Winter weather warning issued for Lake Tahoe

Lake Tahoe residents awoke to rain Sunday morning. And it’s just going to get worse as the day goes on.

The National Weather Service in Reno has issued a winter weather advisory above 7,000 feet from 10 am to 10pm Sunday.

Expect snow accumulations of 5 to 10 inches above 7,000 feet, with accumulations up to 18 inches possible above 8,000 feet. At the 6,000 to 7,000 foot level rain will change to snow early this evening with snow accumulations up to 4 inches.



Rusty may want to think twice about swimming in Fallen Leaf Lake as the weather changes. Photo/Kathryn Reed

Winds will be from the south to southwest at 15 to 25mph, with gusts to 40mph in the lower elevations. Sierra ridge will experience gusts up to 85mph.

The Weather Service says to not be surprised if Caltrans and NDOT put up chain controls this afternoon for the passes –

Donner, Echo, Spooner, Carson, Mount Rose and Daggett.

It's possible Monitor and Ebbetts passes could close this evening.

Road conditions may be accessed by hitting the state icons on the Home page of *Lake Tahoe News*.

– Kathryn Reed

Nev. in top 10, Calif. bottom 10 for business tax climate

By Kara Lapoint, Reno Gazette-Journal

The Tax Foundation, a nonprofit and nonpartisan tax-research group in Washington, D.C., has released its latest edition of the State Business Tax Climate Index, which ranks the tax systems of the 50 states.

Nevada came in at No. 4, which means the state had the fourth-best tax climate on the first day of the 2011 fiscal year, or July 1, 2010.

South Dakota's tax system was ranked first, making it the most welcoming to economic activity, and was followed by Alaska and Wyoming at second and third.

Florida, Montana, New Hampshire, Delaware, Utah and Indiana rounded out the top 10, after Nevada.

The 10 states ranked to have the least hospitable business tax climates are (41st to 50th): North Carolina, Rhode Island, Minnesota, Maryland, Iowa, Ohio, Connecticut, New Jersey,

California and New York.

Read the whole story

Collaboration lessens threat of fire

By Michael Kay, Union Democrat

There was a time when the forests of northeastern Calaveras County fed communities. Now they threaten to destroy them.

Decades without thinning and wrongheaded national anti-fire policies have left a tinderbox of thickly grown trees and heavy brush, according to many experts.

It is so bad in some areas that fire officials say if a fire started within the forest it would be too dangerous to leave the road to fight it.

“Our forests, once our friends, have become the most scary thing out here,” said Calaveras County Supervisor Steve Wilensky, who represents the area in question.

The situation has spurred a massive coalition of public, private and nonprofit groups to form a partnership several fire industry veterans call “unique” and “unprecedented.” The goal is to make the forests safe again.

So far, crews have cleared some 70 acres in the West Point area.

Fire breaks – areas where fire will be at least delayed, if not stopped – are in place for the first time in decades.

Read the whole story

State gets cash back from website vendor that failed Nov. 2

By Torey Van Oot, Sacramento Bee

The secretary of state's office has gotten its cash back from the web vendor hosting the crash-plagued statewide election results site on Tuesday.

The site, which includes a county-by-county breakdown and results map, went down shortly before the polls closed at 8 p.m. Tuesday.

It was soon replaced with a less flashy backup page listing the results. Even that fail-safe site couldn't withstand the high traffic at points in the night.

The vendor, Rackspace Hosting, issued a mea culpa on Wednesday and offered to refund the secretary of state for its services, a bill that amounted to roughly $1,000.

Read the whole story

Protection for Sierra’s 3-toed woodpecker sought

By Matt Weiser, Sacramento Bee

The black-backed woodpecker, a native of the Sierra Nevada, has just three toes, a yen for burned trees, and tremendous potential to shake up California logging rules.

Environmental groups recently filed a petition to protect the woodpecker under the state Endangered Species Act. The Center for Biological Diversity and the John Muir Project at Earth Island Institute say the species may go extinct because California doesn’t have enough burned forests, the bird’s preferred habitat.

If the petition succeeds, private forest owners who experience a fire could have a harder time harvesting burned trees to produce lumber, a practice known as salvage logging.

California currently allows salvage logging under streamlined regulations so property owners can harvest the wood before it rots.

The environmental groups argue this deprives the black-backed woodpecker of essential habitat. The bird prefers to nest in burned trees, and feeds on insects that attack trees after a fire.

Read the whole story

City to erect signs to deter walkers near convention center site

By Kathryn Reed

Trying to prevent a lawsuit and provide public safety, the South Lake Tahoe City Council on Tuesday agreed to increase the signage at the bankrupt convention center site so people will know not to walk on the north side of Highway 50.

Tiny signs are at either end of the dormant construction site saying to not walk there and to cross the street. But they don’t always work based on the number of people seen walking there.



Cyclists don't have much leeway on Highway 50 by the convention center project. Photo/Kathryn Reed

Caltrans approved an encroachment permit Dec. 3, 2008, which expired Aug. 1, 2009. Nichols Engineering had designed a plan to make the area better for pedestrians, but Lake Tahoe

Development Company nixed that idea, according to city staff.

LTDC filed for bankruptcy in October 2009 on the 11-acre parcel and is awaiting the judge's December decision to know the future. At this time, according to city staff, LTDC won't put any money into making the area better for walkers/cyclists.

When the fencing first went up around the concrete and rebar, signs on the wooden fence facing the highway had pictures of what the end project would look like. Those have long since been removed.

Insiders say the $410 million project the city and Randy Lane's Lake Tahoe Development Company agreed to will not resemble what will eventually go on this prime piece of real estate near Stateline. Most people close to the project tell *Lake Tahoe News* a convention center is not likely to be built. High-end lodging is expected to be a component.

Before anything gets built, the city has agreed to put up more signs so people don't walk by the area. A narrow strip of asphalt barely wide enough for a cyclist separates traffic from the K-rail – those concrete barriers.

"I would recommend both signage and a boardwalk if funding is available," city engineer Stan Hill told the council Nov. 2.

The council was presented with three plans Tuesday – leave the area as it is, implement the K-rail plan prepared by Nichols Engineering at a cost of about $30,000, or establish a pedestrian access path with Caltrans for about $150,000.



No sidewalk here to get to the other side.

Councilman Hal Cole came up with the fourth idea, which the council agreed to, that is to put more signs up deterring people from walking on the north side of the street. At what cost this will be is unknown.

The money for any work at the site would come from the $365,000 that is collected in tax increment revenue each year from the site. The Teeter Law allows the county to pay the city property taxes from the site despite the property owner not actually paying a dime for year. But that income source will dry up in about 18 months per state law.

Harrah's loses $164.8 mil. in third quarter

By Steve Green, Las Vegas Sun

Harrah's Entertainment Inc. of Las Vegas today posted a third quarter loss as costs expanded and customers spent less on the Las Vegas Strip and around the country.



The company lost $164.8 million in the quarter, a turnaround from 2009's third quarter when Harrah's lost $1.7 billion.

Both quarters included charges against earnings for impairment of intangible assets. The charges were $44 million in the 2010 quarter and $1.328 billion in the 2009 quarter.

Net revenue of $2.289 billion in the third quarter of 2010 was up slightly from $2.282 billion in the year-ago quarter, with revenue affected positively by the acquisition of Planet Hollywood on the Las Vegas Strip but hurt nationwide by "the continuing impact of the recession on customers' discretionary spending."

Read the whole story

Garrido competency hearing set for March

By Sam Stanton, Sacramento Bee

Phillip Garrido's competence to stand trial in the Jaycee Lee Dugard kidnapping will not be decided until a hearing in early March, an El Dorado Superior Court judge decided Thursday, and more mental health experts may be appointed to examine him before then.

Judge Douglas Phimister also said he would allow arguments in early December by a lawyer for The Bee and other media groups

seeking to have dozens of documents in the case unsealed, including Garrido's psychiatric records and transcripts of Dugard's secret testimony to a grand jury in September about her 18 years of captivity.

Garrido and his wife, Nancy, are accused of kidnapping Dugard in 1991 when she was 11 and holding her captive. As the case has proceeded over the past year, the judge has sealed about 29 documents and held a number of closed hearings, including two sessions that took place out of public view Thursday.

Read the whole story

Hwy. 50 construction on West Slope taking longer than expected

By Tony Bizjak, Sacramento Bee

Up in the El Dorado Hills area, commuters complain that one Highway 50 reconstruction effort seems to have become the region's official never-ending project.

It's been two years since work started on the combination car-pool lane and freeway interchange upgrade project – yet workers are still out there, shifting lanes for construction.

A sign next to the freeway says the project will be finished in 2010. Oops on that. The original finish date was two weeks ago. El Dorado officials now say July is the new due date. Meanwhile, the budget's bumped from $29 million to $34 million.

What happened? If you want to lay blame, start at the Capitol, where the governor and Legislature did their best to get this and dozens of other projects off to a really bad launch.

Read the whole story

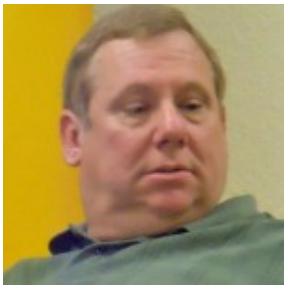
Grego shutdown trying to get to meat of General Plan's draft EIR

By Kathryn Reed

South Lake Tahoe City Councilman Bruce Grego expressed dissatisfaction with contents of the city's environmental impact report for the updated General Plan, but was essentially shutdown by the consultant.

"It appears there is a certain philosophy being worked into this document," Grego said at the Nov. 2 council meeting.

He took issue with regulating fireplaces and woodstoves, restrictive lighting for businesses, and the pervasive view people are going to stop using their vehicles.



Bruce Grego

“Today is not intended to be a dialog of the adequacy of the document,” explained Pat Angell of PMC World, the group paid to assemble the EIR. “When we prepare the final we will relook at the language and unintended consequences.”

Angell gave a brief, superficial PowerPoint of what the EIR is about, but no substance to what is in it.

Even though a PowerPoint slide said the purpose of the public hearing was to, “Provide an opportunity for interested agencies and the public to provide input on the adequacy of the draft EIR,” Angell did not seem to care what Grego had to say.

Staff and fellow councilmembers pointed out to Grego that much of what he is worried about in the draft EIR is already in city code or part of Tahoe Regional Planning Agency rules.

One person from the audience spoke.

Mayor Kathay Lovell agreed with Councilman Bill Crawford’s statement, “I think the General Plan is much like the city budget, both are living documents that are subject to be changed along the way.”

This was an informational item, with nothing to vote on.

The General Plan, once approved, will replace the existing General Plan that was adopted in 1999. The public may comment on the draft EIR until Nov. 12. The plan is online. The final EIR is expected to be released in January or February.