

Sierra water content 20% of average

Results of the Jan. 3 manual readings by the Department of Water Resources:

Location	Elevation	Snow Depth	Water Content	% of Long Term Average
Alpha	7,600 feet	7.9 inches	2 inches	15
Phillips Station	6,800 feet	9.3 inches	2.3 inches	20
Lyons Creek	6,700 feet	15.4 inches	3.6 inches	31

By Kathryn Reed

PHILLIPS STATION – While there was snow to be found during the first water content survey of the season Friday, it was minimal.

The readings taken Jan. 3 in the field next to the entrance to Sierra-at-Tahoe along Highway 50 measured 2.3 inches of water content, a snow depth of 9.3 inches for what amounts to 20 percent of average. This makes it the second driest reading on record for this time of year.

Two years ago Gehrke was walking on dirt, while in 2013 there was about six times the amount of snow there is today. But both years turned out to be dry water years, and this is looking like it will be the same.

Phillps Station had its lowest water content reading of 0.1 inch in 2012, in a snow depth of 0.6 inches. On Jan. 2, 2013, at the same location 12.1 inches of water in 48.8 inches of snow were recorded.

Of the 50 years that records have been kept, other dry years include 1987 (0.9 inches of snowpack water content), 1981 (2 inches), 1976 (2.7 inches) and 2000 (3 inches).



Frank Gehrke with the Department of Water Resources on Jan. 3 measures the water content of snow at Phillips Station. Photo/Kathryn Reed

While Gehrke was taking his readings, Gov. Jerry Brown's Drought Task Force that he created last month was meeting.

"It's not good news (for reservoirs)," Frank Gehrke with the Department of Water Resources said. "We are really eating into the reservoir storage."

Sierra snowpack feeds the reservoirs downstream, which in turn provide for about one-third of the drinking and irrigation water for California.

Lake Oroville is at 36 percent of its 3.5 million acre-feet capacity and Shasta Lake is at 37 percent of its 4.5 million acre-feet capacity.

December, January and February are usually the wettest months of the year. December was disappointing and January is balmy. It's possible today's record high of 58 for South Lake Tahoe that was set in 2012 could be broken. South Lake broke a

record Dec. 31 with a high of 57. The previous record of 54 was set in 2011.

While there is a slight chance of moisture for the Lake Tahoe Basin on Jan. 7, the temps will be warm so it could just be rain.

Meteorologist Zach Tolby with the National Weather Service in Reno told *Lake Tahoe News*, "We are not expecting a lot of precipitation out of it. Then it gets unpredictable after that."

Besides needing to ration the water coming out of the tap, dry winters affect recreation, the environment and the economy.

Plus, with the ground being dry much of the snowmelt is going into the ground instead of going downstream.

Northstar plans to expand terrain, lift access

By Kathryn Reed

New lifts, increased terrain and a better experience – those are some of the goals of Northstar.

The Truckee ski resort is in the midst of getting environmental documents for the Northstar Mountain Master Plan approved. Comments will be taken for another week. The final environmental impact report is expected in the spring, with necessary approvals shortly thereafter.

But what gets built first remains to be seen. Officials said it's too early to say how specific projects will be

prioritized.

A gondola is proposed to take people from the lower parking area to the village. Parking and traffic have been major complaints of guests ever since the village was built. The village and additional lodging wiped out a significant amount of parking that was close to the base area.



Northstar's proposed lift
and on-mountain
improvements.

It's likely a lift would start in the village to take riders to the top of Lookout Mountain. Right now that area takes a few lifts before it can be accessed.

Expanding the resort to include Sawtooth Ridge has long been talked about. The proposal calls for 300 acres to be incorporated into the ski boundary.

Northstar is mostly on private land and is outside the Lake Tahoe Basin. This is why the U.S. Forest Service and Tahoe Regional Planning Agency are not involved.

“Our priorities remain in line with the initial goals of the Northstar Mountain Master Plan, which are to implement a plan consistent with habitat and land use goals defined in the Northstar Habitat Management Plan; and to offer a better balance of beginner, intermediate, and expert terrain in order to improve and extend the vacation experience for the

destination guest and day use skier,” Northstar COO Bill Rock told *Lake Tahoe News*. “The primary project objectives contained in the EIR and proposed NMMP (are to) maintain Northstar’s competitiveness as a resort destination by upgrading existing services, amenities, and operations. This includes providing a better balance of skier amenities, improving lift technology, and increasing the variety and mix of recreational activities.”

Northstar’s eventual expansion will require more electric power for new lifts as well as increased snowmaking.

While Liberty Utilities, the electric company for the resort as well as all of Truckee and the California side of the Lake Tahoe Basin, is looking at revamping its lines in Truckee-North Lake Tahoe.

“The proposed NMMP improvements would connect to existing electrical infrastructure and would not require new distribution facilities, upgrades to the Northstar substation or any other off-site improvements,” Rock said.

Liberty and Northstar have told *Lake Tahoe News* that the resort’s plans have nothing to do with the utility company’s wanting to upgrade its system. It’s a matter of being able to keep providing consistent power – a reliability issue that Liberty says needs addressing today under current conditions.

“We expect that building out the additional improvements proposed in the master plan will increase electrical power consumption over existing levels. This is disclosed in the draft EIR and determined to be a less-than-significant impact,” Rock said. “Ski related equipment such as chairlifts and snowmaking guns are continually being improved in terms of energy efficiency in order to reduce both consumption and operating expenses. Northstar intends to take full advantage of the improvements in these technologies over time in order to realize the benefits they offer. In addition, the

California Building Code sets strict limits on the energy efficiency of each new building that is constructed, for example new on-mountain skier service buildings and warming huts.”

Liberty’s feeder tie between Northstar and Truckee is a 14.4 kilo volt line.

“This project again is not driven by Northstar load additions. It is another reliability issue that exists today and is being addressed,” Rock said. “Based on information supplied by Liberty Utilities, the current Northstar substation is at roughly 50 percent of its capacity on a peak winter day.”

Northstar is doing its part to try to conserve energy. Older snowmaking guns have been replaced with energy-efficient models and the underground parking garage was recently upgraded with energy-efficient lighting.

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Notes:

- Comments are being taken until Jan. 13. They may be emailed to cdraecs@placer.ca.gov.
- The draft environmental impact report is online.
- There will be a public hearing about the document Jan. 9 at 10:20am in the Placer County Planning Commission Hearing Room, 3091 County Center Drive, Auburn.

Economists forecast bright 2014

By Marilyn Geewax, NPR

As the new year begins, most economists' annual forecasts are brimming with good cheer.

"The economic news remains broadly encouraging," the Goldman Sachs forecasters write in their 2014 outlook.

And the brighter prospects are not limited to this country. "The global economy is likely to emerge in 2014 with modest growth of 3.3 percent compared with 2.5 percent this year," according to Nariman Behraves, chief economist at the forecasting firm IHS Global Insight.

Most stock analysts also see more gains coming on Wall Street. JPMorgan chief U.S. equity strategist Tom Lee, who accurately predicted stock advances for 2013, says Americans are now in the midst of "a classic bull market," driven by good earnings.

So, why all the upbeat forecasts? What has changed?

Read the whole story

Family tries to find good

after '12 SnowGlobe tragedy

By Janelle Wetzstein, Argus-Courier

No parent wants to admit their child is using drugs. No parent wants to accept that drugs contributed to their child's death. And no parent wants to think that if only their child stuck with a friend, they might still be alive.

But in the past year, Petaluma's Kevin and Kim Byrne endured all three tragic scenarios.



There was a candlelight vigil in South Lake Tahoe for Alyssa Byrne last January. Photo/LTN file

"Sometimes I think we're still dealing with it as if it happened yesterday," Kevin Byrne said Monday afternoon. "We're getting by, one day at a time, but it's difficult."

It's been a year since Kevin Byrne said goodbye to his 19-year-old daughter Alyssa as she headed off to the annual SnowGlobe music festival in South Lake Tahoe. Hours after ringing in the New Year and the end of the concert, Alyssa was nowhere to be found.

Her body was discovered days later in a nearby snow bank. An autopsy found she likely died of hypothermia, and a toxicology report revealed she had large amounts of methamphetamine and

psychoactive drugs in her system. Her drug use, coupled with the location of her body, caused authorities to speculate that Alyssa Byrne tried to walk to her hotel to avoid the long lines at the shuttle bus after the concert concluded, and then became disoriented in the freezing temperatures.

While many parents would break down after such loss, the Byrnes instead spent the past year helping young adults fight substance abuse and reminding young people of how important a buddy can be when partying.

“At least a dozen kids have reached out to me since Alyssa died,” said Kevin Byrne. “They’ve asked for help with serious substance abuse problems. I’ve sat through many Narcotics Anonymous meetings with them. It’s incredible that this tragic circumstance has helped other people.”

Read the whole story

Gloves are not an accessory to overlook

By Kathryn Reed

Every element of outdoor wear is important. Hours can be spent researching the best skis and boots. But seldom is the same amount of time and effort given to finding the best accessories.

Gloves often fall into the category – they fit, I’ll buy them. And while fit is a huge component, there are more things to consider when choosing the fabric to protect your digits.

“When a glove fits you are going to want to be able to pinch

in front of the fingers. You don't want it so tight because blood flow won't reach the end of the finger," Lindsay Thayer, marketing manager at Tahoe Dave's in Kings Beach, said.



Gloves are an important accessory for skiers.

Then there is the question whether gloves or mittens are better. Mittens were the overwhelming response for kids. It's easier to get them on and often they are warmer.

The warmth factor is also why adults like mittens. They are recommended for people with poor circulation or those who always are complaining about cold hands.

"All the fingers get to snuggle together," is how Thayer explained it to *Lake Tahoe News*.

A hybrid of a glove and mitten is the lobster claw. The index finger and thumb are separate from the other three fingers. This allows for more dexterity.

"What you want is balance between warmth, dexterity and waterproofness," explained Matt Gibely, glove guru at Alpenglow Sports in Tahoe City.

He said it's important to have gloves for each sport – downhill, Nordic and backcountry.

Dexterity is not critical for most people skiing the slopes of Lake Tahoe. A glove with waterproofing material, along the

lines of Gore-Tex, is recommended. The waterproof layer is usually not the outer shell, but instead goes in between the shell and the warming layer.

Synthetic insulation will not be affected by moisture as much as down.

“Nordic gloves are a whole different animal. Those tend to breath very well because Nordic skiers are exerting energy the whole time,” Gibely told *Lake Tahoe News*.

As with most gear, the price for a pair of gloves is all over the board. *Ski* magazine in September came out with its top six picks. They ranged in price from \$40 to \$375.

Dave Salazar, salesman at Sports Ltd. in South Lake Tahoe, said heated gloves are the most expensive – topping out at about \$400. A battery makes the gloves warm; then there are settings to adjust the amount of heat.

Salazar and Thayer are proponents of the one-time use hand warmers. But don't put them in your palm because the blood does not circulate there. Use the compartment on top of your glove – that's what it's there for – not your money or a key. The top of your hand is where the blood is circulating and what you want heated so the warmth reaches your fingertips.

Virginia City hangs onto its roots

By Adam Kealoha Causey, Las Vegas Review-Journal

VIRGINIA CITY – Mining may not get top billing anymore, but this town built high on Northern Nevada hillsides still packs

that history into its punch.

Today tourism is big business, and there's something here for everybody who likes tales of yesteryear, whether rooted in fact or fiction. There are signs of life from the actual boom days that drew thousands to mine the Comstock Lode starting in the 1850s, and also the made-for-TV version from "Bonanza" that started its 14-season run a hundred years later.

You can find markers and a museum commemorating Mark Twain's newspapering days. He reported for the Territorial Enterprise in the early 1860s. Piper's Opera House, whose current location dates back to 1885, still houses performances in the same spot where traveling shows stopped to make some cash back in the day.

Even this town's name, according to legend, is a throwback. Miner James Finney, whose nickname was "Old Virginia" or "Old Virginny," christened it Virginia City to honor his home state.

Read the whole story

Not all ski deaths are counted by NSAA

By Vernon Silver, Bloomberg

There's a grim certainty that comes with the start of a fresh U.S. ski season: Inevitably, for a tiny number of those who take the slopes, winter fun will end in deadly tragedy. Counting just how many perish in accidents is a job that falls

to the skiing industry itself, and the tally stops short of trying to reflect each and every death on skis.

The statistics compiled by the National Ski Areas Association exclude a range of deaths, including those that happen outside commercial ski slope boundaries, those who ski after normal operating hours, victims of heart attacks on the slopes, participants in competitions, and ski area employees who die on the job. This means that Ian Lamphere, 35, who died while skiing in Colorado this April, didn't make the count. Nor did the four snowboarders who died with him. The group was out of ski area boundaries when an avalanche claimed their lives at Loveland Pass.

Over the past decade the NSAA's count has averaged 39.6 annual snowboard and skiing deaths in the U.S., or 0.69 deaths per million skier visits.

Read the whole story

Opinion: A few ideas for Lake Tahoe in 2014

By Kathryn Reed

While it's not possible to wipe the slate clean, it is possible to approach things from a different perspective. That is in a lot of ways what New Year's resolutions are about.

Here, in no particular order, are some resolutions, ideas, and thoughts I have for 2014 for the greater Lake Tahoe area:

- Let's not artificially start the ski season before Thanksgiving. Mother Nature seldom has. I remember growing up

in the Bay Area and many a year the skiing was not good at Lake Tahoe at Christmas. This was long before climate change and global warming were in our vocabulary. Let's promote fall in Tahoe; then ramp up the snowmaking – if need be – so there is a white Christmas on the slopes.

- Let's have elected officials set the example for how to behave properly. This means no screaming at people getting signatures for petitions, no accosting reporters at meetings, no disrespect to people whose opinion you disagree with, no bullying. You are elected to lead and to represent everyone, even those who did not vote for you and those you don't like.

- Let's put locals first. I've long advocated that if we create an area where people want to live and work, then tourists will follow. Most tourists want an authentic experience, not some make believe village or Disneyland-esque venue. Tourist traps, jacked up prices, crappy service – no one wants any of that.

- Let's take pride in what we have. How hard would it be to at a minimum once a month do something to improve your business and your residence? This includes people who don't own, own but don't live here, and part-timers. It could be cleaning the windows, raking, shoveling, taking out fire-prone juniper, a fresh coat of paint, building morale with a company event, closing for a half day and letting employees use that time to volunteer in the community, getting neighbors together to help each other with a project – the possibilities are endless.

- Let's broaden our horizons by getting out more. Visit a store you haven't been to before. Take a walk, a hike, a bike ride some place new. Eat at a different restaurant, have a beer someplace new. Go to an event you've never been to. Tahoe might have more to offer than you realized.

- Let's help our local businesses by writing reviews on Yelp, Trip Advisor, Open Table and the like. Have family and friends

do the same. And if you have had a bad experience, talk to the manager or owner and tell that person what happened so the same negative thing doesn't happen to someone else. That's more helpful than complaining to friends or writing a bad review.

- Let's take a hard look at how much we really need. We claim to want to build things because we need more tourists – aka more money. Bigger isn't necessarily better; just as change is not necessarily bad. Let's make decisions based on the merits of the project. Not all development is bad; just as not all redevelopment is good just because it looks pretty. And just because something has been on the books for X number of years is not a reason to go forward with that idea.

- Let's learn the arts of listening and compromise. Everyone has a right to his or her opinion. Instead of challenging it, just hear what that person has to say. That does not mean you have to agree with it. It's good to know what you want, even better to give a little so even more people get what they want. That is compromise. Listening and compromising can be hard, but both are rewarding.

- Let's remember that Lake Tahoe means different things to everyone. Each section of the basin has something special to offer locals and visitors. It belongs to all of us. No one person, no one business, no one agency is more important than another. Yes, there are different visions and even more ways to create those visions. But we're all here only briefly. Let's make the best of it instead of being so divisive.

Happy New Year, Lake Tahoe!

CalFire worried about early fire season

By Dave Marquis, News 10

CalFire, the largest firefighting agency in the world, is cautioning that without enough winter rain and snow an intense, dangerous fire season could start as early as April.

“In my 27 years of doing this, I’ve never seen, this far north, fires continue to occur through the winter,” said CalFire Battalion Chief Fred Lopez at his station along Cook Riolo Road in western Placer County.

In Big Sur on the California coast, flames burned homes and property in an unusual late-season fire in mid-December.

The problem in the spring, Lopez said, is that without enough precipitation, heavier fuels that burn longer and hotter, will become dangerously dry.

Read the whole story

Nevada to be test site for commercial drones

By Kristy Totten and Steve Tetreault, Las Vegas Review Journal

WASHINGTON — Look to the skies. Nevada was chosen Monday as a coveted base for the emerging drone industry.

The Federal Aviation Administration announced the Silver State as one of a half dozen authorized to become test sites for the

commercial development of unmanned aerial vehicles, or UAVs.

The winners now get an early start – along with the federal government’s lucrative seal of approval – to cash in on the vision of drones populating U.S. skies alongside piloted aircraft.

Nevada officials have projected the creation of 15,000 well-paying jobs in the state directly tied to the industry, as well as thousands more in feeder industries.

Read the whole story