Nev. hunters shoot down land transfer idea

By Benjamin Spillman, Reno Gazette-Journal

A proposal that would unload millions of acres of federal public land in Nevada fell flat Friday in Carson City.

Dozens of hunters and anglers told the Nevada Wildlife Commission they oppose the proposal contained in Congressional bill by Rep. Mark Amodei, R-Nev.

The commission, a state body which oversees the Nevada Department of Wildlife, voted unanimously to summarize the hunters' concerns in a letter to Amodei.

Read the whole story

Grassroots effort to deal with affordable housing

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 Terra Breeden

Most of the single-family homes in South Lake Tahoe sit empty. They are second homes, used by the owners only a handful of times a year, or as vacation rentals.

Affordable housing options have become limited in South Lake

Tahoe and around the lake. There simply are not enough long-term rental homes or affordable subdivisions to house the local population. Many residents are forced to pay an inflated monthly rent in order to secure a decent living situation, stay in hotel rooms for extended periods of time, or move to less expensive areas like Minden and Gardnerville.



"In my mind, there is no difference between workforce housing and affordable housing."
--**Sue Novasel**, *El Dorado County supervisor*

Because of the housing crisis, South Lake Tahoe is losing many of its longstanding current residents and potential newcomers. This creates a community where actual residents are scarce and vacationers are plentiful.

"Seventy-five percent of our residents are in a low income bracket," El Dorado County Supervisor Sue Novasel said a meeting Feb. 10. "There are 1,800 employees who come here for the winter and we can't get them to stay in Tahoe. In my mind, there is no difference between workforce housing and affordable housing. So now we are asking, 'what are people's needs' and looking at the economic side of it."

Progress for Tahoe hosted a community meeting at Mountain Lab on Friday to discuss the South Lake Tahoe housing crisis. Progress for Tahoe, a grassroots movement founded last year, has declared the lack of affordable housing to be one of the most pressing issues facing South Lake Tahoe residents. The

meeting was attended by about 20 community members from El Dorado County officials to concerned residents.



“As a local, I wanted to be at this meeting and let the community know about their options,” founder of the Tahomes Facebook page and South Lake Tahoe resident Kelsey Adams said. “A lot of people are into affordable housing, but I have to turn down about 30 people who are looking for homes each day.”

At the meeting, attendees broke into small groups and brainstormed solutions to the housing crisis. They discussed a variety of proposed ideas, from improving the balance of vacation home rentals and long-term rentals in South Lake Tahoe to reviving the Silent Second Mortgage program. Any idea that might create more affordable housing in the community was considered.

Crested Butte, Colo., a ski resort town similar to South Lake Tahoe, was introduced as a model of what a small community can do to build affordable housing for its residents. Crested Butte has built multiple affordable housing units (without relying on grants or government money) by issuing a $2,000 to $50,000 fee for building new homes in the area and installing a public transportation tax. The money gathered from these incentives is put into a community pot that is used explicitly to build affordable housing for its long-term residents.

“We want to honor the fact that we live in a beautiful place and it’s sensitive to development, but if we look at communities like these, we see that it can be done,” a woman in the audience said.

Other ideas discussed at the meeting included reviving the

Silent Second Mortgage program, a program that helps people who make less than $60,000 a year purchase homes. Troy Matthews, a member of the Progress for Tahoe steering committee, wants to make an appointment with the city manager to see if the city of South Lake Tahoe can reinstate the program.

Zoning South Lake Tahoe neighborhoods so that ratios of vacation home rentals, second homes, and long-term rentals are equalized was another solution proposed at the Progress for Tahoe community meeting. By zoning neighborhoods, the belief is the city could create a required ratio of long-term rentals for residents and help solve the housing crisis.

Everyone at the meeting agreed that there is a substantial shortage of long-term home rentals for families and short-term rentals for Heavenly Ski Resort employees in South Lake Tahoe. But building one affordable housing unit is not going to solve the housing crisis. And there are several obstacles to building new homes in Lake Tahoe. The cost to even put a shovel in the soil and break ground is humongous due to zoning and government fees.

However, Novasel has put together a task force to look at what can be done to reduce building fees and to collect data on current housing conditions in South Lake Tahoe.

“We want to look at zoning, fees, and the fact that we have limited space to build,” Novasel said. “These are the three major barriers to building more affordable housing.”

California’s roads are in dire shape

By Patrick McGreevy, Los Angeles Times

In more than four decades as a top transportation planner in California, Will Kempton says the state’s roads have never been in as bad condition as they are right now.

Kempton, 69, who is retiring as executive director of the advocacy group Transportation California, said he is “frustrated and disappointed” that California has failed for decades to agree on a plan to pay for a $136-billion backlog of repairs on state highways and local roads. Gov. Jerry Brown and legislative leaders said they will take another crack at reaching a deal during the next two months, which Kempton said is welcome news.

“This is the worst I have seen,” he said of street conditions in California.

Read the whole story

Caltrans: Hwy. 50 to be closed indefinitely



Mudslides continue to make Highway 50 inaccessible through the American River Canyon. Photo/Caltrans

Updated 6:54pm

Highway 50 in the Kyburz area will remain closed indefinitely due to multiple mudslides.

This means the main route between the South Shore and Placerville is off limits at least as a thoroughfare. It is possible to access some points along the route from each direction. For example, Sierra-at-Tahoe is open.

Crews are working on three significant slides in a 12-mile area along the American River Canyon, along with other minor slides.

The first major slide occurred Feb. 10 near Sand Flat. The second slide, which is between Whitehall and Kyburz, came down Saturday afternoon. The third slide is two miles east of Kyburz and has been slipping for the last few days. It came down Saturday afternoon.

Highway 50 was closed for four weeks in January 1997 for what

was called the Mill Creek landslide. That year 350,000 cubic yards of debris were removed at a cost of $4.5 million, according to Caltrans.

There is still no time for when Highway 50 in Nevada will open either.

By Kathryn Reed

Highway 50 linking Tahoe and Placerville will not be opening on Sunday, nor will motorists be able to use Highway 50 in Nevada to get from the South Shore to Carson City any time soon.

Neither Caltrans nor NDOT have an estimate when the highways will open. Both transportation departments said it is too dangerous to have people driving through the area. And in California, it's just impossible to do so because of all the debris crossing all lanes.

"It is constantly moving with water moving through the mountains," Deanna Shoopman with Caltrans told *Lake Tahoe News.* It is literally a fluid situation.

Highway crews had hoped to open the roadway this evening, but that is not happening because is it not safe. What is being called a tall slide, as opposed to wide, fell near Whitehall. This is in addition to the major slide that fell Friday and shutdown this main artery between the South Shore and points west.

Shoopman said the hill an engineer was standing on Saturday to observe the situation is gone today.

"It's crazy how many waterfalls there are; there are waterfall I've never seen," one Meyers resident who drove through 50 to Sonoma County on Friday said. She will be able to get back using Highway 88 via Kirkwood, though there could be delays with avalanche control in the Carson Spur area.

Interstate 80 westbound from state line to Truckee is down to one lane because of a mudslide. It is estimated to open Feb. 13 at 10am.

Highway 395 is open in both directions.

Boulders in the road and an unstable hillside have shut down the Nevada part of Highway 50 at Logan Creek since Feb. 8.

“It all depends on Mother Nature, if it dries out,” Meg Ragonese with the Nevada Department of Transportation told *Lake Tahoe News* in regards to opening that stretch of road. For now the hillside is too soaked to be able to stabilize it.

In all of the slides in the region there has one been one vehicle reported to be damaged. That was near Pollock Pines and Ice House Road where the initial large slide was on 50. The Jeep had been pinned against a tree, which prevented it from rolling into the American River. The occupants were able to get out safely and without injury.

The weather forecast is for it to be dry in the greater Lake Tahoe-Truckee area until Wednesday night, when rain is expected to start falling – again.

Trying to understand political divide in U.S.

By Linda Fine Conaboy

Is American politics becoming clannish? Cliquish? Segregated? Disunited? Or perhaps we’re headed backward and the definitive word would be tribal.

The question then is, did the 2016 election confirm the fact that we're segregating ourselves into tribes? Resoundingly, yes, said Christopher Hare in hard hitting community presentation at Sierra Nevada College last week. He has bachelor's, master's and doctorate degrees in political science.



Christopher Hare

"Partisans increasingly dislike and distrust each other," Hare said. "They filter out opposing viewpoints and process objective facts through a distinctly partisan lens."

When *Lake Tahoe News* asked him his definition of tribal, Hare, an assistant professor of political science at UC Davis, called it "tribal mentality, or an us versus them way of thinking. That is, a strong, almost unquestioning attachment to members of your own 'tribe' or party and a strong aversion to and a distrust of the opposing tribe, or opposite party."

A quick Internet search into tribal mentality described it as bands of those who share morals, beliefs and the survival of a group. Generally, tribes are closed to outside interference and they move as a group. Today, the Middle East is an example of tribal mentality.

And closer to home, think about American history and the tightly-knit bands of American Indians, tribes, if you will, fiercely defending their ideals and their way of life against

all comers.

“Even though some evidence suggests that Americans haven’t necessarily become more ideologically extreme, it is abundantly clear that different kinds of conflicts based on policy attitudes, religious beliefs, core values, race and ethnicity, gender, region (urban vs. rural, etc.) are being absorbed into the partisan divide between Democrats and Republicans,” Hare said.

Hare said this is consequential because it means there is even less common ground between the parties, brought clearly into focus during the last election. He added the politicization of already deep religious and value divides serves to further splinter American society.

“Political differences are now organized in terms of fundamental value conflicts, with political compromise interpreted as moral surrender,” he said.

Thinking about the definition of moral—a person’s standard of behavior or beliefs concerning what is right or prudent—so says Miriam Webster. And surrender, which means giving up, resignation or submission, it’s easy to see that within the current political climate, no politician or voter for that matter, is about to give up his or her beliefs, to morally surrender those beliefs, which are considered to be right or prudent.

The result? There is little consensus about what the big issues are. “Few Republicans say environmental protection is a pressing national concern, and few Democrats say the same about the national debt,” Hare said. “The implications for policy making are that parties have ever less incentive to work together, especially on issues that require trade-offs and compromise, but are only viewed as important to one party.”

It’s also important to note how polarization is intertwined

with other big forces in American society, Hare said. Forces such as relatively stagnant economic growth, income inequality, the concentration of family breakdown among lower-income Americans and an aging population.

When asked what kind of political system now needs to be in place to goose stagnant economic growth, Hare had this to say: "This is the $64,000 question. One perspective is that stagnant GDP growth (gross domestic product) is inevitable in advanced, industrialized nations.

"But the U.S. has some real advantages that may allow us to buck the trend. For instance, we have the best university system in the world, bar none, and a tremendous spirit of entrepreneurialism. Another perspective is that a lot of these problems, such as family breakdown, are simply cultural and don't have political solutions."

Although Hare did not make any prognostications as to the future state of political affairs in the U.S., he did offer one more potential reason for the great divide, that being the influence of talk radio and social media.

He mentioned the "echo chamber." For those not familiar with the term, the echo chamber is analogous to an acoustic echo chamber, where sounds reverberate in a hollow space. In other words, one talking head will make a claim, which many like-minded people then repeat, overhear and repeat again, until most people assume that some extreme variation of the story is true.

"Fragmented media and the echo chamber certainly aren't helping polarization," Hare said. "One other aspect of this is that our social networks are becoming more like-minded, so we're more likely to surround ourselves with people of similar partisan, ideological persuasions.

"This is a natural byproduct of geographic sorting—Democrats are clustered in urban areas; Republicans in rural areas. The

current political system has proved itself to be incapable of addressing these economic and societal stresses," he said.

Californians keep their lawmakers' phones ringing

By Sarah D. Wire, Los Angeles Times

The phone in Rep. Tom McClintock's office rang seven times in 10 minutes Tuesday afternoon.

"This is Congressman McClintock's office, how may I help you?" the receptionist said again and again, scribbling down each caller's name, address and comment. "This call means a lot to us. I'll express that to the congressman."

Members of Congress have been inundated with phone calls and emails in the scant weeks since President Trump took office, with staff answering two to three times as many calls and emails as normal.

Read the whole story

Tahoe-Truckee trying to understand new pot laws

By Sage Sauerbrey and Alexandra Spychalsky, Moonshine Ink

The phrase of the year is “gray area” regarding the Golden and Silver states’ new green issues. Confused? So is everyone else. When California – the first U.S. state to outlaw marijuana, as well as the first state to approve its medicinal use – legalized recreational cannabis alongside Nevada last November, it commenced an unprecedented effort to define what that will mean on a legal, regulatory, and even cultural level.

Legally, California and Nevada share a few hard and fast laws as of Jan. 1, 2017. Both allow the recreational possession and use of up to one ounce of unconcentrated cannabis or 8 grams of concentrated cannabis for users 21 and older, as well as the cultivation of up to six plants, but the sale of recreational cannabis is still prohibited. This paradox will exist until the relevant regulatory agencies begin issuing licenses on the anticipated date of Jan. 1, 2018.

According to Alison Bermant, a lawyer who specializes in marijuana law in the Truckee-Tahoe area, there are “thousands of people growing marijuana in this community.” In spite of these numbers, Bermant says that she hasn’t had a cultivation case come across her desk in more than five years; all of her marijuana related clients are non-locals who were nabbed by one particular CHP agent for transporting illegal amounts of marijuana with the intent to sell. Bermant calls Interstate 80 one of the largest drug trafficking highways in the country, and Truckee is a convenient stopover town on the route to non-legalized states. Bermant says that many of the growers in this community are operating lawfully under Proposition 215, which permitted medicinal marijuana in California in 1996, but their legal protection has an expiration date.

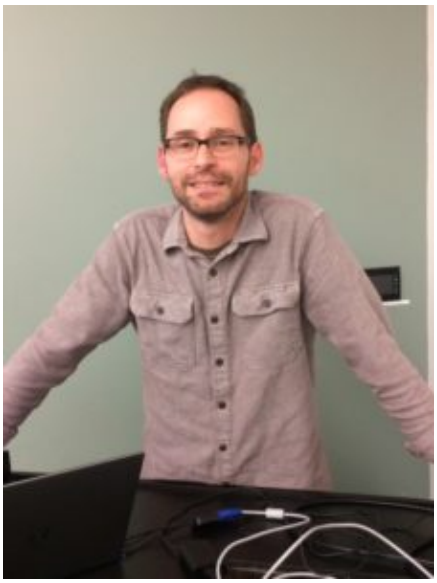
Read the whole story

Sierra lakes hold answers to climate change

By Carole Jablon-Bernardi

INCLINE VILLAGE – The Sierra Nevada snow drifts are at a drought busting 173 percent of average, with the most snow recorded since 1995, so said California water managers as of Feb. 2. That was before another 2 feet of snow fell overnight Thursday on the North Shore.

On a snowy Feb. 9 evening it was appropriate the topic at Tahoe Environmental Research Center on the campus of Sierra Nevada College was climate change.



Steve Sadro talks climate change on Feb. 9. Photo/Carole Jablon-Bernardi

Steve Sadro, who is with Department of Environmental Science

and Policy at UC Davis, titled his lecture “Climate Change and Lake Temperature in the Sierra Nevada.”

Water temperature regulates a broad range of fundamental ecosystem processes in lakes. While climate can be an important factor controlling lake temperatures, in many lakes, water temperatures are responding differently than air temperatures. Through multiple decades of climate and water temperature data from a high-elevation catchment in the Southern Sierra Nevada scientists now hope to be able to illustrate the magnitude of warming taking place and demonstrate the role of winter snowpack in regulating those lake temperatures.

Sadro’s study is Emerald Lake, a glacial cirque lake located in the Tokopah Valley of Sequoia National Park. The Tokopah Valley forms the headwaters of the Marble Fork of the Kaweah River in the Southern Sierra Nevada. The lake, situated at 8,200 feet, runs 30 feet deep and 400 yards across. It is one of approximately 14,000 lakes in the Sierra.

This area has been the focus of sustained limnological and watershed research since 1983. Ultimately, the knowledge gained through Sadro’s research could help with understanding how these thousands of lakes and watersheds are responding to global change.

Lakes have long been studied by environmental scientists and the insights from their investigations have led to advances in the natural sciences. Mountain lakes, in particular, are recognized as excellent indicators of regional environment conditions and are increasingly being used by regulatory agencies.

What Sadro pointed out is the importance of mountain snowpack to freshwater supplies mandates that attention be paid to the bio-geo-chemistry, hydrology and ecology of these systems.

“In the next 50 years, we have an opportunity to alter the

course of climate change on a global scale. Despite the political turmoil and/or setbacks, I feel we can all take heart," Sadro said. "Irregular funding might create gaps, but the impact to humanity remains."

Mark Twain was once said, "Climate is what we expect, weather is what we get." One could say that Sadro's exact words in comparison reflect the same observation: "Climate reflects long-term trends and weather is the noise."

Climate trends include factors such as air temperature, sea levels, snow cover, solar input, CO2 and glacial mass. To be even more specific, Sadro broke it down to an acute focus on Sierra lakes:

· Greenhouse gas emissions

· Carbon and nutrient cycling

· Lake productivity

· Community ecology

· Bioenergetics

· Water equality

· Physical dynamics.

He went a step further to break it down to three primary areas of cause and effect:

· Warming air temperatures: high elevation in certain Sierra sites are warming at well above regional rates.

· Drought: the frequency and severity of droughts have increased in recent decades (and in lake research drought is about "supply and demand"; evaporative drought).

· Lake temperature governed by snow, water, equivalent: a large snowpack buffers lakes from warming.

Snow-water-equivalent is what's commonly known as snowpack measurement. It is the amount of water contained within the snowpack. It can be thought of as the depth of water that would result if the entire snowpack melted instantaneously. For example, a swimming pool that is filled with 36 inches of powdery snow at 10 percent water density. Melt all the snow and there would be 3.6 inches of water in the pool.

Although Sadro's research and analysis was strictly based on Emerald Lake, the majority of locals who attended the lecture were obviously also interested in the body of water just down the road – Lake Tahoe.

In the **2015 "State of the Lake"** document TERC Director Geoff Schladow warned about Tahoe's ever increasing average temperature. It is getting warmer at a faster rate than the historical average.

Even more disturbing to scientists is how all this warming has affected lakes' abilities to mix its own waters, a natural process that Sadro described as a predictor of "anoxia", which is the absence of oxygen supplied to an organ or tissue. This can deprive fish and other life forms from thriving in their normal habitat.

Nev. fast tracks regulating recreational marijuana

By Ben Botkin, Las Vegas Review-Journal

CARSON CITY – State officials plan to move quickly with a task force for regulating recreational marijuana, the Nevada Senate Judiciary Committee heard Wednesday.

The first steps will be putting temporary regulations in place by July to allow medical marijuana establishments to sell recreational marijuana. By the end of the year, permanent regulations are to be in place.

In the world of state government, that is a fast-tracked process for completing regulations. It can take a year or so for that to happen.

Read the whole story

Nevada tourism gurus revamping ad campaign

By Richard N. Velotta, Las Vegas Review-Journal

What's the best way to lure prospective adventure-seekers to Nevada?

Is it an image of a park ranger and the mantra "when other states restrict, we allow"?

Or is it a campaign featuring a man with a beard, images of all-terrain vehicles and a message of "we go about things our own way"?

Those were the choices that were presented Wednesday to the marketing committee of the Nevada Commission on Tourism, which got its first glimpse of spring and summer ad concepts.

Read the whole story