Avi safety message targeted at younger crowds

By Phuong Le, AP

MOUNT BAKER, Wash. – Walker Smith has been skiing in-bounds at resorts since he was young, but lately the Seattle teen has become more interested "in getting tracks where no one else has really gone."

He knows backcountry travel comes with avalanche risks, he said. So under a brilliant blue sky one Saturday, he and a dozen teens hiked out into the snowy landscape outside the boundaries of Mount Baker ski resort to learn how to identify avalanche terrain and spot warning signs.

"It's not 100 percent safe in the backcountry so you have to know about all the dangers," said Smith, 17, a member of the Mountaineers Adventure Club, a Seattle-based teen program that partnered with Northwest Avalanche Center to organize the avalanche awareness field trip.

As more young adults head out of bounds to ski, snowboard or hike in the winter, experts are targeting their message about avalanche safety to an even younger audience. They're trying to reach kids early – in middle or high school, sometimes even in elementary school – to build their knowledge about snow and avalanches.

"They're young, they're impressionable. They don't have a pattern of bad behavior yet. By spending more time on youth, we feel like we can make a difference in changing behavior," said Scott Schell, program director of the Northwest Avalanche Center, a Seattle-based non-profit and federal government partnership.

The center, which issues weather forecasts and avalanche

warnings, also offers about 200 free or low-cost education classes each winter to church groups, schools, shops and other organizations. About one-third are now geared toward teens or young adults.

“We feel that working with younger people is the way to affect behavior down the line,” since they’re likely to be lifelong users of the outdoors, Schell said. “We tell them that most of the time it’s safe and sometimes it’s not. Learning when it’s safe and when it’s dangerous is one of the key takeaways.”

At least 14 people have been killed in slides so far this season; the three most recent deaths happened Sunday in Washington and Wyoming. This month has been the deadliest January for slides in nearly 20 years, according to the Colorado Avalanche Information Center, the central archive for avalanche accidents in the country. On an average, 27 people die in avalanches across the U.S. each year. The center doesn’t track age of all fatalities, but avalanche deaths typically involve men between 20 and 45, the center said.

After a 2003 avalanche killed three young men in Utah, the Utah Avalanche Center created a free avalanche awareness program for middle and high school students. The hour-long program includes a high-energy video that helps them understand how to have fun in the mountains while avoiding avalanches.

Better gear, more media coverage and rising lift tickets at resorts have made the backcountry more accessible and appealing to a wider range of people.

A lot of the kids may not go into the backcountry, but the idea is that “when someone talks them into getting into the backcountry 15 years from now, they’ll have this knowledge that they’ve stored away,” said Paul Diegel, executive director of the Utah Avalanche Center.

More than 200,000 students in Utah have been exposed to the

“Know Before You Go” program over the last decade. And the program has spread to other states.

In Jackson, Wyoming, the American Avalanche Institute, which targeted high schoolers, has expanded its program to middle schools as well. It runs several free avalanche programs for kids 10 to 18, which is funding by the Steve Romeo Memorial Fund.

Lessons are shorter with more hands-on activities; the goal is repetition and learning progresses through the age groups. “We try and send our younger, hipper instructors who are easier to relate to,” said Sarah Carpenter, co-owner and teacher at the American Avalanche Institute.

The message to younger age groups is to stay in bounds and avoid the backcountry, Carpenter said. But with older teens, “our goal is not to preach abstinence. As the kids get older, they’re going to go into the backcountry.”

The goal is to give them good habits and skills to build a foundation, she said. The message: if they duck under a rope or venture out-of-bounds, the conditions are going to be very different.

For the teens, ages 14 to 18, with the Mountaineers Adventure Club, the day began with a review of the avalanche forecast, which said conditions were moderate.

Eric Gullickson, an avalanche instructor with the Northwest Avalanche Center, lead the group as they set off, snow crunching under foot, toward Artist Point on Mount Baker, about 130 miles northeast of Seattle.

As they hiked, Gullickson pointed roller balls on slopes, cornices and other avalanche dangers. He asked the group what the difference is between snow inside ski resorts and out of bounds. The teens chimed in that ski resorts control the snow by grooming it and skiers and boarders are packing down the

snow.

“The snow is always changing so you always have to be assessing,” he said. “As you’re walking around, keep an eye on the slopes. In your mind, think: ‘Do I want to go there? What’s a good place to go?'”

Gullickson then used a shovel to dig a snow pit, carving a 6-foot vertical face in the snow to reveal the layers of snowpack. The teens moved closer as Gullickson pointed out the hard layer of snow between two soft layers.

“It’s good to know,” said Rowan Forsythe, 15, of Seattle, afterward. “The more knowledge you can have, it’s another tool.”

Conner adds more allegations against SLT

By Kathryn Reed

South Lake Tahoe City Councilwoman JoAnn Conner has added more grievances to her **lawsuit** against the city and City Manager Nancy Kerry.

Conner now claims:

· The council violated the open meeting law in September;

· She can’t get things on the agenda in a timely manner;

· Her personal email is being blocked;

· That rules are being created to hurt her personal business.

Who will decide this matter remains unknown. A Placer County judge is tasked with ruling on Conner's attorney's request to have El Dorado County Superior Court Judge Steve Bailey dismissed.

Jacqueline Mittelstadt, a one-time attorney for the city, is representing Conner.

Her accusation about the Brown Act violation reads, "In fact, the discussion was not a performance evaluation of the city manager, but rather, was simply a discussion by all present criticizing City Councilmember Conner for a variety of reasons. It is believed that this closed session violated the Brown Act. The discussion included presentation of documents and allegations of evidence against Ms. Conner by both the city manager and members of the City Council."

This closed session was on Sept. 15. The item to be discussed was Kerry's performance. Conner along with the other four electeds is Kerry's boss.

Kerry on Jan. 27 would not comment about the amended motion.

As for getting something on an agenda, a councilmember needs consensus to do so from one colleague. The soonest it would be on the agenda is two meetings later. Staff also has a huge say in the agenda. The Tuesday prior to the meeting the city manager, city clerk, city attorney, mayor and mayor pro tem solidify the agenda.

Conner last fall asked for the parade policy to come before the council. With November, December and January each having one meeting instead of two, the parade policy has not risen to the top level of importance. Conner has a vested interest because she owns an event company that puts on parades.

She is also upset with what she deems a change in policy regarding public safety being part of her parades. If the fire department were to be part of the parade, that would in

essence mean an elected official was benefitting from taxpayer resources, which is illegal. Police may provide an escort, as is customary any time safety is an issue.

Conner is also disgruntled with what she believes is a change in policy when it comes to her being able to put on events at city property, most notably the rec center. Last summer the council, which she voted for, agreed to alter some of the permit regulations. Because one of her events is slated to bring in more than 1,000 people it's necessary to get a special use permit instead of a just renting the facility.

As for the email, this was part of mandate dating back to **September** where Conner was banned from communicating with staff in any manner without going through the city manager or city attorney.

"People should be shocked and appalled. Today they don't like what JoAnn is saying and tomorrow it might be you. There is no due process," Mittelstadt told *Lake Tahoe News.*

Report: Most Nev. households mired in financial hole

By Eli Segall, Las Vegas Sun

Despite the slowly improving U.S. economy, more than half of Nevada households are locked in "perpetual financial insecurity," says a new report, as the state remains near the bottom of the pack nationally for residents' financial health.

Nevada has some of the highest rates of bankruptcy filings, underemployment, delinquent mortgages, uninsured residents and

student-loan defaults, according to the nonprofit Corporation for Enterprise Development, or CFED.

The state also has some of the lowest rates of high school graduation, residents with college degrees, early childhood education enrollment, strong consumer-credit scores and small-business ownership.

Read the whole story

Ski town rents push workers to the edge

By Jack Healy, New York Times

BRECKENRIDGE, Colo. — On nights when she could not crash on a friend's couch or unroll a sleeping mat on an attic floor, Chelsea Lilly tucked her silver Subaru into a supermarket parking lot or a dark spot along a mountain pass, wrapped herself in a green Army blanket and watched movies on her phone until she fell asleep.

Getting work at a day spa in this bustling ski town had been easy, but finding an affordable apartment this winter proved almost impossible. So Ms. Lilly, 34, bounced along an itinerant path of couches and borrowed bedrooms that has become a fact of life for workers in jewel-box tourist towns across the country. Nights in the Subaru got so cold that she shivered awake every few hours and ran the engine to thaw out.

The miners who once pried gold and silver from the heart of the Rocky Mountains would attest that living in paradise has never been easy. These days, soaring home prices and a shift

toward weekend vacation rentals have created a housing crisis in ski country, one that has people piling into apartments, camping in the woods and living out of their trailers and pickup trucks.

Read the whole story

Peshon embraces duties of EDSO undersheriff

By Kathryn Reed

Randy Peshon is a man who understands every facet of law enforcement.

And that's a good thing because for nearly a year he has been undersheriff of El Dorado County.

"He's a star. He's excelled at everything," El Dorado County Sheriff John D'Agostini told *Lake Tahoe News.*

D'Agostini tapped Peshon for the job when Rich Williams retired.

"His knowledge and leadership are the two main reasons I selected him for undersheriff," D'Agostini said. "I looked at where we have been and where we are going. Randy was the best choice for the next phase of this administration."

Peshon started with El Dorado County Sheriff's Department in February 1997 after having spent time as a ranger with the National Park Service and East Bay Regional Parks.

After the initial training he became the resident deputy in

Tahoma, a job he had for eight years.

“It was great. At that time you not only did patrol, search and rescue, coroner, I was the dive team – you did everything the sheriff’s office did,” Peshon told *Lake Tahoe News*. “I was never bored.”

When he made sergeant he was transferred to the South Lake Tahoe office where he worked in patrol and the courts. For a time he supervised the bailiffs. Then he spent three years in detectives before going back to patrol. As a lieutenant he oversaw the jail in Tahoe.

Undersheriff was never on his radar. Neither is being sheriff. Peshon is happy to serve as No. 2; especially knowing D’Agostini intends to run for a third term in 2018.

“I’m expected to handle everything for the sheriff. It’s a very delicate, very political job,” Peshon said. “There are competing priorities. Nothing is easy. Every challenge lands on your desk.”

The 60-year-old admits things are much different now compared to when he started.

“Technology is a big change. When I started we did reports in pencil. There were no computers in the cars,” Peshon said.

He said the public scrutiny, especially lately, is another thing to contend with. Cameras are everywhere now – on officers, suspects and bystanders.

“It’s the Ferguson effect. It’s the accountability piece,” Peshon said in reference Michael Brown, an unarmed black man, who was killed in 2014 by a white police officer in Ferguson, Mo. An officer’s word is no longer golden.

Then there is the Hollywood effect, where TV shows and movies paint an unrealistic picture of what officers are able to do – like having DNA tests back in five minutes, when the reality

is some tests take weeks or months.

“Social media drives a lot of perceptions a lot faster. We still have to manage perception even if it is wrong,” Peshon said.

And, still, at the end of the day many aspects of law enforcement are the same. It’s all about dealing with people and their problems.

“How you do it has changed. It’s more procedure driven,” Peshon said.



Randy Peshon has been undersheriff of El Dorado

County for nearly one year. Photo/Provided

It was while Peshon was lieutenant of the Tahoe jail that D'Agostini got to know him.

Peshon was the force behind creating the **culinary program** at the Tahoe jail. This allows inmates who qualify to learn a skill that can translate into a job once they are released. And every year at the El Dorado County fair the inmates bring home multiple ribbons for their baking prowess.

"I've known Randy since his days as the Tahoma resident deputy. Randy has been instrumental in bringing a much needed focus on providing appropriate treatment to the mentally ill offenders who are incarcerated in our local jail. His hard work and tenacity resulted in the county receiving a MIOCR grant, which supported transitional housing for those leaving the jail and reentering society," El Dorado County Superior Court Judge Suzanne Kingsbury told *Lake Tahoe News*. "He worked with other county agencies, NAMI and the court to develop our Behavioral Health Court. The primary goal was to reduce the number and length of incarcerations of mentally ill offenders who could be safely treated in the community. It was extraordinarily successful, but when the funding ran out, the county was not able to sustain the housing component of the program, which was a huge blow. Just recently, Capt. Jackie Noren worked with criminal justice partners to obtain another MIOCR grant, which enabled the county to secure a new transitional house."

After Peshon made captain he was transferred to Placerville, oversaw both county jails and then was tapped as undersheriff. Not all of California's 58 counties have an undersheriff, so he doesn't have many peers.

"It's a very unique job. It's really an honor that someone selects you to run the agency for them. It's also a huge opportunity to leave a legacy. The decisions I make now will

affect the agency for 10 to 20 years. It tends to keep you awake at night at times," Peshon said.

The main job D'Agostini has thrust upon Peshon is to get the new headquarters in Placerville built.

"He has been my No. 1 advisor through the whole process," D'Agostini said.

Peshon was instrumental in finding the $2.6 million for the property in Placerville, which will be paid for in February. Construction will be another $45 million.

The sheriff said his No. 1 goal is public safety, No. 2 is to get the headquarters built. He said the current facility is so bad it "needs to be bulldozed."

While the fact that Peshon hails from Tahoe was not a deciding factor to promote him to undersheriff, D'Agostini admits it's a bonus. The sheriff has made a concerted effort to eliminate the us vs. them mentality of the divide between Placerville and Lake Tahoe. Peshon is that human bridge.

For Peshon, though, the job has him spending the bulk of this time – even the nights – on the West Slope. He returns on the weekends to his home and wife.

"I'm having the time of my life. I have a really good boss," Peshon said. "He has extremely clear values, a vision for where the agency needs to go. It's an honor to do that for him."

Lawmakers reject bills aimed at artificial turf

By Laurel Rosenhall, CalMatters

Is it safe for children to play on fields made of ground up old tires?

That’s a question California scientists are studying in the wake of alarming media reports that featured cancer-stricken soccer players describing years of diving into artificial turf made of recycled tires.

The substance known as “crumb rubber” has made its way onto thousands of California schools and parks, where it helps cushion falls and conserve water. It’s formed into mats on playgrounds and ground up into granules that cover fields of synthetic grass.

One reason so many play spaces are made of crumb rubber is that the state gives away money to encourage its use. To keep some tires out of landfills, California’s recycling department has given $42 million in grants since 2005 to communities that use materials made from old tires.

Read the whole story

Mt. Rose ski resort for sale

By Benjamin Spillman, Reno Gazette-Journal

The independently-owned Mt. Rose Ski Tahoe is officially up for sale.

Fritz Buser, majority owner of the Reno-area winter resort since 1971, “is looking to sell the resort,” according to a statement issued late Saturday afternoon.

“From a business perspective, the timing is right with the 2014-15 season proving highly successful despite enduring the leanest snow season in the history of the mountain,” the statement said. “In addition, the 2015-16 winter is currently on track to be one of the strongest in the last 10 years and prove exactly what the resort is capable of achieving in a typical or above average snow year.”

Read the whole story

Wild, natural beauty abounds in national parks

Publisher’s note: ***This is one in a series of stories about the National Park Service, which is celebrating its 100th anniversary in 2016.***



Male elk engage in ritualized annual mating behavior during the rut in Colorado's Rocky Mountain National Park. Photo Copyright 2016 Carolyn E. Wright

By Carolyn E. Wright

I had visited Rocky Mountain National Park many times to hike, bike, and photograph the beautiful landscape. This time was different. With my new husband in tow, we were in search of the elk rut, also known as the mating season, when the males fight for a harem of cows and their calves. The bull elk also will bugle during this time to attract the females and to intimidate other bulls.



Carolyn E. Wright photographs elk in Denali National Park. Photo Copyright 2016 Carolyn E. Wright

We started our afternoon drive from Estes Park where we were staying in the famous Stanley Hotel, which was the inspiration for the movie "The Shining." We followed the main road through

the park, stopping to enjoy several overlooks, as this was my husband's first visit to the park. It was getting late and I knew we had to get to the Poudre Lake area where the land is flat and water abundant. There, we should find our goal.



The layers of Canyonlands National Park in Utah. Photo Copyright 2015 Carolyn E. Wright

We rounded the corner and saw herds of elk. I couldn't gather my camera equipment fast enough. Fortunately, we were rewarded with several young bulls fighting and other interactions. It's an incredible opportunity to witness nature at work.



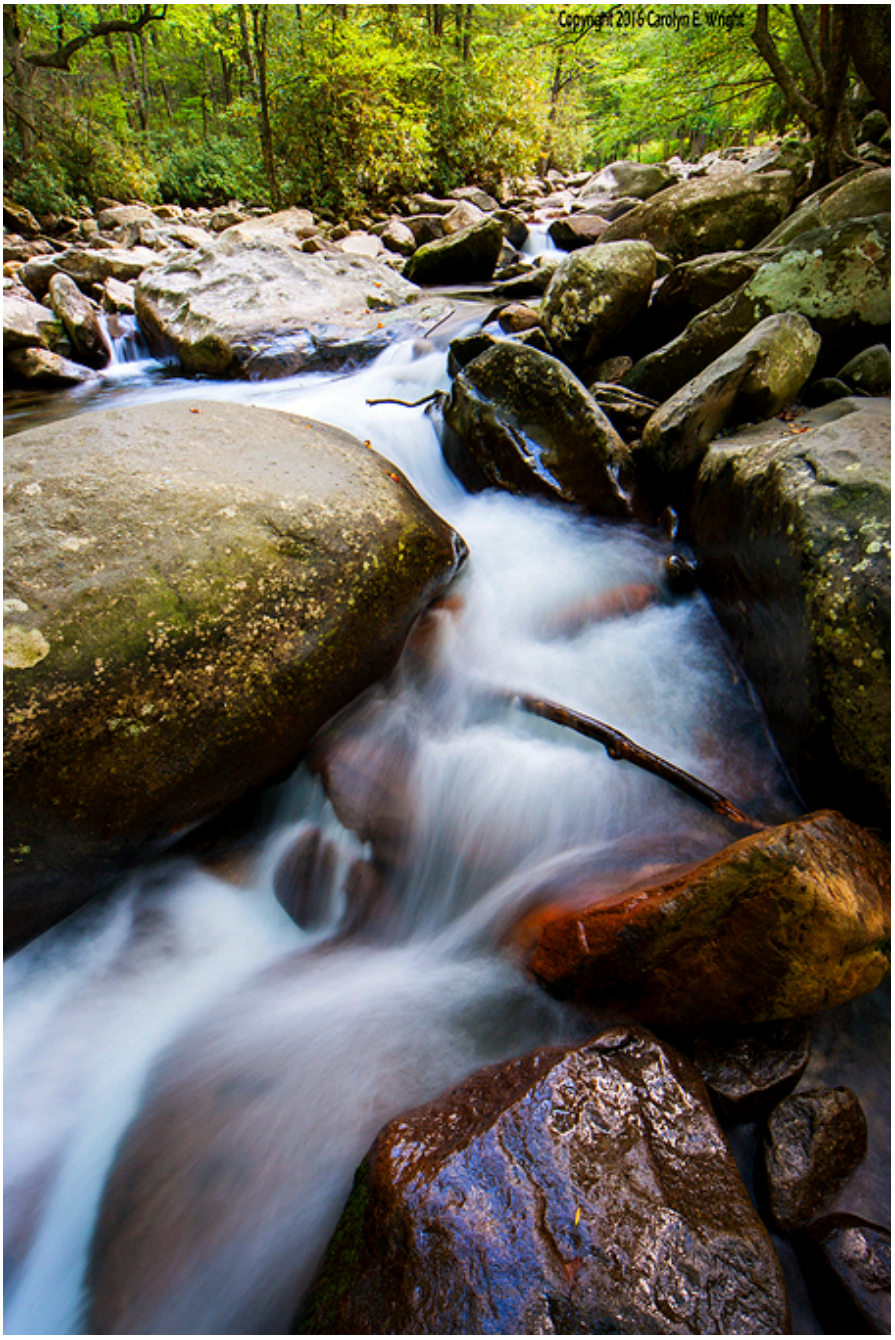
A grizzly finds its salmon dinner in Alaska’s Lake Clark National Park and Preserve. Photo Copyright 2016 Carolyn E. Wright

This is one of my many wonderful experiences at our national parks. These memories started as a youngster growing up in Tennessee, where my family and friends made several trips to nearby Smoky Mountain National Park. My family enjoyed the outdoors and camping, so I soon started to document the beauty with my camera.



Harbor seals chill on glacier ice in Kenai Fjords National Park in Alaska. Photo Copyright 2016 Carolyn E. Wright

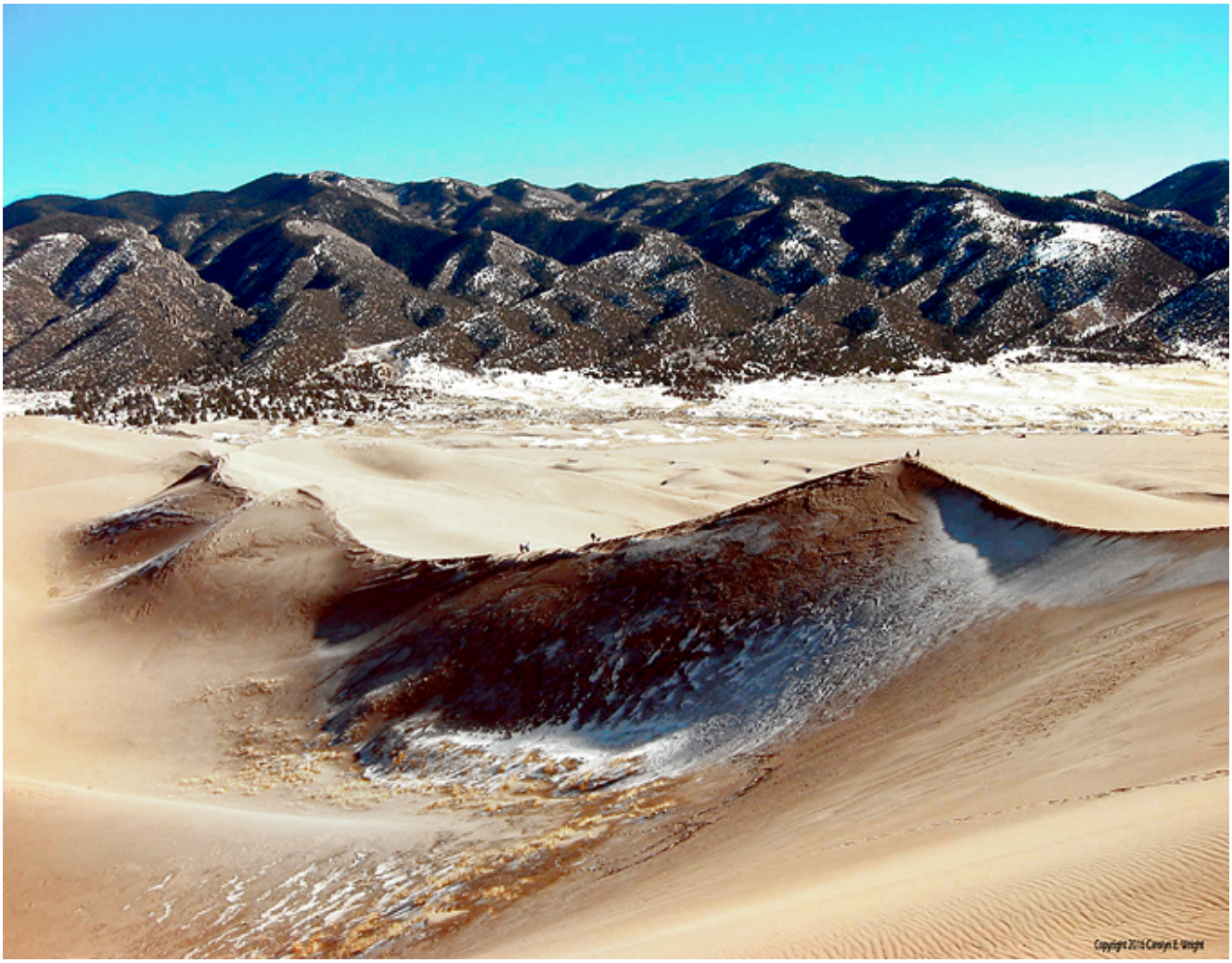
I later added the goal of visiting every national park to my bucket list. While I could spend lots of time and money traveling all over the world, it is much easier and cheaper to enjoy the incredible diversity and beauty of our park system. I don’t have to worry about language barriers, passports, or currency exchanges. I also had to travel for work, so it was easy to add a weekend visiting a nearby park to my business trip.



Smoky Mountains Creek flows through Great Smoky Mountains National Park in Tennessee. Photo Copyright 2016 Carolyn E. Wright

We have 59 national parks, plus many more national monuments and recreation areas. I've been to 33 national parks (some of them several times), from the Everglades in Florida, to Denali in Alaska, Acadia in Maine, and Sequoia in California. Each park has unique and varied features. Rocky Mountain National Park is my overall favorite because of its combination of extreme mountains and wildlife. Kenai Fjords (sea life,

including whales, otters, and sea lions) and Lake Clark (coastal brown bears, aka grizzlies) offer the closest access to animals. Great Sand Dunes provided the most fun, running and rolling down the dunes. Yellowstone presents the most diversity of landscape and animals.



Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve in Colorado if full of contrasting terrain. Photo Copyright 2016 Carolyn E. Wright

My experiences during my visits have ranged from elation to fear. During a backpacking trip in the Smoky Mountains, a wasp stung me, we had to cross a fast running creek seven times, and we got lost for several hours. I've watched a mother bear nurse her cub within feet of me in Lake Clark. I've seen the rare blossoming of fields of wildflowers in Death Valley. The Denali mountain provided the most spectacular view, but it is

one of the most difficult areas to hike because there are no trails in the park. I fought hypothermia during a backpack trip there. An alligator approached us in the Everglades. I hiked to the bottom and back up the steep Grand Canyon. Deer ate berries next to me in Olympic.



A sow nurses her cub at Lake Clark National Park and Preserve. Photo Copyright 2016 Carolyn E. Wright

All of our national parks bestow a plethora of scenic opportunities and a sense of grounding at a low price. Great thanks to President Theodore Roosevelt who started the National Park Service and to those who continue to preserve these national gems.

Casinos bankroll effort to preserve Nev. taxes

By Associated Press

LAS VEGAS — The vast majority of the money used to defend Gov. Brian Sandoval's new $1.1 billion tax package is coming from major casinos.

An expert says that's likely because the governor's plan spreads the tax burden broadly across a range of businesses and doesn't single out the gambling industry.

The *Las Vegas Sun* reports that most of the $242,000 donated to the Coalition for Nevada's Future in 2015 came from five gambling giants, according to reports filed earlier this month with the Nevada secretary of state.

Wynn Resorts, MGM Resorts International and Caesars Entertainment each gave $38,000, while Station Casinos and Boyd Gaming contributed $28,500 apiece. The South Point casino and Affinity Gaming donated $4,750, and some casinos in Reno offered smaller amounts.

The coalition is funding attorneys who are trying to stop several efforts to repeal the tax.

Coalition lawyers won a court fight against a proposal backed by conservative activist Chuck Muth to repeal all three parts of the tax package.

But they lost a battle to stop a potential ballot measure, backed by Republican state Controller Ron Knecht, to repeal just the new Commerce Tax that affects large businesses. A judge cleared the way for supporters to gather the more than 55,000 signatures they'll need to qualify the petition for the November ballot.

Backers say taxing a range of businesses will help Nevada's revenue stream hold steady when individual industries are struggling.

"The precipitous decline in state revenues during the Great Recession was due in large part to the reliance on a very narrow tax base," said Nevada Resort Association President Virginia Valentine, whose group represents the state's largest casinos. "The Commerce Tax should reduce volatility while providing long-term growth, especially as the Nevada economy becomes more diverse."

Observers say the casinos also have a personal stake in the tax surviving a ballot challenge.

"If that gets gutted, the easiest fix would be to try to go for gaming again (for additional tax revenue)," UNLV political science professor David Damore told the newspaper. "For gaming, (the Commerce Tax) was a win because, yeah, their taxes went up – but everyone else's taxes went up, too."

Golf course provides tranquil cross country ski



The Upper Truckee River meanders through Lake Tahoe Golf Course. Photos/Kathryn Reed

By Kathryn Reed

MEYERS – Golf courses offer some of most wonderful cross country skiing opportunities. They are flat, scenic and go on for miles.

And while golfers might think the trees are close together, winter recreationists find these plots of land to be wide-open.

Such is the case with Lake Tahoe Golf Course. This is an 18-hole course for much of the year. In winter a snowmobile concessionaire operates there. To the right of the clubhouse is the way to get away from the motorized fun. We started to the left of hole 10.

On the first Saturday of the year people were farther off to the right playing in the snow – building snowmen and just enjoying the white stuff.



Plenty of virgin snow to ski through.

The noise from the sleds dissipates quickly. The exhaust, though, is noticeable as we return. It clearly was stinking up the fresh mountain air.

One of the nice things about this trek is that it doesn't take long to glide into a serene landscape. Plenty of people had been there before us. Snowshoe and cross country tracks crisscross each other.

Some of the tracks are so worn it's as if they've been professionally laid. The slight slickness to them makes for easy gliding.

But the snow was perfect this particular day so breaking trail was no big deal, and in many ways was more fun. The give to it made it relatively easy to push through and a bit more of a workout than going where others had already gone.

Barriers across the bridges keep snowmobilers out. It means either having to gingerly step over them or taking off the skis. Some cross the Upper Truckee River, others Angora Creek.



The Angora burn area is visible just below Mount Tallac.

Many of the South Shore's more recognizable peaks make themselves known as we go farther – Freel, Jobs, Mount Tallac and of course Twin Peaks is right there.

The golf course sits on state land – Lake Valley State Recreation Area. It abuts Washoe Meadows State Park. There are several access points to both. The golf course provides the most parking, especially on days when parking on a street could be problematic because of snow removal.

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Getting there:

From South Lake Tahoe, go west on Highway 50. The golf course is on the right before hitting the heart of Meyers.