EPA proposes stricter rules on water pollution

By Juliet Eilperin, Washington Post

The Obama administration announced Wednesday that it will impose stricter pollution controls on millions of acres of wetlands and tens of thousands of miles of streams.

The new guidelines from the Environmental Protection Agency, which will be codified in a federal regulation later this year, could prevent the dumping of mining waste and the discharge of industrial pollutants to waters that feed swimming holes and drinking water supplies. The specific restriction will depend on the waterway.



Glass bottles strewn on the bank of the Upper Truckee River in summer 2010. Photo/LTN file

The question of which isolated streams and wetlands qualify for protection under the Clean Water Act has been in dispute for a decade. The Supreme Court has issued two decisions, and the George W. Bush administration issued guidance in 2003 and 2008 limiting the scope of the act.

EPA Administrator Lisa P. Jackson said in a telephone news conference with reporters that although the new rules will expand the waterways enjoying federal protection, “this is not some massive increase, as far as we can tell.”

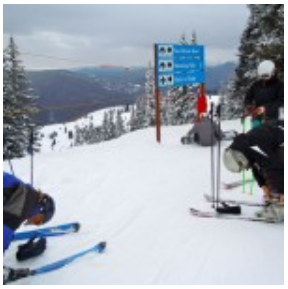
Read the whole story

Skier visits up 3.9% at Vail Resorts

By Ed Sealover, Denver Business Journal

Skier visits to Vail Resorts Inc. properties this season rose 3.9 percent over last year and lift-ticket revenue jumped 8 percent, according to final numbers released Thursday by the Broomfield-based company.

Vail Resorts also reported significant year-over-year increases in several areas of ancillary revenue: 9 percent for dining revenue, 8.4 percent for ski school revenue and 8.3 percent for retail and rental revenue.



Buckling up for Vail's bowls. Photo/Kathryn Reed

“The 2010-2011 ski season has come to a close and we are pleased with the ski season metrics across our six resorts,” Vail Resorts CEO Rob Katz said in a news release. “It was especially good to see the rate of growth in lift ticket and ancillary revenue continue to outpace skier visits due to price increases across our lift ticket and season pass products, together with increased spending per visit.”

Read the whole story

Bodies of 2 Tahoe area skiers found in Eastern Sierra

By Mike Rogge and Tim Mutrie, Powder

Overdue since late Tuesday from a ski mountaineering outing to Split Mountain, south of Bishop, the bodies of Kip Garre and Allison Kreutzen were discovered today during a search-and-rescue operation, Powder.com has confirmed.

Garre, 38, an accomplished skier, guide and mountaineer, and his girlfriend, Allison Kreutzen, intended to climb the Split Couloir on April 26. They did not return. Both Garre and Kreutzen lived in the Tahoe area.

When reached via telephone by Powder.com this afternoon, Inyo County Sheriff’s Office Public Information Officer Carma Roper said, “There was a search and rescue effort launched at 8 a.m. this morning. They were two very experienced hikers/skiers and they were overdue, near the Split Mountain area.”

Roper later confirmed that two bodies had been discovered; Powder.com independently confirmed Garre and Kreutzen as the

two skiers involved. “The wind situation right now is horrendous and the helicopters aren’t able to get into certain areas that they should be able to,” Roper added.

Seven of Garre’s and Kreutzen’s friends assisted in the search-and-rescue operation, according to Roper. Powder.com reached one of those skiers this evening, California time, just as they were making their way out of the mountains. That person declined to discuss details of the situation until first connecting with friends and family.

Garre grew up in Hancock, New Hampshire. Captivated by the freeskiing movement of the early 90s, Garre moved to Squaw Valley and was an early supporter in the park scene before shifting his focus to ski mountaineering and backcountry adventures. He made descents down some of the world’s most elusive mountains, including in Kashmir, Pakistan, China, the Tetons, the Alps, Alaska, Antarctica and his beloved Sierra.

Read the whole story

Labor-backed mailers attack Beth Gaines

By Torey Van Oot, Sacramento Bee

A labor-backed independent expenditure committee has launched a last-minute attack against Republican Beth Gaines in the 4th Assembly District.

Opportunity PAC reported this week that it has spent more than $9,000 on mail pieces opposing Gaines, a candidate in next week’s special election to fill the seat vacated when her

husband, Ted Gaines, was elected to the state Senate.

Read the whole story

Private land the new frontier for pot wars

By Robert Townsend, California Watch

A little-spoken-of war is taking place behind California's fences and property lines: Trespassing marijuana growers are setting booby traps, resorting to violence and vandalism, and spoiling the land by stealing water and spraying dangerous chemicals that leach into streams.

As the federal government focuses on stopping illegal marijuana crops in public parklands and U.S. forests, sheriff's and state drug enforcement officials face the persistent and potentially dangerous problem of pot growers commandeering private land for their crops.

While some land owners fear violence, others face environmental havoc.

Read the whole story

Schools near Mt. Rose Highway

on lockdown

By Steve Timko, Reno Gazette-Journal

The Washoe County Sheriff's Office said the man they are looking for in an incident off the Mount Rose Highway is Wade Richard Kelly, 52.

Kelly and a brother allegedly got into a fight at the home of his mother in the 16600 block of Callahan Road, the sheriff's office said. His mother was not at the home at the time of the incident.

The sheriff's office is preparing to go into the home to see if Kelly is inside. He may have fled. Authorities fear he may have guns.

Kelly is described as 5 feet, 10 inches tall with brown hair and blue eyes was last seen wearing a black-and-gray pullover shirt.

Read the whole story

Online gambling crackdown puts poker world in limbo

Gary Mihoces, USA Today

Greg Raymer, whose $160 entry fee in an online poker tournament led to a $5 million win at the 2004 World Series of Poker, says it's hard to tell how a federal crackdown on online gaming will affect WSOP entries this year.

But he’s a gambler. If he had to bet, he’d figure on a sizeable drop. The 2011 WSOP, a series of 58 events, starts May 31 in Las Vegas. Its Main Event, which begins July 7, had 7,319 entries last year.

“If I was actually putting a number to bet on, I would say more like somewhere in the low 5,000s (this year),” Raymer said by phone from his home in Raleigh, N.C. “If you made me pick a number because you were going to bet either over or under “» it would be something like 5,250.”

Last Friday, federal authorities in New York targeted three online gaming firms: PokerStars, Full Tilt Poker and Absolute Poker. Eleven people were charged with bank fraud and illegal gambling. Restraining orders were issued against about 75 bank accounts allegedly used to process payments in 14 countries.

Read the whole story

Controversial Boulder Bay project OK’d, Biltmore is gone

By Kathryn Reed

KINGS BEACH – Depending on who one listens to, the Boulder Bay project is either going to be the gold standard for redevelopment in the Lake Tahoe Basin or will be the worst thing to ever be approved by the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency.

On a 12-1 vote, the Governing Board on April 27 approved the more than $150 million project. Mara Bresnick voted no on

everything concerning the project. (Board member Byron Sher left before the vote, but said before he left that he would have voted no.)



Boulder Bay is designed to revitalize Crystal Bay.

The multi-phase project will obliterate the outdated Tahoe Biltmore in Crystal Bay and in its place will be the Boulder Bay Resort & Wellness Center. This is the brainchild of Roger Wittenberg, who made his money as co-founder of Trex Company.

As the last of the 80 people who commented on the project during the public hearing Wednesday, Wittenberg told the board that after four years of back-and-forth with the TRPA, he is not going away. He encouraged the board to approve the project unanimously to send a message to the naysayers. While he didn't get that, he can now move forward.

"There will be two phases, with the bulk of the utilities, BMPs, new roads, and major concrete pour in the first phase," project manager Brian Helm said. This allows the existing facility to keep operating.

In a perfect world, construction could begin in May 2012, though with paperwork (aka permitting process) that still needs to occur, dirt may not be turned until 2013.

The first phase is likely to take two seasons – which in the basin is May 1-Oct. 15 in terms of being able to move dirt.

What was approved was the final environmental impact statement, an amendment to Chapter 22 of the TRPA rules regarding height of buildings, and acceptance of the Community Enhancement Project.

Eight structures will be built. The number of hotel units will go from 111 to 275 at the end of build-out. Fifty-nine units will be whole ownership. Fourteen will be affordable housing – with another 10 units also designed for employees to be constructed off-site.

As a sign of the decline of gaming in the region, the area devoted for gambling will drop from 22,400 square feet to 10,000.

The four casinos in the Crystal Bay corridor – like their counterparts on the South Shore – are outdated. The North Shore gaming venues were built in the 1930s and ’40s.

Sticking points

Of the 80 people who voiced their opinions Wednesday, 58 were for the project, 16 against and six were in the middle.

The League to Save Lake Tahoe voiced its displeasure with the project mostly in terms of overall size and the height amendment.

Rochelle Nason, executive director of the League, told *Lake Tahoe News* her group will gather and debrief – as they do with all decisions like this one.

While Nason was at the meeting, a staff member spoke on behalf of the League during the public hearing.

Most of the people who had mixed feelings about Boulder Bay shared the League’s concerns.

Passion ran strong from all sides, though it was civil discourse. The morning presentation on the project took three

hours. After lunch the public spent about four hours giving input. Then the board deliberated for more than three hours before the vote was taken.

With minutia to detail, the board took a break at 8:22pm, resuming at 8:43pm. The votes were taken at 9:25pm with adjournment right after that.

While the height issue received much discussion, it was repeatedly pointed out that the amendment could only be applied to other projects in this community plan area – not universally throughout the basin.

This is an important fact because the Homewood project that is also in the TRPA process wants to be granted a height variance.

Some of the problem is how TRPA measures the height of buildings. The controversy is when a structure is built on a slope. Instead of measuring from the foundation to the roof at each spot, height is essentially calculated by the lowest point to the highest point.

Traffic was another major sticking point. The environmental document says vehicle miles traveled will be reduced. Many who spoke took issue with how this statement came to be.

VMT is a huge component of air quality measurements.

Mixed use is designed to reduce vehicle miles traveled. This is because people have what they want in one place instead of needing to make multiple stops.

But one could easily argue casinos by nature are mixed use based on being a hotel, casino, having restaurants and sometimes a spa – meaning this new project may not change how people travel to the site on Highway 28.

About an hour was spent by the board discussing how traffic studies are done, what goes into them, the standards of the

studies and validity of them.

What the public wanted to know is how Wittenberg wants to increase patronage with a new complex, but traffic will be less. That question was never answered.

Although Boulder Bay has to put money into public transit, it's a well-known fact people who live and visit the basin like to drive their cars. This was obvious by the full parking lot at North Tahoe Event Center and lack of carpooling.

Another concern was the transfer of tourist accommodation units – including 72 from the old Colony Inn in South Lake Tahoe to Boulder Bay.

Some guarantees

The failed convention center project in South Lake Tahoe that has left the South Shore with a more blighted eyesore of concrete and rebar than the rundown buildings that had been there before was repeatedly brought up.

No one wants another hole in the basin. To help combat that, Wittenberg is going to have to prove he has financing before he can break ground.

Another bone of contention is erosion control measures (best management practices) have only been temporary since Wittenberg bought the property a handful of years ago. The reasoning being he would have to undo those as construction took place.

Board member Clem Shute proposed changing the five-year mandate to have a bond to fund BMPs to be extended to 20 years. This is to ensure that if the project goes belly-up, the property owner is still doing the basics to keep sediment from going into the lake. This was added to the requirements.

When the project is done, it will reduce the amount of sediment reaching Lake Tahoe by 90 percent – going to 3,500

pounds a year.

Another thing the project will do is bring jobs to the area. It’s estimated Boulder Bay will employ more than 200 people.

For more information about the Boulder Bay project, go online.

Warning: Be wary of property tax mailings

By Cathy Locke, Sacramento Bee

El Dorado County Assessor Karl Weiland advises residents to be wary of mailers offering to reduce property taxes for a fee, noting that property owners can obtain the same tax relief free of charge.

The latest mailer, from Property Tax Assessor Records Corp., offers to assist homeowners in obtaining a homeowner’s exemption for $25. The reverse side of the mailer offers additional information on comparable sales along with an offer to provide a customized report, again for a fee, according to a news release from the Assessors Office.

Weiland suggested that any property owner who receives a solicitation offering help with property taxes should contact the Assessor’s Office to make sure the service is not available for free.

In 2007, property owners received an official-looking notice that solicited a payment of $189 before the deadline and $209 afterwards. The mailers included an unrealistic value and implied significant savings. The owners of the Southern California company were subsequently charged with mail fraud

and deceptive business practices.

Read the whole story

Heller appointed to replace Ensign in Senate

By Las Vegas Sun

Gov. Brian Sandoval appointed Rep. Dean Heller today to fill the Senate seat being vacated by Sen. John Ensign.

Sandoval said last week that he would appoint Ensign's replacement before his May 3 resignation. The appointment of Heller was widely expected.

Sun columnist Jon Ralston reported the appointment late this morning.

Sandoval had already endorsed Heller for Senate in 2012, and given the boost Heller will get from assuming the title of "senator" and the experience and incumbency that comes with it, Heller seemed his most sensible choice.

Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid issued a statement welcoming Heller to the Senate.

Read the whole story