

Nevada lawmakers press BLM for answers

By Benjamin Spillman, Reno Gazette-Journal

Nevada lawmakers sought answers from a high ranking public land manager on everything from wild horses to wilderness study areas.

John Ruhs, Nevada state director for the Bureau of Land Management, testified Tuesday before a join committee of the Legislature's natural resources committee.

Ruhs' appearance before the Legislature was a routine briefing aimed at helping lawmakers better understand the role of the BLM.

[Read the whole story](#)

What this week's storms mean for California

By Ryan Sabalow and Phillip Reese, Sacramento Bee

While a nearly record-breaking rainy season has battered California's dams and stretched the limits of local levees, the storms that began to hit Sacramento on Tuesday aren't expected to put much additional strain on the state's flood-control system.

Spanning into next week, the storms are expected to drop as much as two inches of rain in Sacramento and two feet of snow

in the higher elevations of the Sierra Nevada. But federal weather forecasters said Tuesday they aren't too worried about widespread problems.

"These series of storms are definitely wet, but they're not what we saw in January and February, by any means," said Michelle Mead with the National Weather Service in Sacramento. "They're more typical of our winter-into-spring storms, meaning we're getting into that shower and thunderstorm season."

Read the whole story

Group exploring options to solve housing dilemma

Publisher's note: *This is one in a series of stories about affordable housing in the Lake Tahoe-Truckee region. All articles may be accessed via the home page under Special Projects, 2017 Affordable Housing.*

By Kathryn Reed

Tackling the South Shore housing crisis from as many fronts as possible is the goal of Progress for Tahoe.

Members of this South Lake Tahoe grass roots group recognize no one solution will solve the problem, but instead are entertaining as many ideas as possible. But they also want to be action oriented. For now, they are still in research mode.

At a meeting last week of the housing subgroup, Bill Roby with

the El Dorado Community Foundation talked about his desire to create a land trust that would assess every property that is sold in South Lake Tahoe 3 percent to fund the land trust.



He pointed to other locales on both sides of the United States with similar programs.

Roby's analysis shows that a 3 percent surcharge to every property sold in the city would bring in between \$5 million and \$7 million a year. That money could be used to buy old hotels and turn them into deed restricted apartments.

Voters would have to approve having the equity in their home be spent on paying for someone else to have a place to live instead of being able to take what is rightfully theirs. Then there would be the issue if someone is upside down on a property; they'd be losing even more. Roby is taking his idea to more than a dozen groups in the next few weeks. He was asked to come back to the Progress for Tahoe group to report in what others think of the idea.

El Dorado County Supervisor Sue Novasel wondered if taxing only higher end properties would be better so those who are in affordable housing would not be punished.

Doug Williams, who has worked in the mortgage industry, said sellers will essentially pass this on to buyers via a higher price.

Michael Ward, the consultant working with Novasel's housing task force that is separate from this group, said land trusts work. But he worries an assessment like what Roby is proposing

would be a punishment for owners.

"It could crush some purchase for locals," Williams warned of the assessment.

David Orr with Tahoe Mountain Lab brought up the idea of a vacancy tax that would be applied to second homeowners. His calculations are this could generate about \$20 million a year with about a 1 percent tax.

However, California's Proposition 13 would probably now allow for a vacancy tax.

This group has not clearly defined what affordable housing means to the members. They interchanged affordable and work force housing. Technically, there is a legal definition to affordable housing that involves income levels.

An issue throughout the basin is that there will always be limited supply because there is only so much land that can be developed.

Novasel said this is why area plans, like the one in Meyers that is yet to be completed, should have regulations that allow for higher density. This would help developers be able to build affordable housing.

Some members of the group will be talking to city staff this week to find out what happened to the silent second mortgage program. Others want to address the possibility of neighborhood zones for vacation home rentals.

Troy Mathews, who is on the Lake Tahoe Unified School District board, wants land the district owns to be developed for teacher housing. Students could be working in a vocational setting to learn a trade as the housing is constructed. The problem is the district has limited developable land.

While getting rid of the rundown motels that are labeled single room occupancy or SRO is desirable, it was pointed out

that they are profitable for owners. People living there don't have the means for first and last months' rent, plus a deposit so they stay in this SROs.

The Tahoe Regional Planning Agency's commodity regulations is another barrier – for developers and getting rid of SROs. Instead of having a truly free marketplace TRPA has put a value on each hotel room, every residential unit and all commercial floor area – and then has decided how many or much of each is available. Changes to the bi-state regulatory agency's rules are at least a couple years away, and even then there is no guarantee the next incarnation will be transformative.

Technology IDs gamblers who disguise their location

By Todd Prince, Las Vegas Review-Journal

Backing up about 100 feet from the California border near the Fashion Outlet in Primm, Nev., a reporter is finally able to log into the World Series of Poker application on an iPhone.

The reporter is here to test the accuracy of the geolocation service used by the poker application to ensure people physically outside Nevada cannot access the game. WSOP uses the geolocation technology of Vancouver-based GeoComply, a 5-year-old company that also serves daily fantasy sports company Draft Kings and MGM Resorts.

Geolocation and age identification services have been at the heart of the debate over legalizing online gaming. Opponents have sought to ban online gaming in part on the basis that

neither technology is fool-proof.

Read the whole story

Tahoe firm's climbing method cuts summit times in half

By Eben Novy-Williams, Bloomberg

When Brooks Entwistle, a partner at Everstone Group in Singapore, climbed the sixth-tallest mountain in the world, the 26,800-foot-tall Cho Oyu, he didn't take the typical seven weeks. He took three weeks off and sandwiched the 17-day ascent between a board meeting and a parent-teacher conference.

That timeframe was unheard of in guided high-altitude mountaineering until recently, when Lake Tahoe-based Alpenglow Expeditions began offering its first "rapid ascent" climbs up some of the tallest peaks in the world. In April, the outfitter will guide a group to summit the 29,000-foot Mount Everest in 42 days, nearly half the time of most expeditions. Later this year, Alpenglow will take another group up Argentina's Aconcagua, the tallest mountain in the western hemisphere, in 14 days instead of the usual 20-plus.

For decades, climbing the world's highest peaks has been an opportunity reserved for those long on money and athletic ability. But for those who have both, the biggest factor is time. For about 30 percent more than the normal price, Alpenglow streamlines the process in various ways: expedited permits, aggressive scheduling, and, sometimes, flying directly to base camp in a helicopter instead of multiple days

of trekking in on foot.

Read the whole story

LTUSD suing company responsible for STMS field

Updated 9:45am:

By Kathryn Reed

The nearly 10-year-old artificial turf field at South Tahoe Middle School is substandard and the manufacture knew this at the time of sale, according to a lawsuit.

Lake Tahoe Unified School District is suing FieldTurf for breach of contract.

According to court documents, “Between 2005 and 2012, FieldTurf sold and installed approximately 1,700 artificial turf fields throughout the United States, which generated reported revenues of \$570,000,000. Unfortunately for its customers, the fibers that FieldTurf used to make its artificial turf was defective – and FieldTurf knew it.”

The knowledge stems from FieldTurf suing its supplier of artificial fibers in 2011. That lawsuit was settled in 2014 for an undisclosed amount.

Lake Tahoe Unified School District’s lawsuit contends FieldTurf kept the money it received and did nothing to repair the fields that it knew had substandard fibers.

FieldTurf stopped using the product in 2012.

STMS defects include breaking, splitting, and thinning of the individual fibers. Those inadequacies are the same reasons FieldTurf sued its supplier.

“When you look at the fiber it was laying down and it had been for a couple years,” LTUSD Superintendent Jim Tarwater told *Lake Tahoe News*. Sweeping it, which is part of the regular maintenance of the field, did not make it stand up.

There is no danger to anyone using the field. It’s about the quality and lifespan of the field.



LTUSD believes it was sold a substandard artificial field and is suing for compensation. Photo/LTN

FieldTurf is the same company that was used for South Tahoe High School’s field three years ago, though it had a different supplier. The community ball field, which is being replaced by Lake Tahoe Community College, is a different manufacturer.

The original cost for the 92,104 square feet of Duraspine artificial turf field at STMS was \$471,300. The contract was signed in March 2007, and the field installed the following August. Part of the agreement was a guarantee of eight years of premature wear and ultraviolet degradation. The field was supposed to have a “useful” lifespan of more than 10 years.

LTUSD didn’t know it was sold a substandard product until

December 2016 when media in New Jersey exposed the FieldTurf story.

Internal FieldTurf emails that are part of the court filings show the company knew it was installing a less than durable product and that the fields were failing prematurely.

The district believes it is owed at least \$500,000 from the turf company. This would compensate LTUSD for “the loss of the soccer field, costs to investigate these damages, costs to replace the defective field, attorneys’ fees and other economic and special damages.” The district said it would amend damage totals if need be prior to going to trial.

Montreal-based FieldTurf told *Lake Tahoe News*, “We strongly disagree with the representation of the facts in this complaint. Since we first became aware of the issue with Duraspine, we have tried to be forthcoming with our customers and we have not hid from this problem. Additionally, it is important to note that the issue with Duraspine has not impacted safety – only how a field looks as it wears. We are committed to honoring our warranties and working with our customers to address any issues if they arise.”

“South Tahoe Middle School’s field was installed in 2007 and is still in use. This means that the school has gotten roughly a decade of use from the field – well beyond the standard eight-year warranty term.”

FieldTurf is a big company – having provided turf for 21 out of the 32 National Football League stadiums. The company recently hired Ted Wells, the attorney who led the National Football League’s investigation into New England Patriots quarterback Tom Brady in what was called Deflategate. In addition to the LTUSD lawsuit, FieldTurf faces seven other fraud lawsuits. More lawsuits are possible.

The LTUSD lawsuit was filed in U.S. District Court in Sacramento in February.

100+ housing bills introduced in California

By Liam Dillon, Los Angeles Times

California lawmakers have introduced more than 130 bills this year that try to tackle the state's housing affordability crisis.

Reams of statistics support the depth of the problem: California's homeownership rate is at its lowest since World War II, a third of renters spend more than half of their income on housing costs and the state has nearly a quarter of the nation's homeless residents – despite having 12 percent of the overall U.S. population.

William Fulton, director of the Kinder Institute for Urban Research at Rice University, said he has never seen such interest in housing in the three decades he's been tracking the issue in California.

[Read the whole story](#)

Roads and salt pushing evolution of species



Brine leaves streaks on the road at the end of North Upper Truckee Road toward Highway 50. Photo/John Adamski

By Jason Daley, Sierra

Over the course of millions of years, environmental pressures push species to adapt, leading to a new tail shape, a striped color scheme, or a taste for eucalyptus leaves. But in the last couple decades, researchers have found that evolution isn't just a slow invisible hand molding dinosaurs into birds.

“Contemporary evolution” is also happening at a scale that is easily observable in a human lifetime, and some of those changes are actually driven by humans. In fact, a new study explores how one of humanity's biggest footprints, the massive system of roads that crisscross earth, are driving evolution in the plants and animals that live near them.

That's not to say roads are creating new species in front of our eyes. Instead, they are driving localized adaptations that take place in relatively isolated populations.

Read the whole story

Weather reduces Liberty Utilities' reliability

By Kathryn Reed

Flip a switch and the lights go on. In the 21st century in the United States we expect that same outcome every time.

But the reality is there are circumstances beyond the supplier's control that cause the power to go out.

Weather is the No. 1 reason Liberty Utilities customers find themselves in the dark. Equipment failures, traffic accidents, animals on the lines and loss of power from NV Energy are other factors.

Liberty supplies electricity to the California side of the basin, Truckee and just north of there, and Alpine and Mono counties. The 1,476-square-mile service area encompasses 50,000 customers. The bulk of its power comes from Las Vegas-based NV Energy.

New for this year the California Public Utilities Commission is mandating companies under its purview host reliability reporting workshops in its service area. Liberty did so last week in South Lake Tahoe and Kings Beach.



A broken pole this winter in the Ward Creek area took out power to Alpine Meadows ski resort and area residents. Photo/Liberty Utilities

The goal is for customers to not experience more than 160 minutes' worth of outages in a year. In 2014, Liberty customers were in the dark on average 352 minutes and for 2015 it was 357 minutes.

Customers should expect 1 to 1.2 outages a year. In 2014, the average was 2.4 outages and 2015 it was 2.01.

"We are trying to push to have better restoration time," Travis Johnson, vice president for Liberty, said.

The delay is often in finding the problem, not actually fixing it. There isn't some magic board at headquarters that pinpoints where the broken pole is, or what line is down, or which wires slapped together. Linemen need to find the problem and then assess how to remedy the situation.

Still, the company recognizes it needs to better communicate with customers what is going on. Instead of its website just listing the counties affected, the plan is to make it more

detailed. Better estimated times for restoration are also being talked about.

Living in snow country and having equipment in remote areas only compound the potential for problems in the winter.

A large swath of the West Shore was in the dark for days earlier this year. Plows won't clear roads with wires on the ground. Unplowed roads make it difficult to reach the problem. Helicopters were used to lower workers to sites; this, after the weather cleared. At times crews were trudging through waist-high snow, at 3am, with temperature at zero degrees, all while carrying heavy cables and other equipment.

Some lines had snow accumulations the diameter of a basketball.

Utility companies operate with redundancies so when one transmission line goes down the system can still function. This winter two lines were down from Emerald Bay to Portola. Then a tree took out the third line.

"We are in uncharted territory of what our system has seen before," Johnson said. He pointed to a diagram showing the Tahoe-Truckee area trending toward precipitation levels well ahead of 1982-83.

Exacerbating the problem is that customers from Emerald Bay to parts of Tahoe City are on one circuit.

Jeremy Vanyi with Liberty said the plan this summer is to modernize some of the equipment and to put in devices that would mean fewer customers being affected by the same outage.

Bright spots in the reliability spectrum include Liberty's praise for phase one of the 650 electric line on the North Shore. Steel poles instead of wood means they can stand up to the wicked winds that blow through the area. Plus, trees were adequately thinned to ensure they didn't fall on the new line.

Liberty is also experiencing fewer short-term outages, which it attributes to having done more work to remove potentially problematic trees or limbs.

The two worst circuits for Liberty are in the Woodfords-Markleeville and Coleville-Walker areas. This summer the company will work on both areas to improve reliability.

Work this summer in South Lake Tahoe will involve the continuation of undergrounding cables along Pioneer Trail.

Tahoe nutritionist touts plants over animals

By Kathryn Reed

The link between food and health was underscored this month in a nutrition presentation before the South Lake Tahoe City Council.

Registered dietician June Denney promoted a plant-based diet in her talk with physician Greg Bergner. Her message was that food can cause and prevent disease.

Citing the 2015 Global Burden of Disease Study, Denney said, the No. 1 cause of premature death and disease is food.

Diet-related chronic diseases include:

- Obesity
- Cardiovascular disease
- Hypertension

- Diabetes
- Cancer
- Osteoporosis.

Denney provided information from multiple studies showing the benefits of eating vegetables over meat.

Stats included:

- Strawberries are the most powerful anti-angiogenic food
- 1 serving per month of kale or collard greens reduces the risk of glaucoma by 69 percent
- Beets and arugula decrease blood pressure, improve COPD, peripheral artery disease and improve fitness performance
- One banana a day can decrease the chance of stroke by 40 percent.

One of the problems people have in the United States is with serving sizes. Three ounces of cooked red meat is a serving. Most hamburgers, though, are the equivalent of two servings. So, not only are people eating foods that are bad for them, the quantities are more than most people realize.

With most African nations not adopting a Western diet, they don't have the same diseases at the United States.

Denney shared:

- 1 in 3 Americans die of cardiovascular disease
- 1 in 1,000 Africans die of cardiovascular disease
- Some hospitals in Africa have not seen a single case of colon cancer
- Kenya sees 20 times less breast cancer than the United

States.

"We are doing something wrong," Denney said.

The presentation was in recognition of March being National Nutrition Month.