

Nevada scrutinizing renewable energy options

By Sean Whaley, Nevada News Bureau

CARSON CITY — Gov. Brian Sandoval this week issued an executive order directing a state agency and task force to assess the regional market for Nevada's renewable energy resources.

In a briefing with Sandoval senior adviser Dale Erquiaga and Nevada State Office of Energy Director Stacey Crowley, it was explained that the assessment is intended to help determine if alternative energy resources can be developed in the state for transmission to California to meet its ambitious alternative energy goals.

The order directs the New Energy Industry Task Force to facilitate "the timely development of transmission facilities and renewable energy resources in this state"

Crowley said she expects to name the 11 members of the task force by Dec. 1, with the goal of having a first meeting before the end of the year. A technical advisory committee will also be appointed, with representatives from the Public Utilities Commission, among others, to assist in the charge given the panel by Sandoval.

Erquiaga said clean energy is one of the sectors identified in the report released last week by the Brookings Institution and SRI International offering guidance to Sandoval and policy makers on economic diversification and new job creation. The report identifies seven economic sectors, some already in existence such as gaming and tourism, and some emerging such as clean energy, where Nevada should focus its efforts.

"How do we get a market for clean energy generated in this

state?" Erquiaga asked. "We have to be able to put it on the grid and transmit it, really, to the hungry market over the hill in California."

Erquiaga said the transmission line discussion has been going on for some time, particularly by NV Energy.

"Part of this conversation is about the 'where' the stuff goes, part of this conversation is about the business case; if we generate it, will they buy it," he said.

The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission has also issued an order mandating that areas of the U.S. look at the regional development of transmission lines, Crowley said.

Crowley's office will oversee the work of the task force, which is an existing statutory committee. The panel has until Aug. 1, 2012, to report to Sandoval on the business case for the production and transmission of renewable energy for both native and regional requirements.

The deadline is to ensure enough time for the drafting of any legislation that may be needed to implement the task force recommendations, and to allow for any budgetary considerations.

"We need to understand the costs associated with that transmission, and the benefits to Nevadans, whether it be new tax base, job creation, etc.," Crowley said. "So those numbers need to be determined in order for us to make a business case to say, California we think we can give you our renewable energy. We may have to build some transmission lines to get there, but it will still be worth it for you, there is still value in it for both states."

Crowley said California has a goal of obtaining 33 percent of its energy needs through alternative sources by 2020.

Nevada's goal is 25 percent of its energy consumption coming

from alternative energy by 2025.

Erquiaga said Nevada officials are working closely with California Gov. Jerry Brown's staff on the potential of supplying alternative energy to the state. Brown and Sandoval discussed the issue at an energy summit in Las Vegas in August, he said.

Placer County working on a blueprint for Lake Tahoe

By Katherine E. Hill

KINGS BEACH – Wanted: Local residents and business owners to serve for at least two years on one of four committees to help direct future planning and growth on Tahoe's North and West shores.

That's the message from Placer County officials at a recent meeting on the Community Plan Update, a multi-year planning project that will determine the future of commercial and residential growth in the Lake Tahoe Basin from the state line in Kings Beach to the El Dorado County line on the West Shore.

The plan will address zoning and design guidelines for land use, housing, safety issues, transportation and conservation across four plans areas: North Tahoe East from east of Highway 267 to the state line, including Kings Beach; North Tahoe West from west of Highway 267 through Cedar Flat; Great Tahoe City from Cedar Flat through Tahoe City and down the West Shore to the Granlibakken area; and West Shore from Granlibakken to the county line in Tahoma.



Placer County
is working on
its community
plans in the
Lake Tahoe
Basin.

The community plans are joint planning documents that were adopted by Placer County and the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency nearly 20 years ago. Now, the TRPA is in the process of updating its Regional Plan and the community plans for counties and city around the Tahoe basin must be inline with that plan.

Placer County is taking on the process of updating its 20-year-old plans for the North and West shores to fall in line with TRPA guidelines. Placer County is consolidating the nine plan areas that now exist into the four plan areas being reviewed.

During a quick-paced presentation by Placer County Supervising Planner Crystal Jacobsen, the audience of more than 100 residents and business owners heard the county's plan to address each area as an individual community for growth, housing, commercial and transportation issues. The call now is for residents, business owners and those with environmental interests in the plan area to serve on a committee that will help to develop the plans for these area. A task that Jacobsen says will likely take at least two years.

"The key factors are to have a good balance of commercial and residential uses," Jacobsen told the audience.

Committee members are being recruited now, with applications accepted through Nov. 30. The committees will be appointed in early January, with the county hosting open houses about every two months to gather public input on the plan.

Committees will be made up of seven to nine people, and members are required to either be a resident of or a business owner in the plan area of the committee that they wish to serve on, or, to have an environmental interest in the plan area. Membership on the committees is not open to second homeowners, however, but they may voice concerns at the public open houses, Jacobsen said.

While Placer County is recruiting committee members, county officials are already at work on proposed zoning maps for the plan areas as part of the Technical Committee, made up of representatives from utility districts, fire districts and other government agencies.

“The idea is that the framework will be set (by the first workshop),” Jacobsen said. “We’ll then break out those subareas and decide the overall look and design.”

The Community Plan Update is based on the Pathway 2007 document that Placer County completed four years ago to serve as a guide for development until 2027. Pathways 2007 calls for reinvesting in the basin’s communities, including workforce housing, commercial and lodging for tourists; improving the gateway areas to the county; improving transportation, including non-motorized uses for residents and visitors; and to address water quality and environmental improvements.

Details on the Community Plan Update and the maps of the four plan areas are available online under Planning Services Division. Applications to serve on the committees also are available on the site.

Proving Congress is getting rich off Wall Street

By Peter J. Boyer, Newsweek

In the spring of 2010, a bespectacled, middle-aged policy wonk named Peter Schweizer fired up his laptop and began a months-long odyssey into a forbidding maze of public databases, hunting for the financial secrets of Washington's most powerful politicians. Schweizer had been struck by the fact that members of Congress are free to buy and sell stocks in companies whose fate can be profoundly influenced, or even determined, by Washington policy, and he wondered, do these ultimate insiders act on what they know? Yes, Schweizer found, they certainly seem to. Schweizer's research revealed that some of Congress's most prominent members are in a position to routinely engage in what amounts to a legal form of insider trading, profiting from investment activity that, he says, "would send the rest of us to prison."

Schweizer, who is 47, lives in Tallahassee with his wife and children ("New York or D.C. would be too distracting—I'd never get any writing done") and commutes regularly to Stanford, where he is the William J. Casey research fellow at the Hoover Institution. His circle of friends includes some bare-knuckle combatants in the partisan frays (such as conservative media impresario Andrew Breitbart), but Schweizer himself comes across more as a bookish researcher than the right-wing hit man liberal critics see. Indeed, he sounds somewhat surprised, if gratified, to have attracted attention with his findings. "To me, it's troubling that a fellow at Stanford who lives in Florida had to dig this up."

It was in his Tallahassee office that Schweizer began what he thought was a promising research project: combing through congressional financial-disclosure records dating back to 2000 to see what kinds of investments legislators were making. He quickly learned that Capitol Hill has quite a few market players. He narrowed his search to a dozen or so members—the leaders of both houses, as well as members of key committees—and focused on trades that coincided with big policy initiatives of the sort that could move markets.

While examining trades made around the time of the 2003 Medicare overhaul, Schweizer experienced what he calls his “Holy crap!” moment. The legislation, which created a new prescription-drug entitlement, promised to be a huge boon to the pharmaceutical industry—and to savvy investors in the Capitol. Among those with special insight on the issue was Massachusetts Sen. John Kerry, chairman of the health subcommittee of the Senate’s powerful Finance Committee. Kerry is one of the wealthiest members of the Senate and heavily invested in the stock market. As the final version of the drug program neared approval—one that didn’t include limits on the price of drugs—brokers for Kerry and his wife were busy trading in Big Pharma. Schweizer found that they completed 111 stock transactions of pharmaceutical companies in 2003, 103 of which were buys.

“They were all great picks,” Schweizer notes. The Kerrys’ capital gains on the transactions were at least \$500,000, and as high as \$2 million (such information is necessarily imprecise, as the disclosure rules allow members to report their gains in wide ranges). It was instructive to Schweizer that Kerry didn’t try to shape legislation to benefit his portfolio; the apparent key to success was the shaping of trades that anticipated the effect of government policy.

Read the whole story

Bay Area residents scooping up houses in Tahoe basin

By Pete Carey, San Jose Mercury News

Lake Tahoe area real estate agents, hungry for sales in the aftermath of the housing bubble, are counting on the Bay Area's booming tech industry to help generate the next crop of million-dollar vacation home buyers.

Sales of million dollar-plus Tahoe homes are down about 30 percent from the third quarter of 2010, according to Coldwell Banker. While sales of luxury homes have improved recently, a flock of freshly minted IPO millionaires can't come soon enough for Tahoe real estate agents.

"People are starting to feel a little bit better about things. Silicon Valley is kind of spearheading that revival. We're seeing those folks make their way into the Tahoe market," said Jim Telling of East-West Partners, the developer of Home Run at Northstar.

Some buyers from the tech industry have snapped up vacation homes recently that run from \$1 million to \$4 million or more.

For example, more than 20 parcels at Martis Camp – a 2,100-acre custom lot development between Truckee and Northstar – have been scooped up by employees of tech companies such as Google, Facebook, VMware and Apple, according to the development's spokesman.

One Apple employee bought at Home Run, a small mountainside ski-in, ski-out village of townhomes, where luxury real estate sells for \$1.75 million to \$2.2 million.

Another Apple employee sold some stock and purchased a place at Incline Village recently, reportedly for \$3 million.

Read the whole story

State senators see broad management problems in Caltrans

By Charles Piller, Sacramento Bee

In a sometimes contentious legislative hearing Tuesday, state senators told California Department of Transportation officials that their management of data falsification by a technician in one of the agency's testing units suggests pervasive management problems.

"I'm a little bit troubled about what seems to be a systemic problem in the agency," said Sen. Bob Huff, R-Diamond Bar. "I'm concerned that it took a whistle-blower and the press to bring this to light

"I can only imagine if you were a private entity caught in falsifying data, what the consequences would be."

The Senate transportation committee's hearing was called to address the findings of a recent Bee investigation concerning fabricated data, improper test methods and apparent misuse of state property in the Foundation Testing Branch, which examines the integrity of underground supports for bridges and other freeway structures. The Bee found that Duane Wiles, a technician who fabricated data on three structures, also examined the foundations for portions of the new Bay Bridge

eastern span, slated for completion in 2013.

Huff suggested that the state might consider moving some Caltrans responsibilities to county agencies as part of a realignment of budget priorities.

Read the whole story

Judge taking a month to rule on Kindertown's future

Kindertown Day Care will remain closed as El Dorado County Superior Court Judge Warren Stracener reviews charge brought against the South Lake Tahoe center by the state.

At a hearing last week in Placerville that was attended by supporters of day care owner Maria Barrows-Crist, Stracener said he would have a decision in a month.

Kindertown was closed earlier this month after the state Department of Social Services went to the appellate court.

Barrows-Crist represented herself in court.

"I correct every citation I get. Then they pile them together and use them against me. I feel like it's double jeopardy," Barrows-Crist told *Lake Tahoe News*. "I feel horribly discriminated against."

The state does not return phone calls.

— Kathryn Reed

State forcing South Tahoe drug task force to disband

By Kathryn Reed

Drug dealers and users may have something to celebrate with the New Year. For everyone else it might not be such good news that the South Lake El Dorado Narcotics Enforcement Team is disbanding.



SLEDNET is one of the 34 drug task forces being forced to shutdown because of state budget cuts. The remaining 18 operations in the state rely solely on federal money.

While the local agency has been around since 1988, the joint task forces of federal, state and local law enforcement have been part of the Bureau of Narcotic Enforcement since 1976. This is the oldest state narcotics bureau in the country, having started in 1927.

On Dec. 31, 170 agents employed by California will work their last day. This is part of Gov. Jerry Brown's quest to cut \$71 million from the Department of Justice budget over the next two years.

"If you take away the threat of being caught in this community, it is going to be disastrous," Jeff Catchings,

SLEDNET commander, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

"It would not be good. I cannot say that enough," he said of eliminating the narcotics task force.

Catchings works for the state, but is one of the agents with enough longevity to be spared receiving a pink slip. Between now and the end of the year he is working with local law enforcement and the state to keep SLEDNET functioning in some manner.

In addition to Catchings, officers from South Lake Tahoe Police Department, El Dorado County Sheriff's Department and California Highway Patrol are part of SLEDNET.

What the state brings to the table are resources and money. The state has a greater ability to gather intelligence, especially with drug trafficking, than local jurisdictions have.

"We are trying hard and looking at every avenue we can to keep this task force intact," Sheriff John D'Agostini told *Lake Tahoe News*. "All the typical results you see in a drug ridden community, you would see that increase in the basin (without SLEDNET)."

All the local players are looking at operating SLEDNET – just without the state's oversight. No money comes out of the local agencies' general funds for the drug team – it's grants and drug forfeiture money that pays for things. What the state picked up was Catchings' salary and equipment.

Police Chief Brian Uhler said he and D'Agostini are trying to meet with Attorney General Kamala Harris to keep the asset forfeiture money in town to go solely for SLEDNET. That meeting, though, has not been arranged.

It might not matter if the meeting happens because Harris has been outspoken in not agreeing with the governor's decision,

saying she wants more control in how to make the cuts to her department. But she is not getting her way.

If the state doesn't help resolve the issue, Uhler wants the police and sheriff's departments to pick up the commander's salary. But that will take an act of the City Council and Board of Supervisors to reallocate funds.

Uhler said the drug problem on the South Shore is huge, and that it would be worse without SLEDNET. He points to the heroin busts in town in the last year as examples of why SLEDNET must stay intact.

Catchings said marijuana is another significant problem here.

Highway 50 and the airport are conduits for drug traffickers.

"The FAA is constantly tracking tail numbers. A lot of things happen behind the scenes that people don't realize," Catchings said.

Looking at what climate change will mean for California

By Matt Weiser, Sacramento Bee

The songbirds at the feeder outside your window are not the same as they used to be. The goldfinch, the grosbeak and even the ever-present sparrow are all a little bit bigger.

The reason is climate change, according to a new study, which found that 70 bird species, all common to Central California, have evolved a longer wingspan and greater body mass over the past 40 years.

Scientists think such adaptations, in annual increments of less than a tenth of a percent on average, help birds cope with food shortages and stronger storms already triggered by climate change.

"We need to be thinking about things like extreme weather and other ways climate change is going to impact our ecosystems, and those things are not just important for birds," said Nat Seavy, co-author of the bird study and research director at PRBO Conservation Science, a research facility in Petaluma. "They are important for farmers and all sorts of people."

The evidence is just one piece of a new wave of research slowly painting a more vivid picture of what climate change may mean for California. The studies also reflect a new effort by scientists to help the public understand climate change by speaking plainly.

"We struggled mightily to translate these results into lessons that could be useful to policymakers and resource managers," said James Cloern, a biologist at the U.S. Geological Survey

in Menlo Park and lead author of a comprehensive new climate study on the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta.

“We don’t want to scare people with this paper. We want to put them in a position where they can start thinking and planning.”

Read the whole story

Parking tickets issued to people at community Thanksgiving dinner

People attending and volunteering at the annual community Thanksgiving Dinner at Grace Hall have one less thing to be thankful for – the South Lake Tahoe Police Department.

Ten parking tickets were issued Nov. 21 to people parking along the frontage street in front of the tennis courts at South Tahoe Middle School. Lots of signs are posted.

South Lake Tahoe spokeswoman Nancy Kerry told *Lake Tahoe News* the parking enforcement officer said all the tickets were for parking in the fire lane.

One volunteer told *LTN* people have been parking there for years. After all, this is the 23rd year the event has taken place.

But the city has said it is not tolerating parking violators.

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*

Reno fire contained, 29 homes lost, 8 damaged

By Brian Duggan, Reno Gazette-Journal

Cheryl Wilson still had bruises on her hands Sunday, a painful reminder of the frantic moments after awakening to smoke at 2am Friday, then running to her neighbors' doors on Starr Meadows Loop to pound on them as hard as she could.

The victim of a house fire in 2005, Wilson said her first instinct was to notify people on her street before packing up her car and leaving with her husband and two dogs as the Caughlin Fire approached their neighborhood.

"So I knew the No. 1 thing was to get people out," she said. "Anything else can be replaced. It's just stuff. But you got to save people's lives."

They watched the fire roar with a pair of binoculars while perched on top of the Peppermill parking garage that night. When they returned on Saturday, their house had been spared by the inferno. Their next-door neighbor's home, however, was uninhabitable with a red marker telling everyone to stay away from its charred remains.

"It's a horrible thing to see happen to your neighbors," Wilson said. "I just thank God that they're all alive."

From her backyard porch that overlooks the Truckee Meadows, Wilson looked at the homes still standing despite the 1,935-acre blaze that ultimately destroyed 29 homes, damaging eight others – seven seriously.

"Look at the devastation that could have happened."

Residents continued picking up the pieces on Sunday as officials from insurance agencies, the Red Cross and restoration businesses made their rounds in the southwestern Reno neighborhoods. Fire officials patrolled the area, too, ensuring people stayed out of the homes deemed too unsafe for entry.

Officials said Sunday evening that the Caughlin Fire was 100 percent contained after more than 100 firefighters spent the day looking for hot spots, doing what they could to extinguish them as heavy snowflakes started falling in the afternoon.

Many of those smoldering areas were inside some of the 29 demolished homes, said Mark Regan, the spokesman for the Sierra Front Management Team overseeing the response to the Caughlin Fire.

Read the whole story