Water content well above average in Sierra Nevada

By Brenda Knox and Kathryn Reed

PHILLIPS STATION – With the amount of snow that has fallen and the sudden meltdown of it, people living in Lake Tahoe know there is plenty of water in that white stuff.

Officials from the California Department of Water Resources made it official Tuesday.

The measurements taken March 1 at the entrance to Sierra-at-Tahoe show 89 inches of snow, 31.7 inches of water content, which is 128 percent of normal. Statewide, water content is 124 percent of normal.



Frank Gehrke takes water samples March 1 near Sierra-at-Tahoe. Photo/Brenda Knox

A month ago the content at Phillips Station was 125 percent of normal and in December it was 158 percent.

Even though the state is still technically in a drought – that designation is something the governor controls – the readings

are much better than last year when the water content was 107 percent of normal, and in 2009 was 80 percent of normal.

Frank Gehrke, chief of the California Cooperative Snow Survey Program, said the state would be in “pretty good shape hydrologically speaking at the end of the season.”

So much snow was in the field that it was getting stuck in the core of the metal tube he uses for the seven samples. A month ago there was so little snow hiking boots could be worn instead of snowshoes or skis.

For a La Nina year, the amount of moisture coming down has been unexpected. A month ago Gehrke was concerned if the dry January continued, it could be trouble for water users downstream of the Sierra runoff. He acknowledged it has been quite an unusual winter.

“March 1 is a key date, flood control reservoirs can increase storage as of March 1,” Gehrke said. “It’s important to fill reservoirs.”

Typically, snow continues to accumulate at a decent rate through April 1, and then the meltdown begins. The peak runoff is usually in May.

The mountain snowpack numbers are important because approximately one-third of the water for California’s households, industry and farms come from this source.

Location	Elevation	Snow Depth	Water Content	% of Long Term Average
Alpha	7,600 feet	91.7 inches	36.8 inches	131
Phillips Station	6,800 feet	89 inches	31.7 inches	128
Lyons Creek	6,700 feet	101.1 inches	39 inches	153

Tamarack Flat	6,500 feet	Missing	Missing	Missing

Source: Department of Water Resources

Snowboarder dies at Northstar

Publisher's note: ***Jeffrey Halperin of San Francisco has been identified as the snowboarder.***

By FoxReno.com

TRUCKEE – Officials confirmed that an unidentified 30-year-old man was killed Sunday while snowboarding at Northstar-at-Tahoe.

According to a press release issued Monday afternoon by Northstar Spokeswoman Jessica Van Pernis, ski patrollers and officials with the Northstar Fire Department were alerted of an unconscious snowboarder at 10:38 a.m. Sunday; they found the man lying by a cluster of trees near the Challenger ski trail on the backside of the resort.

According to Northstar, patrollers said upon first contact they administered emergency medical care to the man, who was not wearing a helmet.

Read the whole story

Freeskier dies from injuries sustained at Kirkwood competition

Pete Thomas, GrindTV

Pro freeskier Ryan Hawks died early Tuesday of injuries suffered during an extreme competition in Northern California. He was 25 and a rising star in the sometimes dangerous sport of big-mountain freeskiing.

Hawks, a Utah resident originally from Vermont, had had been attempting a 40-foot backflip Sunday during the North American Freeskiing Championships at Kirkwood Ski Resort near Lake Tahoe. He fell hard after landing and was airlifted to Reno's Renown Health Center, where he was being treated for internal injuries.

An official cause of death is pending an investigation, according to Reno's Washoe County Medical Examiner.

Dan Abrams, president of FlyLow Gear, which sponsored the athlete, told Outside magazine: "The comp was in full swing. All of the heavy hitters were skiing, but a lot of the guys were falling. There was an opportunity for Ryan to go all out get on the podium. He has a history of back flips and basically going for it in comps."

Read the whole story

Former South Tahoe official interim Reno city manager

Publisher's note: ***Sue Schlerf is a former assistant city manager of South Lake Tahoe.***

By Susan Voyles, Reno Gazette-Journal

Practicing what it had just preached, the Reno City Council today rejected an offer from one assistant city manager to serve as interim manager for the next six months after he wanted a raise for the extra work and instead picked the other assistant to fill the post for about a month.

Susan Schlerf, an 8-year employee, said she would consider only a brief appointment because she is getting married soon. She replaces Donna Dreska, who announced her intent to resign Feb. 18.

Mayor Bob Cashell proposed John Hester be named as interim director for six months and be paid $23,000 more than his $172,800 salary. That also would be more than what Dreska was paid.

"I think that's too much," Councilman Dave Aiazzi said.

Read the whole story

Lawyer: Garridos confess to

Jaycee Dugard kidnapping

Updated: Feb. 28 8:35pm.

By Sam Stanton, Sacramento Bee

Phillip and Nancy Garrido have made a “full confession” to the 1991 kidnapping of 11-year-old Jaycee Lee Dugard in hopes of convincing prosecutors to allow Nancy Garrido to some day be released from prison, a defense attorney in the case revealed today.

Nancy Garrido’s court-appointed lawyer, Stephen Tapson, said this afternoon in Placerville that the Garridos had met separately with El Dorado County sheriff’s detectives in the last month and spelled out exactly how they abducted Dugard and held her captive for 18 years.



Phillip and Nancy Garrido

Nancy Garrido’s confession took place with Dugard in the room, watching from across a table as the woman who snatched her off the street tearfully described what she had done, Tapson said.

The extraordinary revelation came after a brief and seemingly routine hearing in the 18-month-old case. Tapson emerged from the El Dorado County courthouse and told reporters gathered around him that Phillip Garrido had made the statement in a bid to win leniency for his wife. He said prosecutors have offered her a plea deal if she agrees to a sentence of 241

years, eight months to life, while Phillip Garrido has been offered a sentence of 440 years to life.

“So, she’s obviously guilty of kidnapping and a bunch of other charges, but I think at least based on what happened after all the stuff started to become the bizarre family that she should at least be able to walk on the beach, probably with a walker at some point before she dies,” Tapson said.

Read the whole story

LTBMU forest supervisor named

Nancy Gibson is returning to the basin as forest supervisor for the Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit. She was deputy forest supervisor several years ago.

Second in charge will be Jeff Marsolais.

The start date for both has not been released.

For the last three years, Gibson has been deputy forest supervisor on the Six Rivers National Forest. She has also worked in the Klamath and Mendocino national forests.

Marsolais has been acting forest supervisor for LTBMU since November. He came from the Inyo National Forest.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Judge denies release of Dugard transcript

By Sam Stanton, Sacramento Bee

The judge in the Jaycee Lee Dugard kidnap case today rejected efforts by the media to have court documents unsealed, including a grand jury transcript, in which Dugard described her 18 years of captivity.

El Dorado Superior Court Judge Douglas Phimister said he had reviewed more than two dozen of the sealed documents in the one and a half year old case but could not release them without jeopardizing Phillip and Nancy Garrido's right to a fair trial.

"With regard to the grand jury transcripts, and Phillip Garrido's mental health records, the court recognizes the right of access by both press and public but finds that the release of these records prior to jury selection will prejudice defendants' right to fair trials," the judge wrote in a ruling issued this morning.

The Bee and other media organizations have been seeking release of the records since October, and it remains unclear today whether the grand jury transcripts eventually may become public.

Read the whole story

Census results may shift political power to S. Nevada

By Guy Clifton, Reno Gazette-Journal

Nevada’s population shift to Southern Nevada will be reflected in the redrawing of representative districts, but whether it means seats will be added in the state Legislature for the first time in 30 years or whether Northern Nevada loses seats remains to be seen.

With Democrats in control of the Legislature and Republican Brian Sandoval in the governor’s office, a partisan battle is more than likely.

Public hearings will be held in Carson City, Fallon, Reno and Las Vegas over the next six weeks to let concerned citizens weigh in on the issue.

Based on Census population figures released Thursday, if the current number of 63 legislative districts stays in place, each of the 42 Assembly members would represent 64,299 residents and each of the 21 seantors 128,598 residents.

About 75 percent of the state’s population of 2.7 million lives in Southern Nevada, with 1.95 million in Clark County alone.

Read the whole story

Solar energy's greenness under scrutiny

By Todd Woody, New York Times

SAN FRANCISCO – Just weeks after regulators approved the last of nine multibillion-dollar solar thermal power plants to be built in the Southern California desert, a storm of lawsuits and the resurgence of an older solar technology are clouding the future of the nascent industry.

The litigation, which seeks to block construction of five of the solar thermal projects, underscores the growing risks of building large-scale renewable energy plants in environmentally delicate areas. On Jan. 25, for instance, Solar Millennium withdrew its 16-month-old license application for a 250-megawatt solar station called Ridgecrest, citing regulators' concerns over the project's impact on the Mohave ground squirrel.

At peak output, the five licensed solar thermal projects being challenged would power more than two million homes, create thousands of construction jobs and help the state meet aggressive renewable energy mandates. The projects are backed by California's biggest utilities, top state officials and the Obama administration.

But conservation, labor and American Indian groups are challenging the projects on environmental grounds. The lawsuits, coupled with a broad plunge in prices for energy from competing power sources, threaten the ability of developers to secure expiring federal loan guarantees and private financing to establish the projects. Only one developer so far, BrightSource Energy, has obtained a loan guarantee and begun construction.

Like so many of this state's troubles, the industry's problems

are rooted in real estate.

Read the whole story

Not enough parking in Tahoe for all the skiers

By Kathryn Reed

TWIN BRIDGES – Some ski areas in Lake Tahoe are discovering there are consequences to too much snow. And that would be not enough parking to cater to all those people who want to ski and snowboard.

A sign at the base of Echo Summit on Highway 50 warns people that traveling will be slow because the lots at Sierra-at-Tahoe are full. Traffic headed west on Highway 50 was backed up Sunday morning to Sawmill Road.



Sierra-at-Tahoe's lots on Feb. 27 are full before noon. Photo/Kathryn Reed

Once people get to the resort they are not allowed to turn up the driveway and must continue on the highway.

About 11am Feb. 27 one law enforcement official told *Lake Tahoe News* it had been this way for a little bit. California Highway Patrol officers, El Dorado County sheriff's deputies and Sierra employees were working the entrance of the ski resort.

Calls to the resort were not returned before this story was published.

A spokeswoman for Heavenly Mountain Resort had no information about parking, but based on this Tweet from the resort at 11:17am, lots are likely to be full as well as Ski Run Boulevard: "Don't want to mess with driving or pesky parking? We have four base lodges and complimentary shuttles running between all of them!"

Victoria Sabelmik, guest services manager at Kirkwood Mountain Resort at about 11am said, "We are getting close to capacity for parking." She added Presidents' Weekend was definitely busier.

Besides the fresh snow, the North American Freestyle Championships are drawing people to Kirkwood today.