

Yosemite bears eating like it's 1915

By Bettina Boxall, Los Angeles Times

Black bears in Yosemite National Park aren't snacking as much on human food as they did decades ago, according to new research that traces changes in the diet of Yosemite bears over the last century.

Researchers analyzed samples of bear bones from museums and bear hair collected from the field to determine the ratio of human-to-wild-food that Yosemite bears consumed as far back as 1915.

Not surprisingly, they found that the proportion of human food rose significantly after the park started feeding bears in 1923 to keep the animals away from developed areas. Lighted feeding platforms were even used to entertain park visitors until 1940.

[Read the whole story](#)

Lake level causing problems for boat owners

By Kathryn Reed

Boats already aren't able to get in and of Lake Tahoe marinas and with only a little runoff expected to come down from higher elevations in the next couple months, the situation is only going to get worse as summer rolls into fall.

The Tahoe Queen paddle-wheeler can no longer get in and out of its home port at Ski Run Marina.

“There are plans to dredge if the drought continues. It is being done directly by Aramark,” Mansoor Alyeshmerni, owner of Ski Run Marina, told *Lake Tahoe News*.



Steve Pascal had to remove his boat this winter from the Tahoe Keys Marina because he can't get out to the lake. Photo/Provided

Aramark's habit of not returning calls continues. No permit has been sought by Aramark to dredge, according to Lahontan officials.

Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board has permitted a maintenance dredging project that has already started at the North Tahoe Marina.

“I've heard from a representative of Tahoe City Marina they may wish to dredge this summer. We are talking about maintenance dredging. That is to dredge to the area that has previously been dredged,” Alan Miller with Lahontan told *Lake Tahoe News*.

The agency is also in the process of permitting a maintenance dredging operation for Tahoe City Public Utility District.

Miller said now is the typical time to dredge so marinas avoid

the busy summer season when boats want access. It takes about 30 to 60 days to get a permit.

“They can (dredge) anytime unless there’s a habitat issue,” Miller said.

Steve Pascal had to remove his 56-foot-long boat last month from the Tahoe Keys Marina because he could no longer get out of the channel into the lake. He hasn’t been able to do so since September.

The lake level was at 6,225 feet then. The natural rim of Lake Tahoe is 6,223 feet. The water level is about 1 foot above that now.

“My boat draws 4.5 feet and I was unable to get out. The water level in the channel now is about 3 feet,” Pascal told *Lake Tahoe News*. “The majority of boats in Lake Tahoe need more than 3 feet underneath them to get out of the channel.”

He said the Keys is the only marina that can house his vessel and is the only one where he can remove it. Francesca, named after his grandmother, is now in San Diego.

What irks Pascal is that part of his slip fee was a surcharge for dredging maintenance. He’s had large boats at the marina since 1993. In those 21 years he said he’s spent \$240,000 on slip fees, maintenance dredging fee, and water quality fees.

Pascal said he’s talked to Robert Spinnato, general manger of the marina, about dredging, but nothing ever happened.

Spinnato did not return multiple phone calls.

CDC: Antibiotic overuse can be lethal

By Betsy McKay and Valerie Bauerlein, Wall Street Journal

The overuse of antibiotics in U.S. hospitals is putting patients at risk and helping to fuel the creation of deadly superbugs, according to a government report released Tuesday.

Prescribing practices vary widely, with doctors in some hospitals providing three times as many antibiotics for patients as physicians in other facilities treating similar types of patients, concluded the report, produced by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The CDC analyzed prescribing practices at 323 hospitals in 2010 and 11,282 patients at 183 hospitals in 2011. About 36 percent of patients studied were given the powerful antibiotic vancomycin without testing or for too long, the report found.

Read the whole story

Study: Indian gaming affects childhood obesity

By Monte Morin, Los Angeles Times

Apparently casinos are good for losing more than just cash.

A study published Tuesday in the Journal of the American Medical Association found that adding slot machines to California casinos was linked to a modest reduction in obesity

rates for Native American children. Specifically, researchers found that for every one-armed bandit added per child, there was a corresponding 0.19 percent reduction in obesity risk.

Study authors based their conclusions on an examination of 117 California school districts that encompass tribal lands.

Read the whole story

Musical employment chairs at Barton Health

By Kathryn Reed

On the one hand Barton Health is struggling because the number of patients is declining. On the other hand based on the agency's 2012 tax return the top 12 people in the organization collectively had annual salaries of more than \$3.2 million, with CEO John Williams taking in nearly \$600,000.

Those figures don't include benefits or bonuses. And while bonuses were suspended for some in 2012, they were back in vogue in 2013.



Barton Memorial Hospital's

numbers continue to decline.

Photo/LTN

However, not now and not when Barton laid people off a few years ago did upper management take a pay cut. For someone like Leanne Kankel, vice president of human resources who is No. 6 on the 2012 pay scale at \$250,063 a year, she also gets free health insurance because her husband is a retired South Lake Tahoe firefighter.

While substantive salaries and perks are being handed out, so are pink slips. Several positions between Tahoe Medical Group and the Community Health Center have been eliminated. But before people were let go they first had to apply for their jobs. Those not selected were shown the door.

To compound the pain of being out of work some of their jobs have been handed to people from outside the area. They were not given reasons for why they are no longer employed and Barton isn't telling *Lake Tahoe News*.

Three of the people let go at the health center were registered nurses. Two RNs kept their jobs. The difference between those who got to stay is they have a bachelor's degree, are younger and are lower down on the pay scale. Those let go were not offered the opportunity to return to school to get their degree.

People have already been hired to replace them; some are RNs, some are medical assistants.

"We have hired registered nurses who fit a patient-centered care management model," Monica Sciuto, Barton spokeswoman, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Why the RNs who were let go couldn't fit that model isn't known.

"This was not in an effort to save costs, but rather to put

the correct level of expertise into positions to fit the needs of our patients,” Sciuto said of the layoffs.

But that in part contradicts a letter Williams sent to staff on Jan. 6. He went through a litany of concerns regarding decreased patient admissions (it’s at 78 percent of the volume compared to 1998) as well as a drop in births – 57.7 percent from 1998 to 2012.



CEO John Williams approves layoffs, but has never taken a pay cut. He makes more than a half million dollars.
Photo/Provided

“In addition, due to the Affordable Care Act we anticipate payment for services will decrease across the board from our government and private payers,” Williams wrote. “To address these shifts, Barton department heads and the executive team will be taking a closer look at how we run our organization.”

Novia Strategies has been hired at an undisclosed cost to “objectively evaluate how we do business and where we can be more efficient,” the PR department said.

Changes for employees

Hours for the janitorial crew have also been cut. Barton would not talk about these changes.

Nurses who were used to working 10- or 12-hour shifts now have

to work five eight-hour shifts, at least at the community center.

Barton would not release the number of people who have been laid off, the number of new hires or the job titles of the people. Many of the workers had been with Barton a decade or longer.

Others have told *Lake Tahoe News* that in addition to the three RNs being let go, seven medical assistants, and one receptionist were released. Some of those positions, though, have been filled.



Front office employees at the health clinic now must be medical assistants.

Photo/LTN file

Now all office staff must at least be a medical assistant. This means front desk people will be able to give shots, wound care and assist doctors.

With Barton owning most of the doctors' groups in the area, it means those professionals work for the health care system. They don't have a say in who works in their office, who is hired, who is fired.

"They changed the receptionist to a different receptionist and laid off the one I had. I wasn't consulted," Ronald Roth, a physician with Tahoe Medical Group, told *Lake Tahoe News*. "It was a little disruptive to have spontaneous changes without

consultation.”

Other doctors are reluctant to talk on the record because of the possibility of retribution. Tahoe Carson Valley Medical Group, which includes 28 doctors, just renewed its contract with Barton. Tahoe Orthopedics and Sports Medicine is in contract negotiations.

Doctors are being evaluated and paid based on productivity. How productivity is evaluated is not being made public.

Going forward

Some of the people who are now in the unemployment line who spoke with *Lake Tahoe News* said what they fear most is the level of care patients will receive.

Barton says there is no reason to be worried.

“(It’s) so they can provide more clinical knowledge and facilitate the ongoing care of patients. Barton’s front desk staff completed Barton University’s accredited National Center for Competency Testing program to qualify to become medical assistants,” the PR folks said.

Barton has changed how it recruits for employees. The “career website” is being revamped. In Williams’ letter he asked for “individual written testimonials on why you enjoy working for Barton and what in particular you find rewarding about your job.”

Some who were let go say Barton is all about the positive, wanting to put a Disney-esque spin on things instead of listening to concerns.

“Though change can be challenging, we see this as an opportunity to create a new environment that holds a brighter, financially sustainable future at Barton. Barton is committed to coming to thoughtful, well informed solutions,” Williams wrote to employees.

Nevada casinos partnering with hotel chains

By Hannah Dreier, AP

LAS VEGAS — Time was, gamblers didn't even want credit card companies maintaining a record of their time in Las Vegas.

Now, visitors want loyalty points from mainstream hotel chains for the days they spend holed up in Strip casinos.

Casino corporations MGM Resorts International and Caesars Entertainment Corp. have announced loyalty program partnerships with major hotel chains (Hyatt and Starwood, respectively). The independent Strip casino the Cosmopolitan is also partnering with a hotel chain, striking a deal with Marriott.

The deals enable customers to earn and redeem loyalty points with both the hotel and casino chains, and also hold out the promise of enabling visitors to experience Las Vegas like a high roller, if they have enough points.

The Caesars partnership also applies to Harrah's Reno, Harrah's Lake Tahoe and Harveys Lake Tahoe. It was unclear Tuesday afternoon if the MGM partnership applied to Circus Circus Reno.

The partnerships give the hotel chains a presence in one of the country's biggest tourist destinations, and helps the casinos in their effort to market themselves as more than places to gamble.

MGM owns 12 properties on the Las Vegas Strip, including the MGM Grand and Bellagio. Caesars owns nine on the Las Vegas

Strip, including Planet Hollywood and the Flamingo.

MGM announced the partnership over the summer, followed by Caesars in December, and the Cosmopolitan in January.

Caesars celebrated the announcement with a junket for national hotel reporters, including a stay at Caesars Palace, VIP seats at Britney Spears' Las Vegas show, and free spa service. Rewards programs participants can experience similarly luxurious moments, though it might take a while.

Jeff Zidell, senior vice president of Hyatt Gold Passport said the partnership with MGM has allowed the hotel chain to expand the benefits of joining its loyalty program, and is proving a hit with customers.

"Over time, members had shared their desires for a wider selection of locations for earning and burning Hyatt Gold Passport points —with a particular interest in The Las Vegas Strip. MGM Resorts has nearly half of the hotel rooms on The Las Vegas Strip, and these 12 participating MGM Resorts destinations are iconic," he said in a statement to the Associated Press.

Casinos were hit hard by the recession, and have been slower to come back than other businesses. Some in Las Vegas are hailing the new partnerships as a sign that the Strip no longer looks as dubious to major hotel chains.

Two major Strip players remain un-partnered: Wynn Las Vegas, which owns the high-end Wynn and Encore casinos, and Sands Las Vegas, which owns the Italian-themed Venetian and Palazzo casinos.

Study: Doctors overprescribing drugs

By Lisa Girion and Scott Glover, Los Angeles Times

Doctors are fueling the nation's prescription drug epidemic and represent the primary source of narcotic painkillers for chronic abusers, according to a government study.

The finding challenges a widely held belief that has long guided policymakers: That the epidemic is caused largely by abusers getting their drugs without prescriptions, typically from friends and family.

Tom Frieden, doctor and director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, which conducted the study, said the research showed the need for greater focus on doctors who are "problem prescribers."

[Read the whole story](#)

Chateau land under 1 ownership for first time



The Chateau project in South Lake Tahoe is beginning to look like the original designs.

By Kathryn Reed

For the first time in the project's history, South Lake Tahoe's "hole in the ground" is now under the control of one owner.

Tahoe Stateline Ventures, a subsidiary of Owens Realty Mortgage, has closed escrow on the nine parcels that encompass 3.4 acres at the site that it did not own. The company paid City National Bank \$6 million in cash.

TSV is in the process of developing the retail along Highway 50. The construction fence is expected to come down by June, if not sooner. Stores will open in late summer or early fall, though tenants have yet to be named.

"It's very exciting news that Mr. (Bill) Owens is continuing to invest significant resources into the community and is committed to this project and to see it to fruition one way or another," South Lake Tahoe City Manager Nancy Kerry told *Lake Tahoe News*. "This is the perfect outcome – one owner who can now design the right project or attract the right capital investors."

It was in June 2007 that construction started at the 11-plus acre site on what was to be the largest redevelopment project in the city's history. At the time it was going to cost \$410 million to build two hotels, a convention center, nightclub, retail and open spaces. The opening was to be two years later.

Instead, Lake Tahoe Development Company, run by Randy Lane of Zephyr Cove, went bankrupt. The more than 20 parcels were never consolidated into one map. Locals lost their life savings. And the city was left with an eyesore.

Last year construction started on the first phase. There will be 19,000-square-feet of retail, which does not include the restaurant-night club. (By comparison, Heavenly Village has about 120,000-square-feet of retail.) The restaurant will be the new McP's, which was the original plan. The circular entrance is now visible over the fence at the corner of the highway and Stateline Avenue.

What comes next remains to be seen.

Attorney Lew Feldman, who represents TSV, was not available for comment.

"This acquisition provides ORM the flexibility to make minor project reconfigurations resulting in greater development opportunities, which should enhance the marketability of the project," Owens said in a statement. What that really means is not known.

Douglas County manager resigns

By Kathryn Reed

Douglas County Manager Steve Mokrohisky has tendered his resignation, with his last day slated for April 11.

Like his predecessor, Mokrohisky is headed to Oregon. He will be the top guy in Lane County, whose county seat is Eugene. It's much larger than Douglas County, with 350,000 residents and 2,100 employees and the county includes the University of Oregon. Douglas County has less than 50,000 residents.



Steve Mokrohisky's last day as Douglas County manager is April 11. Photo/Provided

It's also a county in need of some help. The budget has been hit because of lack of timber revenue and the last administrator was fired for inappropriate operations.

These are the types of challenges Mokrohisky embraces.

"They are enticing to me," Mokrohisky said of the obstacles ahead of him. "I got into public service 15 years ago because I wanted to make communities better than they were."

He told *Lake Tahoe News*, "Douglas County is in a good position. I felt it was an OK time to step away and the organization and community will continue to function well."

Mokrohisky was hired in February 2009 as assistant county manager. He has been county manager since July 2011.

He is proud of the work he's done in the last five years. He points to the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency Regional Plan being adopted, Douglas County's area plan at the lake, trails in the ground, a vision for the South Shore, the community center in the valley, transformation of the Minden airport and a balanced budget as some of the accomplishments during his tenure.

"It's important for people to be reminded that transformative periods for communities or organizations are not the result of

one person at the top," Mokrohisky said.

County Commissioner Nancy McDermid said, "It's a blow for us to lose him. He is at his peak."

McDermid said Douglas was competitive with salary, but understands Mokrohisky wanting a bigger stage to work on.

Mokrohisky said he struggled with the decision to leave – for professional and personal reasons. He's married with two young daughters. He and wife believe now would be a better time to move than later. Mokrohisky also knows city and county managers don't often have longevity in a community.

"The people are what I will miss most. I've been overwhelmed by the outpouring of support in this community. I've made lifelong friends. We did not come here five years ago thinking that we would grow roots," he said.

The scenery is the second thing he will miss. He was at Heavenly Mountain Resort on Sunday skiing with friends.

With the announcement of his departure just days' old, the county has not decided what the transition will be.

McDermid said the commissioners will work with Mokrohisky and county staff to figure out how best to go forward.

Later trash pick up best thing for Tahoe bears

By Cheryl Millham

The problems of bears and garbage have gotten worse over the

past 15 or so years.

Put yourself in a bear's mind for the next few minutes. It's about 5:30am with no humans and no cars in sight. You (the bear) walk around the corner and the street ahead of you has bear-size bowls (trash cans) at every house. How kind the humans are to feed me out of these wonderful bear-size bowls or easy to open plastic bags.

Now I don't have to go out of my way to forage out in the forest all day. Never mind the mess I make. The humans will clean it up.

This is the thinking of a bear.

Lake Tahoe Wildlife Care starts getting calls about "bad bears" because of situations like this. People want us to come and take the bears back out to the forest. We try to educate the public that we are in the forest and that the bears come to where the "easy" food source is located. We try to plead with them to not put their garbage out until just before it is to be picked up.

That will help solve the problem of bears coming around neighborhoods for food.

One comment we hear is, "I'm not going to get up out of bed at 5am to put out my trash. Period!" I can totally understand. I am not a morning person either, but, Tom gets all the trash ready the night before and at 5:15am on trash day, he gets up and takes it out. What a guy.

We have spoken with the South Tahoe Refuse company and asked if there were any way the trash pick-up hours – for residents – could be a little later in the morning. We were always told what a large job it would be to change all the pick-up routes and we were always told how sorry they were, but "no".

About two weeks ago, as I was sorting through the mail, I

threw out a flier from the refuse company, but noticed on the front cover a line (in red) that said there would be a change of pick-up hours. I was so excited I picked up the flier. This is monumental. I would encourage all South Lake Tahoe residents (and visitors) to get behind these new hours and clean up Tahoe's trash problems.

The new hours started March 1. So, we all have time to figure out what time pick up will be at your house.

The male bears should start coming out of hibernation in the middle of March. If they find no garbage to eat, they should go back to the normal grazing on grasses, which should be plentiful then because of the rain we have received lately.

Another interesting fact is that if the sows don't have all that food out of garbage cans to put on the extra weight, they should go back to having one cub and not 2 or 3.

So, come on Tahoe, let's get behind the new pick-up times. You have no more excuses.

Oh, and one more thing, thank you South Tahoe Refuse.

Cheryl Millham is executive director of Lake Tahoe Wildlife Care.