

Nev. BLM workers join Twitter resistance to Trump

By Henry Brean, Las Vegas Review-Journal

An anonymous group of current and former Bureau of Land Management employees, including a few from Nevada, have joined a Twitter-based revolt against their new boss.

The “Alt_BLM” Twitter account, launched Thursday afternoon, describes itself as the unofficial resistance team of the BLM, dedicated to “defending science and our public lands.” The posts so far have offered a harsh rebuke to President Donald Trump and his policies.

A bureau employee, who spoke on the condition of anonymity out of fear of retribution, said the account was started “to show solidarity with other natural resource agency employees” and keep uncensored information flowing.

Read the whole story

Measure T deemed invalid, unconstitutional

By Kathryn Reed

South Lake Tahoe’s Measure T is not valid.

That was the decision today by El Dorado County Superior Court Judge Jim Wagoner.

He ruled that the measure was unconstitutional, unenforceable

and fundamentally flawed. These are the same arguments the city said from the get-go.

Measure T was put before the voters in November asking them to decide if they should have a say via the ballot process on the loop road. (The proposed loop road would realign Highway 50 in the state line area.) The question, though, was not that straightforward. It would have prevented the City Council from being able to do its job; one of the reasons it was ruled unconstitutional.

Jason Collin before he got elected to the council last fall filed a lawsuit challenging the measure. His goal was to have the court decide before the election. Wagoner said he'd decide after the election. That decision came Jan. 27.

Collin was not able to attend the Friday hearing in Placerville because he is out of town at a conference. By phone he told *Lake Tahoe News* he is happy with the outcome.

"I hope we solve issues like this farther upstream in the future," Collin said. "It's not a good use of time and resources for anyone."

The city was the defendant because it is the entity that put the measure on the ballot at the request of the Measure T proponents.

"It is as done as it possibly can be because the only people who could possibly appeal is the city and we are not going to," City Attorney Tom Watson told *Lake Tahoe News*.

The proponents have no recourse. Bruce Grego, who was one of the Measure T backers, had not read the decision and therefore could not comment.

Trump versus Calif.: The feud becomes real

By Cathleen Decker, Los Angeles Times

Between his executive orders on immigration and the investigation he wants into voter fraud, President Trump had a clear target on Wednesday: California.

The state was one of two singled out as a focus of the vote fraud investigation stemming from Trump's belief that he lost the popular vote due to "illegals" taking part in November's election.

California also was the unnamed center of Trump's announcement of plans to tighten immigration rules and punish jurisdictions that offer sanctuary to those without proper papers—penalties that in California could rise to millions or billions of dollars.

The new president's moves came one day after Gov. Jerry Brown used his State of the State speech to challenge Trump's presidency and assert that California intended to go its own way.

[Read the whole story](#)

Placer residents urged to clear propane tanks

Placer County officials are warning officials that snow loads on residential propane tanks are extreme and pose a risk of

leaks and possible explosion.

In 2011, when similar snow loads were a concern, propane leaks in the Serene Lakes area were widespread, triggering evacuations and the disconnection of power to homes. One leak caused an explosion that completely destroyed a home.

“Snow loads on roofs and decks are a problem throughout the Sierra right now, and everyone should take care to clear those. But the loads on propane tanks are an especially serious concern,” Placer County Office of Emergency Services Manager John McEldowney said in a statement. “Residents should dig out and inspect their tanks as soon as they possibly can and call 911 if they smell any gas at all.”

Access to all types of propane tanks should be cleared, including underground, sheltered and stand-alone tanks. Residents should contact the Placer County Department of Environmental Health office in Tahoe City at 530.581.6240 before digging into the ground.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Snow removal expectations, reality differ

By Kathryn Reed

When it comes to snow removal, South Lake Tahoe and El Dorado County officials are defensive and bristle with the barrage of criticism.

They point to the amount of snow – several feet in consecutive days – as being a literal barrier to being able to clear

streets.

Those who have lived in the basin for a short time seem to complain the most. They have cleared their property and now expect the public right-of-ways to be snow-free zones.

Those who have been here more than a decade have a bit more tolerance. Some remember a time when businesses were mom and pop operations, nothing corporate. Residents didn't go to work because the boss couldn't make it either, nor could any potential customers. It's not that way today. People don't expect commerce to stop for Mother Nature.



South Lake Tahoe equipment

- 12 graders; 8 are used during a 12-hour shift, while 4 are backups
 - 2 sander plow trucks that are primarily used at the beginning of the storm
 - 7 blowers; 6 are active and 1 is a 1960 machine with a blown engine
- "During a 12-hour shift, and we do two per 24-hour day, we have eight grader operators, two plow truck operators, one manager, and two or three mechanics on duty. Same for the next shift. We are fully staffed. This has been the same number of plow operators for many years. Nothing has changed in the labor numbers or the patterns or the methods. We are short on mechanics, but that is being taken care of." – **Jim Marino**, *South Lake Tahoe public works deputy director*

El Dorado County equipment in Meyers

- 9 graders, plus 1 backup
 - 7 rotaries, no backup
 - 2 loaders
 - 2 sand trucks
- "Most graders are 11 years old. In the past we replaced them every seven years when possible. We have five rotaries from the 1970s one from the 1980s and one brand new one that was delivered in 2016."
- **Brad Lower**, *director of El Dorado County's transportation division*

El Dorado County equipment in Tahoma

- 2 graders, no backup
 - 2 rotaries, no backup
 - 1 loader
 - 1 sand truck
- "The graders at this location are only a couple of years old and our rotaries are from 1994 and 2003." – **Brad Lower**, *director of El Dorado County's transportation division*

The city and county in large part are operating with decades-old equipment. This has a lot to do with voters not upping the

snow removal tax and the jurisdictions then not putting together a fleet replacement plan in time to deal with the problem. Tahoma residents voted to pay \$50 a year. South Lake Tahoe and El Dorado County South Shore property owners pay \$20/year.

South Lake Tahoe sends a mechanic out to a broken down apparatus. It's fixed in the street, not back at the shop. It's faster, but clearly not ideal working conditions. The county mechanics are based in Meyers; one of the four is out.

Bard Lower, director of El Dorado County's transportation division, told *Lake Tahoe News*, "Our crews have been working seven days a week 24 hours a day since the New Year without a break."

Experience driving the plows makes a difference, too. Two-thirds of the city's crew has five or more years' experience plowing with graders. The remaining third is new. The county drivers based in Meyers have an average of 14 years of snow removal experience.

(This is **a story** about a snowplow ride-along this reporter did in 2011 that explains what it is like to do that job.)

Both agencies say they provide better service than the other. That internal bravado is not carrying over into reality, at least with some residents. This is Day 4 since there has been any substantial snow and yet some neighborhoods are still a mess.

"This is the worst year in my 50-year history for snow removal from our roads. What changed? Places like Angora Highlands and Echo View Estate have yet to see a rotary plow – this is at 1:30 on Thursday. This is extremely substandard," one resident wrote to *Lake Tahoe News*.

Lake Tahoe Unified School District called a snow day on Tuesday because officials said the roads were impassable for

buses.

Yet, fire trucks that are 38-feet-long were going down those same roads.



Some South Shore residents have little tolerance for narrow streets. Photo/LTN

Issues continued for school bus drivers on Wednesday.

“A couple of buses did get stuck in neighborhoods where they couldn’t clear the turns on the roads. There were some minor delays in dropping students at school, but no damage to buses, and no accidents,” Shannon Chandler, spokeswoman for LTUSD, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Years ago the district used main bus routes when side streets were not plowed. Not so anymore. No explanation was provided by the district why this no longer occurs. (When LTUSD has at

least three snow days it applies for a waiver from the state Department of Education to not have to have the maximum days of instruction.)

The county says school bus routes are a priority after main routes like Pioneer Trail and Upper Truckee Road are plowed. The city doesn't factor in school bus routes in its prioritization.

"Our guys have been going 24/7 since Dec. 28 and in that time have only had three days off. We experienced mechanical issues with the plows, downed trees, power lines, grader diversions to accident scenes for fire and police, and a gazillion cars abandoned in roadways all compounding a long duration storm. Couple that with the 'instant gratification need' of some of our population and we have trouble satisfying," South Lake Tahoe Deputy Public Works Director Jim Marino told *Lake Tahoe News*.

The county has the same obstacles.



Gates are not dropped on snowplows when a driveway is not cleared. Photo/LTN

“Each of these items add significantly to the time required to clear not only the street, but those around them. For example, county staff has to wait to remove snow from streets until power lines have been removed for safety reasons and in an effort not to destroy the infrastructure of the power provider,” Lower said.

Both agencies say plows have now hit every street at least once. Still, many are narrow, requiring cars to stop in order to have oncoming traffic pass.

The city used to have a GPS system where the public could track the plows. It didn’t work as expected and therefore was discontinued. If better technology presents itself, the idea might be revisited.

The county’s Meyers office is responsible for snow removal

down to Strawberry. A separate group handles Tahoma.

Much contention in all jurisdictions surrounds the use of the gate on plows. The irony is the gate was created years ago by a South Lake Tahoe employee who then sold the concept to a snowplow manufacturer. Now those gates are the norm.

“If you watch our operators, you will see that they lower the gate when they can see they are going to pass a driveway. If there are only a few inches of snow the snow will be moved beyond the driveway – no berm. However, if there is more than 6 to 8 inches of snow, even with the gate down, snow will boil over the gate and is left in the adjacent driveway,” Lower said. “With the amount of snow we’ve had recently, graders can no longer move the snow effectively and our crews are using blowers to open up the road. A blower generally leaves a fairly straight line along the edge of the road and leaves little or no berm.”

Marino said, “I can honestly say our guys really do try and minimize problems for properties as much as we can, but this storm gave us no respite, we simply did not have a long enough break between snowfall to break out the blowers and widen.”

NV Energy, Apple partnering on solar energy in Nev.

By Erin Ryan, Las Vegas Sun

NV Energy and Apple have jointly announced an agreement to build 200 megawatts of additional solar energy in Nevada to support the tech company’s Reno-based data center with renewable energy. Completion is expected by 2019.

First, NV Energy must apply with the state's Public Utilities Commission to enter into a power purchase agreement for the solar power plant.

Apple plans to dedicate up to 5 megawatts of the new power to a subscription solar program NV Energy has in the works for residential and commercial customers.

Read the whole story

Calif. drought is over in roughly half the state



Heavenly Mountain Resort has enough snow to provide skiing well into spring. Photo Copyright 2017 Carolyn E. Wright

By Paul Rogers, San Jose Mercury News

Hammered with record rainstorms and blizzards, nearly half of California is no longer in a drought, and the rest saw dramatic improvement over the past week, federal scientists reported Thursday.

Overall, 49 percent of the state is now drought free, the highest level since April 2013, according to the U.S. Drought Monitor, a weekly study by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the University of Nebraska, Lincoln.

A year ago, only 5 percent of the state was classified as not in drought conditions.

Read the whole story

Storms tap Caltrans' Tahoe budget

By Alexa Renee, KXTV-TV

So how are the recent storms affecting the Caltrans budget?

"We budget for this annually," said Deanna Shoopman, chief spokesperson for Caltrans District 3. "It's not something new."

Caltrans keeps a maintenance budget which covers cleanup after storms, according to Shoopman.

The total budget for District 3 this fiscal year is about \$44.3 million, according to Caltrans. District 3 has spent

approximately \$31.5 million, not including the recent storm damage. The storm cleanup will include the costs of massive sinkholes, fallen tree cleanup, road repairs, snow removal and much more so the costs will likely exceed the \$44.3 million budget.

Read the whole story

Trump decisions could have major effects in Nev.

By Nicole Raz, Las Vegas Review-Journal

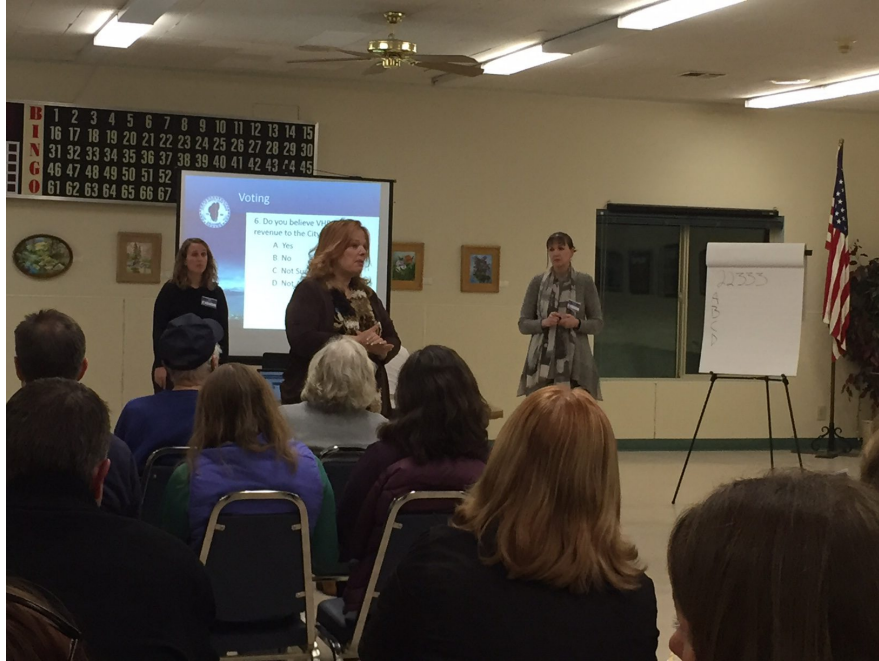
There are a lot of “what if’s” for Nevada following the election of Donald Trump.

Trump’s policy decisions on China, health care and infrastructure spending could have major consequences for Nevada, according to speakers Tuesday at the Las Vegas Metro Chamber of Commerce’s Preview Las Vegas networking and forecasting event at the Thomas & Mack Center.

Mike PeQueen told the crowd of about 1,900 business and community leaders that he believes it will be a good year ahead filled with “a lot of surprises because of the new presidential administration.”

Read the whole story

Little consensus on VHRs in S. Lake Tahoe



South Tahoe City Manager Nancy Kerry addresses questions about VHRs on Jan. 25. Photo/LTN

By Kathryn Reed

Wednesday night's vacation home rental workshop became more about whining than an information gathering opportunity.

People were becoming angry when the majority didn't agree with them. Those in the room were upset that those voting online often had different answers. Then there were the people who claimed they were not being listened to because they didn't get their way.

South Lake Tahoe is in the throes of an economic study about vacation home rentals. Jan. 25 was the second workshop conducted by consultants Michael Baker International, the group tasked with compiling all the data.

The consultants will be looking at perceptions people have as well as the facts. The preliminary report is expected to be released this spring, with another workshop after that and then the final document to be out in the summer.

From there it will be up to the City Council to decide if any policies are changed.

VHRs have been a regulated entity in the city since 2003. It has been contentious ever since then, with tweaks to the policy coming seemingly every year. The lack of enforcement, neighborhoods becoming party zones, regional regulations and the increasing inability to find long-term rental housing have triggered anger toward VHRs to the point some would like a moratorium or outright ban.

On the flipside is those who want to stay somewhere other than a hotel – whether it's here or elsewhere. Then there are all the people who have a job related to the industry. And there is the money involved.

Ten questions were asked Wednesday. The more than 40 people at the senior center were polled as well as people online. Statistically this survey is not valid, but it did give an indicator of what people are thinking. What isn't known is who was voting online. Those at the meeting were predominately residents, most over 60, and almost all Caucasian.

The answers by people at the meeting are hard numbers, while the online responses are percentages. The number of respondents online for each question were not given. It was possible for online voters to have also voted in person.

The majority believed VHRs expand the lodging options for tourists and provide jobs.

When it came to whether VHRs strain public services, those at the meeting said yes, while those online said no.

When it came to saying whether VHRs in residential areas are an inappropriate use, 21 people at the meeting said yes, 16 said no. The online percentage – 22 percent said yes, 71 percent no.

The question about whether VHRs have a negative impact on the character of a neighborhood also differed between the in-person vs. online response. Yes said the majority physically present, no said those remotely.

Those in person believe VHRs decrease the supply of affordable housing, while those online said the opposite.

VHR owners were asked what they would do if they could not use their property in this manner: 11 percent would make it a long-term rental, 53 percent would leave it vacant, 28 percent would do something else, and 8 percent said “not applicable”. No one at the meeting answered the question, signaling that no VHR owners were in attendance or that they didn’t want to make themselves known to a crowd that was clearly against them.

After the questions were asked and answered the conversation was more directed to city staff.