

Politics at center of off-reservation casino fight

By Laurel Rosenhall, Sacramento Bee

In the coming weeks, Gov. Jerry Brown will decide whether two Indian tribes in remote parts of California can build gambling establishments next to freeways many miles from their homes.

The questions he faces put him at the center of a big-money casino fight – a massive lobbying effort in the Capitol that includes some very rich and influential groups.

The proposals from the Enterprise Rancheria near Marysville and the North Fork Rancheria near Fresno are part of the growing phenomenon critics describe as off-reservation casinos. But they are unusual because approval is in the hands of the governor under a process that's been used only a few times nationwide.

Most Indian casinos are on either tribal land or land restored to a tribe by the federal government, leaving state politicians out of the equation.

The Enterprise and North Fork proposals are subject to a different bureaucratic process because they don't necessarily fit those criteria – tribal members already have land but want to build casinos somewhere else.

Their projects have been given the green light by the U.S. Interior Department. Now Brown has until Aug. 31 to decide whether they can move ahead.

Read the whole story

Drought could send food prices to record levels

By Joshua Zumbrun and Mark Drajem, Bloomberg

Cloudless skies seldom look so ominous.

A worst-in-a-generation drought from Indiana to Arkansas to California is damaging crops and rural economies and threatening to drive food prices to record levels.

Agriculture, though a small part of the \$15.5 trillion U.S. economy, had been one of the most resilient industries in the past three years as the country struggled to recover from the recession.

“It might be a \$50 billion event for the economy as it blends into everything over the next four quarters,” said Michael Swanson, agricultural economist at Wells Fargo & Co., the largest commercial agriculture lender. “Instead of retreating from record highs, food prices will advance.”

The U.S. Department of Agriculture declared July 11 that more than 1,000 counties in 26 states are natural-disaster areas, the biggest such declaration ever.

The designation makes farmers and ranchers in affected counties – about a third of those in the entire country – eligible for low-interest loans to help manage the drought, wildfires or other disasters.

Corn rose Monday to the highest in 10 months while soybeans increased to the costliest since 2008.

Read the whole story

5 people pull papers to run for South Tahoe council

In the first week of election filing, five people have taken out papers to run for South Lake Tahoe City Council.



They need to turn in the papers to be on the November ballot.

The potential candidates as of July 20 are: Bruce Grego, Clinton Schue, Austin Sass, JoAnn Conner and Stacey Wheeler.

The seats occupied by Grego and Hal Cole are open. Cole is leaning toward running, but has not committed.

The filing deadline is Aug. 10.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Arrest made in Placer County

fire

By Cathy Locke, Sacramento Bee

Information provided by the public shortly after the Robbers fire started last week led to Friday's arrest of a 28-year-old Sacramento man, according to fire officials.

Bryon Mason was arrested on suspicion of recklessly causing the fire that began about 3:30 p.m. July 11 off Yankee Jims Road near the north fork of the American River in Placer County. Bail is set at \$100,000.

Daniel Berlant, a spokesman for the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, said investigators determined that the fire was started by a pyrotechnic device.

"That first day, we received numerous reports from people who allegedly had information (about how the fire started), and that's what helped us get to this point," Berlant said.

The fire, which was reported reported fully contained late this afternoon, burned 2,650 acres northeast of Foresthill. It destroyed one home and four outbuildings, and threatened 170 residences. Families were forced for evacuate their homes, with some displaced for more than a week. CalFire reported that all evacuations were lifted Friday.

Read the whole story

Lawmakers give staff raises

while cutting pay for other state workers

By Patrick McGreevy and Michael J. Mishak, Los Angeles Times

SACRAMENTO – Lawmakers gave raises worth \$4.6 million annually to more than 1,000 of their aides before cutting the pay of most other state workers, newly released records show.

The lawmakers said they were trying to make up for several years without staff pay increases.

“Modest adjustments based on individual performance were appropriate,” after pay and hiring freezes during the previous four years, Senate President Pro Tem Darrell Steinberg, D-Sacramento, said in a statement.

But the raises, at least 10 percent for some top staffers in the last 11 months, have been disclosed at an awkward time for Steinberg and his fellow Democrats, who control the Legislature. They are gearing up to help Gov. Jerry Brown to convince the public that the state is desperate for money in the aftermath of a deep recession and should pass billions of dollars in tax hikes in November.

Opponents of the governor’s tax plan wasted no time in painting the Democrats as hypocrites.

“It’s an outrage that they did this when the governor is asking voters to approve a tax initiative because he says we can’t pay our bills,” said Lew Uhler, head of the California-based National Tax Limitation Committee.

And state workers hit with a 4.62 percent pay cut to help balance California’s budget were enraged by news of the raises.

Read the whole story

2 men arrested in Douglas County on gun charges

Two Vallejo residents were arrested Friday on weapons charges.

A resident in the 3700 block of Highway 50, which is about halfway between Spooner Summit and Carson Valley, reported hearing several rounds fired from a firearm. The resident also told Douglas County sheriff's deputies she heard a couple noises outside the home which indicated bullets may have struck the house or ricocheted nearby.

At about 1:20 on July 20 deputies found two men had been shooting rifles, a third had been shooting a pellet gun, and the fourth had not been firing.

Deputies said the suspects had been shooting at trees and did not have a safe backdrop area behind their target; therefore several of the bullets that were discharged from the rifles continued into the nearby rural residential area.

The two males who had been shooting the rifles, 21-year-old Lance Caro and 20-year-old Daniel Dautz, were arrested on charges of discharging a firearm where a person might be endangered; a gross misdemeanor carrying a sentence of up to one year in jail. They were additionally charged with misdemeanor destruction of property.

The rifles used by Caro and Dautz, both medium caliber bolt-action rifles, were collected and booked as evidence.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Delays expected on Hwy. 89 near Squaw

Caltrans this week announced an eight-mile, \$7.2 million pavement project on the North Shore.

The pavement rehabilitation project will extend the pavement life by 10 years, restore ride quality for motorists, bicyclist, improve drainage and significantly reduce future maintenance needs.

The project on Highway 89 from the Nevada County line to Squaw Valley Road in the Lake Tahoe area includes in-place recycling and placing a 0.25 foot Hot Mix Asphalt overlay from Squaw Valley Road to Goose Meadows Campground. Dig out and repair areas of severe failure with HMA, seal cracks wider than 0.2 inches and overlay with 0.25 feet of HMS for project limits from Goose Meadow Campground to West River Street.

Roadside message boards will be used to post the latest information.

Motorists can expect delays up to 30 minutes in various locations, and one-way traffic controls from 7pm to 10am Monday through Friday.

The project is anticipated to be finished in late 2012.

Director of California Parks resigns

By Matt Weiser, Sacramento Bee

State Parks Director Ruth Coleman resigned this morning and her second in command has been fired after officials learned the department has been sitting on nearly \$54 million in surplus money for as long as 12 years.

The moves come in the wake of a scandal, revealed by The Bee on Sunday, in which a deputy director at State Parks carried out a secret vacation buyout program for employees at department headquarters last year. That buyout cost the state more than \$271,000.



California
Parks Director
Ruth Coleman
has resigned.
Photo/LTN file

The *Bee* began inquiring about rumors of a surplus when it learned about the buyout, and submitted a Public Records Act request for the fund data on Wednesday.

John Laird, secretary of the state Natural Resources Agency,

which oversees State Parks, told the *Bee* that investigations have been launched by both the Attorney General's office and the Department of Finance to figure out how – and why – the Department of Parks and Recreation squirreled away so much money for so long.

“Ruth has stepped up and taken personal responsibility,” Laird said of Coleman, who is the longest-serving director in the 150-year history of the department. “It’s an incredibly troubling discovery.”

Laird emphasized that it remains unclear who is to blame for the surplus, and whether it is linked to the vacation buyout, which sources told The Bee was carried out by Manuel Thomas Lopez, 45, of Granite Bay, who was demoted in October and then resigned in May.

Read the whole story

Another complaint filed in land deal involving ‘Beverly Hillbillies’ star

By Reno Gazette-Journal

Attorneys representing former “Beverly Hillbillies” actor Max Baer Jr. filed an amended complaint Thursday alleging that two Carson City car dealers and a former associate defrauded him out of \$7 million in a land deal for a proposed casino in Carson City.

The complaint filed in Douglas District Court alleges that Carson City car dealers Michael Hohl and A.M. “Dink” Cryer,

along with their former associate Jay Timon, lied to Baer about several aspects of the multimillion dollar land deal in 2007.

Representatives for Timon, Hohl and Cryer could not be reached for comment on Thursday. The *RGJ* left after-hours messages for the three.

The complaint would be the fifth legal case to originate from the land deal, including a lawsuit that was filed by Douglas County in 2010 and an arbitration case between Timon, Hohl and Cryer, according to Baer's attorney Sean Brohawn.

Baer played Jethro on the "Beverly Hillbillies," a 1960s sitcom.

New York firm wins contract to promote Nevada tourism

By Cy Ryan, Las Vegas Sun

CARSON CITY — Gov. Brian Sandoval says he knows there will be some concern with the state awarding a \$3 million contract to an out-of-state firm to increase tourism in Nevada.

But he says the 19 companies, 11 of them from outside Nevada, were graded fairly in selecting Burson-Marsteller of New York City to promote the marketing campaign for Nevada's museums, art offerings and Native American experiences.

The selection committee did "a great job" in unanimously choosing the company that has offices in Los Angeles and San Francisco, he said.

State Purchasing Director Greg Smith and Claudia Vecchio of the state Commission on Tourism briefed the state Board of Examiners that approved the proposed contract.

Smith said Burson-Marsteller will have to come into the state “and learn about it.” The company will bring some fresh eyes in promoting Nevada, said Smith. And the state will be working with the branch offices of the company in California.

The selection process was almost like the Miss America contest, said Smith.

The tourism commission ended its contracts with private firms in 2009 because of the budget crunch, and the selection of this company will help draw visitors to Nevada, said Smith and Vecchio.

Read the whole story