Snowpack, reservoir levels well above normal

By Tim Hearden, Capital Press

California's record-setting rainfall in the past week has left many reservoirs flush with water and mountains smothered in snow.

The state's Department of Water Resources is predicting its deliveries of state project water will be at least half of contractors' requests – an extraordinarily high amount for this early in the season.

"The usual procedure is to start out conservatively at the first of the water year and see what kind of direction mother nature is going to take," DWR spokesman Don Strickland said. "Obviously she is going in the right direction now, so it's not beyond the possibility that water allocations could be increased again provided the storms keep coming on through."

The prediction comes as the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation has been releasing water from several nearly full reservoirs to make room for more.

At Shasta Lake, crews have been sending 15,000 cubic feet per second down the Sacramento River, up from the normal 7,000 cfs. Releases from Folsom Lake near Sacramento were ramped up from 15,000 cfs to 30,000 cfs, and the Tolluch Reservoir on the Stanislaus River has been letting out 1,500 cfs rather than the normal 200 cfs.

Bureau officials expected releases to ease back to normal by this weekend as the deluge lets up, spokesman Pete Lucero said.

"With all of our reservoirs, one of their main purposes is for

flood control," Lucero said. With these storms coming in this past weekend and coming up this week, we need to be sure we have enough flood reservation space within the reservoirs."

There's plenty more water coming. As of Dec. 21, the water content in snowpack statewide was 204 percent of normal for this time of year, including 274 percent of normal for the southern Sierra Nevada Mountains.

Read the whole story

Creditors to foreclose on SLT convention center; Lane out

By Kathryn Reed

Randy Lane and John Serpa are no longer involved in the would-be convention center project in South Lake Tahoe.

The two men who ran Lake Tahoe Development Company and sunk about $90 million of their money in the 11-acre site must walk away with only concrete and rebar to show for their efforts.

The creditors who own the 29 parcels are in control. They have agreed to foreclose, South Tahoe Lake officials said. This all transpired in bankruptcy court Dec. 21.



Creditors looking for someone to buy their rebar and concrete. Photo/Kathryn Reed

What happens next remains to be seen. Creditors and South Lake Tahoe officials have a meeting with Tahoe Regional Planning Agency representatives Jan. 4 to discuss what flexibility the bi-state regulatory agency will allow.

“The design is outdated,” South Lake Tahoe City Manager Tony O’Rourke told *Lake Tahoe News*. “We need to see what we need to do to amend the entitlements.”

TRPA officials were not available for comment.

Although O’Rourke does not anticipate any work occurring at the state line area site for at least two years, he says it is imperative to know how the footprint can be changed to accommodate the next developer.

“The biggest issue is we are in a market place that has collapsed and it will take some time to rebound. This is way too valuable (property) for it not to be developed,” O’Rourke said.

The July 2006 agreement with Zephyr Cove-based Lake Tahoe Development Company that the then-City Council of Hal Cole, Kathay Lovell, John Upton, Ted Long and Mike Weber approved called for two hotel-condo structures, retail, insufficient parking, and no easy access to Heavenly Village across the busy highway. (Additional parking was supposed to be at Harveys, but no agreement was ever secured. Caltrans never signed-off on a proposed over or underpass for Highway 50.)

With that operating agreement only good for fire starter or a

doorstop, it’s possible the next contract won’t be so one-sided with the developer on the winning end.

Even though creditors – aka land owners – will have a large say in what happens, the city and TRPA will be part of the decision process because they dictate land use policy.

It was the council of Lovell, Long, Weber, Bill Crawford and Jerry Birdwell that gave the OK for LTDC to start construction without a final map in place – thus the reason multiple creditors own 29 parcels. Their vote also came with the assumption funding was in place, while in reality all LTDC had was a letter from a lending agency that turned out to be worth less than the paper it was written on.

Lane did not return phone calls.

Owens Mortgage Investment Fund is the largest creditor – owed about $28 million. The attorney for the creditor was unavailable for comment.

Most likely the creditors will get their respective properties appraised to know the value in today’s dollars. They vary in size and location, making them not of equal value.

O’Rourke speculates the group will bring in a recognized brokerage firm with experience domestically and internationally to move the project forward. In addition to anticipating a more traditional high-end hotel being part of the project, he believes a much smaller conference center will be erected.

“It will probably be more like a regional conference center like what Monterey has,” O’Rourke said. “Over the course of the near future with the creditors in control we will come up with a game plan that is market drive. We hope to attract a major investor whether it is Vail Resorts or someone else.”

Vail through its real estate arm RockResorts was going to be

the initial hotel operator. That fell through long before the developer filed for bankruptcy in October 2009. The Colorado-company, which owns Heavenly Mountain Resort on the other side of the street, will not discuss future acquisitions.

Wind forced evacuation of skiers at Mt. Rose

By Reno Gazette-Journal

A Mt. Rose Ski Resort lift was operating again Monday after it was jammed on Sunday with skiers stuck on it for two hours.

There were 23 chairs on the Zephyr lift holding 76 skiers when a freak wind from the south moved the cable on which the lifts operate and moved it out of the running rail, said Mike Pierce, Mt. Rose director of sales and marketing.

Read the whole story

Report: Reno a forgotten vacation destination

By Jason Hildago, Reno Gazette-Journal

Lord Chesterfield once said that an injury is much sooner forgotten than an insult.

Which raises the question: Does inclusion in a list of

forgotten vacation destinations qualify as the former or the latter?

That's the predicament Reno finds itself in after being included in *U.S. News & World Report's* rankings for "6 Forgotten Vacation Spots."

Reno made the list along with allegedly forgettable commiserators Pismo Beach, Calif., Fort Lauderdale, Fla., Lake Placid, N.Y., the Poconos, Pa., and Acapulco, Mexico.

Uh, what were we talking about again?

The article offered a glum assessment of Reno, citing Las Vegas' rise as Nevada's gaming mecca and the impact of competition from Indian gaming.

Read the whole story

Nevada adds seat in House

By Steve Timko, Reno Gazette-Journal

Nevada has picked up a fourth seat in the U.S. House of Representatives, according to U.S. Census Bureau figures released today.

Despite a population contraction toward the end of the decade, Nevada remained the fastest growing state in the country between 2000 and 2010.

Read the whole story

California fails to gain House seat based on census

By Michael Doyle, Fresno Bee Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON – California's congressional delegation will remain the same size while Texas and Florida will bulk up, under final 2010 census results released Tuesday morning.

With a population of 37.3 million, California will retain its current 53 House seats for the coming decade. Along with every other state, California will also keep two senators.

Reapportionment following the 2010 census still leaves California with the largest delegation in the 435-member House of Representatives. As the nation's population grew 9.7% to 308,745,538, though, the overall balance shifted across the country.

"This is really an important day for the American people," Commerce Secretary Gary Locke said at the National Press Club. "Much is riding on the results."

All told, 18 states will either gain or lose House seats, while 32 states will stay the same

The 2010 census marks the first reapportionment since 1920 that California has not gained at least one House seat. More broadly, it marks a continued population tilt away from Rust Belt states into the Sun Belt.

Read the whole story

Finding uses for gray water

By Susan Carpenter, Los Angeles Times

About 50 percent of the water used inside U.S. homes can be reused to irrigate landscapes and flush toilets, according to a greywater report released by the Oakland-based Pacific Institute last week. The Overview of Greywater Reuse examined the application of greywater systems worldwide to determine how the wastewater generated from sinks, baths, showers and clothes washers could be reused to reduce demand for more costly, high-quality drinking water.



“In California, there are a lot of reasons why we’re looking for new and innovative water sources, including the legal restrictions that are coming to bear on our ability to move water around the state,” said Juliet Christian-Smith, senior research associate at the Oakland-based research institute. “Climactic changes are occurring…. We are looking at a future with less of a natural reservoir in our snow in the Sierras and less water available from the Colorado River system.”

In 2009, California modified its plumbing code to allow the reuse of certain types of gray water. The Pacific Institute was interested in examining how that change might affect the state and aid its development of a “soft path of water management.”

Read the whole story

Truckee continuation school singled out by state

By Laurel Rosenhall, Sacramento Bee

Rocklin's Victory High School and Truckee's Sierra High School have been named two of the state's model continuation schools.

The campuses made a list – released Friday by state Superintendent Jack O'Connell – of 27 continuation schools that should serve as models to the rest of the state for their programs to help struggling students stay in school.

Read the whole story

Auditor warns El Dorado supes about pension liability

By Carlos Alcalá, Sacramento Bee

El Dorado County's auditor-controller has issued a warning to the Board of Supervisors about unfunded pension liability.

According to Joe Harn's letter to the supervisors last week, the liability has more than doubled from June 2008 to June 2009, the most recent reported.

The current liability is $264 million, he said.

Read the whole story

Gas prices going up, more people expected on roads this week

By Mark Glover and Darrell Smith, Sacramento Bee

Friends and relatives may be urging you to drive on down for the holidays, but prices at the gas pumps are definitely arguing for the joys of gathering around the home fires.

Regular gas in California is at $3.26 a gallon and rising. An unprecedented – for this time of year – $3 a gallon nationwide average is still possible by Christmas.

“You know it’s ridiculous, but what can you do? You’ve got to go with it,” said Kacey Pankins of Sacramento as he filled up Friday. He paid a relatively low $3.17 a gallon at a Valero station on Franklin Boulevard and Meadowgate Drive.

Analysts link climbing gas prices to crude oil prices now flirting with $90 a barrel, driven by speculators betting that an improving world economy will increase demand.

Dan Lina, who also paid $3.17 a gallon Friday at an AM/PM station at Elk Grove Boulevard and Highway 99, said gas prices were part of his decision to stay home this year.

But for many, the lure of distant holiday festivities is too strong to be deterred.

Read the whole story