Crews make progress on lightning started fires

By Victor Calderon, Reno Gazette-Journal

Firefighters continued Tuesday to battle several fires caused by lightning strikes including one north of Gerlach while containing just over half of the Constantia Complex Fire north of Reno.

The U.S. Bureau of Land Management is managing the Rock Creek Fire, about 18 miles north of Gerlach, said Lisa Ross, a public affairs specialist for the Winnemucca BLM district.

By 5:30pm Tuesday, the 6,200-acre fire was about 30 percent contained, Ross said. The fire started about 10pm Saturday.

“Firefighters have made good progress and the expected containment is by Thursday,” she said.

Read the whole story

El Dorado County expects more jobs, services to be cut

By Carlos Alcalá, Sacramento Bee

The El Dorado County Board of Supervisors gave the go-ahead to start planning cuts of 150 positions from the county’s budget for 2011-2012.

The job eliminations are needed to bridge a projected $16 million budget deficit.

They would cut nearly one out of every six full-time positions covered by the county’s discretionary budget.

There are now 932 full-time equivalents in that budget. The county has 1,761 such positions in all, including mandated positions paid for by outside revenue sources.

Read the whole story

California e-waste program short circuits

By Tom Knudson, Sacramento Bee

It seemed a perfect symmetry: California, the world’s high-tech capital, would lead the way in recycling the debris of our digital revolution.

But five years after its launch, the state government-run electronic waste program stands out not as a model of the green innovation for which California is famous but as an example of good intentions gone awry.

By paying more than $320 million to collect and recycle computer monitors and televisions, the state has built a magnet for fraud totaling tens of millions of dollars, including illegal material smuggled in from out of state.

Read the whole story

Somber gathering to remember Guinn

By Ray Hagar, Reno Gazette-Journal

LAS VEGAS – They came from cross the state tonight – Nevadans involved in sports, schools, banking and government – to pray for the soul of departed former Nevada Gov. Kenny Guinn, who died here Thursday after falling from the roof of his home.

U.S. Sen. John Ensign, R-Las Vegas, state Senate Minority Leader Bill Raggio, R-Reno, and former Gov. Bob List were among the hundreds who packed into St. Joseph, Husband of Mary Catholic Church for the recitation of the rosary, ahead of Tuesday's 10 a.m. funeral at the church.

Former first lady Dema Guinn was not in attendance. She had been at a private family ceremony earlier in the evening and was too emotional to attend the rosary, family friends said.

Read the whole story

Crews gain on 1,700-acre fire north of Reno

By Victor Calderon, Reno Gazette-Journal

Firefighters continued Monday to contain several brush fires caused by lightning strikes and made progress on the large Constantia Complex Fire about 45 miles north of Reno.

Fire activity was slow Monday on the Constantia Complex Fire,

which had consumed more than 1,700 acres of timber, grass and brush near Doyle, Calif., Sierra Front spokesman Todd Chaponot said. Nearly 300 fire personnel were on scene strengthening the area on the west side of the fire, he said.

There were three fires that comprised the Constantia incident, a main fire, a second to the west of that fire and one to the north, Chaponot said.

Read the whole story

Diesel spill closes Mt. Rose Highway

By Jaclyn O'Malley, Reno Gazette-Journal

An overturned truck that dumped 40 gallons of diesel fuel is causing Mount Rose Highway to be closed for the next hour, Nevada Highway Patrol reported.

Upon completion of the clean up, the road will be a single lane for the next few hours after that.

Troopers said motorists will have to travel through Carson City or Truckee as a detour.

The incident occurred about 11 a.m. on Mount Rose Highway near the Christmas Tree Inn. No injuries were reported.

Read the whole story

Kollar juggles complexities as sheriff in divided county

By Kathryn Reed

Fred Kollar was a short timer from the first day he took the helm of the El Dorado County Sheriff's Department. And he's OK with that.

But he's not about to take on the roll of a lame duck leader just because he was appointed the position earlier this year when Jeff Neves left before his term was up or because he will retire after a new sheriff is elected in November.



Fred Kollar

For some time there has been talk about morale being lousy inside the department. Kollar disagrees. He doesn't get that sense walking down the hallways in Placerville, where he spends the bulk of his time. Nor does he overhear negativity when he is changing in the locker room.

"I don't want my successor to clean up my problems," Kollar said during a recent lunch. Meaning he is doing what he can to ensure there is cohesiveness in the department.

He points to the number of people applying for the sergeant's test as evidence people are happy.

"People wouldn't strive to move higher up if morale were bad," Kollar said.

A vacant detective-sergeant’s position had more than a dozen internal applicants.

Still, it’s curious that the two candidates for sheriff represent an insider (Craig Therkildsen) and an outsider (John D’Agostini). Perhaps that is more reflective of the electorate than what is going inside the department when it comes to status quo v. change.

One issue that is wearing on the department is a recent discrimination suit filed by an employee.

Tahoe-Placerville relations

An issue that has been going as long as Kollar can remember is the disconnect between Lake Tahoe and Placerville. It’s even obvious in the sheriff’s race. The six candidates in the June primary barely showed their faces in Lake Tahoe. The two finalists have set no public events in the basin, nor does anyone seem to realize there is a sheriff’s race in November.

The department has most newbies start in Tahoe, then go to Placerville. The idea is then they have a feel for the whole county as well as an appreciation for what goes on in the basin. Kollar said any affection an officer had for Tahoe seems to wane after a couple years.

Part of the issue is that a fraction of the 175,000 county residents live in the basin. Estimates are about 30,000 are on this side of the summit.

Kollar isn’t in Tahoe nearly as much as he would like. One of the things that is different with him compared to his predecessors is they all had an undersheriff. When he moved from the No. 2 to No. 1 post, his former job was not filled.

But he also points to this Tahoe-Placerville divide not being unique to the sheriff’s department. Most departments with a Tahoe office tend to feel isolated by the granite barrier

known as Echo Summit.

That summit is of concern to Kollar and officers working in Tahoe because it’s expected to be closed next spring or come with substantial delays when Caltrans replaces the rock barrier.

County employees commute between the two areas. Sheriff’s deputies regularly transport inmates over the summit.

“It’s going to add an hour each way,” Kollar said of routing his staff through Amador and Alpine counties.

Plus, cell phone and radio reception can be sketchy on the back roads.

Tahoe specific issues

For a small county, and the portion of Lake Tahoe being a blip on the map in some ways, this area has had it’s share of high profile events.

Right now Joseph Nissensohn is sitting in the South Lake Tahoe jail awaiting his murder trial for a crime that occurred in 1989. The trial in this death penalty case is supposed to start in January, but with the death of a key witness, it could change things.

Kollar has testified at hearings involving that case. The trial will be in South Lake Tahoe.

From the 2007 Angora Fire, it’s media relations that the sheriff said needed the most improvement.

“We didn’t have a good handle on it until the fourth day into it,” Kollar said.

On the first night – June 24 – the department was planning how residents of the 254 houses that burned to the ground and their neighbors would be allowed in. Kollar kept the road

closed so people could assess the damage without being hounded by onlookers.

Deputies on looting patrol took down the addresses of the houses that were destroyed. This provided displaced residents with quick, accurate information.

“It would have been a great day on patrol if they were not my neighbors,” sheriff’s Lt. Randy Peshon said. His house survived. The stories of his heroic acts to get people out of the inferno are cherished by those he helped. Some say he is lucky to be alive.

Kollar was also the lead spokesperson last summer during the first press conference after Jaycee Lee Dugard was rescued after 18 years of captivity.

“We worked that case long after people thought we had stopped,” Peshon said.

Shortly after Dugard was rescued, Kollar was sent to the Antioch compound where she and her two daughter lived with the kidnapping suspects, one of whom fathered her children.

These cases just scratch the surface of what Kollar has been involved in during his law enforcement career.

Publisher’s note: ***Read Lake Tahoe News on July 27 for look inside the South Lake Tahoe jail.***

Red flag warning for Tahoe

until 8pm

Gray skies started early Sunday, with the South Shore losing most of its blue sky by 11am. The sun has peeked in and out most of the day, as threatening thunderheads loom nearby.

“Thunderstorms will be driest through 4pm, then begin to produce some wetting rains and abundant lightning with the threat of new starts continuing through 8pm,” the National Weather Service in Reno said.

A red flag warning is in affect for Eastern California and Western Nevada until 8pm.

Lightning and 50mph winds are expected to create an extreme fire threat.

– Compiled by Kathryn Reed

Fires burning north of Reno and in Lassen County

By Pete Krajewski, Reno Gazette-Journal

The Garson Fire near Verdi was 100 percent controlled Sunday afternoon, with full containment expected by 5pm for the blaze that burned an estimated 40 acres near Boomtown.

Another blaze that started around 11:30am near Eagle Canyon Drive and Loop Road north of Spanish Springs charred about one acre. The Hungry Fire was determined to be human-caused, possibly from a target shooter, and tribal police have begun an investigation, Sierra Front spokesman Todd Chaponot said.

Elsewhere, a massive brush fire north of Reno continued to burn out of control Sunday afternoon, as new thunderstorms were popping up and the danger of more fires in the area persisted.

The Constantia Fire in Lasson County was estimated at 400 acres at 12:15pm, and firefighters had the blaze about 30 percent contained, Chaponot said. The blaze destroyed one home and two buildings Saturday evening.

Read the whole story

Lightning strikes fill foothill, Sierra skies

By Loretta Kalb, Sacramento Bee

The foothills and mountains to the east of Sacramento are in line for a dose of lightning strikes today and Monday, courtesy of "monsoonal moisture" from the nation's Four Corners region.

Drew Peterson, meteorologist, said some 20 or so lightning strikes were recorded by mid-morning, mostly within the mountains east of Sacramento, although the entire Sierra Nevada is experiencing the thunderstorms.

"We've had a few strikes in El Dorado County as well as Amador and Calaveras (counties)," Peterson said.

Read the whole story