

Best ways to help Colorado disaster relief

By Joanne Davidson, Denver Post

The outpouring of support for those impacted by the Colorado wildfires is nothing short of amazing.

However well-intentioned, though, an offer you might think is helpful can in fact create problems. From HelpColoradoNow.org, here are some helpful hints for would-be benefactors:

Donate only things that are requested by those in charge and bring them to the officially designated collection centers; items that are not needed may go to waste and get in the way of relief efforts.

Cash allows disaster agencies to purchase exactly what is needed.

Double-check before handing over cash or merchandise. For a list of reputable agencies, call 2-1-1 or 1-866-760-6489.

[Read the whole story](#)

Moody's: Gaming business gains may stall

By Steve Green, Las Vegas Sun

Moody's Investors Service today warned that the stagnant U.S. economy could hurt the casino industry and that some newly opened casinos appear to be taking market share from

competitors as opposed to growing the market.

In a “special comment” called “A More Cautious Consumer Steps Away from the Casino,” the debt-rating company said companies that could be hurt by these trends include Caesars Entertainment Corp., Cannery Casino Resorts LLC and CityCenter Holdings, all in Las Vegas.

These are among the companies that are highly leveraged or facing significant near-term debt maturities that will have to be paid off or refinanced.

“Improving U.S. gaming revenue trends in place since the middle of last year appear to be stalling,” Moody’s said in its report. “Momentum began to slow in March, and then in May most jurisdictions reported outright declines in gaming revenue. That, along with weakness in consumer confidence, employment and retail sales, indicates the rebound in gaming has a high probability of stalling.”

Read the whole story

Gondola Fire threatened to take out South Shore 10 years ago

By Susan Wood

When up to 30mph winds ignited a hellish wildfire under the town gondola on Lake Tahoe’s busiest week a decade ago, firefighters, residents and stakeholders may have sought divine intervention in stopping the 673-acre blaze that threatened 550 structures, forced the evacuation of hundreds

of people and cost more than \$3 million to fight.

During four challenging days, they certainly got it – from Heavenly Mountain Resort, an army of firefighting resources including more than 1,700 in fire crews, successful emergency plans and a whole lot of water at their disposal.

Like the Angora Fire five years later, South Shore communities suffered no loss of life from the Heavenly Gondola blaze. This one was presumed to have been sparked by a carelessly discarded cigarette out a gondola car window between towers 11 and 12 on July 2, 2002.



Kit Bailey, fire chief for the USFS in Tahoe, explains how the Gondola Fire burned.
Photos/Kathryn Reed

The impact on those who fought the Gondola Fire and lived through its rage is remembered vividly.

No one may have internalized the crisis more than Kit Bailey, fire management officer for the Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit of the U.S. Forest Service.

Bailey, who has spent more than three decades fighting fires, including a stint in Oregon as a smokejumper, has seen it all. But to this day he remembers what intersection he was in when

the call came over the radio. The fire officer seemed a little perplexed that any cigarette can start a fire, but he and other fire investigators had no doubt upon examining the area afterward. Some say the odds of a cigarette igniting a blaze are 1 in 10, but Bailey believes they could be even higher. No suspect has ever been fingered, despite lengthy interviews conducted of guests.

"It's difficult for a cigarette to start one. It has to land in the right spot in the right fuels," he said, while recently surveying the point of origin with *Lake Tahoe News*. Ironically, a cigarette butt lay close to the same spot as it did 10 years ago when the perfect storm formed.

"(Officials) were aware. They knew the potential was here. And all the conditions came together," he said, referring to heavy wind, a cigarette and a preceding dry winter with drought-like spring. "But one benefit to Lake Tahoe of having a fire here is the access to international resources. They moved the resources quickly. And I think there were lessons learned for the local fire departments."

On July 2, 2002, the winds were whipping and the town was filling up with tourists for the Fourth of July holiday as the 12:30pm call came from dispatch. Crews raced over to Montreal Road and negotiated the rocky terrain up the gondola line. Part of the territory is now home to the nation's first bistate park named after rancher Jack Van Sickle. It was tough getting the water line up to the fire until one was attached at Keller Road and trucks were brought up to the blaze from a South Tahoe Public Utility District service road.



The scar of the Gondola Fire
10 years later.

“We needed a continual supply (of water),” Bailey said.

The unrelenting wind hurled the fire in two directions. There was a time when residents at the Saddle Road area watched intensely as it headed southwest toward their homes. They were not on mandatory evacuations, but were told to be ready.

However, the winds carried the bulk of the blaze east in a rage that spread from 2 acres to 25 in only an hour. With the amount of dry brush and trees and huge neighborhood lining the canyon, Kingsbury Grade became a hotbed of concern.

“We had small-scale wind shifts, but the predominant wind pushed it across the hill (east). That’s why it burned diagonal instead of up,” Bailey said, pointing to the swiping scar across South Lake Tahoe’s most recognizable ridge view.

Fire crews tried to conduct an “anchor and flank” to surround the fire from the back and pinch it off but “we couldn’t get in front of it,” Bailey lamented.

Instead, he knew its sporadic crowning at the top of the trees and consumption of hot-burning pine needles in a grove about halfway up the ridge east of the gondola line were going to spell trouble.

“When it flashed there, it burned more intensely. I thought: ‘Now we’re done’,” he said.

Ski resort helps

Fire crews and resources stepped into high gear as the blaze rolled into the North Bowl and Olympic chairlift areas of Heavenly's ski resort.



Kit Bailey stands at the point of origin of the Gondola Fire.

Although the danger exists with flying operations in the wind, the Lake Tahoe Airport became grand central station in terms of helicopter drops. Residents and tourists watched six helicopters take constant triangular runs between the lake, the mountain and the airport to refuel. An estimated 300,000 gallons of water from Lake Tahoe were dropped on the fire.

Beyond the ample water source, Heavenly chipped in with its own trifecta of fire suppression.

Bailey said fire crews received much help from Lake Tahoe's features of winter – Heavenly ski runs served as perfect fire breaks and the resort's snowmaking guns blew out water used in the summer for irrigation. The mountain's lakes at the East Peak and Sky areas were on standby if necessary.

Jim Larmore, who was Heavenly's snow surface director at the time, recalled the fire as a successful challenge for which emergency response plans train twice a year. These operations plans were set in motion quickly because the ski area was

forced to contend with providing a safe evacuation of 200 people who were still on the gondola. Workers quickly stopped loading riders at the base, but continued to run the lift to the end point.

“Our first thing was to get people out of harm’s way,” Larmore said.

From there, riders were shuttled over to the top of Kingsbury ahead of the fire and down to the Carson Valley. Highway 208 from the lake to the summit turnoff was closed to traffic.

Tourists taken elsewhere

Meanwhile, the Ridge Tahoe was dealing with its own issues as the resort was situated in the direct line of the predominant fire. Between operator Resorts West’s four properties at the summit, 1,500 guests among its 376 units were evacuated due to the urging of then Tahoe Douglas Fire Chief Tim Smith when asked by the Ridge’s Senior Vice President Dan Garrison.



Charred trees make it hard to believe the fire was in 2002.

“The conversation lasted less than a minute,” Garrison told *Lake Tahoe News*.

The most startling reason Garrison believed the resort was in danger came when the management team met on the view deck of the clubhouse facing the lake and “ash began to land on the

tabletops.” Guests were told to grab their medicine and leave their food because “there is no time.” Gas valves were shut off and water pumps floated in the pool.

One guest who refused to evacuate was told to provide the name of his dentist if he didn’t leave. He later obliged.

When the sky darkened from the smoke, guests shuttled by bus were leaving as fire units arrived to line Ridge Club Drive. Fire crews took over and stayed at the resort overnight, while spot fires broke out on the property.

“I remember as I drove away I looked into my rearview mirror and behind one of our buildings a large pine tree was fully engulfed with flames. I said to myself: ‘Building 10 won’t be there in the morning.’ And while it sounds dramatic, tears rolled down my cheek. I’ve been with the property before it was a property starting in 1982,” Garrison recalled.

Lessons learned

In the end, with no deaths and property damage – the Ridge executive commended his quick-thinking staff, as did Larmore of Heavenly.

The aftermath set wheels in motion in fire prevention and recovery efforts.

No smoking signs were erected throughout Heavenly’s property. More fire hydrants and valves were installed with the ability to run a 2,500-foot water hose from the gondola mid-station down the mountain. The gondola cars were equipped with plastic plates over windows that do not allow cigarettes to be dropped out.

The community and agencies have planted trees, including a major effort put on by Heavenly and the Sugar Pine Foundation last October for Vail Resorts’ annual Echo Day. Volunteers placed more than 1,000 seedlings in the ground over a 10-acre

span in the Van Sickle Bi-state Park.

"We certainly hope to see these newly planted sugar pine seedlings thriving 100 years from now," Heavenly's General Manager Pete Sonntag said in a statement released last fall.

A quarter of the gondola fire burned in the California Tahoe Conservancy property endowed by Van Sickle to build the state park.

"In a way, the rocky nature of the gondola burn is a small blessing," CTC's top forester Brian Hirt admitted to *Lake Tahoe News*.

He explained how having less highly flammable chaparral growth in the rocks has allowed the new, small trees to grow faster. Usually, the overabundance of the underbrush hinders the tree growth.

"The good news is that there are quite a few trees establishing in the gondola burn, but the bad news is that the scar will take longer to appear healed," Hirt said, adding the area is also "prone to erosion."

The CTC pledged to continue to work with Nevada State Parks – the agency that spearheaded the opening of the 725-acre, day-use park. Much faith and love has gone into the building and restoration of the park, including a Lake Tahoe Stewardship Day that brought out people from many walks of life to participate in the burn-area cleanup.

The fire consumed 243 acres in Nevada and 17 of the Conservancy's property designated for the park.

The day of the fire, CTC's program analyst Bruce Eisner was preparing to tour the area with this reporter and instead found himself watching the blaze roar over the ridge from the Saddle Road area.

"Whoever threw the cigarette out of the gondola knew

absolutely nothing about this bistate park,” he said.

Eisner said he was never concerned the fire would douse the hopes of the park forming as planned.

“I grew up in Southern California, so I’m well aware of how fast fire moves. But this was a first in being the closest I’ve come to a wildland fire,” he said.

Turning climate change data into policy not an easy task

By Capital Public Radio

Data suggest climate change is bringing an increased risk of more severe forest fires, but warming temperatures may cause other complex ecosystem changes. Local agencies are already planning ways to mitigate and adapt, but making policy based on models that show global trends over the next century is not an easy task.

On a recent brisk sunny morning at Lake Tahoe, the waters sparkling their iconic blue. Scientists from UC Davis’s Tahoe Environmental Research Center take the boat out to Tahoe Buoy Three, a floating concrete island about 10-feet in diameter with scientific instruments bolted to its tripod structure.

“When you have a long-term record, especially going back more than 40 years , you can start to see these long-term trends,” said Geoff Schladow, the director of the Tahoe Environmental

Research Center. “So now springtime defined by the peak of the spring runoff, is occurring two weeks sooner than it did 40 years ago.”



Lake Tahoe is an outdoor laboratory that could help predict the future.
Photo/LTN file

Data from these buoys show that the lake has warmed about 1 degree Fahrenheit on average over the last four decades.

But it's not the average that's worrisome. The concern is that the surface has warmed much more than the depths. So that makes the surface water much lighter.

“We're finding on average that density difference is getting larger, meaning more energy is needed to mix that water,” Schladow said.

Historically Lake Tahoe mixes all the way from top to bottom about once every three or four years. The mixing helps move oxygen throughout the lake's water.

“What the model suggests is that in the coming decades, it's going mix to that depth less often,” Schladow said. “And possibly in the second half of the century, that mixing may cease altogether.”

Less water mixing could bring a cascade of changes to the ecosystem. There have already been some periodic increases in

surface algae. This could reduce zooplankton, which are a critical food source for fish. And reduced mixing could cloud Tahoe's famous water clarity.

That's the tricky thing about climate change. Science can point to some concrete trends – water and air temperature warming; or more precipitation falling as rain, not snow – but scientific models can't tell what will happen next year. Or exactly how climate changes might affect the ecosystem.

Andy Wirth, CEO of Squaw Valley, says they can't base their business plan on suggestions that snowpack might be reduced by half in the next 50 years.

"Those are horizons that are very difficult to manage to. And I would really make effort to have everyone understand how seriously we take this," Wirth said.

Read the whole story

Adelson's deep pockets could influence online gaming in Nevada

By Anjeanette Damon, Las Vegas Sun

As Nevada gaming lobbyists diligently lay the groundwork for what might be a final end-of-the-year push for federal legislation legalizing online poker, perhaps the biggest wild card is a man who has vowed to spend as much as \$100 million influencing this year's election.

Las Vegas casino mogul Sheldon Adelson has spent \$26 million

on the presidential race and is likely to sink resources into Nevada's U.S. Senate race – in which his longtime nemesis, Democrat Shelley Berkley, is running.

And Adelson, chairman and CEO of Las Vegas Sands Corp., doesn't like online gambling. At all.

Berkley's Republican opponent, Sen. Dean Heller, stands to benefit from the substantial influence and money Adelson will bring to the race. But Heller continues to favor online poker.

"Sen. Heller continues to support legalizing Internet poker and has been working closely with both Sen. (Harry) Reid and Sen. (Jon) Kyl on legislation to achieve this goal," Heller's spokesman, Stewart Bybee, said in a written statement.

Bybee said Heller wasn't available for an interview for this story.

Jan Jones, vice president of public affairs for Caesars Entertainment, which has been actively lobbying for passage of online poker legislation, echoed Bybee's statement.

"Sen. Heller has been excellent," Jones said. "He's fully engaged and understands the importance of the legislation to Nevada."

As a Republican in the Senate, Heller could play a role in winning over skeptical members of his party – those who worry about the proliferation of gambling if Congress legalizes online poker. Indeed, some blame former Sen. John Ensign for failing in that role in 2010 when he was in the thick of the scandal surrounding his extramarital affair.

Kyl, an Arizona Republican, had been a roadblock to the legislation but has since been convinced that gambling proliferation would be worse if individual states jump into the business, creating a patchwork of licensing and regulatory schemes.

That's starting to happen now in the wake of a Department of Justice opinion that the federal Wire Act prohibits only online sports betting, not all online gambling.

Nevada companies are ramping up in preparation not just for federal legalization, but also to enter markets in states that legalize online play. Station Casinos this month launched Ultimate Poker, a free play site, on Facebook. Also this month, the Nevada Gaming Commission issued online betting licenses to Bally Technologies and International Game Technology.

Although Nevada gaming companies stand ready to take advantage of individual state markets, they are better poised to capitalize on a national market, where their name-brand sites are familiar.

But even as lobbyists rush to convince lawmakers that a federal law legalizing online poker – and outlawing other types of Internet gambling – is needed, many say it's Adelson who should be worked. Adelson's influence with Republican leadership in the House, especially Majority Leader Eric Cantor, is more of a threat to online poker legislation than the money he is spending to back Heller, lobbyists say.

"Eric and Sheldon talk all the time; it's an ongoing dialogue," one industry lobbyist said. "Dean is one vote, where Eric controls the agenda."

The question is how engaged Adelson decides to become on the issue.

Read the whole story

Juvenile arrested in Friday stabbing incident

A 16-year-old male was arrested by South Lake Tahoe Police Saturday afternoon for allegedly stabbing a man in the arm during an altercation on 11th Street and Eloise Avenue on Friday.

Following up on leads, police found the juvenile suspect around 12:30pm Saturday in an apartment on Blackwood Trail after identifying it as the apartment of a parolee, according to Sgt. Josh Adler of South Lake Tahoe Police. Earlier, during their investigation police took into custody a 17-year-old male from a location on Kokanee Trail in El Dorado County who was allegedly also involved in the incident. Police say Sonya Klempner was also at that location and obstructed the investigation and was also arrested.

Police say the stabbing does not appear to be gang related.

On Friday, police and fire personnel responded to a call and found a 22-year-old male who said he had been riding a bicycle and got into an altercation with a male riding a skate board who stabbed him in the arm and then fled west across Emerald Bay Road. The victim was taken to Barton Hospital for treatment and police, with the assistance of the El Dorado County Sheriff and California Highway Patrol, searched the area but were unable to locate the alleged assailant at the time.

Sgt. Adler told *Lake Tahoe News* the victim is in stable condition after surgery.

Police are still investigating the crime and said anyone with information should contact them at (530) 542.6100 or Secret Witness at (530) 541.6800

Bill would expand fireworks sales in California

By Hannah Madans, Sacramento Bee

In California, Fourth of July is the one holiday that gets the fireworks pass – for one summer week, starting today, you can buy sparklers and fountains to celebrate Independence Day.

In a couple of years, you may be able to hoist a champagne glass as your fireworks light up the winter sky to toast the new year.

A bill that has already passed the state Senate – unanimously – would double the weeks fireworks can be sold, from June 28 to July 4 and from Dec. 26 to Jan. 1.

A second week of sales would not only give New Year's celebrants another way to party, but also would ignite sales for wholesalers such as TNT Fireworks, the sponsor of the bill.

The companies have some key supporters in their corner – the nonprofits that set up those plywood roadside stands that dot the Sacramento area this time of year.

“The fact that we’re cutting back on all the programs, safety net programs and what not, a lot of the money that nonprofits used to get, they don’t get anymore,” said Sen. Ron Calderon, D-Montebello, who is carrying the measure. “The sale of

fireworks on a local level helps create a lot of revenue.”

Senate Bill 1468 would add that second week for just two years, 2014 and 2015. It’s pending in the Assembly.

Under current law, about 290 California communities allow nonprofit groups to sell fireworks, including churches, high school booster clubs and sports organizations.

Among them is the Rosemont Little League, whose treasurer Dennis Gallagher said fireworks sales make up 20 percent of the league’s budget.

Adding more sales between Christmas and New Year’s Day “would be an additional revenue stream that we would definitely pursue,” he said.

Read the whole story

5 Tahoe Keys board members face recall

Five out of the seven Tahoe Keys Property Owners Association board of directors are being recalled.

The five are Susan (Joey) Wolff, Jim Siegfried, Mark Koffman, Sam Pavone and Alexandra Musser. The board was served notice at the June meeting.

According to the petition the reasons for the recall are the board does not enforce the CC&Rs, members are not treated fairly, executive sessions are abused, fiduciary duties have been breached, and board members act in a secretive manner.

TTD board awards initial phase of bikeway construction

By Anne Knowles

The Tahoe Transportation District Board of Directors awarded the first phase of construction on the Stateline- to-Stateline Bikeway Project to Herback General Engineering after dismissing a protest to the award.



During a special meeting held Friday, the board approved the contract after determining that Herback, the lowest of five bidders with a bid of \$1,498,835, had fully met the requirements of the project.

A&K Earth Movers Inc., the second lowest bidder, filed a complaint based on Herback's lack of any disadvantaged business enterprise (DBE) participation. Contractors on public projects are required by law to utilize a small percentage of subcontractors or suppliers classified as DBEs, a for-profit small business concern that is at least 51 percent owned by one or more individuals who are both socially and economically disadvantaged.

"It was well documented that Herback made a 'good faith' effort," to find DBEs for its bid, said Carl Hasty, district manager, TTD.

Construction on the first phase, from Kahle Drive to Elks Point Road, should begin this summer, said Hasty.

The board also voted to amend the South Lake Tahoe Short-Range Transit Plan to include upgrades to a fueling station and computer hardware and software. The new fueling station will be located closer to the service yard and add biodiesel fuel.

The board's approval was needed to secure \$778,306 in Proposition 1B funds from the state.

The board also received an update on the first week of operations for the East Shore Express service of the BlueGo bus system. The service carried 291 passengers in its first week, from June 15-21, with more than half, or 186, on the Sunday of that week. Sixty eight of the riders were either reduced fare, for children aged 5 to 12 or adults over 60, or free, for kids younger than 5.

Comment period on TRPA's Regional Plan update ends

By Kathryn Reed

STATELINE – It's over. That would be the comment period for the draft environmental documents for the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency's Regional Plan update.

On the final day – June 28 – 21 people spoke during the Governing Board meeting in Stateline. Two were opposed to the preferred alternative. About a dozen spoke at the Kings Beach meeting the day before.

Many who spoke and hundreds of others also put their thoughts in writing.

On Monday the El Dorado County Board of Supervisors was given

an update by John Hester, TRPA planning director.

Supervisor Jack Sweeney chastised Hester a bit by saying TRPA is wrong to interchange the words clarity and quality when describing the waters of Lake Tahoe. Sweeney's example was how he had a spring on his property providing clear water that was of poor quality.

The supes also harped on TMDL, even though those requirements are from another agency – the Lahontan Water Quality Control Board.

"You have to convince me that more density doesn't make us have to pickup the cleaning tab at Lake Tahoe," Supervisor Ron Briggs said.

Creating town centers is what TRPA's goal is so people walk more, while also getting current structures out of sensitive areas.

Hester responded, "Redevelopment has had a dramatic reduction on load and pollutants." The translation being that density would not be an economic hindrance.

TMDLs also came up Thursday. The EPA's Jack Landy wants some resolution on how the Regional Plan update will affect current law. Lahontan is an arm of the EPA, and while it only governs waters in California, the NDEPA is its Nevada counterpart and also reports to the EPA.

TRPA Executive Director Joanne Marchetta said it's premature to know if that issue will be resolved before or after the RPU vote is taken in December.

Back at the supes meeting, Supervisor Ray Nutting said, "I think your thresholds are based on politics and not science."

To this, Hester said, "I don't disagree."

He explained to the supes how for the first time in the 40-

plus history of the TRPA the agency had the threshold evaluations peer reviewed.

Hester and Supervisor Norma Santiago, who is also chair of the TRPA Governing Board, said the agency was told to look more closely at the thresholds, how information is gathered and were told some measures don't make sense.

On Thursday it was agreed to reconvene the TRPA's Regional Plan Update Committee so members can be working on the issues that were never resolved.

An October release of the final EIS is on the calendar, with board deliberations in November and a vote in December. However, there will be multiple meetings this summer where the board will discuss aspects of the Regional Plan update.