Price of water increases an average of 9% in most U.S. cities

By Brett Walton, Circle of Blue

In the last year, the price of water in 30 U.S. metropolitan areas has increased an average of 9.4 percent for residential customers with medium consumption levels, according to data collected by Circle of Blue. The median increase for medium consumption was 8.6 percent. Water rates for high-volume consumers have increased slightly more than rates for lower consumption—an indication that utilities may be attempting to curb water use by charging higher marginal rates.

The annual survey, which Circle of Blue first conducted in April 2010, charts what residents pay per month for water in the 20 largest U.S. cities, as well as 10 regionally representative cities.*

Monthly water bills were calculated for a family of four at three consumption levels:

* Low: 50 gallons per person per day (6,000 total gallons per month)

* Medium: 100 gallons per person per day (12,000 total gallons per month)

* High: 150 gallons per person per day (18,000 total gallons per month)

Since the prices depend on cost-of-service factors and revenue decisions unique to each utility, comparisons between cities are somewhat difficult at first glance. However, the broader trend is unmistakable: the price of water is going up.

Over the last year, the largest relative rate increases occurred in Indianapolis (29.3 percent increase at medium consumption), Milwaukee (25.4 percent), and Houston (24.3 percent).

Water prices in two cities – Fresno and Chicago – have not changed since last April. Both cities, however, have already seen their fair share of rate hikes in recent years. From 2007 to 2010, the cost of water doubled in Fresno, while prices increased by half in Chicago.

Read the whole story

Tahoe tourism officials hope spinning wheels turn into cash

By Kathryn Reed

While there is no guarantee of making money from the Amgen Tour de California race, making money is the reason to be part of it.

“California’s majestic scenery, thrilling sporting events, world-class museums and art galleries attract millions of visitors to our state each year. Last year visitors spent nearly $90 billion in our local communities. This money has an enormous impact on employment and can serve as a catalyst to grow our economy,” Gov. Jerry Brown said in a statement.



Tricked out vehicles with TV cameras are already cruising the streets of South Lake Tahoe. Photos/Kathryn Reed

As the premier cycling event in the United States takes off from the South Shore on Sunday, it coincides with the final day of National Travel and Tourism Week.

May 15 begins a two-day affair for Lake Tahoe to show the world what it has to offer to cyclists and to those who would want to visit for other reasons.

“Ninety countries will be broadcasting this event to a global audience who may not even have heard of Tahoe. We can likely assume that this is millions of dollars worth of media for these impressions coupled with the incredible regional and national impressions,” explained B Gorman, president of the Lake Tahoe South Shore Chamber of Commerce. “We will never be able to track this value in terms of visitors who have the brand reinforced or begin to think about our piece of heaven as a destination they might visit in the future.”

There will be 27 hours of television coverage during the eight-day race that ends May 22 in Thousand Oaks.

Most of the economic impact to the South Shore, Truckee and Squaw Valley will come down the road when people travel here after being teased by the media with the allure of the Jewel of the Sierra.

That’s not to say hotels, restaurants and retail won’t benefit this weekend while people are in town for the start in South Tahoe, the end of stage one at Northstar-at-Tahoe, and the stage two start May 16 in Squaw.

Hotel and sales taxes, which are reported several months later, will be an indicator of how big of a boon this event was for the area. Considering May is one of deadest times in the basin, having an event of this magnitude is likely to be a bonus for some businesses.

“This event will be well followed in the European market and helps to define Lake Tahoe as a destination. The board of commissioners view this as a tremendous economic opportunity for Douglas County during a historically slow time of the year,” said Lisa Granahan, Douglas County Economic Vitality manager.

Some concerns

Several business people on the route of the race have expressed apprehension about customers being able to access their businesses during the road closures.

“To be honest, if I’m a citizen trying to run a business, I’m going to guess there is a cost,” said Truckee police Sgt. Robert Womack.

Despite what appears to be an unusual influx of travelers to Tahoe this time of year, not everyone has heads in beds.

“I haven’t heard of anyone exceedingly benefitting from this. It is creating less demand than we had hoped for,” Matt Fenn, president of the South Lake Tahoe Lodging Association said.

“But there were never any promises made.”

Part of this may have to do with LTVA’s lodging partners giving away 1,700 room nights – mostly at MontBleu and Harveys. Another 700 rooms were donated on the North Shore.

That’s one of the issues with something like this, host cities are asked to give a lot in return for the recognition and prestige that is associated with being involved with this caliber of an event. Food is part of the package, too.

LTVA budgeted $250,000 to bring the event to South Lake Tahoe. What has actually been spent is not known.

North Lake Tahoe Resort Association officials would not disclose what their share is.

Money in the bank

“Hosting the Amgen Tour de California has already paid for itself in media coverage generated. The exposure prior to the stage one start is estimated at $260,000 in advertising equivalency – what it would cost to purchase the same amount of editorial space – and a reach of 96 million in circulation/listenership,” according to LTVA literature.

In addition, local tourism officials have a robust social media campaign, including the LTVA’s iPhone app Tahoe South that has tons of race information.

LTVA also expects to generate about $50,000 in revenue from retail, sponsorships, last night’s gala and today’s Legends Ride.

In the long term, LTVA told *Lake Tahoe News* it anticipates the local impact of the actual race and events leading up to it could bring $5 million to $10 million to the area.

Previous Tour de California races have brought an estimated $100 million to the state.

North Lake Tahoe Resort Association officials, who have partnered with LTVA, wouldn't make projections about the fiscal impact of the race on the region or North Shore in particular. Though they also see money to be reaped down the road.

"This type of affiliation will go a long way in the promotion and awareness of this region as a bike mecca – both road and mountain," Andy Chapman, NLTRA tourism director, said.

Even though a large number of out of town plates have been zipping along the local roads, it's hard to know if they are here for the race.

"We have an opportunity to showcase ourselves as a destination for various types of recreational activities for individuals, families, groups, amateur, elite and professional athletes," Gorman said. "The visitor who travels to a destination to participate in sports, activities and hobbies such as hiking, cycling, kayaking, art, culture, history etc. stay longer, use public transportation and spend more."

It also seems like a larger number of adult beverage trucks were making deliveries on the South Shore on Friday.

Businesses have signs welcoming the riders and spectators, with some having displays out already. Highway 50 from Stateline to the Y is expected to be one big party scene, with much of the same atmosphere when the riders complete stage one at the Northstar Village.

Part of the Mikasa parking lot at Y in South Lake is already barricaded off so people can gather there to watch. The cyclists will pass that location twice. Plus, there will be a BMX demo at that site.

Cooperative effort

To put on something like this requires a great deal of

cooperation with law enforcement. They will be everywhere. A California Highway Patrol SUV was speeding behind a supped up camera-mobile Friday morning as a practice run of sorts through South Lake Tahoe.

CHP did not release what this costs them or if they charge the race promoters for the added manpower.

The Nevada Highway Patrol is putting extra people on duty while the race comes through the Silver State for the first time. They are billing the folks at Amgen.

For Truckee police, no added cost is involved, though more officers will be out and about. Womack said instead of having a training day this month, officers are working the bike ride.

South Lake Tahoe is spending about $27,000 on the event – $7,000 on the BMX expo; $8,500 on community services, staffing and support, event coordination, tents along the route for nonprofits, street barricades from Stateline through the city; and $11,500 on public safety overtime. Overtime is built into the budget with the expectation of special events coming up throughout the year.

Added personnel include a combined extra 21 police and fire, five public works employees, and parks and recreation staff working the event.

“As for revenue, I understand hotels have reservations above the average occupancy for this time period, which will provide an increase in TOT if bookings hold up. More visitors would also provide an increase in sales tax,” Nancy Kerry, city spokeswoman said.

Douglas County will have 35 sworn deputies, about 10 citizen patrol officers, 15 on horseback, and 30 search and rescue.

All jurisdictions have a wealth of volunteers helping.

The Douglas County commissioners approved $9,000 in overtime

costs for the sheriff’s department.

“The action sheet states that the economic impact from the Amgen tour to Lake Tahoe’s South Shore is estimated at $3 million to $6 million over a several day period,” Douglas County’s Granahan said. “That is based on information from other cities’ experiences with Amgen in the past. We expect much of that to be in room tax and sales tax regionwide. Obviously, it is also good for local merchants, catering companies, marketing/advertising, art, and flower companies to name a few who have been engaged in contracts by LTVA.”

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Twain’s name won’t be on Nevada cove

By Tom Knudson, Sacramento Bee

A proposal to name a small inlet on the Nevada side of Lake Tahoe in honor of Mark Twain was turned down Thursday on a 5-to-4 vote of the U.S. Board on Geographic Names.

Louis Yost, executive secretary for the board, said in an email that members rejected the proposal because of opposition from the U.S. Forest Service and uncertainty over whether Twain actually camped at the spot, as proponents contend.

A Bee story Thursday highlighted controversy over the proposal in which Twain enthusiasts in Nevada have clashed with a California researcher over the iconic author’s whereabouts at the lake in 1861.

Read the whole story

Brown set stage for budget fight during campaign

By Kevin Yamamura, Sacramento Bee

Gov. Jerry Brown set the stage for this budget fight more than a year ago.

The Democratic governor launched his campaign in March 2010 on a promise he would not raise taxes without a vote of the people. It was a way to disarm GOP attacks on taxes while embracing the popular notion of allowing voters to resolve the budget.



Lake Tahoe Unified teachers ready to protest May 13 in Sacramento. Photo/Provided

The idea remains popular among the electorate, but it has complicated Brown's path toward a balanced budget as each month goes by without an election in place.

The specter of a public ratification has made it difficult for

schools and others who rely on the state budget to prepare for the coming fiscal year. It also raises the possibility that lawmakers would have to revisit the budget this fall or winter should voters reject taxes at the ballot, possibly delaying state payments and normal borrowing procedures.

“Hindsight is always 20/20,” said Adam Mendelsohn, an adviser to former Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger. “At the time, the pledge was very smart. It was an election that was really dominated across the country by fiscal conservatives.”

Already, major unions that support Democratic campaigns have come out against the ballot idea after offering tepid support earlier this year. Assembly Speaker John A. Pérez, D-Los Angeles, has also suggested that Brown pursue taxes without a public vote.

Read the whole story

State Parks cuts avoid Tahoe facilities

California State Parks today announced a plan to close up to 70 of its 278 parks due to budget cuts. No Lake Tahoe parks are slated to be shut down.

The closures are necessary to achieve an $11 million reduction in fiscal year 2011-12, and $22 million in the following fiscal year as mandated by Gov. Jerry Brown



Bale Grist Mill in the Napa Valley is slated to be closed. Photo/Kathryn Reed

“We regret closing any park,” said Ruth Coleman, director of California State Parks, said in a statement. “But with the proposed budget reductions over the next two years, we can no longer afford to operate all parks within the system.”

Closures will begin in September, with reduction in services starting this summer.

The decision of what to close was based on being able to provide the diversity of experiences wanted by visitors across the state. For instance, State Parks has a variety of state historic parks, state beaches, state recreation areas, state nature reserves and state parks and most of the parks in all categories will remain open.

The parks to be closed are:

Anderson Marsh SHP

Annadel SP

Antelope Valley Indian Museum

Austin Creek SRA

Bale Grist Mill SHP

Benbow Lake SRA

Benicia Capitol SHP

Benicia SRA

Bidwell Mansion SHP

Bothe-Napa Valley SP

Brannan Island SRA

California Mining & Mineral Museum

Candlestick Point SRA

Castle Crags SP

Castle Rock SP

China Camp SP

Colusa-Sacramento River SRA

Del Norte Coast Redwoods SP

Fort Humboldt SHP

Fort Tejon SHP

Garrapata SP

George J. Hatfield SRA

Governor’s Mansion SHP

Gray Whale Cove SB

Greenwood SB

Grizzly Creek Redwoods SP

Hendy Woods SP

Henry W. Coe SP

Jack London SHP

Jug Handle SNR

Leland Stanford Mansion SHP

Limekiln SP

Los Encinos SHP

Malakoff Diggins SHP

Manchester SP

McConnell SRA

McGrath SB

Mono Lake Tufa SNR

Morro Strand SB

Moss Landing SB

Olompali SHP

Palomar Mountain SP

Petaluma Adobe SHP

Picacho SRA

Pio Pico SHP

Plumas-Eureka SP

Point Cabrillo Light Station

Portola Redwoods SP

Providence Mountains SRA

Railtown 1897 SHP

Russian Gulch SP

Saddleback Butte SP

Salton Sea SRA

Samuel P. Taylor SP

San Pasqual Battlefield SHP

Santa Cruz Mission SHP

Santa Susana Pass SHP

Shasta SHP

South Yuba River SP

Standish-Hickey SRA

Sugarloaf Ridge SP

Tomales Bay SP

Tule Elk SNR

Turlock Lake SRA

Twin Lakes SB

Weaverville Joss House SHP

Westport-Union Landing SB

William B. Ide Adobe SHP

Woodson Bridge SRA

Zmudowski SB

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

El Dorado County drops charges against man allegedly transporting pot

By Greg Welter, Oroville Mercury-Register

Charges have been dropped in El Dorado County against a Chico man arrested with a large amount of marijuana in his car, but he now faces prosecution in Butte County, where it was allegedly grown.

Robert Daniels, 62, was arrested in October 2010 after California Highway Patrol officers reportedly found 103 pounds of processed pot in his vehicle during a traffic stop near Tahoma. Officials said he was on his way to deliver it to a pot cooperative in South Lake Tahoe.

An investigation led to the discovery of an additional 295 pounds of marijuana and 62 plants at Daniels' Chico residence during a search warrant served by El Dorado County officials.

Prosecutors in El Dorado asked a judge to drop charges against Daniels so he could face allegations in Butte County of cultivating marijuana and possessing it for sales.

An investigation revealed Daniels was allegedly among five other people operating a pot grow in the Richardson Springs area, east of Chico.

Read the whole story

Fortier changes financial forms after questioned by League

By Kathryn Reed

Claire Fortier received nearly $10,000 from the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency last year. Now she is on the Governing Board of the bi-state regulatory agency and the League to Save to Lake Tahoe is going through TRPA documents to find out what all Fortier has done for TRPA.

Since the League brought the information to light, Fortier has since amended her financial disclosure forms.



Claire Fortier

“I’m not sure I did need to change it. That’s the big if. For the year before you are on the TRPA board you have to disclose what you made,” Fortier told *Lake Tahoe News*. “I amended my statement even though (the payment) was outside of a year.”

Fortier did the work for TRPA on behalf of her Reno-based company Laren Communications. The last check she received was in February 2010. A year later she was on the Governing Board, after being appointed to it by her colleagues on the South

Lake Tahoe City Council, to which she was elected in November 2010.

“It’s not that she did anything wrong, but the fact she revised her disclosure statement (is something) the public should know,” Rochelle Nason, executive director of the League, told *LTN*.

Fortier also worked on a brochure for TRPA a few years ago regarding Pathways 2007.

“I absolutely believe they are going after me because I am calling them on having an unbendable stance that is stymieing our ability to fix ourselves, to fix Lake Tahoe,” Fortier said of the League.

Jeff Cowen, spokesman for TRPA, said the $9,681 worth of work Fortier did was research of the agency’s history so a presentation for that 40th anniversary could be put together. He said staff did not have time to do it.

“Claire Fortier did not have a contract with TRPA. Our purchase procedures call for a formal bid and contract when the expense is above $25,000 and this project’s total cost was under $10,000. The project Claire Fortier/Laren Inc. worked on for TRPA began with a scope of work which evolved over the course of the project,” Cowen said. “The project necessitated more of Claire’s time to complete the State of the Basin slideshow and report to the Governing Board, vs. the 24-page report and website we had initially scoped.”

She was paid an hourly rate.

“The League is glad Claire has stepped up and done the right thing in disclosing her financial dealings with the TRPA. We are encouraging her to be proactive about contacting the Fair Political Practices Commission and making sure she has made all the disclosures required by state law as well,” Nason said. “We are still concerned with the question why TRPA would

spend almost $10,000 for historical research on its 40th anniversary. All that information has been assembled repeatedly in the past, in connection with the 30th, 25th, 20th, and 10th anniversaries of the agency. We will be seeking information about the contract, payments, and work product and expect to offer some suggestions about how the agency might operate more efficiently."

Here are the forms involving Fortier:

• Jan. 11, 2011, 700 form

• Jan. 11, 2011, TRPA form

• April 27, 2011, TRPA form.

And here is the end result of her work – the TRPA slide show.

The Block's ex-owner still owes Tahoe cash as he starts airline

By Tim O'Reiley, Las Vegas Review-Journal

Even as he promotes his vision for a high-flying airline called LV Air, Eneliko Smith continues to be dogged on the ground by what he terms "my stupid-ass mistakes in the past."

When he first announced the plan in February, Smith laid out a vision for luxury air service flying four daily round trips between Sin City and New York starting in 2011.



The Block in South Lake Tahoe has been fenced off for years. Photo/LTN

“Soon you will be able to fly LV Air to Las Vegas,” the LV Air website promises. “Experience the luxury, the service, and the brands that illustrate the world of Las Vegas when you board your aircraft – everything afterwards is fantasy.”

The *Associated Press, Bloomberg Television, CNN Trave*l and *Huffington Post* have featured stories about Smith and his audacious airline, which touts plush seats that fold out as beds, complimentary Ipads, limo service and meals fit for “sheiks and moguls.”

In mid-April, Smith upped the ante by announcing that 16 destinations were now under consideration.

But in El Dorado County, officials are still waiting for Smith to pay restitution for a previous failed venture, the Block Hotel in South Lake Tahoe, where he was the managing partner.

After months of not paying room taxes collected at the boutique hotel that catered to hard-partying snowboarders, Smith was arrested in September 2008 in Las Vegas and extradited to California.

“I paid my employees instead of my bed taxes, and I paid the price for it,” Smith wrote in an email. “I never took one penny out of malfeasance and never will.”

A year ago, Smith pleaded no contest to a felony count of grand theft by embezzlement. As part of the plea deal, the felony is to be dropped to a misdemeanor if he pays more than $120,000 in back taxes, said El Dorado County Assistant District Attorney Hans Uthe.

But Smith has paid nothing, Uthe said.

“We are less than pleased with his progress. He’s in trouble.”

Read the whole story

Diabetes research part of Tour de California race

In a first step to fill a major void in diabetes sports research, global sports organization Team Type 1, the official parent company of the Team Type 1-sanofi aventis professional men’s cycling team, will launch a clinical study at the Amgen Tour de California.

The pioneering study conducted by the TT1 Diabetes Sports Research Institute, will assess blood glucose levels of elite cyclists – with and without diabetes – with a goal of identifying optimal levels for peak athletic performance. The study will be led by Institute Medical Director Juan P. Frias. Frias is affiliated with the UC San Diego Department of Medicine, and is the former chief medical officer of Johnson & Johnson, Diabetes Care.

“While there have been several athletes with type 1 diabetes who have competed and succeeded at the professional and Olympic levels, there is very little published clinical data

related to optimization of athletic performance in persons with type 1 diabetes," Frias said in a statement. "We strongly believe our efforts will play an important role in expanding research in this field and in helping other athletes with diabetes manage their glucose to perform safely and optimally."

Throughout the eight stages of the ride, which includes grueling climbs and hundreds of miles of racing from Lake Tahoe to Thousand Oaks, Team Type 1-sanofi-aventis athletes who have volunteered to take part in the study will wear continuous glucose monitors, while meters on their bikes measure parameters such as speed, power and energy expenditure.

The study will continue at other cycling events throughout the racing season including the USA Pro Cycling Challenge in Colorado from Aug. 22-28. Additionally, a controlled laboratory component is planned in collaboration with the San Diego State University School of Exercise and Nutritional Sciences.

Douglas County's master plan not waiting for TRPA

By Kathryn Reed

STATELINE – Douglas County is tired of waiting for the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency to update its Regional Plan, so it is revising its master plan to reflect what citizens want – not necessarily what the bi-state regulatory agency dictates.

"Everyone is worried the Regional Plan won't get updated or it

will take too long so we are pushing now for this transect planning," Brandy McMahon, the county's senior planner, said.

TRPA officials are saying the plan that was supposed to come out in 2007 will be released late 2012.



Douglas County is making plans for how to improve Stateline. Photo/LTN

Although the county is not proposing any major projects, it does want the community's input in regards to vision for the future.

At a meeting Thursday night at Kahle Community Center, nine people turned out to give McMahon ideas about what they want to see going forward.

Steve Teshara, who has his hands in all things transportation related in the Lake Tahoe Basin, sees this as "a chance for the county to take some leadership."

Douglas County reviews its master plan annually and more substantially every fifth year. The original plan was adopted in 1996, with a 10-year update done in 2006.

"With TRPA's rules, it's hard to put something together that is economically viable," Gary Midkiff of Midkiff and Associates said. He pointed to density and height issues.

These are some of the same issues being brought up in South Lake Tahoe in regards to its General Plan update, which is likely to be voted on May 17. South Tahoe also wants to be a leader and not just do what the bi-state regulatory agency says.

Although no one from the League to Save Lake Tahoe was at the May 12 meeting, this advocacy group has threatened the city if it approves a plan that does not comply with the Regional Plan.

“People need to understand when they put money into the League to Save Lake Tahoe, that is not money to save the lake,” Midkiff said. “Their sole function is to block everything.”

He particularly singled out the Sierra Colina project that is proposed to be built in Stateline but has been in litigation for nearly two years because the League has filed a lawsuit.

“If we keep doing nothing, we will have a worse situation than we have, which is hard to imagine,” Midkiff said.

Recently the South Tahoe Alliance of Resorts was formed to create a vision for the Stateline area. This group wants to cooperate with South Lake Tahoe so there is continuity between Ski Run Boulevard on the California side down to the Kahle Road area and up Kingsbury Grade.

This group, along with the master plan, will keep working on what reconfiguring Loop Road around the casinos might entail and how the casino corridor could be more pedestrian friendly.

With the transportation component last revised in 2007, Teshara intimated most of his comments would be transit related.

It was also brought up that the Van Sickle Bi-State Park, that is still proposed to open this summer, is not in the county’s master plan and will need to be added.

Recreation components are part of the plan – like the Stateline-to-Stateline bike trail. It's still possible the demo site on the South Shore could break ground this summer, though the original May 15 start date is off the books.

McMahon also said the county, which owns the old Kingsbury Grade, is looking at turning that route into a mountain biking area. She also touched on how the Carson Valley Trails Association wants to put in a trail along Foothill Road, and how there will be a trail built from Walley's Hot Springs to Genoa.

Comments will be accepted until Sept. 1. Send them to bmcmahon@co.doglas.nv.us. More information can be found online.

The next public meeting is May 25 to discuss the Carson Valley and Pinenut planning areas. It is from 9am-5pm at 1602 Esmeralda Ave., Minden.

The goal is to have the Planning Commission review the master plan in October and have commissioners take action in November.