

No word on when Comet chair will spin at Heavenly

There is no estimated time when the Comet chairlift at Heavenly Mountain Resort will be back in operation.

It has been out of service since New Year's Day morning. Everyone on the lift had to be evacuated.

"The Comet chairlift is not operating due to a mechanical issue and an inspection is currently under way. The inspection is focusing on the gear box, but Heavenly Mountain Resort will complete a thorough review of all components to ensure safe operation of the lift," Jonathan Cook-Fisher with the U.S. Forest Service told *Lake Tahoe News*.

The ski resort operates mostly on USFS land, which is why the feds are involved. Cook-Fisher is the agency's permit administrator for the resort.

The Comet chair is on the Nevada side. It is one of the resort's older chairlifts.

Coop Cooper with Heavenly chose not to comment for this story.

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*

Storm starting to impact areas of basin



Water accumulating on Texas Street in South Lake Tahoe on Jan. 7. Photo/Susan Wood

Updated at 7:01pm:

By Kathryn Reed

An avalanche threat has been issued for parts of Incline Village.

“There are indications that an avalanche may occur in the Third Creek drainage and in the avalanche path adjacent to Third Creek to the south. Flowing debris from this anticipated avalanche(s) are expected to remain confined to the gullies and not affect homes or streets. However, the air blast – a

cushion of air pushed ahead of the debris flow – from such an event could rattle windows and affect pedestrians and vehicles in the immediate areas of the avalanche paths,” Tia Rancort with North Lake Tahoe Fire Protection District said in a statement on Jan. 7.



Trout Creek in South Lake Tahoe from Highway 50 on the afternoon of Jan. 7.
Photo/Susan Wood

Residents on Apollo Way, Jennifer Street, Lunar Court and the Mercury Court neighborhood areas have been notified.

Liberty Utilities has called in additional line crews to deal with likely outages. The power company is asking customers to only contact them in the event of an emergency.

Water is ponding in places in the basin. Highway 89 in Meyers has some flooding, including at the bridge at Portal. Reports are that it is not draining and has more than a foot of water

on it.

Linda Witters lived through the floods of 1997.

“Our Spring Creek became a torrent of water 100-feet wide and split its banks and went through three garages on the way to the river,” Witters told *Lake Tahoe News*. “Water will take the path of least resistance every time. The streets will be rivers and driveways will allow the water to go right through garages, houses, etc. Conditions beings as they are with the density of the snow, I expect this flooding to be worse if we get the predicted amounts of rain falling on snow.”

South Lake Tahoe temporarily ran out of sand at the Rufus Allen Boulevard site. Truckee’s supplies are running low after approximately 6,000 bags were distributed.

The National Weather Service in Reno says, “Widespread moderate to major flooding is imminent and very rapid rises on all waterways will begin this evening through Monday.”

The atmospheric river is still expected to bring rain to the 9,000-foot level, with 6 to 12 inches of rain in the basin between now and Monday morning.

The Douglas County Board of Commissioners have declared a state of emergency in preparation for the significant flooding event forecast for this weekend.

Alpine Meadows will be closed Jan. 8 and Squaw Valley will have limited terrain offerings. Tahoe Cross Country in Tahoe City will also be closed Sunday.

Noise monitoring at LT Airport keeps evolving

By Joann Eisenbrandt

"Noise, by definition, is 'unwanted sound.'"

This is how the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency's 2015 Threshold Evaluation report characterizes it. The report goes on to note that vehicular traffic and "aircraft activity at the South Lake Tahoe airport have been identified as the predominant noise sources in the basin."

El Dorado County opened the Lake Tahoe Airport in August 1959. It was annexed by South Lake Tahoe in 1983. From the beginning of city ownership, there have been vigorous debates over the environmental impacts of the airport versus its economic benefits. The "unwanted sound" of noisy aircraft operations in the skies above the lake's clear blue waters has often been at center stage.



With Lake Tahoe Airport not being used as much, noise issues have diminished. Photo/Kathryn Reed

Airport Master Plan update under way

The city began an update to its Airport Master Plan in 2013. This plan outlines the preferred configuration of the physical facility and the number of flight operations and mix of aircraft using the airport over the next 20 years. When the 1992 Master Plan was put in place, the noise generated by scheduled commercial flights over residential neighborhoods was a key concern, as well as that created by business jets bringing celebrities and tourists to the lake in the summer for special events.

The environmental document required by CEQA (California Environmental Quality Act) that must accompany the master plan is being prepared, with the 30-day circulation and comment period for the draft document expected to take place in

February. It will identify potential environmental impacts of the master plan, including noise, and outline ways in which they can be mitigated.

TRPA's noise standards

In its Regional Plan, the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency sets maximum allowable noise levels in decibels for aircraft operations. The 1980 federal Compact that created the bi-state agency gives it this power. The TRPA noise standard for daytime aircraft arrivals and departures (8am to 8pm) is 80 dBA and the nighttime standard (8pm to 8am) is 77 dBA. Aircraft noise is measured in A-weighted decibels (dBA), a measurement that eliminates very high and very low frequency sounds in the same way they are perceived by the human ear.

These noise standards are also a part of Lake Tahoe Airport Master Plan. The airport monitors noise at six sites in the vicinity of the airport and logs all exceedances of these single-event noise standards. It is to provide TRPA with quarterly and yearly reports. Cumulative noise impacts (CNEL) over a 24-hour period from aircraft in the South Lake Tahoe Airport Transportation Corridor are also measured. The TRPA threshold standard for these noise events is 60 dBA.

Commercial air service and noise

When the city took over the airport in 1983, it agreed to finish the county's incomplete Airport Master Plan. The airport facility had been deteriorating and annual enplanements had gone down from a high of 294,188 in 1978 to a low of 37,553 in 1982. AirCal was the existing commercial carrier, and the city chose to immediately increase the number of its flights into Tahoe. TRPA believed this was a violation of its noise and other environmental standards and filed a cease and desist order. The city sued TRPA saying it did not have jurisdiction over the airport; the California Attorney General's Office sued the city and AirCal. More lawsuits

followed.

After years of legal wrangling, the 1992 Airport Master Plan Settlement Agreement ended all pending litigation and set strict guidelines for commercial operations at the airport for the next 20 years. It included requirements for the airport to adhere to the TRPA noise standards, have noise monitoring equipment in place, keep records and submit reports of noise exceedances to TRPA.

Commercial service to the airport ended in 2000, but until recently, the city continued to affirm its important economic value to the community and retained hope for its eventual return. In a 2012 *Lake Tahoe News* article, then interim City Manager Nancy Kerry insisted, "We have this facility. What is its best and highest use? A general aviation airport is just a waste of space ... The goal is to bring commercial service back here." Those like the League to Save Lake Tahoe who saw the return of commercial service and the noise that would come with it as an inappropriate assault on the basin's fragile environment, continued to vocally protest against it.

Changes in the aircraft industry, the cost of maintaining the airport's FAA Part 139 certificate for commercial service, and the prohibitively expensive changes to the physical layout of the airport that would be required to again accommodate scheduled air service changed the city's mind. The preferred alternative chosen by the City Council as part of the current master plan update does not include commercial service. The city relinquished its FAA Part 139 certificate.

But even without commercial service, noise from aircraft operations still affects the South Shore community. In addition to general aviation aircraft, business jets and chartered transport category planes still use the airport, as do helicopters for medical and scenic purposes. Because the airport has received federal funding, military aircraft have the right to access the facility.



President Obama used Marine One to land at Lake Tahoe Airport in August. Photo/South Lake Tahoe

Measuring the impacts of noise

The technical measurement of acoustical sound levels is important in determining a noise event's impacts. But equally important, and much harder to measure, is the subjective component of noise – how it is perceived by those who hear it.

The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) in its Aviation Noise Effects circular concludes, "It is not possible to state simply that a given noise level from a given noise source will elicit a particular community reaction ... an individual's attitudes, beliefs and values may greatly influence the degree to which a person considers a given sound annoying."

This is especially true at Lake Tahoe. The fact that the background, or ambient noise levels, at the lake are much lower than those in more industrial or urbanized areas makes noise events like aircraft arrivals and departures stand out. Because of the lake's spectacular beauty and national status, there is a heightened focus on preventing degradation of its

valued natural character.

How Lake Tahoe Airport monitors noise

Noise monitoring at the airport has been ongoing for decades, but recently, concerns were raised about the functionality of the aircraft noise monitoring equipment and how well noise complaints from the public and violations of the TRPA aircraft noise standards were being addressed.

For the noise monitoring of aircraft operations to be effective, the noise monitoring system must be able to not only accurately record the decibel levels of noise events at the monitored locations, but there must also be a way to differentiate between noise from aircraft and loud noises generated by other nearby sources such as roadway traffic or chain saws.

Over the years, the airport has used a variety of methods to tie TRPA noise level exceedances recorded at its monitoring sites to specific aircraft events. Until 2004, the airport had a manned FAA Air Traffic Control Tower, which recorded all aircraft to aircraft and aircraft to tower radio transmissions in the airport's traffic pattern. All aircraft in the traffic pattern were required to be in contact with other aircraft in the pattern and the tower.

An administrative assistant at the city coordinated the timing of noise exceedance events at the monitoring stations with the FAA tower recordings. If a pilot were on the radio at the time of such an event, it was assumed the violation came from aircraft noise. If there were no aircraft transmissions around the time of an exceedance, it was considered a non-aircraft noise event. When the tower closed in 2004, the aircraft radio recording system owned by the FAA was decommissioned. Due to city budget cuts and reorganization, the administrative assistant position was later eliminated.

Mark Gibbs, the city's new airport manager, told *LTN* that in

2005, the airport “tried another approach to differentiate noise monitoring exceedance events between aircraft and non-aircraft” However, it proved to be, “less accurate, more time consuming and quite costly to provide.” The airport purchased radar data from the Approach Control facility in Oakland. This radar data monitors all aircraft with transponders that are turned on in TVL terminal airspace. But not all aircraft have transponders and not all pilots who have transponders operate their planes with them turned on, so the only noise exceedances that could be positively identified were those from planes equipped with transponders that were turned on. The data was costly to purchase and also needed third-party software to translate the FAA data into a format for noise analysis. The city discontinued this approach in 2010.



Lake Tahoe Airport gets more use as a city hall than it does for planes. Photo/LTN file

TRPA's analysis of compliance

Every five years, TRPA puts out a Threshold Evaluation Report

which analyzes how well the standards and goals of its Regional Plan are being met. In its Draft Report for 2015, the agency originally noted that during the years between 2011 and 2015, analyzing the noise data from Lake Tahoe Airport was difficult and trends were hard to determine because the noise monitoring equipment was “malfunctioning” and unable to tell the difference between aircraft and other noise events.

Gibbs explained, “The French built 01DB Airport Noise Monitors were never designed to differentiate between aircraft sounds and other sources so that was never a “malfunction” of the equipment. The TVL noise monitors were operational the entire reporting period 2010-15. The noise monitoring equipment is designed to only log the time, date and dba level of each discrete exceedance of TRPA standards. There is no readily available electronic noise monitoring technology that can differentiate between aircraft and other sources.”

TRPA’s final 2015 Threshold Evaluation Report has removed any references to equipment malfunction, but does note that between 2011 and 2015, only total exceedances of the noise standards were reported by the city without discriminating between aircraft and non-aircraft noise events. This made it impossible to determine if the number of noise violations at the airport had trended upward or downward from previous reporting periods. TRPA did estimate, based on historical data, that an average of 17 percent of noise level exceedances are caused by aircraft. For the years during the latest monitoring period where the city reported a full year of data, total exceedances ranged from 1,038 to 1,698.

In 2015, the city found a cost-effective aircraft radio transmission recording system to replace the system in place when there was a control tower at the airport. VersaDial records aircraft radio traffic on the common traffic advisory frequency for TVL.

“If a noise complaint is logged,” Gibbs explained, “the city

will review the recording to ascertain the aircraft in violation based on time/date of occurrence and compare that against the active noise monitoring system readings. If a noise exceedance is found, the airport can reference the owner of the aircraft by the call sign used on the radio transmissions. The airport now has the capability to replay aircraft radio transmissions to ascertain if a noise exceedance event logged by the noise monitoring equipment coincided with aircraft operations at the same time in terminal airspace."

Gibbs added that, "The TRPA and the airport will continue a dialogue to ensure that the public has the best available data on airport noise impacts in the future ... The airport and TRPA are both committed to limiting the negative impacts of noise in the community to the greatest extent practicable."

Re-evaluating TRPA's noise standards

Beyond the issue of how well the airport's noise monitoring system can identify aircraft noise violations, is the question of the current validity of the standards themselves. Tom Lotshaw, TRPA's public information officer, told *Lake Tahoe News*, "These airport noise standards are pushing 30 years old and were developed and adopted as part of the Settlement Agreement in 1992. From our perspective, these are legacy standards from back in the day when there were commercial service operations and a higher level of (airport) activity."

TRPA's 2011 Threshold Evaluation Report was peer reviewed, as was the 2015 report, by an outside panel of experts in different fields. The 2011 report's review indicated that TRPA's noise program is too complex with too many land categories and noise thresholds to be able to evaluate attainment. It could not effectively evaluate single noise events at the Lake Tahoe Airport for compliance and they were given a status of "unknown." Lotshaw noted that under its Strategic Initiative, TRPA is now working with the Tahoe

Science Advisory Council, a science advisory group, and several dozen other partners, to bring science to the table when trying to determine which TRPA policies continue to work. TRPA will be looking at their noise threshold standards and re-evaluating them to make sure they are scientifically sound.

This re-evaluation will not happen overnight. In the interim, the city will continue to monitor aircraft noise and submit reports to TRPA. In 2015, there were 19 noise complaints logged at the airport.

“Any noise complaint is investigated by the airport manager,” Gibbs confirmed, “and, if warranted, an attempt to contact the pilot is made.”

Residents can report noise concerns from aircraft by using the city’s website or by calling the airport manager’s office.



TWA was one of several airlines that used to fly into Lake Tahoe Airport. Photo/Del Laine

Aircraft noise as an issue in the future

With commercial service not envisioned in the Airport Master Plan update now being finalized, how much of an issue for the South Shore community will airport noise continue to be?

South Lake Tahoe City Manager Nancy Kerry said, "People don't see it as a big issue. I don't even think it was a big issue in the Master Plan (public) hearings. The issue was whether or not there would be commercial service."

The city chose to do a mitigated negative declaration, a less exhaustive CEQA environmental document, instead of the more in-depth environmental impact report. Hilary Roverud, the city's deputy director of Development Services, explained the rationale behind that choice.

"We feel there are no impacts that can't be mitigated. We are not anticipating any expansion of the airport property or significant changes in its configuration. (ESA, the consultants) are evaluating the master plan based on the current baseline conditions and looking at any changes the master plan is proposing that will affect noise ... nothing in the draft master plan will create noise issues. The city has already reduced the footprint of the airport, narrowed the runway, and performed SEZ (stream environment zone) restoration," she said.

According to Gibbs, the city is also looking at NextGen, an FAA national initiative program that would replace ground-based navigation aids with GPS-enabled instrument procedures. This allows aircraft to follow a tighter flight path to the airport. In Tahoe's case, it would make it easier for pilots to follow the recommended "meadow" approach which takes them over open space rather than residential neighborhoods. The city has put in a request for these procedures, hoping that Tahoe's sensitive environment will make it good candidate, but it must compete with many other airports. It isn't a grant program and doesn't cost the city money because it only involves FAA-owned airspace. The selection process is expected

to take a number of years.

The League to Save Lake Tahoe, which has remained vocal regarding the environmental impacts of the Lake Tahoe Airport, was asked about its view of aircraft noise as an ongoing issue. Darcie Goodman Collins, League executive director, told *LTN* in an email, “We are happy that the city has ended its efforts to renew the commercial status for the airport. As the city moves forward, they are required to take actions to comply with Tahoe’s threshold for noise. This will be challenging for an operational airport, but we remain confident that the city, working in cooperation with TRPA, will make progress on its efforts to reduce noise and be a good neighbor for the surrounding community.”

Once the mitigated negative declaration is completed it will be available for review by public agencies and individuals for 30 days. The city plans on having one public hearing during this review period to receive input from residents on potential environmental impacts identified in the Airport Master Plan, including aircraft noise, and the adequacy of the mitigation measures the Plan proposes to reduce them to less than significant. This will be the public’s chance to indicate how significant an issue airport noise is.

Agencies on full alert for intense storms

By Lake Tahoe News

The Nation Weather Service in Reno is forecasting a series of extreme weather events over the next two weeks for the Lake Tahoe Basin, calling it a “once a decade event.”

Snow is expected on Saturday, with the white stuff as low at 2,000 feet. Then it will be heavy rain for a 24-hour period starting Sunday. Rain could be falling at the 9,000-foot level. This will melt the snow, increasing the flooding hazards.

Caltrans warns, "Motorists are required to carry chains even if driving a four- or all-wheel drive vehicle with mud + snow rated tires." People are being advised not to travel unless it's absolutely necessary.

Expect delays crossing all mountain passes. (Kingsbury reopened Jan. 6.)

Vehicles with cable (ladder) chains may be turned around on Highway 267 at the Northstar and Kings Beach chain control checkpoints because they have proven to be ineffective when attempting to drive over Brockway Summit during heavy snow storms.

Highway 89 over Emerald Bay is closed because of avalanche hazards.

A flood warning has been issued for Douglas County from Jan. 7-9. In the event there is major flooding in the Carson Valley, deliveries of groceries, gasoline and other goods to the South Shore could be restricted.

A flood watch means flooding is possible. People should be prepared to move to higher ground upon short notice. A flood warning means a flood is occurring or is about to occur.

If needing to evacuate, remember the five P's: people, prescriptions, paper, personal needs and priceless items.

People should be prepared with a 72-hour kit, which should include extra water, a three-day food supply, a flashlight with batteries, first aid kit, and AM/FM radio.

"This is going to be some of the more significant flooding

we've seen in the past decade ... areas may flood that haven't seen impacts for several years," according to the California Highway Patrol.

South Lake Tahoe is keeping its sand bag locations open 24/7. The city provides the sand and bags, but people must fill the bags. Sand is available at the maintenance yard on Rufus Allen Boulevard and at fire station No. 3, 2101 Lake Tahoe Blvd.

Sand bags are available at the El Dorado County Department of Transportation Yard 1121 Shakori Drive in Meyers; Zephyr Cove Park; Northstar Fire Department will assist residents with sand bags – call 530.562.1212, ext. 4; Truckee has sand bags at 11473 Donner Pass Road (Fire Station 92) and at Stockrest Springs by the U.S. Forest Service.

A state of emergency has already been declared for the Reno area. The Truckee River is expected to hit flood stage at 1pm Sunday.

The National Guard and U.S. Forest Service are on alert to help Nevada with flood related issues.

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For more information:

- California and Nevada road information may be accessed from the home page of *Lake Tahoe News*. Click on the state icons.
- Douglas Country Emergency Management **website**.
- South Lake Tahoe storm update/emergency **information page**.
- Nevada flood information **website**.

Kingsbury Grade reopens between Tahoe-valley

Kingsbury Grade is open.

Nevada Department of Transportation crews were able to stabilize the sink hole so motorists can use this main thoroughfare that links Lake Tahoe and Carson Valley. (There are chain or snow tires requirements in effect as of Friday night.)

“We reinforced it and then we repaved over it so it is open for safe travel,” Meg Ragonese with NDOT told *Lake Tahoe News* on Jan.6.

The work done since the closure went into effect 72 hours ago is temporary. More permanent repairs will be made in the spring or summer. At that time the highway is expected to be closed for two to three weeks.

The failing road is on the Carson side the highway. An eroding drainage pipe under the highway created problem.

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*

Nev. traffic fatalities

increase by 1 in 2016

Preliminary data shows that 327 traffic fatalities occurred on Nevada roads in 2016, one death more than the previous year.

Total year-end traffic deaths could be adjusted based on ongoing traffic crash investigations. Statewide, traffic fatalities reached an all-time high of 432 in 2006.

Unsafe driving behavior and an increasing number of miles traveled on Nevada roads may be two contributing factors to the traffic deaths, according to the Nevada Department of Transportation. On average, the amount of miles traveled on Nevada roads increases nearly 4 percent every year. When compared to the amount of miles traveled on Nevada roads, traffic deaths have dropped from an average of 2.05 deaths per every 100 million miles traveled in 2005 to 1.3 fatalities per 100 million miles in 2015.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration reports that approximately 94 percent of traffic deaths are the result of driver behavior.

Calif. saved less water in Nov. than previous year

By Joseph Serna, Los Angeles Times

California water conservation took a slight step backward in November, officials announced Wednesday, possibly due in part

to an unusually wet fall and months of successful conservation efforts.

Californians used 18.8 percent less water this past November compared with November 2013, the benchmark year for state conservation measurements. In November 2015, residents statewide cut back usage 20.2 percent compared with 2013.

Though meteorologists note that rainfall across wide swaths of the state was below average in November, it was preceded by the wettest October in 30 years in Northern California, dulling the impact of the reduced precipitation.

Read the whole story

Nevada students learn legislative ropes

By Sandra Chereb, Las Vegas Review-Journal

CARSON CITY – Former state Sen. Valerie Wiener was aghast when she read a 2003 report that painted a bleak picture of young people and their basic understanding of government.

“We learned that more than 80 percent of 15- to 25-year-olds could identify the most recent ‘American Idol’ (winner), while fewer than half knew the party of their state’s governor,” Wiener, D-Las Vegas, told an Assembly committee in 2007.

Wiener was testifying on Senate Bill 247, a measure that created what is now the Nevada Youth Legislature, an award-winning program that not only educates Nevada high school students about civics but gives them an active role in setting policy and passing laws pertinent to their generation.

Ten years later, dozens of former and current participants credit the program with sparking their interest in public service. Present and past youth legislators will meet on Saturday for a reunion of sorts, with one event scheduled in Las Vegas and the other in Carson City.

Read the whole story

Tahoe-area effluent spilled into Carson River

By Benjamin Spillman, Reno Gazette-Journal

An unknown amount of wastewater effluent spilled into the Carson River Tuesday and Wednesday.

That's according to the Douglas County Sewer Improvement District which operates a pipeline that moves treated wastewater from Stateline-area casinos, businesses and homes to agricultural land in the Carson Valley.

Rob Hopkins, general manager of the sewer district, said officials noticed the rupture at about 11am Tuesday. The break was repaired by about 11:35am Wednesday, he said.

Read the whole story

Storm cuts power, affects schools, clogs roads

Updated 10:55am:

The heavy, wet snow that has been falling in the Tahoe basin was finally too much for power lines.

Power is out in various locations. Liberty Utilities has had outages in most of Meyers, including the Sky Line area, much of the West Shore around Tahoma, and the Glenshire area of Truckee. The lights came back on in Meyers at 7:25am after being out for about two hours.

However, there is a tree down at the end of Christmas Valley that has caused about 100 customers to be without power. It could be noon before power is restored.

At 10am NV Energy had no estimated time when the 76 Stateline customers will have power. Most of the 100 customers in Incline Village should have power by noon.

"We have been having them all night," Randy Kelly of Liberty said of the outages. He also told *Lake Tahoe News*, "We have heard of a broken pole too; that could be a tree breaking off with this heavy snow."

As of 10:55am, Liberty had no estimated time when power would be restored to Tahoe Vista, Carnelian Bay, Tahoe City, Homewood, Tahoma, Squaw Valley and Truckee. There are 240 customers without power in those areas.

Snapped poles, trees on wires, downed wires have caused three circuits to go out.

In El Dorado County, 3,451 customers are affected; in Placer County there are 175. In the Stateline line area, 77 customers are without power.

The snow has also canceled classes in Truckee Unified School District. Incline Village schools are on a two-hour delay.

Roads are a mess in most locations. For up-to-date conditions, click on the state icons on *Lake Tahoe News'* home page.

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*