DRI scrambles to come up with money to cloud seed

By Jeff Delong, Reno Gazette-Journal

Nevada’s cloud-seeding program, almost killed by the state budget crisis, produced nearly 13 billion gallons of extra water over six months ending in late April, experts said.

“That’s nothing to sneeze at,” said Sparks Councilman Mike Carrigan, who chairs two water commissions that voted to provide money to keep the cloud-seeding program alive last winter.

Now, officials at the Desert Research Institute hope to convince providers that the program squeezes enough extra moisture out of winter storms to justify the expense of about $1 million per year.

The cloud-seeding program was in big trouble after the 2009 Legislature, facing a record budget deficit, dropped state funding for DRI’s efforts. Last summer, DRI went so far as to dismantle its five cloud-seeding generators in the Lake Tahoe area.

Read the whole story

Potential investor backs out of convention center project

By Kathryn Reed

The investor developer Randy Lane lined up to take over the stalled South Lake Tahoe convention center project backed out of the deal this week.

“The Investor is no longer pursuing an investment in the Debtor or otherwise pursuing a plan in the Case,” reads Michael Rosenfeld’s May 12 letter to the bankruptcy court in Sacramento.



The would-be convention center took another hit this week. Photo/Kathryn Reed

That is the letter in its entirety.

Lane, the principle with Lake Tahoe Development Company, filed for bankruptcy last fall on the $400-plus million endeavor to create two high-end hotels, a convention center and retail space on the northeast corner of Highway 50 and Stateline Avenue.

He brought in Rosenfeld earlier this year to create a plan to resurrect that project that has not had a laborer on the 11-acre site in a couple years. Although some in the city saw Rosenfeld as a savior, others considered him nothing more than a salesman with glossy photos to show for his credentials.

Lane was not available for comment, nor was Mayor Kathay

Lovell.

The court had given the Zephyr Cove developer exclusive rights to come up with a plan. The deadline was June 2. That exclusivity goes by the wayside with Rosenfeld's withdrawal.

South Lake Tahoe City Attorney Patrick Enright said now any creditor may come up with a plan.

"(Rosenfeld) did submit a term sheet on May 1. It was an outline of what the deal would be without substance. It was a bullet point," Enright said.

The city learned about Rosenfeld's decision to end his involvement with The Chateau project at the close of business Wednesday. As of Thursday evening the city had not connected with Lane.

"I'm not sure if we were surprised. We knew it was a possibility," Enright told *Lake Tahoe News* of Rosenfeld's decision. "I want to talk to the creditors. I think they have been in contact with other people who may have an interest in the project or something similar."

It's possible the judge could say liquidate the property. The problem is rebar and concrete cover the 29 parcels. A final map was not filed with the city before permits were issued to allow construction to begin. This muddies the waters in being able to return property to the original owners. Plus, structures that were there have long been bulldozed.

The city is not one of the creditors. The money South Lake Tahoe has spent relates to consultants and planning costs. Until a little more than a year ago Lane picked up those costs. A dollar amount for what the city has spent on the convention center project could not be tracked down Thursday night.

South Lake Tahoe continues to receive its share of property

tax on the land from El Dorado County because of the Teeter law even though Lane isn’t paying his tax bill. With the assessed value more than what it was before construction started, the city is making more on the property now in property taxes compared to when businesses were open near Stateline.

Heavenly faces lawsuit in fatality involving zipline



By Jeff Delong, Reno Gazette-Journal

The family of a man killed last summer when he fell from a chair lift at a Lake Tahoe ski resort has sued the resort and groups associated with the zipline adventure ride they say caused the accident.

Defendants named in the suit filed Thursday in El Dorado County Superior Court included Heavenly ski resort, Terra-Nova LLC, Sampson Rope Technologies, the Lamoreaux Group, BCS Motion, Inc., This Side Up and Productions Inc.

Read the whole story

Spike in chickenpox cases in El Dorado County

Health officials in El Dorado County are seeing an increase in cases of chickenpox in the community and recommend parents ensure their children are fully immunized.

“Two doses of the chickenpox vaccine are recommended for full protection,” Olivia Kasirye, El Dorado County health officer, said in a statement.

Although it isn’t uncommon to see a few cases of chickenpox each year in El Dorado County, two schools have seen a spike in cases in the past two weeks. Sierra Ridge Middle School in Pollock Pines has had 12 reported cases of chickenpox among students and Camino School in Camino has had four reported cases.



Olivia Kasirye

“All of the cases have been mild,” Kasirye said. “However, we know that chickenpox can be spread easily and that the illness can be more serious in some individuals, particularly very young children, pregnant women, and people with immune compromised systems.”

Chickenpox, caused by the varicella virus, is spread by direct contact or through the air by coughing or sneezing. Symptoms include a mild fever and tiredness, followed by a rash that causes blistering skin lesions.

Health officials from the El Dorado County Health Services Department are working closely with the schools that have reported the chickenpox cases, and information has been sent to parents of children attending the schools.

“Any student who has chickenpox or symptoms of chickenpox should stay home or be sent home from school,” Kasirye said.

A system is currently in place in the county for school nurses to routinely report unusual illness patterns among students to the Health Services Department, Public Health Division.

The risk of contracting chickenpox can be greatly reduced through vaccination. Parents are advised to check their child’s vaccination records and ensure their child has received the vaccination.

“Although one dose of chickenpox vaccine is required by the state for admittance to school, recent studies have shown that two doses provide the best possible protection,” Kasirye said.

Most pediatricians offer the chickenpox vaccine as part of a schedule of other childhood vaccinations. The Health Services Department also offers the vaccine for children by appointment. o schedule an appointment, call (530) 621.6100 in Placerville or (530) 573.3155 in South Lake Tahoe.

Additional information about chickenpox can be found at www.edcgov.us/publichealth.

Angora rebuilding nightmare

puts house in jeopardy again

By Michael Finney, KGO-TV

If you ever have to hire a contractor, you could end up paying twice for the same bill. It’s happening to more and more people.

It’s another sign of the times. The recession seems to be taking its toll even in the most unusual ways.

Images of the devastating Angora Fire in South Lake Tahoe are still etched in the minds of Howard and Joann Manning. The fire destroyed their home three years ago, but they’re still living with the consequences today.

“It’s very stressful. We haven’t had a normal life,” Howard said.

Read the whole story

Forest Service creating blueprint for Tahoe’s future

By Kathryn Reed

Creating a working document with a bit of elasticity is the goal of the Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit. With the current Forest Plan dating to 1988 and its roughly dozen amendments since then, the local Forest Service office is looking to create a new bible of sorts from which to seek guidance.

About 20 people gathered at the Forest Service office in South

Lake Tahoe on Tuesday night for two hours to offer their feedback and input. The main topics were:

• Watershed and aquatic habitat;

• Forest health/terrestrial habitat;

• Recreation.



Forest Service personnel listen to the public May 11 in South Lake. Photo/Kathryn Reed

Recreation is always a popular topic because so many people move to Tahoe to play in the 155,000 acres in the Lake Tahoe Basin that the Forest Service manages.

The irony is that as local tourism officials change their mantra from gaming to the outdoors, more stresses will be put on an already overused system. LTBMU is one of the heaviest used forests in the country on a per acre/per capita basis.

What more people will mean to an ecosystem that is already taxed and to an agency that is hard up for money to manage its resources remains to be seen.

Eli Llano, assistant forest supervisor, said the current plan is not entirely outdated and therefore his agency is not starting from scratch. He said that nationally all forests are

looking at climate change, aquatic invasive species and incorporating new science into their respective plans. These concerns were not part of the 1988 plan.

The idea behind developing a flexible plan is that when changes need to occur it will be easier to do so instead of going through the formal, more cumbersome amendment process.

In the current plan the emphasis is on expanding recreation opportunities in the basin. The focus going forward is maintenance, especially with a $25 million backlog of projects needing to be done to keep the facilities functioning.

However, not all expansion ideas are off the table. Under consideration is allowing ski resorts to offer more to the public outside the traditional ski months.

The need for separation of user groups is high on the list of the public's concerns. People want mountain bikers on trails not used by hikers. Moving snowmobilers someplace else is also a common refrain. Promoting the use of the water trail was also talked about.

Much of the plan is integrated and not isolated. For example, watershed and recreation are tied together when authorities look at removing recreation sites from stream environmental zones.

It's issues like these the Forest Service will wrestle with as the Forest Plan is created.

As the people in attendance Tuesday broke into three groups, Forest Service personnel wrote down the public's wish lists.

"Relocate trails from meadows" and "make sure recreation doesn't interfere with biodiversity" and "increase the amount of fuel reduction" and "restore fire to the landscape for fuel reduction, vegetation conditions, ecological health" were some of the comments.

The LTBMU Forest Plan revision has been in the works for years. Initially an environmental impact statement was not going to be done. However, a court ruling in 2008 changed that course of action. The draft EIS is expected to be released this fall, with a 90-day comment period to follow.

The EIS will have the option of doing nothing, a preferred alternative and several other alternatives. The exact number of other alternatives to be studied has not been determined.

USFS officials anticipate another public hearing to air concerns during the comment period. Responses to comments will then be put together, with the final EIS released in summer 2011. People will have 45 days to appeal it. It will be up to the regional forester in Vallejo to sign off on the framework.

Another meeting on the plan will be tonight from 5-7 at the North Lake Tahoe Conference Center in Kings Beach.

Garridos denied in person jail visits; phone OK

By Sam Stanton, Sacramento Bee

A judge has denied a request by alleged kidnappers Phillip and Nancy Garrido to visit each other in jail, but he has agreed to allow them to speak to each other in a five-minute phone call this month and another in June.

An order from El Dorado Superior Court Judge Douglas C. Phimister said that he considered evidence presented at a closed April 15 hearing and was denying their visitation requests.

Read the whole story

Recall of Fallen Leaf Lake board members progresses

By Susan Wood

A petition to recall two board members of the Fallen Leaf Lake Community Services District has been certified, the El Dorado County Elections Department confirmed Tuesday.

The filing targets President Mike Kraft and board member Eric Thaden for what a disgruntled group of Fallen Leaf Lake citizens labels an “unresponsiveness” to their constituencies. A dispute over the ouster of longtime store and marina operator John and Ruth Rich has spurred controversy for nearly a year. The board has since chosen a new concessionaire, with Rob and Sandy Wirth planning to get the hub of the village outside South Lake Tahoe running by Memorial Day weekend.

Petitioners collected more than the necessary 48 signatures — 30 percent of the registered voters in the district. Residents will pay for the election. The board will meet Saturday at 11am in the Fallen Leaf Lake Fire Station at 241 Fallen Leaf Lake Road. The board is expected to call the election and has two weeks to set the date, or the Elections Department will do it for the board.

An Aug. 31 election has already been set to replace the seat

vacated by former President Dana Clark, who cited the negativity of the concessionaire issue as his reason for leaving.

Also on the agenda for Saturday's meeting is an update by interim General Manager Tom Barnes on upgrades to the store and marina; a progress report from the Wirths on their preparations; the continuation of the special fire district tax; and a discussion of an emergency plan for the village.

Rise eager for Taser incident to go to trial

By Kathryn Reed

Dale Rise is ready for a jury of his peers to decide if he is guilty of one misdemeanor and two felony charges stemming from his September altercation with three South Lake Tahoe police officers at his residence.

The South Tahoe Public Utility District board president was back in court Monday. Another court hearing is slated for July, with the trial set to begin in September.



Dale Rise

One thing Rise's attorney Bill Cole is seeking is for El

Dorado County Superior Court Judge Suzanne Kingsbury to not hear the case. That decision has not been made.

Part of Rise's defense is invoking the Fourth Amendment, which states, "The right of the people to be secure in their persons, houses, papers, and effects, against unreasonable searches and seizures, shall not be violated, and no Warrants shall issue, but upon probable cause, supported by Oath or affirmation, and particularly describing the place to be searched, and the persons or things to be seized."

Rise said he never willingly stepped out of his house.

He told *Lake Tahoe News* the District Attorney's Office wanted him to accept a plea bargain.

"I'm not pleading guilty to something I did not do," Rise said.

Assistant District Attorney Hans Uthe was not available for comment.

It was Rise's 24-year-old daughter who called 911 eight months ago. She was living with her parents at the time. No domestic violence charges were ever filed.

Rise said when the three officers had him they pressed a Taser against his stomach. It was at that time, he said, that he grabbed the wires or probes out of his stomach.

Part of his defense is the recent court ruling stating Tasers are not to be used for punishment. Nor were the devices ever intended to be used directly on a person, but instead by an officer standing a couple feet away.

Former LTCC counselor hired to be vice president

By Kathryn Reed

A familiar face has been hired to replace Susan Middleton, who after 24 years is retiring this summer as vice president of Academic Affairs and Student Services at Lake Tahoe Community College.

Tom Greene was once a counselor at the South Lake Tahoe two-year institution. He is currently associate vice president of Enrollment and Student Services at Sacramento City College.



Tom Greene

LTCC's board, with Molly Blann absent, voted 4-0 Tuesday night to hire Greene. Ironically, Greene doesn't know if he will be reporting to President Paul Killpatrick. Killpatrick was gone May 11 to interview for a job out of state. It was Middleton who sat in the president's seat this particular night.

Greene did not attend the meeting.

Not only is Greene familiar with the campus, but also he is intimately knowledgeable about the faculty. He and English instructor Suzanne Roberts are engaged to be married this summer. An exact start date has not been set. He will be making more than $100,000.

Middleton will leave later in the summer, with the hopes of being able to train Greene before turning in her keys.

“The first thing I want to do is enjoy Tahoe,” Middleton said of her plans for retirement.

She started at LTCC as a counselor with the college when it was based out of a hotel on Highway 50. She was promoted to dean of Student Services. With Lori Gaskin leaving her post a year ago, the job of Student Services and Academic Affairs was blended into one position – the one Middleton has had this school year.

Moving to the campus off Al Tahoe Boulevard, watching it grow, seeing ideas become a reality like the Spanish Institute and the fire academy are the memories she will take with her.

It’s listening to students return to campus to praise their education at LTCC and talk about what they are doing now that Middleton will miss.

“I will miss the people without a doubt and the students,” Middleton said. “It will be hard to adjust to.”

Board members had praise for Middleton and her successor.

In closed session Tuesday the board deliberated over two finalists.

“He is a jewel,” board President Kerry David said of Greene after the meeting. “We are most fortunate to get him.”

Before Greene’s first stint at LTCC he was a TRIO counselor at Vermillion Community College in Ely, Minn. He left LTCC in 2003 to earn his doctorate from the University of Texas, Austin. He also has a master’s in education with an emphasis in counseling and a bachelor’s in finance.

He was the special assistant to the president at Valencia Community College in Orlando before taking the job in Sacramento. In Sacramento, he oversees a staff of more than 200 with an operational budget in excess of $10 million.

“The board and the committee believe he was the No. 1 candidate,” David said. Ten people were interviewed for the job.