Info lacking on mountain snowpack, runoff

By Matt Weiser, Water Deeply

Most Americans may not realize it, but we really don’t know with a lot of accuracy how much snow there is sitting in the mountains during winter. We also don’t always have a precise picture of where the snow level is when a storm moves in, or how much will run off when the snow melts.

One reason for this is that, in most areas, the weather sensor network in the mountains simply isn’t very dense. Gauges that measure rain and snow are often placed for convenient access. The highest elevations and forested areas often have no sensors, leaving huge data gaps in many watersheds.

This creates a host of problems, from estimating flood risk accurately to figuring out how much water is available for summer farm irrigation.

Read the whole story

Disputed alert system upgraded after NorCal fires

By Carolyn Lochhead and Joaquin Palomino, San Francisco Chronicle

A potentially lifesaving emergency alert system that Sonoma County officials decided against using during the deadly fires that swept through the area last month will finally get a

long-planned upgrade, after nearly a yearlong delay by the Trump administration.

All wireless carriers will be required to more specifically target the areas where cell phones would receive Wireless Emergency Alerts, or WEAs. Sonoma County officials said they did not send such an alert as the fires raged late on the night of Oct. 8 because it would have hit phones all across the county, possibly causing panic and traffic jams that would have blocked people from getting in and out of the area.

They are among a number of local emergency officials who have found fault with the WEA system since it was put in place in 2012, including some who have declined to adopt it at all. Only about a third of all counties in the U.S. have access to the alert system, which is administered by the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

Read the whole story

Jury awards ex-Barton CFO nearly $800,000

By Susan Wood

After hearing a high-level power struggle among Barton Health executives, an El Dorado County Superior Court jury on Wednesday awarded former Chief Financial Officer Steve Neff with almost $800,000.



Steve Neff

Neff’s lawsuit involved a violation of labor law, fraud and breach of contract.

The Nov. 8 judgment in favor of Neff includes $715,782.50 for “breach of the covenant of good faith, fair dealing and defamation” as well as $71,578.25 in punitive damages for defamation, Neff’s attorney Patricia Kramer said. Nothing further was provided from Kramer on the trial presided over by Judge Daniel Proud.

The civil case stemmed from disputes that occurred in contract negotiations and the seven months leading up to Neff’s termination in March 2015. The negotiations were between former Chief Executive Officer John Williams, then-Chief Medical Officer Clint Purvance – the current CEO. Neff was replacing the retiring Dick Derby, who returned to the job when Neff left.

The complaint filed a year ago this month laid out 11 counts ranging from negligent misrepresentation and breach of contract to unlawful harassment and defamation of character.

For the jury, there were 19 items they had to rule on. Of those, they determined three in Neff’s favor and 16 in Barton’s.

It’s unclear whether the South Lake Tahoe-based medical group will appeal as Barton attorney Tom Perry declined to speak to *Lake Tahoe News.*

“We are pleased the jury found in Barton’s favor on most

disputed issues," Barton spokeswoman Mindi Befu said in a statement. Barton added the penalty reflects the remainder of Neff's three-year contract, and punitive damages amounting to 10 percent of the contract sum were inflicted "because some statements that were attributed to Barton were considered defamatory" to the jury.

"Although we are not in agreement with all of the jury's findings, we respect their diligence and conscientious effort in dealing with the many complex issues in this difficult case," the statement reads. "We are glad to move forward and continue focusing our attention on the health of our community."

Neff claimed that he came on board with the notion and alleged promises that his CFO job would eventually lead to him taking over for Williams, with Purvance agreeing to mentor him.

The complaint adds that Neff took the job with the understanding that Purvance as the CMO "had no desire to fill that position and that the CFO position Neff was being recruited for would be the perfect segue for Neff to become CEO of Barton." It reads the CEO position paid about $600,000 a year base salary with potential bonuses that could result in another $300,000.

But that didn't happen. Instead, it appeared Neff and Purvance — who allegedly was supposed to be grooming the plaintiff — were each vying for the top job.

The jury, though, did not find those claims in Neff's favor.

Further, Neff listed a barrage of incidents in the complaint in which he was poorly treated and subjected to "frequent religious proselytizing in the workplace" with the "express purpose of receiving Christian indoctrination that conflicted with Neff's own religious belief system." He's Jewish.

This too was not found to be true, according to the jury.

Neff took issue with Barton's discrepancies posed during the recruitment process and of questionable working conditions and operations at the hospital while he was there. At one point, Neff alleged Williams told him he was "the king" of Barton and that "he was unaccountable to Barton's board of directors."

The discrespanices in the recruitment process were not ruled in Neff's favor.

The contract between the hospital and Neff was a point of contention on several occasions. His tenure appeared rocky throughout the seven-month stint right up to his termination, including a claim he was "humiliated in front of his colleagues" despite the hospital allegedly insisting they were firing him for "no cause."

The medical executive primarily laments about uprooting his family and enduring financial losses when he in good faith left a 17-month partnership at Renaissance Healthcare Partners in Massachusetts to go to work at Barton on a base salary of $285,000.

In the last few years, Neff has been unable to secure any position as a CFO or CEO and believes he's "lost approximately $548,420 in income."

Neff has worked in health care for 32 years. He now operates a BrightStar Care home care franchise in Carson City.

Lake Tahoe News Publisher Kathryn Reed was a reluctant rebuttal witness for the prosecution. She was brought in to testify about the story she had **written in 2015** after Neff was fired and the story **last June** about the lawsuit. Much of the testimony centered on the use of the word "fired."

Calif. dream is becoming a bit nightmarish

By Matt Levin, KQED

The California dream isn’t dead. It just upped and moved to South Dakota.

Less than half of people born in California in 1980 are making more money than their parents did as young adults. That’s the lowest percentage of children out-earning their parents that California has seen since at least 1940.

By contrast, 62 percent of people born in South Dakota in 1980 out-earn their parents. That’s the highest percentage for any state in the country.

Those figures come from a study by Stanford economist Raj Chetty and several prominent co-authors, whose widely publicized work on intergenerational income mobility—the likelihood children will fare better financially than their parents—has transformed what we know about the data behind the American dream.

Read the whole story

Victims in Kings Beach shootings identified

By Associated Press

Sheriff’s deputies say a long history of conflict between a

motel manager and a tenant preceded a murder-suicide at Lake Tahoe where the manager shot a Kings Beach woman then turned the gun on himself.

The Placer County sheriff's office identified the woman killed Saturday as 34-year-old Isabelle Gallon. The manager of the Northwood Pines on Tahoe's north shore was 64-year-old Scott Kotter of Kings Beach.

Read the whole story

Voters say no to South Tahoe's Measure C

By Kathryn Reed

While the majority of voters said yes to Measure C, that was not enough support for the South Lake Tahoe roads measure to pass.

The sales tax initiative required two-thirds of the voters to cast yes ballots.

With all the votes counted on Nov. 7, El Dorado County Elections Department is reporting the measure received 1,194 yes votes (54 percent) and 1,017 no votes (46 percent.)

The low voter turnout (22 percent) was expected with this being the only item on the ballot.

The ballot measure asked the residents of South Lake Tahoe to raise the sales tax from 7.75 percent to 8.25 percent. The $2.5 million that was projected to be raised annually could only have been spent on roads.

There are zero dollars for roads in the 2017-18 South Lake Tahoe budget. The City Council of late has funded roads at the mid-year budget review. However, not a single road was paved in 2000, 2002, 2004, 2005, 2011 and 2016.

With a projected deficit coming in the next few years based on revenues leveling out and expenses – retiree costs in particular – increasing, the mid-year cash infusion into roads is likely to go away.

The council will have the option to continue to not make roads a priority in the budget or cut something else to clear the way for pavement projects.

While the City Council on Tuesday appointed members to a roads authority management board, those people need to look for another way to be civically involved. They were to have had oversight of the projects.

Neither City Manager Nancy Kerry nor Mayor Austin Sass returned *Lake Tahoe News'* calls, nor did Measure C opposition spokesman Bruce Grego.

Experts: Calif. ripe for massive flooding

By Tim Craig, Washington Post

Even living on the West Coast, Marion Townsend decided to act as floods ravaged Texas and hurricanes pounded the Caribbean in recent weeks.

Her Sacramento neighborhood slopes downward from a levee that separates it from the American River, in an area that

officials concede never should have been settled but is home to 100,000 residents.

After seeing images of boat rescues in Houston and frantic evacuations in Miami, Townsend began repositioning important documents, photographs, jewelry and her sentimental quilts up onto shelves.

Townsend needs to be reaching even higher.

Models show a levee failure could submerge parts of this inland metropolis under as much as 20 feet of water. As Northern Californians are recovering from wildfires and sifting through homes reduced to ash, officials in the state's capital are struggling to prevent another type of natural disaster.

Read the whole story

SLT limits VHRs to 1,400 in residential areas

By Kathryn Reed

Fourteen hundred. That's the maximum number of vacation home rentals South Lake Tahoe will allow.

After another meeting of the City Council on Nov. 7 where short-term rentals dominated the discussion, it's possible the electeds might let the ink dry on the latest ordinance before revising it yet again. But no promises because already Councilman Jason Collin broached the idea of reducing that number even further. He even wants to revisit this whole topic every six months if not more often.

On a 3-1 vote Tuesday, the first reading of the newest ordinance passed. The second reading is slated for Nov. 21. Then the ordinance takes effect 30 days later. Until then the law of the land is the urgency ordinance approved last month, which called for an immediate moratorium on VHRs.

All of the changes only pertain to the non-tourist core area.

Councilman Tom Davis recused himself from the discussion because of his stake in Tahoe Keys Resort. Councilman Austin Sass voted against the ordinance, stating the only dissatisfaction being the 1,400 number. He preferred the limit be 1,200.

The latest numbers show there are 1,397 VHRs outside the tourist area.

Before that vote was taken Sass was able to bully his way into making sure no new permits are issued until the new ordinance takes effect. Before the council was an agenda item asking to allow the 93 permits that had been submitted to go through the approval process. At previous meetings that was the sentiment of the majority, but it was not written into the urgency ordinance. Tuesday's measure was in essence a clarification of council's wishes. It required a fourth-fifths vote, but with one councilmember unable to vote, it really had to be a unanimous decision. That didn't happen. The motion failed on a 3-1 vote.

Sass said to allow the permitting process to proceed would be "hypocritical" when his goal was to reduce VHRs.

"We have changed the rules on them halfway through," Councilwoman Brooke Laine said of the applicants. "It's lights out. We didn't intend that."

Laine, Collin and Councilwoman Wendy David were adamant in not wanting to hurt the people who had been going through the process in good faith.

Between 15 and 20 VHR owners choose not to renew their permit each month, so about 200-250 go off the market each year. Of course new ones take their place.

And new ones will still be allowed – just not more than 1,400, and not until Jan. 21.

The current applicants will remain in the pool if they want to be; or they can ask to have the application pulled and be issued a refund. (It costs more than $500 for a VHR permit.) They will all have to abide by the ordinance that was approved Tuesday.

Some of the key rules in the ordinance include:

· Mandatory bear box, with number of cans based on square footage.

· Occupancy being two per bedroom, plus four.

· No use of hot tub between 10pm and 8am.

· No special treatment for applicants in escrow.

· No zoning administration hearing.

· No notification of neighbors of a new VHR in the area.

· No warnings will be issued; only citations.

· Three violations in 24 months and the permit is revoked.

· Five community service officers will be hired. (One is employed now.)

· Fines of $1,000 will be issued to renters and owners for each violation.

· Owners will be subject to VHR rules.

· Shared rentals are not part of the ordinance, meaning

they don’t have to be permitted or pay transient occupancy tax. This topic will be discussed on its own at a future meeting.

Nev. gets low marks for inmate health spending

By Ben Botkin, Las Vegas Review-Journal

State spending on inmate health care in Nevada is among the lowest in the U.S., according to a national Pew study released recently.

The study also ranks the state’s rate of health care staffing as the fourth-lowest out of 43 states surveyed. But the study highlighted the Nevada Department of Corrections for gathering data on its health care delivery system to measure outcomes and effectiveness.

The 140-page study by the Pew Charitable Trusts sheds light on Nevada’s system.

Read the whole story

Killings in Kings Beach ruled

murder-suicide

The shooting Saturday in Kings Beach has been ruled a murder-suicide by Placer County sheriff’s deputies.

“The manager showed up at the woman’s room, they exchanged heated words, and he pulled a gun and shot her. The woman’s boyfriend was present in the room, and as he ran to the bathroom window to escape, he was also shot at, but wasn’t hit. A moment later, the suspect shot himself,” investigators said.

The shootings occurred the afternoon of Nov. 4 at a motel on Trout Avenue.

The names of the people involved have not been released.