Many in law enforcement against legalizing pot

By Brooke Edwards Staffs, Orange County Register

A growing number of California law enforcement organizations and leaders are voicing objections to a state ballot measure that would legalize recreational marijuana, saying it would make the state less safe.

San Bernardino County District Attorney Mike Ramos said the initiative to legalize marijuana "will do nothing to curb black-market activity in California." He is one of several police officials who is actively opposing the measure, a group that includes the Riverside Sheriffs' Association, the Association for Los Angeles Deputy Sheriffs and the California Police Chiefs Association.

Law enforcement remains one of the most influential voices when it comes to debating issues such as marijuana legalization, according to Dan Schnur, director of the Jesse M. Unruh Institute of Politics at USC. And its credibility doesn't seem to have declined, he said, despite recent controversies surrounding the relationship of police and community.

But marijuana legalization advocates so far have collected 40 times more campaign cash than opponents.

Read the whole story

National park jewels draw record crowds



With this being the centennial celebration of the National Park Service, visitors are flocking to popular parks like Yosemite. Photo Copyright 2016 Carolyn E. Wright

By Brad Branan, Sacramento Bee

Visitors light up as they step off tour buses at Tunnel View and see Yosemite Valley for the first time. Half Dome and El Capitan, those towering walls of granite, demand attention. From miles away, visitors can watch water pour from Upper and Lower Yosemite Falls and Bridalveil Fall. The Merced River and the meadows provide a peaceful retreat.

“It’s a park that captures the wonder of the world, that changes you by being there,” President Obama said during a visit to Yosemite in June. “There’s something sacred about

this place.”

As the National Park Service celebrates its 100th birthday Aug. 25, visitors are about to break attendance records at Yosemite and other parks for the second year in a row. More than 4 million people visited Yosemite last year, the highest total ever, and the number of visitors through June of this year eclipsed last year’s total for the same period. Likewise, more than 307 million people visited Park Service properties last year, and this year’s figures suggest another record in the making.

Read the whole story

Twin Lakes – a journey along a water-filled trail



A waterfall descends from the far side of Twin Lakes.

Photo/Kathryn Reed

By Kathryn Reed

We almost didn’t make it to the lake. There were so many pretty places along the stream that called out it was hard not to stop and just take it all in.

It was one of those hikes where the journey truly surpassed the destination. And the destination was stunning, especially with the multi-legged waterfall in the distance cascading down the granite wall.

While there were some wildflowers along the route, this excursion is more about the water.

The end point was Twin Lakes in Desolation Wilderness.

Round-trip is it six miles, though we did a little loop at the end that took us closer to Wrights Lake to make it more like a seven-mile day.

Starting out the terrain is lush. The tree canopy provides a shady route. This is where the bulk of the flowers are.



Wildflowers sprout from the granite. Photo/Kathryn Reed

The climb is gradual, though there are some granite steps that

might make those with knee issues want poles.

Dirt gives way to granite. In some ways this is reminiscent of hiking to Horsetail Falls. But there isn't so much rock that AJ needs her booties.

What's better about this trail compared to Horsetail is that people have outlined with rocks where to go or built cairns. The markers are definitely needed at various locations.



An abundance of water is throughout this trail. Photo/Kathryn Reed

While Twin Lakes looks inviting, the temperature is icy. The wind makes it necessary to put the layer back on that was removed on the way up.

Coming down, Wrights Lake, essentially the starting point, looks so tiny and far away. With starting at about 7,000 feet

and going up nearly 1,300 feet, the expanse below is vast.



Pyramid Peak is a constant landmark during the hike. Photo/Kathryn Reed

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Getting there:

From the Y in South Lake Tahoe, take Highway 50 west for 20.7 miles to Wrights Lake Road. Turn right. Follow signs for Twin and Grouse lakes. After 8.8 miles there is a big parking lot. The trailhead begins just below the parking lot.

Notes:

· There will be a free wildflower and natural history hike on Aug. 13 at 10am starting at the Twin Lakes trailhead. It will last about an hour.

· This is rated a moderate hike.

Specialized meteorologists on front lines of fires



The set-up for an IMET who is keeping tabs on the weather at a fire incident. Photo/NOAA

By NOAA

When you think of the role NOAA's National Weather Service plays in hazardous weather, you may think of the forecasts they produce or the watches and warnings they issue leading up to a storm. What you may not realize is that the NWS has eyes on the sky before, during and after some of the country's most dangerous weather.

On average each year, wildfires kill 30 people, destroy 2,800 homes and burn more than 7 million acres. The annual average cost for damages and suppression of wildland fire is more than $2 billion. Smoke from wildfires also causes numerous health issues. Breathing in smoke produced by wildfire can be extremely hazardous, particularly for children and older adults.

Meteorologists from NWS work on the front lines to support

agencies who prevent and fight wildfires, collaborating closely with state and local fire control agencies, as well as the U.S. Forest Service and other federal agencies.

Wildfires are not weather. However, weather conditions influence how easily a fire may start, how quickly it spreads and where the fire (and smoke) will move. Lightning strikes in dry areas are a common cause of these fires.

Incident meteorologists (IMETs) help keep the fire crews safe by enabling responders to plan operations taking into account one of the most variable aspects of the incident – the weather. They are NWS forecasters who have been specially trained and certified to provide weather support at a fire location.

IMETs keep firefighters safe by interpreting weather information, assessing its effect on the fire and communicating it to fire crews. Once on-site, IMETs become key members of the incident command teams and provide continuous meteorological support for the duration of the incident.

IMETs are located in numerous NWS offices across the country. Once a large wildfire has started, an IMET is contacted and given orders to travel to the site of the fire as quickly as possible. Ken Simosko, an IMET with the NWS Bismarck Weather Forecast Office, has worked five fire incidents. “You have to be ready at a moment’s notice. I have my bag ready to go so that when I get the call, I can spend my time getting spun up on the history of the fire, its current and future situation. Usually an IMET is on scene within 24 hours to 48 hours of the initial call. This depends on the mode of travel [car or plane] and how far the IMET is from the wildland fire.”

At the fire site, the IMETs check in at the incident command center. This is usually located relatively near the active wildfire and is either part of a temporary tent or trailer camp that is set up for those who are working the event.

“Depending on the size of the fire there can be hundreds of folks involved. Some people bring tents to sleep in. I usually bring a blow-up mattress and sleep in the back of my truck. The command center supplies food and brings in shower and bathroom facilities on a flatbed for all of us who are working the event,” says Simosko.

Each IMET deployment lasts about two weeks, or until the wildfire is considered contained. If a fire lasts more than two weeks, another IMET will be sent to relieve the one who has just completed their two weeks on-site. There is very little “down time” when working a wildfire.

Jason Clapp, an IMET with the Sacramento WFO who has worked 18 fire incidents, notes that, “Morning comes early. You have to have time to check the weather situation and verify the forecast is still on track before the morning briefing.”

The day officially starts with this briefing for the full camp at 6am. From that point until lunch time an IMET’s time is filled with keeping an eye on the forecast and briefing individual groups who are handling different aspects of the fire.

“Sometimes I’ll be briefing the pilots who are fighting the fire by air so after the main briefing I’ll take a short ride to the airfield. Then I might come back and be asked to brief a state or county official who is going to be doing media interviews to get the latest information out to the public. You never know who you’re going to need to brief so you have to be flexible,” says Simosko.

IMETs often visit different locations where the wildfire is burning with a fire behavioral analyst. The fire area may have different types of ground cover, such as dry grasses, scrub brush, dense trees, or barren soil. If there is a terrain change, such as from flat field to rocky hillside, this can also impact the weather. To help understand these localized

conditions, remote automated weather stations are placed around the fire and feed ground observations to the IMET to help them make their forecasts. To get a better idea of the weather conditions above ground level, which is especially important when monitoring for thunderstorms, weather balloons are launched on-site at the wildfire.

As the day goes on, an IMET's duties shift a bit more heavily toward forecasting, especially if there is a chance of thunderstorms. In the areas where large wildfires tend to occur, thunderstorms don't necessarily bring much rain, but they do bring plenty of lightning.

"If thunderstorms are in the forecast, you're tied to your workstation, watching the storms on radar once they have started, and updating the forecast as needed," says Clapp.

The safety of the crews working the fire is paramount so when lightning is in the area they are pulled back to a safe location. Wind is another dangerous element of thunderstorms. Strong gusts can cause the fire to suddenly shift, which can injure the firefighters or cut off their way back to safety.

Simosko noted that forecasting for a wildfire incident is very different from the general weather forecasts he issues in the office.

"[I'm] focusing on a much smaller area and a shorter time period. Because the forecasts are being used within minutes to hours, I get immediate feedback on how I did," says Simosko.

Simosko and Clapp appreciate the immediate feedback. It challenges them to continually strive to make the best forecast possible.

Big marijuana not calling the shots in Nevada

By Ric Anderson, Las Vegas Sun

As Nevada voters prepare to vote this fall on whether to decriminalize recreational marijuana use, they're going to hear a sinister-sounding warning that the push for legalization is being fueled by out-of-state money.

Former Assemblyman Pat Hickey, a prominent opponent of legalization, already sounded the alarm in a June 21 post on his blog, Soup to Nuts. He wrote that "the term oligarchy ('a business interest controlled by a small group of people') applies to the mostly out-of-state special interests who are responsible and largely paid for the pot legalization question on this November's ballot."

Sounds foreboding. But voters should be aware that we do know where a great deal of the funding is coming from – longtime Nevadans who have invested in the business.

In fact, when state lawmakers crafted the licensing requirements for operators of marijuana businesses, they took pains not to open the door wide to outside control of the industry.

Read the whole story

Obama, fuels reduction

funding may highlight Lake Tahoe Environmental Summit

Updated: Aug. 8 to reflect President Obama is definitely attending.

By Kathryn Reed

Protecting Lake Tahoe has been on the radar of the federal government for decades – and not just because the feds own 85 percent of the land in the basin. Congress implemented regulations mandating effluent be pumped out of the basin, created the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency, and funded the Lake Tahoe Restoration Act after President Bill Clinton's visit in 1997.

The EIP – environmental improvement program – was established after the inaugural Lake Tahoe Environmental Summit when Clinton and Vice President Al Gore launched the annual event.

With this being the 20th anniversary of the summit and its being Sen. Harry Reid's last one, it is being hailed as a bigger deal than the ones in recent years. Reid, D-Nev., is hosting the summit at Harveys in Stateline on Aug. 31 at 2pm.

New this year is that it costs to attend the event. Tickets are available **online**.

The Killers, the group that performs Nevada's tourism theme song, will be putting on a concert for attendees.

President Obama will be attending. Those close to the event are hoping he'll bring news that the basin has been awarded the $29,499,942 for fuels reduction from the Southern Nevada Public Lands Management Act.

The White House has contacted Lake Tahoe Airport about Air Force One landing there.

Rank	Tab #	Project Name	Requesting Entity	Location	Nomination Request	Funding Recommended	Total Recommendation
Hazardous Fuels Reduction and Wildfire Prevention Nominations Recommended for Funding							
1	7	Nevada Regional Fuels Reduction	North Lake Tahoe Fire Protection District	Incline Village, Nevada	$973,250	$973,250	$973,250
2	4	Complete Remaining Wildland Urban Interface Treatments - Carnelian, Incline, and South Shore Hazardous Fuels Reduction	FS	National Forest System lands in the wildland urban interface in the Lake Tahoe Basin	$17,640,000	$10,358,300	$11,331,550
3	9	Tahoe Network of Fire Adapted Communities	Tahoe Resource Conservation District	Lake Tahoe Basin	$5,826,125	$5,826,125	$17,157,675
4	3	Carson City Westside Hazardous Fuels Reduction	Carson City Fire Department	Carson City, Nevada	$1,999,900	$1,999,900	$19,157,575
5	1	California Lake Tahoe Basin Regional Hazardous Fuels Reduction and Wildfire Prevention	California Tahoe Conservancy	North, west, and south, Lake Tahoe, California	$6,814,500	$6,814,500	$25,972,075
6	2	Carson City Hazardous Fuels Collection	Carson City Fire Department	Carson City, Nevada	$102,389	$102,389	$26,074,464
8	6	Mt. Rose Corridor Hazardous Fuels Reduction Planning	FS	Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest west of Reno and Washoe Valley	$1,640,635	$1,640,635	$27,715,099
9	8	Programmatic Timberland Environmental Impact Report (PTEIR)	Lake Valley Fire Protection District	California side of the Lake Tahoe Basin	$1,784,843	$1,784,843	$29,499,942
Not Recommended for Funding							
7	5	*Lake Tahoe West Collaborative Landscape Restoration (Secondary List Priority # 3)*	FS	Lake Tahoe Basin, California	$7,093,000	$0	$29,499,942
10	10	Truckee Watershed Fuels Reduction Planning	FS	West of Reno on the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest	$1,621,635	$0	$29,499,942
Total					**$45,496,277**		**$29,499,942**

Source: *BLM*

SNPLMA was created in 1998. Land the federal government no longer wants in the Las Vegas Valley is sold, with the proceeds going to public entities. The Lake Tahoe Basin has received more than $300 million of these proceeds for environmental improvement program projects.

The Bureau of Land Management, which handles SNPLMA money, did not return a call asking when a decision will be made about this 16th round of funding. The comment period on allocations ended July 28.

The preliminary recommendation is for eight of the 10 funding requests to be filled. Though the sales are in Nevada, money can be spent in California in the basin. Of the nearly $30 million that would be just for forest fuels reduction, about $2 million is allocated to Carson City and the remainder in the Tahoe area.

Grim beginning to California fire season

By Joseph Serna and Veronica Rocha, Los Angeles Times

As California enters traditional brush-fire season, there is something ominous in the air and on the ground.

Drought-stricken and ready to burn, the tree canopy in the central and southern end of the Sierra Nevada is awash in yellows, browns and oranges. Many of the trees showing green are already dead, but they just haven't shown it yet, said Jeffrey Moore, acting regional aerial survey program manager for the U.S. Forest Service.

"From our written history, this has probably been the worst situation California's forests have faced," Moore said. "If a fire comes in, it kills everything and leaves nothing behind."

Already, the fire statistics for 2016 are grim.

State fire officials estimate roughly 223,600 acres, or 350 square miles, of California have burned so far this year in some 4,000 wildfires on state and federal land. More than 300 homes have burned, and eight people have been killed, including a bulldozer operator helping fight a fire.

Read the whole story

Bill would end ban on bikes

in U.S. wilderness

By Michelle L. Price, AP

More than 100 million acres of America's most rugged landscapes designated as wilderness are off-limits to mountain bikers, but two Utah senators have introduced legislation that would allow bikers to join hikers and horseback riders in those scenic, undisturbed areas.

The proposal is controversial within the biking community and opposed by conservationists who say bikes would erode trails and upset the five-decade notion of wilderness as primitive spaces.

The bill from Sens. Mike Lee and Orrin Hatch, both Utah Republicans, would give local officials with the Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Forest Service and other federal management agencies two years to decide in each wilderness area if bikes will be allowed. If no decision is made within two years, the bike ban would be lifted in that area.

The legislation, which has not yet had a hearing, comes from somewhat unlikely sponsors. Hatch and Lee both represent Utah, where outdoor recreation and mountain biking are big business, but are supporters of the GOP state's push to takeover public lands controlled by the federal government – something environmentalists and outdoor recreation groups oppose.

Lee, who said he's a former mountain biker, said his bill takes on what he sees as another overreaching federal regulation that hamstrings locals and that there's no evidence that mountain bike tires cause any more erosion than hikers do.

At issue is a part of the 1964 Wilderness Act restricting the use of "mechanical transport" – bikes, all-terrain vehicles and cars – in those 100-plus million wilderness acres in 44

states. It’s the only blanket ban on bicycling in the federal public lands system.

The ban on “mechanical transport” doesn’t include wheelchairs, which are allowed as part of the Americans with Disabilities Act, and Lee notes that skis, rock climbing gear, kayaks, which are also allowed, “arguably involve some type of mechanical action” and help people move about.

While mountain biking wasn’t a popular sport when the law was passed, they will alter the character of those spaces and are tough on trails, said Alan Rowsome with the Wilderness Society, a Washington, D.C.-based conservation group.

Rowsome said that only about 10 to 12 percent of all U.S. public lands are protected under the Wilderness Act, one of “the bedrock environmental laws we have in this country” setting aside some areas as sacrosanct.

That includes tens of thousands of acres of forests, valleys, lakes and peaks around Lake Tahoe, that “if mountain bikers could start riding those trails, they would be in Seventh Heaven,” said Ted Stroll, president of the Sustainable Trails Coalition, a nonprofit that’s working to overturn the ban.

Stroll said the wilderness ban on bikes leaves riders in Colorado on dirt forest roads from Crested Butte to Aspen instead of more scenic single track trails. In North Dakota, he said, about 100 miles of one bike trail are bookended by wilderness zones, leaving bikers to make detours at both ends to avoid the protected areas.

The International Mountain Bicycling Association doesn’t have a position on the bill and is still reviewing it, according to President Mike Van Abel, but the association’s 40,000 mountain bikers are divided on the idea.

Some mountain bikers don’t want to upset longstanding political alliances with conservation groups and say bikers

should instead focus on working with interest groups and lawmakers to negotiate and move the boundaries of wilderness areas to allow bikes on trails.

“Wilderness is the first time we as a species decided to put the needs of nature above the needs of man,” said Ashley Korenblat, the owner of a bicycling tour company based in the mountain bike Moab, Utah, a red rock mountain biking playground. “We don’t need to ride our bikes everywhere.”

Korenblat, a former chair of the International Mountain Bicycling Association, said there are few trails in wilderness areas that would be fun to ride, but “the last thing the bike industry wants to do is have a big fight with the environmental community.”

CTC chief could derail SLT Whole Foods deal

By Kathryn Reed

It’s true – a Whole Foods is looking at coming to South Lake Tahoe. But the deal has not been consummated.

It wouldn’t be the big grocery stores, but instead one of the chain’s new concepts called 365 by Whole Foods Market.

Some have compared them to a Trader Joe’s. Besides being smaller, more in the 30,000-square-foot ballpark, they have a large grab-and-go section, pricing is different so the moniker “whole paycheck” isn’t quite as true, and there is a rewards program.

Two of these stores opened this year – one in Southern

California, the other Oregon. Eighteen others are in the development phase in eight states.

The South Lake Tahoe store would go where the Knights Inn is on Highway 50 near Ski Run Boulevard.

“We are not at the point where we can talk about the project we are doing with city just yet,” Chris Peto, COO with Halferty Development, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

He did say Whole Foods is one of the possible tenants, but would not commit. However, others close to the project have told *LTN* Whole Foods will be the anchor.

Halferty Development of Pasadena is purchasing the developable portion of that site for $4 million from South Lake Tahoe. The city is paying $6 million for the property that is owned by Pradip Patel. Halferty is also buying the adjacent parcel dubbed the “southwest corner” for $1.1 million from the city. The city will retain ownership of the non-developable acreage of the Knights parcel, the conference center on Lloyd Avenue and the current owner’s residence.



The area in green represents the Knights Inn, while the gold are is the “southwest corner” property at Ski Run and Highway 50. Map/South Lake Tahoe

The combined retail complex will be four buildings that could open in fall 2018. The Whole Foods would be the largest building. A T-shape building is proposed to go in at Ski Run that will be about 12,000-square feet, with a 5,000-square-foot building at Herbert Avenue and another one that size that may be a restaurant in the middle of the complex.

This is likely to be a $10 million investment from Halferty.

While the other tenants have not been disclosed, a wine bar has been discussed.

The 110 hotel units can be converted into commercial floor area – two commodities the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency created as a way to curb development. (The rooms bring in about $100,000 a year in transit occupancy tax.)

At the end of the day, the city anticipates having excess commodities that can be used elsewhere or sold. The increase in property and sales taxes is estimated to bring in much more than the hotel tax ever did.

City officials have been working for nearly four years with Halferty on the southwest corner, and more recently on the Knights site. The development company originally wanted to put a drive-through pharmacy there. The city intervened in an attempt to get something better – in terms of adding variety to the commercial offerings in town, a project with a stronger tax base and buildings that would be more pleasing – especially at a key intersection.

For much of this year the negotiations have been touch-and-go. It has to do with environmental groups in the basin trying to dictate what should happen. TRPA – the bi-state regulatory agency, California Tahoe Conservancy – which has neighboring properties, and the League to Save Lake Tahoe – the basin's environmental watchdog, have all been at meetings between the city and developer.

“In regard to potential redevelopment of the Knights Inn site, there was some early thought that California Tahoe Conservancy Prop. 1 funding might be available to help pay for environmental improvements as part of a project,” TRPA Executive Director Joanne Marchetta told *Lake Tahoe News*. “That Prop. 1 funding may not be available, so the parties are all working to negotiate the best possible redevelopment project. The city of South Lake Tahoe is still negotiating and fine-tuning the parameters of this potential redevelopment project with other partners. Those talks include incorporating things such as water quality improvements.”

(The city has jurisdiction over permits for the project. The TRPA would get involved with tourist bonus units.)

The city in March spoke to the CTC board about obtaining a multi-million dollar grant for stream environmental zone restoration and water quality improvements. This is a routine allocation of CTC money. The board is expected to vote on the grant in September.

CTC Executive Director Patrick Wright has indicated that now he will ask his board to not allocate the money. Publicly he has not said why. However, those close to the talks say it is because he isn’t getting the project he wants so he is being an obstructionist. Wright did not respond to inquiries from *LTN.*

Larry Sevison, who is chair of that board, was unaware of any issue with allocating funding to the city until *LTN* called and therefore wasn’t able to talk about the subject matter.

“… projects like the Knights Inn, which is already located in a designated town center, must maximize environmental benefits. We hope we do not lose the opportunity to restore the section of stream through the parcel, which would help reduce stormwater pollution that currently flows from neighborhoods and developed areas above the parcel and into

the lake via pipes at Ski Run Marina," Darcie Goodman Collins, executive director of the League, told *Lake Tahoe News.* "The currently existing infrastructure under the inn is failing and polluting the lake. Any new development on the site should repair and replace that infrastructure and daylight the creek."

City Manager Nancy Kerry told *Lake Tahoe News*, "This project achieves those things. It achieves both economic and environmental goals."

What it won't achieve is all of the potential environmental goals without the state – aka CTC – helping.

City officials estimate 8,000 pounds of sediment could be prevented from reaching the lake with the proper erosion control measures put into place. This in turn would meet more than 20 percent of the city's sediment reduction goals that Lahontan Water Quality Control Board has mandated for the five-year period starting this year.

Not having the CTC on board is forcing the developer to rethink what the project will ultimately look like and what it is willing to spend. Build-to-suit agreements with tenants are also in jeopardy.

If the CTC says no, the city is prepared to scale back the environmental improvement aspect of the project while at the same time seeking grant funding elsewhere, including from the state Department of Water Resources.

Kerry said this project shows why it is near impossible to get rid of old hotels and redevelop them. With hotel rooms (aka tourist accommodation units) and commercial space being commodities, it inflates the price of a building – in terms of purchasing it or constructing it from scratch – to the point it's easier to do business outside the basin. There is little or no incentive for developers to go the extra step with the environmental fixes because there is no return on investment.

It takes public dollars to get the big gains. That is why grants from the CTC and others help bring the biggest environmental benefits to a project.

Few Nevadans like their retirement prospects

By Jason Hildago, Reno Gazette-Journal

At 70 years old, Dee Goodman has clocked in decades as a member of the American workforce.

Ask the small business owner about retirement, however, and she just shakes her head. As the owner of Old West Barber in Reno, Goodman says she still loves doing her job. For many of the folks who sit in her barber chair and share their stories, however, retirement is easier said than done.

“Used to be, my financial man told me to put away 10 percent of my income to be able to live the way I want to live when I retired,” Goodman said. “People just don’t have that kind of money to put away.”

That sentiment was echoed by a majority of Nevadans surveyed in a new Wells Fargo/USA Today poll, which found 51 percent of respondents doubted they’d have enough income for an ideal retirement. In contrast, just 38 percent said they had confidence.

Read the whole story