Fines being levied on people trespassing at Meyers Landfill



People entering the old Meyers Landfill site are being cited. The fine is $175.

This area off Pioneer Trail in El Dorado County was closed to the public earlier this summer so a cap could be put on the toxic site.

“We issued a citation on July 26 at noon to a nearby resident [Hekpa Drive] for violating the closure. They entered the area on bikes, and were approached by one of our staff who pointed out to them that they just passed about seven closure signs and asked them to turn around and leave the area,” U.S. Forest Service spokeswoman Cheva Heck said. “One rode on, the second turned around. Our staffer called our law enforcement, who responded, caught up with the one who had turned back and issued a citation. ”

The area is closed from Garbage Dump Road to Saxon Creek through the end of the year. The main landfill site and the surrounding area will remain closed for a few years to allow vegetation to re-establish.

“We are asking that people respect the closure. We don’t want to write tickets, but we will, in the interest of safety and allowing the cap construction to proceed smoothly,” Heck said.

For more information on the Meyers Landfill site, including a map of the closure, the Record of Decision and the Remedial

Design, click here.

— Compiled by Kathryn Reed

Fire north of Reno contained, SoCal blazes raging

By Reno Gazette-Journal

The 1,369-acre Constantia Complex of fires is 100 percent contained, authorities said this morning.

The fire northwest of Reno and about 5 miles south of Doyle, Calif., started Saturday night, now has a line all the way around it with vegetation removed to prevent its spread.

Even though the fire is not burning, crews will continue to work on the lines cut by hand and with bulldozers and using firebreaks to make sure the flames do not spread.

Read the whole story

Click here for info on the Southern California fires.

Marine imposter caught in Tahoe exposes lapses in

security

By JJ Hensley, Arizona Republic

Sgt. John Rodriguez cut an imposing figure when he was introduced at the Republican committee meeting in the winter of 2008.

The decorated Marine and aspiring precinct committeeman came to the event in his green service uniform with some of the military branch's highest honors clearly visible, including the Navy Cross.



John Rodriguez

That was the first thing that caught Dan Ryan's eye.

"My first reaction was, this guy's a stud," Ryan said. "Then I looked a little more and thought, something's going on here. I'm very, very sensitive about the Navy Cross. I happen to have written one of the citations for the Marine who was killed right next to me in 1967 in Vietnam in a firefight."

Ryan's hunch led the former FBI agent to do some digging of his own and ultimately put him in touch with investigators at the Arizona Department of Public Safety.

Read the whole story

GM named for Heavenly; Vail sends Carrig to Colorado

By Mark Harden, Denver Business Journal

Vail Resorts Inc. said Thursday it is shuffling its mountain-resort leadership.

The moves are part of a reorganization of the management of Vail Resorts' Mountain Division, which oversees Colorado ski areas Breckenridge, Vail, Beaver Creek and Keystone as well as Heavenly Mountain at Lake Tahoe on the California-Nevada line.



Pete Sonntag will be the general manager at Heavenly.

Among the changes announced by the Broomfield-based company (NYSE: MTN):

• Keystone Resort COO Doug Lovell has been named VP and COO of Beaver Creek and will report to Mountain Division Co-President John Garnsey.

• John Buhler, director of skier services for Breckenridge,

has been promoted to VP and GM of Keystone and will report to Mountain Division Co-President Blaise Carrig.

• Vail Ski & Snowboard School Director Pete Sonntag has been promoted to VP and GM of Heavenly and also will report to Carrig.

Read the whole story

La Nina may bring dry conditions to California

By Mark Grossi, McClatchy Newspapers

FRESNO – Don’t let the running rivers and rising reservoirs fool you. The break in California’s three-year drought might not last.

The global weather phenomenon La Nina has begun cooling down the Pacific Ocean, which means drier times may be ahead for major parts of California.

The effects of La Nina aren’t felt until the rainy season in California. But in May and June, a harbinger appeared as ocean temperatures dropped as suddenly as anyone could remember.

Based on past patterns and statistics, scientists see a clear shift toward drier weather for Southern California and possibly the Sierra Nevada in Central California.

Read the whole story

Report: Pilot error cause of 2009 air tanker crash

By Jeff Delong, Reno Gazette-Journal

Pilot error likely was responsible for the fatal crash of a single-engine air tanker that smashed into rugged terrain while battling a Northern Nevada wildfire last summer, federal investigators said.

Pilot Dave Jamsa's "failure to maintain a stabilized approach prior to the retardant drop and his subsequent failure to release the retardant load" as he attempted to pull out of a dive caused his aircraft to crash, the National Transportation Safety Board said.

Jamsa, a Montana resident under contract to the U.S. Bureau of Land Management, died in the Aug. 20 crash. He was among eight pilots battling the Hoyt Fire about 125 miles northeast of Reno.

Read the whole story

El Dorado County DA clears officer in death of mentally

ill woman

By Cynthia Hubert, Sacramento Bee

The El Dorado County District Attorney has found that a Placerville police officer was justified in shooting and killing a mentally ill woman who fled a local hospital in a stolen ambulance in late March.

Linda Carol Clark, 39, of Folsom, died in the driveway of a Placerville home after leading officers on a slow chase through town. Police said she tried to ram officers with the vehicle, prompting them to fatally shoot her. An eyewitness disputed that account.

District Attorney Vern Pierson has not released his office's investigation into the incident. But the dead woman's father, Marty Hansen, met with officials Wednesday and learned that the shooting has been deemed justifiable, he told *The Bee*.

Read the whole story

Feds attempting to strip pot farms from public lands

By John Ellis, McClatchy Newspapers

FRESNO – Local law enforcement officials joined their federal counterparts Wednesday to deliver a unified message: marijuana farming operations in the foothills and mountains of the Sierra Nevada are dangerous to citizens and the environment.

Gil Kerlikowske, director of the White House's Office of

National Drug Control Policy, and Benjamin Wagner, the U.S. attorney for the Eastern District of California, joined local sheriffs Margaret Mims of Fresno County, John Anderson of Madera County and Bill Wittman of Tulare County at a town hall in Clovis to discuss their concerns over marijuana-growing operations on public lands.

“This is industrial scale, and it is happening on property that belongs to you,” Wagner told the audience.

Read the whole story

LTCC to interview president candidates in August

By Kathryn Reed

Lake Tahoe Community College is hoping one of the handful of people expected to be interviewed Aug. 11 for the job of interim president will be able to start by Sept. 1.



Susan Middleton, vice president of Academic Affairs and Student Services, has been the acting president since Paul Killpatrick left earlier this month. She plans to retire Aug. 31. She has told the board she would stay on longer if need be.

The college board is having a retreat Aug. 6 at 8:30am in the boardroom. Part of the session is to hash out what the five want in an interim president. It has not been decided how long that person would be at the helm of South Lake Tahoe’s two-year institution. Some believe it would better to have a

permanent person in place by January, others believe waiting to hire after the first of the year would be best. The board will likely make that decision in September.

About 18 people applied for the interim job. It's not known if any local candidates are in the mix.

The interviewees will go through a dual process, with the board members in one room interviewing someone and another candidate being questioned by a committee of classified-faculty-administrators. Both groups will grill each candidate.

The board will likely go into closed session that day to deliberate, assess what the other panel thought of the candidates and ideally come up with a finalist. Background checks would then begin, with a special meeting being called for the official vote and announcement.

A month-to-month contract will be offered the person. Usually it is people with past presidential experience who are looking for this type of contract work.

Interviews to replace Diane Rosner, who retired this summer as dean of Instruction and Social Sciences, will be Aug. 17. The person is expected to be hired on an interim basis.

EDC grounds its buses; BlueGo sputters to stay viable

By Kathryn Reed

El Dorado County pulled its two buses out of the BlueGo fleet Wednesday, creating an unstable situation for on-call riders of the public transit system.

“Because everything happened late (Tuesday) I’m not sure about the on-call services or what is being offered to those folks,” county Supervisor Norma Santiago told *Lake Tahoe News* late Wednesday. Until July 22 she was the vice president of the South Tahoe Area Transportation Authority. She is still on its board. “There are some discussions going on that I’m not privy to.”

(STATA is a nonprofit Nevada-based umbrella agency that runs the transit system on the South Shore.)



No one is riding El Dorado County-owned BlueGo buses. Photo/Kathryn Reed

On Wednesday afternoon one of the two buses was in the county’s transportation yard in Meyers. Just after 5pm a BlueGo bus was in service in the Meyers area headed toward South Lake Tahoe on Highway 50.

The directive to park the vehicles came about because of liability issues involving the county not being named on the certificate of insurance, Santiago said.

Two closed session items involving BlueGo were on the Board of Supervisors’ July 27 agenda, though no reportable action was taken. These pertained to lawsuits.

Eleven days ago the set route in Meyers was eliminated along with other changes in an attempt to put a Band-Aid on the ailing system.

Lake Tahoe News called BlueGo dispatch Wednesday asking about booking a ride for this morning for on-call service in Meyers. The dispatcher said it was possible, but there was limited availability.

Financial concerns

“Right now the county has no agreement with STATA,” Santiago said.

On June 29, she made a motion as chairwoman of the Board of Supervisors to not fund an estimated $181,343 for July 1, 2010, through June 30, 2012, to provide for the operation and funding of BlueGo on-call services. The board agreed.

Stacy Dingman, a STATA board member and spokeswoman for the group, told *Lake Tahoe News* this week she knew nothing of El Dorado County’s June vote even though the STATA board last met July 22.

Things are so bad at the Stateline agency that the B word – bankruptcy – has been broached.

“There have definitely been rumors about bankruptcy. The fiscal year began July 1. That is when new grants come in. Monies are coming in,” Dingman said.

Mike McLaughin, attorney for STATA, said, “The board is considering all of their available options and it would be imprudent not to consider bankruptcy as an option. Settling the debt with MV is an option and other options are available.”

State and federal dollars, which is what STATA relies on to keep the buses rolling, have strings attached. A basic requirement is to have annual audits and a semblance of

financial stability.

STATA has neither. The audit for fiscal year ending June 30, 2009, is not done. And its financial solvency resembles scarlet red more than midnight black.

In an email from STATA accountant Rhonda Saigh to Dingman, which Dingman shared with *LTN*, it says, “The 08-09 audited financial statements have not yet been accepted by the board. That action is expected to be taken at the board meeting on Aug. 9. No public distribution or posting is appropriate prior to board acceptance. The audited financial statements are not required, but desired, to be posted on the website. To refresh your memory, the completion of the 08-09 audit was vastly delayed primarily because of the very, very late grant billings to NDOT. “

The Nevada Department of Transportation is so worried about STATA’s ability to operate that it sent STATA Chairwoman Nancy McDermid and Treasurer Dan Garrison an email July 12 saying it was threatening to cut off funding.

The letter from Derek Kirkland, transportation planner, says, “The biggest concern is that STATA is lacking cash flow and is relying solely on grant funding, which is not allowed. NDOT’s grant funding is a reimbursable program and requires a 50 percent local match,” Kirkland wrote. Later the letter says, “As I know you are very aware, STATA is in a very serious situation and risks shutting down service indefinitely.”

Federal law mandates annual, timely audits be done in order to receive funding.

One of the issues for El Dorado County is the 2009 audit is not approved, when in fact it’s the 2010 audit that should be under way. Audits are due to California by Dec. 31 each year.

“STATA has a contractual obligation to the county to provide us with an audited financial statement,” county Auditor-

Controller Joe Harn said. “(It’s) unfortunate the audit was not completed sooner. It might have provided insight to the board of directors of STATA and to the county of El Dorado about what was happening financially to STATA.”

Because STATA is a Nevada corporation it does not have to meet some of the stricter rules California has on the books. John Andoh, the transit administrator who left STATA earlier this year, did not have to file papers with the Fair Political Practices Commission in relation to MV Transportation – his former employer – who he recommended to the board be the transit operator. If it were a California entity, the contract STATA signed that was valued at more money than it had, would have been null and void.

Looking for answers

Santiago says there is plenty of blame to go around for why STATA is in the quandary it’s in. She admits the board should have asked more questions of Andoh and not relied on this one staff person to be so powerful.

“Hindsight is 20-20. We should have reigned in John a lot sooner,” Santiago said. She said he misrepresented to MV what the board wanted and what STATA was capable of paying.

Andoh at one time tried to get El Dorado dollars passed to a dormant, essentially non-existent JPA called the Basin Transportation System that was established in the 1970s.

McLaughlin does not believe there has been any misappropriation of funds.

“I don’t think anyone has cast any doubt that all the funds in the operation were used for capital acquisition and operations. But the system was set up to run with a certain budget and all those budgeted funds did not come to fruition,” McLaughlin said.

Another lawsuit on the books

On July 27, the fourth lawsuit from MV Transportation, the transit operator for the South Shore system until June 20, was filed. This one in Douglas County names all of the member agencies of the South Tahoe Area Transportation Authority.

The entities named in the latest suit are: South Lake Tahoe, El Dorado County, Douglas County, Harveys, Harrah's, MontBleu, Horizon, Lakeside, Heavenly, Ridge Tahoe, Tahoe Transportation District, and Tahoe Regional Planning Agency. TRPA is a non-voting member of STATA.

"The lawsuit filed (Tuesday) is pretty extensive. Everyone is scrambling," Santiago said.

The problem is STATA owes MV more than $2 million, though the sparring entities disagree on exact amount.

Bringing in TTD

To appease NDOT, and probably other funding agencies, STATA at its special July 22 meeting that was a joint board meeting with Tahoe Transportation District, agreed to have this agency handle the day-to-day operation. Transit Resource Center has a limited contract to run the actual vehicles.

NDOT officials were at last week's meeting. It had been the state agency's recommendation in the July 12 letter that TTD be brought in.

TTD will do this through Sept. 30. This agency, which has two staff members, is tasked with handling grant proposals and administering the request for proposal to find a long-term bus operator for STATA.

It's possible a longer contract could be issued or that TTD would take over the bus system and STATA would be dissolved. One thing that needs to be overcome is the TTD board is made up of public agencies, while STATA is a public-private

enterprise.

Santiago envisions it being a rough road going forward for everyone involved.

“I think everybody is committed to making sure the BlueGo system continues to operate. It may operate on a smaller scale,” McLaughlin said. He said talks have centered on having a transit system where the operations fit the confirmed dollars coming in. “The system might get a bit smaller. I don’t think anyone anticipates the system going away.”