gave the trees a little growth spurt. But we had a little snow and a good cold snap; that sets the needles. And people love it with snow on the ground when they come up, looking for a Christmas tree. It just feels right.”

Bay Area man dies in cycling accident in Truckee

By Barbara Barte Osborn, Sacramento Bee

TRUCKEE – A Los Gatos man died Saturday after his bicycle and a vehicle collided at the west end of downtown Truckee.

Robert Koechlin Jr., 45, was pronounced dead at Tahoe Forest

Hospital in Truckee, where he was transported by firefighters who had taken over life-saving efforts from citizens at the scene.

The early-afternoon accident occurred at the McIvers Roundabout on Donner Pass Road.

Truckee police officers closed the roundabout and the eastbound lane through town for several hours, diverting traffic around High Street, while investigating the accident.

Anyone who saw the accident is asked to call Sgt. Bob Womack at (530) 550.2335.

A price to pay for saying no to NV Energy smart meter

By Cy Ryan, Las Vegas Sun

CARSON CITY – Not wanting a smart meter could be an expensive choice.

An estimated 10,000 NV Energy customers in Southern Nevada who don't want smart meters will be hit with extra costs, under a draft order to be presented to the state Public Utilities Commission on Tuesday.

If adopted, those who opt out of the smart-meter program in Southern Nevada would have to pay $98 for installation of an alternative meter and a $9-per-month fee.

In Northern Nevada, about 4,000 customers would be charged

$107 for installation and $10 a month, under the draft order by commission Chairwoman Alaina Burtenshaw.

The three-member commission will vote on the proposed plan and is still free to make changes.

The draft order says the fees imposed on the opt-out customers "will result in just and reasonable rates."

Some customers oppose the smart meters, fearing they might cause health hazards, and many said they would be willing to pay the added cost.

NV Energy has installed about 1.3 million smart meters, which can transmit meter-reading data directly from a home or business to the utility.

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4 people die in accident near Placerville

By Darrell Smith, Sacramento Bee

Four people were killed, including two children, and five others were injured in a collision Saturday night in the Apple Hill area of Highway 50 near Placerville.

California Highway Patrol officers say a Toyota Prius westbound on Highway 50 near Braeburn Lane about 6:05pm veered into the path of a minivan driving east on the highway, colliding head-on with the van.

A 4-year-old in the minivan and a child in the Prius died in the wreck as did the Prius' driver and another adult in the car, said CHP Sgt. Gilbert Lee.

Four others in the minivan, including 1-year-old twins, survived the collision as well as a 10-year-old in the Prius, Lee said. All were taken to local hospitals with injuries.

Ski report: Enjoy the sun while it lasts



It’s another beautiful day to hit the slopes.

More snow is predicted for this coming Wednesday and Thursday. Keep your fingers crossed for 18 inches.

Here is the Nov. 25 ski report.

— Curtis Fong

Nevada Division of Forestry

to begin series of pile burns

The Nevada Division of Forestry will start burning slash piles in the North Canyon area east of Carson City beginning Nov. 26, weather permitting.

Upon completion of the North Canyon project, forestry crews will conduct pile burning at Sand Harbor, Slaughterhouse Canyon and the Van Sickle unit at South Lake Tahoe.

The burning will continue through March.

The Nevada Division of Forestry implements forest restoration and fuel reduction projects on about 300 acres annually within Lake Tahoe Nevada State Park funded through the environmental improvement program.

Opinion: How to have a great time on the North Shore

By Andy Wirth

With more than $100 million invested in ongoing capital improvements, destination travelers to Lake Tahoe ski resorts can look forward to new chairlifts, on-mountain improvements, base area renovations and a variety of guest amenities – there’s no better time to book a ski vacation in Lake Tahoe than now. Of course, if you want to make the most of your ski vacation, there’s a lot to take into consideration. Here are a few suggestions on what to think about when planning your next Lake Tahoe ski vacation.

• **Get out and explore.** Whether you decide to stay for two days or six, I highly recommend taking the time to explore our mountain communities beyond the ski resorts. While every ski resort is proud of the resort experience that we have to offer, we also feel that there is great value added to the vacation experience when guests take the time to explore the surrounding attractions. Whether making the short drive to Tahoe City for truly stunning views of Lake Tahoe, or paying a visit to historic Truckee for an amazing dinner and night on the town, you'll find some incredible mountain towns that you'll be glad you didn't miss.



Andy Wirth

• **Give yourself enough time.** While it's easily possible for some travelers to get up to North Lake Tahoe and back in a day, your experience will be infinitely better if you plan to stay the night – or a few nights. This way, you will be able to get the full experience and enjoy all of the amazing activities, restaurants and après ski scenes that the area has to offer. You might be tempted to try to fit it all in – morning fresh tracks, afternoon ice-skating, night skiing – but remember to fit in some time to relax and be spontaneous.

• **There's no perfect formula.** Some groups will want to ski or ride from dawn until dusk every day of their ski vacation – others, not so much. If you're going with a larger group, be sure that you are staying somewhere where everyone will be able to pursue their favorite activities. If everyone in your group wants to ski or ride every day and call it an early night, a more back-to-the basics resort might be the ticket.

If people in your party want to split their time on the hill and fit in some shopping, dining and ice skating, look for a larger resort that offers a wider variety of amenities.

• **Maximize your budget.** Ski resorts now work the same way as airlines – if you plan and buy early, you're going to save money. If you show up to the ticket window last minute, you can't expect the best deal. Many resorts including Squaw and Alpine offer discounts if you book lift tickets online three or more days in advance. If you're going to ski more than five days in the season (be it overall or just in one week), be sure to consider resorts' season pass deals. The same goes for lodging rates. Book early and take advantage of the best rates. Mid-week rates are usually the best and think about visiting during non-holiday, off-peak periods. Spring can be a great time to visit. Lake Tahoe is known for superior spring conditions – the sun almost always is shining and the calendar is chock full of amazing spring events.

• **There's a vacation for every budget.** If you love living in the lap of luxury, consider some of Lake Tahoe's most luxurious properties, including The Resort at Squaw Creek or the Ritz Carlton Lake Tahoe. If you'd rather save your money for lift tickets and a few nights out on the town (or maybe a snowcat or snowmobiling adventure) there are plenty of other lodging properties in the area to fit every budget. Condo-style units such as The Village at Squaw Valley offer plush accommodations with incredible access to the slopes, as well as full kitchens and living areas so you can save some money by not eating out every night. Smaller hotels in Tahoe City and Truckee also offer highly affordable lodging, leaving the rest of your budget for the fun stuff. For help with finding the best fit for lodging accommodation, whether it is ski-in/ski-out, in historic Truckee or on the shores of Lake Tahoe, check with Squaw Valley Lake Tahoe Reservations – they can work with you to tailor your vacation by helping you decide the best lodging and activities to build your ultimate

vacation.

• **It’s easy to learn.** There isn’t a single mountain in the North Lake Tahoe lineup that doesn’t have an exceptional learn-to-ski and ride program. My suggestion: Bring your previously non-skiing friends, family or spouse, and have them all join you for a great ski vacation. The learn-to-ski and ride programs are affordable and provide a great experience. There’s no reason for one person in your group to feel like they have to stay home or post up in the lodge all day. You’d be surprised how easy and inexpensive your experience can be by taking advantage of a learn-to-ski and ride program. Introduce someone new to the sport you love and you’ll be giving them the best gift of all.

• **The most important aspect of the trip?** Bring your favorite people. Whether it’s your family, your girlfriend or your long-lost college friends, pack your car full of the people that make you the happiest and your trip to the mountains will be truly unforgettable.

Be a part of all the excitement that is taking place. The time is now, and North Lake Tahoe is the place. Start planning your ski vacation now so you can experience of one of the best mountain resort destinations in the United States.

Andy Wirth is president and CEO of Squaw Valley and Alpine Meadows. This column first appeared in Northern Nevada Business Weekly.

Placer County supes take on

variety of Tahoe issues

The Placer Board of Supervisors took up several Lake Tahoe-related actions at last week's meeting in Auburn.

Items included: approval of an annual contract with the North Lake Tahoe Resort Association for marketing, transportation and infrastructure projects; approval of an amended lease for the Jackpine parking lot in Tahoe City; approval of the acquisition of easements as part of the Kings Beach Commercial Core Improvement Project; and a modification of public hearing locations for the Kings Beach Benefit Assessment District.

The contract with NLTRA pays for the promotion of Placer County's portion of the North Shore of Lake Tahoe. The $5.15 million agreement, paid for by transient occupancy taxes collected on the North Shore, helps promote tourism and provides guidance in funding infrastructures to enhance to North Lake Tahoe communities. As approved, the contract maintains tourism and business development and services while balancing other Placer County Tahoe operational needs such as the North Tahoe health clinic, beach maintenance, additional Placer County Sheriff's Office patrols over the Fourth of July holiday and transit service.

The Jackpine parking lot in Tahoe City opened in 2006 and is available for off-street parking in the Tahoe City business district. Land for the lot, which has space for 40 cars, was leased under an agreement between the landowners and the former Placer County Redevelopment Agency. The board approved an amended lease that will save $357,624 over the term of the lease, which runs until 2036.

With the Kings Beach Commercial Core Improvement Project progressing, the board approved two easements and a modification of a public hearing that are related to this project. The first easement is a permanent acquisition needed

for construction of a roundabout on Highway 28; the second easement is a temporary construction easement.

In October, the board adopted a resolution to consider the formation of the Kings Beach Benefit Assessment District No. 1. Should the district be formed, assessments collected would pay for the maintenance and services of all improvements related to the Core Project. Following the distribution of an assessment ballot to all property owners within the district in early December, a public hearing will be held. Following the public hearing, the ballots returned by property owners will be tabulated to determine whether a majority exists to form the district.

The board has scheduled that hearing for Jan. 22 at the North Tahoe Event Center during its regularly scheduled meeting. In addition, the hearing will also be held simultaneously in Auburn at the County Administrative Center.

South Shore behavioral therapist helps resolve issues with 4-legged family members

By Kathryn Reed

Ignore her. Don’t look her in the eye. And, here, put these treats in your pocket.

That’s what we are supposed to tell everyone who comes over.

With a desire to keep dogs in their homes, especially rescue dogs, Karin Schuller is all about making canines comfortable in their new homes, with their new people, and with whomever enters the house.



Karin Schuller goes over homework with AJ's people. Photo/Kathryn Reed

It doesn't take Schuller long to figure out this dog is a bit nervous and overprotective of her people. AJ had been super protective of Joy – especially the last year of her life – so it's not a surprise she is protective of Sue and me.

And it doesn't take long for Schuller to see why she has been summoned. Sue is on the floor and Schuller reaches down to get the paperwork. AJ doesn't like this and makes it known.

If only dogs could talk – tell us what is going on, what they're thinking, why they feel threatened by an innocent gesture.

Well, that's not going to happen. And that's why we decided to enlist help to figure out how to make our new family member more secure. Joy rescued AJ – so there is a period of her life that is a mystery. The 9-year-old is part yellow Lab, part greyhound, and other stuff.

I’ve known AJ for several years. Honestly, she is so incredibly sweet and loving. But she has some attitude.

Schuller’s business is aptly named – Dogs with Issues.

“Female dogs are a lot more bossy,” Schuller says. But she adds, “Old dogs can learn new tricks.”

Schuller has been working with dogs for years, having worked for two veterinarians when she lived in San Diego and one in Zephyr Cove. She had her certificate to be a veterinarian technician and has taken classes in animal behavior.

Personal experience has also taught her what works. Schuller has rescued 70 dogs, worked with a malamute rescue association, and had a team of them when she lived at Fallen Leaf Lake.

For the past two years it’s been all about working with dogs to create a harmonious environment. Her approach is “less is more.”

“Dogs mostly live in the moment, but they do have a long memory,” Schuller said. “When people spoil or baby them too much, it can make them more aggressive.”

Schuller works on making the people have control. She gives us homework. We sign an agreement that says without working on the training daily, we will have failed – not AJ, not Schuller.

We’ve added the phrase “leave it” to our vocabulary. Schuller says there are at least a hundred ways to use it.

We are starting with just a couple. More will come on future visits from Schuller. Next time we’ll all go for a walk together.

We learn that it’s best to have AJ outside (or in a room if the weather is not ideal) when people first come over so the

commotion at the door is eliminated. She doesn’t know someone hugging us hello isn’t hurting us.

It’s amazing how much information Schuller gives us in a little more than an hour. She leaves handouts to reinforce the lessons we’ve learned.

Now it’s time to get back to training.

Tips from Schuller:

• People leave the house first, then the dog. Otherwise the dog is in control.

• If the treat is too big, by the time she finishes it, she will have forgotten why she was given it.

• On a leash, keep her close to your side.

• Don’t sleep with dogs. It teaches them they are equals.

• Corn-based dog foods make the animal aggressive.

• Don’t give her rawhide because it would swell in her stomach.

• Bones are bad. The splinters can cause her to bleed out.

• Don’t come over the top of the head of a dog. This is threatening; especially for dogs that have been hit.

Notes:

• Phone: (530) 577.0263

• Email: highsierramtdogs.att.net

• Facebook: search Dogs with Issues

• Schuller also works with puppies.

Sullivan takes third in downhill

By USSA

LAKE LOUISE, Alberta – Veteran U.S. Ski Team downhiller Marco Sullivan of Squaw Valley parlayed a strong training run Thursday plus two weeks of training at the U.S. Ski Team Speed Center at Copper into a third place downhill finish Nov. 24 in the opening Audi FIS Alpine World Cup speed event of the season in Lake Louise.

Starting 42nd, Sullivan hit a perfect line to tie with Austrian Klaus Kroell 0.64 seconds behind winner Aksel Lund Svindal of Norway.

Sullivan solidified his comeback with his first Audi FIS Alpine World Cup podium since 2009 with a third in the opening dowhill.

It was the fourth podium of his 13-year career with the U.S. Ski Team that includes a downhill win at Chamonix, France, in 2008.

Sullivan switched to Atomic skis and boots in the off season and spent a long six-week stretch in Chile to dial in his new equipment.

He had been training at the U.S. Ski Team Speed Center at Copper Mountain since late October before traveling to Lake Louise.