CalFire: Create defensible space before a fire occurs

Publisher's note: ***This is the first of three articles from the Amador-El Dorado Unit of CalFire regarding the "Ready-Set-Go!" fire and life safety campaign.***

By Teri Mizuhara

CAMINO – Unit Chief Kelly Keenan believes living in the Sierra Nevada foothills is a dream come true but with that dream comes a responsibility that many urban/suburban dwellers do not face. Fire is a natural part of our ecosystem. It helps clear out the weeds and brush and creates a healthy forest dynamic.

But with so many homes scattered throughout the rural foothills, naturally occurring fire is not allowed to do what it should because fire agencies must suppress fires that threaten lives and property. So people must do their part and create a space around their homes where fire can be better controlled as it approaches.



Defensible space is critical to being fire safe. Photo/CalFire

Creating a buffer zone between your home and the wildland greatly reduces the risk of your home catching on fire from radiant heat or flying embers. These embers can destroy homes and even entire neighborhoods that are far from the actual flame front of a wildfire.

Keys to creating defensible space are:

Zone One extends up to 30 feet (or your property line whichever is closer) from every structure on your property

• Remove all dead and dying vegetation

• Remove leaf litter from your roof and rain gutters

• Relocate woodpiles well away from your home

• Trim trees so they are a minimum of 10 feet from your chimney and roof line

• Remove ladder fuels (low-level vegetation that could allow fire to spread from the ground to shrubs and bushes to the tree canopies).

Zone Two extends from 30 feet to 100 feet (or to your property line whichever is closer)

• The key is to keep plant material separated from each other horizontally and vertically, this prevents the vegetation from acting like a ladder and allowing the fire to move from the ground to the tree canopies

• Cut annual grasses down to a maximum of 4 inches in height.

Preparing and practicing your family's disaster plan is also key to being ready for fire season. This plan can make evacuating ahead of a

CalFire beginning Monday is increasing staffing for the fire season on the South Shore and the Northern California counties of El Dorado, Placer, Amador, Nevada, Yuba,

wildfire or other disaster far less stressful. Creating a “Family Disaster Plan” is the first step in preparing for a disaster. It is important every member of your family understands what to do in the event of a wildfire in your area. Practice this plan on a regular basis so each member of your family knows their role and what they need to do; keep a copy of this written plan in an accessible place so that you can refer to it quickly and easily.

Tuolumne, Calaveras, Stanislaus, San Joaquin, Butte and Glenn.

“Things to include in the plan are: meeting locations away from your home, communication plans and evacuation plans for your family and your pets. Identify where your gas, water and electrical shut-offs are and how to use them. Plan several evacuation routes in your neighborhood and drive them so you are familiar with them day or night. Assemble emergency supply kits and have them ready for yourself, family and animals. Don’t forget to include a portable radio and/or scanner so you can stay updated,” Keenan says.

Finally, take steps to make your home more fire resistant; if you are building a new home or renovating your home, consider these fire resistive measures (hardening your home):

• Roofs are the most vulnerable surface on your house. Make sure your roof is made out of “class A” materials, such as composition, metal or tiles.

• Rain gutters should be screened or enclosed to prevent accumulation of plant debris that can catch on fire from a flying ember during a wildfire.

• Exterior walls of your home should be made of ignition resistant materials such as cement siding, stucco or fire retardant treated wood.

• Windows should be double paned with one of the panes made of

tempered glass which will reduce the potential of the heat from a wildfire breaking the window and catching the interior of the house on fire.

• If your home is dependent on a well for water, install a backup generator so you have water in case the electricity goes out.

The following areas of your home should be checked annually and maintained as needed:

• Check that your chimney has an approved spark arrestor (screen) in good condition covering the opening. The screen should have openings no smaller than three-eighth inch and no larger than a half inch.

• Keep the area under your deck or balcony free of combustible material. Never store your firewood under your deck.

• Consider having multiple garden hoses that are long enough to reach any area of your home and any structure on your property.

Keenan adds, “Wind driven embers can fly up to one mile during a wildland fire so ‘hardening’ your home with fire resistive material, creating a solid buffer zone of defensible space and preparing and practicing your Family Disaster Plan are critical. Being ready for wildfire season is your best defense. Preplanning for a disaster can save your life and the lives of the ones you love.”

For more detailed information, go online or call (530) 644.2345 to receive a free brochure.

State Senate rejects tax extension, budget deadline looms

By Kevin Yamamura and Torey Van Oot, Sacramento Bee

Senate Republicans blocked a tax solution to the deficit Friday, prompting Democrats to respond with a countermeasure expanding local taxation powers.

Thus began Round 2 of the state budget battle, complete with readings of letters from sheriffs and taxpayers, parliamentary gamesmanship and failed amendments on abortion funding.

With a threat of lost pay hanging over their heads, lawmakers face a Wednesday constitutional deadline to balance the budget. The Senate made procedural progress Friday by passing a slew of budget alterations on a majority vote, but state leaders still lack a bipartisan agreement.

The key divide remains taxation. Democrats want to solve the remaining $9.6 billion deficit with extensions of higher sales and vehicle taxes, as well as a return to higher income tax rates that expired last year. Democrats asserted Friday that they had already taken hard votes by slashing universities and various programs for the poor in March.

“The public doesn’t like cuts and they don’t like taxes,” said Senate President Pro Tem Darrell Steinberg, D–Sacramento. “And as my budget director is fond of noting, I have yet to see a poll that results in a balanced budget. If there was a pain-free option to balancing the budget, we would have passed it months ago.”

Read the whole story

LTCC professor creates calculus app for iPhone

Lake Tahoe Community College math Professor Larry Green has created a collection of a few hundred calculus videos that he has put up for free on the Internet.

A few months ago, a publisher contacted him about turning the collection into an app for the iPhone.

“The app has become pretty popular amongst calculus students and the first royalty check arrived (this month),” Green told *Lake Tahoe News*. “The videos are still available for free online, but if a student wants them downloaded onto their iPhone, they cost a few dollars for each quarter of the complete collection.



Larry Green

Green doesn’t have a cell phone, so he let the publisher take care of the marketing and the technical details of bundling them into an app.

The links may be found at:

App 1

App 2

App 3

App 4.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Legislation would extend ban on gold mining technique

By Matt Drange, California Watch

When it comes to protecting California watershed habitats, environmentalists rarely embrace budget cuts. But that is exactly what they are doing in response to a recent proposal to slash funding for gold mining permits.

Last month, legislators amended the proposed state budget to prohibit the California Department of Fish and Game from issuing new permits for the gold mining process known as suction dredging. They estimate it will save the state $1.8 million by eliminating costs associated with selling and databasing individual permits, sending biologists to collect information at various sites, and paying for wardens who must devote a portion of their time to enforcing the regulations.

Suction dredging involves using vacuum-like devices to suck up sediment from the river bottom and deposit the material into sluice boxes floating on the water. But environmentalists say it is damaging to fisheries that are already on the decline. Craig Tucker, a spokesman for the Karuk Indian Tribe in Northern California, said it has been “downhill” for the tribe since the first Gold Rush more than 150 years ago.

Some fish species, such as the lamprey, live in riverbed

sediment for up to seven years during their larval stage, Tucker said, and are especially vulnerable to suction dredging.

“It’s deadly to those species,” Tucker said.

Read the whole story

S. Tahoe council not thrilled with county redistricting ideas

An agreement was reached by the South Lake Tahoe City Council, but enthusiasm was missing for any of El Dorado County’s five redistricting proposals.

Per federal law, the county must assess its five supervisorial districts and redraw the lines to make each one contain approximately the same number of people.

Some of the proposals would mean the South Shore would have two representatives, but both could live off the hill based on proposed boundaries.

Ultimately the council on June 7 lent its support for Alternative 3 (which has one supe representing the South Shore), and if that doesn’t happen, then Alternative 5 (with two supes).

Supervisors are expected to discuss redistricting later this month.

– Kathryn Reed

Sunny weather launches tourism season in Lake Tahoe

By Kathryn Reed

It's Day 3 – or at least it's forecasted to be. Day 3 of sunshine that is. Day 3 of feeling like summer might have arrived in Lake Tahoe before the calendar says it's supposed to. The National Weather Service expects it will hit 71 in South Lake Tahoe on Monday.

That's good news for a region that disagrees with economists who say the recession is over. Just look at the near 17 percent unemployment rate in South Lake Tahoe, the vacancy signs on hotels, the empty parking lots and abandoned storefronts.



The Tahoe Queen will race the M.S. Dixie II on Labor Day weekend. Photo/LTN file

Summer is Lake Tahoe's bread and butter season. It was beginning to seem more like burnt toast after the dusting of

snow covered the ground throughout the basin on Monday and May being more gray sky than blue, which turned the Amgen Tour de California into a bust for Lake Tahoe and Memorial Day one not to remember.

But when things start heating up in Sacramento – it's supposed to be in the 80s today and higher going forward – those Central Valley dwellers start thinking of cooler climates. Tahoe is often that perfect spot to get-away to.

Lake Tahoe Basin tourism officials are hoping word from the Leisure Travel Summit in New York last week will come to fruition. U.S. residents are expected to travel more this summer compared to a year ago, according to experts from Best Western, AAA and the U.S. Travel Association.

At the annual summit, Best Western reported advance reservations for peak summer travel up more than 4 percent at its U.S. hotels.

On the South Shore, hoteliers are also saying summer bookings are better than a year ago. And for an industry that has seen advance booking become a rarity and the last-minute reservation more the norm, this is a welcome change.

Despite gas prices hovering at about $4 a gallon in Tahoe and just less than that elsewhere, AAA predicts 85 to 90 percent of Americans will travel by vehicle this summer.

All of this could bode well for Tahoe, which despite trying to be a destination market for people with fat wallets, is still reliant on the drive-up market.

This is evident with Lake Tahoe Visitors Authority spending the bulk of its advertising dollars on the Sacramento and Bay Area markets.

Carol Chaplin, LTVA executive director, told *Lake Tahoe News* it is seeing success with the two television ads that are

aired during San Francisco Giants games. They are on cable and network channels, but the Giants games are where they are doing the best.

One TV ad is based on a Japanese game show that shows two guys with pantyhose on their heads, which then leads to the same old visuals of the South Shore. The other lead-in is two boxing chins. The tagline on both is “Get your vacation on.”

That’s the same campaign Duncan/Channon of San Francisco came up with for summer 2010.

“The idea of both is to catch your attention. They are weird and stop you,” Chaplin said.

Radio stations in the Sacramento and Bay Area markets have been airing ads since mid-May that the LTVA is paying for. Soon those ads will be replaced with promos touting the American Century Celebrity Golf Tournament, which is July 12-17 in Stateline. Then the regular ads will be broadcast until just past Labor Day.

What is new this Labor Day is a return to having the three-day weekend be more than just a fireworks show that Sunday.

Tourism officials on Thursday made the rounds to the South Lake Tahoe Lodging Association and Lake Tahoe Visitors Authority meetings to tout what is hoped to be a culinary extravaganza on land and water.

A winemaker dinner aboard the Tahoe Queen and M.S. Dixie II paddle-wheelers will start the fun Sept. 2, with a race between the two boats the next day.

For the past several years the boat race has been in June – in what was dubbed Opening Days Lake Tahoe. That event has been scrubbed from events lists. In the early 1990s Labor Day Lake Tahoe featured the race between the two boats and had events throughout that weekend as a way to keep locals entertained

and put heads in beds.

Tourism officials are going back to that line of thinking – making that weekend be full of fun.

Also on Sept. 3 will be Viva Valhalla, a celebration of Tahoe's Latino culture on Ski Run Boulevard from 10am-5pm.

On the Sunday of Labor Day will be the second annual Sample the Sierra. That night is the annual fireworks show.

But the fireworks are expected to be better and cost LTVA less money. The same goes for the Fourth of July event.

While Pyro Spectaculars is still putting on the show, the music choreographer has been fired and Jerry Bindel, LTVA board member, will be helping coordinate that aspect of the pyrotechnic display.

Mike Frye, who handles special events for the tourism agency, negotiated the rate from $10,000 a minute to $6,000 for the fireworks. The July 4 display will have about 23 minute of fireworks or 1 minute longer than last year, while the Labor Day show is a few minutes less – which is always the case.

Lodging association board members said much discussion was had in January with the LTVA about whether the July 4 fireworks should be moved to July 3 so they would be on a Sunday. Mixed and heated emotions rose to the surface about whether that would be unpatriotic, would tourists be confused if the date were changed, and what is the best option for increasing room nights.

Ultimately, it was decided July 4 fireworks should happen on July 4.

S. Tahoe gas station attendant chases off would-be robber

Randi Noonan, 27, tried to mess with the wrong gas station clerk Wednesday.

The South Lake Tahoe resident entered the American Gas station on Highway 50 June 8 at 4:45pm with a gun and demanded money, according to South Lake Tahoe police officers.

The clerk essentially said, “Not on my watch.”

The employee, whose name is not being released, confronted Noonan, disarmed her and chased her from the business, according to police.

Authorities are not releasing more specifics about how all that happened. But officers normally recommend not acting like a vigilante.

The clerk saw the license plate of the vehicle the suspect was driving which allowed police to track her down.

Noonan was still in the El Dorado County Jail in South Lake Tahoe the night of June 9. She is charged with attempted robbery.

– Kathryn Reed

Sheriff’s deputies geared up for Carson Valley Days

Douglas County sheriff’s deputies will be out in full force this weekend for the annual Carson Valley Days.

The two major events are the Friday night celebration in old town Gardnerville and the Saturday morning parade along Highway 395 in town.

On June 10 from approximately 7pm to 2am, in the business area along Highway 395 between Gilman Avenue and Eddy Street in downtown Gardnerville, citizens typically commemorate Carson Valley Days by socializing with each other at many of the restaurants and bars located in the area.

The Friday night event was started by the citizens of the Carson Valley years ago as an event to come together one night a year to commemorate the unity of the community and celebrate the accomplishments of the past year.

Sheriff Ron Pierini says excessive drunkenness, disorderly conduct, yelling, cursing, quarreling, fighting, or challenging others to a fight will not be tolerated.

Members of the Douglas County Sheriff’s Office will be conducting extensive foot patrol throughout the area during the entire celebration. Violators of the previous mentioned acts will be promptly arrested and removed from the crowd, authorities warn.

Due to the adult nature of the event, minors are discouraged from attending unless in the custody of a parent.

On June 11 from approximately 8am to noon, Highway 395 between Buckeye Road and Waterloo Lane will be closed to vehicle traffic to accommodate the Carson Valley Days Parade and a

walk/run/jog event hosted by the Douglas County Partnership of Community Resources.

The parade route will be from Minden Park, along Esmerelda Avenue, to Highway 395, to Waterloo Lane, ending at Lampe Park.

Northbound and southbound vehicle traffic on Highway 395 will be diverted around the parade route, from Buckeye Road in the north to Waterloo Lane in the south.

Douglas Avenue and County Road will be temporarily closed to through traffic during the staging hours of the parade from 7-9am.

USFS fire crews from Tahoe, Truckee deployed to Arizona

A slower than normal start to the wildfire season in California has allowed about 1,200 firefighters from the U.S. Forest Service to assist with blazes in the Southwest, including the historic Wallow Fire, which has now burned more than 389,000 acres in eastern Arizona and western New Mexico.

Among the resources that have been deployed are 27 hotshot crews, eight Type 2 Initial Attack Crews, 60 fire engines, 17 smokejumpers, 12 bulldozers, 11 water tenders and more than 150 personnel in various fire support positions. Nine contract crews and 4 additional contract engines bring the total number of personnel from California to an estimated 1,400. Fire crews from California are assigned to more than a dozen

blazes in the Southwest.

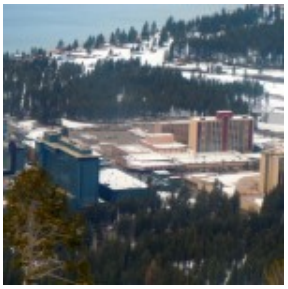
California has experienced a modest amount of fire activity thus far, mostly at lower elevations where seasonal grasses are almost fully cured. As vegetation continues to dry out and temperatures increase throughout the summer, fire activity is expected to increase. Runoff from heavy snowpack in the Sierra and other mountain ranges also continues to influence fire conditions.

U.S. Forest Service firefighters that have taken assignments in the Southwest in 2011 are from such California communities as South Lake Tahoe, Truckee, Placerville, Yreka, Alturas, Hayfork, Redding, Susanville, Lakeport, Willows, Camptonville, Foresthill, Nevada City, Sonora, King City, Fresno, Porterville, Santa Maria, Santa Barbara, Mammoth Lakes, Bishop, Lake Isabella, Antelope Valley, Santa Clarita, Sylmar, Glendora, Lytle Creek, Lake Arrowhead, Idyllwild, Corona, Lake Elsinore, Ramona, Rancho Bernardo and El Cajon.

Stateline casinos buck state trend – April numbers up

Gaming revenues surged at Stateline in April by 14.99 percent or $14.3 million compared to the same time in 2010.

Statewide, casinos collected $806 million from gamblers, which is a 0.58 percent decline compared with $810.7 million collected in April 2010, according to the state Gaming Control Board which released the April data this morning.



Stateline casino earnings were up in April. Photo/LTN

Carson Valley reported a drop of 3.34 percent.

In March, Stateline casinos reported a 29.8 percent drop in revenue. Often times March is a good month for casinos because of betting on college basketball.

April 2011 did have more skier days than usual with resorts staying open until late in the month to accommodate Easter. Most of the bed base for South Shore ski areas is within walking distance to the Stateline casinos.

– Kathryn Reed