

Toxic Alpine County sulfur mine settlement near

By Kathryn Reed

Ponds oozing toxic chemicals sitting in what looks like a wasteland. That is what the long defunct Leviathan Mine in Alpine County is today.

For decades the old sulfur mine has been in litigation. A settlement between Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board and ARCO should be signed any day.

It is such a nasty situation that in 2000 the federal government deemed it a Superfund site. It doesn't get worse than that.

"The high sulfur content in the waste rocks and fractures at the 250-acre mine site turns snowmelt, rain and groundwater into sulfuric acid, which leaches contaminants from the native minerals such as arsenic, copper, nickel, zinc, chromium along with aluminum and iron," the Environmental Protection Agency website says. "This acid mine drainage then flows into the creek system at a number of points, devastating aquatic life until the creeks join the East Fork of the Carson River, a much larger flow."



Leviathan holding ponds and treatment system used by the water board at the site.

Photo/Lahontan Water Board

Millions of dollars have been spent to curtail the environmental damage from the mine that is six miles from Markleeville. Hundreds of millions of dollars is likely to be needed to create a system that will better treat the contaminants.

Today, ARCO and Lahontan have separate systems. The settlement would bring them all under Lahontan's purview. ARCO would pay 75 percent of the cost to construct a more robust treatment system, the state would pay the remainder. Operation and maintenance costs will be split 70-30, with taxpayers getting saddled with the lesser amount.

The litigation expense has been covered by an insurance policy the state had. But taxpayers have already been billed \$25 million. The ongoing operation and maintenance could be \$5 million a year total. Lahontan expects to be saddled with this chore forever.

While there are treatment systems in place, they are not comprehensive. The settlement will address what gets done when and who pays for it.

A feasibility study will consider if the current diesel generators are the route to go or if bringing power to the site is better in the long run. Whether the area should be fenced is also a consideration.

Chuck Curtis, who has been overseeing the mine for Lahontan for years, told the board at the July 16 meeting, "Protecting human health and the environment are the bottom line."

As a CERCLA site, there are certain parameters that must be followed. And there is also a certain amount of risk that is allowed. This site will presumably always be toxic, just not to the degree that it is today.

And even today it is better than what it was.

In 1999, there were no rainbow, brook or brown trout in Lower Leviathan Creek, according to the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service. In 2013, there were 72 rainbows, 521 brooks and zero browns.

In Bryant Creek in 1998, there were 64 rainbows, 16 brooks and zero browns. By 2013 the numbers were 728 rainbows, 528 brooks and 1,657 browns.

Anaconda Copper Mining Company used the mine from 1951-62. It was sold in 1963 to William Mann, who was Alpine County's clerk, for \$100.

Eventually officials discovered acid mine drainage was contaminating Leviathan Creek. There was no way Mann was going to be able to write the checks for the cleanup.

California stepped in in 1983 and bought the land. A lawsuit was filed against Atlantic Richfield Co. , which had bought Anaconda. A settlement of just more than \$2 million allowed clean up to start.

But then the Washoe tribe asked the EPA to get involved because the pollutants were creating a thick layer of orange precipitate along the streambed that ended up in the East Fork of the Carson River.

The EPA went after ARCO, and in turn ARCO filed a suit against Lahontan. It is that second lawsuit that is near resolution and will ultimately lead to better clean up of Leviathan Mine.

Loan ensures Kirkwood will be on grid in Nov.



Kirkwood power house being built after the 2010 fire.
Photo/Provided

By Kathryn Reed

Another federal loan will finalize Kirkwood's push to be on the grid by Nov. 1.

The remote enclave off Highway 88 that borders El Dorado, Alpine and Amador counties has had a problem keeping the lights on and lifts spinning. There are about 700 mostly part-time residents in Kirkwood, with the ski resort being the main commercial entity.

The \$8 million from the U.S. Department of Agriculture is in addition to the \$50 million federal loan that was secured in 2012. The USDA is investing \$263 million in projects in eight states to modernize electric systems. Kirkwood is the only California recipient of the cash.

Kirkwood Meadows Public Utility District, which in 2011 acquired Mountain Utilities, supplies the power to this resort area. KMPUD is separate from the ski resort, but supplies the electricity and water. The resort has been owned by Vail Resorts since February 2012.

Coop Cooper with the ski resort told *Lake Tahoe News* upgrading to the grid – “It’s a great thing.”

Michael Sharp, general manager of KMPUD, was not available for comment.

What KMPUD will soon have is a 34.5-kilovolt power line that ties into PG&E lines. Much of it goes through U.S. Forest Service land.

Kathy Hardy, then forest supervisor for Eldorado National Forest, signed the record of decision in March 2012 allowing the project to go forward.

The line ties into a PG&E source at Salt Springs Reservoir in Amador County, then goes above ground for 3.1 miles to Bear River Reservoir. The Bear River to Kirkwood line will be underground. Two substations are part of the plans.

A bit of irony, though, is when the entire South Shore of Lake Tahoe was without power on Sunday Kirkwood’s lights were on.

Kirkwood had a powerhouse with six diesel generators that were sketchy at best. That facility burned to the ground New Year’s Day 2010, leaving people in the dark and without power for a couple days.

The powerhouse that was built after the fire will act as a backup once KMPUD is on the grid.

Consumers padding their

checking accounts

By E. Scott Reckard, Los Angeles Times

With wounds from the Great Recession still fresh, chastened Americans are hoarding more cash in their checking accounts than at any time in the last 25 years.

The defensive stance, uncharacteristic of previous periods of low inflation and an improving economy, reflects how debt-burdened Americans have striven to clean up their personal finances since the recession ended five years ago.

The lack of attractive investment alternatives, with savings accounts paying next to nothing and the stock market already at lofty heights, is another factor, financial analysts said.

A report released this month by bank consulting firm Moebs Services Inc. calculated the average balance for U.S. checking accounts at \$4,436 at the end of last year – more than double the average of \$2,100 over the 25 years of the annual survey.

Read the whole story

Zac Brown puts plenty of rock in his country



Zac Brown delivers a high-energy concert July 20 at Harveys. Photos/Kathryn Reed

By Susan Wood

STATELINE – Despite a raucous storm that produced a widespread power outage affecting thousands of South Shore customers, the Zac Brown band electrified an enthusiastic audience who stood on their feet for most of the show at Harveys.

The drizzle that ended Sunday's dramatic summer storm did little to dampen the spirits of the Southern rock, country band or the audience at the casino's outdoor summer concert series. This is even with a late start that sent lines of people rushing to the food and drink concessionaires. (No French fries, though, with the cutter being electric, and only cash-only payments were accepted given no power.)

But the important thing – the show went on and turned out to be a huge hit.

Right after roadies took the tarps off the stage equipment, guitarist and vocalist Clay Cook entertained with a few acoustical numbers, including those performed by artists

ranging from Ray Charles to John Mayer. The improvisation provided a key opening to the eight-member band waiting to be powered up.

Then, the power of the three-time Grammy award-winning band showed its appeal and its range, knocking out hits and popular numbers from their five albums and other artists' covers as well. Zac Brown, himself as lead, came out with a top hat on and asked is the audience: "Staying warm?"

Even if the air had cooled off considerably, the concert turned hot quickly.

Between the screams, fist pumps and dancing, the concertgoers rewarded the band with love. After all, not all country bands can go from singing a sentimental "falling in love" in the ACA-nominated "As She's Walking Away" to Cook's own rendition of Robert Plant from the legendary rock band Led Zeppelin.

From there, the band led by Brown on vocals and guitar and violinist Jimmy De Martini accompanying turned up its country prowess and heavy string influence with a perfect imitation of Charlie Daniels' "The Devil Went Down to Georgia." This was fitting, given Brown's roots come from Georgia, and he references the state in their huge hit "Toes."



People were on their feet for most of the entire sold-out show.

Still, Brown acknowledged his appreciation for Lake Tahoe and mentioned expecting to see a “wampus cat” in these rugged mountains. The cat is a type of cougar descending from Cherokee mythology.

“It’s a beautiful place,” he said, as drummer Daniel de Los Reyes flashed a peace sign. Reyes had just won a Percussionist of the Year 2014 Drummies award.

The sound quality appeared to reverberate through the mountains, and it especially proved pertinent when Brown slowed things down with poignant lyrics featured in “Sweet Annie” – “But one day lightning will strike, and my bark will lose its bite, but don’t give up on me.”

It was as though the audience was made up a giant Zac Brown fan club, mouthing the words to most of the songs.

“Their music is different than most modern music, with a lot of sex. They just like to have a good time,” Bella Wulfsberg of Rohnert Park said. The recent South Tahoe High School graduate, who had an urban picnic near Cecil’s Market before embarking on the concert, characterized one of her favorite bands as the guys next door who look after you.

These guys next door brought a rare combination of perfect harmony in the vocals and synchronicity of their instruments as demonstrated in their stirring, back-to-back singles: “Free,” “No Hurry,” “Goodbye in Her Eyes” and “Knee Deep.”

Sandwiched between sets, the band launched into a melancholy version of Van Morrison’s “Into the Mystic.” You could almost hear the “fog horn blow” to a tune that would “rock your gypsy soul.”

During their own soulful ballad “Colder Weather,” Brown got up and close and personal at stage level to take pictures of the audience with a cell phone. The melancholy sweetness of the song oozed from the stage. He tapped his heart as if touched

by the reception and the song's effect on the audience.

From there, he gave out a heartfelt thank you to the concertgoers for attending, as some of the proceeds go to the band's charity Camp Southern Ground. It has raised more than \$2 million in the last few years to help special needs children. Brown was inspired since he spent summers as a camp counselor.

In a special tribute, members of the Armed Forces came out in uniform and saluted on stage during one of three encores the band performed.

The skeleton suits provided an interesting backdrop to a country band led by bassist and singer John Driskell Hopkins pulling off the hit Metallica song "Enter Sandman." The heavy metal band plays it in honor of former star New York Yankees closing pitcher Mariano Rivera.

Then in a complete melodic turnaround, the band got light and breezy with their biggest hit: "Chicken Fried." Brown didn't even need to sing. He put the microphone out and the audience eagerly belted out these laid-back lyrics and melody that are in large part what sent the group soaring on the charts.

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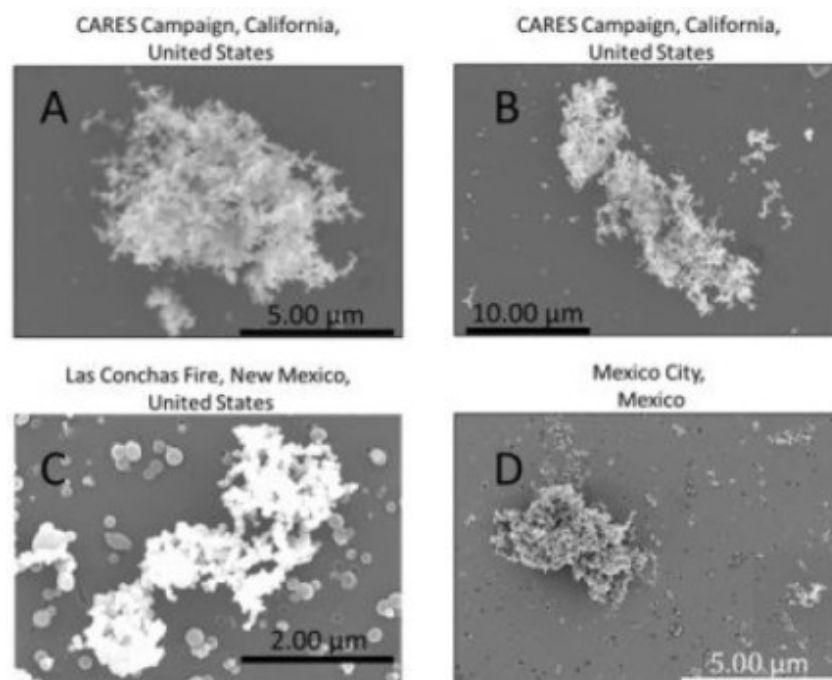
Notes:

Harveys will continue its lineup of concert performances with:

- Train, July 25
- Journey and Steve Miller, July 30
- Lady Gaga, Aug. 2
- Boston and the Doobie Brothers, Aug. 3
- Aerosmith, Aug. 8

- Bruno Mars, Aug. 14
 - Sammy Hagar and Friends, Aug. 16
 - Rascal Flatts and Sheryl Crow, Aug. 24.
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Scientists linking wildfire soot, climate change



These images show typical soot superaggregates observed with an electron microscope in wildfire smoke samples collected from three fires in Northern California, New Mexico and Mexico City. Photos/Desert Research Institute

By Science Daily

Every year, wildfires clear millions of hectares of land and emit about 34 percent of global soot mass into the atmosphere. In certain regions, such as Southeast Asia and Russia, these fires can contribute as much as 63 percent of regional soot mass.

In a paper published in Nature Scientific Reports, a team of scientists led by Rajan Chakrabarty from Reno's Desert Research Institute report the observation of a previously unrecognized form of soot particle, identified by the authors as "superaggregates," from wildfire emissions.

These newly identified particles were detected in smoke plumes from wildfires in Northern California, New Mexico, Mexico City, and India.

For several decades, scientists have been trying to quantitatively assess the impacts of wildfire soot particles on climate change and human health. However, due to the unpredictability of wildfire occurrences and the extreme difficulty in sampling smoke plumes in real-time, accurate knowledge of wildfire-emitted soot physical and optical properties has eluded the scientific community.

Read the whole story

Experts: Calif. drought will only get worse

By Veronica Rocha, Los Angeles Times

California is probably headed into a deeper drought this

summer, making it harder to escape in the future, an expert says.

With more than 80 percent of the state in an extreme drought, dry conditions will probably continue and won't improve much in the next few months, said climatologist Brian Fuchs of the National Drought Mitigation Center at the University of Nebraska.

New National Weather Service data show that more than 80 percent of California is now in an extreme drought.

The prolonged statewide drought means it will be "harder to break the cycle," much like some thirsty regions in Oklahoma and the entire state of Texas, which have been struggling with drought since 2010, he said.

A U.S. Drought Monitor map released Thursday showed 81 percent of California in the category of extreme drought or worse, up from 78 percent. Three months ago, it was 68 percent.

Read the whole story

Catholic academy to replace St. Theresa School

By Kathryn Reed

St. Theresa School is being reincarnated into Lake Tahoe Catholic Academy when it opens Sept. 2.

"The diocese will not control the direct day-to-day operation of LTCA, but instead we'll focus on maintaining a Catholic identity within the school, as well as our adherence to the

principles of Catholic education,” Malin Kennedy, spokeswoman for the academy, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Lake Tahoe News first reported in June that St. Theresa would be closing. Declining enrollment at the K-8 South Lake Tahoe school has been an issue for years. There were just more than 50 students last school year.



St. Theresa Catholic Church will continue to have a school operating next door.

The academy, like St. Theresa's, will be preschool-8. It will operate in the same buildings. Differences are that it will not be overseen by Sacramento Diocese and it will not be an official Catholic school.

“STS simply was not successful as defined by the Sacramento Diocese enrollment numbers and financial stability model,” Kennedy said. “But STS was consistently successful in its mission to educate successful, well-rounded students. High school valedictorians and community leaders have graduated from STS.”

Anne Flice, who had been principal at St. Theresa, will be the interim principal at the academy as well as director of education. Allison Monroe is president of the academy. There is also a board of directors.

“Many duties of the principal will be co-managed with the president – specifically, curriculum development, recruitment and fundraising, and public relations,” Kennedy said.

The division of labor will have Flice being responsible for improved academics, with a focus on science and math, while Monroe’s job is more about fundraising and recruitment.

“We still believe that a small private faith-based school is critical to the South Lake Tahoe education community. We have a dedicated group of parents and educators, a Catholic parish, and an entire community that will support our goals,” Kennedy said.

The academy came about from parents and teachers not wanting to let the Catholic school model die. They, with other community members, created Lake Tahoe Catholic Academy.

“I truly believe in this school and I’m an atheist. It not only was a strong positive influence on my son’s life, but it made quite a positive impact on me and my ex-wife as well,” Toogee Sielsch told *Lake Tahoe News*. “I volunteered on average 200 to 300 hours a year when Ian was a student and I still help out where I can.”

All faiths are welcome.

Enrollment applications will be available in the next week. Lake Tahoe Catholic Academy may be reached at 530.208.7657.

Illegal sex trade threatens

Nev.'s 'oldest profession'

By Henry Brean, Las Vegas Review-Journal

On lonely highways from Pahrump to the state capital, you can still find signs of a rare and controversial business as old as the mining camps that helped put Nevada on the map. Just follow the trademark spinning red lights.

While recent decades have seen casinos sprout from coast to coast, Nevada still holds the distinction as the only state where brothels are legal.

Lately, though, this regulated version of the world's oldest profession seems a little long in the tooth.

"There's just nothing that's really working for this unique little industry," said George Flint, longtime lobbyist for the Nevada Brothel Owners Association. "I hesitate to say this, but I think legal, regulated sex for sale is on its way out."

The culprit isn't moral opposition or government interference, although U.S. Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid did call for an end to legal brothels during a speech to state lawmakers in 2011. What's really killing the houses is unfettered competition from illegal prostitution set loose on the Internet and the Strip, Flint said.

Clark County is one of five Nevada counties that prohibits brothels, and it is the only one barred from the practice by state law. But thanks to an endless barrage of handbills, mobile billboards and phone-book ads promising women on demand, many tourists – and a fair number of locals – are under the mistaken impression that prostitution is legal everywhere in the state, not merely at approved establishments far from its largest cities.

Flint said legalization is the only viable way to curb the

rampant illegal sex trade in Las Vegas – a billion-dollar criminal enterprise he said the Strip resorts seem content to ignore or tacitly encourage in the name of customer service.

Replace “the exploiters and the pimps” with some legal, closely regulated bordellos, he said, and the county could bring in as much as \$500 million in annual tax revenue while helping to curb crime, disease and the victimization of underage girls.

Read the whole story

Nevada at high risk for significant earthquake

By Jaime Hayden, KRNV-TV

A new federal earthquake map is shaking things up a bit for about one-third of the United States, including Nevada. The U.S. Geologic Survey updated its national seismic hazard maps for the first time since 2008.

Nevada is one of 16 states considered to have the highest risk for earthquakes. So there is a 2 percent chance our state could experience very intense shaking over a 50-year lifespan.

But experts say Northern Nevada’s risk has not changed much in the last decade.

“A couple iteration’s ago, this map showed us a lot of changes in our Reno, Carson, Tahoe area, so we’ve kind of settled down on that hazard,” said Nevada Seismological Laboratory Director Graham Kent.

[Read the whole story](#)

Underwood blows away Lake Tahoe audience



Carrie Underwood brings her unique country persona to Harveys on July 18. Photos/Kathryn Reed

By Kathryn Reed

STATELINE – From sultry to raunchy to melancholy to edgy – Carrie Underwood’s vocal delivery is as expansive as her lyrics.

On Friday she was a bundle of energy that charged the crowd at Harveys Outdoor Concert Series. So many in the audience were singing right along with her.

With multiple hits year after year, it seems like Underwood has been part of the country music scene for decades. But the 31-year-old wasn't discovered until she won "American Idol" in 2005.

Her first album "Some Hearts" debuted that same year. It was at the top of Billboard's Country Albums chart for 27 weeks and has sold more than 7 million copies.

Her songs and persona have grown up in the last seven years. Just look at her album covers – they are like a photo album of her going from innocent vocalist to diva.

If you missed Underwood live on July 18, check out the "Somethin' Bad" video where she and Miranda Lambert sizzle. Lambert, who played Tahoe in 2011, has the song on her latest album.

While Underwood didn't sing "Somethin' Bad", it was piped through the speakers just before she took the stage.

Underwood is a definite crossover artist – able to sing pop ballads and rock hits. Not many other country artists could pull off Guns N' Roses' "Paradise City" – though, she did sing it at the 2013 CMA Music Festival.



Many fans were dancing throughout the night.

Her seven-member band, though, looks like they would fit in well behind a rock star, or that they could have been mistaken for athletes participating in the American Century

Championship. Providing the robust sounds were two bass guitarists, two guitarists (one who also plays fiddle), a keyboardist and drummer. The steel guitar whined like a jilted lover. A backup singer also accompanies Underwood.

While she didn't interact much with the audience, she did comment on how gorgeous Tahoe is.

She explained how Randy Travis was an inspiration growing up. When she heard his song "I Told You So" she thought a woman should sing it. They have performed it as a duet, but Friday it was all Underwood crooning the lyrics of the love song.

Underwood co-wrote eight of the 14 songs on her fourth and latest album, "Blown Away".

"Two Black Cadillacs" is a not so subtle story about what happens to a man when his wife and mistress get together.

Underwood seems to have aced songs in which women have been wronged.

What had the full house singing the loudest was "Before He Cheats". Though, it was clearly a chorus of women belting out: "I dug my key into the side of his pretty little souped up 4 wheel drive, carved my name into his leather seats... I took a Louisville slugger to both headlights, slashed a hole in all 4 tires... Maybe next time he'll think before he cheats."

There's a reason the 7-year-old song is still her best hit – it resonates.

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Notes:

The lineup for Harveys Outdoor Concert Series:

- July 20 Zac Brown Band
- July 25 Train

- July 30 Journey, Steve Miller Band
- Aug. 2 Lady Gaga
- Aug. 3 Boston, Doobie Brothers
- Aug. 8 Aerosmith, Slash
- Aug. 14 Bruno Mars
- Aug. 16 Sammy Hagar and Friends
- Aug. 24 Rascal Flatts, Sheryl Crow
- Aug. 29-30 Eagles.