# Wet winter quenching California's thirst

**By Jim Carlton, Wall Street Journal**

After three years of debilitating drought, California appears headed into a second straight wet year, giving a boost to ski resorts, farms and communities that languished during the dry spell in the fiscally troubled state.

Since California's rainy season began Oct. 1, the state has received roughly double the mountain snowfall it normally gets, according to state estimates.

That means the rainy season is off to its best start in at least five years, with 16 of California's 24 major reservoirs equipped with flood controls already beginning to release water so they can take on spring runoff, state water officials say.



South Lake Tahoe residents have been doing plenty of shoveling and blowing this winter. Photo/Kathryn Reed

The bounty is providing a shot in the arm to many local economies across California, the nation’s most populous state, which is struggling to recover from the recession.

Combined with last year’s abundant rainfall, officials of some water districts, including the Santa Clara Valley Water District in San Jose, Calif., have dropped mandatory rationing restrictions. That particularly helps farming-related businesses, which are more dependent on water than most other parts of the economy, economists say.

Ski resorts are reporting visits and revenue above what they had anticipated, said Bob Roberts, executive director of the California Ski Industry Association.

**Read the whole story**

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# South Tahoe employees consider workplace average

**By Kathryn Reed**

A C-plus – that’s the grade South Lake City employees gave their employer and overall work environment.

City Manager Tony O’Rourke is not surprised by the results of the survey 92 percent of the 198 employees took in early December. Results are being disseminated to staff this week, with directors having received the report late last week.

Of the 72 questions, the one receiving the lowest overall rating was: City management considers the interest of employees when changes are made in the city that affects my work. Sixty-seven percent disagreed, while 5 percent agreed with the statement.

“Anything that received less than 50 percent needs addressing,” O’Rourke said.

He wants change to be a collaborative effort between staff and management.

What role his management style played into the results would be hard to ascertain. When the survey was taken Dec. 6-7 he had been at the helm for four months – enough time to influence opinions, not enough to be responsible for engrained beliefs/attitudes.

The firm doing the analysis wrote, “Particularly in these economic times, adequate staffing levels is an enormous challenge and rarely do we find organizations where employees feel the staffing is adequate. Limited staff and high demand for services can also mean the leadership time and attention required for effective two-way communication and inclusive decision making and collaboration across departments can wane. This ultimately affects morale and productivity as evident in the results of the assessment and reflected in the written comments.”

In the 45-year history of the city, no employee survey has been taken before. O’Rourke wants to use this one prepared by Alta Mesa Group as a benchmark. His plan to conduct a survey each year, see if weaknesses have been addressed and what new issues may need to be resolved.

“We need to treat employees as well as we treat the customers,” O’Rourke said. His mantra since Day 1 has been all about providing quality service, treating customers (aka the

public) with respect.

The areas city employees had the highest remarks for were:

• I feel a high degree of responsibility for the work I do;

• I work in an environment that is free from drugs and alcohol;

• I have the skills and knowledge necessary to perform my job;

• I know what is expected of me in my job;

• The people in my work group work hard to do quality work;

• I have a great sense of personal satisfaction when I perform my job;

• Employees are treated equally regardless of race, national origin, age, gender, sexual preference, marital status, physical handicap, medical condition, veteran status, or religious affiliation.

The areas people had the lowest remarks for were:

• My department is adequately staffed;

• Suggestions for improvement are taken seriously;

• City management considers the interest of employees when changes are made in the city that affect my work;

• City management promotes a team environment within and among departments;

• City management sets attainable goals;

• In general, this organization is better to work for now than it was a year ago;

• City management genuinely cares about employees’ welfare.

How the 57 supervisors-managers responded compared to the 126 line employees was about the same. Usually management has a higher regard for the institution.

The consultant wrote, “A focus on communication, leadership and citywide policy issues amongst city managers and supervisors may create a significant opportunity for improvement in the organization, and will likely be noticed by line employees.”

Underlining the issue with communication is the fact 75 percent of employees say they understand issues the city faces, but only 19 percent trust what the city tells them.

Only 12 percent believe management takes their suggestions seriously. Twenty-one percent feel comfortable saying what they think.

For the question: City policies and standards are applied consistently to all employees – 57 percent disagreed and 16 percent agreed.

The City Council on Jan. 25 will have this survey and the community survey at its disposal while discussing the strategic plan.

“The council will have to prioritize services,” O’Rourke said. “I want the process to be public and transparent. It needs to be tied to action plans and assessments.”

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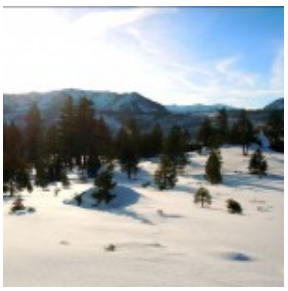
# Records fall, cooler temps

# returning this week in Tahoe

More records fell on Monday as the Lake Tahoe area baked under a hot sun.

For the second day in a row South Lake Tahoe set a record. The high of 61 degrees Jan. 17 was three degrees hotter than the previous record set in 1961.

Reno’s record high for Jan. 17 was 64 set in 1971. On Monday the high was 66.



Warm on Tuesday, normal temps for Lake Tahoe returning for the rest of the week. Photo/Kathryn Reed

Markleeville’s high was 69, nine degrees higher than the 1934 record.

Enjoy the unseasonably warm temps today because forecasters with the National Weather Service in Reno are saying it’s all going to change overnight. The highs on Wednesday and Thursday are slated to be in the 30s in the Lake Tahoe Basin – what one might call normal for January.

*– Lake Tahoe News staff report*

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# Giffords continues to heal, show signs of recovery

**By Amanda Gardner, U.S. News & World Report**

Arizona Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords continues her remarkable recovery after she was gravely wounded by an assassin's bullet to her brain nine days ago: On Sunday, her doctors upgraded her condition from critical to serious.

Giffords underwent surgery Saturday to replace a breathing tube that had been in place since she was shot in the attack in Tucson that left six people dead.

The 40-year-old Giffords was breathing on her own, but the breathing tube had been left in as a precaution. In its place, surgeons inserted a tracheotomy tube in her windpipe, protecting her airway and allowing her to be disconnected from a ventilator, according to officials at University Medical Center in Tucson, where Giffords is being treated.

Doctors also inserted a feeding tube. Both procedures, according to the hospital, are common in people hospitalized with brain injuries.

The hospital issued a statement saying that Giffords' "recovery continues as planned."

Giffords can't talk because of the breathing tube, but her husband reported Monday that she has improved so much that she was able to smile and give him a neck rub as he sat by her side, according to the *Associated Press*.

“She’s …gone through this traumatic injury,” astronaut Mark Kelly said in an interview with *ABC News* anchor Diane Sawyer. “And she spends 10 minutes giving me a neck massage. It’s so typical of her that no matter how hard the situation might be for her, you know, she’s looking out for other people.”

**Read the whole story**

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# South Tahoe attorney enters Assembly race

**By Rocklin & Roseville Today**

Retired Coast Guard officer and South Lake Tahoe attorney Matt Williams has filed the necessary papers with the Secretary of State to run for the 4th Assembly District seat recently vacated by Senator Ted Gaines. Williams, a Republican and two-time Olympic torch bearer, has pledged to cut his Assemblyman salary by twenty percent if elected. Williams’ campaign will focus on creating jobs, cutting government spending, and improving schools. In his contract with voters, Williams will hold quarterly meetings throughout the district to inform citizens of state government actions and policy.

Williams, a fourth-generation California, is a graduate of the U.S. Coast Guard Academy, and has a master’s of public administration degree from Seattle University and a law degree from the University of Washington.

During his 20 years of military service, Williams was twice selected for Exchange Duty with the U.S. Navy and as a “Loaned Executive” to the United Way. While stationed in Louisiana, Williams coached Mike Fontenot, now of the World Series

champion San Francisco Giants. Williams and his family moved to South Lake Tahoe in 1995, where he ran a Navy leadership program at South Tahoe High School and was inducted into Who's Who Among America's Teachers. He was selected to carry the torch for the 1996 and 2002 Olympic Games in recognition of his community service and leadership in numerous civic and youth organizations.

Williams recently returned to the legal profession where he provides services in trial litigation; business creation; landlord-tenant law; and estate planning.

**Read the whole story**

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# Record high temp records fall in greater Lake Tahoe area

People were in short sleeves in much of the region Sunday and are likely to be today as well as unseasonably warm weather settles in.

Record highs were recorded several places Jan. 17. In South Lake the 60-degree mark was hit, breaking the 1985 record of 55 degree. Markleeville hit 69, nine degrees warmer than the previous record set in 1934. The Reno-Tahoe International Airport hit 67, which broke the 1920 record of 64 degrees.



Sun in the Lake Tahoe region is expected all week. Photo/Kathryn Reed

The National Weather Service in Reno is expecting more records to drop today:

| City | Forecast | Record |
|---|---|---|
| South Lake Tahoe | 58 | 58 |
| Truckee | 54 | 55 |
| Carson City | 65 | 65 |
| Reno | 66 | 64. |

No moisture is in the forecast for the entire week, just sun and warmth. What this may mean for snowmelt and potential flooding remains to be seen.

*Lake Tahoe News staff report*

# Kingsbury Middle School site about to have ‘for sale’ sign

**By Kathryn Reed**

ZEPHYR COVE – Douglas County School District is moving forward with plans to sell the former Kingsbury Middle School site.

Superintendent Lisa Noonan briefed the board at its meeting this month about her intention to begin tackling all the state statutes involved with selling school property as well as concerns the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency may have.



One issue the district will look into is whether the coverage at KMS can be transferred to other school sites in Lake Tahoe.

The old middle school is in its third year of sitting idle. Declining enrollment forced the district to consolidate the three lake schools into two, with Zephyr Cove Elementary becoming a K-6 and Whittell High a 7-12.

“I know this is not the best economic climate to sell real estate, but it is a unique piece of property,” Noonan told the board. “I would love to see its next life contribute to the community even if it is not a Douglas County School District facility.”

The plan is to have at least one forum at the lake to discuss the future of the KMS site.

In other action:

• Sharla Hales is president of the board, Tom Moore vice president, and Karen Chessell clerk.

• B Gorman, executive director of the Lake Tahoe South Shore Chamber of Commerce, gave a presentation about the Prosperity Plan.

• The board gave the superintendent direction to speak with Jacks Valley Elementary parents about consolidation issues as well as possibly making the school a K-8.

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# La Nina not living up to her reputation

**By Henry Fountain, New York Times**

For meteorologists and climate scientists, the flooding that has affected the Australian state of Queensland has not been unexpected. It is seen as collateral damage from the current La Niña, a lowering of sea-surface temperatures in the tropical eastern Pacific Ocean.

While a typical La Niña — the low-temperature side of the cycle known as the El Niño/Southern Oscillation — usually brings wet weather to the western Pacific, it also brings dry conditions to the Southern United States, including Southern California.

But since late December, Southern California has been hit by severe rainstorms, with some areas receiving nearly a normal year's worth of precipitation in a few weeks.

"Clearly, to this point, the pattern has not been panning out for Southern California," said Michelle L'Heureux, a meteorologist with the Climate Prediction Center of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration in Camp

Springs, Md.

When La Niña is in effect, as strong easterly trade winds in the tropical Pacific push warmer surface water to the west, colder water rises in the eastern Pacific to replace it.

**Read the whole story**

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# CalFire budget cuts would reduce staffing on engines

**By Greg Welter, Chico Enterprise Record**

SACRAMENTO – CalFire, the state's firefighting agency, is facing a budget cut in excess of $30 million for fiscal year 2011-12, and will trim staffing on engines from four down to three to cover most of it.

Starting in 2003, former Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger issued an annual executive order bumping engine crews to four throughout the state, to meet the demands of approaching fire seasons.

H.D. Palmer, with the California State Budget Office, said studies since 2003 have shown that the wildfire containment rate in California has remained about the same using three-person crews versus four.

**Read the whole story**

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# Murderer with ties to El Dorado County wants out of prison

**By Sacramento Bee**

A convicted murderer of an Olivehurst man wants out from behind bars – this time legally, according to the State Board of Parole Hearings.

Troy Alexander Temple, now 50, is serving 15 years to life for killing Kenneth D. Cossey, 50, of Olivehurst in 1989. He also is under a nearly 32-year sentence for an escape from the Yuba County jail after he was convicted in 1991.

The escape sentence will start when and if Temple is paroled from the murder conviction, records indicate.

Temple also has a criminal history in Nevada and El Dorado counties, records indicate.

**Read the whole story**