Over-prescribing doctors can escape scrutiny in Nev.

By Anjeanette Damon and Jason Hidalgo, Reno Gazette-Journal

Nevada has a pill problem.

From the number of people dying from prescription pain pill overdoses to the sheer amount of narcotics that doctors prescribe, Nevada tops national lists.

At the same time, Nevada lawmakers – pushed by a strong lobby of doctors – have resisted instituting programs used in other states that could flag practitioners who may need intervention for their prescribing practices.

That regulatory gap is exacerbated by professional licensing boards that say it’s not within their purview to initiate investigations against members outside of the formal complaint process.

Read the whole story

Gauging the health of Lake Tahoe tributaries

By Tom Lotshaw

Wading in the Upper Truckee River in South Lake Tahoe, Sean Tevlin and Tiffanee Hutton run fine mesh nets through the water to collect benthic macroinvertebrates, insects that live on the bottom of streams and require clean water and good

habitat.

Populations are poor, even in shallow riffles where they should be thriving. Instead of stoneflies, mayflies, caddisflies, and other indicators of healthy Sierra streams, they find mostly blackfly larvae, a species more tolerant of pollution and degraded stream conditions.

Assistant environmental specialists for TRPA, Tevlin and Hutton wade 150 meters of the Upper Truckee River, Lake Tahoe's largest tributary, and one of its largest contributors of clarity-robbing fine sediment.

They assess the river's habitat conditions and aquatic life, measure water temperature, flow, and depth, and make extensive notes about its physical attributes, such as riparian vegetation and substrate size.



Stream channels restored or enhanced
2010: 2,780 feet
2011: 8,207 feet
2012: 13,117 feet
2013: 1,570 feet
2014: 1,000 feet
2015: 1,601 feet
Source: *Lake Tahoe Environmental Improvement Program Project Tracker*

Photo/LTN: *Trout Creek in March 2016*

This span of river in the meadows near Highway 50 is in marginal condition. There's heavy channelization, bank erosion, and a layer of fine sediment carpeting the bottom. Water temperatures are high. Similar to the insect life, fish habitat and populations are lacking.

Lingering impacts from cattle grazing and logging decades ago are partly to blame for degrading the stream. But urban stormwater runoff from the highway and the nearby Sierra Tract neighborhood also discharges directly into the river, something the city of South Lake Tahoe and Caltrans are working to address with water quality improvement projects.

Downstream, the California Tahoe Conservancy is planning a broader project to restore the Upper Truckee Marsh. It's the largest remaining marsh in the Tahoe basin and its restoration would greatly benefit the Upper Truckee River's water quality and habitat.

"It's sad to see poor-quality sections of streams in a beautiful environment like Tahoe, but it shows just how far we have to go to get where we want to be in terms of stream health," Tevlin said.

Lake Tahoe's mid-lake water clarity measurements get lots of attention as a key indicator of water quality and environmental health. But regular monitoring of the 63 streams that flow into Lake Tahoe also provides important information about water and habitat quality, plant and animal populations, and overall watershed health.

Tevlin leads TRPA's stream bio-assessment program. Each year from June through September, Tevlin and his assistant assess the health of randomly selected sections of Tahoe's tributaries. They range from remote, rugged streams with

raging whitewater to small backcountry trickles and streams through golf courses and urban areas.

Information from the assessments helps measure the success of stream restoration projects, water quality improvement projects, and conservation measures. It also helps determine whether Tahoe is meeting the mandate to attain and improve threshold standards for things such as water quality and fish habitat.

Tevlin estimates about one-quarter of Tahoe's tributaries are in marginal condition. The rest are in good or excellent condition.

Streams in the Tahoe basin can face many challenges. During the last four years of drought, many streams have seen low water levels and high water temperatures lethal to fish. Other common issues include erosion, sedimentation, stormwater pollution, invasive species, and culverts that block fish passage. In a 2010-11 survey of 218 stream structures on public land in the Lake Tahoe Basin, including old culverts and dams, the U.S. Forest Service found 64 percent are impassable to fish.

"Compared to the rest of California and Nevada, our streams are pretty good. But for the relatively pristine environment we have, there are a lot of issues," Tevlin said.

Tevlin hopes to see overall stream health improve because of the stream restoration projects that agencies have completed and other projects in planning. "A lot of sites are falling in areas that have been restored or are going to be restored, so we should see the trend line improving. But it will take time," Tevlin said.

And as the health of Tahoe's tributaries improves, the water quality, clarity, and health of Lake Tahoe will benefit as well.

Tom Lotshaw is public information officer at Tahoe Regional Planning Agency. This article first appeared in Tahoe In Depth.

Untangling EDC measures E and G

By Joann Eisenbrandt

Proponents of Measures E and G say these measures will:

> *"Restore the purpose of zoning, which is to segregate uses that are incompatible and to implement the policies which will preserve the rural character of the county."*

Opponents of Measures E and G say these measures will:

> *"Threaten our open spaces, water and rural way of life."*

El Dorado County's 2004 General Plan lists as its objective, "To foster a rural quality of life." The difficult question for voters on June 7 is whether voting "yes" or voting "no" on Measures E and G will protect the rural nature of El Dorado County the General Plan envisions. To do this, they must be able to make sense of the proliferation of roadside signs, advertisements, flyers, online videos, editorials and community meetings trying to convince them to vote one way or the other.

Measures E and G are complex because they focus on the county's 2004 General Plan and Zoning Ordinance. These often-technical documents outline how land in the county can be used. In December 2015, the Board of Supervisors approved the **Targeted General Plan Amendment/Zoning Ordinance Update**

(TGPA/ZOU) which made limited amendments to the 2004 General Plan and extensive updates to the Zoning Ordinance. The TPGA/ZOU was challenged in court by Rural Communities United, a local nonprofit. That litigation is pending.

Measures E and G make specific changes, additions or deletions to some of the county's land-use policies. But beneath the details lies the bigger question: How will Measures E & G affect the future physical, economic and social development of El Dorado County, and is this a future that voters support?

Measures E and G: A two-year process

In early 2014, Sue Taylor of Save Our County and Laurel Stroud of Residents Involved in Positive Planning filed a notice of intent to circulate a petition with the county elections office for two ballot measures. At that time, they were called Initiative 3 and Initiative 5. Petitions were circulated, signatures obtained, counted and certified by county elections, and then forwarded on to the Board of Supervisors, but the entire process was not completed in time to make the Nov. 4, 2014, ballot.



No on E and G signs are mostly found on the West Slope.

What the initiatives propose

Measure E, titled "Initiative to Reinstate Measure Y's Original intent – no more paper roads," amends policies in the Traffic and Circulation Element of the 2004 General Plan as well reverses changes made to Measure Y in 2008.

In 1998, voters first approved Measure Y, the "Control Traffic Congestion Initiative." It added policies to the 1996 General Plan prohibiting residential development projects of five or more units that would cause or worsen level of service (LOS) F traffic congestion. LOS F is at the bottom of the traffic flow measurement scale and is essentially gridlock. Measure Y also prevented adding new roads to the list of roads that the 2004 General Plan allowed to operate at LOS F without voter approval; required developers to pay fees that would mitigate the traffic impacts of their new developments and prohibited county tax revenues being used to mitigate these traffic impacts without voter approval. Measure Y was to remain in

effect for 10 years.

In 2008, the Board of Supervisors put Measure Y on the ballot for an extension, but with modifications. These allowed the board to override by a fourth-fifths vote the prohibition against developments creating LOS F and enabled the county to use tax revenues to pay for needed road improvements caused by new development as long as the roads projects were in the county's capital improvement program.

Measure E would undo these 2008 changes, and return with several modifications to Measure Y's 1998 configuration. It would remove the board's four-fifths vote override. No new roads or segments of roads could be added to the list of roads permitted to operate at LOS F without voter approval. Infrastructure improvements needed because of residential developments that could create LOS F would have to be built first, not just put into the CIP before "any form of discretionary approval can be given to a project." Measure E would not allow county tax revenues to be used to pay for building these road capacity improvement projects, but would allow state and federal grant funds to be used.

As Taylor told Lake Tahoe News, "We wanted to hold developers' feet to the fire and make them pay for their own infrastructure upfront instead of putting the road improvements needed to meet the new demands of development into a five-, 10-, or 20-year capital improvement program." She called these CIP projects "paper roads" because when or whether they would actually be built "exists only on paper."

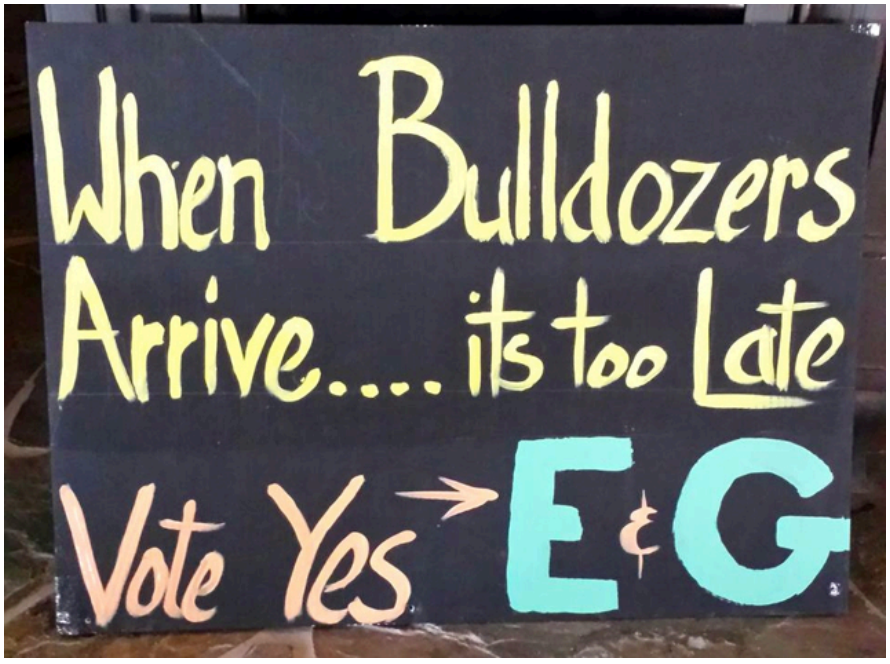
Measure G, the "initiative to retain El Dorado County's current zoning and rural assets", changes some policies of the General Plan back to what they were in the 2004 plan, adds a number of policies and deletes others. It requires that where a land use designation is inconsistent with current zoning, the land use designation is amended to match existing zoning. Land use designations are broad categories, like agriculture

or residential or commercial, while zoning refers to more specific land uses allowed within each area, such as high-density residential, or agricultural grazing or timber production.

Which specific uses are appropriate in each broad category and which uses are compatible adjacent to each other is where much of the controversy over zoning and zoning changes lies. Measure G includes a land use compatibility matrix showing which uses are compatible or incompatible with each other.

The measure also provides for a minimum 200-foot setback between agricultural zoned and adjacent agriculturally-incompatible uses. It restores the Mixed Use Policies (residential, business and retail) to the lower units per acre densities in the 2004 General Plan, and does not allow for such properties to have only a residential use. It further requires the implementation of the General Plan's Cultural and Historical Resource Policies.

It modifies or deletes several General Plan water supply policies to "ensure an ongoing balance between water supply and demand in El Dorado County." Medium-density, high-density and multifamily residential projects as well as commercial, industrial and research and development projects in both community regions and rural centers would have to connect to public water systems. Community regions and rural centers are the areas where more intense development is likely to be directed.



The Yes on E and G supporters want to regulate growth.

On this side of the ring we have

Supporters of Measures E and G include such community groups as Save Our County, Shingle Springs Community Alliance, Rural Communities United, and Residents for Responsible Planning, plus a range of local residents and businesspeople.

Opponents of Measures E and G include the El Dorado County Chamber of Commerce, El Dorado Hills Chamber of Commerce, Farm Bureau, El Dorado Winery Association, Citizens for Water, Alliance for Responsible Planning (EDCARP), and Parker Development. They also include individuals and business owners.

There are many complex layers of interaction among the organizations and individuals who support or oppose Measures E and G. These are not intended to be comprehensive lists. Complete information on committees for and against Measures E and G, their members and their funding sources is available on the elections' **website**.

Key points of disagreement

A full-page ad appearing in West Slope publications points to the most-debated potential impacts of Measures E and G. It says, "… these careless, poorly written measures undermine our county's water rights and hurt our ability to maintain a safe, clean and reliable supply of fresh water for local farms, vineyards, ranches and homes. They also push development into our rural areas, reduce funding for local roads and highways, and make our economy more 'volatile'."

Conforming land use to zoning

How land will be used is the "bedrock" issue. Opponents of Measure G are concerned that in the case of conflicts, it would change land use designations to match zoning. What the TGPA/ZOU did in 2015 was the opposite. It changed the zoning ordinance to conform to the General Plan land designations. California Government Code Section 65860(c) says, "In the event that a zoning ordinance becomes inconsistent with a general plan by reason of amendment to the plan, or to any element of the plan, the zoning ordinance shall be amended within a reasonable time so that it is consistent with the general plan as amended."

The impartial analysis prepared by County Counsel Mike Ciccozzi as part of the ballot materials for Measure G says, "The measure would require that El Dorado County amend General Plan land use designations to match zoning. Although such action would ensure consistency between the General Plan and the zoning ordinance, it would do so in an atypical way … accordingly, implementation would likely require additional analysis and action by the county."

Measure G was written in 2014, before the TGPA/ZOU was approved, so it refers to the situation as it existed then. Proponent Sue Taylor told Lake Tahoe News, "When we did this initiative, the county was still working on the General Plan overhaul. Land use and zoning didn't match. We were told by planning that these conflicts would be looked at individually

to check for compatibility. Now (with the TGPA/ZOU) they have made decisions based on their own judgment instead of using the criteria in the General Plan. They say the way Measure G is going to conform uses is illegal because land use should trump zoning. I say that the board has total power over land use and they could have matched them earlier."

Precisely how Measure G would be implemented were it to pass depends on whether the existing lawsuit against the TGPA/ZOU is upheld or denied.

Defining discretionary development

EDCARP has devoted an entire page of its website to the no on E and G effort. Alliance President Maryann Argyres described the organization to *Lake Tahoe News* as a volunteer organization that is focused on research. "We don't start out with a premise." The website describes them as a "coalition of the middle – those who feel the dialogue on land use has been dominated by no-growth advocates on the one hand and development interests on the other."

They do not support "ballot box planning and initiatives promoted by personal interests and agendas," but have formed a committee to actively oppose Measures E and G. They believe the Initiatives, "contain 'poison pills' that obstruct General Plan implementation, along with economic development, expansion of agriculture, housing and jobs."

A main concern for EDCARP and other opponents is that E and G would prohibit "discretionary projects." What discretionary projects are and how E and G would affect them depends on who you ask. Opponents paint it with a broad brush. EDCARP's website says the Initiatives will "stop discretionary actions by the county needed to allow job centers, research parks, tourist recreation businesses, lighted ball fields, home occupations, hotels, wineries, retail stories, even the expansion of existing businesses. The list is virtually

endless.”

In a letter to members of the El Dorado Hills Chamber of Commerce, President Debbie Manning says, “They effectively stop all non-residential uses (agricultural, public facilities, business park research and development, commercial, CSD and government actions) that require discretionary approvals. What project doesn’t need county approval?”

Lori Parlin of Shingle Springs Community Alliance and a member of the Yes on Measures E and G Committee, disagrees. She says, “Discretionary project means that the project is not allowed by right and would either need the Planning Commission or Board of Supervisors to pass legislation, such as a General Plan amendment, in order to allow the project. This measure does nothing to remove a property owner’s right to request a rezone or change. All of this only kicks in if the development creates LOS F (gridlock traffic).”

Asked for his definition of “discretionary projects” as applied by Measure E, County Counsel Ciccozzi responded in an email to *Lake Tahoe News*, “The interpretation of this language should the initiative measure pass will be one of the issues that must be addressed.”

Parlin agrees, “We have talked to County Counsel about all of this. The word discretionary will have to be further defined.”

Words matter

The EDCARP website says, “Words matter, especially language used in ballot measures and other laws.” Taylor agrees. She has concerns that the ballot title and language as prepared by the county do not accurately describe the measures’ purposes and may confuse voters. The resolutions to put Measures E and G on the June 7 ballot with the descriptions provided by the county came before the Board of Supervisors on Feb. 23 as part of the consent agenda. Taylor and other E and G supporters met

with county counsel and staff on Feb. 22 to go over their concerns. Taylor had asked in writing that the resolutions be pulled from the consent agenda for full discussion before they were adopted. Anyone may request the pulling of an item from the consent agenda, but only a member of the board can actually pull it.

The resolutions were not pulled and were approved as presented with Supervisor Shiva Frentzen voting no. Taylor subsequently filed a writ of mandate in El Dorado County Superior Court to have the language changed. To uphold the writ, the court would need to find that the petitioner had shown by "clear and convincing evidence" that the county's language was "false, misleading, or inconsistent with the requirements of [Election Code] section 9105." On April 1 the court found Taylor had not met that burden of proof and denied the writ. Judge Warren Stracener said in the denial, "Also, there is no legal requirement that the ballot question be the most accurate, most comprehensive, or fairest that a skilled wordsmith might imagine."

On April 5, the county put a press release on its website's home page regarding Stracener's decision. "The county is pleased with the court's ruling," it said, "and believes that the ballot questions are a fair representation of the proposed initiative Measures E and G."

Déjà vu all over again

Measures E and G are not the first contentious land use-based initiatives to show up on El Dorado County ballots. In 2014, Measures M, N, and O focused on similar issues and proved equally confusing to voters. Measures M and O were supported by basically the same groups now in favor of E and G, and opposed by those who now oppose E and G. Measure N is a bit trickier. There was a committee opposed to M, N and O and also a committee in favor of N but opposed to M and O. Some who started out supporting certain measures ended up opposing

them. Texts of these measures, as well as all the committees formed and financial contributions made are available through the county elections website.

All three initiatives failed.

Growth and staying rural

Opponents of E and G say that by putting restrictions on high-density residential development in community centers and along the Highway 50 corridor, it will have negative impacts on the county's growth and economic development and will drive development into rural areas. Laurel Brent-Bumb, CEO of the El Dorado County Chamber of Commerce, told *LTN*, "We're going to grow whether somebody doesn't want it or not and it has to happen where the infrastructure can support it. If it doesn't happen there, it will happen in our rural communities."

Brent-Bumb believes the 2008 version of Measure Y still contains its original intent and has no problem with funding for road improvements going into the CIP or the board of supervisors overriding restrictions against projects that create LOS F road impacts by a four-fifths vote. "I trust in my elected officials," she said. "I don't believe that our elected officials would pass by a four-fifths vote something that would make you sit and eat your lunch on Highway 50 while you are waiting to get to work."

Taylor counters, "Development moving into rural areas can only happen if the board votes to approve it regardless of issues with water or roads. That's not what's on the books. They would have to do General Plan amendments."

This brings up the larger question of how "rural" is defined. Maryann Argyres of EDCARP, who is also on the Farm Bureau board of directors and past president of the Apple Hill Growers Association, explains, "I have lived in Camino for 43 years. I have a small apple ranch. I live in a rural area. I'm against E and G. If you live in a community region with a

backyard and a back fence, you are not rural. You live in a county that is mostly rural, but a community region is designed to have 1 percent growth per year."

Brent-Bumb and the chamber are members of the No on E and G Committee for which Parker Development and its affiliated companies, Marble Valley Company LLC and Serrano Associates LLC, are major funders, with contributions close to $500,000. Asked if this concerned her, Brent-Bump replied, "No on E and G is a very diverse committee and our objective is to defeat these initiatives. We can only do this by being funded and Parker has agreed to write those checks. I am quite comfortable with that."

Asked by *Lake Tahoe News* why Parker Development was willing to spend so much money to defeat Measures E and G, Kirk Bone, director of government relations, said, "These measures would gut the county's General Plan and would make it very difficult, if not impossible, to do something as simple as obtaining a building permit or any other minor discretionary approvals. We are proud to be part of a broad-based coalition including the Farm Bureau and chambers of commerce attempting to preserve the adopted General Plan."

Sue Taylor doesn't see it quite that way, "Parker Development says vote no on Measure E because what they want to do with open space is to build on it."

Water, farms, apples and wineries

The Farm Bureau, El Dorado Winery Association and Citizens for Water oppose Measures E and G. The Farm Bureau's mission is to, "Protect, promote, and enhance the economic opportunities and long-term viability for El Dorado County farmers, ranchers, and foresters." Farm Bureau President Jim Davies told *Lake Tahoe News*, "Measure E will make development illegal. It will force people to move to those parcels of land in the open space. In some areas, like Rural Centers, Measure

G forces any kind of development there to have a water purveyor supply them. There couldn't be a grocery store in Mt. Aukum. In places in the south county, that little bit of commercial would help them dramatically with their agri-tourism. This will become incredibly expensive because it will be litigated to pieces."

"If property is zoned by right to be developed, that's a ministerial project," Taylor said in defense of Measure G. "It doesn't go before the board. There are 17,000 parcels that can be built on right now. Only the supervisors can decide when it's time to open up more land for development. "

The Farm Bureau is also not concerned with the large financial role being played by Parker Development in the effort to defeat E and G. "Parker has been engaged with the General Plan process since the inception. We've also been engaged in that process and have tried to be at the table and help our members get what they need as ag entities, but we are not connected with Parker Development. Parker is defending their turf. We have problems with E and G for a number of reasons and they have them for different reasons. We are cooperating because neither party wants E and G to pass.

"We are only developers in the sense that we develop a piece of land to raise apples or graze cows. We are not trying to chop up the county so it looks like Daly City. I've been looking at those green hills (along the Highway 50 corridor) and it pains me to see houses going up, but people want to come here. I'd prefer they be there rather than in Camino, Coloma or Fair Play. The state would say your growth rate is 1 percent and if you don't (grow that much) we are going to require you to grow."

Former El Dorado County Supervisor Bill Center disagrees. "It isn't a state requirement that we grow 1 percent. The state can only mandate that you provide enough zoned land for affordable housing. That's it. The Housing Element, which the

county has certified as being consistent with this requirement, says there is enough zoned land available to build affordable housing. You could not find a statement (in state law) that mandates that percentage of growth for El Dorado County."

The media blitz

Bill Center is in a unique position, representative of the complex advertising campaigns being waged. The EDCARP website's No on E and G page has a video of Center expressing concerns before the Board of Supervisors in 2014 regarding the impacts on discretionary projects of changing the 2008 version of Measure Y. He is also in a video on the Save Our County website expressing his support for Measures E & G. Measure E would make such changes. These appear to be contradictory positions.

"I've been on both sides of the field with that issue," Center said. "I have had to decide what is discretionary and what is ministerial as an official. I was concerned about the breadth of (Measure M's) language but I've had 18 months of perspective. The county has been arrogant and controlled by development interests. Those development interests, some of them like Serrano and Marble Valley, are paying for all the ads and signs. That money has had a big impact on the El Dorado County Chamber of Commerce, and promises have been made regarding water supply that have influenced the farmers and wineries."

"I don't think we can make progress," Center believes, "until the county starts listening to the general public in a respectful way rather than essentially telling them to shut up and go home while rolling out the red carpet for developers. I'm voting in favor of E and G because I think it will help balance the scales."

The El Dorado Winery Association and Citizens for Water have

signed mailers that were sent out to voters. These mailers, along with the one sent out by the El Dorado County and El Dorado Hills chambers of commerce seem to point to county-generated documents as validation for their positions. The El Dorado Winery Association flyer says, “Please read the county’s official analysis of Measures E and G, which explains how they force development into rural areas, reduce funding for roads and destabilize our local economy.” The Citizens for Water flyer adds, “According to the impartial analyses prepared by the county, Measures E and G undermine our county’s water rights, hurting the county’s ability to maintain a safe and reliable supply of clean, fresh water for local farms and families.”

There are two sets of county-prepared documents on Measures E and G that these flyers might be referencing. One is the impartial analysis for each measure composed by County Counsel Ciccozzi, which appears on the elections website and in ballot materials. These are designed, Ciccozzi explained, “to describe the effect of the measure on existing law and the operation of the measure as information to the voters.”

The second set is the two reports written in 2014 at the request of the Board of Supervisors as part of their decision-making process on the initiatives. These reports were prepared by county counsel and county staff at the direction of the CAO’s office and offer their analysis of a broad range of the initiatives’ potential impacts on land use and finances for use by the board. “The best characterization of the reports would be informational,” the county counsel told *Lake Tahoe News*. “We will not speculate as to what the opponents of Measures E and G mean when they use the term ‘official county analysis’.” The county has put a link to these two reports on its website. Here is the one for **Measure G** and the one for **Measure E**.

Lake Tahoe News did not receive responses back from those who produced these materials.

Voters have an admittedly difficult task ahead of them. The vocal, and often confusing, fight over Measures E and G only serves to point out how central to the future of El Dorado County that land use decisions are, and how strongly so many feel about just what that future should be.

Nev. panel discusses e-games wagering

By Daniel Rothberg, Las Vegas Sun

State leaders and regulators explored Friday whether Nevada could allow wagering on e-sports, a growing industry of video game competitions that attracts millennials and is expected to bring in $1.9 billion by 2018.

As many groups push for a larger e-sports presence in Nevada, officials must determine whether spectators can bet on them like they would a sporting event.

During the meeting of the Nevada Gaming Policy Committee – a panel that included Gov. Brian Sandoval, regulators and casino executives – topics such as daily fantasy sports, e-sports, skills-based gaming and online gaming were discussed. The popularity of the video game industry could bring significant economic development if regulators agreed to take wagers on the outcome.

Read the whole story

Scientists analyzing crayfish impacts on Tahoe

By Tom Lotshaw

Researchers with UNR are working to better understand the impacts that a small but voracious non-native freshwater crustacean is having in Lake Tahoe and Crater Lake, two of America's deepest, clearest lakes.

Public agencies deliberately introduced signal crayfish into Lake Tahoe and Crater Lake in the early 1900s to help feed stocked sport fish popular with fishermen. The crayfish may be doing more than altering food webs in the two lakes; they may be affecting their famed water clarity.

An omnivore that can feed on plants and animals, signal crayfish rapidly established themselves throughout Lake Tahoe's near shore waters, negatively impacting native invertebrate and non-game fish species.

At Crater Lake, signal crayfish did not start to expand beyond a couple of sites until the mid-2000s. They are now spreading and taking over the habitat of the Mazama newt, an endemic amphibian found nowhere else in the world. It was the top predator in Crater Lake before fishes and crayfish were introduced into its waters.

"From 2008 to 2014 crayfish increased their range in Crater Lake. We are now finding crayfish where we used to find Mazama newts," said John Umek, UNR freshwater ecology researcher.

The spread of crayfish and the corresponding decline in newt populations raised questions for researchers: Is there competition between the two species for habitat or food? Or are crayfish eating newts when they can?

“Turns out it is all of the above,” Umek said. “We found they prefer the same substrate areas, rocky boulder areas where there is protection to hide from predator fish and ultraviolet light. They are also eating similar food sources, so we do see competition for food and habitat.”

Researchers suspect climate change is helping crayfish expand in Crater Lake. Increased water temperatures give crayfish more energy to forage and reproduce, and as crayfish populations reach their maximum in one site, they head out to colonize new areas.

“As crayfish populations expand in nearshore areas in Crater Lake, we see the area for newts getting smaller and smaller. There’s a lot of discussion about what we can do to impede or slow down crayfish in the nearshore and hopefully provide refuge for these newts,” Umek said.

One potential area of refuge for the newts is the small seasonal pools around the shore of the lake, formed by rock slides and avalanches. “We have not found crayfish in any of those pools, so one idea is to do more research into how newts are using those pools and make sure we keep crayfish out of those areas,” Umek said.

Crayfish are impacting more than newts at Crater Lake. Researchers have seen a seven- to eight-fold decrease in benthic (deep water) invertebrate densities in the areas where crayfish have expanded. As crayfish reduce those populations, researchers are seeing an increase in algae biomass along the shoreline, a result of invertebrates no longer consuming algae at the normal rate.

Umek is also working to understand how crayfish are impacting benthic invertebrate populations and algae growth at Lake Tahoe, as well as how crayfish are impacting non-game nearshore fishes such as the redside shiner, Tahoe sucker, and Tui chub, since they also compete for food sources and

habitat.

“From other research in our laboratory at the University of Nevada we’ve seen a reduction in benthic invertebrates in Lake Tahoe, almost a 60 percent decline from research done in the 1960s and 1970s compared to research done in 2009-10,” Umek said. “So we’re curious how the reduction in benthic invertebrates may increase algae on rocks and sand in the near shore. Are crayfish helping increase the amount of algae as they reduce invertebrates that eat the algae? Or maybe the increase of algae comes from the addition of nutrients to the nearshore that increase the numbers of crayfish as they graze on this plant material in the nearshore environment.”

Understanding the impacts that signal crayfish are having and managing the impacts is a goal for both lakes.

Now that crayfish are well-established in the lakes, it would be extremely difficult to eradicate them. That’s in part because young crayfish hide in rock crevices for their first year to avoid predation, making them difficult if not impossible to trap. “Even if we went in and trapped heavily, we may remove certain age classes, so we would need to have a continual removal of crayfish,” Umek said.

A few years ago, California and Nevada changed their policies to allow the private harvest of crayfish from Lake Tahoe. Working with private business and encouraging them to remove crayfish could be an opportunity to facilitate the continual removal over time.

“Visitors expect to see clear, blue nearshore areas at Tahoe, and if crayfish are impacting algae biomass in those areas, that could have impacts not only for the ecology of the lake, but the economy as well. People don’t want to see these large algae blooms,” Umek said.

Tom Lotshaw is public information officer at the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency. This article first appeared in Tahoe

In Depth.

Split-second decisions all part of cops' job

By Kathryn Reed

An agitated suspect danced around, moving toward the officers in an aggressive manner. To shoot or not to shoot? Use another tool like a taser or baton?

In a matter of seconds some of these "officers" shot at the suspect, others held back.

It turned out the "perp" was reaching for his wallet, and after that a cell phone to record what was going on. All the while he was acting like he was hyped up on meth.

While this was a make believe scenario last week, it resembles what real law enforcement officials are faced with on a regular basis. On this particular night it was the South Lake Tahoe Citizens Academy classmates who had to make the decision – to pull the trigger or not.

The academy is a free seven-week course designed to give residents a better understanding about how the city works as well as an opportunity to ask questions of staff. This reporter is part of the current class.

The class participated in three scenarios using guns with non-lethal bullets. The suspect was a real officer playing the part of the bad guy. Later that night video from the dash camera on a patrol car was shown in a debriefing. The camera only captures what is going on immediately in front; there is

no way for it to track the entire scene.

The use of cameras was a big part of Police Chief Brian Uhler's opening presentation. South Lake Tahoe officers do not wear body cameras even though these devices are becoming more popular in the wake of officer involved shootings.

He explained how the norm is the cameras are not on all the time, that officers must consciously activate them. For Uhler, he'd rather have his officers focused on the situation at hand instead of whether it should be filmed. After all, seconds can mean the difference between life and death.

A video showed how police cameras don't always capture everything that is going on. The outcome was that cameras could actually favor officers.

Uhler is hoping technology will be developed to better aid officers and the public to the point that one day cameras would be more seriously considered as a viable tool in South Lake Tahoe.

Officers Jeff Roberson, Mick Carlquist, Matt Morrison and Davis Spaid handled most of the nearly four-hour class session.

Many officers have gone to wearing vests instead of a belt to carry all of the tools of their trade. It's easier on their bodies; still they've been criticized it makes them look more militarized. Those vests weigh about 30 pounds for the average officer, closer to 70 pounds for SWAT.

Handcuffs, expandable baton, gun, taser, radio, flashlight, ammo, wireless microphone – it's all part of the standard equipment. The only thing really optional is to carry pepper spray.

Officers find the audio recorder most beneficial during domestic violence calls because the truth tends to come out in

the heat of the moment. After the fact the couple might make up and recant their statements.

Most officers carry a Glock 22. Each quarter they must pass a shooting test. To practice there is a mobile range at the department. They also have rifles. Shotguns with beanbags are used as a pain compliance tool, or to shoot out windows, as was the case in the most recent fire in the Tahoe Keys.

The type of crimes local officers contend with is all over the board, especially being a border and tourist town.

“For a city our size we have an inordinate amount of **gang activity**,” **Detective Carlquist** said.

He spent a good amount of time talking about the various cases he has worked in the eight years he’s been with the department.

A large part of what the 12-member SWAT unit contends with is gang related.

At the end of the night the class left with a greater appreciation for what the men and women in blue deal with 24 hours a day, and seemed to appreciate what Officer Morrison said: “Everyone behind the badge is human. We are not a robot.”

Lake Tahoe luxury home sales blossom

By Mark Glover, Sacramento Bee

Luxury home sales are flying high again in the exclusive Lake

Tahoe region and the Sacramento area.

Tahoe City-based Coldwell Banker Residential Brokerage said the number of single-family luxury home sales in the North Lake Tahoe/Truckee region soared more than 62 percent in the first quarter of the year compared with the same period a year ago. The figures were derived from Multiple Listing Service data of all single-family homes sold in the region with a sales price of more than $1 million during the most recent quarter.

The biggest increase in sales in the first quarter was in the $1 million to $2,499,999 segment of the market, with 34 transactions, up about 80 percent from the 19 sales in that price range a year ago.

Read the whole story

NRA eager to defeat Nevada gun initiative

By Sean Whaley, Las Vegas Review-Journal

CARSON CITY – The National Rifle Association's Institute for Legislative Action has launched an informational website to stop the "Californication" of Nevadans' gun rights.

The www.votenoquestion1.com website "exposes the truth" about how a universal background check would criminalize the commonplace activities of many Nevada gun owners, the group announced Wednesday.

The background check measure will be on the Nov. 8 general election ballot. It was qualified through the initiative

process and is before Nevada voters because the Legislature did not enact the measure in the 2015 session.

The measure would extend firearm background checks to private party sales and some transfers.

Read the whole story

No opposition to STPUD rate increases

By Susan Wood

Looks like the thousands of South Tahoe Public Utility District customers are going with the flow in respect to proposed water and sewer rate increases.

The district scheduled a workshop on May 12 to gather input and provide a presentation on the infrastructure-laden plan. No one showed up.

The capital improvement plan with rates amounting to a 6.5 percent increase for water and a 6 percent uptick in sewer services generated zero feedback. The public absence demonstrates a huge departure from meetings two years ago that created a little unrest.

“I am surprised no one showed up. We put a lot of effort into advertising it. Maybe what’s happened is we made extensive outreach to the community, and even though they had to be confirmed each year, the rates were adopted for five years. We talked about the projects, and it brought out a lively discussion (two years ago),” Executive Director Richard Solbrig told *Lake Tahoe News* Thursday night.



South Tahoe PUD plans to install more fire hydrants this summer. Photo/LTN file

In 2014, the district sent a five-year notice to all its customers – 14,000 water and 18,000 sewer – to meet Proposition 218 guidelines. The measure requires local governments to gain voter approval to increase taxes, fees and charges.

The infrastructure-laden plan will be folded into a larger discussion when the district takes up its 2016-17 budget May 19. The meeting is delayed from 2pm to 6pm because of the Amgen bike race.

The STPUD 2016-17 budget rounds out to about $40 million between the two utility services.

A typical consumer will pay an additional $15.36 per quarter from the $122.30 water bill and $94.35 sewer statement. Two years ago, the increase was $13.62 per quarter.

If it passes the board as expected, the improvement plan for the year appears to be aggressive and ambitious.

Over the long haul, water expenditures call for $43.7 million over the next decade and $57 million for sewer in that timeframe.

For starters, the installation of water meters is about halfway done, with about 5,000 more to do.

Solbrig lamented over California's laborious process in settling a low-interest loan to help fund the massive project. Even though the loan is 1.6 to 1.8 percent, "interest payments are significant."

The feedback on the whole metering process has been tenuous at best.

"In general, most people think meters are a fairness issue, and that they should pay for what they use," Solbrig said.

In other words, some customers thought their bills would go down.

But the delivery of water and sewer is different compared to rate setting for electric and gas. It's based on infrastructure regardless of how often residents inhabit their homes. Case in point – fire protection becomes a steady constant need "whether you're living in it or not."



Luther Pass pump station is part of

the 2016 capital improvement plan. Photo/LTN file

The cost is in the delivery of the product – not the product – when it comes to water.

Solbrig also addressed the specific earmarking of the money gained by rate increases.

“One hundred percent of the rate increases are driven by infrastructure needs,” he said.

Beyond meters, South Shore residents will also notice 105 additional fire hydrants installed in places that are “strategically located to meet the fire departments’ standards for fire flows,” he added. The hydrants are placed alongside the stretches where the new, larger 6-inch water lines lie. The U.S. Forest Service absorbed $400,000 of the $1 million plan through a grant designed for fire suppression.

And Tahoe knows about fire.

One of the scariest times during the 2007 Angora Fire was two days after the start when the back blaze reversed and jumped Highway 89 toward the Tahoe Keys in the Lukins Water district jurisdiction. The small company had just announced major challenges in having adequate flows.

Fire districts are requiring hydrants spaced within 250 feet of properties. Some sketchy areas include the uphill side of Pioneer Trail and pockets in the Sierra Tract, Solbrig mentioned.

On the sewer side, the district wants to rehabilitate concrete treatment tanks and replace electrical equipment and motors at the Luther Pass Pump Station. This station sends all of the recycled wastewater from the district over the Highway 89 pass to Alpine County.

STPUD also plans to replace equipment that fails to meet standards, namely for air quality regulations. One mentionable is the standby generator at the wastewater treatment plant, a necessary device in case of an electrical outage.

Drought, beetles take toll on Tahoe trees

By Terra Breeden

INCLINE VILLAGE – Take a drive around Lake Tahoe and you'll notice red and brown trees jutting out of the evergreen forests, their brittle pine needles dropping off dead branches. Since the snow melted, hundreds of dying trees have been exposed. They are everywhere, from Spooner Summit to Crystal Bay. Dead trees stand forlornly on the roadside, in brick-colored clusters in the meadows, and in huge swaths on the mountain slopes.



Patricia Maloney

Forest ecologist and conservation biologist Patricia Maloney explained the scourge of recent tree deaths in the Lake Tahoe Basin at a May 10 presentation at Sierra Nevada College.

According to Maloney, the prolonged California drought has weakened the trees' natural defenses to pests and disease. When there is a lack of water, Lake Tahoe's trees are susceptible to attacks from bark beetles, forest pathogens – native and invasive – and stress caused by human activity.

"I've been studying why trees die for over 20 years," Maloney said. "I know what's going on and it's an important issue."

Maloney studies tree mortality in the Lake Tahoe Basin by examining the forests and extracting core samples from dead and healthy trees.

"Part of my work is to take a physiological study on drought-stressed trees in the Lake Tahoe Basin," Maloney said. "I take a core sample and can go back over a 100 years to see how these trees are affected by drought."

The results are not pretty. Although Maloney is still conducting her research, she's noticed that the drought has led to increased bark beetle populations.

"In droughts you get elevated bark beetle activity," Maloney said. "When there's competition for resources – especially water – everything is aggravated."

Three types of bark beetles are indigenous to the Sierra Nevada: mountain pine beetles, Jeffrey pine beetles, and fir engraver beetles. As their names imply, each species feeds on specific types of trees, with the mountain pine beetle being the most aggressive.

Usually, trees defend themselves from a bark beetle onslaught by secreting a sticky sap called a pitch tube, which stops beetles from burrowing under the bark. However, in times of drought, many trees simply can't retain enough fluid to halt a beetle attack.

"Unfortunately, we are seeing no evidence of pitch tubes. The

trees' tanks are empty," Maloney said. "We're seeing everything from massive trees to little seedlings die. The trees are so stressed out by the drought that it doesn't take many beetles to kill them."



Tree mortality is a growing concern throughout the Lake Tahoe Basin. Photo/Terra Breeden

Another cause of tree death in the Tahoe basin is the spread of forest pathogens like dwarf mistletoe and white pine blister rust. Dwarf mistletoe is a native plant, but white pine blister rust, named for the scab-like eruptions that form on infected trees, is invasive and has recently wiped out many trees in North Lake Tahoe.

"White pine blister rust was introduced to the U.S. by white pine seedlings in the early 1900s, and probably entered the basin area in the 1940s," Maloney said.

According to Maloney, 65 percent of the white bark pine trees on Rifle Peak are infected with blister rust.

This winter, frequent snow removal has put salt in the wound of drought-stricken trees along roadsides surrounding the lake. Quite literally, the brine that's been slung across the

road with every snowstorm is killing trees. Maloney calls this “salt stress.”

“Essentially, the salt binds with water and is absorbed by the tree, scorching the leaves,” Maloney said. “Salt stress affects trees up to 60 feet along roadsides. But in this case, public safety trumps tree health.”

Lake Tahoe isn’t the only area affected by a high rate of tree deaths this year. The U.S. Forest Service conducted a statewide survey of forest health in California and concluded that since 2015 more than 10 million trees have died. Most of the tree deaths are in the Southern Sierra where last year, temperatures and mountain pine beetle populations skyrocketed.

But Maloney insists that it’s not all doom and gloom; forests recover from droughts. It can take several years, but healthy young saplings will grow and replace the dead stands of trees. Maloney and her team of biologists speed up the forest recovery process by replanting trees in the areas most affected.

“I have 500 seedlings that we are planting from Tunnel Creek to Sand Harbor,” Maloney said.

Maloney also questions whether tree thinning, a practice that’s been utilized around the lake to reduce the risk of wildfire, is actually good for forest health. She thinks that maybe leaving forests dense and un-thinned will give more trees a fighting chance in drought years, even though it increases the threat of wildfire.

As Maloney continues to study tree mortality In Lake Tahoe, she has more questions.

“I’m a conservative optimist,” Maloney said. “Tree mortality is alarming and I’m concerned. But there’s also a lot we don’t understand. What I’m trying to do is find out why some trees die and some don’t.”

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Notes:

· El Dorado County and Georgetown Divide resources conservation districts, CalFire and Society of American Foresters are co-sponsoring a workshop on tree mortality on June 17 form 8:30am-3pm at the El Dorado Board of Supervisors' chambers in Placerville.