

Report: Extreme weather costing taxpayers billions

By Alex Seitz-Wald, NBC News

WASHINGTON — Climate change is costing taxpayers billions of dollars in disaster relief and the tab will only increase as extreme weather events become more common, according to a new government study.

The federal government has spent an estimated \$350 billion over the past decade responding to extreme weather and fire events, which are exacerbated by climate change, according to the Government Accountability Office (GAO) report. It comes as Congress moves to approve billions of dollars in extra funding for hurricane relief.

“Climate change impacts are already costing the federal government money, and these costs will likely increase over time as the climate continues to change,” the report found.

Read the whole story

Squaw-Alpine gondola possible in 2 years

By Ed Fletcher, Sacramento Bee

The operator of Squaw Valley and Alpine Meadows on Wednesday will formally announce plans to link the two North Lake Tahoe area ski resorts with a base-to-base gondola starting with the 2019-20 season, a proposal that faces significant opposition

from environmental advocates.

The newly named California Express gondola would allow skiers and snowboarders to take advantage of different terrain and amenities on both mountains without having to drive or take a bus between them. But the project must first survive an environmental review by Placer County and the U.S. Forest Service.

The gondola would shave 10 minutes or more for skiers, creating a 13-16-minute ride from the base of one resort to the other, according to the plan. About 37 lift towers would transport passengers the length of the roughly 13,000-foot line.

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SLT limits VHRs; issue may go to voters



A few dozen people listen to the VHR discussion Oct. 24 at Lake Tahoe Airport. Photo/Susan Wood

By Susan Wood

After intense deliberation and public pleading on both sides, the South Lake Tahoe City Council on Tuesday night temporarily closed the door on new vacation home rentals.

The 4-0 vote, with Councilman Tom Davis having to recuse himself, came on the same day an intent to petition for a ballot measure against VHRs made its way to the city clerk's office.

The council wants to return on Nov. 7 for a first reading on a new ordinance the members can all agree on and the public can stomach. A second reading that would enact the law would take place the following month.

The new ordinance would go over points in need of addressing from bear boxes and allowable caps to limits on distance between them and three-strike warnings to violators.

Vacation home rentals have become a hot topic since 2002, with councils talking about and tweaking regulations in order to keep the peace and keep an industry rolling in a tourism-based economy. The City Council alone has hosted 42 public meetings on the issue.

Vacation home rentals are divisive and contentious.

To prove that point, two citizens – Ken Weitzman and Daniel Browne – delivered their intent to circulate a petition outlawing VHRs in residential neighborhoods. The document encourages “the expansion of vacation rentals in our tourist and commercial zoned areas.” The bold petition could make its way to the November 2018 ballot Mayor Austin Sass announced during council and staff reports at the end of the meeting. Most of the 35 people in attendance had already cleared out.

Naysayers to the practice of renting homes for income claim it changes the profile of their neighborhoods and creates a

nuisance. Those in favor of them insist there are but a few bad seeds, and the level of enforcement needs to rise.

To that, city Police Chief Brian Uhler retorted his department conducts a good job in "difficult circumstances." When Uhler arrived in 2010, he "hardly ever heard of vacation home rentals being an issue," he told the council. But that changed in the last few years as it's "demonstrated a serious issue."

Granted, complaints called in because of unruly behavior from properties do not necessarily end up as citations on vacation home rentals, City Manager Nancy Kerry pointed out.

VHR advocates dominated the public comment period Oct. 24 by quadrupling those who support the moratorium. Property managers, private homeowners and even a ski resort employee seeking housing for her international workers lined up to speak in favor of VHRs, hoping the council members would change their minds about stopping the permitting process for now.

Currently, there are 3,398 VHR listings representing 2,067 rental properties in South Lake Tahoe, according to a consultant that made a presentation to the council last month. Like statistics on complaints and citations, these numbers show growth but fluidity. Meanwhile, the city shows 1,847 have secured permits, with 1,397 being outside the tourist core areas. The tourist area not affected by the VHR ordinance changes.

The urgency ordinance freezes the number of VHRs for 45 days. It can be changed between now and then or extended at that time for a year.

Time and time again, Councilwoman Brooke Laine returned to the fairness issue while attempting to find a way to exempt those with scheduled hearings from the moratorium. But City Attorney Nira Doherty noted that type of change constitutes a "substantive" change that would require a rewrite of the

rules.

Marlena Freitas appealed to the council's sense of fairness. She had a hearing slated for next week on her vacation home rental she uses for necessary income. It will go on hold until the moratorium is repealed.

"I've already invested \$1,200, and it's been three months," she told the council.

Sierra-at-Tahoe ski instructor Victoria Lynn turned her plea to others.

"The housing market is already tough enough for permanent residents," she said. Sierra needs to find homes for its ski season workforce.

Many who spoke in opposition to the moratorium wondered "why the urgency?" The discussion turned philosophical in trying to define and constitute the "public health, safety and well-being" of a community.

The issue was even debated in the non-agenda item portion of public commentary. It included an adversarial longtime property manager Jim Morris claiming not "everyone is breaking the law" and Weitzman suggesting the police department use a volunteer enforcement division like El Dorado County's STAR force.

By the end of the evening, Councilwoman Wendy David admitted to feeling sad over "the loss of community" in testimony she's heard from residents complaining about their "quality of life."

"We want to be fair. But maybe we should take a break. It's a good reason to pause till we figure this out," David said.

Wild horses and the inmates who 'gentle' them

By Steven Kurutz, New York Times

There's a term in the horse world known as "gentling." It refers to working with a wild horse until it becomes responsive to a trainer's commands, meaning that it no longer wants to kick you in the face. If handled properly, it even bonds with its trainer.

Gentling happens every day at the Silver State Industries ranch in Carson City, a 1,100-acre property east of the Carson Range in the vast, harsh high desert south of Reno. Up to 2,000 wild horses are corralled there at any time; a good number are trained for adoption.

The ranch is part of the Northern Nevada Correctional Center, a medium-security prison that also houses minimum-security inmates. Twelve to 15 inmates, most of whom have little or no experience with horses, work under the instruction of a cowboy named Hank Curry. It is the inmates who do the gentling.

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Tech billionaire Ellison

buying Cal Neva

By Dale Kasler, Sacramento Bee

Larry Ellison has made billions in high technology and has a knack for buying glitzy real estate properties. Can the founder of Oracle Corp. bring his Midas touch to a faded Lake Tahoe resort once owned by Frank Sinatra?

Ellison's Lawrence Investments has been cleared to buy the Cal Neva Resort & Casino for \$35.8 million, according to U.S. Bankruptcy Court records. A federal bankruptcy judge approved the sale on Oct. 16 after no other bidder surfaced for the fabled property.

The Cal Neva has gone through a succession of owners over the years and has been unable to regain its Sinatra-era luster. The resort, which straddles the California-Nevada border and includes a 10-story hotel tower and a small casino, has sat idle since 2013.

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Experience is Mancuso's secret weapon for S. Korea

Publisher's note: *This is one of a series of stories about Lake Tahoe area athletes who hope to compete in the 2018 Olympics in South Korea.*

By Susan Wood

PARK CITY, Utah – Experience counts in most facets of life.

So at age 33, alpine skier Julia Mancuso is counting on that theory to take her onto the podium in February in South Korea for the Winter Games.

Through the years, the four-time Olympian who hails from the Lake Tahoe area when she's not in Hawaii has racked up 100 career victories in her sport. At the Games of 2002, 2006, 2010 and 2014, she's taken home one gold and bronze medal each as well as two silvers in various skiing disciplines. But from first glance at an Olympic media summit in Park City last month, she's not done.

Her gym in Truckee is thriving. She's happily married. And she took a bit of a respite coming off a hip injury that forced her to skip the Audi FIS Women's World Cup she helped her home resort Squaw Valley to host.

But the flame is still within Mancuso.



Julia Mancuso is eager to participate in her fifth Olympics.
Photo/Kathryn Reed

When asked at a press conference what it meant to her to win Olympic gold, she beamed.

"I passed those Olympic rings every day on my way to school – to see the flame burning," she said of her childhood in Truckee where her skiing career started. She knows it's special to grow up in a town that once hosted the Olympics.

But don't kid yourself. The thought of whipping down a slippery mountain slope with two planks attached to her feet at speeds some people drive on a highway can be taxing physically and mentally. It's not easy.

"It's been difficult coming back with my hip. But I'm training and getting stronger," she said of her surgically repaired joint. Mancusco has hip dysplasia and has fought off the pain. She remained on crutches for half the year.

Now as she approaches the Games in PyeongChang, it's a new day. Therein comes a new outlook. She even got to do a test run last year, enjoying both "the course and the culture."

"Skiing is actually easier than walking," she told *Lake Tahoe News*. But for other racers on the conference stage such as superstar Mikaela Shiffrin of Colorado, she warned them not to expect she'd somehow be handicapped.

"Don't be fooled," she quipped.

"I love skiing as fast as possible. There's no judge on how to get there. Just the clock is the judge," she said.

Her wisdom through adversity has provided a new lease on life. In some respects, it's therapeutic helping other injured athletes as she does with her support of the High Fives Foundation. The Truckee-area nonprofit was founded by Roy Tuscany in 2009 to help with injury prevention awareness and help for those severely injured.

She knows the anguish of coming off an injury far too well.



Squaw Valley's Olympic rings from 1960 still inspire Julia Mancuso.
Photo/LTN file

"It's been hard. I just wait for the day when I wake up, and it gets better. Everything has its peaks and valleys," she told *LTN* during a roundtable discussion. "But I know anything's possible. I just want to stay positive. I have the desire to ski fast. I just expect my body to keep up."

Indeed, this is a racer with five World Cup medals to complement five Olympic versions.

Now as the season approaches, Mancuso has considered improving

with baby steps. She hopes to shave off seconds when considering making the team. With a short window, some athletes will discover they qualify within weeks of the Olympics.

And at this Olympics, there are new additions to the repertoire of ski events. In particular, alpine skiing comes up as a team sport. Male and female skiers have an equal role to play. With the event moving away from an individual focus, skiers will be working together and pooling their efforts. The winners of each heat advance to the next round. The two teams left standing slug it out for gold.

Mancuso commended the expansion, but for purist alpine racers, the team skiing event is described as more of a spectacle for viewership.

It will be the first time South Korea has hosted the Winter Olympics – thus launching a spate of Asian Olympic Games. Tokyo will host the 2020 Summer Games. Then, Beijing will bring on the 2022 Winter Games.

Next year's Games are slated from Feb. 9-25.

Nev. agencies hide names, salaries of workers

By Arthur Kane, Las Vegas Review-Journal

The names and salaries of 349 state employees, including park rangers and game wardens, have not been made public to taxpayers who spent \$30.1 million last year in wages and benefits for those staffers.

State officials said the positions are sensitive and the names must be protected, but several workers voluntarily identify themselves and pose for photographs in news reports.

Open government advocates contend that names of public employees should only be withheld in rare instances, such as for undercover police officers.

Read the whole story

Fires spark underground power line discussions

By David R. Baker, San Francisco Chronicle

Underground power lines don't sway in the wind. Tree branches blown sideways by a gale can't hit them. They don't sit on wooden poles that can fall down.

They would, in other words, seem to be an ideal way to prevent wildfires in a place like California, which has a history of big blazes sparked by overhead power lines tangling with trees. Investigators are now trying to determine whether that combination triggered the wildfires that tore through the Wine Country this month.

Unfortunately, underground power lines are also very expensive.

Read the whole story

Whole Foods already changing SLT neighborhood



The public will help decide the future of Herbert Avenue.
Photo/LTN

By Kathryn Reed

A spotlight is being shined on a private street with a very public profile.

Herbert Avenue in South Lake Tahoe is one of those streets that is popular with people who live in the neighborhood. They use it to avoid Ski Run Boulevard.

Now the developers of Whole Foods 365 want to use Herbert as an access point, which could impact the commercial strip on the other side of the street.

The problem, though, is the city doesn't own the road. Mike

McKeen does.

According to McKeen, in the 1940s the street was dedicated to El Dorado County by the owner at the time. When the city incorporated in 1965, the dedication went to South Lake Tahoe. McKeen in 2003 bought the parcel fronting Highway 50 that stretches back and includes the apartment complex.

According to City Manager Nancy Kerry, "In 1946 that stretch of land was dedicated to the public – not to the city or the county. It is a dedication to the public."

McKeen told *Lake Tahoe News* there is some question as to whether the street was ever officially dedicated. He's been told he has a 50-50 chance of prevailing in court. Instead of going that route, McKeen is opting to work with the city.

He doesn't argue that there is a prescriptive easement on that stretch of asphalt. The city maintains the road – this includes plowing it, filling in pot holes, striping and any other maintenance.

"It's not worth the money or time to fight over it. No one wants to lose," McKeen told *Lake Tahoe News*.

There was a time when he wanted to develop into the street. Now he is willing to work with the city for the betterment for all.

"If I'm going to get any bonus from Whole Foods, it needs to be almost a continuous commercial area," McKeen said. "I have six tenants in the building. They can't be hurt at the expense of Whole Foods."

He envisions one day redeveloping at least some of what he owns so the commercial area seems like one contiguous entity.

Altering Herbert would help make that be more attractive to pedestrians in the area.

The idea being floated now is to have Herbert dead end at Bill Avenue, maybe making it a cul de sac. This would allow the Whole Foods that is going in where Knights Inn used to be to have access to Herbert, for McKeen's tenants to keep parking, and for the neighborhood to have less traffic.

The city is hosting a meeting Oct. 25 from 6-7:30pm at the Senior Center to gather community input about what the future of Herbert Avenue should be.

LSC Transportation Consultants, an engineering and planning firm with offices in Tahoe City and Colorado, has been hired by the city to do a traffic study.

The future of the street will ultimately be up to the City Council.

Halferty Development, the firm that owns the old Knights Inn parcel and adjacent lot on Ski Run, has the right to have an ingress/egress on Ski Run, Herbert, and two on Highway 50.

The original traffic study had parking on Herbert at the commercial strip owned by McKeen going from perpendicular to parallel. This would dramatically decrease the number of spaces.

Already employees in the area are affected by the elimination of spots because of the redevelopment project. Lloyd Avenue used to be where they parked, but that street has been abandoned and essentially incorporated into the project area.

McKeen said he sent a letter to 82 people in the neighborhood seeking input about Herbert Avenue changes, with many favoring altering Herbert. This week everyone may weigh in.

Vacationing in U.S? Be warned, some countries say

By Shivani Vora, New York Times

Natural disasters like Hurricanes Maria and Irma and the recent wildfires in California have led to a spate of warnings from countries that want to caution their citizens about the risk of traveling to the United States, but the advisories are also noting potential for violence in the wake of the Las Vegas shooting and the potential for terrorist attacks as well.

While warnings for travel to the United States aren't new, they have picked up significantly in the last few weeks, following these events, said Ed Daly, who oversees the content for the Global Intelligence Division of iJET International, a travel intelligence firm based in Annapolis, Md.

"After a lull, there was a rash of incidents which happened one after the other and led to these advisories," he said.

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