

Gauging the Trump effect on land in the West

By Daniel Rothberg, Las Vegas Sun

On a brisk day in late February, we pulled off a one-way, unpaved loop and watched cattle dogs guide five cows across a flat basin. Weeks of heavy winter storms meant the Southern Nevada desert's iconic drive-by shrubbery appeared greener and fuller.

Two months after then-President Barack Obama designated this 300,000-acre expanse the Gold Butte National Monument, little else had changed. The cattle remained controversial. The Bureau of Land Management continued saying it had no immediate plans to round them up. In nearby Mesquite, the designation continued to inflame the question: Where does the federal government's power begin and end?

A BLM official explained that while the agency still had a court order to remove livestock grazing illegally on public land, it would wait for word from Washington, D.C.. The Trump administration was in charge.

President Trump promises to take a hard turn away from Obama's environmental policies, from the management of public lands to the direction of the energy industry. But what the Trump administration means for the 11 contiguous Western states, in practical terms, is unclear.

Read the whole story

Bike trail expansion in Angora, Fallen Leaf region

By Jessie Marchesseau

Summertime in Tahoe is starting to become synonymous with the Tahoe Area Mountain Biking Association building and upgrading yet another recreational bike trail in the basin.

Last year it was the Kingsbury Stinger Trail, the year before that it was the Bijou Bike Park, and before that, perhaps their best known project to date, the Corral Trail. This year's project, however, could turn out to be their most notable undertaking yet: the Fallen Leaf Lake/Angora Ridge trails project.

"It's not just a single trail like TAMBA has taken on in the past," said Ben Fish, president of TAMBA, "this is really a trail system."



There will soon be more mountain bike opportunities at Fallen Leaf Lake. Photo/Chris McNamara

This summer, TAMBA, in partnership with the U.S. Forest Service, plans to construct about six rideable miles of trails in the Angora Ridge, Angora Lakes and Fallen Leaf Lake areas. This is roughly half of the planned and approved trails for the area. The rest will be on next year's agenda.

Fish said it just seemed logical to take on this project right now. With 2017 being the 10th anniversary of the Angora Fire, it felt like an appropriate time to restore and reinvigorate the scarred landscape. Plus, its proximity to residential neighborhoods, camping, lakes and other activities creates potential for a highly used recreational area.

Once completed, this new trail system will give users access to spectacular views at the top of Angora Ridge, a trail to hike or bike to Angora Lakes from Tahoe Mountain, the ability to bike around Fallen Leaf Lake, and eventually, a connection to the highest used bike trail in the basin, the paved trail along Highway 89 connecting Pope and Baldwin beaches.

Fish described the new trails as more of a low-elevation rolling trail system, and as such, they will be conducive to riders of a variety of skill levels.

“There are just those days where you’re like: ‘Do I really want to climb 4,000 feet today?’” he said.

These will be the trails for that kind of day. Mike Gabor, forest engineer for the USFS, said he can see this becoming a trail people ride to unwind after a long day at work, taking in the views of Lake Tahoe, Fallen Leaf Lake and the surrounding ridgelines.

The trails system will also provide access to areas which have previously been inaccessible by hiking or biking paths. There is a handful of what the USFS calls “social trails” in this area, trails formed simply by people walking on them. They often start as wildlife trails and then get used more and more, but they are not maintained or sustainably built, often causing erosion issues and impacting wildlife. Some of these trails run parallel to each other and don’t always make logical connections. This summer’s plan involves rebuilding and improving some of those trails, decommissioning others and building new, sustainably-planned ones.

“You couldn’t even describe to people how to hike around Fallen Leaf Lake, because it was such a spaghetti bowl of trails,” Jacob Quinn, USFS trails engineer, told Lake Tahoe News.

Quinn has worked closely with TAMBA on nearly all its recent projects, including the Fallen Leaf Lake/Angora Ridge trails.

He explained how the Forest Service develops trail ideas, creates the plans and takes them through the necessary environmental approvals, but often lacks funding and manpower to make them happen. This is where the partnership with TAMBA has really paid off. Through their fundraising efforts and volunteer workers, TAMBA has been instrumental in bringing the Forest Services' trail visions to life.

Last summer, TAMBA set a fundraising goal of \$55,000 to make this trail project happen. They kicked off fundraising efforts in July and have since exceeded their goal, raising more than \$60,000. The extra funds mean TAMBA might be able to hire a paid trail builder to work on the trail consistently all summer, and it also opens the door to working on trails which weren't slated for construction until next year, like a bikeable trail to Lily Lake.

Even though this year's goal has been met, more funds mean more trails, so there are still more fundraising events on the horizon, like the TAMBA spring party next month. Training workshops are in April and May for crew leaders, sawyers and more. Construction on the trails is scheduled to begin in June with TAMBA hosting volunteer weekends throughout the summer.

"I'd like to stress how great this project is because of all the partnerships created to make it happen," Fish told Lake Tahoe News. "It'd be just lines on paper waiting to be built if it wasn't for the willingness of the USFS to work with partners like TAMBA and the community stepping up to help build and fund the construction."

For more information on workshops or becoming a volunteer, go **online**. Here is a map of the project area.

Squaw may stay open throughout the summer

By Angela Fritz, Washington Post

Did you hear? It snowed a lot in the Sierra Nevada this winter. Unless you spent the cold months avoiding the news (we wouldn't blame you), then you already know it's a record-breaking season.

Squaw Valley and Alpine Meadows, sister ski resorts, have tallied nearly 60 feet of snow this winter. At a slightly higher elevation, Sugar Bowl at Donner Summit hit 751 inches – 63 feet! – this month. Last week alone, Squaw reported three feet of snow.

"I'm actually considering staying open through the summer and fall so it becomes the 16-17-18 season," CEO Andy Wirth said. "We're taking a hard look at that. Maybe we spin Shirley [a back-side chair lift] through the summer. There's so much snow up there."

Read the whole story

Data: Massive disconnect in Nev. teacher evaluations

By Meghan Delaney, Las Vegas Review-Journal

There are absolutely no ineffective teachers in Nevada's worst-performing schools.

That's according to the most recent teacher evaluation data provided by the state Department of Education. Statewide, only 55 of the 20,785 teachers rated after the 2015-16 year under the Nevada Educator Performance Framework were deemed "ineffective" – the lowest of four possible categories.

And none of them worked at what the state considers the most underperforming schools. You'll find more ineffective teachers working in what the state considers its best schools, according to the most recent ratings of the five-star system issued after the 2013-14 year.

Read the whole story

Extra patrols enhance VHR enforcement in SLT

By Kathryn Reed

Enforcement is what people have been calling for in regards to vacation home rentals and the city finally delivered on that request.

The South Lake Tahoe City Council on Tuesday will hear a report about the outcome of the 90-day enhanced enforcement. The council is likely to discuss the possibility of continuing the added patrols during peak tourism months in the summer and winter.

"The neighbors are clearly seeing patrol vehicles come through with the VHR patrol. They are being listened to," Police Chief Brian Uhler told *Lake Tahoe News*.

He believes the combination of the rules the council has put

in place, the storms happening on weekends, VHR owners putting pressure on tenants and the extra patrols have contributed to make vacation home rentals be less of a problem in town.

The High Sierra Patrol workers did not interact directly with people at the VHR, but instead reported back to the community service officer who made the face-to-face contact.

The security teams worked from mid-December through mid-March, daily from 4pm-2am. High Sierra Patrol personnel were tasked with checking on 120 properties with closed permits to see if they were operating illegally, houses where a complaint had been filed and residential areas outside of the tourist core.

Findings include:

- 26 properties were operating without a valid permit
- 33 properties are on a watch list because of the higher number of calls
- 85 rental signs were not visible because of snow, lighting or a sign didn't exist
- 36 VHR owners received an advisory notice
- 10 owners were issued warnings
- 3 administrative citations were given
- Dispatch during the same time frame received 68 calls for loud noise, of which 16 were from VHRs
- In addition to those 68 calls, dispatch received specific VHR complaints – 14 for noise, 20 for parking and four for trash.

Where people were cited, the city sent out bills totaling \$26,750.

The cost to the city for High Sierra Patrol for those 90 days

was \$26,310.

Earlier this month the council approved the hiring of a full-time permanent community service officer who will handle VHR issues. This has been a temporary position.

Uhler said it has been difficult in the past to keep people in this CSO job. Having more consistency with staff has also made for better tracking of problem properties and getting out a consistent message.

Modern ski bum adapts to a housing crisis

By Sage Sauerbrey, Moonshine Ink Staff

Ninety-nine percent of the species to live on Earth are extinct. Meteors. Over-hunting. Low sex drive. Extinction has taken many forms over the years, but the uncontested winner is habitat loss. Enter the modern Lake Tahoe ski bum.

Shackled with an incompatible ratio between median income and median home price, the modern ski bum's diminishing habitat is fueling an extinction that could mean the end of the ski town as we know it. (At least low sex drive isn't the issue.)

The caveat to calling out extinction in this case, however, is defining the culture that is threatened. A bum is commonly viewed as existing on society's periphery; their time spent goes by relatively unnoticed. But in ski towns this has never been the case.

Here, the ski bum has always been the protagonist, a cultural icon exemplify the reason we all shovel our way through Sierra

winters and make the sacrifices necessary to live in a mountain town. But are we losing this unspoken hero? As ski towns become increasingly gentrified, the ski bum has two choices common in the natural world: disappear, or adapt and evolve. To find out which, we spoke with a handful of local icons to define this endangered culture, and how it's holding on.

Read the whole story

Battle over public lands rages on

By Kirk Johnson, New York Times

BURNS, Ore. — A year ago, this corner of rural Oregon became center stage in the drawn-out drama over public lands when armed militia leaders seized a national wildlife refuge, arguing that the government had too much control of land in the West.

Now that President Trump is in office, people here and in other parts of the 11 states where 47 percent of the landmass is publicly owned are watching to see what he will do on everything related to public lands, from coal mining and cattle grazing to national monuments and parks. In Burns, some ranchers and others are feeling emboldened, hopeful that regulatory rollbacks by the federal government will return lands to private use and shore up a long-struggling economy.

But the change in administration has also spawned a countermovement of conservatives and corporate executives who are speaking up alongside environmentalists in defense of

public lands and now worry about losing access to hunting grounds and customers who prize national parks and wildlife.

In Idaho, for example, a deal to put thousands of acres into private ownership – exactly the sort of transaction that the militia leader brothers, Ammon and Ryan Bundy, had espoused in seizing the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge – was met with fierce opposition, by no less than a group of conservative outdoorsmen.

Read the whole story

Purity of Lake Tahoe water a source of pride

By Kathryn Reed

“Drink Tahoe tap.” It’s the mantra Madonna Dunbar wants everyone to embrace. She’s so passionate about it that she got the phrase trademarked.

Dunbar is the executive director of the Tahoe Water Suppliers Association. This is a 12-member group, with all but South Tahoe Public Utility District getting its water directly from the lake. The other members are: Cave Rock Water System, Edgewood Water Company, Glenbrook Water Cooperative, Incline Village General Improvement District, Kingsbury General Improvement District, North Tahoe Public Utility District, Round Hill General Improvement District, Skyland Water Company, Tahoe City Public Utility District, Zephyr Water Utility, and Lakeside Park Association. The EPA oversees the water association.

Dunbar gave a talk last week at Lake Tahoe Community College about all things water at the invitation of the American Association of University Women.

“We advocate for protecting Tahoe as a drinking source,” Dunbar said. That is one reason the group is not supportive of the Tahoe Keys wanting to use herbicides to rid its canals of invasive weeds.



Messages about Tahoe's tap water are becoming the norm around water fountains. Photo/LTN

Adding chemicals, even ones approved by the EPA, to Lake Tahoe's water is not something they can support. In-take pipes for the various water agencies are 1,000 to 3,000 feet from the shoreline. That lake water services 20,838 connections and 34,179 full-time residents.

“We are trying to find money to do anything but herbicides,”

Dunbar said.

What the water association does strongly back is the boating program that mandates inspections of watercraft in order to keep more invasive species from inhabiting Lake Tahoe.

Six members of TWSA have the rare "filtration exemption" status from the Environmental Protection Agency. This means the water is not filtered; Lake Tahoe is that pure.

There are only 60 of these permits throughout the United States. Dunbar said most are in remote areas, like Hetch Hetchy, and usually don't allow recreation on the water body.

A noticeable difference between lake and groundwater is that the latter will have a mineral taste.

She cited the Porter Cologne Act as being the "single biggest thing to protect Tahoe as a clean drinking water source." Two aspects of the bill include the ban of septic tanks and the requirement that wastewater be pumped out of the basin.

One thing Dunbar shakes her head at is bottled water.

"Forty to 50 percent of packaged water is filtered tap water that is sold at 1,000 times the price," Dunbar said. To meet the suggested eight glasses of water a day it would cost 49 cents a year with tap water and \$1,400 with bottled water, she said.

Those bottles take a lot of petroleum to make, most aren't recycled and there is little regulation with bottled water. Dunbar said tap water is more strictly regulated than bottled.

She likes that Truckee is considering banning water that comes in containers less than a gallon, which is something San Francisco already did.

Education about the quality of Tahoe's water is critical, she said, to get people to realize bottled water is a waste in so

many regards.

Damaged sewer line creates sink hole in Tahoe Keys



Crews on April 15 work to fix the broken sewer line in the Tahoe Keys. Photo/Kathryn Reed

By Kathryn Reed

A collapsed sewer line in the Tahoe Keys has caused a sink hole that will take several days to fix.

Tahoe Keys Boulevard west of where it intersects with Venice Drive is closed, and will be for a few days as South Tahoe Public Utility District crews work to fix the break.

“We don’t know how it collapsed,” Chris Stanley, field operations manager for STPUD, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

The road started to buckle on April 14. About half of the street and the median area have created a sink hole that is more than 10-feet in diameter.

No sewage has leaked, according to Stanley. The wastewater is being rerouted to the Tahoe Keys pump station via specialty pumps that bypass where the break is.

“We are keeping up with all of the flows,” Stanley said. He added it would help if customers tried to reduce their water use for the next few days.

The line serves the entire Tahoe Keys as well Fallen Leaf Lake and the beach areas off Highway 89 owned by the U.S. Forest Service. From this area the wastewater is then pumped to the South Tahoe PUD plant.

This 24-inch gravity line that has failed is several decades old. It is 16 feet below ground. Before crews start to dig plugs are being put in on both ends to prevent sewage from filling the hole.

Traffic is being rerouted to a side street off Venice that hooks up with Tahoe Keys Boulevard beyond the road closure.

Nev. prepares for potential Katrina-style spring flooding

By Benjamin Spillman, Reno Gazette-Journal

Nevada could see weeks of Katrina-style flooding when warm spring and summer sunshine melts the massive snowpack blanketing the Sierra Nevada.

That's according to the Nevada National Guard and other emergency planners and responders who briefed Gov. Brian Sandoval on potential disaster scenarios.

"Typically, Nevada experiences flash flooding," Col. Cory Schulz told Sandoval, referencing hurricane flooding in 2005 that devastated New Orleans and southern Mississippi. "This will be saturation flooding, much like Katrina."

The state has already endured two flood situations that triggered federal disaster declarations in February and March for western and northern parts of the state.

Three counties, Churchill, Lyon and Douglas, have declared emergencies in advance of the coming snowmelt and more could join that group, Sandoval said.

Read the whole story