

GOP tax bill could curtail renewable energy surge

By Brad Plumer and Jim Tankersley, New York Times

WASHINGTON — The Republican tax bills moving through Congress could significantly hobble the United States' renewable energy industry because of a series of provisions that scale back incentives for wind and solar power while bolstering older energy sources like oil and gas production.

The possibility highlights the degree to which the nation's recent surge in renewable electricity generation is still sustained by favorable tax treatment, which has lowered the cost of solar and wind production while provoking the ire of fossil-fuel competitors seeking to weaken those tax preferences.

Whether lawmakers choose to protect or jettison various renewable tax breaks in the final bill being negotiated on Capitol Hill could have major ramifications for the U.S. energy landscape, including the prices consumers pay for electricity.

Read the whole story

USOC is full speed ahead to the Winter Olympics

By Rick Maese, Washington Post

While senior members of the Trump administration have

suggested that tensions on the Korean Peninsula could force the United States to skip the Winter Olympics, the U.S. Olympic Committee on Friday reaffirmed its intention to send a full squad to the PyeongChang Games in February.

USOC officials were taken aback this week when two high-ranking members of the Trump administration appeared to cast some doubt on the United States' participation in the Olympics, citing possible security concerns and safety issues. U.N. Ambassador Nikki Haley said it was an "open question" and White House press secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders said "no official decision has been made" as to whether the United States would send a team. Both later softened their stance, and Sanders tweeted, "The U.S. looks forward to participating in the Winter Olympics in South Korea."

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For some skiers, it's uphill all the way

By Elaine Glusac, New York Times

In a DIY precursor to downhill skiing, the latest on-slope trend is to go uphill.

Called skinning, the activity of walking up a downhill slope on skis to schuss back down exemplifies a no-pain, no-gain ethos among skiers determined to earn their turns for the sheer challenge (or to burn calories). Skinning falls under the family of activities known as uphill, which includes snowboarders using special split boards, snowshoers and hikers.

What was once strictly a backcountry practice, used to explore ungroomed, off-piste terrain, is becoming more common in the front country. Fifty percent of ski resorts in the country now allow uphill skiing on their slopes, according to the National Ski Areas Association, an industry resort group. Several are adding new uphill ski races this year.

Read the whole story

Cooperation key to improving Placer County

By Kathryn Reed

Partnerships and collaboration are making a difference in Placer County.

The California Tahoe Conservancy has been a huge player in getting water quality projects, bike trails and other improvements established. In all, the CTC has poured about \$62 million into the lake portion Placer County.

At the state agency's board meeting last week in South Lake Tahoe reps from the CTC, Placer County, North Tahoe Public Utility District, Tahoe City Public Utility District, California State Parks and North Lake Tahoe Resort Association talked about what has been accomplished and the work that is left to do. Many projects overlap jurisdictions, with funding coming from multiple sources, with benefits to all.

"We are looking at it from a watershed scale," Kansas McGahan with Placer County said of projects. It means looking at water quality, stream environmental zone, air quality, and economics

among other criteria together. This approach gives more depth to projects.

Sixteen multi-benefit watershed projects have been completed since 2001. That was the year the county established the Tahoe Engineering Division. A key purpose to doing so was to work specifically on environmental improvement projects as they relate to the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency's Regional Plan.

Placer would like to see transportation projects be considered under the EIP umbrella.



Lakeside Trail in Tahoe City is decorative, has interpretive signs, seating and endless views of the lake. Photo/LTN file

McGahan said the county's current focus is the Griff Creek corridor, which includes putting in a roundabout at highways 267 and 28, and cleaning up the corner and making the creek more viable. Fanny Bridge replacement is also high on the list, as are completing the Dollar Creek trail and the North Tahoe bike trail.

For Kim Boyd with the Tahoe City PUD she called completion of the Lakeside Trail the "missing link." Funding is a stumbling

block, though the exact route has also not been finalized.

The public utility districts on the North Shore have recreation as one of their main objectives, in addition to water and sewer obligations. TCPUD operates the only public boat ramp on the North Shore at Lake Forest.

Reps talked about Pomin Park in Tahoe City, in TCPUD's jurisdiction, being ripe for water quality projects. While people are talking about possibilities to move the field out of what is essentially a wetland, just wiping out the recreation facilities and not replacing them is not a viable option.

TCPUD and NTPUD officials are worried about having proper firefighting capacity. It's one thing to have enough water and pressure to fight a house fire, it's another to go into the wildland urban interface to douse flames.

Duane Whitelaw, general manager of NTPUD, is a former fire chief in the basin. He'd like some of the firefighting issues to fall under the EIP program.

Regulatory agencies like TRPA and Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board track EIP projects and then reward/penalize jurisdictions based on accomplishments.

The next big project in the Tahoe basin for State Parks will be work in Kings Beach, most notably the pier replacement. The draft environmental documents are expected to be released for public comment just after the first of the year.

The North Lake Tahoe Resort Association is a big player because it is the recommending body for Placer County for how 2 percent of the hotel tax collected in the Tahoe area is then invested back into the community.

NLTRA is looking at how to raise more money. Increasing the transient occupancy tax, which is at 10 percent, and hiking

the 7¼ percent sales tax are under serious consideration.

Trademark lawsuit over name 'Apple Hill'

By Sam Stanton, Sacramento Bee

Apple Hill has been an autumn destination for decades for Northern California families in search of fresh fruits, Halloween pumpkins, Christmas trees and wine tasting.

Now, it is at the center of a legal fight over who can use the name "Apple Hill" to hawk their farm goods.

The dispute is between the Apple Hill Growers Association, which adopted the name "Apple Hill" in 1964, and the family that runs Boa Vista Orchards, one of the largest farm stand operations in the area just east of Placerville along Highway 50.

Read the whole story

Boys and Girls Club – not enough space for kids



Lake Tahoe Boys and Girls Club needs more room and a permanent space. Photo/Susan Wood

By Susan Wood

For over a decade, the Lake Tahoe Boys and Girls Club has represented a home away from home for hundreds of South Lake Tahoe youngsters.

Now it needs a home itself.

The thinking is eventually the Lake Tahoe Unified School District may want to reopen the **Al Tahoe Elementary School**, so shared use should be defined. The club took over part of those grounds in a year-to-year lease after the grade school closed in 2004 because of declining enrollment and through a reorganization of South Tahoe Middle School.

In that timeframe, the demand has mushroomed for the club on Lyons Avenue. The organization serving ages 5-18 busts from the seams in satisfying the needs of children finding a window of opportunity to play and study between school and home.

The Boys and Girls Club of South Lake Tahoe has grown from 423

members to 731 between 2014 and 2017 – with at least 20 families on the waiting list, Executive Director Jude Wood told *Lake Tahoe News*.

“I think it’s a reflection of an economy improving,” Wood said.



Jude Wood is leading the South Shore Boys and Girls Club to greater independence.
Photo/Susan Wood

If both parents are working, the club serves as an ideal alternative to latchkey children or babysitters.

Even as the best alternative, the kids are outgrowing the facility. During playtime, the recreation room is crammed with people. Backpacks line the hallway.

“We’ve outgrown it anyway,” Wood said.

The director and her staff have improvised nicely, but the dream is to cut a deal with the school district to build a new clubhouse next door where the portables are located.

Unlike club membership, school district enrollment is steady, but not surging.

The school district discussed the options with the club during a board meeting this fall. The trustees agreed to bring on an architect to survey suggested construction of a two-story, 10,000-square-foot structure adjacent to the gym and close to the ballfield.

The club is seeking a joint-use agreement with the district and expressed an openness to fund the design of a new place. The cost to build may be absorbed through donations, grants and other capital investment. Currently, the club renews its annual lease with the district every summer.

In exchange for a 50-year lease of the land, the club has offered to renovate Al Tahoe's gym and kitchen, the latter being a vital resource serving more than 60 meals a day. Plus, the district would like to make the gym more multi-purpose.

"It's a yearlong process. We're doing our due diligence to see what's best for the club," Wood said.

Therein lies some advantages with the Al Tahoe location. It's close to the middle school, library and the city recreation center and within steps from major bus and walking routes.

"It's pretty realistic, but we have to get the architect involved," trustee Barbara Bannar told *LTN*. "Absolutely we want to help them move forward. It's their decision ultimately. Whatever choice they make – we'll all be happy."



Backpacks cluttering the halls is an indication of lack of space. Photo/Susan Wood

Certainly, Bannar said the school district has also seen the portable units outlive their useful state.

They would come out with the preferred plan, much to the liking of LTUSD Superintendent Jim Tarwater, who told *LTN* he'd push for seeing them go.

Tarwater has much faith in LPA architects from Roseville to build an ideal facility to meet state specifications. The firm designed the remodeled South Tahoe high and middle schools.

"The positive thing is (the club) having all that acreage and a playground with swings," the superintendent said. "The hardest thing for (the club) is buying land. There isn't any."

Other options exist, but perhaps not as attractive as rebuilding next door.

The city of South Lake Tahoe can relate to the plight. After wrestling with its own leaky, rundown recreation center on

nearby Rufus Allen Boulevard, it plans to rebuild. With plans through Measure P for the city to build a new recreation center, the Boys and Girls Club toyed with the idea of being roommates. But who's to say the club won't outgrow that location – especially since the youth organization seeks autonomy.

Besides talk of going into the Unity church site, El Dorado County may also have an option if it moves out of its vector control building on the same street. However, that relocation would require an environmental cleanup.

The county has conducted soil samples and found the land contaminated by pest-control chemicals. Another soil sample is slated to occur.

“We’re interested in helping them any way we can – whatever works out for them,” said Tahoe’s county Supervisor Sue Novasel, a past-president of the Boys and Girls Club. “But we need to do some mitigation out there.”

Novasel believes there’s “no perfect option,” but the drawn-out process is “just what you have to deal with when dealing with land use.”

Safety of Incline area VHRs called into question

By Kim Burrows, KRNV-TV

Lake Tahoe is a popular place to rent a house on a short-term basis to hit the ski slopes in the winter and play on the beach in the summer.

But the North Lake Tahoe Fire Protection District is worried about the safety in some houses. The danger has already cost a teen his life.

People can choose from thousands of rental homes around the lake. Online websites advertise that the homes can sleep 16, 18 and 20 people. But fire officials say it's not always safe.

Read the whole story

It's not only trees – wildfires imperil water too

By Emily Benson, High Country News

The Fourmile Canyon Fire, sparked by a backyard burn west of Boulder, Colo., in 2010, caused \$220 million in damage and destroyed 168 homes. It also scorched nearly a quarter of a watershed that supplies water to the nearby community of Pine Brook Hills. The problems didn't end there: Long after the blaze was put out, intense rainstorms periodically washed sediment and other particles downstream, disrupting water treatment and forcing the local water district to stop pulling water from Fourmile Creek, leaving it reliant upon water already collected in its reservoir.

"The water coming down Fourmile Creek would get so dirty that we simply would shut down moving any water (from the creek)," for days or even weeks, says district manager Robert de Haas. "If we hadn't built the reservoir" – in 2006 – "we'd have been in big trouble."

Now, research suggests that such water-quality problems might

become more frequent across the West. Climate change is already causing a surge in wildfire activity. As a result, scientists expect to see a rise in erosion in most of the region's watersheds in the coming decades. Sediment and ash running off burned hillsides into streams can clog reservoirs, smother fish and disrupt municipal water supplies.

Read the whole story

Communitywide approach to disaster preparedness

By Kathryn Reed

When home is on the other side of a wall of fire that is headed your direction the choices can seem bleak.

This was what several people encountered during the South Shore's 2007 Angora Fire. They were working at Camp Richardson on that Tuesday in June when the fire jumped Highway 89.

The marina fired up the Sky King, an 18-passenger boat it uses as a water taxi, and ferried employees and guests to the Tahoe Keys Marina – out of harm's way.

This is what it means to be prepared and not have to rely on others to be rescued.

With catastrophic disasters becoming more common, South Lake Tahoe officials aren't waiting for the next Angora – or worse – to occur here. City Manager Nancy Kerry on Dec. 8 convened dozens of leaders to talk about having a communitywide approach to disaster preparedness and not just a government response.

"I want to be as efficient and coordinated as we can be," Kerry told *Lake Tahoe News*. She said collaboration hasn't always been a strong suit here, with people operating in silos.

An immediate outcome is South Tahoe Public Utility District is going to hold off on purchasing new communication's equipment to see what direction the city decides to go in next year. This is ideally so they would be compatible with one another.



South Lake Tahoe Fire Chief Jeff Meston talks Dec. 8 about the catastrophic threats to the region. Photo/Kathryn Reed

Fire Chief Jeff Meston lamented how inadequate communications systems are within the city as well as between key players in California and Nevada. While cell phones can work, they are limiting at times because service here can be sketchy. And without cell towers that can survive a fire, that line of communication can be eliminated.

Last winter the city opened its emergency operations center more than once because of the dangerous weather. Gaps in knowledge, information and communications were revealed.

Internally changes have been made.

Friday was about working on external changes. At the meeting were reps from private business, religious organizations, lodging, California Tahoe Conservancy, Lake Tahoe Unified School District, Tahoe Transportation District, Tahoe Regional Planning Agency, Lake Tahoe Visitors Authority, STPUD, El Dorado County, and Barton Health.

The city is hoping to create written partnerships with many of these people. It could be as simple as Camp Richardson pledging boats when needed or a hotel offering lodging for evacuees.

"We are always willing to help out with any of our vessels when we can for public needs," Bob Hassett, who owns Camp Rich Marina, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Having the written agreements helps with federal reimbursements. It also prevents price gauging in the moment.

Meston listed sobering statistics about how much public safety personnel exists throughout the South Shore. That's why he says it's imperative residents be prepared to fend for themselves for 72 hours in a disaster because it could take that long for help to arrive.

More disturbing is that help from outside the area may not arrive – at least not in a timely manner. Meston pointed out how during this fall's Wine Country fires 305 fire engines were requested and only 130 responded in the first 12 hours. Resources eventually came from as far away as Australia.

In 2012 there were 134 unfilled mutual aid requests. In 2017 there have been 6,000.

There are more situations, resources are stretched thin and local areas worry more about needing to protect their own. Then there is the fact the disasters are more horrific – think

the current conflagration in Southern California.

Meston said there have been 15 catastrophes this year that each has exceeded \$1 billion in destruction.

"The common denominator is climate change. That's not going to change anytime soon," Meston said. "Hurricanes and wildfires are the most catastrophic. Climate change has really changed our business."

Fire season, especially in California, is now year round.

While fire is one of the biggest threats to the Tahoe basin, it's not the only one. A seiche, or lake tsunami, is a very real possibility if any one of the earthquake faults moves in a significant manner. The lake water would act like a bath tub, sloshing back and forth in a deadly manner.

Terrorism is possible. In August 2001, Earth Liberation Front claimed responsibility for trying to bring down the Heavenly gondola by tying logs to the cable.

While the presentation was sobering, the goal was hopeful – prepare now as a community so the impact is less and the healing can begin that much sooner.

Burning Man wants permit to grow to 100,000 people

By Jenny Kane, Reno Gazette-Journal

Despite complaints from some critics that Burning Man is already too big, the organization may make their main event even bigger.

As Nevada Bureau of Land Management officials review how the annual, weeklong arts festival has affected the surrounding environment and communities since it moved to Nevada in 1990, Burning Man is proposing that the BLM allow the event to grow to 100,000 people in the future.

BLM officials and Burning Man organizers met with locals this week from Gerlach, Reno and Lovelock, the three communities most affected by Burning Man, to hear their concerns about growth.

Read the whole story