Tahoe’s summer heat ties at fourth hottest

By Susan Wood

It’s been hot this summer at Lake Tahoe – to the tune of fourth in ranking since records were taken 123 years ago at an average of 62.1 degrees. It ties with 1981’s figure. Keep in mind, this is the average from day to night.

The record was set in 1988 at 62.4 degrees – the same year in which Tahoe experienced its hottest day on record at 99 degrees on July 22, the National Weather Service reported this week. The “summer” officially ends its quarter on Aug. 31 for the federal agency.

As a comparison, this summer’s hottest day occurred on June 19 at 90 degrees – at a time when some people were still skiing.

And so it goes with our topsy-turvy climate.

Even though this year missed the record by 0.3 degrees, the significant aspect of the data shows that four of the five record years have fallen in the last five years. Case in point, 2014 was second in line for the record at 62.3 degrees; with 2015 close behind at 62.2 and 2013 at 61.8 degrees.

This year goes down as having continuously hot days. And if you remember especially in July, the variance wasn’t as great from day to night as it traditionally is in Lake Tahoe’s surrounding air. Hence, we were near a record average for the 24-hour days.

Reno hit a record of 108 degrees this July – a month that will go down as the 10th hottest in the United States. The contiguous U.S. averaged 75.7 degrees in July. That’s 2.1 degrees above average. Even the northernmost state, Alaska,

experienced a hot July with 56.2 degrees. That’s 3.5 degrees above the long-term average.



Lakeview Commons in South Lake Tahoe is a popular spot to beat the heat. Photo/Kathryn Reed

Is this the new normal?

“What contributed to our hot summer is the month of July. And (in Lake Tahoe), there were more days in which we were warm,” Evan LaGuardia, meteorologist with the National Weather Service meteorologist in Reno, told *Lake Tahoe News.*

Even the water temperature in the lake shows an abnormal result. The lake temperature within 2 meters down is fluctuating between 69 and 70 degrees. Albeit the water temp being normal for the summer, it shouldn’t necessarily be true this summer given the aftermath from our uncharacteristically dramatic snowfall from last winter.

“With a 69- to 70-degree average, it’s significant this summer because of the water that’s been added from the snowmelt,

(which should be taken into account,)” LaGuardia said. In other words, the water temperature should be colder with the high lake level.

Another factor in warm surface water temperature: “There hasn’t been the storms to churn up the water making it cold,” the meteorologist added. Storms mix up the surface with the deep water of Tahoe through upwelling.

“It has been warm. Who knows what the future holds,” LaGuardia said.

To that, Western Regional Climate Center climatologist Dan McEvoy provided a glimpse.

“There’s definitely a climate change signal pretty much all around the region with our warm days,” McEvoy told *Lake Tahoe News.*

We’ve been seeing this every year. We can’t put our finger on any one thing, but we should see warmer temperatures, in general, as we’ve seen in the last few decades,” he said.

What does this mean?

“What we’re going to see doesn’t contribute to drought, but it intensifies the impact of those droughts,” he said, listing the wildfire danger and bark beetle infestation.

McEvoy pointed out that most of the 10 coolest summers of the last 100 years have occurred in the first half of the 1900s. Records show the last cool summer occurred in 2011 at an average of 58.3 degrees – the coolest in the last decade. The coolest average summer in the years of record keeping was in 1980 at 54.5 degrees.

So the decade of big hair showed big temp swings in summer as having the coolest and hottest for our region.

“The last summer when the temperature in Reno was below the

20th century average was in 1999," said Jake Crouch of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. "While the upward trend is likely to continue, indicating that warm summers will occur more often than not, we can still experience cool summers in an overall warming world."

Still, it's hard to ignore that warm is the new normal, all data and climate stakeholders say.

For example, the 20th century's average summer temperature for Reno was 71.2 degrees, while this one has already dwarfed it at 74.2 degrees. And, there are 83 years left to sizzle.

With that, utility companies are keeping an eye out and doing their record keeping.

Energy use represents a mixed bag for South Lake Tahoe. Liberty Utilities shows no spike in California electricity this summer compared to previous ones, with kilowatt hours holding steady this last July at 47.66 million. The highest in the last five years came in at 49.05 million in 2013, company spokeswoman Kathy Carter dictated.

And water use is usually higher in the summer, according to the South Tahoe Public Utility District, for obvious reasons.

And these numbers could fall for not-so-obvious reasons, with STPUD in the process of installing more than 1,000 meters this summer. The effort encourages water conservation.

"July is always the month of peak production, followed closely by August," STPUD spokeswoman Shelly Thomsen said for now. "The district's water production doubles to triples in summer months, mainly due to landscape irrigation."

However, many homeowners have elected to forego grass in their Tahoe yards – with hundreds waiting to be called up for the turf buy-back program. So conservation efforts should continue to keep in line with increasingly hot summers.

This trend may represent good news for businesses such as Nixon’s. The local HVAC company has experienced a doubling of calls this summer inquiring about air conditioning during our heat waves in contrast to previous years.

“Before, people here would pass on AC. Now it seems we’re putting in AC units in every Tom, Dick and Harry unit. Lots of Bay Area people who are buying and have the means to put them in are opting to have them,” said Wendy Pierson, who works for Nixon’s.

Kingsbury Grade repairs to cause delays

The Nevada Department of Transportation will begin a project Sept. 11 to enhance roadway drainage pipes on Kingsbury Grade.

Between Sept. 11 and late summer 2018, single lane closures with a traffic flagger will periodically be in place on the Carson Valley side of Kingsbury Grade between mileposts 3 and 11. The single lane closures will primarily take place Mondays through Fridays between 7am and 5pm, with periodic Saturday lane closures. Motorists should anticipate travel delays of up to 30 minutes.

Construction will not take place during major special events or the December, January and February winter construction shutdown.

Approximately 15,000 feet of eroding roadway drainage pipe will be reinforced with a cured-in-place pipe liner. A flexible pipe liner is inserted into existing drainage pipes. Resins in the liners are then hardened, creating a durable

pipe able to last decades.

Last winter, NDOT repaired a sinkhole which formed where a drainage pipe crosses underneath Kingsbury Grade, less than 10 miles up the road on the Carson Valley side. NDOT took underground video to review other roadway drainage pipes, finding moderate erosion of some pipes.

The project will cost $4.4 million.

Toxic algae continues to cover Keys canals

By Kathryn Reed

Tests on the water of the Tahoe Keys canals continue to show blue-green algae, also known as cyanobacteria.

The toxic algae have been in the lagoons of this South Lake Tahoe neighborhood since **at least Aug. 11**.

“Based on the levels being detected in last week’s samples, coupled with the site-indicators present (floating scum, blue-green color), we recommended that TKPOA continue to post caution advisories and advise pet owners to be especially careful if their dog might play in the affected water. Unlike a human, a dog can be exposed to the toxin by drinking the water, eating a glob of algae that might contain the toxins, and further by grooming their coats when they get out of the water with saturated fur,” Mary Fiore-Wagner, senior environmental scientist with Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board, told *Lake Tahoe News.*

She sent an email to veterinarians about the low levels of

cyanotoxins – Anatoxin–A and microcystin that were found in water samples last week and the potential harm to dogs. Detailed information was sent to the doctors so they would be aware of symptoms.

Tahoe Keys Property Owners Association took additional water samples on Aug. 28. The results are not in yet.

The blooms are improving in some locations, but have developed in others. Cyanobacteria blooms can look like slicks of opaque, bright green paint, or "pea soup," but closer inspection often reveals the grainy, sawdust-like appearance of individual colonies, according to the state Water Board.

"Next week we are coordinating with TKPOA to initiate a larger sampling effort throughout the Tahoe Keys waterways. EPA-Region 9 will be supporting the effort by funding analysis of one of the toxins being detected (microcystins). Analysis will be through the EPA-9 laboratory. Additionally, several field duplicates samples – samples collected at the same time, from the same location – will be collected and run at a commercial laboratory paid for by TKPOA and the EPA-Region 9 laboratory for analysis of Anatoxin-A," Fiore-Wagner said.

The state Department of Water Resources on Friday sent out information about the various algal blooms in California what with Labor Day weekend being big for boating and swimming.

The Keys has not limited boating activity in the contaminated canals, but human contact with those waters is not advised.

Toxic blue-green algae exposure can cause eye irritation, allergic skin rash, mouth ulcers, vomiting, diarrhea, and cold- and flu-like symptoms.

The state said, "Bloom conditions can change rapidly, and wind and waves may move or concentrate the bloom into different regions of the lakes. Algal blooms can appear as blue-green, white or brown foam, scum, or mats that can float on the

water’s surface and accumulate along shorelines and boat ramp areas.”

Here are the statewide guidelines regarding waters with blue-green algae:

· Take care that pets and livestock do not drink the water, swim through algae, scums, or mats or lick their fur after going in the water. Rinse pets in clean water to remove algae from fur.

· Avoid wading, swimming, and jet or water skiing in water containing algae blooms, scums, or mats.

· Do not drink, cook, or wash dishes with untreated surface water from these areas under any circumstances; common water purification techniques such as camping filters, tablets, and boiling do not remove toxins.

· People should not eat mussels or other bivalves collected from affected waters. Limit or avoid eating fish taken from these waters; if fish are consumed, remove the guts and liver, and rinse fillets in clean drinking water.

· Get medical treatment immediately if you think you, your pet or livestock have been poisoned by blue-green algae toxins. Be sure to alert the medical professional to the possible contact with blue-green algae.

SLT revamping upper management compensation

By Kathryn Reed

While the 2017-18 budget is on Tuesday's South Lake Tahoe council docket, an item tucked on the consent agenda may be the bigger news. Employees not represented by a union are voluntarily rejiggering how they get paid in an effort to save the city money and provide themselves with a cushion if CalPERS implodes.

City Manager Nancy Kerry earlier this summer was the first city employee to go down this road.

At the Sept. 5 meeting if the electeds OK the plan, the compensation changes will affect all unrepresented employees, which includes the fire chief, police chief, director of development services, finance director, public works director, airport manager, human resources manager, deputy city attorney, deputy director of development services, communications manager, unrepresented/non-management administrative employees in the city manager's office, and any other unrepresented employees who may be added.

(The city manager and city attorney have separate contracts, and negotiate terms directly with the council members. With **Tom Watson leaving** at the end of the month, it is unknown how the future city attorney's compensation package will be structured.)

The changes for the rest of the unrepresented employees would be effective Oct. 1 and go through the end of 2018.

Kerry in her report to the council wrote, "To be clear, CalPERS plans to extract approximately 25 percent of the city's revenues within the next five years, which will severely hamper the city's ability to meet current expenses as well as any new expenses."

The city is forecasting a negative cash flow by 2020 in large part because CalPERS obligations are forecasted to double in the next five years.

The California Public Employees Retirement System tells member agencies how much each must pay to cover current and projected retirees. These people get a promised amount of cash which actually on average goes up 2 percent a year. The money comes from taxpayers. It is an obligation members must pay and one they cannot negotiate. It would take an act of the Legislature to change this.

Unfunded CalPERS liabilities are growing for most organizations. Today the city's liability is $50 million, and is expected to grow to $60 million in a few years.

Kerry in the report went on to say, "Many CalPERS retirees have the incorrect belief that their pensions are 'paid for,' and thus are not at risk."

South Lake Tahoe officials are trying to get rank and file employees as well as retirees to realize the gravy train might derail.

That is why at least the non-union employees of South Lake Tahoe are hedging their bets by restructuring their compensation plan. All employees could, but it would take the will of the union to do something that in many ways is radically different.

The purpose of the changes is to stem the city's pension obligation, while at the same time providing workers with more control over their future retirement dollars and being able to give them raises. If CalPERS were to go bankrupt or cut payments, they would still have the cash in the 401(a) or 457 accounts.

The police and fire chiefs have agreed to reduce their pensionable salaries to $140,000 a year, the maximum recognized under the 2013 California Public Employees' Pension Reform Act. The remainder ($29,291) will go into an employer funded retirement account that would be similar to a private sector 401(k).

Employees other than the chiefs, city manager and city attorney will have money put into a non-pensionable retirement account.

Raises they all will receive would be one-time payments that go into the new retirement funds.

In essence their base pay has been frozen and the raise automatically goes into a retirement account instead of being disposable income.

Kerry summarized the changes by saying, “The proposed compensation plan for unrepresented employees utilizes a defined contribution approach and considers the city’s current available financial resources while simultaneously not obligating the city to long-term financial obligations.”

A benefit change is this group will now have paid time off instead of separate vacation and sick pay.

20% in U.S. find workplace hostile or threatening

By Paul Wiseman, AP

The American workplace is grueling, stressful and hostile.

So concludes an in-depth study of 3,066 U.S. workers by the Rand Corp., Harvard Medical School and UCLA. Among the findings:

• Nearly 1 in 5 workers — a share the study calls “disturbingly high” — say they face a hostile or threatening environment at work, which can include sexual harassment and

bullying. Workers who have to face customers endure a disproportionate share of abuse.

• Nearly 55 percent say they face “unpleasant and potentially hazardous” conditions.

• Nearly three-quarters say they spend at least a fourth of their time on the job in “intense or repetitive physical” labor.

Read the whole story

Delays on Hwy. 50 in SLT about to get worse

Motorists can expect longer delays on a section of Highway 50 in South Lake Tahoe beginning next week because lane restrictions will be increased.

Work has been suspended for the Labor Day weekend.

Beginning Tuesday at 12:01am the contractor is permitted to reduce the highway to one open lane in each direction around the clock until 11am on Fridays. The work schedule for the remainder of the construction season will be around the clock from midnight Sunday to 11am Friday. Motorists can expect delays of up to 30 minutes.

Construction on the $56 million water-quality improvement project is taking place from the Y to Winnemucca Avenue this season. This is the first of three phases. The project will eventually extend to Trout Creek, covering two miles of the highway with new drainage filtration systems, curbs and gutters, new sidewalks, a wider highway to include 6-foot

shoulders on each side, and a new roadway surface. Completion is expected in fall 2019.

Sandoval joins group proposing Obamacare alternative

By Julie Carr Smyth and James Anderson, AP

Nevada's Brian Sandoval is part of a bipartisan group of governors urging Congress to retain the federal health care law's individual mandate while seeking to stabilize individual insurance markets as legislators continue work on a long-term replacement law.

The recommendation spearheaded by Ohio Gov. John Kasich, a Republican, and Colorado Gov. John Hickenlooper, a Democrat, is part of a compromise plan that's designed to be palatable to both parties. It was endorsed by eight governors who shared their plan in a letter to congressional leaders Thursday.

"Since the beginning of the recent healthcare debate I have said that I will fight for the Nevadans who now have access to healthcare as a result of the Medicaid expansion and Silver State Health Insurance Exchange," Sandoval said in a statement to the *Las Vegas Review-Journa*l. "I have also stated that I will fight against any plan that places an increased financial burden on Nevada. Holding states harmless should be a priority as Congress continues to debate federal healthcare policies."

Read the whole story

Slinkard Fire on Hwy. 395 continues to grow

The Slinkard Fire is estimated to be 9,00 acres with 12 percent containment as of early Friday night.

Topaz has been evacuated north of Highway 89 to the Nevada state line.

For public safety, Highway 89 remains closed between highways 395 and 4 (at Monitor Pass). Highway 395 is closed from the junction of Highway 182 in Bridgeport to the Nevada state line. However, Highway 395 will be open with highway patrol escort when safe.

Liberty Utilities is getting ready to re-energize the damaged line.

“All customers in the Topaz-Coleville-Walker area should have power restored by 5pm if this works. If it fails because there’s more damage than we can see and access), then we’ll fire up the temporary generator we’re currently installing,” Kathy Carter with Liberty said.

The fire is located in Slinkard Valley and the west slope of Antelope Valley, west of Topaz in Mono County, California. The fire is burning in cheat grass, sagebrush and pinyon/juniper.

Lightning started the fire earlier this week.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Confusing Camp Rich light here to stay

Caltrans has received several complaints about the pedestrian hybrid beacon installed at Camp Richardson on Highway 89. The perception has been that the beacon is causing major weekend backups.

The beacon will remain active this weekend and until further notice.

Caltrans conducted a two-day study on July 21-22 and determined the beacon isn't a major contributing factor to the weekend traffic backups. The state agency said once the limited beach parking fills up motorists are driving at slow speeds looking for shoulder parking along the highway, impeding the free flow of traffic.

But this isn't anything new during the summer. Locals would say it takes more than a two-day study. Traffic since the light went in has been worse, and the color scheme and blinking don't make sense.

Caltrans said it realizes motorists may be confused when experiencing the beacon for the first time. This is a relatively new pedestrian safety feature on California highways and the first of its kind installed in Lake Tahoe.

The beacon head consists of two red lenses above a single yellow lens. The beacon head is "dark" until a pedestrian desires to cross the street. There is no green light which people are used to.

A group of local agencies is working on short- and long-term remedies to speed the flow of traffic. In the mean time, people are stuck with the confusing beacon.

Radio trouble keeps Calstar from flying in Tahoe



Airbus is working to solve the radio problem with Calstar in Tahoe. Photo Copyright 2017 Carolyn E. Wright

By Kathryn Reed

Calstar's helicopter at Lake Tahoe Airport has been grounded for more than two weeks and there is no date on the horizon when it will be flying again.

"We are unable to efficiently and effectively communicate in

that region because of the radios. We won't fly without good communications," Anna Blair, vice president of business strategy for Calstar, told *Lake Tahoe News*. "It is very specific to the radio frequency that is utilized in your community."

No other base is affected by this radio issue.

Air Medical Group, which is now the parent company of Calstar, has 240 air ambulance in 32 states. Calstar has bases in Auburn, Ukiah, Gilroy, Concord, Salinas and Santa Maria. It has been in South Lake Tahoe since October 2001.

Since the merger last year Calstar now uses an Airbus H135/P3. Airbus is working on a solution to the radio problem.

"They are literally working every single day until we are back in service. Typically, they are a very responsive vendor," Blair said.

It was not an immediate issue, but something that developed over time.

In the interim Care Flight has been picking up the slack. It operates out of the Truckee and Minden airports and is based in Reno.

"It's not uncommon to rely on each other for service when things are busy. We haven't experienced anything where we've left the region uncovered," J.W. Hodge, COO for Care Flight, told *Lake Tahoe News.*

His people and Calstar are in regular communication. Care Flight has not needed to adjust its staffing or move resources to accommodate the increase in calls with Calstar's absence.

The air ambulances cover for each other during routine maintenance of the aircraft and when one is on a call. So in many ways this is no different for the crews.

Plus, the number of calls tends to decrease when school is back in session and even more so after Labor Day weekend.

Not being able to fly hasn’t meant the local Calstar employees are out out of work.

“For the staff, there is still a lot of items to do – training, collateral duties. We do have other Calstar bases and they do move around,” Blair said.

For South Lake Tahoe Fire Department, Calstar’s situation has not caused any problems to date.

“Generally we give the helicopter a heads up before we think we need them. When we’ve needed the helicopter the other company has been here,” Fire Chief Jeff Meston told *Lake Tahoe News.*

One thing to note is that when Calstar was bought last year the reciprocal membership agreement with Care Flight went away. This means it’s a good idea to have both memberships because one never knows which helicopter will arrive on scene. The membership is like an additional insurance policy.