

Stateline casinos down, statewide revenues are up

While overall Nevada casinos posted higher revenues in March compared to 2016, Stateline casinos went in the other direction.

On the South Shore the \$16.7 million win was 2.3 percent less than a year ago.

The Nevada Gaming Control Board released the numbers on April 26.

Statewide, casinos reported taking in \$991 million in March, 7.4 percent year-over-year gain.

For the first quarter of 2017, the numbers are higher for the state and Stateline compared to 2016.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Full cost of Calif. drought still being tallied

By Dale Kasler, Sacramento Bee

Californians paid for the drought in many ways. Homeowners saw their water rates rise. Farmers sacrificed revenue when they idled fields.

And practically everyone spent more on electricity.

Californians' electricity costs jumped by a combined \$2.45 billion from 2012 to 2016 because of severe shortages of cheap hydroelectricity, according to an estimate released Wednesday by the Pacific Institute, an Oakland water policy think tank. The hydro shortage was one of the little-known effects of the just-concluded drought, said the study's author and institute's president emeritus, Peter Gleick.

Read the whole story

Spooner chase ends in arrest, 3 vehicles damaged

A South Lake Tahoe man on Wednesday morning led Nevada Highway Patrol officers on a high-speed chase over Spooner Summit that ended with the driver crashing and going to jail.

Jesus Herrarea-Casas was arrested on charges of eluding police, reckless driving, disregard for traffic control devices, speeding, and driving without a valid license. He may also be charged with driving under the influence pending test results.

Troopers tried to stop Herrarea-Casas about 7am April 26 west of Spooner Summit. However, he continued east on Highway 50 toward Carson City.

"The speeds reached dangerous levels and the driver's actions were extremely dangerous to the public. Spike strips were deployed half way down Spooner and several of the vehicles tires were punctured," troopers said in a statement. "Despite having flat tires, the vehicle continued and headed north down Carson Street. "Nevada Highway Patrol troopers forced the

vehicle to crash to end the danger to the public.”

Two NHP vehicles were damaged during the incident.

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*

Wildfire season could be bad with healthy vegetation

By Michelle Robertson, San Francisco Chronicle

California emerged from its five-year drought after heavy winter rains filled reservoirs and turned our golden hills green. But don't be fooled by the emerald hues. CalFire expects wildfires to burn just as fiercely as they did during drought years – if not more so.

The Eight-Station Index, a measure of Northern Sierra precipitation that helps determine statewide water levels, has deemed 2017 the wettest year on record at 92.8 inches. With all that rainfall, California's wide open spaces are now covered with lush vegetation.

You'd think that would be good, but firefighters say you'd be wrong. More grass means more fuel for the flames.

Read the whole story

Truckee grappling with dire housing situation

Publisher's note: *This is one in a series of stories about affordable housing in the Lake Tahoe-Truckee region. All articles may be accessed via the home page under Special Projects, 2017 Affordable Housing.*

By Linda Fine Conaboy

TRUCKEE – Affordable living spaces, including single family homes, rooms, sheds, apartments, trailers and anything else deemed inhabitable in Truckee and its environs are now non-existent, leaving the area in a state of crisis affecting not only individuals, but also the region's economy.

When one thinks about the immensity of this situation, it can be hard to digest the desperation of the countless numbers of people who are unable to satisfy one of the most basic of all human needs—a safe and affordable place to call home.



However, this phenomenon isn't new; it's a fact that the skids on these wheels have been in the greasing process for some time. The downward free fall is now full-blown reality, with the gap broadening between those who, for one reason or another enjoy the privilege that enough money

brings, and those who find they must hand over up to half of their take-home pay, in some cases, simply to enjoy the security of a roof over their heads.

The national recommendation is that housing costs not exceed 30 percent of annual earnings, at the outside.

It's important to keep in mind that the Sierra isn't the only place where all forms of robust recreational opportunities are available; and it's definitely not the only place where the gap between the rich and the not-so-rich is a problem.

A report generated by the town of Truckee notes that the housing puzzle is not new and has been under scrutiny since Truckee's incorporation 24 years ago.

Nevertheless, the status quo does not seem to be improving; in fact, now, consensus has it the crisis is genuine. Valuable time has seemingly been frittered away with no concrete solutions.

In view of this, it was clear that the time was ripe for responsible leadership—a chore assumed by the Tahoe Truckee Community Foundation, which stepped up, embarking on a long-term study of the situation, with results becoming available in summer 2016. Since then, TTCF and other stakeholders have been at work to engender consensus and create a plan of action.

TTCF generated a report titled "Truckee North Lake Tahoe Regional Housing Needs Assessment," which contained a comprehensive review of the area's needs and demographics, with funding provided by Placer County, Truckee, Nevada County and the Workforce Housing Association of Truckee Tahoe.

In brief, the results of the poll showed:

- 55 percent of households have incomes classified as moderate or low
- 59 percent of workers commute to their jobs
- 47 percent commute out of the region to their jobs
- 4,000-plus new jobs are expected to be created in the region over the next 15 years

- Almost half spend more than 30 percent of income on housing; 26 percent spend 50 percent
- Rental rates are high, but there is little rental housing available
- 80 percent of the region's 474 below-market housing units are in Truckee, all with waiting lists.



Housing in Truckee comes in a variety of sizes.
Photos/Linda Fine Conaboy

Putting a face to the problem

With these facts in mind, meet Elvia Esparza, a hard-working ex-Truckee resident, who is the office manager at Family Resource Center of Truckee.

Esparza, born and raised in Truckee, and husband Jose, have three children, all of whom now commute from Reno, daily, to work and go to school in Truckee. She says the mobile home

they lived in at a park in town became too small as their family grew.

“I was born and raised in Truckee and I have four brothers, one twin sister and my mom. We are all very involved in our community (Truckee),” Esparaza told *Lake Tahoe News*. “As our family expanded, we were running out of space so we decided to look into purchasing a home in Truckee. We applied for the first-time home buyers program. We qualified for 10 percent of the purchase price or up to \$40,000. We started our house search and realized that homes under \$400,000 were either way smaller than what we currently had or they were falling apart.”

After scouring Truckee for something to meet their needs, the Esparzas realized that they had to consider other options.

“My husband asked me if I would consider moving to Reno. I originally said no, but in all reality, this was going to be our only option. My husband told me that we have two options; we can stay in Truckee and get something that we will struggle to pay for and live stressed every day and not be able to do fun things with our children, or we move to Reno where we can afford a home and still have a great quality of life and enjoy activities with our kids.

“With no doubt I said yes. We sold our mobile home and purchased a home in Reno. We continue to commute to Truckee as I love this town; it is a great town to raise children in and I would love for my children to have the opportunity to be raised in this wonderful community. I hope in the future we will be able to move back.”

Although Jessica Gorton doesn't live or work in Truckee (she works in Incline Village and lives and works her second job in Kings Beach), her story is representative of many younger people who reside in the area and are free-spirited, outdoor enthusiasts who struggle to be able to continue to live their

dream in the region.

"Right now, I live in a shed. I know this probably shocks you, but it is true," Groton told *Lake Tahoe News*. "And it's still \$600 a month plus a share of the utilities of the house it sits next to. The landlord converted it to a rentable room with heat and electricity, but I have to use the bathroom and kitchen in the main house, so the shed is really a bedroom."

Groton said she was desperate, and no longer wanted to live in her car, which, she said, wasn't so bad since she got to camp and climb four days a week and save a lot of money for "cool" trips and more climbing gear.

"This might sound like a series of unfortunate events, but to be honest, it has become a bit comical," she said of her other housing adventures. "I now live very simply and all the things I own in Tahoe fit into a single carload. It's OK to laugh about it. I do. Luckily, living in Tahoe is a pretty great life, so if this is the worst I deal with, I suppose I still have it pretty dang great."



Truckee does not have enough housing, especially for the average worker. Photo/Linda Fine Conaboy

Looking for solutions

To date, there have been three public meetings in Truckee to discuss the housing crisis—one in January, another in February and a final meeting in mid-April. *Lake Tahoe News* attended all three, and in each meeting, to some degree, several of the same points were made and rehashed.

Tony Lashbrook, Truckee town manager, and others at these meetings have deliberated all sorts of ideas, including the merits of constructing some sort of housing on public lands, which, they said, would require voter approval. They talked about modification of fees as well as the implementation of new laws to allow second units to be built on some properties and then exempt them from some of the imposed fees.

However, to its credit, and as reported by Lashbrook, Truckee continues to address the situation. Some of the steps the town has taken or is considering include:

- Plans for new housing—5,000 new homes since 1993
- Advanced planning for affordable housing
- Regulations modified to allow second units on properties
- Allowed for residential units above businesses
- Home buyers' assistance programs
- Set aside \$2.5 million as a housing reserve to provide housing for locals.

Lashbrook also cited some of the lessons learned as the town continues to address the housing crisis. They are, in part:

- Needed, 12,000 new housing units for locals
- Truckee is 6,000 housing units away from build-out
- Truckee must be careful to maintain its small town character
- Affordable housing units struggle for success
- Very few second units have been built, perhaps because of restrictions
- Maybe fees are too high and can be modified—construction costs include almost \$42,000 in building charges.

At the third and final public meeting, Lashbrook and others listened to input from various area businesses and interested parties and re-visited ideas put forth at previous gatherings.

They included modifying the impact fees with the intent to

stimulate the construction of affordable housing; provide a fee amnesty program for the costs of building second units on some properties; approaching homeowners' associations to soften restrictions on second units; create stock building plans for second units, and pay the building permit fees for new secondary living spaces.

Additionally, there was talk of restricting the number of short-term rentals or curbing the time a space can be rented on a short-term basis. Additionally, the merits of providing more incentives to homeowners to rent to locals rather than listing spare rooms on Airbnb was tossed around.

It is apparent the quest for affordable housing continues for large portions of the population, a fact that is not lost on TTCF or other stakeholders including Northstar ski resort, which recently ponied up \$30,000 to help with the formation of the original Regional Housing Council and to offset the costs of the crisis.

According to Ashley Cooper, TTCF communications and grant manager, plans for the next steps will be rolled out at a meeting scheduled for this weekend. They include introduction of the Mountain Housing Council of Tahoe Truckee, the name chosen to replace the original Regional Housing Council.

Cooper told *Lake Tahoe News*, "Housing the people of our community is a top priority for the recently formed Mountain Housing Council of Tahoe Truckee. TTCF and other key stakeholders are committing time and resources to establishing a regional agenda to accelerate housing solutions."

According to Cooper, the kickoff is scheduled for April 29 from 8-11am at Truckee High School and in addition to introducing the Mountain Housing Council of Tahoe Truckee's members, the meeting represents the culmination of nearly two years of gatherings and discussions.

Reservations for the April 29 meeting are required and can be

made by going **online**.

Chinese see Tesla's gigafactory as tourist draw

By Ray Hagar, Nevada Newsmakers

Nevada's Lt. Gov. Mark Hutchison recently returned from a 10-day TravelNevada trade mission to China.

One of his biggest takeaways is the Chinese – who make up the No. 1 foreign travel market for the U.S. – see the Tesla gigafactory near Reno as a major tourist attraction.

Hutchison said he saw so much interest in the Tesla gigafactory among the Chinese that he wants to talk to Tesla officials about official tours through the gigafactory. At 5.5 million square feet, the gigafactory is reportedly the biggest building in the world in terms of its physical footprint.

Lake Tahoe was also a big draw, Hutchison said.

Read the whole story

Nev. lawmakers line up against reviving Yucca

Mountain

By Gary Martin, Las Vegas Review-Journal

WASHINGTON — Nevada lawmakers will testify before a House hearing this week in opposition of revising Yucca Mountain as a permanent nuclear waste site, the Energy and Commerce Committee announced Monday.

In advance of the hearing, Nevada Gov. Brian Sandoval sent a letter to the committee noting the state's opposition based on "scientific, technical and legal merits."

Nevada's two U.S. Sens., Dean Heller, a Republican, and Catherine Cortez Masto, a Democrat, and the state's three congressional members from Las Vegas, also oppose restarting development at Yucca Mountain.

Read the whole story

Audit critical of UC system's pay for employees

By Patrick McGreevy, Los Angeles Times

The administration of the University of California system pays top workers salaries significantly higher than that of similar state employees, has provided millions of dollars in benefits not typical to the public sector and failed to disclose to the Board of Regents and the public that it had \$175 million in budget reserve funds, a state audit found Tuesday.

The audit triggered a dispute with UC President Janet Napolitano, who said charges of hidden funds were false, while two members of the UC Board of Regents charged recommendations to give the Legislature budget authority over the Office of the President encroached on UC's constitutional powers.

The audit of the Office of the President also found that it failed to satisfactorily justify its spending on system-wide initiatives and "inappropriately" screened surveys submitted by auditors to campus officials.

Read the whole story

Search suspended for missing Truckee plane



Mark and Brenda Richard

By Nick Rahaim and Randi Rossmann, Santa Rosa Press Democrat

After six days of scouring a remote section of the northern Sierra Nevada, authorities announced Monday they had suspended their search for a missing Santa Rosa couple presumed to have crashed while flying from Truckee to Petaluma.

"They've exhausted the search," said Sgt. Michelle Anderson of the Sierra County Sheriff's Office, which worked with the Civil Air Patrol, the California National Guard, the California Highway Patrol and other agencies to locate the plane.

Brenda and Mark Richard flew out of the more than mile-high Truckee Tahoe Airport April 17 headed for Petaluma. At the time of their takeoff around 4pm, the temperature was 41 degrees with overcast skies and wind gusts exceeding 20 mph.

Read the whole story

Loop road environmental documents released

By Kathryn Reed

A multi-million dollar transportation project on the South Shore has mushroomed into being a project that could dramatically change the state line area, with repercussions possibly extending beyond the Y.

The loop road would essentially flop how Highway 50 and the southern section of the current loop operate. Even though the same number of lanes would be in use, more land would be paved over. Alternative B includes adding 5.76 acres of asphalt with a roundabout on the eastern end in Nevada or 7.62 acres with a signal at that intersection.

Five alternatives were reviewed in the environmental impact study/environment impact report, with Alternative B the proposed project area. The final document will have the

preferred alternative. (One alternative would create eight-lanes of traffic in some areas.)

The EIS/EIR was released Monday night. Tahoe Transportation, the lead agency on the project, hosted an open house April 24 that had many of the same spectators and the same photos and charts from previous gatherings.

The project area extends from a quarter mile southwest of Pioneer Trail in South Lake Tahoe to Lake Parkway in Stateline.



The proposed pedestrian bridge over the realigned Highway 50 near Van Sickle Park. Rendering/Ascent

Alternative B calls for four 11-foot wide travel lanes, 5-foot wide shoulders, and turn pockets at major intersections and driveways. Signals would be added at Heavenly Village Way and what is now the back entrance to Harrah's.

Six- to 18-foot retaining walls would be built near Van Sickle Bi-State Park. The entrance would be reconfigured and there would be a signal there.

The draft EIR/EIS said noise from the highway will not be a nuisance for park users.

The current highway between Park Avenue and Lake Parkway would be one travel lane in each direction, with landscaped medians, left-turn pockets at major intersections and driveways, and new or upgraded bike lanes.

The EIS/EIR included three areas that were studied for affordable housing that together could accommodate 227 units. One of those sites is where Mike McKeen owns property.

“We will never do affordable housing,” McKeen told *Lake Tahoe News*. “They offered us incentives to do it, but we don’t want it.”

What he would entertain is condos or a second level of commercial. His land is likely to be the gateway, so to speak, where the new highway would begin on the western edge.

Beyond what was studied in the environmental document, TTD is looking at California Tahoe Conservancy land near the Y for **affordable housing**.

The agency is legally obligated to relocate the residents and businesses that would be bulldozed to accommodate the realigned highway.

TABLE 2: TOTAL RESIDENTIAL AND BUSINESS DISPLACEMENT UNITS BY ALTERNATIVE							
Alternative	Total Number of Displacement Units	Total Residential Displacement Units	Single Family Displacement Units	Multiple Family Displacement Units	Total Business Displacement Units	Motel Business Displacement Units*	Motel Rooms
B	97	92	15	77	5	2	58
C	64	61	7	54	3	3	90
D	64	47	5	42	6	1	16

** Motel parcels are included in total Business Displacees*

The project started as a way to move the highway out of the casino corridor and turn that area into a city-county street. The new highway would travel behind Harrah’s and MontBleu.

While that is still the plan, all the renderings show a

complete-street landscape, with wide bike lanes, and decorative vegetation mixed with the new commercial areas. A footbridge would span the new highway to link the casinos with Van Sickle Bi-State Park.

The belief is millions of dollars would be added to the local economy with more people opting to stop to shop-eat-recreate instead of driving through. Adding more transit options – which includes becoming more walkable and bikeable – the goal is to get people to stay longer

TTD had hoped for federal TIGER (Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery) funds to pay for the project. With a new administration in office, it's not known if that will continue to be a funding source. TTD will be pursuing other avenues.

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Notes:

- The draft EIR/EIS is available **online**.
- People have 75 days to comment.
- The final document is expected to be released in the fall.