Washoe County on road to reduce sediment from reaching Lake Tahoe

By Jeff Delong, Reno Gazette-Journal

The tiniest particles of dirt that pose the most dire threat to Lake Tahoe's clarity are targeted in an emerging effort by Washoe County and other local jurisdictions around the lake.

Now in the early stages of a project designed to prevent particles the width of a human hair from flowing into the lake, Washoe County officials are confident they can make a difference.

The goal is to reduce the amount of the fine sediment flowing into the lake from urbanized areas in Incline Village and Crystal Bay by 34 percent over the next 15 years.

"I believe it is realistic however it is a work in progress," said Dan St. John, Washoe County's director of public works.

Washoe's efforts come in tandem with others under way in places like the city of South Lake Tahoe and Placer County to reduce the "total daily maximum load" of tiny particles carried into the lake by runoff.

A decade of research indicates these particles, combined with algae growth, play the largest role in clouding Tahoe's famously blue waters. Historically, one could see more than 100 feet into Tahoe's depths from the surface. Now, one can see only about 70 feet down.

If experts are successful with their 15-year goal, clarity could be enhanced by about 10 feet. Longer-term goals are to reduce fine particle pollution by 71 percent over 65 years, restoring historical clarity.

Read the whole story

Focus of lake clarity doesn’t sit well with SLT council

By Kathryn Reed

A letter expressing South Lake Tahoe’s displeasure with fixating on how far a scientific white plate can be seen in the middle of Lake Tahoe instead of dealing with the muck growing near the shore is being finalized today.

City Councilwomen Claire Fortier and Angela Swanson were tasked with working with staff to formulate the words for the letter to be sent to the state Water Board by the March 18 comment deadline. The letter will be on the council’s March 15 agenda for approval.

The state board plans to conduct a public hearing April 18 in Sacramento regarding the total maximum daily load allocations approved by Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board in November. Officials from the regional office have been briefing state board members this week about TMDL in Lake Tahoe.



A street sweeper in

South Lake Tahoe on March 9 is designed to reduce sediment. Photo/Kathryn Reed

“We need to wave the flag that says before you pass this more consideration needs to be focused on the costs and science,” Fortier told *Lake Tahoe News*. “I personally feel as if we are being railroaded with a standard that is impossible to meet.”

At a September meeting about TMDLs Bob Larsen, environmental scientist with Lahontan, estimated it will cost $100 million a year for 15 years to accomplish his agency’s clarity goal. He also said that estimate is “very rough.”

Today the Secchi disc can be seen to a depth of 70 feet. The goal is add seven to 10 feet to that number.

To reach that goal the city, five counties and two state transportation departments in the Lake Tahoe Basin have mandates put on them by Lahontan to reduce the fine sediment from their jurisdictions that reach Lake Tahoe.

At the council meeting last week, Swanson called it an unfunded mandate.

Lauri Kemper, assistant executive officer with Lahontan, told *Lake Tahoe News* the municipal stormwater permits the agency is working on that should be before her board in October will focus on maintenance of what is in place – which in turn will allow the local governments to meet the state’s initial goals.

“We think with the first five-year targets some will have met them. We are comparing it to the 2004 baseline year,” Kemper explained. “They will get credit for anything they have done in that time.”

This includes using high-end street sweepers and putting in stormwater facilities, sometimes known as an erosion control project.

Fortier at the meeting and afterward questioned why the near shore – the depth people wade into – isn't being addressed.

"Milfoil is a problem, but it's more of a habitat problem than water quality," Doug Smith with Lahontan told the council.

He admitted there are a lot of unknowns regarding the near shore.

Kemper said Lahontan is working with other entities that are addressing invasive species issues. Another thing her agency is looking at is allowing aquatic pesticides to be used for the first time in Lake Tahoe. A hearing on the subject will be conducted this spring, with possible adoption in the fall.

"The good news is everything we are doing is for lake clarity," Kemper said.

She also pointed out how the city has a number of drainages that contribute to the near shore being less than pristine. Some of those will be cleaned up as Lakeview Commons comes on board and Caltrans does its Highway 50 projects starting this year.

In regards to the TMDL time line, after the state board has its hearing next month, which could be pushed back to one of its May meetings depending on the number of comments received, the Office of Administrative Law has 60 days to make a decision. Then it goes to the Environmental Protection Agency for approval. The Nevada Division of Environment Protection also has to approve the plan.

If all the agencies approve the TMDL for Lake Tahoe, it would become the law of the land once the EPA signs off on it.

For more information about the Tahoe TMDL or how to comment,

go to the state website.

K-9 unit to search for drugs on LTUSD campuses

K-9s will be allowed to search for contraband at South Tahoe middle and high schools as well as Mount Tallac High.

STHS will be the first school to have the dog on campus. Random walkthroughs will be conducted in parking lots, near lockers, hallways, classrooms and playing fields.

The idea was brought to the board March 8 by Police Chief Brian Uhler after he discovered there have been 14 drug issues at STHS and 21 cases at STMS – just this school year.

The board, with Judy Cefalu absent, approved the use of the police dog 4-0.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Gaines, Campanale in runoff for Tahoe Assembly seat

By Dan Smith, Sacramento Bee

Republican Beth Gaines edged GOP rival John Allard on Tuesday to make the runoff against Democrat Dennis Campanale in the crowded race for the 4th Assembly District.

Campanale, the lone Democrat in an eight-candidate field, took the top spot with 31.8 percent of the vote. Gaines edged Allard by 667 votes – 22.5 percent to 21.5 percent – for the second slot in the May 3 runoff. She will be the favorite in a heavily Republican district that includes Amador County and parts of Sacramento, Placer and El Dorado counties.

Read the whole story

Carson City firm troubled by Kevin Costner's legal fight

By Jason Hildago, Reno Gazette-Journal

The legal battle between actors Kevin Costner and Stephen Baldwin over oil-spill technology may sound all Hollywood.

But it's an oily mess that recently spilled over into Northern Nevada, much to the chagrin of business owner Bret Sheldon.

An engineer by trade, Sheldon owns Carson City-based centrifuge company CINC Industries. That would be the same CINC Industries that was originally formed by Costner nearly two decades ago as the Costner In Nevada Corporation.

The link to Costner landed Sheldon and his company in a Los Angeles Times story about the lawsuit earlier this month.

Although Sheldon is more than happy to talk about his company, the Costner-Baldwin dustup is one sticky situation he'd rather not step into.

"That lawsuit is something that doesn't involve us directly so I prefer not to comment on it," Sheldon said. "It's really

between Ocean Therapy Solutions and the people who filed the lawsuit."

Read the whole story

State take-aways force S. Tahoe to shift fund balances

By Kathryn Reed

When the 2010-11 budget was passed, the South Lake Tahoe Redevelopment Agency was expected to end the year with a deficit of more than $600,000. It's even more now that the state is demanding a check for $426,210 by May 10.

The state came up with that figure based on the city's 2006-07 gross tax increment.

Last fiscal year Sacramento took $2.07 million from South Tahoe's Redevelopment Agency to balance its books.

Compounding the local problem is tax increment revenues are coming in $1.2 million below what was budgeted.

The value of the timeshares at the Marriott and Diamond Resort are dropping rapidly, especially with many being foreclosed on. This all means less revenue for the city in terms of property taxes. The county assessor decreased their value by 15.7 percent.

“Timeshares nationally have lost value. That is a discretionary expense, usually a vacation home,” City Manager Tony O’Rourke told *Lake Tahoe News*.

He said things will change, but he estimates it will take a number of years.

O’Rourke said taking money from one city fund to fill another is not an indication the Redevelopment Agency is not solvent.

“We would not file bankruptcy. The Redevelopment Agency is in sound shape,” O’Rourke said.

The money the agency collects primarily goes to paying debt — on bonds and another $500,000 to the general fund each year to repay the $7.2 million that was surreptitiously taken to pay for construction at Heavenly Village.

South Lake Tahoe city councilmembers, who also act as the Redevelopment Agency board members, at their meeting last week approved the transfer of $1,034,000 to take care of most of the shortfall.

The Housing Authority is loaning the RDA $426,210, which will be paid back without interest over five years. Another $365,000 is being taken from the tax increment generated from the bankrupt convention center project. Another $201,000 will be saved from not having to pay other entities based on Assembly Bill 1290. The remainder comes out of reserves.

Taking money from the housing fund will not affect the first time homebuyer program because that is funded by state grants. Nor will it affect the Aspens, the affordable housing project on Pioneer Trail, because that has already been budgeted.

As for the money from the convention center, earlier this year city staff had wanted to spend that chunk of change on a pedestrian walkway.

“We are re-examining that whole situation. We are meeting with

Caltrans and looking at less expensive alternatives," O'Rourke said after the council meeting.

The original RDA budget called for $12,859,758 in revenues and $13,477,636 in expenses for a deficit of $617,878. The housing budget was $4,111,334, and was balanced.

Finance Director Christine Vuletich provided *Lake Tahoe News* revised numbers for the Redevelopment Agency. They are:

Revenues:	
Property Tax Increment	5,812,178
TOT	4,100,000
CDBG Block Grant	66,443
RDA Prog. Income Housing Loans	55,000
Operating Transfers In	1,499,210
Other	47,000
Total	**11,579,831**
Expenses:	
Debt Service Fund	10,710,253
RDA Special Revenue Fund	892,178
Low/Moderate Income Housing Fund	1,065,665
RDA Prog. Income Housing Loan Fund	55,000
RDA Capital Improvement Program	597,803
Total	**13,320,899**

***Net Revenue/(Expense)**	**(1,741,068)**
* Represents one-time funding from fund balance	

The money transfer issue was originally on the council's consent agenda, which means it's up for a vote with a series of other items. However, Councilwoman Claire Fortier pulled it for discussion.

The council on a 4-0 vote (Tom Davis had left the room prior to the vote) approved the transfer of money. When Councilman Bruce Grego made the motion he said, "I plan to pay it, but under protest and with further review."

Vuletich explained to the council, "You could claim hardship, but then you have to take the money from the general fund."

Three redevelopment agencies sued the state over last year's take-away. City Attorney Patrick Enright said he would update the council on the status of that litigation at the March 15 meeting.

Census: South Tahoe population declines; Sac region grows

By Phillip Reese, Sacramento Bee

The Sacramento region grew by 353,000, or 20 percent, from 2000 to 2010 and now has 2.15 million residents, according to census figures released Tuesday.

Most of the region’s growth came from its Asian and Hispanic communities, which both saw population increases of roughly 55 percent. Whites no longer make up the majority of Sacramento County’s population and barely make up the majority of the region’s population.

The Placer County town of Lincoln grew faster than any other city in the state, adding 30,000 people for a growth rate of nearly 300 percent. Placer County was the second-fastest growing county in California during the last decade; its 40 percent growth rate barely lagged behind Riverside County.

The federal government divvies funds to areas based on their population, and a few cities are likely to be disappointed by the new figures. Both Citrus Heights and South Lake Tahoe lost residents (23,609 to 21,403) from 2000 to 2010 – a fact that could cost them millions of dollars over the next decade.

Read the whole story

Caesars CEO made $5.6 mil. in 2010

By Amanda Finnegan, Las Vegas Sun

Gary Loveman took home about $5.9 million in 2010 in his role as Caesars Entertainment chairman and CEO, slightly less than the compensation package he received in 2009.

According to a Securities and Exchange Commission filing, Loveman’s compensation package included a base salary of $1.9 million, $2.7 million in non-equity compensation and $1.27 million in all other compensation, which mainly included

security, use of the company aircraft and lodging.

The Sun calculates total compensation based on an executive's base salary, bonus, non-equity compensation, change in pension, all other compensation, options exercised and stocks vested. The Sun does not include stock and option awards until the stocks vest or options are exercised.

Read the whole story

Siberia chairlift still offline at Squaw

Officials at Squaw Valley are not estimating when the Siberia chairlift will be running again.

It remained closed on Tuesday after an electrical issue was reported at 12:48pm March 7. Six people on five chairs had to be roped down by ski patrol on Monday. Everyone was on solid ground by 1:45pm. No injuries were reported.

Amelia Richmond, spokeswoman for Squaw, told *Lake Tahoe News* on Tuesday the cause of the problem was still not known.

All other lifts resumed normal operations on Tuesday.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Placer County opening redevelopment office in Tahoe

Placer County Redevelopment Agency will be opening an office in Kings Beach at 8697 North Lake Tahoe Blvd.

It will be open to the public two days a week when renovations are completed later this month. Office hours are planned for Tuesdays and Thursdays, from 10am-3pm.

The satellite office will give the agency a more consistent presence in the Lake Tahoe Basin. With numerous projects in the development, planning and construction phases on the North Shore, having a permanent RDA office with regular hours will enable residents and other interested parties in the area to drop by and discuss the agency's work.

The Redevelopment Agency is involved with numerous projects in the Tahoe basin:

* Domus Housing Development in Kings Beach;

* Kings Beach Commercial Core Improvement Project;

* TRPA Regional Plan Update/Tahoe Community Plans Updates;

* TRPA Chapter 15 Amendment;

* Parking Lot property acquisition and construction in Tahoe City and Kings Beach;

* Ferrari Kings Beach Town Center Community Enhancement Program (CEP) Project;

* BB, LLC Kings Beach Mixed Use CEP project;

* Tahoe City Transit Center;

* Tahoe City Wye Improvements;

* Kings Beach Eastern Gateway Project;

* Tahoe City Gateway Monuments;

* North Lake Tahoe 5-Year Implementation Plan Update;

* Lake Forest Water District/Tahoe City PUD project;

* Tahoe Housing Rehab Assistance Program;

* Kings Beach Everett Property Redevelopment Project; and

* Tahoe Vista Recreation Area Improvements.