Quest to save water may come at an ecological cost

By Haya El Nasser, Al Jazeera America

LOS ANGELES — Lush lawns have become vilified during California's historic drought that is searing the state for the fourth consecutive year. And removing thirsty turf has been rewarded with generous incentives from local water districts, rebates so popular that the demand has outstripped funds available.

But now, some ecologists are raising concern that the state's water conservation fervor may be harmful to the environment.

"The key thing is what are we replacing lawns with," said Peter Gleick, president and co-founder of the Pacific Institute, a global water think tank based in Oakland.

Mulch and native plants are the preferred environmentally sound alternatives. But some are painting their brown grass green and even paving over their yards.

Read the whole story

South Lake Tahoe's Basecamp Hotel putting down stakes to attract locals and tourists



Basecamp Hotel in South Lake Tahoe is catering to an active and younger clientele. Photos/Kathryn Reed

By Kathryn Reed

In some ways staying at Basecamp Hotel is like glamping, only every room has at least four walls. In some ways it like a hostel – because of the communal venues – but there is no need to share a room with strangers. In most ways it is redefining what casual, relaxed, fun lodging with good beer and food is all about.

The idea is that it is the base camp for fun in South Lake Tahoe for a traveler who has no intention of spending the bulk of their time in the room.

Basecamp is trying to create a community of travelers and locals. The beer garden is open to anyone of drinking age. Plenty of locals were enjoying it during the summer concerts because the sound travels easily across the street from Harveys.

"We want guests to feel like they are locals. We want that interaction," General Manager Amber Gardner told *Lake Tahoe News*.

This weekend is the inaugural Oktoberfest. West Coast beers are on tap or in bottles/cans.



Rooms have few frills, but all the basic necessities.

Christian Strobel in 2012 renovated what was the boarded up, bankrupt 50-room Block Hotel near the state line in South Lake Tahoe. In summer 2014 he and his partner Neils Cotter acquired the adjacent Capri motel, making an additional 24 rooms available last December.

Slapping on a coat of paint and new furniture were not enough. The old Capri parking lot was turned into a greenbelt of sorts for people to hang out on, play games and enjoy a bite and beer. Entrances to the rooms were completely changed, in addition to being overhauled.

The beer garden was the porte-cochère for the Capri, while the kitchen used to be the on-site manager’s living room.

Three large garage type doors roll up so there is a seamless flow between the indoors and outdoors. When it’s cold, the glass still provides an airiness. Even the concrete floors add to the casual urban feel.



It’s not necessary to be a guest to enjoy the beer garden.

Adjacent to the beer garden is a playroom with ping-pong and a television. It can double as meeting space.

“Accessible and casual” is the concept of the entire venue.

Chef Nathaniel Lawrence is creating a pub type menu, with lots of bratwurst. He searched quite a while before he found the perfect pretzel bun. Wild game sausage will be rotated in.

(The hotel owners also own the restaurant at Lakeside Beach and the wedding venue there, so Lawrence was busy cooking there this summer as well.)

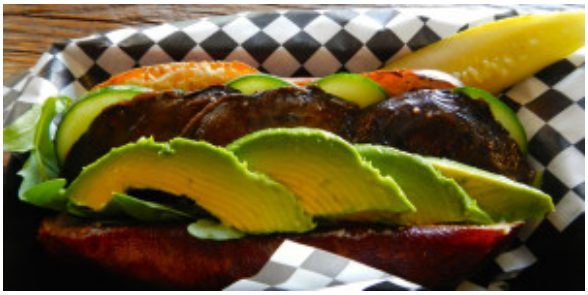
Creative, good food is what he was serving the day this vegetarian reporter popped in. The watermelon salad included his prized pickled onions with feta and fennel vinaigrette.

The portabella dog was something no one else in the basin is doing. On the same bun the meat eaters get, slices of portabella mushroom were interspersed with arugula, cucumber and avocado. It was divine.

“My background is fine dining. I’m trying to incorporate it,” Lawrence told *Lake Tahoe News*. His goal is to make as much from scratch as possible, and to buy it as local as possible.

Dessert – strawberry shortcake – comes in a mason jar. It was creative in presentation, the perfect amount, and a good

balance of cubed cake with the sliced berries.



Vegetarians and meat eaters are bound to be satisfied.

This winter Basecamp intends to resume the family-style dinners on Thursdays-Fridays-Saturday – which are open to anyone. Lunch is also a possibility down the line. For guests, it means not having to go anywhere else; for locals it means another destination.

The beer garden becomes the breakfast room in the morning.

The communal feel of Basecamp is carried throughout the property, with a 16-person hot tub and fire pit that are fenced in. There is also a rooftop hot tub.

S’mores are always available to roast on one of the seven fire pits.

For those needing a place to lay their head at night there are 16 room types to choose from. The family room sleeps six; it has two full size beds with a twin bunk bed above each.

Some rooms have gas fireplaces, a few have private balconies, some come with bathtubs.

In room amenities are sparse and masculine. Lanterns are the lights. The orange-gray décor is comforting.

The Basecamp concept is expanding, with a hotel in Boulder now open and the old Aviva in Tahoe City being renovated with a summer 2016 opening. Each has a slightly different theme, with

the South Lake Tahoe one being bear oriented and North Shore trout.

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Notes:

· The inaugural Oktoberfest celebration is Oct. 10 from 2-8pm at the beer garden.

· The hotel is located at 4143 Cedar Ave., South Lake Tahoe.

· Phone is 530.208.0180.

· The beer garden is open from 3-11pm.

Brown signs aggressive climate change bill

By Michael R. Blood and Judy Lin, AP

Gov. Jerry Brown signed an ambitious climate change bill on Wednesday, aiming to increase the state's use of renewable electricity to 50 percent and make existing buildings twice as energy-efficient by 2030.

"The goal is clear, and California is in the forefront," Brown said at a signing ceremony at the hilltop Griffith Observatory, where a hazy downtown Los Angeles provided the backdrop.

Brown tried for an even stronger measure that would have also

directed state regulators to enforce a 50 percent drop in petroleum use in the next 15 years, but oil interests defeated that part of the package.

He characterized the loss as a short-term setback and insisted that the world needs to wean itself off fossil fuels as quickly as possible.

“What has been the source of our prosperity now becomes the source of our ultimate destruction if we don’t get off it. And that is so difficult,” Brown said.

The Legislature approved the watered-down SB350 in the final hours of the legislative session on Sept. 11.

The measure does not specify how California will achieve these far-reaching goals, deferring the details to the state’s Air Resources Board, Energy Commission and Public Utilities Commission. The boards’ members are mostly appointed by the governor and have broad influence over the state’s economic life.

Lawmakers blamed a multimillion-dollar advertising campaign by oil companies, which raised fears of job losses, for defeating the petroleum reduction requirement.

Both houses are controlled by Democrats, but Brown accused Republicans of failing to take action to slow global warming. He recalled that Ronald Reagan, a Republican, was California’s governor when the state created the Air Resources Board in response to the smog in Los Angeles, and that Republican President Richard Nixon signed the Clean Air Act.

“That was a time when Republicans really got it. We hope they are going to come back to the good old days of Reagan and Nixon, when people cared about clean air and clean water,” he said.

Brown, a Democrat, began the year with a vow to push the most

aggressive greenhouse-gas emissions benchmark in North America through the Legislature.

His goal builds on landmark legislation signed by Republican Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger in 2006. That legislation established the first U.S. program to cap and trade emissions as a way to reduce pollutants to 1990 levels by 2020.

That program, second only to the European Union's in size, imposes extra costs on polluting businesses and has kept the state on track to get a third of its electricity from renewable sources in five more years.

Brown took his campaign around the world, even meeting with the pope in July. But he lost a key political battle among moderate Democrats in Sacramento amid intense lobbying by the oil industry and California's utilities.

Some lawmakers were willing to accept forced cuts in petroleum use if the Legislature could have more power over the Air Resources Board, which has been implementing the greenhouse gas emissions law.

But Brown refused to give up what he sees as his executive authority.

Brown said cleaner-running cars and energy-efficient appliances will improve the environment, but he warned that the world's coming transition from carbon-producing fuels to solar, wind and other renewable energies will be difficult.

"I never want to minimize the task ahead," he said. "It's not going to be easy, and it's not going to come overnight. There is no quick, one thing you can do."

Tahoe yellow cress spared from endangered list



Tahoe yellow cress only grows in the basin. Photo/USFS

By Jeff DeLong, Reno Gazette-Journal

A tiny plant that grows only along the shoreline of Lake Tahoe does not need federal protection after years of successful efforts to prevent its extinction, officials announced Wednesday.

It appears the Tahoe yellow cress now has a promising future and does not need to be listed as an endangered or threatened species, officials from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service said.

Fifteen years of work by a coalition of land managers, conservationists and private property owners has “truly exemplified” the most basic function of the Endangered Species Act – cooperation toward conservation of sensitive ecosystems and the plants and animals that depend upon them to survive, said Ted Koch, supervisor of U.S. Fish and Wildlife’s Reno office.

Read the whole story

SLT council to consider censuring Conner

By Kathryn Reed

The South Lake Tahoe City Council will consider censuring Councilmember JoAnn Conner at a special meeting on Oct. 19.

Mayor Hal Cole called for the meeting to address the behavior and language of Conner toward multiple city employees as well as her interactions with colleagues. He said she is creating a hostile work environment.

Cole told *Lake Tahoe News* the exact wording of the agenda is being worked out, but that two items will likely be on it:

1. A vote to support City Manager Nancy Kerry's decision to ban Conner from having one-on-one access with any staff member.

   "We don't have to do this. I'm concerned with what I'm hearing and reading that JoAnn is making this personal between her and Nancy. It is not personal. It is about protecting the city. It sends a message that it is not just Nancy doing this, that we concur," Cole said.

2. There will be a resolution brought forward to censure Conner.

If the majority of the council votes to censure Conner, she will still be able to do her job. It is essentially a vote to say they object to her behavior. At the local level

impeachment is not an option by the council.

“When I feel my employees have been threatened, I need to protect them and the city coffers,” Cole told *LTN*.

Last month Kerry told the council she would no longer allow Conner to interact with staff and vice versa.

Conner’s abusive behavior has been the norm for the nearly three years she has been on the council, according to city staff. Non-city staff has told *Lake Tahoe News* many stories about Conner’s vulgarity and hostility. Those interactions, though, point to a pattern of behavior, but are not anything the council can address.

In February the council had an open meeting during the weekend strategic planning session in which the five aired concerns about Conner’s behavior. Tears were shed and an honest dialog was had. Later that weekend Conner called it healing. The other four believed Conner when she said change would be forthcoming.

Cole said Conner took some responsibility in February for her behavior, but since then she has reverted to her old tactics of bullying.

Those tactics reportedly include abusive, threatening, repulsive and belittling comments. This, by definition, is harassment.

The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission says harassment is when “the conduct is severe or pervasive enough to create a work environment that a reasonable person would consider intimidating, hostile, or abusive.”

The EEOC goes on to say, “The victim does not have to be the person harassed, but can be anyone affected by the offensive conduct.”

Conner – as are all the council members – is the boss of the

city manager and city attorney. They in turn have an obligation to protect their respective employees or they could be held individually liable. Stopping the interaction between Conner and staff is a form of protection.

Conner was not available for comment late Wednesday. However, she has been active on social media in pleading her case. On Facebook she posted, “I still have no information on the specific charges, just lots of innuendo and hearsay, therefore I cannot explain it, defend it, or change it.” She claims her challenge of the sign permit fee has something to do with what is going on. Cole said the sign permit is irrelevant to what is going on.

She sent a letter to a number of people on Oct. 7, which was forwarded to *LTN*. In it she begs for support.

The email said, “I believe this is a power play to silence the voice of the people. I have always been different from the other Council Members, and am the most active advocate for the ‘little people,’ veterans, seniors, and small business owners.

“I believe they do not like that I do not automatically defer to Nancy Kerry or go along with their agenda. They cannot attack me on my work, as I have accomplished too many good things for the people, so I believe they are attempting to attack me on innuendo and hearsay, to tarnish my reputation, so I will either quit or not run again in 2016.”

At no point does she address the allegations made against her about her conduct. She will have an opportunity in 11 days to do so at the special meeting.

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Notes:

· The meeting is Oct. 19 at 3pm at Lake Tahoe Airport.

Competitive video gaming may be next for Nev. bettors

By J.D. Morris, Las Vegas Sun

In Nevada, gamblers can wager on a wide range of sporting events: football, boxing, horse racing and, as of earlier this year, the Olympics, to name a few.

What if video games were added to that list someday?

It’s already happening elsewhere, thanks to an explosion in the popularity of the competitive video gaming industry, known as e-sports.

In various places throughout the country and abroad, fans gather en masse to watch video game players compete in high-stakes tournaments. Increasingly, fans also bet on the outcomes.

Read the whole story

Calif. federal reservoirs continue to evaporate

By Dale Kasler, Sacramento Bee

In the latest indicator of the severity of the drought, the federal government’s main reservoirs serving California have

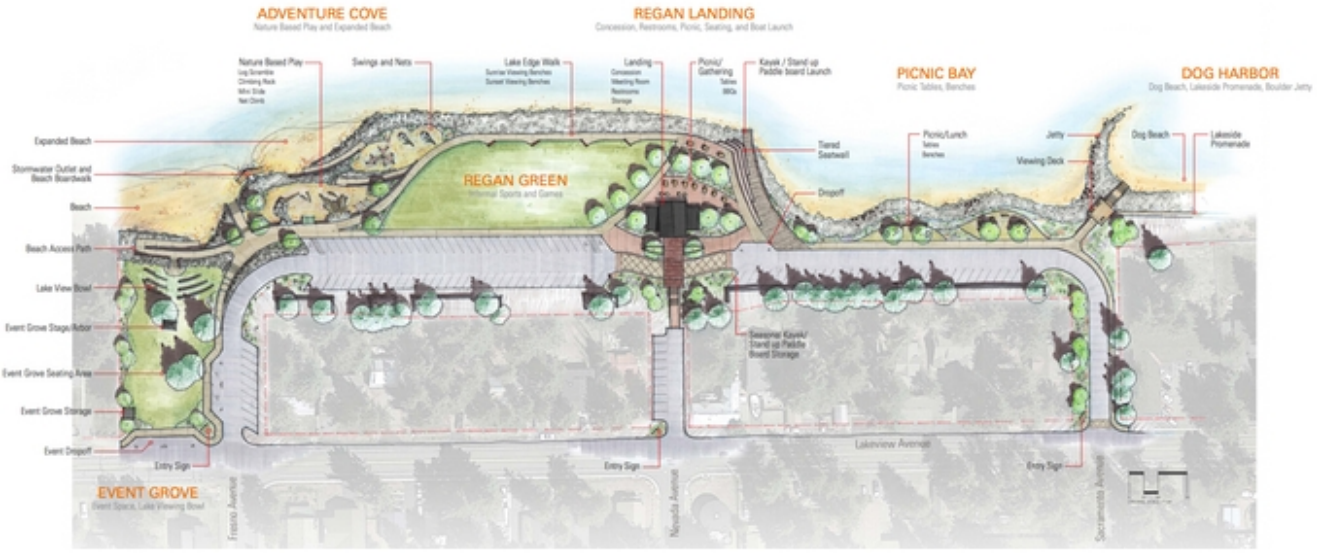
begun the new “water year” at just a quarter full and in worse shape than last year.

The U.S. Bureau of Reclamation said Tuesday that the six key reservoirs of the Central Valley Project were a combined 200,000 acre-feet below the same time last year, a difference of about 6 percent. An acre-foot is 326,000 gallons, or a year’s supply for a typical California household.

All told, the reservoirs, including Shasta and Folsom, are just 24 percent full.

Read the whole story

Regan Beach evolving into contemporary park



Regan Beach plans call for making it modern and accessible to all abilities. Rendering/Design Workshop

By Kathryn Reed

Putting more beach back into Regan Beach is a goal of many who use this South Lake Tahoe recreation area.

Parks and Recreation Commissioner Steve Noll on Oct. 6 went over the latest composite based on feedback at community meetings and through a survey the city conducted. The top amenities or changes people want include:

- Non-motorized boat launch
- Expanded beach
- Jetty
- Adventure play area
- Concession-restrooms

- Picnic area
- Dog beach access
- Multi-use lawn.

“I think we need more beach. People enjoy the water’s edge,” John Cefalu said. He was one of several of the nearly two dozen people at Tuesday’s meeting who voiced a desire for even more beach beyond what the Design Workshop renderings showed.

To accomplish this some of the grass area may have to go away. Already more than 5,000-square-feet of grass may be eliminated.

Other likely changes include eliminating the sand volleyball area, getting rid of the kids swing set and creating something more contemporary called an adventure play area, going from two picnic tables to a potential of 20, upgrading concession stand and bathroom, removing one parking space, adding about 130 linear feet of beach, and adding about 440 linear feet of seating.

One of the biggest changes will be the removal of the 1940’s era bulkhead.

A huge unknown, though, is what was used 70-plus years ago as fill for the beach. Like the Tahoe Keys, this area is manmade. The city will bore into the soil to get samples before any work is done. This will also be necessary before permits are obtained. Depending on what is found, it’s possible the fill may have to all be trucked out of the basin and uncontaminated dirt brought to the site.

Back in the day people buried all sorts of things with complete disregard for the environment. The city has found tanks from the old Globin resort while doing work in this area of town. Multiple gasoline storage tanks – including two full ones – were discovered up the road a couple years ago during

work on Harrison Avenue.

Jim Marino, assistant public works director, told *Lake Tahoe News* that whatever the fill is composed it should not prevent the project from going forward.

Overflow parking into the neighborhood from events is a concern. Lauren Thomaselli, parks manager, said it's possible to include in rental agreements the need to provide adequate parking, even if that means shuttling people to the venue.

The City Council will make the ultimate decision on what the design will be. A date has not been set for when that will occur. Design Workshop will make final conceptual designs as well as put an estimated price on the work before the electeds discuss any project.

Pension reform advocates want measure on ballot

By Joe Rodriguez, San Jose Mercury News

A pension reform coalition that includes former San Jose Mayor Chuck Reed unveiled a pair of statewide ballot measures Monday to rein in retirement benefits for government employees.

The coalition, spearheaded by Reed and former San Diego City Councilman Carl DeMaio, wrote two propositions to improve its chances of winning a long-running battle with state Attorney General Kamala Harris, whose office is in charge of writing the titles and summaries of statewide ballot measures. The campaign plans to place only one measure on the November 2016 ballot after seeing how the attorney general summarizes them.

The coalition claims the Attorney General's Office penned unfair summaries of previous measures it proposed because Harris, a Democrat, enjoys the political support of labor unions. Harris' office denies this allegation.

Read the whole story

Nev. patient dumping suit to be settled

By Michelle Rindels, AP

CARSON CITY – Nevada has tentatively agreed to pay $400,000 to the city and county of San Francisco to settle allegations that the state wrongfully and intentionally bused psychiatric patients to the city and declined to pay the costs connected with their care.

The deal, if approved by the Nevada Board of Examiners and a similar board in San Francisco, is expected to end an expensive legal battle that has lasted more than two years. Nevada officials budgeted more than $1.9 million to fight the lawsuit through the summer; a final tally of the costs wasn't immediately available.

"The settlement will bring an amicable resolution to this matter," Republican Gov. Brian Sandoval said in a statement. "The settlement will also validate the patient management best practices and procedures which Nevada has had in place for two years."

Officials from the San Francisco City Attorney's Office

declined to comment on the agreement, which would cover the city's attorney's fees.

San Francisco sued Nevada in September 2013, after the *Sacramento Bee* published accounts of patients who were apparently discharged from Rawson-Neal Psychiatric Hospital in Las Vegas, given bus tickets to cities in California and directed to seek further care there.

San Francisco City Attorney Dennis Herrera sued, saying that 24 people with no prior connection to his city had been bused there over a five-year period, and 20 needed medical care shortly after they arrived.

"What the defendants have been doing for years is horribly wrong on two levels," Herrera said in a statement when he filed suit. "It cruelly victimizes a defenseless population, and punishes jurisdictions for providing health and human services that others won't provide."

In the months immediately after the newspaper's investigation, Nevada health officials said policies were strengthened to ensure a patient has support at their destination, several employees were fired, and more than $30 million was added to the budget to fund mental health services.

Sandoval said he expects Nevada and San Francisco to agree on new procedures for transferring psychiatric patients.

"We look forward to working with California to ensure all patient transfers to and from both states are managed using these best practices and adhering to conditions detailed in the agreement," the governor said.

The settlement is expected to come up for a vote at a Nevada Board of Examiners meeting on Oct. 13.