Rim Fire salvage plan ignites debate

By Michael Doyle, McClatchy Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON – The devastating Rim Fire around Yosemite National Park has now rekindled a fierce fight over salvage logging.

Some want to speed commercial removal of the wrecked timber left behind by the fire that has burned over 257,000 Sierra Nevada acres since mid-August. Others caution about the consequences of eliminating the standard regulatory and judicial reviews. The politically savvy agree that a far-reaching timber salvage bill newly introduced by Rep. Tom McClintock, R-Granite Bay, is only the start of serious debate.

“If this effort is anything more than just a press release, he’s going to have to be able to sit down and negotiate with the Senate,” Rep. Jim Costa, D-Fresno, said Friday.

The bill introduced late Thursday is a more aggressive version of a salvage logging amendment added, on a largely party line vote, a week ago to a separate piece of House legislation about public lands. Like McClintock’s House amendment, his bill effectively blocks lawsuits to challenge salvage logging plans.

Read the whole story

S. Tahoe coalition receives multi-year drug grant

By Kathryn Reed

Drug use and abuse is nothing new in South Lake Tahoe. But there is a group in town that believes the status quo must go.

The South Tahoe Drug Free Coalition secured a $150,000 federal grant for each of the next five years. The money will primarily go toward education and prevention. The funding starts Oct. 1.

South Lake Tahoe was one of nine communities in California and one of 147 nationwide to receive the Drug Free Communities grant.

“Look around, there is probably not one of us who doesn’t have a family member, an associate or someone in our different circles that has not been affected by substance abuse,” Erica Eng told *Lake Tahoe News*. “The grant is about prevention and prevention at a young age so kids don’t go down that route to begin with, so they don’t become addicted to alcohol, marijuana and prescription drugs.”

Eng works for Tahoe Youth & Family Services, the lead agency for the Drug Free Coalition. While she led the charge during the grant seeking process, Leanne Wagoner with Barton Health is now chair of the coalition. (This reporter is a member of the coalition.)

“Working toward reducing substance abuse in our community will benefit everyone. Substance abuse can be correlated with many other social health factors such as domestic violence or mental health, known as co-occurring disorders, which can negatively affect the quality of life for many living in our area,” Wagoner told *Lake Tahoe News*. “Additionally, from

Barton's perspective, reducing substance abuse may ultimately reduce healthcare costs. You see, when a patient is admitted to the hospital for a medical issue and it is combined with substance abuse, their stay tends to be longer. Many of these patients do not have the ability to pay for these services, which results in Barton donating this care, which affects the cost of healthcare for everyone."

The coalition also wants to work with Lake Tahoe Unified School District. Students from South Tahoe Middle School are part of the coalition. Going forward South Tahoe High students are expected to be part of the mix.

Here are some local stats from the California Healthy Kids Survey, which is conducted every two years in middle and high school:

• In LTUSD during the 2011-12 school year, 27 percent of freshmen and 46 percent for juniors said they had at least one alcoholic beverage in the past 30 days.

• The number of juniors in the district using alcohol in the past month was nearly 10 percent higher than the state average from 2004-10.

Barton Health's 2012 Community Health Needs Assessment showed that 29 percent of people living on the South Shore consider themselves binge drinkers. This is 12 percent higher than the national rate. The survey found local illegal drug use nearly four times the national rate.

"Barton has been working this past year on initiatives targeting substance abuse in our community by creating an awareness poster campaign in primary care offices encouraging patients to ask their doctor about available resources, supporting initiatives like the Drug Store Project and Every 15 Minutes through the volunteerism of many nurses and physicians, looking at pain management protocols and how Barton can be more proactive about looking into non-medication

solutions to address patients' pain, integrating an electronic medical record system which allows physicians to better manage a patient's care holistically and helps practitioners identify conflicts in care or overuse of medication, sponsoring local events and nonprofit organizations such as Tahoe Youth and Family Services, Live Violence Free, the Drug Store Project, and sober grad nights at both local high schools," Wagoner said.

Binge drinking was the subject of a study at the University of Michigan from 2005-11 where more than 16,000 high school students across the U.S. were surveyed. The results were released this month. The research revealed in the last two weeks 20.2 percent of high school seniors reported drinking more than five drinks or more at a time, 10.5 percent reported having 10 or more drinks, and 5.6 percent reported 15 or more drinks.

Other stats from the study: Rates of 5+ binge drinking and 10+ extreme binge drinking have declined since 2005, but rates of 15+ extreme binge drinking have not significantly declined. Students from more rural areas were more likely than students from metropolitan areas to consume 15 or more drinks.

Lake Tahoe is considered rural.

Some of the grant money will help keep current prevention programs intact. This includes Drug Store Project. In April, 350 sixth-graders went through the program that shows them the consequences of taking prescription drugs. (The 2014 event will be April 1 at Lake Tahoe Community College.)

Illegal drug use is not just a local issue. Sen. Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif., head of the Senate Caucus on International Narcotics Control, on Sept. 25 chaired a hearing on dangerous synthetic drugs such as Molly, K2, Spice and bath salts.

She cited statistics, saying poison centers nationwide

responded to approximately 3,200 calls related to synthetic marijuana and bath salts in 2010 and that by 2011 that figure jumped to 12,834. Sixty percent of those calls were from people 25 and younger.

“In my view, synthetic drugs are diabolical. Synthetic drugs are often unregulated substances designed by scientists to mimic the effects of controlled substances. They are similar in chemical structure to Schedule 1 controlled substances. They are sold at gas stations, convenience stores, head shops and over the Internet,” Feinstein said during the hearing. “When Congress outlawed several of these synthetic drugs last year, traffickers did not stop producing them. Instead, they slightly altered the chemical structure of illegal drugs to skirt the law. By making these alterations, the drug traffickers produced what we call ‘controlled substance analogues’ which mimic the effects of drugs like ecstasy, cocaine, PCP and LSD.”

In July, Feinstein introduced the Protecting Our Youth from Dangerous Synthetic Drugs Act to give law enforcement the tools they need to prosecute individuals who produce and distribute controlled substance analogues. The bill would establish an inter-agency committee of scientists to be responsible for establishing and maintaining an administrative list of controlled substance analogues.

The local drug coalition will hire a coordinator to implement the goals of the group, oversee future programs, and manage the grant funds.

For more information about the South Tahoe Drug Free Coalition, including becoming a member or volunteering time, contact Erica Eng at Erica@tahoeyouth.org.

Study: Calif. one of the best states for women

By UPI

WASHINGTON – Despite U.S. women's advancements, substantial inequalities remain with men, but disparities for women also exist among states, a nonprofit group says.

A report by the Center for American Progress analyzed multiple factors – 36 factors overall – involving women.

For example, women in Vermont make on average close to 85 cents for every $1 a man makes, while women in Wyoming make only 64 cents $1 a man makes. Nationally, U.S. women are paid only 77 cents for every dollar a man makes. On average, African-American women make 64 cents for every dollar that white men make.

On leadership, 15 states have no female elected leaders in the House of Representatives or the Senate. Lastly, while less than 10 percent of women in Vermont, Wisconsin, Hawaii and Massachusetts are uninsured, nearly 25 percent of women in Texas do not have health insurance.

Read the whole story

Panel: It's definite humans are changing climate

By Mark Memmott, NPR

Declaring that “human influence on the climate system is clear,” a U.N.-assembled panel of scientists reported Friday that “it is extremely likely that human influence has been the dominant cause of the observed warming since the mid-20th century.”

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, which brings together hundreds of researchers from around the world, adds that “warming in the climate system is unequivocal and since 1950 many changes have been observed throughout the climate system that are unprecedented over decades to millennia.”

Looking ahead, panel co-chair Thomas Stocker warns that “continued emissions of greenhouse gases will cause further warming and changes in all components of the climate system. … Heat waves are very likely to occur more frequently and last longer. As the Earth warms, we expect to see currently wet regions receiving more rainfall, and dry regions receiving less, although there will be exceptions.”

Read the whole story

Students learn about overcoming disabilities

By Kathryn Reed

Nationally ranked wrestler in high school. Green belt in martial arts. World traveler. Accomplished artist. Motivational speaker.

This is a great resume – and one that is similar to many people’s. What makes Brett Eastburn different, a word he

probably would not use, is that he has no arms or legs. The 41-year-old was born with a congenital birth defect known as Quad-membral Limbs Deficiency.

When he played high school basketball the other team just stared as he scooted down the court dribbling the ball. They didn't bother to cover the guy under the basket because they never thought Eastburn could throw the ball. He could. And he soon became his coach's secret weapon.

"Handicaps are not always where they appear to be," Eastburn said, pointing out that the other team's preconceived thoughts about his ability became a disability for them.



Brett Eastburn signs autographs Sept. 26 for South Tahoe Middle School students. Photo/Kathryn Reed

The message Eastburn brought to the entire South Tahoe Middle School student body on Sept. 26 was about what people *can* do.

"When you say you can't you are right because you aren't even going to try," Eastburn told the nearly 800 students as well as the adults in the room.

He started to draw to prove his point. To do so Eastburn put a marker next to his cheek that he held there with what he has of a left arm. (He is quick to point out that his nickname on his high school basketball team was stub.)

When he’s done with drawing Garfield he asks the audience if they could do the same thing. Most said no. To which Eastburn said, “You have missed the point of the presentation.”

And then Eastburn explained how by breaking the process into pieces it is easier to accomplish the goal. It’s starting with a circle, making some squiggles and other shapes to have the finished piece of artwork.

He said people tend to fail when they try to do everything at once.

Sitting on a table Eastburn was able to show the students how he can throw a football without fully developed limbs. He has no hands or elbows. He put a spiral on a football that might have Jim Harbaugh wondering if Colin Kaepernick should be replaced.

Eastburn readily admits these skills didn’t come easily. It took multiple times at failure to be able to be accomplished at what he desired to do.

“No” does not appear to be in his vocabulary.

He knows people can be uncomfortable when they see him. But if the number of students who sought his autograph after the assembly is any indication, STMS kids thought he was someone special.

Principal Beth Delacour told *Lake Tahoe News* it is good for students to realize “we are more alike than different.”

(Soroptimist International Tahoe Sierra paid for the presentation.)

Students were able to ask him any question. He said he uses a toothbrush for his teeth, a razor to shave, has no problems going to the bathroom by himself, and wiggles into his clothes. He has different ways to handle silverware for eating.

Eastburn sprinkles humor into much of what he has to say. After all, he is also a standup comedian. He'll be at the Pioneer Underground in Reno at 8 tonight. (It's for adults.)

Last year Eastburn published a book about his life called "I'm Not Missing Anything". He and his wife, who is able bodied, travel the world spreading the message that people can do what they want if they put their minds to it.

Congress may adjust online sales tax rules

By J.D. Harrison, Washington Post

Four months after the Senate approved a controversial bill requiring online merchants to start collecting sales tax, a pair of lawmakers have opened the debate in the House, but with one major change from the original legislation – no exemption for small businesses.

House Judiciary Committee Chairman Bob Goodlatte, R-Va., and Rep. Spencer Bachus, R-Ala., a subcommittee chairman, recently released an outline of principles for online sales tax legislation, citing input from taxpayers, trade groups and state and local governments. In it, they argue that lawmakers should take action to level the playing field for brick-and-mortar and Internet retailers.

"Americans across the country are affected by the issue of Internet sales tax whether they are consumers or business owners," Goodlatte said in a statement, adding that the principles are meant to "provide a starting point for discussion in the House."

Currently, states have the authority to collect online sales tax, but the onus is on the shoppers, not the sellers, to report what the transactions.

Read the whole story

Water ruling may impact Calif. fire fee

By Tim Hearden, Capital Press

SACRAMENTO – A judge's recent preliminary ruling that California water rights fees are invalid has piqued the interest of a group suing the state over fees charged to rural landowners for fire prevention.

Sacramento County Superior Court Judge Raymond Cadei agreed with petitioners that fees charged by the State Water Resources Control Board disproportionately burden rights holders with funding the agency's Division of Water Rights.

"The deficiency rises out of the fact that no fees are assessed against the holders of approximately 38 percent of all water rights in California as expressed in acre-feet," Cadei wrote in his ruling, issued Sept. 6. "This evidence is sufficient to establish that holders of water rights that are not charged fees nevertheless receive a benefit from the division's regulatory activities …"

The proposed ruling, which could be finalized at an Oct. 30 hearing, comes as the Howard Jarvis Taxpayers Association is leading a legal challenge against $150-per-structure assessments imposed in rural areas as part of the 2011-12

budget package.

Read the whole story

Experimental forest holds keys to wildfires

By Tia Ghose, LiveScience

Experimental forests that have been groomed to slow wildfires could reduce the frequency of catastrophic fires in the future, researchers say.

The decade-long project to slow and contain forest fires could become a blueprint for fire management across California. The project, which was developed in an experimental forest at UC Berkeley's Sagehen Creek Field Station in Truckee creates pockets of thinner trees in areas where the fire risk is high, while still leaving pockets of dense growth for wildlife habitat.

"The idea is that you coordinate treatments to change fire behavior across a landscape – a big landscape," said John J. Battles, a Berkeley forest ecologist who helped develop the method.

The forest in the Sierra has evolved to thrive with frequent, small fires that consume saplings and brush on the forest floor. For instance, giant sequoia cones are sealed by a glue that only melts in fire, releasing their seeds.

But conflagrations like the recent Rim Fire – California's fourth-largest wildfire in recorded history and the largest forest fire in the Sierra – happen, in part, because a century

of fire suppression and replanting has left forests overgrown, with thick underbrush and cramped trees providing the perfect fuel for blazing hot fires. Hot fires scorch the earth, burning seeds in the ground and the carbon in the soil, and thus potentially changing the forest permanently.

The easiest way to contain or slow the spread of wildfire is to thin the forest. But old forests also provide habitat for iconic animals, such as the California spotted owl and the American marten. Many areas are too steep to reach with bulldozers to rip out trees, said Scott Conway, a vegetation management officer with the U.S. Forest Service in the Tahoe National Forest, who is also involved with the project.

Fire researchers are using models of the landscape and tree density, local weather patterns and historical fire data, combined with habitat information, to find the areas that are likeliest to burn catastrophically. The idea is that by treating only a portion of an area – typically about a third – fire managers can slow the spread of fire across the entire landscape, Battles said.

“By treating in certain spots, the fire never really gets rolling hot,” Battles told *LiveScience*.

For instance, northeast-facing slopes are likely to be cooler and wetter – and, therefore, less fire-prone – than southwest-facing slopes or ridgetops exposed to wind. Fire tends to race up steeper slopes more swiftly than flatter areas. Therefore, fire managers often treat southwest-facing slopes and the flatter areas around steeper slopes that can’t be reached by bulldozers.

“We would only strategically treat a portion of the landscape but in spots where we knew fire normally comes from,” Conway told *LiveScience’s OurAmazingPlanet*. “When fire hits one of these [treated areas], it’s forced to slow down and flank around these treatments.”

The strategy has been used in a few experimental forests: at the Sagehen Creek Field Station as well as the American River Ranger District of the Tahoe National Forest.

The method allows firefighters to actually protect critical areas, Conway said. (If the fire burns too hot, firefighters can do very little to contain it.)

The plan is to expand the method across the entire Sierra Nevada in order to reduce the frequency of catastrophic fires like the Rim Fire.

The researchers may already have a chance to see how their approach has worked: A fire is burning in the treated area of the American River Ranger District.

Once the fire dies out, the team will have a rare chance to see how the new technique worked in action, Conway said.

Rim Fire effects to last for decades

By Bettina Boxall, Los Angeles Times

TUOLUMNE – Tourists stopped at the Rim of the World overlook on California 120 earlier this month to take photos of the panoramic view – just as they always have.

But they stared in silence at the ashen hues of a landscape swept by the largest wildfire to burn in the Sierra Nevada in more than a century of recordkeeping. Steep canyon walls and mountain slopes that had been robed in chaparral and oak were now draped in black, spreading to the horizon in a funereal scene.

To the north, miles and miles of forest were still and lifeless, the earth scoured by flame. Millions of charred trees stood naked, their needles incinerated.

The huge Rim fire, ignited Aug. 17 by a hunter's illegal campfire, is likely to have transformed large swaths of the Stanislaus National Forest for decades to come.

Remote sensing satellite images indicate that virtually all of the vegetation is dead on nearly 40 percent of the area of the 401-square-mile blaze, which burned from the national forest into the western portion of Yosemite National Park, where it continues to smolder.

Burned chaparral and oak will quickly resprout. But where large patches of trees were killed, ecologists say it could take 30 to 50 years for the forest to reestablish itself in the shrub fields that are the first to grow. If there are more fires in the meantime, the land could permanently convert to chaparral.

Read the whole story

'Made in America' becoming vogue again

By Virginia Harrison, CNN Money

The "Made in America" revival is gaining momentum with a majority of manufacturing executives now ready to consider pulling some production back from China.

A new survey published Tuesday showed a big jump in recent months in the number of companies considering "re-shoring"

production from China, once favored for its low costs.

Boston Consulting Group said its survey found most large U.S. companies now plan to move some production to America from China, or are “actively considering” the move.

The number of firms that have shifted manufacturing to the U.S. from China, or will do so in the next two years, has nearly doubled over the past 18 months.

The survey found the three main drivers of the trend are labor costs, product quality and a desire to be closer to customers.

Read the whole story