3 sentenced in Heavenly lift ticket theft case

By Francis Xavier, Unofficial Networks

The “masterminds” behind the great ticket voucher heist of Heavenly have been granted probation for involvement in selling the fraudulent ski passes last year in court in Minden on Aug. 21.

The thefts took place between October 2015 and March 2016. After an audit, Heavenly showed a total of 1,100 lift ticket vouchers were taken. According to court documents, 971 of the 1,100 vouchers were taken from Douglas County. Heavenly reported that only 23 legitimate vouchers were given out in 2016 but 312 had been redeemed since the start of 2016.

Ticket vouchers are usually only given to skiers when lifts break down. The vouchers in question were being sold on Craigslist under aliases.

Read the whole story

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2 Tahoe sisters found safe in Oregon

By KCRA-TV

Two South Lake Tahoe sisters who were reported missing Wednesday after their parents had not heard from the girls for

several days have been found safe, according to the girls' father.

Melissa Lea, 18, and Kalila Lea, 7, were found when people at a grocery store in Prineville, Oregon recognized the sisters, the girls' father, Darryl Lea, told KCRA 3.

There is no cell phone coverage up there, and the sisters told their father they stayed longer than they thought they would after attending the Symbiosis Event in nearby Big Summit Prairie, Ore.

Read the whole story

Homelessness on the rise in Placer County

By Cynthia Hubert, Sacramento Bee

Volunteers counted 146 more people living homeless in Placer County this year compared to a similar census in 2015.

That translates to a 28 percent increase in the county's homeless population during the past two years. But officials said the numbers may be misleading. The number of homeless people documented two years ago may have been artificially low because of an unanticipated staffing problem on the night of the count, said Leslie Brewer of the Homeless Resource Council of the Sierra.

The numbers come from a single "point in time" tally of homeless people counted by volunteers in late January. The biennial count, required for federal funding, provides a snapshot of life on the streets.

Read the whole story

Tree mortality in Tahoe a growing concern



The orange reflects dead trees in Tahoe in July 2016. Photo/USFS

By Kathryn Reed

STATELINE – It was a lively conversation about a deadly situation at Wednesday's Tahoe Region Planning Agency Governing Board meeting.

Trees took up the morning session; specifically dead trees and what is being done about them.

One good winter didn't cure what ails Lake Tahoe's forests – or those throughout the Sierra. Part of the problem is drought, part is beetle infestation – though, those are linked.

The board on Aug. 23 was given an update about the strategic initiative to create a healthy forest in the basin. The board members also approved a permit for Caltrans to thin hundreds of trees along California's highways in the area.

While there is still more green than orange in the forest here, especially compared to the southern and central Sierra, the number of dead trees is increasing. According to statistics provided by Kevin Conway of CalFire this is the tree mortality rate in the Lake Tahoe Basin:

- 2012 –1,025
- 2013 – 905
- 2014 – 5,989
- 2015 – 34,947
- 2016 – 126,479.

Statewide more than 100 million dead trees have been identified.

Conway's report said, "We have never seen an event which will so profoundly impact the forest of California and its associated resources including water, wildlife, fire regimes, public safety, forest products, recreation, and their associated economics."

For Calfire, the major issue is the dying trees are fuel for a wildland fire.

Mike Vollmer, TRPA environmental improvement program manager, said the sugar pines have been “extremely stressed by drought.” Drought leads trees to be more susceptible to being ravaged by insects like the pine engraver, fir engraver, satin moth, and mountain pine beetle. All but the moth is native to the area.

The moth is most prolific in the Marlette Lake area right now. The hope is nature – aka winter – will kill them off and pesticides would not be needed.

Austin Sass, who represents South Lake Tahoe on the Governing Board, questioned why no money is being allocated to help local residents and businesses to remove dead trees when the fire community admits its priority is public safety. There was no answer from the firefighters in the room.

Caltrans, though, is coming to the aid of some private entities with their plan to remove trees along nearly 68 miles of highway on the California side of the basin. This includes highways 50, 89, 28 and 267.

If a dead or hazardous tree along a state highway poses a public threat and is on private property, Caltrans will remove it for free assuming the property owner grants permission. If the person says no and the tree falls onto state property, they are liable for any damages as well as the removal. (Caltrans has the right of way 100 feet in both directions from the center line.)

The TRPA on Wednesday approved the permit to fell 875 hazardous trees that are more than 14 inches in diameter that the state agency has identified. The completely dead trees don’t require a permit, nor do ones less than 14 inches in diameter.

“All trees within this area that are dead, dying, diseased and/or hazardous and can hit the road if they fail are being marked for removal,” the report says.

Any tree more than 30 inches in diameter that is identified for removal must also have a second OK by TRPA's forester.

The staff report says, "… due to the current dynamic nature of tree mortality in the Tahoe basin, the exact number of dying trees requiring a TRPA permit can only be known for a short period of time as dying trees become dead trees and new trees are identified as dying. For this reason, the Governing Board is being asked to permit a process and methodology for identifying hazard trees for this project rather than a specific number of trees."

Luther Pass will be the first area where Caltrans will work.

One of the costly and time consuming aspects of dealing with these drought-beetle ridden trees is that they are scattered about, as opposed to being in a grove.

Larry Sevinson, Placer County's rep on the board, asked what will be done with all the wood. There is no definitive answer. That is the conundrum with removing them. Much of it is not salvageable for the lumber industry, as ***LTN*** **reported in May**.

"This issue is now being talked about everywhere. It's a major issue of what to do with the wood when it's removed," TRPA Executive Director Joanne Marchetta said. She mentioned how at this week's environmental summit Sen. Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif., expressed support for Republican Rep. Tom McClintock's idea to lift the export ban for wood products going to China. This could open up a huge market.

Tourist survives lightning strike near Donner Summit



A man lost his shoe when struck by lightning in the Sierra on Aug. 22. Photo/CHP

By Jennifer McGraw, CBS13

An Austrian hiker was struck by lightning Tuesday near Donner Summit and survived. He is now recovering at UC Davis Medical Center in Sacramento.

Paramedic Matt Calcutt with CHP said he has never seen anything like it, the boulder looked like it had exploded into small desks across the ridge.

Calcutt described the rescue and says the victim’s clothes were literally blown off.

Read the whole story

2 South Tahoe sisters reported missing in Ore.



Melissa and Kalila Lea

By KCRA-TV

Two South Lake Tahoe sisters were reported missing Wednesday after their parents had not heard from the girls for several days.

Melissa, 18, and 7-year-old Kalila Lea were known to be at the Symbiosis Event in Big Summit Prairie, Ore., for the eclipse, the Crook County Sheriff’s Office said. Their parents last heard from the girls on Sunday when they were in Bend, Ore.

Crook County investigators said Melissa’s debit card was used at the event on Tuesday.

Read the whole story

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2 young girls deliberately

start fire in South Lake



South Tahoe firefighters quickly extinguish the Aug. 22 blaze. Photo/SLTFD

Life imitated art in a dangerous way on Tuesday when two youngsters started a fire by the apartments on Lake Tahoe Boulevard just below South Tahoe High School.

“The 8- and 10-year-old girls are fans of ‘Naked and Afraid’ and wanted to start a survival fire,” Police Chief Brian Uhler told *Lake Tahoe News.* (This is a television show about surviving in the elements.)

They were successful in starting the fire the afternoon of Aug. 22, but not so good with putting it out. It grew to about 20 feet by 30 feet by the time firefighters extinguished it.

When they saw the response by fire and police they came forward and admitted what they had done.

Police officers and firefighters talked with the two youngsters as well as their parents.

While this situation could have turned out a lot worse, Uhler said he is confident the message hit home, and hopes the incident is a teaching moment for other parents and a lesson

for other kids who might think about starting an illegal fire.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Millions flowing to help with Nevada flood recovery

By Sean Whaley, Las Vegas Review-Journal

Federal financial assistance is starting to flow into Nevada to help defray an estimated $30 million in damage from two flooding events in much of the state in January and February.

The state Division of Emergency Management already has $4 million in authority from the federal government for the January flooding. On Thursday, the Legislature's Interim Finance Committee will be asked to accept another $5.9 million from the Federal Emergency Management Agency for damage from the February flood.

Read the whole story

How California's housing crisis happened

By Angela Hart, Sacramento Bee

California's high housing costs are driving poor and middle income people out of their housing like never before. While

some are fleeing coastal areas for cheaper living inland, others are leaving the state altogether.

Homelessness is on the rise. California is home to 12 percent of the U.S. population, but 22 percent of its homeless people. Cities that have seen dramatic rent increases, such as San Francisco and Los Angeles, attribute their spikes in homelessness directly to a state housing shortage that has led to an unprecedented affordability crisis.

Housing experts trace the problem back to the 1970s. Backlash began to arise – in coastal communities, in particular – from neighbors who opposed new housing in their neighborhoods.

Read the whole story

Genoa Peak Fire at 5% containment



Smoke from the Genoa Peak Fire is seen from Carson Valley on Aug. 23.

Photo/USFS

A nearly 15 acre fire burning two miles south of Spooner Summit is 5 percent contained.

It started about 2pm Aug. 22 from lightning.

The Genoa Peak Fire is creeping and smoldering in timber and brush, according to the U.S. Forest Service. No structures are threatened at this time.

Two helicopters are working the fire along with crews on the ground. The Boise Hotshots and a third helicopter are expected to arrive later Wednesday. The hope is to have the fire 40 percent contained later today.

The fire is visible from locations in the Carson Valley.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report