USFS seeks input on Meeks Bay Resort

The. U.S. Forest Service Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit is taking public comment until March 18 on a proposal to make water quality, accessibility and utility improvements at Meeks Bay Resort on the West Shore.

The Forest Service wants to implement a variety of water quality best management practices, including slope stabilization using vegetation, constructing storm water infiltration basins, installing bollards or boulders to prevent parking on bare soils, regrading the drive to the main house and creating roof line drip trenches along the cabins and the main house.

The project would improve the accessibility of the parking areas and walkways and provide an accessible walkway to the beach. The Forest Service would also remove power lines from tree and retrofit utility equipment to bring it up to code.

Work could begin this May, with completion in 2012.

For more information on the proposal and how to submit comments, go online or call Ashley Sommer at (530) 543.2615 or via email at asommer@fs.fed.us.

Ensign will not seek another term in Senate

By Karoun Demirjian, Las Vegas Sun

Republican Sen. John Ensign won’t be trying to reclaim his U.S. Senate seat in 2012.

Ensign made the announcement today during a noon news conference at the Lloyd George Federal Courthouse in Las Vegas. He isn’t resigning his seat – simply not pursuing his re-election in 2012.



John Ensign

He said he came to the decision in the last week or so, adding that a Senate Ethics Committee investigation had “zero effect” on the decision not to seek re-election.

“I just came to the conclusion that I couldn’t put my family through this,” he said.

Ensign, whose name was once being tossed about for a presidential run, ran aground politically in 2009 when he announced he had an affair with Cynthia Hampton, a campaign aide whose husband, Doug Hampton, had been Ensign deputy chief of staff.

Read the whole story

Placer supervisor takes side job lobbying for online gaming

By Ed Fletcher, Sacramento Bee

Placer County Supervisor Kirk Uhler has struggled at times to win over voters in his own district. Now, his side job has him trying to win over Iowa lawmakers.

Uhler has quietly taken a job as vice president of government affairs for U.S. Digital Gaming, a Beverly-hills based company working to legalize and operate online poker. His focus has been persuading the Iowa Legislature to legalize online poker.

California is also in the early stages of considering legislation to legalize online gambling. Uhler has not been tasked with lobbying California legislators, but his boss was set to testify before a legislative committee this week.

In 1992 Placer County voters approved Measure A, making supervisors part time and slashing their pay from $84,000 to $30,000, with no benefits or retirement plan. They are among the lowest-paid county supervisors in the state.

While some may be uneasy over Uhler’s job, at least one political expert said that’s the way it is when elected officials are part-timers.

Read the whole story

South Tahoe cops looking for robbery suspect

On March 5 at approximately 7:45pm the South Lake Tahoe police officers responded to a call of a strong-arm robbery at Lake Tahoe Souvenirs at 3477 Lake Tahoe Blvd.

The clerk, Keshia Molina of South Lake Tahoe, reported that a male walked into the store, pushed her against a cabinet, and took $826 from the register. The driver was waiting in the parking lot in a white SUV.

The suspect is described as a white male adult, between the ages of 40 and 50, approximately 6-feet tall, average build ,wearing a dark grey zip up hoodie sweatshirt, a black beanie cap and was unshaven.

Anyone with information regarding this case, is asked to contact Officer Ray Poole (530) 542.6100.

Indian gaming revenue falls for first time

By Reno Gazette-Journal

For the first time, revenue has fallen at American Indian gambling casinos nationwide as the recession forces consumers to curtail spending on entertainment.

The Indian Gaming Industry Report this week showed total tribal casino revenue was down 1 percent in 2009 from 2008, and in California, where tribal casinos compete with Northern

Nevada resorts, revenues fell 5 percent.

The declines from 2008 to 2009, the latest year available, were part of a larger trend influenced by recession, said Alan Meister, the economist who wrote the report.

Nevada gaming experts agreed.

“They live in the same economy as the rest of us. They’re riding the same horse we are,” said Reno gaming analyst Ken Adams.

“It reflects the continuing issue of recession, and California has been hit pretty dramatically,” said Bill Eadington, director of the Institute of Study of Gambling and Commercial Gaming at the University of Nevada, Reno.

That includes two tribal casinos in California’s Sierra foothills on direct routes to Reno-Tahoe: Thunder Valley off of Interstate 80 and Red Hawk along U.S. Highway 50.

The latest annual figures for Nevada gaming revenues show flat growth statewide in 2010 from 2009, with a 4.3 percent decline in Washoe County and a 6.3 percent drop at Stateline on Lake Tahoe’s south shore.

Eadington said the key factor driving down gaming revenue, including tribal casinos, is a continuing decline in home equity values.

Read the whole story

NWS: Wet spring made for mild 2010 fire season

By Bill Lindelof, Sacramento Bee

Northern California avoided a bad wildland fire season last year in part due to a cool, wet spring and fairly mild summer, according to an analysis by the National Weather Service.

A total of 35,674 acres burned in Northern California in 2010 – the smallest amount in the last 12 years, according to the report.

Storms marched through the region almost every week in April and May, according to the Sacramento Fire Weather Annual Summary. Temperatures were 3.4 degrees below normal in April and 4 degrees below normal in May.

Some spots in the mountains and foothills got about 5 inches more precipitation than normal in May. And May rains caused a second crop of green grass to sprout below the 2,000-feet elevation level.

Read the whole story

Water main breaks in South Tahoe

People living along and off Tahoe Keys Boulevard in South Lake Tahoe are without water.

South Tahoe Public Utility District crews expect to fix the

underground pipe on Keys Boulevard by noon Saturday.

The water issue was reported at 5:47am.

An employee, who did not want his name used, did not know how many households or businesses were affected by the problem.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Sports Ltd. not leaving South Lake Tahoe

Sports Ltd. in South Lake Tahoe is not going anywhere nor is it changing hands.

Mark Gandt, who owns the store in the Village Center, signed a seven-year lease late last month, according to Lynn Beaman an 11-year employee at the store. Gandt was not available for comment.

Beaman said Heavenly and Vail Resorts have wanted that site for a number of years, thus the rumors around town that the Colorado-based company was taking over the sports store.

Heavenly Mountain Resort officials, per company policy, would not comment on potential or actual acquisitions.

Terry Hackett, who owns the Village Center, was not available for comment.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Gambling via cell phone may be an option

By Liz Benston, Las Vegas Sun

Imagine gambling on digital blackjack on your smart phone while stuck in traffic in the Spaghetti Bowl or dropping money into a slot machine while doing 80 across a high-desert highway west of Ely.

This will be the newest face of legal gambling if one local company gets its way: playing the games anywhere in Nevada – even lounging in your backyard pool.

Cantor Gaming says it will press the Nevada Legislature this year to allow gambling using the same 21st century technology that surfs the Internet, sends e-mail, views movies and listens to music. It's a big leap for a state that only recently allowed gamblers to use handheld gambling devices in select casinos. Gamblers may also bet remotely, but only on sporting events.

"People want to be able to (gamble) where and when they choose," Wall Street veteran and Cantor Gaming CEO Lee Amaitis said.

Significant regulatory and political hurdles stand in his way, however.

Nevada law allows gamblers within the state's borders to make sports bets remotely by setting up a casino account and downloading software onto a home computer, logging on by cell phone or by using a pager. Such gambling doesn't violate federal prohibitions of Internet gambling because it occurs

over a private wireless network rather than the World Wide Web and doesn’t cross state lines.

American Wagering, which operates the Leroy’s sports books, received regulatory approval last year for technology enabling gamblers in Nevada to make sports bets using BlackBerrys.

Applying that technology to casino games such as blackjack, slots and roulette is a relatively small leap for a company like Cantor. For regulators who must consider the business and social implications of new gambling technology, it’s a potential chasm.

“This would be a huge policy shift for the state,” Gaming Control Board Chairman Mark Lipparelli said.

Read the whole story

TRPA extension designed to spur redevelopment in basin

By Kathryn Reed

STATELINE – South Lake Tahoe developers and property owners have two years to come up with a viable plan to transform the Raley’s and Mikasa centers at the Y and still retain special incentives from TRPA.

Both properties are part of the Community Enhancement Program the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency initiated in 2008.

“The focus of the CEP is to encourage revitalization projects in downtown and recreation areas that demonstrate substantial environmental, as well as social and economic benefits. The

program provides incentives for mixed-use development projects on existing disturbed or underutilized sites," TRPA's website says.



The old Mikasa and Miller's Outpost buildings are part of the Community Enhancement Program. Photo/LTN file

Big components of the CEP are allocations for commercial floor area, tourist accommodation units and multi-residential bonus units. TRPA has in effect made these items commodities that are sold and traded among jurisdictions. There are also a limited number of them arbitrarily set by the TRPA. The CEP has added to that overall pot without the project developers needing to secure them in some other way.

While the Governing Board of the bi-state regulatory agency at its February meeting cited economics and the realization project proponents are not able to get financing as reasons to extend the CEP permit for two years, the truth is no movement has even occurred at the two South Tahoe locations.

This compares to Homewood, which is in the middle of the environmental document process. Boulder Bay – the project to renovate the Tahoe Biltmore in Crystal Bay – will be before

the Governing Board on March 23.

“Limbo” is the word Hilary Hodges, interim director of the Development Service Department for South Lake Tahoe, used this week in describing to *Lake Tahoe News* where the Tahoe Valley Community Plan is. That document is relevant to the CEP discussion because without it developers must work in the confines of current zoning regulations.

Building heights and multi-use projects would likely be stumbling blocks working with today’s rules. Those issues are being addressed in the city’s General Plan and TRPA’s Regional Plan.

The odd thing is the TRPA stipulation for a project to be included in the CEP was it had to be part of an approved community plan. Neither of the South Tahoe projects is in a community plan because one is not approved for the Y. A plan area statement governs that area, but that is not in the league of a community plan.

“The two CEPs at the Y are in the program with the condition that they can’t break ground until an approved community plan is adopted for Tahoe Valley,” explained TRPA spokesman Jeff Cowen. “Homewood is doing its master plan as part of its CEP application.”

Hodges said, “The city would like to move Tahoe Valley forward.” The problem is TRPA’s Regional Plan update that was originally supposed to be approved in 2007 has had one delay after another. The importance of the Regional Plan’s completion is so the city’s document would conform to it. If it doesn’t, then it’s possible lawsuits would ensue or permits would never be issued.

Hodges would not venture a guess to when the Tahoe Valley Plan would come before the council. Last year the original community team came together in hopes there would be movement, but TRPA expressed concerns with going forward, so the group

was disbanded again.

At the TRPA meeting last week, Wyatt Ogilvy spoke on behalf of the BB LLC project on 18 acres in downtown Kings Beach. The mixed-use project is one of nine CEP projects.

“Ultimately by providing a two-year extension you provide the incentive to move forward and adequate time,” Ogilvy told the board. He said his group is going forward with hiring an environmental consultant to prepare the necessary documents.

Dave Ferrari, general manager of Ferrari’s Family Resort in Kings Beach, has plans to overhaul their business, which would also come with significant environmental improvements.

“Our head is above water, but not by much,” Ferrari said. He said it’s hard to move forward with short time lines to get things done when financing is not in place and permitting and environmental review can take years.

Ultimately the board agreed to the two-year extension of the CEP permits, with a review of where the projects are in one year.