Suspicious phone calls claiming to be from WCSO

The Washoe County Sheriff’s Office started receiving reports from the public this week about phone calls from a male identifying himself as a “Detective Phillips from the Washoe County Sheriff’s Office” and asking for personal information.

In one instance, the caller was described as becoming aggressive and angry when information was refused.

Although the motive of these calls is unclear at this time, the sheriff’s office reminds the public to be wary of providing any information to strangers without verifying the credibility of their identity.

If you are uncomfortable with a phone call, gather whatever information you can then hang up, do not give any information out. If you are concerned that the Washoe County Sheriff’s Office may be legitimately attempting to reach you, call the department.

Film spotlights need to protect firefighters



Mary Beth Wusk, a deputy director at NASA Langley Research Center in Hampton, Va., is working with a team of NASA material experts to design a new emergency shelter for wildland firefighters. Photo/NASA

By Kurtis Alexander, San Francisco Chronicle

As Hollywood rolls out a blockbuster drama about the 19 firefighters killed after crawling inside their protective emergency shelters during a raging 2013 wildfire, the federal government is wrapping up a real-life bid to improve the nation's standard-issue fire shelter – by going space-age.

Much of the redesign is being done by a group of NASA engineers, and their work couldn't come at a more opportune time, with the deadly Wine Country fires just the latest in an escalating trend of wildland blazes tearing up the West.

The engineers were already busy building heat shields for space missions four years ago when they heard of the unprecedented deaths of Arizona's Granite Mountain Hotshots, portrayed in the new film "Only the Brave." The NASA engineers immediately decided to volunteer their expertise.

Read the whole story

Weather-ravaged Hwy. 50 repaired 9 months later

All lanes are open on a section of Highway 50 that suffered significant damage last winter.

The roadway near Bridal Veil Falls, about seven miles east of Pollock Pines, was damaged in February. The two westbound lanes had to be closed after the slope failed.

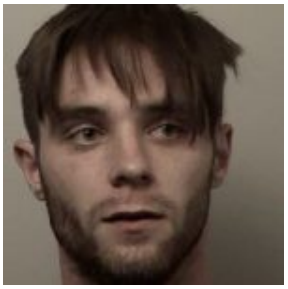
A 600-foot retaining wall has been built to stabilize the slope and the westbound lanes have been reconstructed.

The total cost of the project was just less than $10 million.

EDC sex offender guilty on 16 felony counts

A jury on Nov. 8 found an El Dorado County man guilty of 16 felony sex crimes.

Robert Lee Edmonds, 24, of Cameron Park committed sex crimes against five children under the age of 14, provided controlled substances to a minor, possessed child pornography, and made criminal threats.



Robert Edmonds

The crimes were committed over a two-year period, beginning in 2014 and ending when Edmonds was arrested in 2016.

“Sexual assault against children has become an all too common crime,” District Attorney Vern Pierson said in a press release. “In El Dorado County, we continue to aggressively pursue these cases and seek the maximum punishment under the law against these predators, seeking justice on behalf of these most vulnerable victims.”

According to the El Dorado County District Attorney’s Office, Edmonds befriended his intended victims and then used that relationship to take advantage of them sexually.

Edmonds is scheduled to be sentenced Jan. 22. He faces a maximum sentence of 106 years to life in state prison.

Edmonds is in custody in the Placerville jail.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Study: Weed can be worse for forests than logging



Tree leaves and needles are removed because they block sunlight needed for marijuana crops. Photo/USFS

By Kaleigh Rogers, Motherboard

From guzzling water to pesticide pollution, it's been long established that growing weed—legally or not—isn't great for the environment. But a recent study published in the journal "Frontiers in Ecology and the Environment" shows that, at least by some measures, it can be even worse for the environment than logging.

By comparing GIS data in Northern California from 2000 to 2013, researchers found that while logging has a greater impact overall, weed can be even more destructive on a per-unit-area basis. That's because illegal cannabis grow ops are typically buried deep in the woods, are irregular in size and shape, and are scattered around randomly.

Compared to logging, which typically occurs in large, clear-cut swaths at the edge of the forest, this can have a serious impact on what should be the most protected part of the forest: its core.

Read the whole story

Nev. health insurance outreach aims to bridge fed cuts

By Yvonne Gonzalez, Las Vegas Sun

A huge federal cut to health insurance outreach is spurring awareness efforts, with minority and rural communities considered some of the most at risk of missing the message.

Open enrollment on the Silver State Health Exchange runs through Dec. 15. Heather Korbulic, executive director of the exchange, said an estimated 11 percent of Nevada residents remain uninsured and about 43,000 consumers are eligible for subsidies but not accessing them, either purchasing private plans off the exchange or just remaining uninsured.

Meanwhile, the federal government has cut 90 percent from marketing and advertising for the Affordable Care Act, and implemented a 40 percent drop in outreach funding.

Read the whole story

Ballot proposal would obliterate VHRs in SLT

By Kathryn Reed

From 1,400 vacation rentals to zero is what a group of South Lake Tahoe residents would like to see happen.

Dan Browne and Ken Weitzman are the two who have signed the paperwork to bring the initiative to the ballot in November 2018. Peggy Bourland, they both said, is the other key player behind the movement. (She chose not to speak to *Lake Tahoe News*.)

Browne and Weitzman say hundreds of residents have said they support the cause.

Weitzman told *Lake Tahoe News* the reason for the measure "is because the city has not done anything to alleviate the problems create by vacation rentals in neighborhood. There are so many people who are tormented weekend and week out."

They say residences are being turned into hotels. Noise is a predominant issue. And no one at the city, they contend, is doing anything to curtail the problems. They are fed up, don't believe the council is listening and want the people of South Lake Tahoe to take control.

Their proposal would take the 1,400 VHRS that are permitted outside the tourist core area and eliminate them all within a year of the initiative's passage.

According to City Manager Nancy Kerry, "Many of those homes would likely be placed on the market to sell, which would flood the market immediately, reducing property values. As you know from the Great Recession, as home prices were rapidly falling, the problem was exacerbated as people flooded the real estate market by adding their home for sale to the mix. Consider that if even if just 10 to 20 percent of the 1,400 VHRs (140-280 homes) were added to the for-sale market overnight due to the ban, the competition for buyers would drive prices down, reducing property values, which in turn reduces income for homeowners and all the residual financial impacts. If the percentage of VHR owners who put their home on

the market was more than 20 percent, the financial impacts to the real estate market would be significant."



The Gondola Vista condo project near the state line could provide more vacation rentals in the tourist core. Photo/LTN

It's a lengthy process to get the proposal on the ballot, and then people must vote for it. If approved, there is always the threat of a lawsuit to challenge its legitimacy. Plus, there is talk of a counter-measure that would further muddy the waters.

Proponents have 180 days from Nov. 8 to get signatures from 10 percent of the registered voters in the city based on the last General Election, so just more than 1,100 people. Those will then be verified by the county elections officials. Other paperwork is required as well.

"We are willing to roll the dice. If people in South Lake Tahoe want an unlimited number of vacation rentals, so be it," Browne told *Lake Tahoe News*. "We tried to bring this to the attention of the City Council and work with them as much as we could and they gave us a deaf ear."

Weitzman said, “We are willing to sit down and talk. The city has neglected us. We have to somehow make them understand us. I want to have a nice, congenial, pleasant town.”

While both say a compromise is possible, neither would say what it would take to get them to drop the ballot proposal.

Vacation home rentals in the city – and throughout the state and elsewhere – have become more contentious as residents grow frustrated with lack of enforcement and locals can’t find a place to live.

The city has had dozens of meetings, revised the ordinance multiple times since it was first approved in 2003, commissioned an economic study, formed a subcommittee of two councilmembers, and has met with various interested parties.

The ballot group wants the real estate community to come to the table and propose a number. It has yet to do so as a group.

The South Tahoe Association of Realtors provided the following statement to *Lake Tahoe News*, ““Representatives from the South Tahoe Association of Realtors met with members of the group pursuing a ballot measure to ban VHRs outside of the tourist core area, and sincerely engaged in dialogue in an effort to come to better understanding of issues and concerns about VHRs. Our intention is to work with all interested parties to find a mutually acceptable solution. Given the size of our diverse membership of 300-plus Realtors and 500-plus MLS participants, we need time to reach out to them before we can take a position. We do agree that robust enforcement is key to making any option work.”

Austin Sass, whose tenure as mayor will be over Dec. 12, has taken it upon himself to meet with various groups under the guise of representing the entire council. However, his colleagues gave him no direction to do so, nor did he have the power to make promises. He and Councilwoman Wendy David were

the council's VHR subcommittee, but she was not invited to all of the powwows.

The city is going forward with its business, including looking for a company to provide assistance with monitoring VHRs and providing enforcement help. Bids are being taken until Nov. 20, with the expectation the council will vote on a firm at its December meeting. At the Nov. 21 meeting the second reading of the latest VHR ordinance is expected to be voted on. This is what limits the number of VHRs to 1,400.

Regarding the ballot proposal, the city plans to analyze the financial impact.

"If it were to pass, as I wrote in the last staff report to council, something that drastic could very likely create a similar impact of a recession," Kerry told *Lake Tahoe News.* "The loss of 1,400 vacation home rentals would result in a substantial loss in transient occupancy taxes for the city."

The city receives approximately $2.8 million in TOT from VHRs – which is citywide. The ballot initiative would not affect the tourist core, which has a few hundred units.

Browne was asked if the economic impact weighed on his decision to go forward. It's "not a concern," he said.

Weitzman, though, disagrees with his compatriot. "Yes, that does concern me because I love this local town." What he wants is for people in VHRs to use the empty hotel rooms so the economic impact is not as severe.

Here is the ballot title and summary as prepared by law by the city's attorney.

SLT man faces possible life sentence for sex crimes

A former maintenance worker at a South Lake Tahoe hotel was convicted on seven felony counts, including kidnapping for the purpose of committing a sexual assault, as well as six additional counts and numerous special allegations relating to the subsequent sexual assault of the victim.



Manuel Ramos-Munoz

Manuel Ovidio Ramos-Munoz, 32, could face life in prison. Sentencing is scheduled for Jan. 19. He has been taken into custody without bail.

According to the El Dorado County District Attorney's Office, "On June 11, 2015, the 22-year-old victim had recently arrived from Macedonia to work for the summer as an exchange student when she was taken at knife point by Ramos-Munoz from the steps of her hotel room. Ramos-Munoz forced the victim into the dark, secluded parking lot adjacent to her hotel and repeatedly sexually and physically assaulted her, resulting in numerous injuries to the young victim."

Ramos-Munoz had been a maintenance worker and resident at the Big Pines Mountain House of Tahoe for four years prior to the incident,

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Kings Beach without power

Kings Beach residents can expect to be in the dark for the better part of the night.

Liberty Utilities says the outage is because of an NV Energy equipment failure in Incline Village.

It could be at least 11pm Nov. 9 before power is restored. It’s been out since before 4pm.

— Lake Tahoe News staff report

Vacation rental scam warning in S. Lake Tahoe

South Lake Tahoe Police Department is warning potential vacation home renters of an ongoing scam on Craigslist.

These listings may include pictures and a lengthy description of a real house. Unsuspecting vacationers are paying in advance, usually by check or Western Union wire. The supposed landlord takes receipt of the money and when the victim shows up to the vacation rental, they find that the home is occupied by a permanent resident or that there are other renters in the home.

Other techniques being used are asking unsuspecting renters to deposit money directly into a bank account and then that bank account is closed. People are also being asked to buy gift

cards and provide the card numbers to the scammers.

SLTPD offers the following tips:

- Use a credit card: Never use bank wires, certified checks, western union, or any other service where the money is gone forever immediately after you send it. The credit card company has already performed basic background checks on the company charging your card.
- Obtain full contact info and verify: Obtain full contact information for the person you are dealing with (name/address/phone number/email/etc.) and verify that information (by using Google search, etc). Any real business should be easy to verify, as they will have a full website, be easy to contact, etc. However, if dealing with a person, ask for references, especially full work contact info, and verify that contact info.
- Your phone calls are answered: If they always have to call you back (when you call, you always have to leave a message to call you back), then avoid. When they call, ask for a phone number where you can immediately call them back. If they don’t pick up the phone, watch out. Be aware that many scammers use message services (no one answers; you always need to leave a message). Also, Google any phone numbers. You should find your contact person associated with that number. If not, that may indicate the phone number is brand new.

If you are a victim of a vacation rental scam, contact the South Lake Tahoe Police Department at 530.542.6100.