Lake Tahoe Airport's financial flight plan unique



Lake Tahoe Airport runway improvements are in large part because of FAA grants. Photo/LTN line

By Joann Eisenbrandt

"There are many people in the community who question the value of the airport and why the city continues to subsidize airport operations. This persistent question must be answered."

– Letter to South Lake Tahoe after the Feb. 13 Airport Master Plan Community Meeting

For decades, Lake Tahoe Airport has been a highly visible symbol of the lake's acrimonious and complex balancing act between economics and environment.

Does the airport provide economic, safety and access benefits

significant enough to offset any environmental impacts it may cause? This is the larger question; but for now, let's set aside the environmental issues and focus just on the economic ones. How is the Lake Tahoe Airport funded? Is its economic value measured only by the balance sheet of revenues versus expenses, or is there a broader definition of its financial impacts on the community?

South Lake Tahoe is updating the airport's 20-year-old master plan. The city received a $315,000 FAA grant for completion of the master plan and contracted with C&S Companies in July 2013 to prepare the plan at a cost of $280,212. The FAA's share is 90 percent ($252,191) and the city's share is 10 percent ($28,021), which was budgeted in fiscal year 2012-13. The city had the first community meeting on the plan Feb. 13 and the second May 29.

The master plan is the airport's blueprint for the future – how the physical plant will be configured, how operations will be financed, what types of aircraft will use the facility, and how the needs and priorities of the community will be addressed. South Lake Tahoe City Manager Nancy Kerry described the process to *Lake Tahoe News as*, "a public process funded by the federal government to make the best use of the airport. We hired (the consultants) to talk to other airports and see what's their strategy, to find out how to manage the airport in the best way."

Lake Tahoe Airport is an enterprise fund within the city's budget. As the budget narrative explains, "Enterprise funds are used to account for activities that are financed and operated in a manner similar to private business enterprises. Costs are financed or recovered primarily through user fees."

These fees include fuel sales, passenger enplanement fees, hangar rentals, aircraft tie down fees and property taxes, and rental fees from on-site airport tenants. Lake Tahoe Airport's user fees have not covered expenses for some time, and have

been supplemented by transfers of money from the city's General Fund – by as much as $600,000 a year. Airport Director Sherry Miller told LTN that the budgeted General Fund transfers to the airport for FY 2013-14 is $300,000. After the 2014-15 budget cycle, when the new hangars will be paid off, the city's General Fund contribution could drop to $120,000.

Still, how does this fit into the "enterprise fund" business concept? If a South Shore business operated at such a yearly deficit, many ask, how long would it remain in business? Should the airport be self-supporting in the same way a business must be in order to survive?

Kerry sees the airport as a public service and answers the question this way, "Under the definition of an enterprise fund, yes, but most public services we provide don't capture enough revenues through user fees to be self-supporting. Most airports are not moneymakers. Other taxes subsidize public services when user fees aren't enough…. There's no debate that people expect us to answer the call when a fire occurs … for the airport, it's a fair debate to say, 'Is this a service to the public? How does a city resident benefit from a high roller giving money to the casinos?' City residents are paying for a city airport that a majority of them may not use…. They don't see the direct benefit to themselves."

League to Save Lake Tahoe Executive Director Darcie Goodman Collins recently told LTN, "We can only reiterate the facts, which are that the airport has been subsidized over the past 20 years so it's hard to see an economic benefit there. Commercial service has not worked in the past, so it's hard to imagine it working in the future, especially with the growth of the Reno airport.

"We think the potential environmental benefits of reducing the size of the airport and restoring some wetland would far outweigh economic gains from expanding service."

Others believe the airport doesn't belong in the basin. A comment from the Feb. 13 community meeting reads, "We support closing the airport."

Downsizing is one thing; entirely closing the airport is quite another. Lake Tahoe Airport has received about $21 million in FAA funding. In taking those dollars the city made certain guarantees, one of which is reimbursing all those funds should the airport close. The city recently requested a letter from the FAA explaining in detail the airport closing process. That letter, dated April 17,

2014, to Miller from FAA Airports Compliance Specialist Robert Lee, explains that FAA approval for closing an airport is not just predicated on a return of the money granted. It notes, "… the benefit to civil aviation is the FAA's prime concern." This includes the effect a closing would have on the interests of aeronautical users and service providers, and on the state and national airport system. Approval would only come after the FAA evaluated a complex checklist of considerations.

While the balance sheet of Lake Tahoe Airport's expenses versus revenues is relatively straightforward, the trickier question has always been the airport's broader economic impacts. This is what economic impact studies term the "trickle-down effect" – the economic rollover as the airport's direct revenues filter down to benefit the community as a whole. The city has long contended that the airport provides such a benefit.

In its comments after the February community meeting, the board of directors of the California-based chamber of commerce agreed, "The South Lake Tahoe Airport is a vital regional and local transportation resource. It is a connector between the Tahoe basin and the U.S. Transportation System. It is an economic engine for the South Shore."

The city has conducted economic impact studies as far back as

1987 to quantify this, specifically targeting the money generated by commercial air service, but not everyone has bought into the results. A letter to C&S Companies, the master plan consultants, from a resident following the February meeting says: “We need a 2013 study that shows a positive economic boost to the community and defines those entities that will thrive from this endeavor. What is driving the demand for a full service airport? How are these statistics being gathered?”

Looking beyond Lake Tahoe

Is the Lake Tahoe Airport the only small regional airport dealing with these issues? How are other area airports financed and how is their value perceived by the communities they serve? In looking at three such airports – Placerville, Truckee-Tahoe and Mammoth Yosemite – it’s important to remember that no two airports are exactly alike, and even less so given Lake Tahoe Airport’s unique environmental and regulatory constraints.



Placerville Airport is a public-use general aviation (GA) only airport situated just east of the city limits of Placerville. El Dorado County operates it. Its last master plan was completed in 2007. Like Lake Tahoe Airport, it is an enterprise fund, and also like Tahoe, its revenues from user fees do not totally cover expenses.

As Matthew Mergen, operations and maintenance supervisor, told *Lake Tahoe News*, “We cover the majority of our expenses through leasing of land, hangars, fuel sales and property taxes on locally-based aircraft. We receive a small portion from the General Fund, which is usually equal to the amount of property taxes the county receives from on-airport uses.”

Misty Garcia, administrative services officer for the county's Community Development Administration and Finance Division – the overseer of the airport, agrees with Kerry that airports are not moneymakers. She also agrees with Mergen that the "airport pretty much runs on its own," pointing to the line item in the county's 2013-14 budget showing the transferred "from General Fund for property taxes generated at airport" amount of $30,631.

"At one point," Mergen told *Lake Tahoe News*, "the airport covered its costs. But when the economy slowed down and fuel costs went through the roof, many people got rid of their aircraft."

Unlike Tahoe, Placerville Airport, with between 15,000 and 20,000 yearly GA enplanements, has never considered introducing commercial air service.

"We couldn't support it," Mergen explains. "The biggest aircraft coming in here is a large turbo-prop aircraft. In fire situations, CalFire helicopter crews could come in and we would make part of the airport a helicopter base."

Placerville airport's runway is 3,910-feet long, compared to Tahoe's 8,541-foot runway.

No recent economic impact studies to quantify the airport's larger financial impacts have been done or are anticipated. The last one was done in 1994. There have also been no cries to close the airport. As their Airport Land Use Compatibility Plan indicates, the facility is located, "in a hilly, low-density, rural residential area adjacent to the eastern boundary of the City of Placerville." Long-term high-density land use changes could potentially affect that, but right now the community view of the airport is largely a positive one.

As Garcia says, "Most of those living around the airport are airport supporters."

**Truckee-Tahoe Airport**

Truckee-Tahoe Airport, situated in Truckee, is not operated by a city or county, but instead came into being at the impetus of the Truckee Donner Chamber of Commerce through a ballot measure in 1957, which created a Bi-State Airport District comprised of the eastern portions of Nevada and Placer counties.

The airport's finances are different as well. As Airport General Manager Kevin Smith explained to LTN, "It's such a different animal with cities and counties. (Those airports) are competing with other departments for funding when they look at allocating the monies at budget time, which I don't have to do."

While it is not an "enterprise fund" in the same sense as South Lake Tahoe and Placerville, the airport strives to recoup costs through the same type of user fees in place at those airports. The property tax revenue from the Bi-State District is used to supplement as needed, much as the general fund is for cities and counties, mainly for capital improvement projects. The airport land and improvements are valued at about $45 million and, as Smith states, "we have no debt. We own all the buildings."

He has 19 employees. (Lake Tahoe has five.)

Asked if they had a "business plan," Smith replied that they would be codifying one as soon as the Master Plan update, which they financed themselves, is completed.

“The Master Plan,” Smith noted, “is asking the community what they want us doing with this airport? We own 2,500 acres of property around the airport. What do they want us to do with all that land? We want to be a mirror of the community we serve.”

As part of the Master Plan process, they had eight community outreach meetings and received about 3,500 comments.

“We felt,” Smith added, “that doing a robust and open, interactive process was important.”

That process provided clear direction that district residents didn’t want scheduled commercial air service. The airport has about 25,000 yearly operations. Half are turbo props and small jets bringing in visitors and the other half are itinerant aircraft from the Bay Area and Los Angeles bringing in second homeowners.

“The idea of getting on a SkyWest jet and flying from Truckee to L.A. isn’t wanted,” Smith explained. The Reno-Tahoe Airport is “just down the road,” with easy access even in winter. “There is no push,” he added, “even from larger businesses, to bring in commercial service or regional jets. They don’t want to do anything with this airport that would affect the larger airlines’ service to Reno-Tahoe. More direct flights from Chicago to Reno is more important than direct flights from Chicago to Truckee.”

High rollers, he added, will still choose to fly into Truckee instead of flying into Reno-Tahoe and taking a shuttle. They use membership-based fractional operators and buy a share in an airplane. “They’re not price sensitive,” Smith added.

As with Placerville Airport, community views of the airport are largely positive. Noise complaints are minimal, Smith explains, as the majority of the higher-decibel noise contours are on the airport property itself.

“As far as environmental impacts of the airport, there are not a lot,” he said.

The Bi-State Airport District hasn’t done a full-scale economic impact study since 2000.

“Some agreed with the results and some weren’t sure,” Smith notes. “We know the airport has a substantial impact. My board is talking about doing another study after the Master Plan. There’s just some caution needed in doing these that they they’re not pointed or steered to a product.”



Mammoth Yosemite Airport

Mammoth Yosemite Airport, situated about seven miles outside Mammoth Lakes, has many similarities with Tahoe, as well as some important differences. It’s operated by the town of Mammoth Lakes as an enterprise fund, and, as with Placerville and Tahoe, the user fees it collects do not totally cover expenses. The General Fund allocation to the airport for FY 2013-14 was projected to be $286,943.

Unlike Tahoe, in addition to general aviation traffic, the airport also has regional commercial service provided by Alaska Airlines and United, focused on the Los Angeles, San Diego and San Francisco markets. The number of overall yearly GA and commercial enplanements ranges from 30,000 to 35,000.

“We’re a mountain airport,” Airport and Transportation Manager Brian Picken explained, “so the terrain and technical issues are somewhat similar. We went through a period of growth about 10 years ago where the community wanted small regional jets;

since that time the airport's been using Q400s or other planes of 120 seats or less. You're in a difficult operational area in Tahoe. There's been mitigation to restore the (Upper) Truckee River. You're in town and we're not. "

Acting Public Works Director Peter Bernasconi adds, "In 2007 we updated our General Plan to align the town with healthy lifestyles, basically committing the town to a 'feet first' goal – transit first, auto last. We see air service as part of that 'feet first' concept. Reno-Tahoe is the closest commercial airport, 3½ hours away in summer and up to six hours away in winter. LAX is five hours away."

The airport also receives funding from hotel taxes and a Tourism Business Improvement District, put into effect in September 2013, with a five-year life. The 2 percent of the 13 percent marketing TOT the airport receives and the funds from the TBID are collected by the town of Mammoth Lakes and then distributed by Mammoth Lakes Tourism, a 501(c)6 nonprofit for promotional purposes.

Unlike the General Fund subsidy, which covers airport operations, the TBID money is used to provide minimum revenue guarantees to the airlines.

The TBID, John Urdi, executive director of Mammoth Lakes Tourism, explains, "gets the businesses involved." The assessment is on all tourism businesses within the town limits of Mammoth Lakes. The assessment for each business – restaurant, lodging, retail or the biggest contributor Mammoth Mountain – is determined by a tier structure based on annual revenues and the percentage of business from tourism.

"The guarantees are revenue related," Urdi explains. "If a flight doesn't meet the guaranteed revenue figure for that flight, then the difference goes into that airline's account. It's paid to each airline on a seasonal basis at the end of summer and winter. If load factors are high and there's money

left, then it can rollover and provide a cushion. The TBID always covers the first $1.5 million in winter and (Mammoth Mountain) will cover above that."

Urdi, Bernasconi and Picken all agree on the importance of commercial service for Mammoth and the necessity of revenue guarantee to get airlines to provide that service.

"Commercial service opens up the world to us," Urdi told *Lake Tahoe News.* "Tahoe is different since you have Reno close, but we don't have an airport close. Commercial air service has made us accessible. It's opened up an international market. People book flights from Singapore to L.A. and then from L.A. to Mammoth."

But that service comes with a price.

"Airlines aren't going to come into an airport like ours, or Tahoe," Bernasconi emphasizes, "without some kind of guarantees. A revenue guarantee is a fact of life."

Urdi believes the positive economic impacts of that commercial air service are clear. "We want to see longer stays, people staying during the shoulder seasons, or coming mid-week in winter, which are the most difficult times for the ski resort. Air service helps with that. It makes it easier to get here. Passengers that come via air spend more and stay longer."

A report was done several years ago by American Express using data from its cardholders, showing where and what people spend money on. Based on the air) passenger numbers and spending numbers, after removing locals, it showed a winter impact of $15 million. The airline subsidy in a normal winter, Urdi noted, would be $1.5 million to $2 million. "That's a 10 to 1 return on investment."

Tahoe stands alone

But then again, no airport is totally comparable to Lake Tahoe

Airport, or has faced the same intense, ongoing debate over its value and viability. The city manager sees the unfolding Master Plan process as a positive step forward.

“We’re not approaching this process,” Kerry says, “based on what people said it should be in the past. You have to have an open mind and an open process. I want people to be inspired and encouraged.”

She adds that she has directed the consultants to proceed with an open mind as well. “Everything is on the table.”

Michael Hotaling, C&S project manager for the master plan, told LTN, “Our job is to support what the city and the community want to do.”



Lake Tahoe Airport doubles as city hall.

Although acceptance of the master plan by the FAA does not mean it agrees with everything it contains, there are two parts of the plan they must review and approve – the Aviation Demand Forecast and the Airport Layout Plan. The Aviation Demand Forecast is the financial backbone of the Master Plan. As the FAA describes it, “Forecasts of future levels of aviation activity are the basis for effective decisions in airport planning. Once approved, the forecasts may be used to provide an initial timetable for facility improvements, as a basis for the development of alternatives to meet the projected demand, and as a basis for environmental analyses

and economic and financial plans."

Hotaling adds, "The Aviation Demand Forecast is the key driver in the long-term development of the facility."

After the Aviation Demand Forecast is approved, a preferred alternative is selected, based in part on the financial realities the forecast has revealed. After that, a Financial Feasibility Analysis is done on that alternative, showing the airport's ability to fund the projects in the master plan, including airport management, on-site uses and leases and operating issues that will affect the airport's cash flow.

"We will be doing a Development Plan," Hotaling explains, "showing the financial investment required. In it there is an assessment of the current expenses and revenue generated and a cursory examination of the potential revenue streams that could develop as things change at the airport."

An analysis of the viability of commercial air service with and without revenue guarantees is part of this process.

"It's about who pays and how much," Kerry notes. "What are the costs and benefits of commercial service? If that is not a go, then what's the best use of the airport?"

Who should be paying is, of course, at the heart of the matter. A comment from the Feb. 13 meeting makes the concern clear, "Since the airport is a regional resource that crosses county lines in California and state lines, both public and private sector airport and commercial air service supporters and advocates should be asked to financially support commercial service ventures if such support is requested by commercial carriers. "

Kerry agrees that asking residents to subsidize an airline at a cost of perhaps $2 million a year is not appropriate. Asking El Dorado County, Douglas County, the skiing and gaming industries to help support a facility that provides them

significant benefit should be considered.

In the past, the city has been strongly criticized for not giving residents enough or timely input into airport planning processes. The FAA strongly encourages public input into the master plan process early on. Its Advisory Circular 150 on Airport Master Plans states, “Public involvement has its greatest impact during the early stages of the planning process, before irreversible decisions have been made and while many alternatives can be considered.”

Kerry believes the city is doing a good job this time in reaching out to the community. The first public meeting on Feb 13 was “just to get initial feedback.” Hotaling agrees, noting that, “We didn’t have much information (on the status of the master plan process) for that first meeting. Now that we’ve accomplished some of the master plan tasks, we’ll have something to share. I was encouraged by the number of people who attended that first meeting.”

At the second, on May 29, Hotaling of C&S companies explained they had not yet received final FAA approval of the Aviation Demand Forecast because the FAA needed additional clarification on some of the figures.

He reviewed issues raised at the Feb. 13 meeting, including the FAA process for an airport closure, and explained the economic changes in the airline industry from 2000 to 2014. Through mergers and attrition, seven major carriers have been reduced to three and six low cost carriers have also been reduced to three. Over those years, the airlines have lost $54 billion.

“Their decisions today are based on economics,” he added. Driving those economics are load factors—how full each scheduled flight is. From 2000 to 2014, load factors have risen from 67 percent to 83 percent, with a goal of 85 percent. It costs the same to fly a plane no matter how many

people are on it.

It is just those economics that caused C&S to conclude in the draft Aviation Demand Forecast that Tahoe cannot support commercial airline service.

“It is unlikely,” Hotaling confirmed, “to have commercial service return to Lake Tahoe in the (master plan) forecast period of 20 years.”

If the city wants to pursue it anyway, there are options: a subsidy such as Mammoth Yosemite Airport uses, or approaching El Dorado and Douglas counties and the gaming and skiing industries for financial support. As Kerry put it, “The South Shore doesn’t have any lines.”

Finding better ways to utilize the existing airport and enhance its financial bottom line, even without commercial service, is another option. As an audience member put it, there are “other things we could sell to people with this property here.”

Once the Aviation Demand Forecast is approved by the FAA, the consultants will release that data, then prepare the other parts of the Master Plan, including the selection of a preferred alternative which will outline the airport’s future direction. Both Kerry and Hotaling encouraged those at the meeting to make their views known on what that direction should be.

Additional public meetings will be scheduled as the process continues, with a tentative timetable of selecting a preferred alternative by late summer or early fall.

“We anticipate as many public meetings as the public thinks should happen. The public process should be extensive,” Kerry insisted.

Opinion: It took a community to build LTCC

> *“Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.”*
>
> *– Nelson Mandela*

By Kindred Murillo

When I read the above quote, it evokes emotion that is difficult for me to put into words because I have such a passion for educating our youth and providing life-long learning to our community. Since arriving in South Lake Tahoe three years ago, I have come to understand just how much this community also values education. That is why I feel like I belong here.

As Lake Tahoe Community College celebrates 40 years of serving the communities of the South Shore, I want to take time to reflect on what propelled the college to this place. As we “Honor the Past … and Ascend into the Future,” it is clear that our community supported and made LTCC what it is today, right from its very beginning. For the efforts of those leaders who fought to bring access to higher education to South Lake Tahoe, to the more than 87,000 students who have taken classes, graduated, transferred to four-year institutions, and to the many generous individuals and businesses who have donated tirelessly to our causes, in particular scholarships for students in need – a heartfelt thank you.



Kindred
Murillo

To build an entire college from the ground up it truly takes a vision of what is possible and determination to make that vision become a reality. It happened here because of dedicated, sincere, and tenacious people who had a vision of bringing higher education to South Lake Tahoe. In the 1960s this group, led by individuals such as Roberta Mason, Tony Magliari and Gene Bellisario, among others, raised community awareness, took on California legislation, and fought to bring higher education to our community. These efforts led to the formation of a local college to provide higher education, arts, culture, and many other services to our small, rural community. It also led to an infusion of state funding that provided facilities, programs, and services that continue to benefit this community. What followed was the opening of the original campus in the old Gerkins Lodge on Highway 50, where every classroom had a fireplace and a bathroom: one of the perks to starting a college in a converted motel. The college's current and permanent home on Al Tahoe Boulevard opened in 1988 under the leadership of Guy Lease, who, along with James Duke and the first board of trustees, left a footprint in this community that has forever changed South Lake Tahoe.

Community colleges are only as strong as the community that surrounds them. We depend on our local community members to attend the classes, programs, and access the services we provide. Thank you for attending our local art show openings, our theater performances, and for trusting us to educate your

children and help them achieve their educational goals. Our community college is a great option for students wanting to earn their associates degree and transfer to four-year schools, with more students transferring from LTCC to the UC and CSU systems than other community colleges our size. It is also the best local option for those seeking career and technical education.

You as a community have taken advantage of these options, and have benefited from them. Even though more than 50 percent of students who graduate from South Tahoe High School and go on to college come to LTCC, our goal is to increase that number, and increase the percentage of local high school graduates who access higher education. Simply put, I believe in LTCC because I believe everyone deserves the opportunity to improve their quality of life through education.

We are grateful to our foundation board members, which includes many residents of our community whose commitment to education rivals my own. These professionals, business owners, retired community members, faculty, and staff raise money to support scholarships and programs that support student success at LTCC. I thank them, our board of trustees, our committed faculty, staff, and administration, and especially you, our community members, for your continued commitment and for championing our cause to deliver quality, affordable education to anyone who seeks it.

Please join with us this year in celebrating 40 years of excellence in education at Lake Tahoe Community College. We are one community, one college.

Kindred Murillo is president of Lake Tahoe Community College.

EDC District 5 supe race numbers narrow

With the counting of provisional votes in the District 5 seat in El Dorado County, the contest has gotten closer.

While the two vote getters are the same as when the original tallies came in with 100 percent of the precinct reporting on June 3, the separation between the second, third, and fourth place finishers has narrowed.

The more recent numbers are:

- Sue Novasel – 1,508 votes, 38,44 percent
- Kevin Brown – 950 votes, 17.92 percent
- Angela Swanson – 938, 17.69 percent
- Kenny Curtzwiler – 936, 17.65 percent
- Gerri Grego – 656, 12.37 percent
- Teresa Piper – 300, 5.66 percent.

The top two vote getters advance to the November runoff.

A final count could be days from now, with certification of the election always coming weeks after election day.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Judge ousts Nutting from supervisor seat

By Peter Hecht, Sacramento Bee

Ray Nutting was stripped of his seat on the Board of

Supervisors in a dramatic sentencing order Friday that will shake up El Dorado County's political leadership and force an election to fill his job.

Three weeks after the embattled supervisor appeared to emerge victorious when he was acquitted of felony charges of political malfeasance, a judge declared that Nutting must forfeit his elected office because of misdemeanor convictions over how he raised his bail money.

Declaring that Nutting had committed "misconduct in office," visiting Superior Court Judge Timothy S. Buckley issued a notice to the county that Nutting's seat is now vacant. He also sentenced Nutting to 30 days of community service in lieu of jail time.

Suddenly, Nutting's political career appears to be over with 2 1/2 years remaining on his board term. He is out of office as a result of his actions in the frenetic moments after he was ordered to surrender on felony charges that he had failed to disclose more than $70,000 in state grant income for brush-clearing on his family ranch.

A jury acquitted Nutting on May 14 on three felony counts and deadlocked on a fourth felony count of submitting false paperwork when the work was completed. But he was convicted of six misdemeanors for accepting loans from two county employees and a construction contractor to bail himself out of jail on May 28, 2013.

Read the whole story

Tobacco industry once had high hopes for pot

By Evan Halper, Los Angeles Times

Richard Nixon was in the White House, his “war on drugs” was in full swing, yet Big Tobacco was secretly exploring the possibility of becoming Big Pot.

Newly discovered documents from tobacco company archives at UC San Francisco show that major companies in the cigarette industry investigated joining the marijuana business in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

The companies were driven then by the same shift in public attitudes that is now pushing legalization around the country.

One company even asked a federal counter-narcotics official to secretly secure marijuana from the government for research.

“We request that there be no publicity whatsoever,” a Philip Morris vice president wrote in late 1969 to Milton Joffee, drug sciences chief at the Justice Department’s narcotics bureau. “We will provide the results to you on a confidential basis, and request that you not identify in the form of any public announcement where the work has been done.”

Joffee responded that Philip Morris could skip Food and Drug Administration review of its application for government pot. “I do not feel there is any bar to maintaining the confidentiality you request,” he wrote.

The documents, discovered by public health researchers, were disclosed Tuesday in the Milbank Quarterly, a health policy journal. They not only shed new light on the Nixon era, but appear when some Wall Street analysts and health advocates say tobacco companies may again be considering the expanding

market for legalized weed.

Legalization seemed in the air in the 1970s, though Nixon staunchly opposed it. He ignored a presidential commission's recommendation in 1972 to decriminalize possession for personal use.

But 11 states would do just that between 1973 and 1977. Jimmy Carter was elected to the White House in 1976 on a platform that included marijuana decriminalization. Views shifted dramatically in the 1980s, however, and President Ronald Reagan oversaw a harsh crackdown that included imprisonment for thousands of nonviolent offenders.

Read the whole story

Poll: Most people against guns in restaurants

By Michele Richinick, MSNBC

Most Americans don't want to dine or shop near armed customers.

More than half – 55 percent – of the country supports banning guns in food establishments and retail stores, according to a new Huffington Post/YouGov poll. A mere 32% of the public said they prefer allowing armed individuals into such locations.

Seventy-two percent of Democrats and 41% of Republicans favor a no-gun policy. Exactly half of the GOP members who participated in the poll said they want shops to allow their clients to carry weapons.

Additionally, 64 percent of gun owners said they prefer businesses that permit firearms. But 65 percent of people who live in a household without guns and 63 percent who live with a gun-owner said they would rather visit a shop without armed citizens, the poll found.

Read the whole story

Homewood to host art festival

Pacific Fine Arts Festivals, a producer of high quality art festivals since 1980, has selected Lake Tahoe as one of its stops.

Festival organizers bring together talents of artists from across the nation.

The Homewood Fine Arts and Crafts Festival is July 4-6 from 10am-5pm. More than 50 artists will showcase their assortment of collectable arts and crafts in a variety of media including paintings, ceramics, jewelry, woodwork, photography and much more.

Calif. to protect wolf under Endangered Species Act

By Matt Weiser, Sacramento Bee

The wolf known as OR7 who roamed California for more than a

year is now raising pups just over the state line in Oregon, wildlife officials have confirmed.

The news greatly increases the odds that gray wolves eventually will repopulate the Golden State. It comes on the same day that the California Fish and Game Commission, meeting in Fortuna on Wednesday, voted 3-1 to protect wolves under the state Endangered Species Act.

In a field visit to OR7's location in the Rogue River-Siskiyou National Forest on Monday, biologists observed two pups and photographed them peeking out of a log. Officials at the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife said it is "likely" there are more pups, because wolves typically produce four to six in a litter.

Read the whole story

CTC to improve old Meyers campground

California Tahoe Conservancy is ready to go forward with improving access to the former Tahoe Pines Campground and improving the grounds along the Upper Truckee River on Highway 50 in Meyers.

The Conservancy plans to restore and protect the natural floodplain and riparian habitat of the 8.5-acre site, while providing picnic tables, benches, hiking trails or other compatible amenities.

Comments on the draft environmental document are being taken until June 13.

More info is online.

Tips to avoid a summertime ER visit

By Jessica Firger, CBS News

Summer holiday weekends and vacations mean days and nights chock full of activities: swimming, sun, sand, sports and soirees. But nothing puts a damper on warm weather fun more quickly than a trip to your local emergency room. That's why it's crucial to be aware of the safety issues that may arise when you have another beer, run that extra mile, ride a wave or take a long nap in the sun.

Antonio Dajer, director of the emergency department at the New York-Presbyterian hospital campus in Lower Manhattan has seen it all: the beach-goer who looks like a lobster; the party animal with a cracked skull who claims to have only had two beers; and the weekend warrior who got a little too creative on a skateboard.

Thankfully most accidents related to the season are easily avoided with a little common sense. Here are some common causes of summertime trauma and Dajer's tips to avoid a visit to the ER.

Alcohol-related falls and fights

Throwing back a few with your friends is fine in moderation, but many people lose count and two quickly turns into 10, which can lead to unnecessary accidents, broken bones or a

split head. “The chugging, the shots, the speed with which people drink is impossible to see where you’ll end up,” says Dajer. “The average person will get drunk on six beers in an hour.”

Read the whole story