Placing blame for NorCal's deadly fires

By Sonali Kohli, Los Angeles Times

More than two dozen investigators have spent weeks scouring wine country trying to solve the mystery at the heart of the most destructive wildfires in California history: What caused the infernos that killed 43 people and destroyed more than 8,000 buildings?

The answers will have wide-ranging ramifications for the region, which faces staggering losses and a challenging rebuilding effort. Losses from insured properties alone are expected to far exceed $1 billion, and the total bill for the fires will be still higher. Just fighting the fires cost $189 million, according to CalFire

CalFire is likely to take months to determine the official cause. But in wine country, there is already one prime suspect: utility giant Pacific Gas & Electric.

Read the whole story

EDC on path to temporarily ban recreational pot

By Lake Tahoe News

El Dorado County Board of Supervisors in December is expected to approve a temporary ban on the sales of recreational and medicinal marijuana. Any medical facilities in operation today

would be grandfathered in.

They are taking the same approach as South Lake Tahoe and many other jurisdictions in wanting to have a better understanding of all of the state's regulations pertaining to recreational marijuana before saying yes to anything more than what is required by state law.

While it was a year ago that voters in California approved the use of pot recreationally, it wasn't until this week that the state released many of the rules surrounding the practice.

Local jurisdictions are able to implement laws concerning sales of the product and whether it can be consumed in public places.

However, what they cannot regulate is the growing pot for personal use. Those parameters are state laws. People are also allowed to smoke pot where permissible.

Supervisors Sue Novasel and Mike Ranalli were appointed to the Cannabis Advisory Committee, while the Medical Marijuana Advisory Committee was eliminated.

It is Sheriff John D'Agostini's belief that all forms of marijuana should be banned in the county.

Proposed federal budget, tax cuts could stunt affordable housing

By Michelle D. Layser, The Conversation

Low-income Americans are already struggling to keep a roof over their heads due to a growing affordable housing shortage.

But budgets drafted by the Trump administration and Congress, along with provisions in the tax cut package, are bound to make matters worse.

As a researcher who studies the intersection of tax law and housing policy, I am concerned about how these proposed changes would reduce the volume of new housing for low-income people and cut aid that people facing economic hardship use to cover their rent.

The federal government stopped building public housing two decades ago after years of declining construction. Although it has demolished many of these homes, the government continues to own and rent out about 1.1 million of these units.

Read the whole story

FEMA money likely for Douglas County flooding

Douglas County is likely to recoup much of what it spent last winter on flooding issues.

Seven projects in the Carson Valley cost more than $380,000.

Through FEMA the county could see $285,779.

Work needed to done be included clearing debris, fixing pipes and pumps, and repairs to the North Valley Wastewater Treatment Plant.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Douglas County revamping Housing Element

The **Housing Element** of the 2016 Douglas County Master Plan update is scheduled to go before the Board of Commissioners on Dec. 4, 9am in Minden.

Public comment will be taken at the meeting, while written comments will be accepted before then.

According to participants in the 2016 Master Plan survey, the Housing Element was rated as one of the top three Master Plan elements needing improvement, after Growth Management and Land Use. Several survey respondents expressed concern with the lack of diverse housing stock and the expensive housing market in Douglas County.

Included in the Housing Element is a section on affordable housing. Affordable housing in the Housing Element is defined as market rate housing as well as subsidized housing. The standard rule of thumb is that housing costs, including utilities, should not exceed 30 percent of household income.

In July, the county with the Nevada Rural Housing Authority created the Douglas County Affordable Housing Task Force. Their meetings are not open to the public.

Calif. pot rules open way for potentially larger fields

By Associated Press

California released long-awaited rules Thursday that will govern the state's emerging legal marijuana industry, while potentially opening the way for larger-scale cultivation that some fear could strangle small-farm growers.

The thicket of emergency regulations will allow the state to begin issuing temporary licenses for growers, distributors and sellers on Jan. 1, when recreational sales become legal.

They provide a regulatory roadmap for business operations, from licensing fees to establishing guidelines for testing, growing and distribution of marijuana in what is projected to be a $7 billion economy, the nation's largest.

Read the whole story

Liberty Utilities' rates expected to increase 4%

Electric rates could be going up more than 4 percent starting Jan. 1 for Liberty Utilities customers.

The company in October asked the California Public Utilities Commission for the $2,174,648 increase. The basis is because

of capital projects in excess of $4 million and inflation.

The notice sent to ratepayers, which includes the California side of the basin, Truckee and Alpine county, said, Liberty "seeks recovery of the remaining capital and operating expenses associated with Liberty CalPeco's acquisition, financing, ownership, operation and maintenance of the Luning Solar Project."

The 4.07 percent increase includes 1.5 percent for cost of inflation.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

AAA: Most Americans in 12 years to travel for Thanksgiving

By Barbara J. Powell, Bloomberg

U.S. Thanksgiving travel will jump to the highest level since 2005 boosted by a stronger economy, even as gasoline prices will be higher than a year earlier.

About 50.9 million Americans will journey 50 miles or more from home for the Nov. 22-Nov. 26 holiday period, the ninth consecutive increase and a 3.3 percent jump over a year earlier, AAA said in an emailed report. About 45.5 million will travel by automobile, up 3.2 percent. Air travel will rise 5 percent to nearly 4 million.

Read the whole story

32-year veteran retiring from Lahontan's No. 2 post



Lauri Kemper, left, listens as her boss Executive Director Patty Kouyoumdjian on Nov. 15 reads a proclamation. Photo/LTN

By Kathryn Reed

Like so many people, Lauri Kemper thought she was going to spend a couple years at Lake Tahoe and then move on.

That didn't happen. Instead she spent the last 32 years with the Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board, 20 of them as a manager. On Dec. 18 she retires as the deputy executive officer from the state agency that is based in South Lake Tahoe, after having started in February 1985.

The place and purpose are what kept her here all these years.

"It's like living in a national park. And the career was focused on making things better for humans and the environment," Kemper, whose background is as an engineer, told *Lake Tahoe News.* "The other reason I stayed is the diversity of the region."

Lahontan's jurisdiction, while it covers the California side of the Tahoe basin, extends to the Oregon border and down to the desert.

On Nov. 15 she was recognized by her colleagues and the board of directors for her service. Executive Director Patty Kouyoumdjian read a resolution and presented Kemper with a photo of Lake Tahoe that was signed by her co-workers. Kouyoumdjian was effusive with her praise of Kemper. "All are better for working with her," Kouyoumdjian said.

Kemper will continue to live on the South Shore; she looks forward to having more fun by hitting the slopes, hiking – enjoying the outdoors she has worked so hard to protect.

She said this will feel like the first real ski season she has had since living here. No longer will work get in the way of a powder day.

Taking over for Kemper is Doug Smith, a supervising engineering geologist for Lahontan.

No injuries as LTUSD bus slides off road



A school bus on Gardner Mountain on Nov. 17 was close to going down an embankment after sliding on ice. Photo/LTN

A Lake Tahoe Unified School District bus carrying 15 students slid off the road Friday morning. No one was injured.

According to the California Highway Patrol, the bus driver was west on 13th Street near Gardner Street at a slow rate of speed when she was unable to stop because of the slick road.

This caused the front of the bus to start sliding down Gardner Street. The driver side front wheels went off the edge of the road.

While the bus was sliding it hit a stop sign on Gardner Street.

“There was no indication that this icy intersection had been sanded at the time of the collision,” Officer Mike Garrity said in his report.

The accident occurred at 7:47am Nov. 17.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report