Snowpack reduces risk of wildfires in Sierra – for now

By Jeff Delong, Reno Gazette-Journal

A hefty mountain snowpack and a cool, moist spring will reduce risks of major wildfires in Northern Nevada and the Sierra through June, fire experts said Thursday.

Fire danger will be a little greater this month in a drier Southern Nevada, while grass crops nourished by wet weather could make for active fires in the north later in the season and next year.

“There will be a late start to the fire season. We’ll probably skip most of the entire month of June,” Fred Svetz, fire weather program manager for the U.S. Bureau of Land Management in Reno, said of the situation in the Reno-Tahoe area.

June fire forecasts released by the Western Great Basin Coordinating Center and the National Interagency Fire Center in Boise cited a below-normal fire potential in both Northern Nevada and Northern California.

Read the whole story

Shuttered South Tahoe hotel may be turned into park

By Kathryn Reed

Edgewood Companies will have the rooms it needs to build a

lodge on its Stateline golf course and South Lake Tahoe will have a park to replace a blighted, boarded up hotel.

That’s the proposal on the table. The City Council is scheduled to make the final decision when it meets Tuesday at 9am at Lake Tahoe Airport.

City Manager Tony O’Rourke and Edgewood’s project manager Brandon Hill separately told *Lake Tahoe News* the agreement is an excellent example of a public-private partnership that benefits the South Shore community aesthetically and economically.



The proposed Bonanza Park. Rendering/Design Workshop

What the council has to decide June 7 is if the development rights Edgewood has regarding tourist accommodation units in the city can be transferred to Stateline.

Because the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency has set an arbitrary number for how many hotel rooms can ever be built in the basin, these TAUs are now a commodity. It also means to be able to build something a developer needs to secure the TAUs before permitting would be allowed.

Edgewood is in the process of creating a hotel on its Stateline golf course. It has 194 TAUs in the city limits. One hundred forty-four of those have already been approved for transfer. They come from Redevelopment Area 3, a Ski Run

project and the old Colony Inn. The remaining 50 are before the council. They are from the C&M Lodge on Bonanza Avenue.

Edgewood bought that property near the Y (nearest cross street is D Street) in November for $850,000 with the sole purpose of wanting the TAUs.

O’Rourke said a long-term benefit to the city is the Edgewood Lodge guests – who are expected to be at an income level not often seen on the South Shore – are projected to bring in more than $2 million in sales tax over a 30-year period.

To sweeten the deal Edgewood is proposing to pay for the demolition of the hotel that still sits on the nearly 1-acre parcel and turn it into a park.



The defunct hotel on Bonanza Avenue may become a park. Photo/LTN

The company has met with stakeholders, including the city’s Sustainability, Parks and Recreation, and Latino Affairs commissions. Then they went to the neighbors. This area is really a residential area, with apartment complexes and single-family residences.

“We invited over 200 people to the two outreach events in May and over 100 participated in the feedback process. Two-thirds of the participants were actual residents from the Bonanza

neighborhood," Hill said. "The process we used was, with the help of Design Workshop, a very hands-on approach. We sat, we listened, we gathered people around tables and asked them to draw what they would like to see in the park based on the following success factors: a) it would be well used; b) it could be implemented this year; c) it would use sustainable strategies; d) it would be cost-effective to maintain."

What Edgewood proposes to build is a park that includes a children's play area, grass play area, picnic pods, half-court basketball court, and a fenced-in dog park area.

The city for a number of years has talked about creating pocket parks so residents have a place within walking distance for gathering and limited recreation. Available land and the cost of creating them have stalled the process.

This would be the first one – and at no cost to the city except for eventual upkeep.

O'Rourke estimates it will cost the city about $7,000 a year to maintain what is being called Bonanza Park.

Hill expects it to cost his company about $200,000 to build the park. The plan is start demolition on the hotel as soon as the council gives the go-ahead. The goal is the park will be ready to be used before next winter.

"Upon completion of the park improvements, the land and park improvements will be dedicated or conveyed to the city," Hill said.

Zoval pleads not guilty to wire fraud

By Jessie Marchesseau

At a hearing Friday before a federal court judge, Lori Zoval pleaded not guilty to charges of wire fraud. A jury trial date is set for Sept. 13.

Zoval, a South Lake Tahoe woman indicted in July 2010 on three charges of wire fraud stemming from an alleged investment fraud scheme in 2005-06, was working as an investment banker in Folsom at the time.

The U.S. Attorney's Office offered Zoval a plea agreement in February. She decided not to take it.

"They submitted an offer that was just a little high," Zoval's attorney, Mark Reichel, told *Lake Tahoe News*. "But they've only heard one side of the story."

Reichel said that even though the potential sentence for the charges against Zoval are relatively low, additional time can be added on for what is known as uncharged relevant conduct. This means that Zoval's sentence could be increased for behavior for which she is not formally charged, something reflected in the plea agreement.

"The way I see it, there's a lot of equities in (Zoval's) corner," Reichel said. "Not every time money is lost, does it mean a crime was committed."

Lake Tahoe News reported in February about Zoval's alleged involvement in another investment scheme while employed by Holly's Place, a South Lake Tahoe vacation resort. The FBI has been in contact with the owners of Holly's Place. However, no charges have been brought against Zoval concerning her

interactions there.

The prosecuting attorney, Assistant U.S. Attorney Camil Skipper, could not be reached for comment.

A trial confirmation hearing is set for Aug. 26.

Ritz at Northstar under new ownership

By Jason Hildago, Reno Gazette-Journal

The Ritz-Carlton, Lake Tahoe will end its court-appointed receivership later this month as the luxury resort gets new ownership.

The resort at mid-mountain at Northstar-at-Tahoe is scheduled to have its official ownership change on June 27, according to Steven Holt, Ritz-Carlton, Lake Tahoe public relations director.



The Ritz at Northstar is under new ownership. Photo/LTN file

Holt said the name of the resort's new owner will also be announced on that date, and the property will continue to be managed under the Ritz-Carlton brand.

"The Ritz-Carlton never owned the property," he said. "We've always been a management company."

The new ownership marks the end of a rocky period in the new resort's history, which was at risk for foreclosure after Bank of America filed a notice of default against the property's developer, Avon, Colo.-based East West Resort Development, on March 31, 2010.

Read the whole story

Block owner arrested in Vegas; Tahoe wants him extradited

By Kathryn Reed

Eneliko "Sean" Smith, former owner of the boarded up Block Hotel in South Lake Tahoe, was arrested June 2 in Las Vegas on driving under the influence charges.

Smith, 40, was being held without bail at Clark County Detention Facility. He is also being held on a warrant out of El Dorado County for a probation violation. South Lake Tahoe officials plan to extradite Smith back to El Dorado County to face charges.



Eneliko
“Sean” Smith

Even though it has been well documented Smith was living in Las Vegas and attempting to start an airline there, local officials never had him picked up. And it was in Las Vegas where Smith was arrested in September 2008 on the initial charges out of South Lake Tahoe.

He owes the city more than $100,000 in unpaid taxes.

In March 2008 the South Lake Tahoe Police Department began an investigation into Smith’s failure to pay the transient occupancy tax for the hotel on Cedar Avenue. During the investigation, which also involved other city staff, Smith’s Cedar Lodge was also found to be in arrears in paying the hotel tax.

A lien was eventually placed on the properties and Smith was charged with felony embezzlement of public funds.

Both properties were closed by the city in 2008.

Smith pleaded guilty to one count of grand theft and was placed on probation with a condition to reimburse the city the money it was owed. Smith violated probation by failing to keep his probation officer up to date as to where he lived and he never paid a dime. Thus the reasons for the current warrant.

The Block opened in the mid-1990s as a hotel designed for snowboarders. Pro snowboarder Marc Franc Montoya opened it with his brother-in-law Smith.



The Block in South Lake Tahoe on June 3, 2011. Photo/LTN

“All of our rooms include items like cordless phones, CD players, PS2/XBOX, board up racks and free Wi-Fi. Other amenities include free beer, energy drinks, gift bags, popcorn, Internet cafe, and rooftop hot tub,” the promotions said.

The Block was happening in its brief heyday. The parking lot was full. The parties were legendary among the younger snowboarding crowd. A reality TV show on G4 was launched in 2007.

Now the hotel is boarded up, with a chain link fence around the perimeter and graffiti in some locations. It sits behind the bankrupt would-have, could-have been convention center property.

Public hearing to address basin fees in El Dorado

County

El Dorado County Board of Supervisors is scheduled to vote on a series of fees affecting Lake Tahoe Basin residents at the June 21 9am meeting.

The mosquito abatement and snow removal fees are not changing. The $6 and $20, respective, fees are the same annual charge property owners pay now. The board has to have a public hearing about them each year.

Neither fee has increased for about a decade or more.

The one fee that is slated to go up is garbage rates for people living in the Tahoma area. Per the franchise agreement, Tahoe Truckee Sierra Disposal is seeking to increase the monthly price by 5 percent. Most residents are on the 32-gallon can pickup at the current rate of $23.28/month. It's proposed to go to $24.44/month.

The meeting is at 330 Fair Lane in Placerville.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

El Dorado County man to serve time for cockfighting

An El Dorado County man who was arrested in connection with an alleged cockfighting operation in Garden Valley in February was convicted last week, ordered to serve 45 days in county jail, and pay $700 in fines and fees and more than $4,200 in restitution to El Dorado County. Once he serves his jail time, he will be on searchable probation for three years.

Saul Cuevas Ayala, a resident of Garden Valley, pleaded no contest to the misdemeanor crime for possession of game cocks for fighting purposes. As part of the plea, Ayala cannot possess fowl in the future or implements that could be used for cockfighting, and he must reimburse El Dorado County Animal Services for the costs incurred.

Rogelio Reyes-Higareda, who was arrested at the same time, was not charged. He was deported.

According to Henry Brzezinski, chief of El Dorado County Animal Services, cockfighting operations in El Dorado County and throughout California are a growing problem. “We do want the message to get out into the community that these operations are going on,” Brzezinski said in a statement. “Cockfighting is not just a concern because it involves cruelty to animals. Typically, large amounts of money, drugs and weapons are involved in cockfighting matches. There are also often other crimes and violence involved.”

Ayala and Reyes-Higareda were arrested Feb. 13 when, after a routine traffic stop by law enforcement, injured game birds and cockfighting instruments were found in their vehicle. A search warrant was issued and more than 250 game fowl were found on Ayala’s Garden Valley property, along with fighting implements and other evidence of cockfighting. All of the birds were either in bad shape physically or too aggressive to be rehabilitated, and had to be humanely euthanized, according to Brezinski.

Luxury home market decline

affects listings in Lake Tahoe

By Morgan Brennan, Forbes

Home prices around the country have taken another round of beatings lately, with national home values having dropped more than 30 percent now from the 2006 peak. The ultra luxury end of housing has felt those price plunges too, with multi-million dollar homes cutting prices by the millions. One Lake Tahoe estate is even shaving $25 million off its asking price.



Tranquility estate, owned by Tommy Hilfiger co-founder Joel Horowitz, first hit the sale block in 2006. The asking price? A hefty $100 million, crowning it one of the most expensive for sale properties on the U.S. market. Nearly five years later, with no billionaire takers coming to the closing table, the former CEO is finally slashing that nine figure price tag by 25 percent. It's now asking $75 million.

"He wanted to get in line with what has happened in the real estate market," says Sue Lowe, a Chase International agent who represents the property alongside Chase International CEO, Shari Chase. "He's eager to sell it and he knows that due to the economy, prices have come down and he has to match it."

The estate grounds, once briefly owned by entertainer Wayne Newton, were bought by Horowitz and his wife in 1997. They set to work constructing a luxury home owners' fantasy on the blank land. The result is an opulent 20,000 square foot mansion overlooking Lake Tahoe from 210 acres.

Read the whole story

Number of women-owned businesses increases sharply in Nev.

By Stephanie Veale, Reno Gazette-Journal

The landscape for women business owners has changed drastically since Christine Whitman became an entrepreneur 20 years ago.

In 1991, Whitman, now chief executive and president of logistics company Complemar Partners in New York, led a management buyout of the company she worked for at the time. She said women didn't own many businesses 20 years ago because "very few women were even thinking about doing it. It wasn't part of anyone's expectations.

"Today, I think women assume that they can do it," Whitman said. "There is a different attitude that girls and women are growing up with today than existed when I first started in my career."

The number of women-owned businesses in this country has grown 50 percent since 1997 – a growth rate that's 1.5 times the national average for businesses overall, according to U.S. Census data released in December and analyzed in a recent report from American Express OPEN. Nationally, businesses owned by women number more than 8.1 million.

Read the whole story

Dugard describes abduction details in transcripts

Updated: June 2 8:57pm

By Sam Stanton, Sacramento Bee

Jaycee Lee Dugard described in terrifying detail last fall how Phillip and Nancy Garrido snatched her off the street and whisked her away for 18 years of captivity.

Grand jury transcripts released moments ago recount her secret testimony that was the basis of the guilty pleas the Garridos accepted in April. The transcripts were released at the request of The Sacramento Bee and other media organizations.

Dugard told the El Dorado Grand Jury that the Garridos' car pulled up beside her the morning of June 10, 1991, "and I didn't think it was weird at the time, but it pulled in kind of close to me. And I thought he was going to ask for directions because he started to say something."

Instead, Dugard said she suddenly felt a shock and fell into bushes, the apparent result of the Garridos using a Taser on her and dragging her into their car.

Read the whole story

Here are the transcripts:

Transcript-1

Transcript-2

Transcript-3

Transcript-4

Transcript-5