

N. Nevada land bill couples development, scenic wilderness

By Steve Tetreault, Las Vegas Review Journal

WASHINGTON — A Nevada bill submitted to Congress on Thursday would realign federal lands in Douglas County, opening some for development while creating a 12,330-acre scenic wilderness.

The measure would designate the Burbank Canyons Wilderness in the Pine Nut Mountains northwest of Wellington. The area of three deep scenic canyons is prized by conservationists for an abundance of sagebrush, pinyon pine and juniper.

Sixty-seven acres would be given to the state of Nevada to add to Lake Tahoe Nevada State Park, while 1,000 acres would be put into trust for the Washoe Tribe of California and Nevada.

Read the whole story

Gaming industry to launch outreach initiative for presidential campaign

By Howard Stutz, Las Vegas Review-Journal

The American Gaming Association will launch a national initiative in conjunction with the 2016 presidential campaign

aimed at showing the industry's economic benefits to candidates for the nation's highest office.

The effort, dubbed "Gaming Votes," is twofold – to educate casino industry employees, vendors and other stakeholders on candidate positions on gaming, and to ensure candidates understand the industry's economic contributions.

The organization wants to make gaming issues a topic for discussion during the campaign and change "false" perceptions about the casino industry.

During a presentation on the effort in Las Vegas on Thursday, the association cited a new Oxford Economics report on the broad base of jobs gaming companies provide and diversity in the industry's workforce.

Read the whole story

Northstar redefines ski lodge dining



It takes a culinary team to serve up to 80 people at once at the Mountain Table Dinners at the top of Northstar. Photo Copyright 2015 Carolyn E. Wright

By Kathryn Reed

TRUCKEE – Long wooden tables elegantly adorned with place settings, each with four wine glasses, three forks and three knives. This was no ordinary dinner at a ski lodge.

Foie gras is coming out of the kitchen, bubbly is being poured. Helena Kletch and JT Chevalier are providing background music. There is no fried food, no hot cocoa, no loud screaming children. Nor are there ski boots or ski attire of any kind.

Zephyr Lodge at the top of Northstar turns into a fine-dining restaurant twice a month in what is being billed as Mountain Table Dinners. The five-course meals are created to complement that evening's winemaker. On this particular night Frank Family Vineyards of Calistoga is featured.



Plenty of reasons to toast – to good food, good wine, good friends. Photo Copyright 2015 Carolyn E. Wright

Groups of friends fill up the two long tables. Some are from Tahoe, others from Sacramento, the Bay Area and farther away. It's a festive atmosphere, especially as more wine is consumed. As the musicians played John Denver's "Country Roads" nearly everyone started to sing the words, though not necessarily in perfect harmony.

Executive Chef Steve Anderson is a proponent of using locally sourced food as much as possible. For the pluot demi that went with the bison tenderloin he thawed a stone fruit puree that he had frozen in the summer.

Tahoe Food Hub, the nonprofit beneficiary of the night, is a main source for his fresh vegetables.



The Zephyr Lodge becomes a fine dining restaurant. Photo
Copyright 2015 Carolyn E. Wright

Anderson and Chef Chad Shrewsbury are discussing how best to plate one of the dishes as servers are at the ready.

“We have completely different styles, but the same palates,” Anderson tells *Lake Tahoe News* of the three chefs responsible for the meal. Dan Carter is the third. “We argue back and forth.”

It’s hard to know who won, but every dish coming out of the kitchen is exquisite.

But the meal was a bit of a dichotomy by wanting to use locally sourced products while serving controversial items like foie gras – duck liver was just allowed to return to California menus; Chilean sea bass – which has environmental concerns; veal cheek – an unusual cut of an animal more people are eating less of; and bison – which is more common in the Midwest, than California.



The winery says the Chardonnay has a creme brulee finish. Photo Copyright 2015 Carolyn E. Wright

Despite what seemed to be a conflict between philosophy and what was practiced last month, dinner guests (80 is the maximum) left little if anything on their plates. And the portions were more than ample.

The sea bass was Ann Kramer's favorite morsel of the night, but the Sacramento woman was also pleasantly surprised by the veal cheek – something she had not had before.

Bob Keller of Zephyr Cove was also impressed with the sea bass and veal. "It's fabulous. It's hard to cook fish. This is cooked perfectly," Keller said.

And the veal – "It's the best I've ever had," Keller said. "It's a fabulous dish with a lot of different flavors."

The veal cheek was served with sweet potato gnocchi, Humboldt Fog brulee and a bing cherry glaze. It was paired with a 2013 Pinot Noir, which was one of the favorite wines of the evening. It's one of those wines that can stand on its own

without food, but when paired with food has a more complex flavor and enhances the dish.

Carolyn Wright had the highest praise for the bison.

"I love game of any type. It was tough to cut, but not tough to chew. The flavors are great," the Zephyr Cove woman said.

The 2012 Cabernet Sauvignon was paired with the bison, which Wright thought was very good, and someone else found to be young.

Everyone was complimentary of the food arriving at the tables at the same time, all hot and all plated as though it came out of a high-end kitchen. But there were no refills on any of the wines.



It takes two gondola rides to get to the restaurant.
Photo Copyright 2015 Carolyn E. Wright

The most disconcerting part of the evening was getting to and from the venue. It required taking the gondola from the village to mid-mountain, then walking to the Zephyr lift. That

lift has a few gondola cars interspersed with the regular chairs. This meant waiting in the cold for enclosed seating – which people were warned might happen. And while skiing from the top of the lift to Zephyr Lodge is no big deal, that distance suddenly seems like a ways when walking on slick, icy snow, with the wind blowing and the temperature at or below freezing. The snowmaking gun blowing on us on the way back was not pleasant.

It would seem like Northstar being a Vail Resorts property could look east for better ways to transport dining guests. At Vail, to get to Game Creek for dinner one takes the gondola out of Lionshead and from there a tricked out snowcat takes people on a 6-minute ride to the restaurant. And at Beaver Creek's Beano's Cabin, diners are hauled up at dusk in a sleigh pulled by a snowcat. But this is Northstar's inaugural season to have these dinners and the other locales are seasoned venues.

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Notes:

- The remaining dinners are Feb. 27 featuring Ferrari-Carano Vineyards & Winery (\$120), March 13 is 50/50 Brewing Co. (\$85) and March 27 is with Frog's Leap Winery (\$120).
- Must be 21 to attend.
- Vegetarian options available.
- For more info, go online.

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Bill would label genetically modified food

By Sharokina Shams, KCRA-TV

A group of U.S. senators, including Sen. Barbara Boxer, D-Calif., are pushing for a law that would require labels for genetically engineered foods, but efforts to make similar laws in California have failed.

Some lawmakers want all foods that are genetically engineered to be labeled in order to alert consumers.

“Consumers have a right to know what is in the foods they eat, and parents have a right to know what they are feeding their families,” Boxer said in a news release. “This legislation will direct the Food and Drug Administration to require clear information for food that has been genetically engineered.”

Still, some scientists say genetically engineered, or genetically modified foods, are not harmful.

[Read the whole story](#)

Family-owned Calif. ski resorts struggle from drought

By Scott Smith, AP

With California entering its fourth drought year, even some big resorts with millions of dollars in modern snow-making equipment don't have all their lifts running.

The mid-sized and family-owned resorts struggling most had hoped to reopen for the Presidents Day holiday, traditionally the year's biggest weekend for skiing.

A recent winter storm that washed over the state originated in the tropics and dropped more rain than the much-needed snow. While any wet weather is welcome in California, the storm didn't end the drought or put all the dormant resorts back in business.

"We're basically the canary in the coal mine," said Janet Tuttle, who owns Donner Ski Ranch northwest of Lake Tahoe and one of about seven resorts forced to close mid-season. "It's kind of a sad state here in California."

A stingy snowfall had left Donner's mountain face marked with brown patches of exposed dirt and rock. Tuttle and her husband, Marshall, closed the resort's six chairlifts and two beginner runs by mid-January. They reopened Wednesday with a little boost from the recent storm, hoping to keep the lifts running this weekend.

She worried about more warm weather in the forecast. "I'm not very happy about that," she said.

California's 27 resorts – and two in neighboring Nevada – make up the nation's second-most-popular destination for skiers and snowboarders after Colorado, said Bob Roberts, executive director of the California Ski Industry Association.

China Peak Mountain Resort east of Fresno was among the latest ski areas forced to suspend business, following others in Northern California such as Donner Ski Ranch, Dodge Ridge and Yosemite's Badger Pass. Mt. Baldy Ski Lifts near Los Angeles also closed.

Homewood Mountain Resort at Lake Tahoe suspended skiing early this month but also plans to open for the Presidents Day weekend with a few inches of fresh snow from recent storms.

Ski season started strong with heavy snowfall in December blanketing California's mountains. Resorts opened before Christmas, earlier than the previous year, with raised hopes that more snow would follow.

But January set records as the driest and the second warmest in recorded history, said Michael Anderson, a climatologist with the state's Department of Water Resources. The Sierra Nevada this January received 2 percent of its normal precipitation, with an average high temperature of 53 degrees, he said.

In an unsettling trend, four of California's 10 driest Januaries have occurred since 2007, said Anderson, adding that several days recently at Lake Tahoe have reached the mid-60s. He spent last weekend with his family in the Sierra's Donner Summit, where it rained.

"When it's raining at the top of the mountain, it's awful hard to build a snowpack," he said.

Other Western states have gotten their share of snow this year, said Michael Berry, president of the National Ski Areas Association, noting favorable skiing in Colorado, Utah, Wyoming and Montana. He said storms have hit Washington, but the warm temperatures pushed the snow level to higher elevations.

Meanwhile, much of California remains locked in extreme drought.

Tim Cohee, owner of China Peak Mountain Resort, thought he could keep the lifts running through Presidents Day weekend. But Cohee said that only the beginner skiing hill and a slope for sleds and inner-tubes would be open for the holiday.

China Peak has snow-making machines, but the warm weather gave Cohee few opportunities to turn them on. The recent rain made the mountain blotchy, so he suspended skiing. Cohee said China

Peak and other small resorts are facing serious financial hardship.

“Name a business that could go through four years of this,” said Cohee, who has owned and managed ski resorts in California for 22 years. “I’ve seen a couple wimpy years before, but nothing like this – nothing even close.”

At the large Heavenly Lake Tahoe, a little more than half of the ski runs were open Tuesday, but spokeswoman Rachael Woods of Vail Resorts said those runs are long and well-groomed, providing skiers and boarders with great conditions.

The runs are fully open at Kirkwood Mountain Resort, owned by the same company, and one of California’s highest in elevation, said Woods, adding that Kirkwood, Heavenly and Northstar all received well over a foot of snow from the recent storms.

Cold overnight temperatures at the high elevation ski areas have allowed for making snow, she said, adding, “There are many resorts that are doing well.”

Berry, the National Ski Areas Association’s president, said ski resort operators are optimists by nature; they have to be, he said, adding that a powerful storm may still hit California deluging the mountains and turning the season around in 24 hours. He ran Kirkwood Mountain Resort for 13 years and has seen it happen.

“Mother Nature can be cruel,” Berry said. “She can also be incredibly generous.”

Tahoe wedding officiant has seen it all



Warren Kessler has been a wedding officiant for decades. Photo/ABHOW

By ABHOW

To have and to hold, for better or for worse, for richer or for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish from this day forward, until death do us part.

Warren Kessler, who moved to Tahoe Senior Plaza in South Lake Tahoe in September, has presided over the exchange of this vow more than 13,000 times.

Kessler began conducting weddings in 1983 after he moved to the area with his wife. He was ordained through the Universal Life Church and soon began freelancing as a wedding officiant. Also a state notary, Kessler went on to work for several chapels before settling in at Chapel of the Bells, where he performs ceremonies as an on-call minister. That means he has to be ready to go at a moment's notice.

"I could be at a restaurant. I could be anywhere," he says.

When he gets the call, he runs down to the chapel, does the wedding and goes back to where he left off.

The chapel is a no-nonsense kind of place, where couples often skip the typical frills like tuxes and gowns. "Two people just get out of their car. 'I do, I do.' That's about it," Kessler says.

With 31 years of experience under his belt, it's not surprising that Kessler's mental archives are bursting with fascinating tales. He has pretty much seen it all. Couples come in from all over the country and the world. "They all have interesting stories to tell you," he says.

The average wedding goes smoothly, Kessler says, but every now and then strange things happen. He recalls a nearly 40-year-old groom named Joe, who was affectionately called "Junior" by his mother. In an effort to declare his independence, he insisted that Kessler call him "Little Joe" during the ceremony. Not only were guests confused, the mother was furious. "It looked like the blood drained out of her head and into her ankles," Kessler says.

Other notable weddings include one with a groom getting married for the 10th time and another where the groomsmen rented tuxes but forgot the shoes, leaving them standing at the altar in sneakers.

There's no doubt that Kessler enjoys his work. In fact, he doesn't think of it as work at all – and it certainly isn't the typical 9-to-5 job.

"Weddings are always fun," says Kessler. "It's a happy business."

Founded in 1949, ABHOW is widely known for its pioneering leadership in senior housing and health care. The company serves more than 5,500 residents in 44 retirement communities in California, Arizona, Nevada and Washington.

Lake Tahoe temps keep setting record highs



Just enough snow is being made at Stateline for a snowmobile oval and tiny sledding hill. Photo/LTN

It's shorts weather in Lake Tahoe and it's going to stay that way through the weekend.

South Lake Tahoe hit a record high on Feb. 12 and Feb. 13, and is likely to do so Valentine's Day.

The mercury soared to 61 on Thursday, with the old record being 58 set just last year. On Friday it was even hotter. The high was 65, breaking the 2011 record of 57 degrees. The Feb. 14 record high of 56 set in 1996 is likely to be broken because the forecast is for 62 degrees.

"It's going to be warm this whole weekend. There is a high pressure over the West Coast that is bringing very warm temperatures and light winds," Alex Hoon, meteorologist with the National Weather Service in Reno, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

He said nothing big is on the horizon in terms of moisture –

just more of the same. The temperatures will drop a bit, getting into the 50s. But normally the highs are in the 40s this time of year in the Lake Tahoe Basin.

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*

Drought nothing compared to what may be coming

By Darryl Fears, Washington Post

The long and severe drought in the U.S. Southwest pales in comparison with what's coming: a "megadrought" that will grip that region and the central plains later this century and probably stay there for decades, a new study says.

Thirty-five years from now, if the current pace of climate change continues unabated, those areas of the country will experience a weather shift that will linger for as long as three decades, according to the study, released Thursday.

Researchers from NASA and Cornell and Columbia universities warned of major water shortages and conditions that dry out vegetation, which can lead to monster wildfires in southern Arizona and parts of California.

"We really need to start thinking in longer-term horizons about how we're going to manage it," said Toby R. Ault, an assistant professor in the department of Earth and atmospheric sciences at Cornell, one of the co-authors. "This is a slow-moving natural hazard that humans are used to dealing with and used to managing."

Megadroughts are sustained periods of sparse precipitation and significant loss of soil moisture that span generations, about 10 times as long as a normal three-year drought.

[Read the whole story](#)

Dogs major players in NDOW bear program

By Guy Clifton, Reno Gazette-Journal

Carl Lackey doesn't go anywhere without his Rooster.

That includes trucks, ATVs, helicopters, ski lifts, classrooms and everywhere else Lackey's job as a bear biologist with the Nevada Department of Wildlife takes him.

Rooster is Lackey's 10-year-old Karelian Bear Dog, who – when he isn't being a slightly oversized lap dog at home – is an integral part of the team when it comes to releasing bears captured in populated areas. Rooster, and his 10-month old daughter, Dazzle, have a job – to harass the bear by chasing it, barking in its face, and making it run away or climb a tree.

Combined with a shotgun firing rubber bullets, the idea is to make the bears not want to return. NDOW has had more success with this procedure than by relocating the bears, many of which return to the capture site within days or weeks if no aversion techniques are used.

[Read the whole story](#)

WyGant indicted on 6 federal counts

A federal grand jury on Feb. 12 indicted former South Lake Tahoe fire Capt. Mark WyGant on six counts regarding child pornography.

The 44-year-old faces charges of sexual exploitation and attempted sexual exploitation of minors.



Mark WyGant

WyGant remains in custody in Sacramento where he has been since being arrested Jan. 29.

According to court documents, WyGant filmed a child on numerous occasions using a hidden cell telephone and hidden “spy cameras” that he had purchased for that purpose.

A thumb drive with 5,000 child pornography images and 50 videos of child porn was found in a locker at the fire station. It was turned over to the police, who figured out who they believed the owner was and then the FBI was brought in.

WyGant, who lived in Chico with his wife and stepchildren when not on duty in Tahoe, is scheduled to be arraigned Feb. 13 in federal court.

WyGant faces 30 years in prison and a \$250,000 fine per count if he is found guilty. Each count carries a minimum of 15 years in prison.

He resigned from the department Feb. 4.

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*