

LTRA allows rejiggering of public lands

By Kathryn Reed

Some of what are now publicly owned lots throughout the basin could one day be privately owned and developed.

While that is not the intent of officials with the Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit, it is allowed under the Lake Tahoe Restoration Act that was approved by Congress last fall and signed by President Barack Obama in December.

The legislation says, "Except in the case of land described in paragraphs (2) and (3), the secretary of agriculture may convey any urban lot within the Lake Tahoe Basin under the administrative jurisdiction of the Forest Service."

Convey in this sense means to transfer title of property.

"May does not mean we will or that locally we are leaning in that direction," Heather Noel, spokeswoman for the local U.S. Forest Service office, said in regards to selling the federal land. "They could direct us to look in that direction, but we have not. There would be a lot of discussion before that would happen."

However, a new administration is in charge; one that has indicated a willingness to get rid of federal land.

If the Forest Service were to sell urban lots, it is more likely to occur in Nevada because the California Tahoe Conservancy is expected to have first dibs at the California ones.

"If it goes from federal domain to a private entity, that is where TRPA codes would prevail," LTBMU Forest Supervisor Jeff Marsolais told *Lake Tahoe News*.

This means all the rules the bi-state regulatory agency has in place would become relevant.

“The lion’s share of urban lots was Santini-Burton,” Marsolais said. This means they could not be developed.

For ones that don’t fall under Santini-Burton, they must have development rights and a building allocation. Just because someone owns a vacant lot in the basin does not mean they get to build on it.

A large section of the LTRA deals with land transfers, largely between California and the U.S. Forest Service. Some of the land is protected by the 1980 Santini-Burton Act. That act allowed the acquisition of sensitive lands in the basin by the Forest Service and ensured they would not be developed.

The Tahoe Regional Planning Agency and League to Save Lake Tahoe were integral in wordsmithing the LTRA.

“The broad intent of the language was to preserve these open space lots for the benefit of conservation and environmental protections,” Julie Regan, legislative affairs guru for TRPA, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

The logic behind the land transfers is for each entity to own contiguous property and therefore be managed more efficiently. The thinking is that the California Tahoe Conservancy is better equipped to manage urban lots. The Forest Service wants to get out of owning these parcels that are in neighborhoods. Because there is no similar agency in Nevada, the Forest Service intends to keep its urban lots in the Silver State. In California there are 2,174 or about 3,133 acres’ worth of urban lots, and Nevada there are 1,113 or 1,638 acres.

LTRA identifies 1,936 acres of CTC land and 183 acres of State Parks to be transferred to the USFS. There would be 1,995 acres of USFS land given to those state agencies.

“The public process is important to me in how I approach being a steward of public lands here,” Marsolais said. “I would not move forward without a robust public engagement strategy.”

Still, he said it is not for the Forest Service to say if any aspect of LTRA is good or bad, but instead the agency is to remain neutral and carry out orders from Washington.

While acreage for transfer has been identified, all the LTRA did was give the OK to move forward. The LTBMU, CTC and State Parks need to go through their respective processes before it's a done deal.

The LTRA says this exchange will “not result in any significant changes in the uses of the land; and (will) be subject to the condition that the applicable deed include such terms, restrictions, covenants, conditions, and reservations as the secretary determines necessary.”

In other words, if the land couldn't be developed before, it can't be in the future either. However, if there are development rights associated with that property, they go with the property.

“We will be meeting with the USFS soon to discuss options for moving forward. At this point, however, there is no funding or staff dedicated to process thousands of changes of ownership, or for the Conservancy to manage additional lands. LTRA authorizes \$2 million to help facilitate the transfer, but those funds have not been appropriated,” Patrick Wright, CTC executive director, told *Lake Tahoe News*. “As to the urban lots we would receive, virtually all are deed restricted for environmental purposes, and LTRA clearly states that the transfers are subject to those restrictions, that no changes in uses can be allowed – so they could not be developed, and that their development rights, if any, cannot be used to facilitate development elsewhere.”

People, particularly in South Lake Tahoe, are skeptical of

land transfers after the CTC acquired what was the old drive-in from the city. It is now a mega-home whose only purpose is to be a vacation home rental. Some fear when the CTC owns the current USFS land it will become part of the state agency's asset lands management program – which allows the state to sell the public land and to use that money to keep the agency solvent.

That is why language in the LTRA says, “If a parcel of land transferred under paragraph (2) or (3) is used in a manner that is inconsistent with the use described for the parcel of land in paragraph (2) or (3), respectively, the parcel of land, shall, at the discretion of the secretary, revert to the United States.”

Even so, there remains the real possibility some current public land could one day be privately owned.

2 lost snowshoers rescued during blizzard

Two people are lucky to be alive after getting lost in the Mount Rose Wilderness in whiteout conditions.

Washoe County rescue crews went out in the blizzard Sunday after receiving a call at about 5:45pm that a couple in their 60s was lost in the wilderness area. At times visibility was less than 30 feet.

They were located above the Incline Creek drainage. Using cell phone coordinates the search teams were able to locate the two at about 8pm Feb. 26. The pair was able to walk out on their own, led by the search team. They were at the road by 9pm.

“Given the conditions up there it’s a good thing we are able to get them out. This was a life-saving mission,” sheriff’s spokesman Bob Harmon told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Names and hometowns of the couple have not been released.

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*

California sees rise in AP test scores

By Joyce Tsai, Bay Area News Group

California public high schools are seeing a rise in students taking Advanced Placement exams, as well as an overall improvement in scores on these college-placement exams, said state Superintendent Tom Torlakson on Wednesday.

About 28.5 percent of the state’s graduates in 2016 scored at least a three out of five on an AP exam, the fifth-highest percentage in the nation and an increase of nearly 8 percentage points since 2006, state education officials said.

Also on the rise is the percentage of California’s public high school graduates who took an AP exam. If students score a three or higher on an AP exam in a particular subject, they receive credit for college-level courses.

Read the whole story

Looking at smart city development in Nevada

By Nicole Raz, Las Vegas Review-Journal

Can you define what a “smart city” means for where you live? Neither can many of your local and state officials – but they will tell you that’s the kind of city they want to create.

Generally, a smart city is one that uses data, applications and technology to help people and goods move more quickly, cheaply and efficiently. Imagine a world where you can find a parking spot using an app. Or, better yet, your car will have the parking-spot-finding ability as a pre-installed feature.

The concept is relatively new in the United States. It gained traction in late 2015 with the Department of Transportation’s Smart City Challenge, which asked cities across America to develop ideas for a smart transportation system.

Read the whole story

Sandoval: Affordable Care Act overhaul a concern

By Gary Martin, Las Vegas Review-Journal

WASHINGTON – Nevada Gov. Brian Sandoval said Saturday he would take his concerns about the overhaul of the Affordable Care Act to Capitol Hill where lawmakers are mulling over various proposals to replace Obamacare.

The nation's governors, in town for their annual meeting, are expected to spend Monday talking with Republican leaders and members of Congress about repeal and replacement of the health care act.

Many states, including Nevada, broadened Medicaid programs to take advantage of federal funds to help insure more elderly and poor. Officials in those states are concerned about how the federal government will continue its funding commitment for the expanded programs.

Read the whole story

Demand for lithium a potential boon for Nevada



The Chemetall Foote Lithium Operation in Clayton Valley, a dry lake bed in Esmeralda County. Photo/Doc Searls

By Ben Botkin, Las Vegas Review-Journal

Deep within the bowels of Nevada, a mineral found in the underground brines represents a potential growth industry for the Silver State.

Lithium, used in car batteries, ceramics and even anti-depressant medications, is mined in one place in the U.S.: Nevada.

State mining regulators are working on Assembly Bill 52, which would create a framework for lithium mining and exploration in Nevada. State officials say it would add clarity to a system that requires explorers to rely on water well regulations and waivers to sample brines for lithium from drilled wells.

Read the whole story

SLT ambulance rear-ends vehicle on highway



This ambulance is out of commission
for the foreseeable future. Photo/LTN

By Kathryn Reed

A South Lake Tahoe-based ambulance was involved in an accident early Saturday morning on Highway 50 just east of Sierra-at-Tahoe.

No one was injured and no patients were in the ambulance.

"There were other vehicles traveling that were able to avoid it ... and able to merge into the one lane and avoid the collision," CHP Sgt. Kurt Peterson told *Lake Tahoe News*.

According the California Highway Patrol, a black Acura sedan was stopped in the right lane with its hazard lights on when the ambulance crashed into it.

"It is still under investigation how fast the ambulance was going," Peterson said. "It was going fast enough to disable the vehicle. There was significant damage to the rear."

The ambulance was still drivable, but the front end smashed in, with the grill missing. In what looks like pink lipstick "drive line out" is written on the driver's side window of the ambulance.

The accident occurred just after 1am Feb. 25. The ambulance was returning from an inter-agency transfer.

"The mechanic and insurance company will determine extent of damage and replacement time line," Ryan Wagoner, who runs the CalTahoe ambulance service, told *Lake Tahoe News*. "The contract requires we have three medic units in service, with two additional reserves, but we actually have four reserve medic units."

SLT goal: Embrace Tahoe as national treasure

By Kathryn Reed

Unhook preconceived ideas. Steer rather than row. Visioning is to be unfettered and unconstrained.

Those were the instructions-sentiments of Ted Gaebler, author of “Reinventing Government” and a retired city manager who spent 50 years in local government. He facilitated the Feb. 25 South Lake Tahoe strategic plan meeting at Inn by the Lake. In addition to the five council members, 15 key staff were in attendance at the daylong session.

“Strategic planning is a process that a group goes through to allow people, not at the top necessarily, to take advantage of an unintentional opportunity or respond to an unanticipated crisis,” Gaebler said.

His goal was to get these 20 leaders to realize they can stop delivering some services and let the private sector do it, while at the same time the city can get into new businesses as long it isn’t already served by the private sector.

With long term goals, it means the ability to capitalize on them when the opportunity presents itself.

Much of the wall space in the meeting room was filled with informative posters about the city – a map outlining what lands are publicly owned, investment projects, financial trends, completed and future projects (Lakeview Commons, Regan Beach, Sierra Tract erosion control, playfields), local agency partners, legacy action plan, and the community identity via

other groups.



Ted Gaebler leads South Lake Tahoe officials Feb. 25 in a strategic planning session. Photo/Kathryn Reed

Sitting around four tables, individually they spent 10 minutes writing what they envision for the community – not just city government – by 2030. In other words, what can be accomplished in the next baker's dozen decade. Then at their tables they consolidated the thoughts. And from there they were to develop a composite to represent the entire room. Then they went through a similar process, only they shuffled the seating.

With Lake Tahoe across the street, and the drapes pulled back to see that bowl of blue shimmering, it was easy to capitalize on what makes this place special and unique. Focusing on the area being a global or national treasure resonated with everyone.

Tangibles rising to the top were – improving the built environment and better public transit. Some want to take the dilapidated buildings and either get rid of them entirely or rehab them into something functional and profitable. With

transit, a monorail and cross lake ferry were mentioned, as well as bike-pedestrian paths that reach areas people want to go.

If South Lake Tahoe is a global treasure, then it needs to be treated like one. That has not happened based on how the infrastructure looks and functions. Maintenance concerns for years were not considered and it shows.

Going forward, though, the sentiment will be: "We will reflect the national treasure in which we live."

With saying "we" instead of "the city" the idea is this can be taken to agency partners to have them embrace the same vision.

Other ideas that many embraced included:

- Being able to redevelop waterfront areas for more public access.
- Events center on California side, even if it's not in the city limits. And therefore, have more year-round events.
- Face-lift for Highway 50.
- Need new economy that works; to be part of the 22nd century in the 21st. This new economy will fund the projects they envision.
- Having values to get to the vision.
- Getting fiber optics in place to handle high-speed Internet and the growing demand for all things technological.

Another exercise was working on one- and five-year visions. From the four tables, consensus was to find a funding source for roads, perhaps via raising sales tax.

Other ideas included removing blighted hotels, enforce the sign ordinance, break ground on the recreation center, new communications system for public safety, update fleet, resolve

56-acre ownership-management with El Dorado County, solve vacation home rental issue, build Greenway bikeway, and define site for events center.

At the end of the day there was conversation about what is going on in town and thoughts from the **Feb. 14 preplanning session**:

- A consultant is working with Harrison Avenue property owners regarding parking. The city's redevelopment agency owns three lots on Riverside Avenue that could potentially be paved over if someone were to buy them from what is now the Successor Agency. However, there is actually someone interested in those lots for housing.
- Regarding the collapsed building at Harrison Avenue, the owner intends to rebuild, but what and how remains to be determined.
- Parking lots for trailer parking will have to be used just for that now that the lake is up and the ramp at Lakeview Commons can be used.
- A desire to help the two South Shore chambers of commerce to play nice together.
- Talk of how affordable housing is an issue for a variety of reasons, from commodities to lack of supply.
- Tahoe Regional Planning Agency commodities were discussed.
- A suggestion made to have more workshops to hash out specific topics.

From here a business plan will be developed by staff that the council will adopt this spring.

Nev. pressing forward with recreational pot

By Associated Press

Nevada officials are pressing ahead with a summer launch of recreational marijuana in spite of statements from the Trump administration implying an impending crackdown on the drug.

Any sale or possession of marijuana is illegal under federal law.

But Nevada voters decided in November to allow people age 21 or older to use pot recreationally – one of eight states to do so.

White House spokesman Sean Spicer said Thursday that the Justice Department will step up enforcement of federal law prohibiting recreational – not medical – marijuana.

Nevada Department of Taxation spokeswoman Stephanie Klapstein said Friday that the state is moving forward as planned to develop regulations governing the drug.

Their timeline would allow recreational pot shops to open in July.

Tahoe's rising level a boon for downstream users

By Benjamin Spillman, Reno Gazette-Journal

Reno is experiencing its wettest winter on record and Lake Tahoe-area ski resorts anticipate Fourth of July skiing and snowboarding.

Lake Tahoe is likely to hit its storage limit for the first time since 2006. And that means water from the largest alpine lake in North America will spill into the Truckee River for years to come.

"After Tahoe fills it is good for three years," said Chad Blanchard, the federal water master in Reno. "We could have unprecedented dry (weather) and it still ends up being two years."

With seven months of the water year remaining, Reno has recorded 12.74 inches of precipitation. The old mark for a 12-month water season was 12.72 from Oct. 1, 1982, to Sept. 30, 1983. Since Oct. 1, Tahoe City has seen 56.38 inches of precipitation in the form of rain or snow water equivalent. That beats the previous record for October through February, set in 1969, by more than 10 inches. Even if it doesn't rain or snow before the end of March, it would beat the October to March record, set in 1982, by two inches.

Read the whole story