

Record dry year for Lake Tahoe Basin



Lack of moisture means there is more beach area surrounding Lake Tahoe.
Photo/Kathryn Reed

By Kathryn Reed

Lake Tahoe and many parts of California and Nevada are setting records for being so dry.

Tahoe City receives on average 31.55 inches of precipitation each year. It has received 8.08 inches for 2013. Records date to 1910.

The last significantly dry year was in 1976 when 9.34 inches of precip fell.

South Lake Tahoe's numbers are not as old and are not as detailed. But the entire basin, Truckee, Reno and Carson areas all in the same dry predicament.

"The high pressure could leave us in a dry pattern in the Sierra for another week or two," Jessica Kielhorn, meteorologist technician with the National Weather Service in Reno, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

That ridge of high pressure is just sitting off the California coast, which is causing the dry spell. Storms keep going north and northeast of here.



Source: National Weather Service

Statewide electronic readings show the snowpack water content is 20 percent of normal for the date. The first manual reading of the season near the entrance to Sierra-at-Tahoe is Friday. A year ago the snowpack was 150 percent of normal for this time of year.

The official water year ends June 30, so there is time for the water year to be salvaged.

However, the lack of moisture throughout California and Nevada makes this the third year in a row for below normal precipitation.

Snowpack provides for about one-third of California's drinking and irrigation water.

Normally the hills in the Bay Area and land in the Sacramento Valley are a vibrant green at the start of a new year. That won't be the case for 2014. They aren't even the golden brown of summer. The land is barren; not even suitable for grazing.

Department of Water Resources Director Mark Cowin on Dec. 13 mobilized a drought management team "to offset potentially devastating impacts to citizen health, well-being and our

economy.” Four days later, Gov. Jerry Brown set up a Drought Task Force. Drought conditions are being felt in 94.25 percent of California, according to the U.S. Drought Monitor.

For now, farmers are likely to receive 5 percent of the water they expected. This means some fields will be fallow, while plantings will be scaled back elsewhere. This in turn affects produce prices and unemployment numbers. Both will increase.

The lack of snow is clearly impacting the Lake Tahoe Basin when it comes to tourism. Usually it’s near impossible to get a hotel room this week. But there are several vacancy signs along Highway 50 in South Lake Tahoe.

While ski resorts are open, the bulk of the slopes are covered with man-made snow. Even then, no resort has 100 percent of its terrain open.

If the snow and rain stays away, the other threat to worry about will be wildfires.

Fire destroys 2 residences at Granlibakken

By Kathryn Reed

A father of five escaped with minor injuries when a fire swept through their Granlibakken home in Tahoe City.

Gabrielle Cuevas was trying to help his kids about 4:30am Dec. 30 when he was burned on his hands and suffered smoke inhalation. He was treated at Renown Medical Center in Reno.

North Tahoe Fire Protection District crews were still on the

scene late Monday afternoon trying to determine the cause of the blaze. No dollar amount has been put on the loss of the structure or personal belongings. The family lost everything, including just opened Christmas gifts.



A father saved four children from a fire at their Granlibakken home Dec. 30.
Photo/Provided

Granlibakken and North Tahoe firefighters are going to Toys for Tots in Reno on Tuesday to find toys to replace some of what was destroyed. The Red Cross is also helping the family.

The father and four children ranging in age from 5 to 10 were at home. A 2-year-old was elsewhere for the night. A couple who lived next door is also in need of other living arrangements.

"It's what they call the dormitory. It's an older building where some of the workers stay," Dave Zaski with North Tahoe Fire told *Lake Tahoe News*. Cuevas is a maintenance worker at the resort.

Zaski said the good thing is his department worked with the resort a few years ago to make sure there were smoke detectors in all structures. The other thing that helped the family is the children had been taught by local firefighters about how to stay low to the ground when there is smoke and to change the battery in the smoke detectors.

Granlibakken is open for business. A spokeswoman did not return a call.

Donations of clothes and money for the family may be dropped off at Granlibakken or the fire station at 222 Fairway Drive, Tahoe City.

Nev. makes another bid to name cove after Twain

By Martin Griffith, AP

RENO — Nevada officials have launched a new bid to give Mark Twain recognition in the state where he assumed his pen name 150 years ago, but it doesn't come without opposition.

The Nevada State Board on Geographic Names is again pushing a proposal to name a scenic Lake Tahoe cove for Samuel Clemens, Twain's real name.

But it no longer maintains the inlet should be named for Twain because he actually camped there in 1861.

The board's national counterpart rejected the request two years ago in a 5-4 vote, citing as a factor doubt about whether Twain camped at the spot.

Nevada board members now say they want to name the cove for Twain merely because of his association with Tahoe and the lack of a geographic feature in the state named for him. His book "Roughing It" put Nevada on the map and included an oft-quoted poetic phrase about Lake Tahoe.

"Whether or not the cove was Mark Twain's campsite does not

matter in the national scheme to put a name to that cove,” Bob Stewart, a member of the state board, told the Associated Press. “The very fact that he was associated with the Nevada shore of Lake Tahoe makes an unnamed point on Tahoe eligible for naming for him.”

But Stewart, a historical researcher and former U.S. Bureau of Land Management employee, said he still believes Twain camped at the cove near Incline Village.

“Personally, I’m totally comfortable that this is the campsite, but this is not the point of this nomination,” he said.

David Antonucci, of Homewood, a civil engineer and history writer, maintains Twain camped on the California side of the lake. He has pledged to fight the new bid. His opposition was cited as a factor in the earlier decision by the U.S. Board on Geographic Names.

“It’s just a backdoor attempt to accomplish what was earlier rejected by the national board,” he said. “I don’t think they’re fooling anyone. You’d have to be naive to think if it was named Samuel Clemens Cove that the proponents would not promote that as the site where he camped.”

The request also should be rejected because Lake Tahoe is the ancestral homeland of some Nevada tribes and Twain made racist statements against American Indians, said Antonucci, author of “Fairest Picture: Mark Twain at Lake Tahoe.”

The national board also cited opposition by the U.S. Forest Service as a factor in its decision. But the agency has since sent a letter to the state saying it would not take a position on the new request.

While Twain wrote adoringly about Lake Tahoe, the Forest Service noted that “his legacy also is that he carelessly started a forest fire” at his camp there.

Twain accidentally started the wildfire in September 1861 while preparing to cook dinner. He and a companion staked a timber claim there, weeks after he arrived in Carson City, with his brother, Orion, then secretary of Nevada Territory. Twain later assumed his pen name as a newspaper reporter in Virginia City.

That first trip to Lake Tahoe inspired Twain to write the famous lines: "As it lay there with the shadows of the mountains brilliantly photographed upon its still surface, I thought it must surely be the fairest picture the whole earth affords."

The state board will take final action on the proposal after holding hearings in January and May. The national board is expected to act on the request sometime next summer in advance of Nevada's 150th anniversary of statehood on Oct. 31.

SnowGlobe rocks South Lake Tahoe



SnowGlobe will be rocking South Lake Tahoe for three nights – Dec. 29-31. Photos/Kathryn Reed

By Kathryn Reed

Most SnowGlobers were bouncing to the music blasting from the speakers on Day 1 of the three-day South Lake Tahoe music festival, but plenty more were chilling in the warming tent.

A sea of bodies at the three stages moved to the music supplied by bands and disc jockeys. While the temperature felt warmer this year, more people were fully clothed than the last two years.

Inside the warming area the sounds from the main stage were crystal clear. People were sprawled on what is normally the turf of Lake Tahoe Community College's soccer field. A full bar warmed people in other ways. The only thing that could have made this more ideal would have been screens to see the action going on outside.

While the number of noise complaints is considerably less than

the first year, the bass is louder than last year.

"There is considerably more bass and noise than last year," a resident of Pioneer Village told *Lake Tahoe News* at 4:15pm Sunday. The concert had started an hour earlier.

Bijou Park closed

"Like last year the park is utilized for SnowGlobe staff and equipment parking.



Gibbz entertains the crowd South Tahoe Middle School is SnowGlobe in South Lake the nearest Tahoe.

offsite parking for vehicles traveling to SnowGlobe. The park will reopen to the public on New Year's Day."

— *Lauren Thomaselli, South Lake Tahoe recreation manager*

"(The) first year was awful and very unnerving. We had pictures fall off the walls. Last year was better. We'll see

what this year brings,” the resident added.

About 15 noise complaints were filed with the city the first night.

“Sound monitoring is being conducted throughout the event. No violation of permissible sound limits has occurred thus far,” Police Chief Brian Uhler told *Lake Tahoe News*.

It’s likely the lack of snow contributed to the sound not being absorbed. Plus, as the wind shifted, the noise drifted.

But for those at the concert, other than it being difficult to have a conversation at times, the sound was what they came for.



Daniel Rave and Kati Green show some of the unique clothing worn at SnowGlobe.

Lisi McMadden came up from Santa Barbara for her first SnowGlobe – and her first trip in Lake Tahoe. She will be back the next two nights. She’s already been snowboarding several days.

“My dad proposed to my mom in South Lake Tahoe. It’s a

beautiful, magical place,” McMadden said.

She was waiting for Star Slinger to take the stage in the Sierra Tent. On New Year’s Eve she is looking forward to Snoop Dog.

Miasam Oeli made the trek from Los Angeles for the second year in a row.

He was enjoying the Polish Ambassador.

“It’s a relatable vibe,” Oeli told *Lake Tahoe News*. He described the DJ as reggae with a funky feel.

The only thing he liked better last year was the snow. The snowpack this year has Oeli questioning where he’ll hit the slopes while he’s here.

Buddies Andrew Laufer and Alex Jasmund also came up from Southern California. Jasmund did some research on the lesser known acts so he would be familiar with them.

They are both looking forward to Kaskade, who will be the last act on the main stage tonight.

Single-day and three-day tickets were still being sold Sunday. The last two years the event sold out.

“I noticed many hotels still had vacancies, so my guess is the extra visitors for the event is critical to businesses,” Uhler said.

Flu strain hits young people,

healthy adults hardest

By Cynthia H. Craft, Sacramento Bee

Just days after a Christmas Eve federal health advisory, a top public health official warned Friday of a sudden increase in local influenza activity, possibly led by a strong resurgence of a version of the virus behind the 2009 worldwide flu pandemic.

Olivia Kasirye, the Sacramento County's public health officer, said the viral strain known as influenza A pH1N1 is atypical because it tends to hit young people and healthy adults the hardest. In 2009, the H1N1 virus caused more illness in children and young adults, compared to older adults.

State and federal officials confirmed that the pH1N1 virus is the "predominant strain" circulating so far this season nationwide. Statewide, no influenza outbreaks have been reported to date and only local – as opposed to regional – cases have popped up, according to data collected by the state up to Dec. 14.

Read the whole story

Calif. undecided on legalizing recreational pot

By Peter Hecht, Sacramento Bee

On New Year's Day in Colorado, state-licensed marijuana stores will begin selling pot purely for pleasurable consumption.

Colorado, already home to the nation's most regulated medical marijuana industry, expects to open its first two dozen stores selling recreational cannabis users up to an ounce of pot each. Another 400 applications are pending for retail marijuana shops, commercial cultivators or pot product producers. In Washington, where voters also legalized recreational marijuana use in November 2012, the state is reviewing a flood of applications for 340 state licenses for marijuana stores expected to begin opening this spring.

Now in California, where a recent Field poll showed 55 percent voter support for marijuana legalization beyond medical use, four pot legalization ballot initiatives have emerged as contenders for the November ballot. Yet in the home of America's largest marijuana economy, advocates remain hesitant about moving forward – and putting the necessary money on the line – to qualify a California pot legalization vote next year. They remain uncertain over the state's political climate and are frustrated by failure of lawmakers to set rules governing California's medical marijuana trade, once estimated at \$1.5 billion, in the face of federal raids on cannabis businesses.

Read the whole story

Fire leaves raw beauty along snowshoe trek



The Angora Fire forever changed the landscape of Gardner Mountain. Photos/Kathryn Reed

By Kathryn Reed

FALLEN LEAF LAKE – Traipsing through the woods it all looked so different – partly because it was covered in snow, partly because we were going the opposite the direction we are used to and mostly because we were on snowshoes instead of a bike.

Riding from South Tahoe High School to Fallen Leaf Lake is a standard summer-fall mountain bike ride. But last weekend we left a car on 13th Street by the school and started on Fallen Leaf Lake Road.

But before we headed back toward the first car, the three of us took off for Fallen Leaf Lake via the campground. A family of four from out of town, based on their accents, was taking photos near the glassy, picturesque lake with a snow-covered Mount Tallac in the background. We did the same.

While the shoreline is free of snow, we were happy to have our

snowshoes for the remainder of the trek. Snow depth matters to some extent for snowshoeing, but fortunately going over a bare spot here or there doesn't require taking your equipment into the shop.

We cross to the other side of Fallen Leaf Lake Road and head south through the closed U.S. Forest Service gate.

With so many offshoots in this area it would be easy to not end up where you intended. However, it would be hard to get lost. A hard left and you will eventually be on Highway 89, going straight will get you to the Gardner Mountain neighborhood.

At the start we see tracks from a large vehicle, like a tractor. We're not sure what it was doing out there.

A small aspen grove with its white bark adds contrast to the dominant pines.

It doesn't take long and we are where the Angora Fire of June 2007 ravaged the landscape. Beyond the obvious remaining charred trees it is also so open here. The start of the route is denser – like what this whole area once was like.

We veer to the right to stay high enough so we will come out at the far end of the STHS' football field. Had we gone even higher we would have been able to see Lake Tahoe – something that wasn't possible before the fire.

Looking uphill the remains of the fire are more evident. It's hard to find a tree that is alive. A pile of logs is a reminder of how this area is still being restored.

We also pass the many markers for the pet cemetery.

Freel and Jobs peaks come into view directly in front of us.

At times the trail is wide enough so Sue, Brenda and I can walk together, while other times we are single-file.

It's relatively flat, which is a good thing considering Brenda is dealing with a rather recently surgically repaired knee and I have a raw heel from a previous snowshoe.

But the bounty of beauty we are immersed in is what matters. It's a good jaunt to get the snowshoe legs into shape for the season.

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No moisture in sight; drought-conditions grow

By Brian Lada, AccuWeather

With 2013 quickly coming to a close, it's shaping up to be one of the driest calendar years on record for many places in California.



Regan Beach in South Lake Tahoe in October 2013.
Photo/LTN

Almost all of the Golden State is under either a severe or extreme drought with no end in sight heading into 2014.

This prolonged drought has contributed to the heightened risk of wildfires over the past several months and is raising major concerns in the agriculture industry.

Looking at the forecast through the remainder of 2013 and into the beginning of 2014, it appears as though very little rain – if any at all – will fall across the state.

Read the whole story

Lack of snow makes slopes more dangerous

By Colin Lygren, K0LO-TV

As families continue their holiday vacations, many will be heading up the hill to catch some fresh turns. But this year the mountain may be a little more dangerous than in years past.

Last year we got a lot of snow early in the season and by late December, ski resorts were actually looking pretty good. This year, there's not much snow at all which means less mountain for skiers and boarders to enjoy.

The problem at Tahoe area resorts started two months ago when the snow never came.

Read the whole story

El Dorado Savings making leadership changes

By Kathryn Reed

In this era of corporate banking and corruption, one bank has held true to its roots – El Dorado Savings Bank.

A lot has to do with the fact that members of the Cook family are still at the helm of the Placerville-based institution. It was George Cook Sr. and members of the Warren family who founded the bank in 1957. Cook still works in Placerville three days a week.

In the past 56 years the bank has grown to have 35 branches, including three in South Lake Tahoe, one in Tahoe City, one in Carson City, one in Gardnerville and one in Sparks.



El Dorado Savings has three branches in South Lake Tahoe. Photo/LTN

The bank is a closely held company with about 180 stockholders.

On Jan. 1 a bit of musical chairs will take place in the front office for the first time in years. But those accessing the branches should not notice any changes.

George Cook Jr., who has been president of the bank for the last 23 years, will become CEO. Tom Meuser is stepping down as CEO, but will remain chairman of the board. Meuser is planning to work three days a week.

Cook has been with the bank for 40 years and Meuser 45 years, with the last 23 as CEO.

John Cook moves from senior vice president, chief appraiser, and facilities manager to president of the bank. He has been with the bank 34 years.

(John and George Cook are brothers.)

El Dorado Savings Bank has weathered the tumultuous financial times of the past few years. While it has had to deal with foreclosures, it is not in a precarious situation like other institutions.

"I'm pleased to report we currently do not have any real estate owned on our books and at the end of the year we will be without any on our books," John Cook Jr. told *Lake Tahoe News*. "To be able to end the year without any foreclosures on the books is pretty darn good."

In its last earnings report for the quarter ending Sept. 30, El Dorado Savings Bank earned \$2.3 million. For the same quarter in 2012 the earnings were \$1.9 million. El Dorado Savings Bank has approximately \$1.9 billion in assets.

Cook said there have been plenty of positive signs in 2013 in terms of the real estate market improving and bank finances stabilizing.

In June, Bauer Financial Reports of Coral Gables, Fla., awarded El Dorado Savings Bank its highest five-star rating for being one of the safest banks in the U.S. for the 80th consecutive quarter dating to 1993.