

Washoe County deputies defend actions against RGJ photographer

By Jaclyn O'Malley, Reno Gazette-Journal

Washoe County sheriff's deputies said they cited a *Reno Gazette-Journal* photographer because he entered an active fire scene in Sun Valley without authorization and repeatedly resisted deputies' commands as they tried to confirm his media affiliation, according to statements made by officers in incident reports that were released Tuesday to the newspaper.

Tim Dunn, the *Gazette-Journal's* photo chief, was cited June 18 on suspicion of obstructing and resisting as he was trying to take photos and video of a destructive residential fire near East Fourth Avenue and Flora Way.

Last week, Dunn filed a complaint with the sheriff's office, citing excessive force was used when he was obeying deputies' commands to leave the area. He said he received scrapes to his face and hands after being taken to the ground by two deputies.

Dunn, 60, said a boot came down on his back and a deputy pushed his face in the gravel.

He said Capt. John Spencer accused him of impersonating a firefighter because he was wearing protective fire gear – yellow jacket and pants, a helmet and goggles – which is recommended to be worn by media covering wildfires. This gear is often issued to journalists by fire agencies.

But according to deputies' reports, Spencer said no one touched Dunn's face or head, and that he never accused Dunn of impersonating a firefighter. Spencer said that Dunn was asked

multiple times to stop approaching the fire area, but Dunn ignored his commands and those of deputies Ethan Blosch and Miguel Diaz.

Nevada law states it is the general policy of police to allow reporters with valid identification to pass through police lines into disaster areas after the reporter is made aware of known hazards, according to the Nevada Press Association. However, the reporters' presence must not interfere with emergency operations, and reporters should be aware of the potential for a citation, the association said.

Dunn was grabbed after he had turned to head toward a media area, and Spencer said this was because Dunn kept walking and said, "I'm leaving" when Blosch told him to stay where he was. Blosch said Dunn's "continued refusal to follow instructions and continued efforts to resist us forced us to guide him to the ground." Dunn continued to resist, wrote Blosch, who said he placed his left knee on Dunn's back and used his right leg to brace Dunn's arm against his body while he tried to handcuff him. During the takedown, Blosch tore his uniform pants and received a minor injury to his knee, he said.

"It should be noted that had Dunn simply stopped when directed by either Diaz and Blosch, my direction to the deputies would have been for them to escort Dunn to the perimeter, verify his media identification and direct him to the Fire Media Command Post," Spencer wrote.

An Aug. 1 court date was scheduled in Sparks Justice Court.

Deputies wrote in reports that firefighters initially ran to where Dunn was being taken to the ground because they thought he might have been a fellow firefighter suffering a medical condition.

"I advised Dunn that it seemed suspicious that he was dressed similar to a firefighter but had no outward markings or identification reflecting an association with the RGJ,"

Spencer wrote.

Dunn said he was not asked to show identification until after he was handcuffed.

Dunn said that during the takedown he was trying to protect expensive cameras, which might have caused deputies to believe he was resisting.

Spencer wrote that Diaz and Blosch each had to put one of Dunn's arms in an arm bar so he could be handcuffed. He said Diaz put the camera in Dunn's hand on the ground, while the other camera remained around Dunn's shoulder.

"Dunn clearly did not attempt to bring his arms toward his body where the camera was strapped," Spencer wrote in disputing Dunn's stating his resistance was related to protecting his cameras.

El Dorado supes spend a day talking about Tahoe

By Kathryn Reed

Little was accomplished Tuesday when the El Dorado County Board of Supervisors schlepped to Tahoe for the once-a-year meeting in the basin.



An update five years after the Angora Fire was given to the board as well as a presentation on the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency's Regional Plan update.

A discussion about the Meyers Community Plan didn't amount to much other than the supes wanting to know the community's preference before they vote for anything.

Supervisor Norma Santiago wanted to rename the Meyers Roundtable the Meyers Community Advisory Council, but that was nixed until she gets feedback from residents.

The Meyers Community Plan was approved in 1993, with revisions in 1995 and 1998. Talks are already under way to update the plan so it parallels the TRPA update and could possibly be adopted by the county the first quarter of 2013.

Supervisor Ray Nutting, who has represented the basin in the past and worked on the Meyers plan, said, "A plan is only as good as the ability to implement it."

He is wary of creating another document that will sit on a shelf as well as duplicating what has been done and spending more money on consultants than on an action plan.

"The energy needs to be from the community, not from a consultant who is paid by a grant," Nutting said.

Michael Ward, the consultant being paid by a grant, told the board the plan is to build on what Meyers is doing by being recreation and family centric.

"There is a clear identity we can build on," Ward said.

Supervisor John Knight spoke about how gaming on the South Shore diminished by 50 percent from the heyday and how that has hurt the economy and how Meyers needs to evolve.

What he failed to mention was how it was the county supervisors who voted to allow Red Hawk Casino to be built in Shingle Springs, how Indian casinos have hurt Tahoe, and that the concerns of the eastern side of the county were met with deaf ears when Red Hawk was being discussed.

When it came time to discuss the Washoe – who are not the tribe at Red Hawk – but instead are the tribe that called Tahoe home before the white man displaced them, the supervisors decided not to rename Lakeview Commons. They didn't even mention the Washoe, despite previous meetings where there was talk of using a Washoe name. City Councilman Hal Cole, who was instrumental in Lakeview Commons since his first stint on the council, suggested a sign on the beach that explained the history of the area, including who gave the land for perpetual use by the people of El Dorado County and visitors. Who will pay for a sign and when it would be erected remain to be determined.

Change in Nevada lawmakers could alter future of state's involvement in TRPA

By Anne Knowles

Nevada's future in the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency is still up in the air despite the recent defeat of the man who sponsored the bill that was approved last year that threatens to remove the state from the Compact.

Sen. John Lee, D-North Las Vegas, the main proponent of Senate Bill 271 passed by the 2011 Nevada Legislature, lost to Patricia Spearman in the state's primary earlier this month. Spearman was backed by a broad coalition of groups, including

the Sierra Club and the Nevada Conservation League, that were unhappy with Lee's record on a number of issues, including the effort to withdraw Nevada from the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency Compact unless certain reforms are made.



Lake Tahoe will always be part of Nevada, but whether Nevada will always be part of TRPA remains an unknown.

Photo/LTN file

"When we made the decision to try to defeat Lee in this election we were hopeful it would improve our chances to repeal this legislation," says Kyle Davis, political and policy director, Nevada Conservation League. "Our goal is to see repeal of that legislation next session."

Nevada Assemblyman Kelly Kite, R-Minden, a co-sponsor of SB271, whose district includes the Douglas County portion of Lake Tahoe, also was defeated in the primary. Retired Gardnerville rancher Jim Wheeler, who bested Kite and a third Republican candidate, Gary Schmidt, will face Independent American David Schumann in the general election in November.

Lee and Kite still sit on the Legislature's interim committee that oversees the TRPA and Kite is one of the members of a three-person delegation tasked with meeting with its legislative counterparts in California to negotiate changes to

the agency. The Nevada delegation, which also includes Assemblywoman Marilyn Kirkpatrick, D-North Las Vegas, and Sen. James Settelmeyer, R-Minden, is expected to have the first meeting with its California colleagues during the annual Lake Tahoe Environmental Summit being hosted by Sen. Dean Heller, R-Nev, at Edgewood Tahoe in Stateline on Aug. 13.

Then the Nevada group is required by the law to deliver a report on the state of the TRPA to the interim committee by Oct. 15, when the interim committee wraps up. That's also the deadline for the committee – called the Legislative Committee for the Review and Oversight of the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency and the Marlette Lake Water System – to request up to 10 bill drafts for the 2013 legislative session.

In the meantime, Leo Drozdoff, executive director of Nevada Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, and John Laird, California's secretary of Natural Resources, have been meeting to discuss the TRPA. They plan to meet again in July, according to Kay Scherer, deputy director of the Nevada department.

Laird, who attended his first California Tahoe Conservancy meeting this month (usually a delegate sits in for him on the board), said he and Drozdoff hope to have something to be able to present at the environmental summit.

One of Nevada's main complaints about the bi-state agency has been its inability to deliver a Regional Plan update. The TRPA recently produced a draft RPU and the accompanying environmental impact documents and has had four public meetings to discuss it, with another today in Kings Beach and one Thursday in Stateline. The agency is taking public comment until June 28, with the goal of delivering a final update by year end.

"I'm optimistic the new RPU will be adopted before the new (legislative) session or soon after," Nevada Conservation

League's Davis told *Lake Tahoe News*. "We're hopeful that Nevada won't pull out if they develop a new RPU."

The bill draft or drafts requested by the interim committee could end up in any number of committees during the 2013 legislative session. SB271, for example, emanated from Senate Government Affairs, then chaired by Lee. The make-up of the committees for 2013 is unknown as is the number and content of bill drafts the interim committee on the TRPA will request.

The new members of the next interim committee overseeing the TRPA, which by statute meets every interim, will be determined by the Legislative Commission after the 2013 session.

Wheeler, the winner of the Republican primary for Assembly District 39, is the heavy favorite to win the seat. For his part, he says he would like to be assigned to Natural Resources, Agriculture and Mining, although there is no guarantee he will be appointed to the committee of his choice.

Wheeler opposed the incumbent largely on Kite's vote to pass Assembly Bill 561 during the 2011 session. The bill, negotiated by the leadership of both parties with Gov. Brian Sandoval, extended a number of taxes to raise \$620 million for the state. Wheeler has signed a pledge, available at his website, to not to raise any taxes if he were elected to office.

"I am a very, very conservative person, and I feel the constituents are very conservative," Wheeler says.

Wheeler says instead he would look to cuts in state government employment through attrition and the education budget to balance the budget.

"You have to look at everything," Wheeler says. "The education budget is 51 percent of the budget. We've been throwing money at it and it hasn't worked for 50 years."

He says he supports Sandoval's plan to provide vouchers for education.

"We need more charter schools. We need to bring private enterprise into the school system."

Wheeler also supports SB 271.

"We need to get the TRPA straightened out," he says. "It was a good bill passed in the last Legislature."

Cefalu resigns from LTUSD board effective immediately

By Kathryn Reed

The abrupt resignation Tuesday of Judy Cefalu from the Lake Tahoe Unified School District board upstaged everything else on the agenda.



Not even board President Wendy David was given a heads-up about the letter written by Cefalu. That letter was addressed to Superintendent Jim Tarwater.

Reached at home by *Lake Tahoe News* on Tuesday, Cefalu didn't believe her departure mid-term was newsworthy even though the electorate voted her in for a four-year term. She had nothing to say to them.

"I just think it was time we have someone else come in. It's as simple as that," Cefalu said. She thinks new, younger ideas are what the board needs at this point.

She mentioned she would soon be turning 74, and that it would be good to pass the baton onto someone younger.

Her resignation is immediate. She did not attend the June 26 meeting.

The board discussed Cefalu's resignation in closed and open sessions. The board has 60 days to appoint someone to fill the remainder of the term that expires in December 2013.

As in the past when there has been a vacancy, the board conducts interviews in open session and makes the decision in open session.

Cefalu only had good things to say about the board, administration and district as a whole.

In other action, the board approved the 2012-13 budget.

Lawmaker: Delay in tourism contract exceeds legislative

authority

By Sean Whaley, Nevada News Bureau

CARSON CITY – State lawmakers have put a new tourism contract to promote Nevada on hold despite the concerns of one lawmaker that the move exceeds legislative authority.

Concerns have been raised by Sen. Steven Horsford, D-Las Vegas, about the intent to award the two-year, \$3.2 million contract to an out-of-state firm.

Burson-Marsteller, one of the largest public relations firms in the country, was selected by a state agency to handle the promotion of Nevada for the next two years.

“We haven’t had a bad tourism plan in the past, so I have some real reservations,” Horsford said during last week’s interim Finance Committee meeting. “And to bring in a national firm, that I think is based out of New York, to come in here in our state and promote rural communities, that they don’t even know where they are, let alone what they do; I have some real questions and reservations about that.”

Horsford is running for the 4th Congressional seat, which includes a large swath of rural Nevada in addition to parts of Clark County.

Ultimately lawmakers decided to hold off on approving budgetary changes sought by Claudia Vecchio, director of the Department of Tourism and Cultural Affairs, that would allow the contract to go forward, citing several questions they wanted answered first.

That decision was opposed by Sen. Ben Kieckhefer, R-Reno, who said lawmakers are exceeding their constitutional authority by intervening in an executive branch function.

“The fact of the matter is that some people didn’t like the

contract so now they're not going to appropriate the funding," he said. "That's going backward and that's not our job."

The Legislature appropriates revenue and authorizes expenditures, but it is up to the Executive Branch to implement those decisions, Kieckhefer said. The decision was an attempt to do a de facto denial of the contract and it overstepped legislative authority, he said.

"I totally understand the concern that we're spending a significant amount of money on a big contract with an out-of-state vendor," Kieckhefer said. "But the simple fact of the matter is that no Nevada company was in the top five in this (request for proposals).

"I wish we would spend money in Nevada and we do as much as we can," he said. "But this bid process followed every law that we have in statute, followed every policy set by the Legislature in terms of bidder preference and things like that, and the simple fact of the matter is that this was the best company to do the job. And their job is to drive more traffic to Nevada to enhance our economy, to enhance our biggest industry, which is still hospitality and tourism and gaming."

Delaying a contract that will help the state's economy grow is ludicrous, Kieckhefer said.

Vecchio defended the contract and selection process at the meeting. Nineteen companies submitted proposals, but none of the four finalists was from Nevada, a fact which generated comment from at least one Nevada public relations firm.

Burson-Marsteller, which is actually based in Los Angeles, was the unanimous selection of an evaluation committee made up of Nevada tourism professionals, Vecchio said. The company will be working with Red Rock Strategies out of Las Vegas, she said.

The contract has been drawn up and signed by both parties, but it remains contingent upon approval of state officials.

Vecchio said the firm will provide national and international contacts that will benefit the state.

"The value that you get back, and the value that comes back to a destination by working with the best in the business, is tenfold, twentyfold over what it is with somebody who just has that local perspective," she said.

Burson-Marsteller has proposed an idea for a smart phone application that will provide a way for visitors to craft itineraries and access to services in both cellular telephone service and non-service areas, Vecchio said. Much of rural Nevada does not have cellular phone service, but the information will be downloaded to the phone and so will be available to visitors, she said.

"That's a game changer for this state," Vecchio said. "So it is the understanding of our visitor needs that is so important to our success."

Vecchio, appointed in October 2011 by Gov. Brian Sandoval to the tourism job, has previously worked for Burson-Marsteller in Dallas as well as for the Edelman public relations firm in Chicago.

Horsford said he is certain that there are firms in Nevada with the regional and national experience that could perform the work although he said he did not know the identities of all 19 applicants.

"The Legislature set a policy that 5 percent preference should be given to Nevada-based businesses," he said. "So this is a policy that the Legislature and the governor believe was important, particularly at this time when so many business, and advertising and PR is no exception, need the work."

Nevada's higher education gets failing grade

By Sean Whaley, Nevada News Bureau

CARSON CITY – Nevada is one of four states to receive an F grade for student access and success in its higher education system from the Institute for a Competitive Workforce (ICW), an affiliate of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, in a report released this month.

The third edition of its Leaders & Laggards series, “A State-by-State Report Card on Public Postsecondary Education” examines public colleges and universities in all 50 states, including four-year and two-year institutions, and is designed to provide an in-depth evaluation of data and a careful analysis of postsecondary performance and policy across states.

“With tuition growing, debt loads increasing, students questioning the marketplace value of their degrees, and large amounts of taxpayer dollars invested, the business community and the public are starting to ask questions of policymakers and higher education leaders,” said Margaret Spellings, president of ICW and a former U.S. Education secretary. “This report begins to look at how states are doing in preparing students for jobs after college and the value state taxpayers are getting in meeting the demands of local economies and employers.”

The chamber is urging policymakers, the business community, and educators to craft a reform agenda that promotes transparency to the public, demands better data on performance and improved measurement of student outcomes.

For the first time, the report grades postsecondary institutions in the following six areas:

Student access and success

Efficiency and cost-effectiveness

Meeting labor market demand

Transparency and accountability

Policy environment

Innovation.

The Nevada System of Higher Education received an F grade for “student access and success” at both its four-year and two-year institutions.

Of the failing grades for student access and success in Nevada, the report said: “The four-year institutions rank in the bottom 10 states in terms of completion rate and the percentage of undergraduates receiving Pell Grants. The two-year institutions, despite having a retention rate in the top 10 states, ranked near the bottom on completion rates, credentials produced per 100 full-time equivalent undergraduates, and the percentage of Pell recipients.”

Nevada higher education officials did not immediately respond to a request for comment on the report.

Nevada’s three four-year institutions mustered a C grade for efficiency and cost effectiveness, and D grades in the categories of meeting labor market demand and transparency and accountability.

Its four two-year colleges received a C grade for meeting labor market demand, and D grades for efficiency and cost effectiveness and transparency and accountability.

Nevada’s higher education system as a whole received a C grade

for its policy environment, a D grade for innovation: openness to providers, and an F grade for innovation: online learning.

“I think the results help illuminate that some state systems are doing a far better job of graduating students with the dollars they’re spending, and that too few states are providing students, families, and taxpayers with the information they need to make good choices or hold higher education institutions accountable,” said Rick Hess, director of Education Policy Studies for the American Enterprise Institute (AEI), which conducted research for the report. “With tuition rising at three times the rate of inflation, we want to work with the business community to ensure that students who invest in their education learn the knowledge and skills necessary to enter an increasingly competitive global workforce.”

Tahoe agencies close to failing in their job to implement change post-Angora Fire

By Kathryn Reed

Five years later and people are still wondering how they will evacuate safely from the Lake Tahoe Basin in an emergency, if a reverse 911 system has been installed, and how to get their neighbors to get rid of that shake roof.

While a panel of agency officials sat on the stage of the

theater at South Tahoe High School on Monday talking about what they have done in the five years since the Angora Fire, it was more personal information the audience sought.

But answers for them were few or limited.

The June 25 forum was hosted by state Sen. Ted Gaines, R-Roseville. Speakers were Gareth Harris of Lake Valley Fire Protection District, Kelly Keenan with CalFire, Patty Kouyoumdjian of Lahontan water board, Joanne Marchetta-TRPA, and Mike LeFevre-USFS.

North Shore real estate agent Sue Daniels asked why the Caltrans signs can't alert people about red flag warning days and what the state's \$150 rural fire tax will be spent on.

Gaines said he would look into the sign question. As for the tax, he calls it double dipping. The money collected from homeowners won't help CalFire or any firefighting efforts.

Keenan explained the tax means \$89 million for CalFire, but in reality the department's budget from the state has been reduced by that same amount so the tax is not a net gain to the state fire agency. What people are paying for is unknown. The tax really goes to the general fund to be spent however the governor and Legislature want.

A resident in the Lake Valley area asked what to do about a neighbor who believes doing nothing to their fire prone-shake roof is fine.

Harris said his district received a \$5 million grant from FEMA to deal with just that issue. The money is available to assist homeowners in Lake Valley, Meek's Bay and Fallen Leaf Lake fire districts.

But Harris also encouraged residents to call their local fire department about any defensible space issue and have the firefighters be the bad guys and the court be the enforcer if

it were to get to that point.

Angora burn area resident Susan Ward told the audience of more than 100 how she never received a reverse 911 call five years ago. No one told her Monday night the reason there was no call is because the El Dorado County Sheriff's Department thought the governor had to make that decision. Not so. The county has the capability to use this system without Sacramento's OK – so do other jurisdictions.

While El Dorado County Sheriff John D'Agostini and South Lake Tahoe Police-Fire Chief Brian Uhler attended the forum, neither spoke and neither stayed until the end. They would be the ones to answer how the 911 system works.

The other issue Uhler and D'Agostini could have addressed is the evacuation plan because that is the job of law enforcement. None of the speakers could give any details about how people will be evacuated in the event of an emergency.

It was total chaos five years ago that proved whatever system might have been in place did not work. This proved true the Sunday the fire started and then the Tuesday when the Tahoe Keys area was evacuated when the fire jumped Highway 89.

Grading the work done post-Angora



State Sen. Ted Gaines reveals the agencies in the

Lake Tahoe Basin barely received a passing grade based on the lack of implementation of recommendations post-Angora.

Photos/Kathryn Reed

Gaines had asked the non-partisan Senate Office of Research to examine how the 90 recommendations issued by the bi-state Blue Ribbon Fire Commission that was convened by then Govs. Arnold Schwarzenegger and Jim Gibbons had been implemented.

Sixty have been completed and 10 are in the process. To this, Gaines gave the effort a C-minus grade – barely passing by most standards.

One recommendation of the bi-state commission was to, “Adopt the priority of life, property, and the environment, in that order, with respect to fire safety and fire prevention.” The action taken, according to the report released Monday, was, “Implemented.”

Firefighters have those priorities, but those who control the basin have a different agenda. Water quality is one. Spending grant money to keep their jobs is another. Planning and more planning without implementation appear to be other priorities.

“It’s not an important issue, it’s an urgent issue,” Gaines said of needing to make Lake Tahoe fire safe.

He doesn’t understand when people talk about the importance of Lake Tahoe how protecting it from a devastating fire isn’t at the top of the list. He pointed to the Democrats in the state Legislature not wanting to fund projects that would help Tahoe.

One of the recommendations was to create an 800 number for people to call for information about defensible space guidelines. But the number provided in the report went to a

personal residence when *Lake Tahoe News* called it Monday night.

An “undetermined” was the action for the recommendation, “To avoid continued confusion regarding interagency communications during wildland fire occurrences, all dispatch centers and responding resources in the Tahoe basin will adhere to the existing agreements.”

Considered “implemented” was the recommendation to, “Work with their respective congressional delegation to establish an annual sustainable fund for forest health for the Lake Tahoe Basin.”

But the people speaking on the stage Monday said money is an issue and there is no “sustainable fund” for fuel reduction or firefighting. Congress has not reauthorized the Lake Tahoe Restoration Act that supplied the initial money for environmental projects that included fire related activities. SNPLMA funds are about exhausted. And some entities in the basin would like the remaining Southern Nevada Public Lands Management Act dollars be spent on a loop road on the South Shore instead of fire related issues.

One of the recommendations that was found to be “undermined” was, “Find more stable, long-term funding to replace the stopgap funding provided by the states, likely through the collection of a parcel fee or similar special assessments on property owners.”

Everyone in at the forum would likely have categorized that as “not implemented”.

Going into the burn

Before the evening meeting, Gaines went on a tour of the Angora burn, witnessing the forest as it looks today, talking to homeowners who have rebuilt and seeing a community garden that has sprouted from the ashes.

“We all move to Tahoe because it’s beautiful. We stay because of the people,” Marsha Hudson told Gaines. She said having an evacuation to-do list on the inside of a cupboard helped her family retrieve more belongings than they would have otherwise remembered in such a stressful situation.

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Study: Location of home a key indicator to risk of wildfire

By Bettina Boxall, Los Angeles Times

The expression “location, location, location” doesn’t apply just to buying real estate; it can also determine whether a house burns down in a wildfire.

Researchers who studied data on more than 5,500 buildings

damaged or destroyed in Southern California fires during the last decade found the most vulnerable structures were in certain places and certain arrangements.

The results, recently published in the online journal PlosOne.org, have important implications for wildfire protection policies in the Southland, which focus on brush clearance and fireproof construction. That is not enough, say the authors, who argue there are some places where homes simply shouldn't be built.

"We're finding that geography is most important—where is the house located and where are [houses] placed on the landscape," said the paper's lead author, research scientist Alexandra Syphard of the Conservation Biology Institute.

Syphard and her coauthors from the U.S. Geological Survey and the University of Wisconsin gathered data on 700,000 addresses in the Santa Monica Mountains and part of San Diego County. They then mapped the structures that had burned in those areas between 2001 and 2010, a time of devastating wildfires in the region.

Buildings on steep slopes, in Santa Ana wind corridors and in low-density developments intermingled with wild lands were the most likely to have burned. Nearby vegetation was not a big factor in home destruction.

"If you want to predict whether or not a home will be lost in a fire, going out and looking at the surrounding fuels is not going to tell you nearly as much as looking at the location and the frequency of fires in that location in the past," said coauthor Jon Keeley, a USGS research scientist and chaparral expert.

Comparing the state's fire hazard maps with their own results, the researchers also concluded that on a local community scale, the state maps were not very good at identifying the most vulnerable areas.

The state maps estimate fire risk based on wild land fuel distribution, assuming that the denser and older the brush, the greater the threat. Because most of the Santa Monicas are covered with coastal scrub and chaparral, the state maps put most of the range in the medium- or high-risk category.

But during the study period, home loss was concentrated in only a portion of the Santa Monicas: in the Malibu area, which sits in the path of hot, dry Santa Ana winds that carry embers for miles.

Looking at vegetation growing within roughly half a mile of structures, the authors concluded that the exotic grasses that often sprout in areas cleared of brush could be more of a fire hazard than the brush. "We ironically found that homes that were surrounded mostly by grass actually ended up burning more than homes with higher fuel volumes like shrubs," Syphard said.

Read the whole story

Small fire burning near Truckee

By KCRA-TV

Fire crews are battling a fire just east of Truckee, between Truckee and Glenshire.

The fire was reported as an acre in size, with the potential to grow, due to gusting winds.

Multiple agencies are helping fight this fire and are making good progress, according to fire authorities. CalFire said the

blaze is about 50 percent contained.

CalFire also said no homes are being evacuated at this time.

Santa Cruz man drowns in Lake Tahoe

By Cathy Kelly, Santa Cruz Sentinel

The president of Granite Rock Co., Bruce W. Woolpert, died Sunday afternoon while boating in Lake Tahoe, company officials said.

Woolpert, 61, was operating a power boat he owns when he fell and died from injuries suffered in the fall, said Keith Severson, the company's marketing services manager.

The Coast Guard is investigating, Severson said.

Woolpert also served as Graniterock's chairman and chief executive officer and was the grandson of company founder A.R. Wilson. The company split from the larger Granite Construction in 1936. Both are based in Watsonville. Graniterock includes six locations in the Bay Area and two Santa Cruz County sand plants. Company operations are based largely on high-quality aggregate extracted from a quarry in Aromas, Severson said.

Woolpert had a strong work ethic and was a stalwart supporter of local schools and charities, including the United Way, he said. His wife, son and daughter also worked at the company part-time, Severson said.

The Woolpert family and the company's board of directors have appointed Mark Kaminski as chairman of the board and acting

CEO, Severson said.

Placer County Sheriff's Office Capt. Jeff Ausnow said Woolpert's body was found floating near Blackwood Lake Condominiums on the North Shore on Sunday afternoon. There are no signs of foul play.

Woolpert and his wife, Rose Ann, have two children, Marianne and Arthur.

Funeral arrangements are pending, Severson said.