S. Tahoe testing erosion compounds on city street

By Kathryn Reed

With all the moisture South Lake Tahoe is getting this season, the erosion control test project on Pasadena Avenue should provide plenty of data.

During the past construction season three types of erosion treatments were installed to find out which works the best. Part of the street in the Al Tahoe neighborhood is paved with pervious asphalt, part with pervious concrete paving stones, and part with pervious concrete. Each is a couple blocks long.



Pasadena Avenue in South Tahoe is test street for erosion. Photo/Kathryn Reed

“We are monitoring to see which holds up best to the snowplows,” John Greenhut, director of Public Works, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

He said it’s too early to render a verdict. That won’t come until late spring or early summer.

The idea is if the city deems at least one of the compounds usable, it's possible future projects would incorporate the product. Like all things, this would also be dependent on funding.

A different type of pervious concrete was used on gutters in another part of the city, but it did not hold up well.

The erosion control project was mostly funded with federal recovery dollars, though money from the California Tahoe Conservancy and Southern Nevada Public Lands Management Act were also used.

Included in the overall project was installation of a huge filtration system near the end of Lakeview Avenue. Greenhut said all runoff now goes through this system instead of flowing directly into the lake.

Wicked weather creates slushy mess throughout Lake Tahoe

Updated Dec. 20 9:52am:

Six inches of fluffy snow fell overnight in South Lake Tahoe and it hasn't stopped.

"Most of the roads in the county, both up there at the lake and down here in the valley, have ice on them. So far this morning we have had eight multi-vehicle traffic accidents – luckily none with serious injury – and numerous vehicles that have slid off the roadway," Jim Halsey with the Douglas County sheriff's department said.

By Susan Wood and Kathryn Reed

If this is what fall in Lake Tahoe is like, who knows what winter will bring when it starts tomorrow.

The La Nina tropical weather phenomenon is shaping up to be a doozy for the West Coast. With more than half the United States weather map covered with snow, the Weather Channel reports the Sierra Nevada beating a 30-year record with 300 inches of snow accumulating from November through December.

This latest storm series declared an “atmospheric river” of blustery weather is predicted to bring up to 15 feet of snow in some spots of the mountain range running up and down the spine of California. As a gauge, a basketball hoop sits at 10 feet.



Slushy roads were the norm throughout Lake Tahoe during the weekend. Photos/Kathryn Reed

But it’s the high winds with heavy rain that captured the headlines this weekend.

The National Weather Service in Reno reported a 155mph gust at Alpine Meadows Ski Resort on Sunday. A 67mph gust was reported at Lake Tahoe Airport in South Lake Tahoe.

Take that with the Weather Service reports of at least 3

inches of rain at the lake in a three-day period, and emergency crews have the makings of a major weather event including flooding, downed trees and power lines. The Lake Tahoe region remains in a winter storm warning period until 4pm today.

Downed power lines west of Sierra-at-Tahoe closed Highway 50 near Tamarack Pines Sunday afternoon. In the morning the South Shore ski resort was evacuating skiers and riders after a tree landed on a chairlift cable. This highway incident came hours after snow slid off the cliff onto the eastbound lanes of 50 on the east side of Echo Summit, California Highway Patrol reported.

“Luckily, and I knock on wood, there have been no injury accidents,” CHP Sgt. Terry Lowther reported Sunday afternoon. “But if this rain and slush freezes tonight, it will all be ice.”

Temperatures were supposed to plummet to a low of 22 degrees overnight, making for slick, dangerous conditions for late-travel and this morning’s commute.

For people coming to the mountains, it was an interesting drive with restrictions on most of the roads in and out of the basin. That is likely to be the scenario for the better part of the week as storms keep rolling in. Be sure to check the state icons on the home page of *Lake Tahoe News* to know the road conditions.

South Lake Tahoe police Sgt. Josh Adler said officers are finding people driving way too fast for the conditions. Officers were contending with tons of spinouts and accidents throughout the weekend. No injury accidents were reported through Sunday afternoon.

“One guy said he skidded for 100 feet. I told him you are driving too fast,” Adler said of the motorist who hit the backend of a BlueGo bus.

Douglas County sheriff's dispatch said nothing out of the ordinary was going on.

Lake Valley Fire was hopping Sunday afternoon with engines at incidents of two downed trees – one at North Upper Truckee that closed the road at Shoshone and another plunging into a home at the 1300 block of Glen Eagles, north of Pioneer Trail.

"When you have the high winds with the ground saturated, we're going to have some trees come down," fire Battalion Chief Gareth Harris said.

Sierra Pacific Power was busy Sunday as well. One minor outage was reported at the Skyland area, with another 30 households in the Glenbrook area without power for several hours Sunday. The 80 customers in the North Upper Truckee by Meyers were to have lights back on Sunday night.

In Tahoe City, 500 customers were in the dark, while 1,000 in Incline Village lost power. Those areas are not expected to have power until this morning.

"We heard the crash and we knew that was not a pine cone hitting the roof. And then the power went out," Tracy Owen Chapman said of the tree in the middle of the street in the Skyland area.

One person on the street could not get out because the live wires were directly in front of their house. No injuries occurred, and the tree did not hit a house or a vehicle.

The Reno-Tahoe International Airport experienced delays with the first storm in the series Friday, but reported no affects on Sunday afternoon, airport authority spokeswoman Heidi Berthold noted.

Flooding was a problem on Highway 89 for one Caltrans crew dealing with a pond about a block west of 15th Street in the westbound lane. Those men reported up to a foot of runoff

water at the road there.

John Greenhut, director of Public Works for South Lake Tahoe, said minor flooding in low lying areas started on Sunday, but nothing serious.

“… we are equipped for either snow or rain. We don’t like to have an excess of either,” Greenhut said.

With this being the fourth winter after the devastating Angora Fire, Greenhut said everything in that area is stabilized, but his crews still have an eye on the area.

It has been slush on the roads and in driveways. People don’t know if they should be shoveling or using a broom to clear the muck.

“At 6,600 (feet) I cleaned up about a foot of heavy, wet snow this morning. It is back to rain again at about 34 degrees. We are praying for the temps to drop again so that the storm continues on a cold note,” Chris Nelson of Tahoe Donner said late Sunday morning.

Kaycee Odom of Charlotte, N.C., was awed by seeing snowplows for the first time. She and her friend came to ski, but the weather has not cooperated. Instead, they found their way to the Beacon restaurant for food and drinks on Sunday.

All this weather has been a mixed blessing for people who play in the snow. While the ski resorts are rejoicing about the amount of snow dumping on them, the wind is making the freshies inaccessible.

Most resorts around Lake Tahoe closed early Sunday because wind made operating the lifts hazardous. Sierra-at-Tahoe had the most notable news Dec. 19 when a treetop fell onto the West Bowl lift. Five people sustained minor injuries that did not require hospitalization.

Heavenly closed early except for the Boulder area. Mount Rose

and Squaw closed.

“La Nina continues to deliver massive storms to the region – after opening on 100-plus inches of snow, we are now over 200 inches for the season and it’s still just December. This storm, while a bit heavier than the Thanksgiving storm, is helping build our base depths and fill in all the nooks and crannies in the trees. Once the temps drop and the snow gets lighter, we’ll be looking forward to some big powder days,” said Kirstin Cattell, spokeswoman at Sierra-at-Tahoe.

Backcountry enthusiasts will want to keep a close eye on reports from the Sierra Avalanche Center because the conditions have been precarious.

Hotels around the basin have rooms to rent because people are choosing to not come right now.

Jerry Bindel, who runs Lakeland Village in South Lake Tahoe, said his property’s rule is reservations can be pushed back if people don’t feel comfortable coming up in the weather, but refunds aren’t possible unless the roads are all closed.

“Everyone I talk to is saying business levels are healthy right now,” Bindel said. He anticipates all this snow will translate to heads in beds the entire winter.

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Tree falls onto chairlift cable, no serious injuries at

Sierra

By Kathryn Reed

A treetop fell onto the cable of the West Bowl chairlift at Sierra-at-Tahoe this morning, bouncing a handful of people out of the chair and onto the slope.



No one was seriously injured. The skiers were treated by ski patrol and the doctor at the resort on Highway 50 on the outskirts of the Lake Tahoe Basin. No one was transported to the hospital. The five injured people left the resort on their own.

The people who tumbled out of the chair fell between 5 and 15 feet.

“There was no real damage to the chair so we ran it until all the people on it were off,” Kirstin Cattell, resort spokeswoman said. “We shuttled the rest of the people out of West Bowl. At 11am we closed the whole resort for the day.”

Cattell doesn’t know the last time Sierra was closed because of winds. This resort near the top of Echo Summit is considered one of the better places to ski when it is windy.

However, the National Weather Service is calling for wind gusts this afternoon at the lake being 50mph, with ridgetops hitting 100mph.

About 150 had to be escorted out of the West Bowl area either on snowcats or snowmobiles.

Cattell said everyone evacuated in an orderly manner, with no one panicking.

Resort officials are spending the afternoon inspecting the towers, cables and chairs to ensure the lift will be

functioning on Monday. Ski patrollers are examining the terrain for precarious trees.

The tree that toppled today had been loaded with snow, temperatures warmed up, then the winds picked up which caused it to break from the top.

Cattell said, “We have a robust hazardous tree removal plan in place.”

The resort takes out about 100 trees a year that could be a danger to guests.

For people who skied on Sunday, they can bring their ticket with Dec. 19 on it back any day to trade it in for a full day lift ticket at Sierra, Cattell said.

San Jose becomes largest U.S. city to ban plastic bags

By John Woolfolk, San Jose Mercury News

San Jose became the largest U.S. city to ban plastic carry-out bags Tuesday with an ordinance that supporters said was the most far-reaching in the country aimed at encouraging shoppers to bring reusable totes.

The ordinance, approved on a 10-1 vote after two years of study, wouldn’t become effective until Jan. 1, 2012, to allow for more public outreach. It would prohibit retailers from giving out disposable plastic bags at the check stand and require them to charge for paper bags.

“This is a great step,” Councilman Sam Liccardo said. “It’s an

opportunity to lead on an important environmental issue."

Read the whole story

Caltrans to work on South Shore highways for years

By Kathryn Reed

Peering at a Caltrans work map, the highways on the South Shore look like they will be under construction for several years.

Eight of the 10 projects are for water quality; the other two are labeled intersection projects.



Construction on Luther Pass will be completed in 2011. Photo/Kathryn Reed

Mike Cook, who oversees the projects for this area, gave an update to the incoming South Lake Tahoe City Council on Dec. 14 about what to expect on highways 50 and 89.

Project 1: Originally known as the Ski Run to Stateline project, this will begin in 2011 and continue into the next building season. However, the project now goes 1,200 feet west of Ski Run to Wildwood and doesn't go all the way to the state line. "This is a better use of money," Cook said. This is because much of the state line area already has had water quality treatments. Discussions are still ongoing to widen the street, with Caltrans having met with stakeholders on Dec. 2.

Project 2: Trout Creek to Ski Run will also begin in May. Construction is estimated to take three years. It will include class 2 bike trails and shoulders being widened to 6 feet, sidewalks and landscaping. No traffic delays will be in affect during the time Tour de California cycling events are going on in May, Cook pledged.

Project 3: Trout Creek to the Y will be overhauled in May 2013. Lanes will be wider, a class 2 bike trail put in and sidewalks. Cook said it would not be as extensively landscaped as other sections of Highway 50 because Caltrans is the exclusive payee on this portion.

Project 4: A left turn lane at Sierra Boulevard. This could be part of Project 3.

Project 5: The improvements at the Y, the intersection of highways 89 and 50, were finished last year.

Project 6: Y to Cascade Road will begin in 2014. Caltrans is working with the U.S. Forest Service as the federal agency looks to reconfigure bike trails in the Camp Richardson area. Caltrans plans to replace culverts, add sidewalks, and make the shoulder 4-feet wide in part of the area.

Project 7: Y to Airport Road will have 4-foot shoulders put in starting in 2013. Cook warns this may not be possible for the entire stretch.

Project 8: Another 2013 project is to widen the shoulder from

Meyers Road to Incline Road in El Dorado County.

Project 9: Highway 89 from Meyers to the Alpine County line will be finished next year. With Luther Pass being the detour route while Echo Summit is closed, the plan is to not have delays on this section at that time.

Project 10: Replacing seven rock walls on Echo Summit beginning spring 2011 as soon as weather permits could be the most disruptive of the projects. Highway 50 will be closed for two weeks. From Sacramento/Bay Area, the main alternate route being promoted is using highways 49, 88 and 89 to the South Shore. This will add about an hour to the drive – though it is scenic. After the closure, the highway will have controlled traffic for four weeks. Marketing gurus, who were in attendance at the meeting, are not calling it a closure despite the fact the road will be closed. Originally, the outreach to let people know about the closure was about $50,000. Caltrans has added another $150,000 – especially with people coming to town for the Amgen bike race.

Projects slated to begin beyond 2011 do not have secure funding, so the start dates may change.

Crusade to outlaw smoking in casinos

By Liz Benston, Las Vegas Sun

Paul McIntyre is smiling at the Global Gaming Expo, belying the fact that he is embedded deep behind enemy lines.

From his 10-foot-square booth sandwiched between displays of

gambling tables and slot machines, McIntyre – representing the nonprofit groups Kids Involuntarily Inhaling Secondhand Smoke and Americans for Nonsmokers' Rights – is pressuring casinos nationwide to ban smoking. He is sitting at a long table covered with stacks of fact sheets about smoking and colorful brochures showing smiling casino and restaurant workers. Bookending the table are two giant posters, including a photo of a young female casino dealer.

This is the final frontier for anti-smoking advocates – the casino industry's premier trade show, which wrapped up in Las Vegas last month – and not an entirely welcome place to be.

Few stop at the booth. Those who do usually have something to say.

"People expect to smoke and gamble when they come to Vegas," said Joe Marth, a young man whose Arkansas company makes casino surveillance cameras. A stone's throw away, he has been eyeing the booth all day and comes over for a closer look.

"It's not going to happen," he says when asked about the prospect of banning smoking in casinos.

Read the whole story

Southwest may be heading to the islands

By Richard N. Velotta, Las Vegas Sun

Southwest Airlines could be heading as far southwest as the U.S. goes – to Hawaii.



The airline’s chairman, president and CEO said in New York on Wednesday that Southwest would substitute 20 of its Boeing 737-700 aircraft orders to 800-series jets, opening the door to potential long over-water and international flights.

Addressing the Wings Club of New York City, Gary Kelly said the 175-passenger 800-series planes “set the stage to bring more destinations into the realm of possibilities for Southwest to operate a more economical aircraft and to offer better scheduling flexibility in high-demand, slot-controlled or gate-restricted markets.”

Southwest expects to take delivery of the first of its larger jets in March 2012. The current plan is to deliver the planes in an Extended-range Twin-engine Operational Performance Standards configuration. ETOPS-configured jets are certified to fly over large bodies of water, putting the Hawaiian Islands and the Caribbean in play as potential destinations for the discount carrier that is McCarran International Airport’s busiest airline.

The airline also has indicated that the larger jets could be used at airports where it has a limited number of gates or takeoff and landing slots, like LaGuardia International and Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport, to maximize the number of passengers it can fly to those destinations. Alaska, Mexico and Canada also have been named as potential destinations with the flexibility and range of the larger aircraft.

Read the whole story

Weather service warns of dangerous conditions for Tahoe

By Kathryn Reed

Snow turned to rain Friday and is continuing on the South Shore this morning.

The National Weather Service in Reno says the white stuff is going to return today to lake level this afternoon, with the heaviest snowfall tonight through Sunday when it could be 2 to 4 inches per hour.



"Overall snowfall totals of 5 to 10 feet are likely in the Sierra above 7,000 feet which will significantly increase avalanche danger," NWS officials said. "Dangerous and life threatening conditions are expected in the Sierra due to rapid snow accumulations … near zero visibility and strong winds."

The Sierra Avalanche Center lists the conditions as "extreme" for today.

The nasty weather on Dec. 17 had law enforcement scrambling to keep up with the wrecks and spinouts.

Between 6am and noon Friday the Nevada Highway Patrol handled 47 accidents in Northern Nevada. And the accidents continued throughout the day.

A winter storm warning is in effect until 4pm Monday. One to 3 feet of snow is still expect at lake level.

Here are some of the storm totals the NWS has: Truckee and Tahoe City received 15 inches of snow as of 6:43am Saturday,

Garnderville 1 foot as of 11:23pm Friday, and Reno 6 inches as of 11:30pm Friday.

Don’t put the shovel or blower away because snow is in the forecast for the coming week. The highs will be in the 30s and the lows in the 20s in the Lake Tahoe Basin.

Vegas rethinks marketing message in post-recession era

By Richard N. Velotta, Las Vegas Sun

The Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority is revamping its marketing and advertising strategy to focus on attracting the likeliest visitors in a post-recession economy.

Board members heard a report from a team of marketing experts Tuesday that said the destination should focus its attention on a core base of steady Las Vegas customers and another group that will need some persuasion to choose Las Vegas over another resort destination.

New technologies and social media should enable the LVCVA to zero in on those different market segments, they said.

The plan is a departure from previous strategies that gave more consideration to the demographics of potential visitors and where they come from.

The new strategy was generated following research into how consumers have changed since the Great Recession.

The market segmentation study, developed by LVCVA executives, Las Vegas-based advertising consultant R&R Partners and

Heart+Mind Strategies of Washington, is based on research that determined 38 percent of the market are core customers who love Las Vegas, 41 percent are in the “persuade and convince” group and 21 percent are uninvolved or disinterested.

The new strategy will be to appeal to the “core” and “persuade” customers and devote no resources to others.

While much of the LVCVA’s past marketing efforts have targeted specific demographic groups in particular regions of the United States, the “core” and “persuade” targets are all across the country but can be reached with target marketing enabled by new technologies.

Read the whole story

UNR students want to be leaders in tourism promotion

By Richard N. Velotta, Las Vegas Sun

It was just like old times in Reno last week.

Twenty-seven years after then-Gov. Richard Bryan formed the Nevada Tourism Commission and organized the first Governor’s Conference on Tourism, the organization observed its 25th anniversary at the Peppermill Resort.

That happened because the killer recession forced the commission and the industry to retreat for two years.

But with visitation statistics on the rise and a hint of optimism in the air, the commission and its staff pulled together Governor’s Conference Lite, packing nine panels and

presentations, a quarterly commission meeting and a tribute lunch for Bryan into 1½ days.

This year's conference had a different feel from years past. Many of the same leaders attended, although not as many as in the go-go years of the late 1990s and early 2000s. About 250 people signed up for this year's event compared with close to 1,000 back when.

Because the conference was organized in a series of general sessions instead of splitting it into breakout meetings, it was easy to gauge the level of interest – and most of the seats were filled throughout the event. It seemed that people attending this year's conference were hungry for information.

One event that had a low turnout – and, in fairness, it wasn't actually part of the conference because it filled time between the end of the commission meeting and the opening session of the conference – was interesting because it provided a snapshot of the future of the state's tourism industry.

Between Lt. Gov. Brian Krolicki's poundings of the gavel ending the commission meeting and opening the conference, students from UNR's Reynolds School of Journalism and Center for Advanced Media Studies presented a proposal to promote the Governor's Conference in 2011.

Calling their agency "BluePRint," in honor of UNR's school colors, 20 students affiliated with the Public Relations Student Society of America demonstrated what tomorrow's travelers are going to look like and how to engage them.

Read the whole story