

100+ housing bills introduced in California

By Liam Dillon, Los Angeles Times

California lawmakers have introduced more than 130 bills this year that try to tackle the state's housing affordability crisis.

Reams of statistics support the depth of the problem: California's homeownership rate is at its lowest since World War II, a third of renters spend more than half of their income on housing costs and the state has nearly a quarter of the nation's homeless residents – despite having 12 percent of the overall U.S. population.

William Fulton, director of the Kinder Institute for Urban Research at Rice University, said he has never seen such interest in housing in the three decades he's been tracking the issue in California.

Read the whole story

Russian slot hackers focusing on new targets

By Todd Prince, Las Vegas Review-Journal

An international syndicate of Russian hackers that cashed out millions from slots in U.S. casinos over the years is focusing its efforts on South America and Europe after busts in Missouri and Singapore.

The Russian syndicate most recently struck in Peru, a security consultant to slot-makers told a group of U.S. regulators at a conference Thursday at the Luxor in Las Vegas organized by Gaming Laboratories International. *Wired* magazine first reported the story about the syndicate last month.

The existence of the Russian group, which may have been operating for as long as a decade, was first spotted in Missouri in May 2014. The FBI made its first arrests later that year. Singapore police caught syndicate members cheating in May 2016. Details about the group are still emerging, Carlson said. It may consist of between 40 and 70 individuals with a headquarters in St. Petersburg, Russia.

Read the whole story

Roads and salt pushing evolution of species



Brine leaves streaks on the road at the end of North Upper Truckee Road toward Highway 50. Photo/John Adamski

By Jason Daley, Sierra

Over the course of millions of years, environmental pressures push species to adapt, leading to a new tail shape, a striped color scheme, or a taste for eucalyptus leaves. But in the last couple decades, researchers have found that evolution isn't just a slow invisible hand molding dinosaurs into birds.

"Contemporary evolution" is also happening at a scale that is easily observable in a human lifetime, and some of those changes are actually driven by humans. In fact, a new study explores how one of humanity's biggest footprints, the massive system of roads that crisscross earth, are driving evolution in the plants and animals that live near them.

That's not to say roads are creating new species in front of our eyes. Instead, they are driving localized adaptations that take place in relatively isolated populations.

Read the whole story

Changing water meters could save SLT cash

By Kathryn Reed

Water meters not being used at South Lake Tahoe fire stations are costing the city about \$30,000 a year, according to South Tahoe Public Utility District.

The 4-inch meters were put in when the stations were built; before the city was incorporated. The idea was the fire engines would be filled with water while in the bay at the station. That doesn't happen. Firefighters tap hydrants for

water.

The larger the meter, the higher the price. If the city were to downsize to 1-inch meters, that is where the savings could come from. According to STPUD, this is a relatively easy procedure that any plumber in town should be able to do.

City Manager Nancy Kerry was not aware of the meter issue until *Lake Tahoe News* called.

“They have never told us there was a potential for saving money on any kind of metering,” Kerry told *Lake Tahoe News*.

The city and STPUD have had a less than friendly relationship for a couple years. In part it has to do with the city’s thinking it should be operating the water-sewer district. It also has to do with the city’s now paying about \$100,000 a year for water, which for most of its existence it never had to do.

In 2015, the city and South Tahoe PUD ended a multi-decade agreement that included the city’s getting water for free and the district’s not having to pay encroachment fees within the city right-of-way.

It was at that time when the district was researching how to go forward that it was discovered the fire stations have larger meters than what are needed based on use. But apparently no one told the city about the potential savings.

It’s even a bigger waste of money at station 2 because no fire trucks are even kept there.

Early morning rescue of hiker on North Shore

By Kaleb Roedel, KRNV-TV

An injured hiker was rescued this morning near Bonsai Rock at on the North Shore, according to the Washoe County Sheriff's Office.

Bob Harmon with WCSO says at about 1:3am March 20 the sheriff's office received a report of a hiker at Bonsai Rock in Sand Harbor in need of medical attention.

Harmon says a couple, a male and a female, had parked along Highway 28 and were attempting to "walk down to the water's edge" of Lake Tahoe when the man, in his 50s, started experiencing health problems.

Read the whole story

Weather reduces Liberty Utilities' reliability

By Kathryn Reed

Flip a switch and the lights go on. In the 21st century in the United States we expect that same outcome every time.

But the reality is there are circumstances beyond the supplier's control that cause the power to go out.

Weather is the No. 1 reason Liberty Utilities customers find themselves in the dark. Equipment failures, traffic accidents,

animals on the lines and loss of power from NV Energy are other factors.

Liberty supplies electricity to the California side of the basin, Truckee and just north of there, and Alpine and Mono counties. The 1,476-square-mile service area encompasses 50,000 customers. The bulk of its power comes from Las Vegas-based NV Energy.

New for this year the California Public Utilities Commission is mandating companies under its purview host reliability reporting workshops in its service area. Liberty did so last week in South Lake Tahoe and Kings Beach.



A broken pole this winter in the Ward Creek area took out power to Alpine Meadows ski resort and area residents. Photo/Liberty Utilities

The goal is for customers to not experience more than 160 minutes' worth of outages in a year. In 2014, Liberty customers were in the dark on average 352 minutes and for 2015 it was 357 minutes.

Customers should expect 1 to 1.2 outages a year. In 2014, the average was 2.4 outages and 2015 it was 2.01.

"We are trying to push to have better restoration time," Travis Johnson, vice president for Liberty, said.

The delay is often in finding the problem, not actually fixing it. There isn't some magic board at headquarters that pinpoints where the broken pole is, or what line is down, or which wires slapped together. Linemen need to find the problem and then assess how to remedy the situation.

Still, the company recognizes it needs to better communicate with customers what is going on. Instead of its website just listing the counties affected, the plan is to make it more detailed. Better estimated times for restoration are also being talked about.

Living in snow country and having equipment in remote areas only compound the potential for problems in the winter.

A large swath of the West Shore was in the dark for days earlier this year. Plows won't clear roads with wires on the ground. Unplowed roads make it difficult to reach the problem. Helicopters were used to lower workers to sites; this, after the weather cleared. At times crews were trudging through waist-high snow, at 3am, with temperature at zero degrees, all while carrying heavy cables and other equipment.

Some lines had snow accumulations the diameter of a basketball.

Utility companies operate with redundancies so when one transmission line goes down the system can still function. This winter two lines were down from Emerald Bay to Portola. Then a tree took out the third line.

"We are in uncharted territory of what our system has seen before," Johnson said. He pointed to a diagram showing the

Tahoe-Truckee area trending toward precipitation levels well ahead of 1982-83.

Exacerbating the problem is that customers from Emerald Bay to parts of Tahoe City are on one circuit.

Jeremy Vanyi with Liberty said the plan this summer is to modernize some of the equipment and to put in devices that would mean fewer customers being affected by the same outage.

Bright spots in the reliability spectrum include Liberty's praise for phase one of the 650 electric line on the North Shore. Steel poles instead of wood means they can stand up to the wicked winds that blow through the area. Plus, trees were adequately thinned to ensure they didn't fall on the new line.

Liberty is also experiencing fewer short-term outages, which it attributes to having done more work to remove potentially problematic trees or limbs.

The two worst circuits for Liberty are in the Woodfords-Markleeville and Coleville-Walker areas. This summer the company will work on both areas to improve reliability.

Work this summer in South Lake Tahoe will involve the continuation of undergrounding cables along Pioneer Trail.

Tahoe specialty plate losing popularity

By Kathryn Reed

TAHOE CITY – The specialty license plate benefiting the California Tahoe Conservancy sells well in the winter, but not

in summer. The goal is to ignite sales year-round.

The program funds non-motorized trails in the Lake Tahoe Basin on the California side.

Since 2011-12 the revenue has been declining or has been flat. That fiscal year \$1.172 million from plate sales came to CTC, while in 2015-16 the revenue was \$991,000.

Winter sales are boosted by Tahoe area skiers and snowboarders donating their time to the cause for ad campaigns and then ski resorts giving tickets as an incentive to random license plate owners.

The goal is to create a summer campaign from Memorial Day to Labor Day. A "plates for projects" initiative is in the works. The CTC would partner with an organization or two that needs funding. The group(s) would apply for a grant. In exchange they must promote the license plate program.

Grants are likely to be in the \$7,000 to \$20,000 range. The campaign would be marketed to groups that are already interested in Tahoe such as mountain bike organizations, Jeep trail riders and others.

Pete Fink, who was at the March 16 CTC meeting, said TAMBA would be interested in working with the CTC.

This summer would be the pilot campaign, and if all goes well, it could be expanded in future years.

Of the various specialized plates, the CTC one is the seventh most popular based on sales. The one that surged ahead of all others is the old style black and yellow plates that came out in 2015. There are more than 230,000 of those plates on the streets, while there are about 23,000 CTC plates, and it has been around since 1992.

Car dealers are not allowed to sell any specialty plates. This is a California Department of Motor Vehicles rule. CTC member

Karen Finn said she would look into changing that regulation.

Calif. preparing for future full of extreme weather

By Michael Rios, PBS News Hour

Two straight months of heavy rainfall have effectively ended five straight years of drought in California. But with parts of the state reporting more than 100 inches of precipitation since last fall, the rain activity has also caused floods, road closures, infrastructure damage and evacuations in many areas.

As a result of the unpredictable nature of California's climate, state officials have begun to prepare for what they expect to be continued extreme weather conditions. The Climate Prediction Center predicts lingering drought conditions will persist in parts of Southern California through June even after what it called a "phenomenal wet season."

State officials also expect variable weather patterns to continue in the future, which could extend droughts, increase flood risks and threaten the sustainability of the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta.

[Read the whole story](#)

EDHS teacher arrested on sex crimes

By Bill Lindelof and Nashelly Chavez, Sacramento Bee

Placerville police have arrested an El Dorado High School teacher on suspicion of sexual misconduct with students at the school.

Math teacher Daniel Mummy, 33, was arrested on suspicion of seven misdemeanor counts of annoying or molesting children and a count of sexual battery by a person of authority.

His bail has been set at \$95,000.

[Read the whole story](#)

Soggy forecast for start of spring



Roads in Tahoe could be tricky to

navigate for the better part of this week. Photo/LTN

It seems so typical, the calendar says spring and everyone in Tahoe starts scratching their heads wondering why it isn't true here. Winter is set to return Monday – the first day of spring.

According to the National Weather Service in Reno, "The first system arrives late Monday evening into Tuesday with precipitation starting as rain, but changing to snow in the mountains. Snow levels will start at around 7,000 – 8,000 feet Tuesday morning, falling to around 6,500 feet Tuesday evening. The heaviest precipitation is expected to be on Tuesday into Wednesday morning."

Keep the rain and snow gear out because the wet weather is going to be here the entire week.

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*