

Lake Tahoe's state parks open, but with fewer amenities

By Kathryn Reed

By the time Fourth of July rolls around, all campsites in the Lake Tahoe Basin that are in a California state park will be open.

It's not the case now. At least one loop of each campground is open. But state budget cuts have forced superintendents at the various units to be creative with their resources – including personnel and recreational.



Tours of
Vikingsholm
run through
Labor Day.
Photos/Kathryn
Reed

Pam Armas runs the Sierra District, which includes the basin and goes from Donner Lake to Mono Lake.

"We have not gotten any complaints and we expected to get some over Memorial Day," Armas said of the closures. "It was so cold most people didn't show up."

She did get complaints in the winter when Sugar Pine was

closed to snow campers.

Just last year Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger was threatening to close some of the 279 state parks. Public outcry foiled that plan. In his May budget revise he is funding the state parks. But what the Legislature will propose is anyone's guess.

Still, there will be noticeable differences this summer up and down the state at the parks. Fewer interpretive programs are a given.

"The bathrooms might not be as clean as normal years. There will be a delayed response if someone calls (for a ranger)," Armas said.

This is because she and other superintendents are not allowed to fill vacancies when they arise. People are doing multiple jobs.



Pam Armas

Furlough days will end next month, but Schwarzenegger is proposing a pay cut of 15 percent for most state employees. Armas realizes many people are hurting financially, but she is noticing morale diminishing among her staff as they keep being asked to do more for less.

"I think this will be a really hard summer for all of us," Armas said of state parks workers.

Another obvious change the public will notice is the elimination of campfire programs and few, if any, junior ranger programs throughout the Sierra District.

“We don’t have enough rangers for public safety and campfire programs,” Armas said. “That is a big loss because people expect to see a campfire program. None are planned, but that doesn’t mean we won’t be able to do something as the summer goes along.”

She said all the parks are in the same boat when it comes to having to make choices about what to offer the public.

Vikingsholm and Ehrman mansions opened Memorial Day weekend and will stay open through Labor Day. Campgrounds will be open that long as well.



Vikingsholm is full of stories about old Tahoe.

Campground reservations in the Sierra District are tracking typical years, with expectations for them to be full once school is out the weather feels more like summer than winter in the mountains.

LTCC students create

restaurant caliber 3-course meal

By Kathryn Reed

Skip breakfast and don't worry about needing dinner. The food is that plentiful and that good. Unfortunately, the opportunity to indulge in a three-course lunch for \$10 is going away soon.

Students in Lake Tahoe Community College's Principles and Practices of Intermediate Food Preparation are the servers, chefs, dish washers, meal planners, menu creators – you name it.



Salad and bread start the three-course meal on June 2 at LTCC.

Photos/Kathryn Reed

Part of their final project is working in groups of four or five to come up with a meal to serve to the public.

"We didn't announce the ones in the fall or winter because we had enough sales. Then people in the public started asking about it and wanting to know about the lunches," culinary arts

instructor Steve Fernald said.

The room was full this week.

Fernald encouraged his students to consider having a vegetarian option, though not all took that advice. The students had to price out the menu, create a shopping list, design a menu and print it.

For four Wednesdays the students are creating an ensemble of dishes. This week it was all about Italy.

Sitting in the Creekside Dining Room at the college is like being on the edge of the forest. With all of the picture windows, diners feel like they are truly in Lake Tahoe and can easily forget they are on a campus of higher learning.

I'm taken to my seat by one of the students and handed that day's menu. It's in Italian and English, making me feel like I'm at a restaurant in North Beach in San Francisco perusing a prix fixe menu.

My beverage choices are lemonade or water. Clearly I'm not in The City because a glass of red wine is really what would have been perfect with this meal.

First course is Caesar salad and grilled ciabatta with pesto. This could have been a meal unto itself. The bread could have been cut a little thicker and the layer of pesto a little thinner. Still, the flavor was outstanding – the right mix of garlic and basil.

Three-meat lasagna with béchamel sauce was one entrée choice. I went with the vegetarian lasagna with homemade marinara sauce. The mix of vegetables was tasty, though the ricotta cheese was a bit on the thick side. The overall flavor, though, was yummy.



Vegetarian
lasagna

It came with a couple spoonfuls of sautéed spinach on the side. Aesthetically, this was the perfect presentation. A slice of the bread would have been a wonderful accompaniment.

And the portion – wow. I couldn't eat it all. Of course, I also knew tiramisu cheesecake was still to come. Several people were leaving the dining room with to-go containers.

The only trouble with the tiramisu is how full I was. Still, it didn't stop me from devouring nearly every morsel.

As the hour came to a close, the class came out for a brief introduction and rousing round of applause.

Two lunches remain. The one on June 9 has a Greek theme, while salmon is the focus of the June 16 meal. Per Fernald's instructions, all must be three courses and come with a beverage.

Reservations are necessary. Call Steve Fernald at (530) 541.4660, ext. 334 or email fernald@ltcc.edu.



Tiramisu
cheesecake

An added bonus is the students will share the recipes. The following is the tiramisu they made. The sheet of paper didn't say where the recipe originally came from. I can't attest for the ease or difficulty in making it, but I do know the end product is scrumptious.

Torta di Formaggio di Tiramisu (Tiramisu Cheesecake)

Serves 12-16

1-2 (3oz.) packages ladyfingers

8 T coffee or espresso

3 (8 oz.) packages cream cheese

1 (8 oz.) container mascarpone

$\frac{1}{4}$ C sour cream

1 C white sugar, plus 2 T

2 eggs

4 T all-purpose flour or cornstarch

1 (4 oz.) bar semisweet chocolate

4 T Kahlua

Preheat oven to 325 degrees. Place a pan of water on the bottom of oven.

Remove bottom of 9 x 3-inch springform pan; wrap bottom with plastic wrap. Stir 6 T coffee (cooled), 2 T sugar and 2 T Kahlua in a shallow bowl until sugar dissolves. Quickly dip one side of the ladyfingers into coffee mixture and place wet side up on pan bottom to cover, squeezing in ladyfingers to fit. Use as many as needed. Freeze about 20 minutes or until firm. Lift plastic wrap, with ladyfingers, off pan bottom and place on a flat plate in freezer.

In a large bowl, mix cream cheese, mascarpone, sour cream, and sugar until very smooth. Add remaining 2 T coffee or espresso and remaining 2 T Kahlua, and mix. Add the eggs then add the flour once sifted; mix slowly until just smooth. The consistency of the mascarpone can vary. If the cheesecake batter is too thick, add a little cream. Do not overmix at this point. Pour batter into crust. (See recipe below for crust.)

Place pan on middle rack of oven. Bake 35 to 40 minutes, or until center still jiggles slightly when shaken. Turn off oven (leave door closed); leave cake in oven 20 minutes. Remove from oven, and let it finish cooling. Cover loosely; refrigerate at least 4 hours, preferably 1 day for best flavor. For chocolate shavings, pull a swivel-blade vegetable peeler down length of chocolate bar. Refrigerate curls until ready to use, or garnish slices individually when ready.

Graham cracker crust (for 9-inch pie crust)

About 20 honey graham crackers

6 T unsalted butter, melted

Break the graham crackers into smaller pieces. To turn those pieces into crumbs, you can use a food processor or blender. Pulse in sort bursts until you've got coarse crumbs.

Pour the crumbs into a large mixing bowl, followed by the melted butter. Work the butter into the crumbs with a wooden spoon or your hands until the butter is evenly distributed.

Dump the mixture into a 9-inch springform pan or pie tin. Use your hands or a flat-bottomed glass to press the mixture evenly into the bottom and side (if desired) of the pan. To avoid crumbs getting into the batter, press firmly to ensure the crust is well compacted.

Bake the crust about 8-10 minutes. Let it cool completely

before adding the filling.

El Dorado County grappling with millions of dollars in cuts

By Kathryn Reed



El Dorado County is looking to adopt a budget for 2010-11 that has \$49 million less than the current one. Property taxes are projected to be down by 4 percent, sales tax off by 11 percent, and vehicle license fees reduced by 4 percent.

To attain the balanced budget for the fiscal year that begins July 1 there may be a reduction of 70 full-time positions, or 3.8 percent of the workforce.

In the \$410,246,922 budget, 48 percent, or \$195,248,053, is general fund dollars. This is the discretionary part of the budget. The bulk of the budget is money with strings attached that the county has no say in how it's spent.

The recommended budget is likely to be voted on June 22 or June 29. Any revisions based on what the state comes forward with will likely be adopted in September. With the state wrestling with a nearly \$20 billion shortfall, the impact to all counties and cities could be more dire than what the

governor came out with in his May revise.

The Board of Supervisors begins budget workshops June 7 at 9am, with another one June 9 at 9am and a third, if necessary, on June 10 at 9am. All are in Placerville.

“People are not purchasing as many goods that are taxable. That is a double whammy for us because a lot of state revenue is based on sales tax,” said Mike Applegarth, senior administrative analysis for El Dorado County. “If the money is not there, we cannot spend it.”

When it comes to property tax, people are having property reassessed at a lower rate as well as buying at lower values. This means less coming into the county coffers.

El Dorado County Economic Snapshot

Median Housing Price (March)	Unemployment	Single
Family Permits Issued		
2006: \$515,000 percent	701	4.6
2007: \$479,000 percent	405	5.1
2008: \$359,000 percent	205	6.9
2009: \$335,000 percent	72	11.3
2010: \$294,950 percent (March)	n/a	13.6

Unbalanced departments

All but the District Attorney's Office and Sheriff's Department have come forward with a balanced budget. The DA needs to trim about \$250,000 and the sheriff \$460,000 to make

the numbers work that Chief Administrative Officer Gayle Erbe-Hamlin has come up with.

Law related expenses, including these departments as well as public defender and courts, account for 65 percent of the general fund.

For the upcoming fiscal year the DA's office has been asked to cut \$539,000. It is more than half way there.

Jody Albin, fiscal administrative manager for the DA's office said, it's possible three or four prosecutors will lose their jobs if the CAO gets her way with the cuts. Placerville has 15 active prosecutors, while South Lake Tahoe has six.

"It becomes a balancing act between what we are able to handle," Albin said.

She said District Attorney Vern Pierson plans to tell the board again that certain crimes will not be prosecuted if more cuts come down on his department.

"Aid to fire" is a phrase that is likely to be heard a lot next week during the budget hearings. It's an issue with the DA, sheriff and assessor. Fire departments in the county are supposed to be self-sustaining, but that has not always been the case. The current budget calls for \$1.3 million from the general fund to go to various fire agencies.

This in turn means there are fewer dollars in the general fund to go to the District Attorney's, Sheriff's and Assessor's offices.

Sheriff Fred Kollar is being told to trim an additional \$460,000 from the upcoming budget year.

It's possible supervisors will pass the working budget this month without the DA and sheriff issues resolved. The final figures may not be realized until July, county officials said.

As for timing of things to be discussed on Monday, an internal email from Erbe-Hamlin says, "I am putting the DA's discussion down as first Policy Issue for discussion. This will come after the Overview, Structural Deficit discussion. Cannot tell for sure the time needed for those items since that will be the opportunity for the board to ask questions and provide input. Policy Issue discussion could be late morning June 7 or sometime right after lunch."

Kollar said three scenarios are being talked about for his department. They include eliminating vacant positions, restructuring the department (he doesn't have specifics on that yet) or contracting out food services at the South Lake Tahoe and Placerville jails.

The sheriff's department has 377 employees. It was at 400 2.5 years ago.

For 2010-11, the Sheriff's Department budget is about \$53.4 million. Of that, about \$41.5 million is from the general fund and the rest comes from the state, feds and grants. The total budget in 2008-09 was \$55.4 million.

"We are doing less things. We are not doing the nice to have stuff," Kollar said. "About two years ago we eliminated the DARE program in grammar schools. About a year ago we eliminated school resource officers. We used to have four deputies and a sergeant assigned to special events detail."

The department handled 85,000 service calls with 80 patrol officers last year.

Kollar said the public probably hasn't noticed the cuts made to his department, but he doesn't know how much longer it will go unnoticed.

But another thing that may go unnoticed is the 10 percent raise many in Kollar and Pierson's departments have gotten in the last two years under Measure 504. The Charter Review

Committee recommended to supervisors they take the issue to the voters in November. The board said no and the automatic raises stayed on the books, though it's not a countywide raise, just for certain departments – like the sheriff's and DA.

Looking forward

Even after the Board of Supervisors finishes with the 2010-11 budget, the reality is the forecast is bleak for future years. Erbe-Hamlin is projecting a deficit of \$15 million for fiscal year 2011-12 based on today's forecasts.

For the last three years the general fund has gone backward. The trend before the financial crisis hit was for a growth of 4 percent to 7 percent.

"All indications are that the fiscal situation will continue to worsen over the next year or more. Property taxes continue to decline; there are potential increases of 2-4 percent in our PERS rates, and there is still much uncertainty in regards to state actions," Erbe-Hamlin says in her staff report.

Disabled out-of-towner crippling local businesses

By Kathryn Reed

"It is nothing more than a guy going through town and making money."

Those are the words of David Kelly, president of the Tahoe Area Coordinating Council for the Disabled (TACCD). He is the face and voice of the disabled on the South Shore. And he is

not happy with what a paraplegic from Carmichael is doing to businesses in Lake Tahoe.

Scott Johnson is a 48-year-old attorney. He drives around in a white van. Sometimes a passenger accompanies him. Sometimes he films places. He takes notes of cars without proper stickers parked in handicapped spaces and he looks if ramps exist at businesses. He is extremely adept at sending out form letters.



Re/Max Realty
in South Lake
Tahoe has been
targeted by a
disabled
attorney.

Letters are addressed to the “landlord/business operator” and state they have 90 days to voluntarily bring the property to code or 60 days to provide Johnson with a disabled access compliance report and a post-construction review within six months.

It appears to be Johnson’s mission to take cash from small businesses all over Northern California because he was forced to a wheelchair after being struck by a drunken driver several years ago. Web searches show preponderance for this type of behavior. South Lake Tahoe is his latest cash cow.

When local disabled groups are against him, the motive seems more sinister than sincere.

Unfortunately, no phone number has been located for Johnson’s

company, Disabled Access Prevents Injury Inc. at 5150 Fair Oaks Blvd., Ste. 101 in Carmichael. Perhaps a bit of irony is the street address is the legal code number for someone who is mentally ill.

At the TACCD's monthly meeting last week two certified access specialists (CAsp) spoke to the group about what recourse people may have.

Jeri Oishi, owner of Enchanted Florist, was at the meeting. She had received a letter from Johnson the week before.

"It's not one of those things I can ignore and it will go away," Oishi said. "I have a customer who has been here a number of times in one of those big motorized wheelchairs and he has no problem coming up the ramp so I know it works."

She said someone from the Lake Tahoe South Shore Chamber of Commerce came by the florist inviting her to a meeting June 10 about the issue, but said first she would have to join the chamber.

"Yes we are bringing in an expert CAsp inspector and an attorney. As you know 'membership has its privileges' and hence this event is being offered to members first at no cost," B Gorman, executive director of the Nevada-based chamber, emailed *Lake Tahoe News*. She further said non-members could attend by invitation-only at \$20 as space permitted.

The problem with the Americans with Disabilities Act is little or no wiggle room exists if a business is out of compliance by a half inch even if it works for the people it was designed to help.

Kelly knows of construction being a couple degrees off and Johnson wanting to fight it.

"I think it is wrong. This is not what the ADA was meant to be. It's far from it," Kelly said.

All the business owners contacted by *Lake Tahoe News* said they want to work with the law, help people with disabilities – but they don't want an out of town swindler taking their money.

Clint Schue knows ignoring the threats from Johnson is not an option.

"I researched the guy. He is the same guy who sued the prior owners. They settled with him for several thousand dollars to make it go away," the owner of Brothers Bar said.

That's why settling isn't a long-term solution. Johnson or anyone else can come back with another complaint.

Schue said Johnson came by his place in his white van in April. He asked about a ramp. Schue told him about the temporary one. Now a permanent one is in the back. The rails went up last week.

Re/Max Realty received a letter from Johnson last month.

"They aren't even trying to come into my place. They drive by, send a letter and try to settle," said Jesse Chamberlain of Re/Max in South Tahoe. "It would be one thing if he had an actual real estate transaction going on. It almost seems like they are harassing us."

Interestingly, Re/Max's offices are across the parking lot from TACCD's.

Before the long weekend the white van was filming the Black Bear Inn. The vehicle went up and down Ski Run Boulevard taking pictures of the various businesses.

Kelly is working with South Lake Tahoe officials to have a building inspector become a certified access specialist. Then a sticker can be placed in a business' window that should be enough to keep Johnson and his ilk at bay.

Officials terminate contract with South Shore bus provider



By Kathryn Reed

MV Transportation is being told to hand over the keys to the South Shore transit operation and to cease operating BlueGo as of noon June 20.

A letter from South Tahoe Areas Transit Authority attorney Michael McLaughlin dated May 28 to MV Transportation says STATA is terminating the three-year contract that was signed June 5, 2009.

The Fairfield-based company took over on an emergency basis when ATM abruptly left. Then it came on board to operate the bus and trolley system with the long-term contract.

Financial issues have plagued the relationship from the get-go. STATA took an \$800,000 loan from MV last year that it was supposed to start to pay back July 1. The loan is for five years.

Nikki Frenney of MV says STATA owes \$1.2 million dating to August for services rendered.

Stacy Dingman, board member and spokeswoman for STATA, says STATA this year has written checks to MV for \$1.2 million, including a \$500,000 payment in April.

Monthly costs fluctuate based on hours of service combined with fixed costs. Dingman did not have those figures.

The attorney's letter says, "Please be assured that STATA has every intention of working with MV toward a mutually-agreeable repayment plan to satisfy its obligations to MV; however, STATA's present financial condition provides no opportunity for it to obtain a letter of credit or any other security for the debt, as requested in MV's May 21, 2010, letter."

The exact amount owed is in dispute and is off by about a quarter million dollars.

MV last month had threatened to suspend service if the financial situation did not improve, but it did not expect the contract to be terminated.

"Like any business we cannot continue to operate and not be paid. We are paying drivers and servicing the buses," Frenney said. "They are doing business without having the ability to pay for the service."

STATA's stance is there is no way bus service on the South Shore is going to be interrupted.

To keep things rolling, TRC Consultants, which was brought in early this year, will operate the bus system when MV's obligations cease. TRC and LSC, another transportation consultant, are working to get the system solvent, Dingman said.

"They have already found opportunities that will ensure improvements," Dingman said of TRC. She said TRC has had complete access to the books so officials know what they are getting into.

As for being able to pay TRC, Dingman said the money would come from grants that had not been previously secured, cost-savings TRC has proposed and "doing things smarter all the way

around.”

Cash flow has long been a problem for STATA. The agency gets grants, funding from California, Nevada, the federal government, and money from the member partners. Dingman said bankruptcy is not an option that is being considered.

If the wheels on the buses don’t keep going round and round, it’s possible STATA would have to pay back some of the money it has received.

Federal Transit Administration officials at the San Francisco office did not return a call.

Dingman said the contract with TRC had not been signed as of Tuesday afternoon. It will be for no more than one year, as is allowed in an emergency situation.

Changes to routes will need to go through public hearings. In South Lake Tahoe the City Council must sign off on them. Dingman has said those changes are coming. It’s a matter of when, not if.

Cops ready to paint over work of graffiti artists

By Kathryn Reed

Creating “art” on public structures without permission is illegal. That is why this month crews from South Lake Tahoe Police Department will return the underpass of Trout Creek to its natural color.

A myriad colors fill nearly every space under the Highway 50

structure that covers sand. The side where Trout Creek is running through at a good clip is partially covered in graffiti. People had good balance, didn't mind getting wet or were in there when the water was lower to reach those walls.



Graffiti fills
the underpass
of Trout Creek
in South Tahoe
beneath
Highway 50.
Photos/Kathryn
Reed

Even the ceiling has been tagged.

Some of the walls leading into the covered area have been hit with spray paint. These markings are less colorful than the ones below.

Pictures, names, bubbly lettering – to the uniformed eye it all looks tame. A few gang symbols are obvious, but it's not what dominates these slabs of concrete.

It appears to be a place where presumably young people can let loose with their artistic prowess on a large canvas.

It seems to be a game of sorts with officers. Both sides seem to have their color of choice – drab for the officer, colorful for the youths.

“Maybe they will put it on the list of murals to be painted.

Caltrans could give them permission just like with the power boxes,” South Lake Tahoe police Lt. David Stevenson said.

It’s been about a year since community service officers last covered up this area.

“We cover everything that is reported to us. There are no places we just leave,” explained Bob Albertazzi, community service officer. “We cover it up as weather permits.”

Stevenson said, “With the gang staff, we don’t want them to have an outlet for that anywhere.”

When the days and nights are warmer, the underpasses are known hangouts for youths and homeless people. Fires in the area are always a threat.

On this particular day in May the sand is as pristine as any beach on the South Shore. Cigarette butts are the biggest components of litter. A small piece of glass shines. If this is a party spot, the evidence is missing.

In many ways it’s the ideal place to hang – the noise of the highway knocks out anything anyone below is doing, at night it’s dark, what’s going on below isn’t visible from the street level.

But officers know about this place, so it’s not secluded. And the bike patrol has easy access to this and all locations off the beaten path.

“We don’t like people hanging out under there,” Stevenson said.

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Memorial Day – a time to reflect, a time to say thank you



Lake Tahoe News would like to salute all the men and women who have died fighting for the United States of America.

You are what Memorial Day is all about.

Thank you for making the ultimate sacrifice.

Fallen Leaf Lake – an opening without controversy

By Kathryn Reed

FALLEN LEAF LAKE – Not a cloud in the sky – it's a bluebird day. Boats fill the slips. Children run around; some getting wetter than their parents would like. Ice cream is one of the most sought after items in the store. Hikers are in short-sleeves. Those from off the hill are the ones in the turtlenecks on a day like this. Unfamiliar drivers wonder what kind of road they are on – some of the potholes seem as wide as the narrow, mostly one-lane road.

It must be Fallen Leaf Lake.

With the bevy of activity going on, evidence of all of the unrest and name-calling that went on during the winter at this small mountain enclave on the outskirts of South Lake Tahoe is well hidden.



Fallen Leaf
Lake from the
back counter
at the store.
Photos/Kathryn
Reed

The worst thing, and some would argue the best, is the store ran out of food Saturday and had to borrow from its neighbors – Stanford Sierra Camp.

Rob and Sandy Wirth took over the concessionaire this season, with this being their first weekend to be open.

“We’ve had lots of compliments,” Sandy Wirth said in between helping customers at the store.

Stephanie Bryan and Mona Brauer looked around the outside before going in. They commented on the outdoor teak tables, giving them their approval.

“The store feels more open. You don’t feel like you have to squeeze between the aisles,” Brauer said after perusing the inside.

Bryan owns a house at the lake, while Brauer is an occasional guest at the lake. Neither frequents the store a ton, but they

like being able to pick something up they may have forgotten and they like to browse the T-shirt selection.

The Wirths opened the interior of the store by pushing one of the coolers to a wall, and bringing the shirt and hat selection toward the middle of the store.

It's clear on Day 2 of being open that all the shelves are not stocked. That was planned. A variety of sundries, fishing goods, some fresh produce, mixings for s'mores and other items are available. More will be added.

The menu choices will also grow as the season takes off. For now, burgers, sandwiches, soup and ice cream are the staples. Vegetarians will be accommodated as summer truly unfolds.

The Wirths are working on securing their beer and wine license so people can have a cocktail.

On the back deck are two old sugar pine slabs that have been turned into counters.

Mother Nature didn't help the Fallen Leaf Lake opening. It was snowing in Lake Tahoe this past week. Piles of snow had to be cleared from the area. A team of about 20 volunteers helped get the docks in the water and grounds looking as though it's been spring in the mountains for more than two days.

Ted Wendell spent about four hours in a wetsuit cleaning the lakeshore of debris.

General Manager Tom Barnes is walking around the docks with a clipboard on Saturday in the late afternoon. He is smiling.

He points to Rob Wirth with a rake in his hand on the shore making sure the sand is just right. He calls the people by name who are helping make sure opening weekend comes off without a hitch – people who are volunteering their time.

Barnes talks a bit about what it's been like since coming on

board last August. He doesn't want to badmouth anyone, but he said things had not been as well kept as they could have been.

At the morning community meeting at the firehouse, resident Tom Beales sang the praises of the Wirths and commended them for their efforts in getting things going in such a short period of time. (The Wirths had six weeks to get the site ready, having taken over for the John and Ruth Rich who had the concessionaire job for the last 14 years.)

Rob Wirth gave a brief presentation to the board and nearly 50 people at Saturday's meeting. He told them about the two electric boats the marina has for rent – and that had already been plying the glass-like morning water.

A couple aluminum fishing boats are also new.

Gas is selling for \$3.99 a gallon. That wasn't stopping people from churning through the dark, cold waters that sit on the edge of Desolation Wilderness.

Wirth even said he would deliver food to the firehouse. This may be good news for Gary Gerren; the board hired him that day to be the fire chief.

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Trek along Emerald Bay a vision of Sierra beauty

By Kathryn Reed

Hiking season in the Lake Tahoe area is a gradual migration from lake level to higher elevations. It may be an extended

lake level season this year based on the weather the Sierra has experienced this month.

Still, I was able to get in one of my favorite hikes earlier this month – Rubicon Trail. The four of us started at the Vikingsholm parking lot at Emerald Bay and went as far as Rubicon Point at the end of the bay. (It costs \$7 to park because it's a state park.)



Emerald Bay
along the
Rubicon Trail.
Photos/Kathryn
Reed

When the hiking legs are more energized we often do the nine-mile round-trip to the beach at D.L. Bliss State Park as the halfway point. The round-trip is my favorite hike in the basin. It's one of those ones where bringing an extra camera battery is a good idea.

Going part way like we did this particular Saturday or having another vehicle at D.L. Bliss makes it less strenuous. To the point it's flat and about two miles. To the state park means a few slight hills, but nothing overly taxing. The worst part about the hike is the mile-long trek up from Vikingsholm to the parking lot.

The 200-foot elevation gain feels like a lot more than that.

An old lighthouse is close to D.L. Bliss. California Conservation Corps crews built a trail to it as an offshoot

from the main route. It's worth a look.

I've seen a few daring soles jump from the rocks into the water below. I'm not sure how safe this is, so I'm not recommending it. But it does look like fun for people who don't have height or cold-water issues. There have been fatalities in the past with jumpers.

It's the views along the entire route that are breathtaking. Sauntering along Emerald Bay is mesmerizing. Boats cruise by. The only downside this day is a boat overloaded with partiers looking for a cove to anchor in. Luckily, our lunch spot was too rocky for them.

A kayaker has paddled up to the boat-in only campground. The M.S. Dixie takes a boatload around Fanette Island.

An eagles' nest is on the other side of the bay, so don't be surprised to see one of these majestic birds.

It's mid-May and the trail is well used. It's popular most of the year when snow is not on the ground.

The odd-looking bright red snow plant is sprouting. People have put sticks and rocks around them so they won't be trampled.

Massive sugar pine cones dot the area.

Make sure you are not in a rush. This is one of those hikes that can take all day, not because of the distance, but because of the scenery.

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Delinquent TOT in South Lake Tahoe adds up to \$569,476

By Kathryn Reed

South Lake Tahoe hotels owe the city more than a half million dollars in taxes and penalties. The properties are deliberately not paying the city the transient occupancy tax they collect.

City Attorney Patrick Enright was back in court this week fighting to get the \$43,000 Inn at Heavenly owes.



Blue Lake Inn just paid its back taxes with penalty to South Lake Tahoe.

The TOT collected by lodging establishments must be handed over to the city within 15 business days after the last of the month.

“Delinquent TOT is an unlawful use of the city’s revenues,” Finance Director Christine Vuletich said.

In May, South Tahoe received \$129,000 in back TOT, penalties and interest on the Blue Lake Inn, and \$75,000 from the Fantasy Inn.

“Both of these, and all of the delinquent TOT, paid significant penalties and interest so it would be beneficial to hotel operators if they paid in a timely manner. For instance, in the Blue Lake Inn case, the actual back TOT and [Tahoe Tourism Improvement District] was about \$75,000, with the remainder in penalties and interest,” Enright said.

Blue Lake Inn was in foreclosure. Wells Fargo paid the city after the bank sold the property.

With Wells Fargo having the loan on the Fantasy Inn, the bank interceded to pay the TOT when the city threatened to close the property.

The Paradise Motel was supposed to send a check on May 25 for \$6,060.96. This breaks down to \$4,092.26 in TOT, \$723 delinquent TTID, and \$1,245.70 in penalties and interest.

Properties involving two members of the South Lake Tahoe Lodging Association – Jerry Bindel and Danny Freemon – have been affiliated with properties that are part of the problem. Premier Resorts used to own Lakeland Village. They owe the city \$164,344.17, which include penalties and fees. A lien is on the property. Bindel is not allowed to speak for this company because they no longer own the property he manages.

Freemon is part of the Lake Tahoe Group that has several hotels on Emerald Bay Road, including the Pine Cone Acre Motel that owes more than \$23,000. Freemon did not return a phone call.

“Poor business practices and dishonesty are the primary reasons that hotels and motels become delinquent in paying the city the TOT they have collected, and this behavior has increased with the economic recession,” Vuletich said.

TOT is one of the city’s main revenue sources for the general fund. Some of the things the general fund budget pays for are police, fire, snow removal, streets, and parks and recreation.

"The money is city money that they collect for us as condition of doing business," City Manager Dave Jinkens said. "... they need to know that city government will pursue them in civil and criminal courts if the facts warrant both civil and criminal prosecution."

Click on TOT to see the delinquency report as of April 30. With penalties included, the city is owed \$569,476.06.