Best start in 30 years to NorCal wet season

By Dale Kasler and Ryan Sabalow, Sacramento Bee

It’s only a beginning. But it’s a strong beginning, and it offers at least a rain gauge’s worth of hope to a state enduring its fifth year of drought.

The National Weather Service said Monday that the rainy season in the northern Sierra Nevada is off to its wettest start in 30 years. Mountain conditions are critically important to monitoring the drought because a major share of the state’s water supply is stored for months as snow.

Citing state data from a string of eight gauges scattered around the northern Sierra, the service said precipitation has come in at about twice the average for this time of year, making for the wettest kickoff to the water year in 30 years. The water year, as defined by climatologists and others, begins Oct. 1.

Read the whole story

Christmas is in the air at El Dorado tree farms

By Kathryn Reed

CAMINO – One aroma above all says Christmas – the scent of a

freshly cut evergreen.

It’s everywhere in the foothills of El Dorado County this time of year.

It didn’t matter that the temperature was dropping and snow was beginning to fall, it just added to the magic of the countless families eager to get their tree on Thanksgiving weekend.

Friends Sandy Baker and Kellie Kijanka used to live next door to each other. Their tradition was to get their trees together at Indian Rock Tree Farm in Camino each year. Now they live 120 miles apart – one in Davis, one in Foresthill – but they still meet at the tree farm. They’ve been doing so for 20 years.



One tree isn’t always enough. Photo/Kathryn Reed

That’s one of the special things about Indian Rock, the people who return each year.

Larry and Geri Hyder bought the 33 acres – of which 15 acres

are the tree farm – in 1961. They started selling trees in 1976. They have about 15 varieties.

“What we have here is magical. A lot of people all they are able to have is a flat lot. You are able to walk up the hill here. We call it the Sherwood Forest,” Geri Hyder said in reference to Robin Hood. “The main thing is we want to give people service.”



Larry and Geri Hyder have been in the tree farm business for 40 years. Photo/Kathryn Reed

Multiple generations work at the tree lot – from parking, to sales, to helping cut trees, to selling hot cocoa.

Customers are likely family, too. They seek out the Hyders to say hi, shake hands and give a hug.

A few years ago Indian Rock earned the state award for best tree farm.

On Saturday the lot was bustling with people. This was true of most of the tree farms in the area. Thanksgiving is their busiest weekend, with the next few weeks when they make all of their money for the year.



Binding a large tree for transport takes some effort. Photo/Kathryn Reed

It’s a different kind of frenzy at Rapetti Farms. This is the second year they have sold trees via a membership formula. This means the general public cannot buy from them.

Owner Randall Rapetti told *Lake Tahoe News* they went this route to avoid the parking hassle, arguments, fights and people leaving without paying.

“We have formed almost like a membership base. They get

postcards in the mail and they don’t have to compete for trees,” Rapetti said.

They have mostly Nordmann fir, with some noble fir. The whole farm will eventually be Nordmann, Rapetti said. They come from the Republic of Georgia.



Christmas trees dot a large swath of the landscape in El Dorado County. Photo/Kathryn Reed

At the Hillside Tree Farm customers have 10 varietals to choose from, with Swift silver being the best seller.

“It’s a real family event. We may sell three or four trees at a time,” Peg Perron at Hillside told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Customers come from all over – the Bay Area, Reno, Redding – even people from Los Angeles headed south with an El Dorado County tree on board.

“I don’t think the economy has ever affected us,” Phyllis McGee told *Lake Tahoe News*. With her husband, Michael, they have been running the McGee Tree Farm in Placerville for 32 years. “Sometimes people like to do the simple things.”

People will sacrifice other things to ensure they have a Christmas tree.

And with trees from the northwest – where many stores get their trees – being more expensive this year, cutting a tree locally might be a lot more economical. Many of these farms will also cut the tree you select, so you don’t need to be experienced with a saw.

Water a factor in Nevada’s economic diversification

By Nicole Raz, Las Vegas Review-Journal

A company’s potential water use, in some cases, is the deciding factor in whether Nevada will provide tax incentives.

“We have discouraged a couple of companies (considering relocating for tax abatements) that we felt were water users of such significance, particularly in comparison to the jobs and quality of jobs,” said Steve Hill, director of the governor’s office of economic development.

As state officials work to attract tech and advanced manufacturing companies, they have to reconcile economic development with water conservation. Water is a limited resource in Nevada, and state officials weigh a potential company’s impact on the state’s water supply against potential

job creation and other economic benefits.

Nevada gets the majority of its water supply from the Colorado River basin. The U.S. Bureau of Reclamation allocates 300,000 acre-feet of water per year from the basin to Nevada. Hill said that because of credits for recycling water, Nevada functionally ends up with an annual amount of 475,000 acre-feet.

Read the whole story

Top court to review curbs on Calif. pension spiking

By Bob Egelko, San Francisco Chronicle

The California Supreme Court jumped into a high-stakes dispute over public employee pensions last week, agreeing to decide whether laws aimed at limiting preretirement actions to inflate future benefits can be applied to millions of government workers.

A state appeals court in San Francisco ruled in a Marin County case in August that the new laws could be applied to current employees – a potentially major setback for the workers and their unions, and a victory for local governments facing mounting deficits in their pension plans. But the state's high court voted unanimously to put that ruling on hold while it reviews the issue for a future statewide resolution.

A final decision is at least a year away.

Read the whole story

National park status always eluded Lake Tahoe



Lake Tahoe was considered for national park status multiple times. Photo/Kathryn Reed

By Kathryn Reed

One of the perks of being director of the National Park Service is being able to check in on the land you manage. So it should be no surprise Stephen Mather was in Lake Tahoe on Friday giving a talk about his agency.

But Lake Tahoe isn't a national park and Mather died in 1930.

Steve Hale – aka Mather – regaled hikers at Van Sickle Bi-State Park about the multiple unsuccessful quests to make this area part of the park system. Mather was the first director of the park service after it was established in 1916.



Steve Hale as Stephen Mather, the first director of the National Park Service. Photo/Kathryn Reed

On a visit to the area in 1919 Mather came across hundreds of people inside and outside a Fallen Leaf Lake lodge listening to a talk about birds. He was taken aback that people would be so enthralled by such a thing.

Watching the spectacle gave him an idea. That one incident is what led to what is now the ranger talks at national parks in the United States.

Mather wanted to start by introducing the American public to the animals in the parks, while he also realized there could be so many more educational talks.

It was in 1920 that Yosemite National Park launched the ranger programs.



The waterfall at Van Sickle Bi-state Park on Nov. 25. Photo/Kathryn Reed

This hike on Nov. 25 was part of the Tahoe Rim Trail Association's quest to get people outdoors instead of shopping on Black Friday. Eighteen people partook in the jaunt through the South Shore park to the new bridge at the waterfall.

Hale (as Mather) stopped along the route a few times to transport people back to the last century. When he wasn't giving a history lesson it was one of the four TRT guides – usually trail leader Jim Mrazek – talking about the state park the group was hiking in.

Development at Lake Tahoe is primarily what kept derailing the various attempts to make it a national park. The shoreline was deteriorating in the late 1800s as loggers denuded the forest in order to build silver mines in Virginia City.

The California Assembly wanted the feds to take over Lake Tahoe in 1883, but that proposal failed.

In 1899 the basin was on the congressional radar. According to Hale/Mather, the deal unraveled after an article came out in the *San Francisco Chronicle* on Feb. 27, 1900, detailing how the land swap would benefit the Bliss family and the railroad interests more than the public.



Jim Mrazek, TRT guide, talks about the bridge that was built this year. Photo/Kathryn Reed

William Stewart, a senator from Nevada was a leader of this particular charge to make Tahoe a national park. The newspaper article, though, exposed how Stewart wanted to build a 12-foot-high dam in Tahoe City to benefit agriculture interests in his state.

The park idea for Tahoe died.

Five years later the area became a national forest.

But the idea of Tahoe as a national park flourished one more time – this time in 1913, the same year Hetch Hetchy was approved. To this day damming this pristine area to provide water for San Francisco still rankles many people.

Agricultural and commercial interests eventually outweighed all conservation efforts to make Lake Tahoe a national park.

Struggles of starting kindergarten with few skills

By Teresa Watanabe, Los Angeles Times

Giuliana Tapia was way behind her classmates.

She was just 5 years old, starting kindergarten at Telesis Academy of Science and Math in West Covina.

At a kindergarten screening two months before her first day, she happily chattered about her dog Toodles, her favorite color pink, her Santa Claus pajamas, her nickname Gigi, her outings with dad to see SpongeBob SquarePants movies.

But many of her 21 classmates already knew most of the alphabet, colors and shapes. Two of them could even read all 100 words – at, the, there, like – that kindergartners are expected to know by the end of the year.

About half had been to preschool; Giuliana had not.

“I don’t know,” she said when she was asked to identify letters on a sheet of paper.

Read the whole story

Nev.’s $860,000 execution chamber gathering dust



Nevada’s execution chamber at Ely State Prison. Photo/Nevada Department of Corrections

By Sean Whaley, Las Vegas Review-Journal

CARSON CITY — Nevada’s new execution chamber at Ely State Prison is finished, but there is no expectation it will be used anytime soon.

The state can no longer obtain the drugs it needs to proceed with an execution.

Nearly $860,000 was approved for the new chamber by the 2015 Legislature to replace the death chamber at the now closed Nevada State Prison in Carson City.

Read the whole story

Calendar celebrates strong mountain women



Female patrollers at Squaw Valley are featured in a 2017 calendar. Photo/Keoki Flagg

By Benjamin Spillman, Reno Gazette-Journal

The ski and snowboard industry has had more than its fair share of face plants when it comes to depicting women.

Whether it is ads with women as worse skiers than men or apparel and gear makers who push inferior products on female customers just about anyone with open eyes and a functioning brain can come up with their own example.

The good news is that in recent years there are signs the

pushback against sexist depictions of women in the mountains is gaining steam.

And if a newly released calendar featuring female ski patrollers is any indication the momentum will continue in 2017.

Read the whole story

Former SLT Councilman Crawford dies at age 82



Bill Crawford touched many lives in the nearly 50 years he lived in South Lake Tahoe.

By Susan Wood

Bill Crawford, who made a name for himself on the South Lake Tahoe City Council, died Friday. He was 82.

Mr. Crawford was more than a two-term council member. He loved nature, was an avid athlete and a teacher who touched many lives.

The news of his Nov. 25 death prompted several family members, friends and acquaintances to say much about him.

“Bill Crawford exemplifies ‘service for others’ as all of his passionate advocacy was done in the truest of purpose to serve others, to serve his community. It mattered not whether he agreed with a position or opposed a position, in either case he spoke with a steadfast commitment for the betterment of the community,” City Manager Nancy Kerry told *Lake Tahoe News.*

Some may say it was Mr. Crawford who had the last word, leaving an undaunted spirit blowing in Tahoe winds of doing what he felt was right and speaking up for the underserved – even if it was unpopular to others.

“My dad did not come by his convictions because it was easy to arrive at. It came from a passion in many things. When he went into city politics before joining the City Council, he had a love of where he lived,” his daughter Marlowe Crawford told *Lake Tahoe News.*

Mr. Crawford served on the South Lake Tahoe City Council from 1998-2002 and 2006-10. In many respects, those years came about in some critical times – redevelopment, vacation home rental ordinances and the mounting issues of unfunded liabilities to cover salaries. The latter represented an under-the-radar issue seldom mentioned but also avoided based on the magnitude of the impact on employee salaries.

“I served on the City Council with Bill from 1998-2002. This

was an exciting time for the city as we began to embark and eventually successfully complete the Heavenly-Gondola Redevelopment Project," Brooke Laine told *Lake Tahoe News.* "Although Bill was a staunch opponent of redevelopment, his perspectives and opinions were sometimes significant to helping the council form a well-rounded approach. Bill often left poems at my council chair relative to topics we would eventually take on. Whether I agreed with him or not, we always respected each other, greeted each other warmly, and always shared a good chuckle about our years on the council. No doubt: he cared."

His warning to the city about using eminent domain at the expense of the little guy embedded his reputation as one who believed the city should stand up for all citizens – not just for those with power and money.

"In a way, my dad felt the City Council had given up on the city – that there was going to be some magic bullet, but the city was going to pay a high price for it," his daughter said. "He thought there needed to be a voice that was not seen as being in the pocket of special interests."

Marlowe Crawford understood how her father was misunderstood.

"In some ways, it was infuriating to engage with him in debate. But I could talk to him and we'd have these discussions about many things," she said.

During kinder, gentler times, he enjoyed spending time with his wife of 62½ years, Jonnie. He also liked sharing what Marlowe and her two brothers, Paul and David, were up to.

"People think they know him because of how he was outspoken in so many things, but he was also a private man," his daughter said, adding how his family meant the world to him.

On any given day, Mr. Crawford liked to sit quietly in his living room and look out the big picture window onto his

beautiful front yard near the Tahoe Keys.

He pondered many things, including the role of literature and history in today's modern-day world.

He often would write letters to media publications and quote famous excerpts, while weaving in the issues of Lake Tahoe's times. He'd often send the letters to his daughter to fill her in on the latest happenings around town as if to show her there were areas needing improvement. Marlowe grew up on the South Shore, but now lives in Oakland.

At times, he tapped into her knowledge working at the law library to gain insight on a perplexing issue.

"He'd sometimes say to me: 'Look around. The city's not in a good place.' But then I'd say to him: 'But ,dad, it's still one of the most beautiful places'," she reflected.

Mr. Crawford enjoyed being in the beauty. He loved being outdoors on his bike, and on the alpine ski runs and cross country ski trails. Once he saw this reporter on skis and like a good trainer-teacher instructed to bend the knees more.

He even found the time to train for a marathon.

Mr. Crawford coached football at South Tahoe High School for one year, but spent more time sharing the latest techniques in cross country skiing and running. Nonetheless, he was best known in academic circles, having taught history at South Tahoe High, the former South Tahoe Intermediate School and Mount Tallac High School. He taught for 24 years.

"I have been a friend of Bill Crawford for nearly 50 years. He was an excellent teacher, a runner, a poet, and a football and a ski coach at South Tahoe High School," Les Wright told *Lake Tahoe News*. "He was a watchdog for the community and school district. He wasn't afraid to tell the emperor that he really wasn't wearing new clothes. He was very passionate about

teaching and helping his students. His watchdog personality was controversial at times, but I am sure glad he was part of our community and a longtime friend of mine."

There was a time when Mr. Crawford was president of South Tahoe Educators Association.

Mike Patterson, who years ago had that same role, said, "Bill was always a strong advocate for public schools, students, and teachers. Bill always fought for what he felt was right, regardless of any consequences. He helped teach me what it was to be a union member and later what it was like to be union leader."

Mr. Crawford's own education was also notable, having earned a bachelor's and master's in social science from CSU Long Beach.

Wendy David's interactions with Mr. Crawford were mostly when he came to either a Lake Tahoe Unified School District or City Council meeting. She has been the leader of both boards.

"Bill Crawford always followed his conscience and spoke his opinion and belief. In doing so he often became our collective conscience," David told *Lake Tahoe News*. "His poetry questioned the accepted point of view. He often quoted literary figures as a reminder that we are all a part of history in making decisions for the future."

The Crawfords moved to South Lake Tahoe in 1967.

Mr. Crawford succumbed to a brief illness before his body gave out. He suffered from a stroke two years ago.

No services are planned, and no donations will be requested. Marlowe did ask well-meaning residents to respect her mother's privacy as she grieves – knowing how difficult it is to hold back gestures in honor of a man committed to causes and caring about Tahoe's future.

Kathryn Reed contributed to this story.

Fresh-faced Nev. legislators schooled on everything

By Sandra Chereb, Las Vegas Review-Journal

CARSON CITY — Before the nitty-gritty of lawmaking begins in February, newbie Nevada legislators fresh off the campaign trail need to know the basics.

Orientation began last week for 17 freshman Assembly and Senate members who've never served in the Legislature. It was a three-day crash course on everything from learning where the restrooms are and how to use the Legislature's computer system to tips on dealing with constituents, the press, lobbyists — and one another.

A bill passed by the 2011 Legislature made the crash course mandatory for all new lawmakers. The mandate came as a result of term limits imposed by voters in 1996 that restricted legislators to 12 years of service in both the Assembly and the Senate.

Read the whole story