

Sale of historic Cal Neva on shaky ground

By Dale Kasler, Sacramento Bee

Tech billionaire and real estate fanatic Larry Ellison might back away from a deal to buy Frank Sinatra's old Lake Tahoe casino.

Ellison's \$35.8 million purchase of the faded Cal Neva Resort & Casino has been tied up in court for more than a month, and the Oracle Corp. founder isn't willing to wait much longer, federal bankruptcy officials warned in a court filing last week.

If Ellison drops out, the Cal Neva would be left in limbo. The 91-year-old resort has been a fixture on Tahoe's north shore but has out of business since 2013 and is decades removed from its glory days.

Read the whole story

Tahoe's murky near shore getting more attention

By Kathryn Reed

While a uniform strategy is working to bring more clarity to Lake Tahoe as a whole, that is not the case for the water closest to the shore.

That is the conundrum scientists and regulating agencies are

finding themselves in. There is no magic solution to clean up, so to speak, the murky, algae-ridden water by beaches. This is in direct contrast to the various initiatives to reduce sediment from the lake that is blamed for the lack of clarity.

The near shore, as those tasked with managing call it, is defined as “the low water elevation to a depth of 30 feet, or to a minimum width of 350 feet.”

Bob Larsen with the Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board this month updated the board about what staff and others are doing to improve the quality near the shore.

As has been stated many times, the data is lacking – especially compared to lake clarity. Then there is the quandary of data and anecdotal testimony from longtime locals not being in sync. Data show things aren’t that much different, but those who have lived in the basin for a while or visited the area seem to be a chorus stating things are much different, and not in a good way.

Making things difficult is that conditions vary depending on where on the lake studies are conducted. That requires the need for multiple solutions, which to date have been somewhat elusive. This in part is because studies should involve fish, algae, aquatic invasive species and more.

Money is often a barrier. And then there are competing interests. Plus, it wasn’t until a few years ago that a coalition was put together to tackle near-shore issues.

Algae – some floating, some attached to rocks – is one of the bigger concerns, at least for the public.

At Crater Lake algae has been increasing in the last few years. That body of water in Oregon has similarities to Tahoe.

Larsen said at Crater Lake officials believe crayfish may be responsible for the algae growth. That could be a factor in

Tahoe, where the crustaceans were introduced decades ago.

Another concern is there has been an increase of algae in wilderness lakes in Lahontan's jurisdiction, which goes from the Oregon border to Southern California through the Sierra. There's the potential to do a peer watershed study. Lake Tahoe, which is a highly disturbed lake when it comes to plant and animal species being introduced, could be compared to a higher elevation lake that has not been artificially changed. Though, there are some lakes that have been stocked with fish.

Lahontan is looking for partners to investigate the ecological change at Lake Tahoe to determine the impacts on native species. Ecological studies would determine biological changes, while climate change has physical drivers.

With the cyanobacteria, or blue-green algae, bloom this summer in the Tahoe Keys, human health concerns at the near shore are now a very real concern. This was the first such outbreak in the basin.

This winter/spring the near shore action plan from 2014 will be updated. Next summer an aquatic plants survey will be conducted, along with a microorganisms and toxin survey pertaining to human health, and further algae research. The plant survey will include marinas – unlike previous surveys, “to understand what is going on with native and nonnative species.”

Substantive garbage rate

increase on South Shore



South Tahoe Refuse plans to raise rates beginning Jan. 1. Photo/LTN

By Kathryn Reed

One of the largest rate increases ever requested by South Tahoe Refuse is expected to go into effect Jan. 1.

While the respective jurisdictions still must approve the increase, the Waste Management Joint Powers Authority board this week signed off on it. South Lake Tahoe customers would see an 8.81 percent increase, El Dorado County 9.34 percent and Douglas County 6.81 percent. On a monthly residential bill this would equate to an increase of \$2.34 to \$28.89, \$2.85 to \$33.32 and \$1.21 to \$18.93, respectively.

STR had wanted a 10 percent increase, but the auditing firm tasked with analyzing the proposal came back with the lower rates.

According to the report from Crowe Horwath, without the rate increase STR has a projected revenue shortfall of \$1,370,489 for 2018.

The larger increase in large part has to do with a credit from the construction of the resource recovery facility (RRF) going away.

“STR removed the RRF fund credit which had been paid to JPA jurisdiction ratepayers, to account for excess rate revenues collected during the construction of the RRF. On March 2, 2012, the JPA approved a RRF fund credit of \$4,722,285, with a six-year payback period, applied in base years, beginning in 2012,” the report says.

Beginning in 2018 that credit is gone.

“This is the most significant factor in causing rates to increase for 2018, and effectively represents approximately 50 percent of the requested rate increase,” the report states.

Lake Tahoe News asked STR President Jeff Tillman if these sorts of rate increases will become the norm.

“I certainly hope not to see these,” Tillman told *LTN*. “That’s why we said it could be spread over two years.”

It will be up to the individual jurisdictions to OK the full increase for 2018, or for it to be split with two-thirds of the proposal taking affect next year and the remainder in 2019.

Other reasons for the rate increase are labor and disposal expenses. Employees are getting a 3.4 percent raise, health insurance has gone up 6.7 percent, and workers’ comp bills soared 19.4 percent.

The South Lake Tahoe-based refuse company per its contract is permitted every three years to come back with a base rate adjustment. This is what these increases are. However, the company may seek interim rate increases as well, which in large part are based on the Consumer Price Index. Those increases are usually 2 to 3 percent. Rates at the start of

this year went up less than 2 percent in each jurisdiction, with no increase in 2016.

More than 1 answer to how well Nev. funds education

By Amelia Pak-Harvey and Meghin Delaney, Las Vegas Review-Journal

Talk to just about anyone in Nevada and they'll agree that the state's public education system needs to improve.

But the unanimity ends there.

Superintendents and many education advocates have long called for the Legislature to put more money into schools.

But many legislators and other critics say they want evidence that the school districts are spending wisely and getting results before giving them more money.

[Read the whole story](#)

EDSO going after porch package thieves

El Dorado County sheriff's deputies are taking a proactive approach to stopping what has become a regular crime – stealing packages from porches.

Undercover detectives will be delivering bait packages filled with fake electronics and GPS devices to residences across El Dorado County. The county is partnering with the U.S. Postal Service in this operation.

The tracking device will allow detectives to find where the package goes.

Detectives are asking the public to report any unusual behavior.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Washoe Meadows wins suit against State Parks

By Kathryn Reed

Lake Tahoe Golf Course's footprint will not be expanding any time soon. This is because Washoe Meadows Community prevailed in court against California State Parks.

Nearly six years to the day after the **initial lawsuit** was filed in Alameda Superior Court, the First District Court of Appeal this month upheld the lower court's **April 2015 decision** which in effect ruled the environmental documents are invalid.

This means State Parks, which has owned the 777 acres that comprises Washoe Meadows State Park and Lake Valley Recreation Area in Meyers since 1984, must start over with its desires to revamp the Upper Truckee River in that location, and put on hold its desire to move some of the golf holes across the

river.

To make the state's plans work would have meant reclassification of some of the land. Downgrading actual State Parks land would have been unprecedented.

El Dorado County officials had protested the state's plans as well.

The appellate court said, "The public was not provided with an accurate, stable and finite project description on which to comment," which is required by law. The draft environmental impact report "did not identify a proposed project but described five very different alternative projects."



Washoe Meadows State Park will remain as it is per a court decision. Photos/LTN file

State law through the California Environmental Quality Act demands that a preferred alternative be identified and studied in order for the public to have an opportunity to comment on the proposal and to bring transparency to the process. That didn't happen. While federal law is different and through the National Environmental Policy Act multiple options may be studied at once without a preferred alternative, the appellate court said, "California courts will not follow NEPA precedent that is contrary to CEQA."

The court further said, "In this case the differences between the five alternative projects was vast, each creating a different footprint on public land."

Lynne Paulson, who spearheaded the lawsuit with the backing of the Washoe Meadows Community, said, "This reaffirms all the comments we had about this project from Day 1. Now we have to wait and see what other projects State Parks propose."

While Paulson and others would like to celebrate this victory, now isn't the time. "We are not done with our work," Paulson told *Lake Tahoe News*. "Washoe Meadows Community will stay engaged in order to ensure a transparent process along with a project that benefits the environment and the general public by minimizing the destruction of what was set aside due to its natural resource values."

Although the court made its decision on Nov. 15, Sierra District Superintendent Marilyn Linkem said she was unaware until *Lake Tahoe News* called.

"We are evaluating the court opinion," Linkem told *LTN*. She would not say anything else, so it's unknown what State Parks' next move will be.

The park has never had a master plan. It also doesn't receive much attention from the state or even the local Sierra District headquarters, though trails have been improved in recent years. Officials had said a planning document for the

park could not start until the lawsuit was settled.

The golf course continues to operate on a year-to-year lease.

Fire retardant use brings environmental worries

By Matt Weiser, Water Deeply

Chemical fire retardants are considered a vital wildland firefighting tool, helping to slow the spread of flames while ground crews move into position. But as their use increases, the harmful side effects of these chemicals are coming under increasing scrutiny.

The chemicals, usually dropped from low-flying aircraft, largely consist of ammonia compounds, which are known toxins to fish and other aquatic life. Studies have shown retardants can kill fish, alter soil chemistry, feed harmful algae blooms and even encourage the spread of invasive plants. Yet there is little regulation of their use, and no safer alternatives on the market.

In California, state firefighting crews have applied 15.3 million gallons of chemical fire retardants so far this year, according to data provided by CalFire, the state's wildland firefighting agency. That's a new record, and double the amount used just three years ago.

Read the whole story

Legalization a boon to more than just pot markets

By Chris Kudialis, Las Vegas Sun

Legalization of marijuana in eight states – including Nevada – in last year's election has opened the floodgates for pot businesses to make money.

That's according to more than a dozen business owners whose products are both directly marketed at buyers in the pot sector, and in similar industries such as farming and plant cultivation.

"Let's put it like this: A rising tide takes all ships," said Stuart Titus, CEO of San Diego-based General Hemp. "It's incredible to see the growth in the industry."

Read the whole story

STHS teacher placed on leave for unknown reasons



Paul Kushner

For the second time in five years South Tahoe High School math instructor Paul Kushner has been placed on administrative leave.

In 2013 it had to do with him looking at inappropriate websites of scantily clad women while he was at work.

No one in the district is saying why the tenured teacher is out this time or for how long. He is on paid leave.

Kushner also directs the choirs at the high school, which are almost always only comprised of young women.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Study: 4.2M kids experience homelessness each year

By Leila Fadel, NPR

Marquan Ellis was evicted from his home in Las Vegas when he was 18.

His mother battled with a drug and gambling addiction while he stayed at his godmother's house. But he couldn't stay there forever.

He found his way to the Nevada Partnership for Homeless Youth where he enrolled in the independent living program.

He isn't sure what he would have done if he hadn't found that program: "I would have been on the street looking for someone to help, looking for my next meal, looking for my next shower, looking for my next place to sleep."

Like Ellis, nearly 4.2 million young people experience unaccompanied homelessness in the course of a year, according to a study from Chapin Hall a research center at the University of Chicago.

Read the whole story