Viability of Squaw Creek, aquifer being studied

By Kathryn Reed

Those tasked with managing water in Olympic Valley, in particular Squaw Creek and the surrounding aquifer, are taking a more methodical approach to studying trends and potential impacts.

The Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board is one of the regulators of this body of water between Tahoe City and Truckee and had requested a workshop on the item; which occurred at the last meeting.

“The state board years ago when they approved our water quality restoration plan for Squaw Creek, which focused on reducing sediment coming from primarily the ski resort, and also the county roads and development in the valley, asked us to also look at the effects of groundwater pumping in the valley,” Lauri Kemper with Lahontan told *Lake Tahoe News*. “Residents had complained that the creek goes dry every fall and fish kills occur due to overpumping for drinking water supply in the valley. Because of the concern and the proposed increased development in the valley, the local water district conducted a study looking at ground and surface water interactions. Pumping does affect creek flows in late summer and wells could be relocated away from the creek closer to the mountain (canyon walls) and reduce chances of lowering creek flows.”

Mike Geary with Squaw Valley Public Services District went over the aquifer/stream flow interaction study at the November meeting.

In addition to SVPSD, the main groundwater pumpers in that basin are Squaw Valley Mutual Water Company, Resort at Squaw

Creek and Squaw Valley Ski Resort. The ski resort has four wells on the valley floor for snowmaking, while Resort at Squaw Creek has an irrigation well for the golf course. SVPSD has four active wells.



Squaw Creek and the surrounding aquifer are how the Olympic Valley gets its drinking and irrigation water. Photo/LTN file

There is plenty of snowmelt to recharge the aquifer each year. It takes eight hours to fill the SVPSD tanks, which uses about 4 percent of the water in the creek, according to Geary. Storage capacity, or the lack of it, is one of the main issues.

“We can’t store enough in the water tanks to be useful,” Geary said. “We struggle to capture some of the water that leaves the valley in the dry months. That is challenging.”

He doesn’t foresee a dam/reservoir being a viable storage alternative.

One thing being talked about is reconfiguring the creek to more of its natural route with the hope less groundwater is lost to the creek. Right now there is a trapezoidal channel that was built by the Army Corps of Engineers before the 1960 Olympics. It drains water from the shallow aquifer into Squaw Creek.

By modifying the trapezoidal channel it would reduce drainage from the shallow aquifer into the channel in spring and early summer.

Also being proposed is moving pumping as far west as possible and reducing or eliminating pumping on the east side of the valley. Developing a formal pumping management strategy has been proposed to map municipal water needs and minimize impacts on the creek.

SVPSD looks at what water usage may be 25 years from now. The big change would be the proposed development in the Squaw Valley Village that would create lodging, retail and recreational entities in what is now the parking lot. Two new wells will be paid for by the ski resort for that project.

Officials have an eye on climate change as well, especially with all the predictions that there will be less snow falling in the Sierra in the coming years. This would mean Squaw Creek would dry out sooner. On the flip side, more rain would mean the aquifer would recharge with those storms.

One thing SVPSD doesn’t have that is a norm in the water business is interties with neighboring districts. It makes these water users a bit isolated and potentially cut off in an emergency.

This is why tying into the Martis Valley has been broached. That proposed $25 million project would inevitably invite a political/environmental firestorm. Still, it’s a battle the district is contemplating.

The Olympic Valley aquifer has a maximum depth of 150 feet and is one-half square mile. The Martis Valley aquifer has a depth of about 800 feet and is 15 square miles.

It is not possible to tap into Lake Tahoe because federal agreements prohibit entities downstream of the lake to use the water.

Multibillion-dollar water measures heading to Calif. ballot

By Kurtis Alexander, San Francisco Chronicle

With a five-year drought and then a winter of floods having exposed the limits of California's vast network of reservoirs, dams and canals, voters are likely to have the chance next year to decide whether to pay for major upgrades to the state's waterworks.

Two multibillion-dollar bonds are expected to go before voters that promise to boost water supplies, offer flood protection and restore rivers and streams. One measure, sponsored by the Legislature, also would fund new parks and hiking trails. The second, a privately backed initiative, would go further to improve the infrastructure that moves water to cities and farms.

Regardless of whether state voters approve either measure, a handful of reservoirs will be built or expanded with billions of dollars from a previously approved water bond.

Read the whole story

Study: Arctic ice loss could spell more drought for Calif.

By Kurtis Alexander, San Francisco Chronicle

Californians may have another reason to keep an eye on melting sea ice in the Arctic – at least if they're concerned about the state's propensity for plunging into damaging droughts.

Alongside the obvious perils for polar bears and other wildlife, as well as the problem of rising ocean levels, the massive ice thaw thousands of miles away is triggering changes in the atmosphere that are likely to shrink rainfall close to home, according to research by scientists at Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory.

Their study outlines a chain of meteorological events that leads to formation of storm-blocking air masses in the North Pacific. The masses are similar to the so-called Ridiculously Resilient Ridge that kept rain from making landfall during California's five-year drought, forcing widespread water rationing in homes, prompting farmers to fallow fields and causing the Central Valley to sink due to heavy pumping of groundwater.

Read the whole story

Tahoe firefighters sent to raging SoCal blaze

More than 15 engines, making up three strike teams, have been deployed from the Lake Tahoe Basin area to the Thomas Fire near Ventura County.

The Thomas Fire started on Dec. 4 at approximately 6:28pm and has burned 45,000 acres and destroyed more than 150 structures.

Engines assigned to the numerous strike teams deployed include: Tahoe Douglas Fire, East Fork Fire, Truckee Fire, North Tahoe Fire, Lake Valley Fire, Truckee Meadows Fire, Sparks Fire, Amador Fire, Mule Creek Fire, North Lake Tahoe Fire, Carson City Fire, South Lake Tahoe Fire, Central Lyon County Fire, and Fallen Leaf Fire.

A fourth strike team has recently been ordered to assist with an additional wildfire burning in Southern California. Resources assigned to the fourth strike team are in the process of being assigned to the incident.

Man sleeping near fireplace severely burned

A man staying at the Ridge Tahoe sustained severe burns to almost 50 percent of his body.

According to Tahoe Douglas fire officials, the victim fell asleep by a radiant fireplace in his room and awoke to find himself on fire.

Just after midnight Dec. 5 he was flown by CalStar from the resort at the top of Kingsbury Grade to the UC Davis Burn Center.

Firefighters were able to keep the fire to his clothing and the carpet.

The name of the man and his hometown have not been released.

Heating incidents are one of the leading causes of deaths in homes. The fire department suggests people read this safety brochure.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Landmark case could affect every cell phone user

By Sara Israelsen-Hartley, Deseret News

SALT LAKE CITY — Anyone carrying a cellphone could be tracked by the government without their knowledge and without permission — which is why legal scholars are encouraging the Supreme Court to set a few more rules regarding privacy in a digital age.

A case argued Wednesday before the high court, Carpenter v. United States, is a "once-in-a-generation" case, asking whether it was constitutional for law enforcement to research the location of a suspected armed robber for 127 days through cellphone tower data without a warrant.

The case brings up questions about expectations of privacy for personal data handled by third parties, how police can access

that data, and what it means to be searched – questions that some experts worry are beyond the power of digitally naive case law to answer, including the long-standing Fourth Amendment, which protects people from unreasonable government search and seizure.

Read the whole story

Cold weather alert for Lake Tahoe Basin

By Tracy Sheldon

The National Weather Service in Reno is forecasting low temperatures in the days ahead.

Starting Dec. 5, a strong high pressure will builds over the area resulting in a prolonged period of strong morning inversions which will be very cold. This pattern will likely last through this weekend and may negatively impact air quality.

Monday night there will be strong east ridge winds. Gusts to 80 mph will likely result in very cold wind chills. Some of these winds will flow down into the area creating boating and tree-fall hazards. Many of our trees are not accustomed to east/northeast wind directions.

As temperatures drop this winter, the American Red Cross offers 10 steps people can take to stay safe during cold weather:

- **Layer up.** Wear layers of lightweight clothing to stay warm. Gloves and a hat will help prevent losing your

body heat.

- **Don’t forget your furry friends.** Bring pets indoors. If they can’t come inside, make sure they have enough shelter to keep them warm and that they can get to unfrozen water.
- **Remember the three foot rule.** If you are using a space heater, place it on a level, hard surface and keep anything flammable (things such as paper, clothing, bedding, curtains or rugs) at least three feet away.
- **Requires supervision.** Turn off space heaters and make sure fireplace embers are out before leaving the room or going to bed.
- **Don’t catch fire.** If you are using a fireplace, use a glass or metal fire screen large enough to catch sparks and rolling logs.
- **Protect your pipes.** Run water, even at a trickle, to help prevent your pipes from freezing. Open the kitchen and bathroom cabinet doors to allow warmer air to circulate around the plumbing. Be sure to move any harmful cleaners and household chemicals out of the reach of children. Keep the garage doors closed if there are water lines in the garage.
- **Better safe than sorry.** Keep the thermostat at the same temperature day and night. Your heating bill may be a little higher, but you could avoid a more costly repair job if your pipes freeze and burst.
- **The kitchen is for cooking.** Never use a stove or oven to heat your home.
- **Use generators outside.** Never operate a generator inside the home, including in the basement or garage.
- **Knowledge is power.** Don’t hook a generator up to the home’s wiring. The safest thing to do is to connect the equipment you want to power directly to the outlets on the generator.

We strongly encourage you to sign up for the **emergency alert**, text messaging service which is part of the city’s

comprehensive emergency notification system. Whether you live in the city limits or the county, sign up now for **reverse 911**.

Tracy Sheldon works for the city of South Lake Tahoe.

Scam involves callers impersonating law enforcement

The Douglas County Sheriff's Office is warning the public that people are falsely saying they are DCSO personnel.

The callers are using DCSO member's names and falsely stating the person has missed a court date and a fine is now due. The caller is asking for a credit card number.

These calls are phone scams and the callers are trying to obtain personal information from those they are calling. The calls may appear local on the resident's caller ID.

DCSO never calls people to notify them they owe money on a warrant or fine.

The public is encouraged to hang up on those calls and never give out personal information on the phone.

Status of snowpack after a

mild November

By Angela Schilling, KTVN-TV

Lake Tahoe is the fullest it’s been for this time of year since the mid 1980s, and according to the National Weather Service, the region would need to have more than one dry winter to go back into a drought.

It usually takes about three dry years for Lake Tahoe to deplete its storage.

As far as the current snow season, the snowpack is doing quite well above 8,000 feet. Looking at the snow water equivalent, the Truckee basin is 145 percent of normal and about the same in Carson and Walker. The Tahoe basin is at 64 percent, as it is lower in elevation.

Read the whole story

Nev. receives $5.7M to keep child health programs running

By Gary Martin, Las Vegas Review-Journal

WASHINGTON — Nevada will receive $5.7 million in unspent funds for federal health care for low-income children, but the state’s entire congressional delegation urged House and Senate leaders Friday to quickly reauthorize the program that expired two months ago.

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services notified the state that it would receive the redistribution of unspent

funds, which should allow Nevada to provide Children’s Health Insurance Program services through January.

Nevada was expected to run out of CHIP funds around Dec. 15, prompting Gov. Brian Sandoval and the state’s bipartisan congressional delegation to urge quick action to reauthorize the program.

Read the whole story