

Reno fire far from contained; homes remain threatened

Publisher's note: *South Lake Tahoe firefighters have been sent to Reno.*

By Reno Gazette-Journal

9:30pm: Containment for the Caughlin Fire was at zero percent Friday night, and 2,000 homes remained threatened. A cause had not been determined. About 2,300 customers remained without power as the result of the fire reported at 12:22am.

8:45pm: About 455 firefighters are on duty – including 150 overnight – looking for hot spots, contain fire and assess the damage. Thirty fire engines are to remain on patrol overnight. About,2000 homes remain threatened.



Firefighters
struggle to
contain the
Reno blaze.
Photo/Reno
Gazette-
Journal

8:15pm: Blaze stands at 2,000 acres with 0% containment at Caughlin Fire. No cause yet for the fire. The Caughlin Fire stands at about 2,000 acres with 21 structures damaged. No

cause of the for the fire determined, fire officials said.

7:30pm: Areas where homes were lost or damaged include Gibraltar Drive, Pioneer Drive, Quiet Meadows Court, Meadow Valley Lane and Lakeridge Shores West, officials said. Residents in the area also reported homes on Alpine Creek Road had been burned.

6:40pm: Officials said they did not expect to begin allowing evacuated residents to return home until about noon Saturday. Affected homeowners were urged to contact authorities for updates on evacuation status.

6:10pm: Firefighters said they saved 4,000 or more homes from a late-season wildfire that burned about 2,000 acres and could have been far worse.

Read the whole story

2 people die at Colorado ski resorts

By Kieran Nicholson, Denver Post

Two people were killed today in accidents on Colorado ski slopes.

A 62-year-old man was killed during opening day on Vail Mountain. The *Summit Daily News* reported the man died this morning in an accident while skiing on Gitalong Road, a beginner trail.

Meanwhile, a 20-year-old snowboarder died at Breckenridge Medical Center after he hit a tree at an intermediate run at

Breckenridge Ski Resort.

The snowboarder was identified by the Summit County Coroner as Evan Massini, a CU-Boulder student from Westbrook, Conn.

Read the whole story

Ash from woodstoves start small fires off Pioneer Trail

U.S. Forest Service and Lake Valley firefighters recently quickly doused two fires of less than a quarter acre each off Pioneer Trail.



Both were caused by people dumping hot ashes from a woodstove or fireplace in the woods. One was Nov. 3 and the other Nov. 16.

“The change in our weather doesn’t mean we can stop paying attention to fire prevention,” LTBMU fire prevention officer Beth Brady said in a statement. “Woodstove ashes can retain enough heat to start a fire in your home or surrounding forest for many days after you think your fire’s out.”

Officials said neither house had defensible space, and the resulting wildfires could have destroyed the home or adjacent structures. Residents can be cited for “negligently placing any material that could start a fire,” which carries a \$350 fine. They also can be held responsible for the costs of fire suppression.

State and local fire agencies recommend placing ashes in a metal container, which should not be stored in the house or garage, or on any flammable surface, such as a deck. The ashes should cool for at least four days before final disposal, and any hot spots doused with water.

Winds wreak havoc, destroy one South Lake Tahoe house

By Kathryn Reed

This particular Christmas tree will not have any presents under it next month. No children will fill the four twin beds upstairs.

That's because this house on Anita Avenue in South Lake Tahoe has been condemned.

Greg Falkner got a call from a neighbor at 6am Friday saying a tree had gone through the house. He drove up from Alameda and this afternoon was moving belongings to more secure areas of the home.

It's so bad he doesn't plan to show his wife any pictures.



No one was
home when a

tree crashed
into a bedroom
of a house on
Anita Avenue.
Photos/Kathryn
Reed

“Last weekend people were sleeping in there,” Falkner says of the room with the twin beds. Three beds are next to the wall and below the roof where much of the damage occurred.

Someone easily could have been impaled had they been sleeping there. Tree limbs are on the floor. The beds are sunken into the garage below.

The house has been in Falkner’s family for 36 years. Last summer he bought it from his parents. He spent six months fixing it up. It may take longer than that this time around.

General contractor Tony Piscitelli was on site helping clean up the mess. Next step was to take the dormer off and seal the holes on the house with plywood for the winter.



The house has
been
condemned.

Piscitelli estimates the Jeffery pine was 80-feet tall and 3½ feet in diameter. Ed Cook was at the house about 8am taking away the tree that was rotten on the inside.

Houses on both sides of the Falkner’s also sustained damage,

but are livable.

The National Weather Service said the highest wind gust clocked at Lake Tahoe Airport was 56 mph early Friday morning. Ridge tops had gusts of more than 100 mph.

The U.S. Coast Guard reported swells on the lake at 4 feet. Lake Tahoe continues to be a sea of white caps. The wind advisory is in effect until 4pm Nov. 18.

“It’s mainly a cold and windy storm,” said Jessica Kielhorn, meteorology technician with the National Weather Service in Reno. “It’s a very quick moving storm.”

Snow started falling on the North Shore in the late morning, with flurries being spit out on the South Shore by the afternoon. Snow totals aren’t expected to be much – 1-3 inches at lake level by Saturday morning, 4-6 inches at the higher elevations.

Winds were strong enough to prevent Heavenly Mountain Resort from opening Friday. This is the third consecutive year Mother Nature has delayed the opening. The gondola is slated to open Nov. 19 at 8:30am.



White caps on Lake Tahoe, with 4-foot waves spotted on the North Shore.

Liberty Energy said the storm has kept crews busy, but not with major problems. Branches on power lines and sporadic outages have affected customers.

NV Energy did not return a call, though they are working with significant power issues related to the devastating Reno fire.

Sgt. Shannon Laney with the South Lake Tahoe Police Department said a tree on Chonokis fell in the street and was cleared, a power line fell on Apache, wires were hanging on Seneca and part of the traffic signal at Al Tahoe was damaged.

Mostly it was burglar alarms that kept officers busy. Winds trigger them.

Kielhorn said most of the snow would come overnight. The cold will stay through Saturday with a high on both ends of the lake expected to be in the low 30s and the overnight low for Friday and Saturday in the teens.

State puts hold on contract with NDOT liaison

By Sean Whaley, Nevada News Bureau

CARSON CITY — A 23-month, \$280,000 contract approved by the Nevada Department of Transportation for a private sector individual to work as a liaison between the agency and contractors seeking work has been put on hold because of concerns expressed by Gov. Brian Sandoval and other members of the NDOT Board of Directors.

The contract with William “Buzz” Harris to serve as an ombudsman between the agency and bidders on contracts was

approved by the agency in September, but NDOT Director Susan Martinovich said it will be put on hold while concerns raised at the board meeting this week are resolved.

The board was told the \$280,000 is the amount that can be spent on the services provided by Harris from August through June 2013, but is not guaranteed. Harris, who was selected after a request for proposals was issued by the agency, would be paid \$100 an hour under the contract, which would include most of his expenses.

But Sandoval, who serves as chairman of the NDOT board of directors, noted the potential contract cost is well in excess of what even he earns as governor.

Other members of the board also raised questions about the contract, including Lt. Gov. Brian Krolicki, who said such positions are usually filled internally by an agency rather than bringing in someone from the outside.

Attorney General Catherine Cortez Masto, also a member of the board, asked for information about who submitted proposals for the contract.

"My understanding is historically and traditionally an ombudsman position is contained within the respective department, and that person would have an encyclopedic knowledge of the operation," Sandoval said. "With an external ombudsman, that person will in turn have to get a hold of somebody who is within the office to perhaps respond to those questions."

There are a lot of unanswered questions that need to be answered in regard to the contract, including the cost, he said.

Harris is a former assistant executive director at the Nevada Associated General Contractors.

Assistant Transportation Director Richard Nelson, said the purpose of the contract is to provide a problem solver and facilitator for contractors seeking to do business with the agency. Harris has a good working knowledge of the contracting business and NDOT, he said.

Reporting on the success of the program to NDOT is part of the contract as well, Nelson said.

“There is a lot of nuance to dealing with the department,” he said. “And a lot of times these new contractors don’t know what questions they should be asking. And we don’t want to see any contractor go under because they get balled up in the bureaucracy.”

Reno sports gala canceled because of fire

Due to the dangerous circumstances and the declared state of emergency because of the fire in Reno, the Reno Tahoe Winter Games Coalition is postponing tonight’s inaugural International Sports Hall of Fame Gala.

The RTWCG anticipates having a new date for the event by mid-December.

Calif. Senate staff receive raises despite budget crisis

By Torey Van Oot, Sacramento Bee

California's chronic budget problems haven't stopped the state Senate from giving some of its own staff members a bump in pay, handing out raises averaging 7 percent to dozens of workers in recent months.

The Senate increased the pay of at least 169 employees – nearly one-fifth of the staff – during a three-month period ending October 31.

The raises affected staff members serving in many levels of Senate operations, including Capitol security technicians, printing specialists and district workers.

The changes also boosted the paychecks of some of the Capitol's highest-paid aides. Nine chiefs of staff, including the top aide to Senate President Pro Tem Darrell Steinberg, saw their six-figure salaries rise by as much as 10 percent.

At least 10 additional staff members are making more money because of changes to their job classifications, with promotions leading to salary increases of more than 25 percent in some cases.

Read the whole story

Bond sale to pay for capital improvements in Nevada

By Nevada News Bureau Staff

CARSON CITY – Nevada Treasurer Kate Marshall announced that her office completed a series of bond sales this week that will net the state a total face value of \$149.4 million, with \$32 million going for capital improvement projects and the remaining \$117 million to be used for the refunding of existing state obligations.

“Nevada taxpayers saved \$6.3 million as a result of a successful new marketing and investor outreach program,” Marshall said. “We personally met with potential investors, provided an ‘internet roadshow’ and developed a specific State of Nevada bond sale website to generate greater interest in the market for Nevada bonds.

“In addition, Nevada maintained its AA credit rating, which is critical during these trying economic times, as it saves the state and its taxpayers millions of dollars in borrowing costs,” she said. “In keeping the state’s AA credit rating, the rating agencies relied upon Nevada’s ‘strong and prudent financial management’ as a key component for preserving our present credit rating.”

All three rating agencies – Fitch, Moody’s and Standard & Poor’s – kept Nevada’s credit outlook as “stable.”

In all, six bond series were included in the sale. The capital improvement project funding will be provided to state agencies for construction projects, including the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources to fund safe drinking water projects. The savings achieved through the refundings will be used to increase the state’s bond reserves.

Home prices fall, sales increase

By Rick Daysog, Sacramento Bee

The number of single-family homes sold in the Sacramento region rose sharply in October, but prices continued to fall.

Market researcher DataQuick said Wednesday that 1,732 existing homes were sold in Sacramento County last month, a 19.6 percent increase from the same month of 2010.

Placer County saw its sales volume increase 31.1 percent to 498 while sales in El Dorado County rose 18.7 percent to 229. Yolo County resales increased 2.5 percent to 122.

"It's not a bad October by Sacramento standards," said Andrew LePage, DataQuick analyst. "The caveat is that two-thirds of the sales were distress sales."

That point was reflected in the median prices, which were down again in all four counties.

According to DataQuick, the median price for a single-family home in Sacramento County dropped 8.2 percent to \$157,000, while the median in Placer County tumbled 12 percent to \$252,000.

The median price for homes in El Dorado County was down 13.2 percent to \$230,000 while Yolo County's median fell 14.6 percent to \$194,750.

Read the whole story

Tahoe residents protest in mini occupy movement

By Kathryn Reed

Lake Tahoe residents may not protest by the hundreds or thousands like larger areas, but they were part of Friday's nationwide solidarity movement that is part of the larger Occupy Wall Street movement which started two months ago.

Horns honked and fists pumped from the vehicles that passed the approximately 20 people who were in front of Heavenly Village carrying signs that read: "Remove \$\$\$ from politics", "Bail me out", "We are the 99%", and "End corporate personhood".



Michele
Sterling at
Occupy Lake
Tahoe on Nov.
17.

Michele Sterling spent her lunch break showing her support.

"I feel it's time we stood up for ourselves. The disparity of income is growing more and more each year," Sterling, a bus driver with Lake Tahoe Unified School District, said.

This was the second demonstration of what organizer Tracy Africa hopes will be regular gatherings in South Lake Tahoe. Last week's demonstration at Bank of America had about 16 supporters. The goal is to have a weekly event.

Occupy Tahoe is on Facebook. Notices of future meetings as well as demonstrations will be posted there as well as through Meet Up and Move On.

Heavenly Village was picked more for its location and being a high trafficked area, Africa said, than the fact it is anchored by two Marriott properties that are separated by Vail Resorts-owned Heavenly Gondola.

"If you come here, you should go to the local businesses," Africa said.

While corporate America is well represented at the village, as well as the casinos down the street that were in view of the demonstrators, corporate employees were lining up to enjoy the perk their employer was giving them. Heavenly employees could ski for three hours Nov. 17.



Demonstrators
in South Lake
Tahoe show
their
allegiance.

The irony seemed to go unnoticed by the protestors – that many of the 99 percent they are marching for would rather ski than walk along Highway 50 carrying a sign.

Africa said the Tahoe group supports the goals of Occupy Wall Street:

- More jobs.
- More health care.
- Fix the political process.
- Remove corporations from the government.
- Reduce the political influence of the wealthy.
- Economic justice.
- Punish the criminals who caused the Wall Street crash.
- Greater regulation of the banks.
- Greater regulation of the market.
- Tax the wealthy and use the money for education.
- Free speech without fear of penalty.
- Stop making wars and focus on peace.

But some of those out on this bitingly cold and windy day believe so strongly about what is going that they drove from the North Shore to participate because they said the people on the other end of the lake have yet to organize.

Trudy Lesem and Gwen Rosser came down from Tahoe Vista for the Nov. 17 peaceful demonstration.



Gwen Fox-Tyson
came from
Kings Beach to
show her
support.
Photos/Kathryn
Reed

“I feel the country is going in the wrong direction. Politicians are being bought by big corporations and money corrupts,” Lesem said. “Things must change if we are going to continue to be a thriving democracy.”

Rosser said, “People who are fed up with conditions need to make changes. I (wondered) for a long time – Where is all the anger?”

Frustration, more than anger, was the emotion expressed by those in South Tahoe during the noon-4pm event.

Gwyn Fox-Tyson of Kings Beach wants to get rid what she calls freeloaders as well as not having politicians in bed with big business.

“The American people can’t fulfill their dreams anymore,” Fox-Tyson said.