

Calif. plan makes water conservation 'a way of life'

By Darryl Fears, Washington Post

Here in the land of beauty and make-believe, it's important to keep up appearances. Tracy Quinn sees it whenever she walks her dog: sprinklers irrigating pretty green lawns and wasted water bleeding across sidewalks during the state's driest spell in centuries.

"It drives me crazy," said Quinn, a water policy analyst for the Natural Resources Defense Council.

But now California is preparing for a dramatic change in how its residents use water. A water management plan that could be finalized in January is designed to make conservation "a way of life."

The new plan would instead give each water agency a budget for how much water its customers are allowed to use. Each agency's allowance would be based on estimates from state officials of its demographics – population, economy, outdoor temperature, tree canopy and even the rate of water evaporation – to determine its need.

Read the whole story

EDC commits to loan to build

sheriff's complex

On a 5-0 vote last week, the El Dorado County Board of Supervisors agreed to accept a \$57 million 40-year loan from the USDA to build a sheriff's facility in Placerville. This is the largest loan the county has ever taken.

The interest rate will be 2.375 percent.

While county Auditor-Controller Joe Harn recognizes the need for the law enforcement complex, he believes the county has gone about this the wrong way. He said as much in a letter to the board that was included in the packet for the Dec. 28 special meeting.

"For the past six years our CAO's Office has been dominated by individuals with no roots in our community who were not concerned about the long term wellbeing of our county. The county should have been saving for this facility and other capital improvement needs for the last six years. If we would have set aside funds over the past six years for this project we would be borrowing significantly less than \$57 million today," Harn wrote.

In 2014 he suggested the voters should decide if that type of loan should be taken out.

Harn is worried about how the county will be able to make the \$2.3 million payment each year based on other financial obligations like CalPERS, road maintenance, retiree health insurance, and assistance to rural fire districts to name a few.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Bill pushes for marijuana decriminalization in all states

By Jonathan Bach, Statesman Journal

Sen. Ron Wyden, D-Ore., is cosponsoring a bill to decriminalize marijuana across the nation and penalize states with high arrest and incarceration rates for pot-related crimes.

The Marijuana Justice Act of 2017, first introduced in August by Sen. Cory Booker, D-N.J., would remove weed from the federal list of controlled substances.

The bill also would penalize states that haven't legalized marijuana and have "disproportionate" rates of arrest and incarceration for marijuana-related offenses by cutting federal funding in those states for new jails, prisons and staffing.

Read the whole story

Nev. hopes inmate programs yield post-prison success

By Michelle Rindels, AP

Nevada prisons are going to start planning for their inmates' successful release back into society on the first day they get into prison, rather than waiting for the end of their sentences.

The changes taking effect Jan. 1 are part of the Nevada Department of Corrections' effort to reduce recidivism and are supported by two new federal grants. About 12,000 inmates who are in Nevada prisons today will return to the community in the next 15 to 18 years.

The goal is to reduce re-offense rates in a targeted group by 15 percent over the first two years and 50 percent over a five-year period. The Board of Examiners approved a \$232,000 agreement with UNR allowing the university to evaluate the effectiveness of the new strategy.

"If we do a better job of re-entry, that means there will be less victims of crimes," state prisons director James Dzurenda told the Nevada Board of Examiners at a meeting earlier this month.

Support comes from a nearly \$1 million federal Second Chance Act grant. Nevada was one of three states to get the money.

Since 2014, the state has been studying the impact of its existing programs to help inmates adjust to life after prison. The review found that about one-third of that work was making little or no impact on inmates' drug addiction problems or overall crime rates, Dzurenda said.

The department will be scrapping those old programs and

refocusing on a group where interventions might be more effective – male inmates between ages 18 and 55 who were convicted of property crimes and are thought to have a moderate to very high likelihood of re-offending. The target group includes drug offenders and inmates whose substance abuse played a role in their crime.

Property crimes accounted for 80 percent of all crimes committed in Nevada in 2014.

“It makes sense to begin focusing our evidence-based programming on those offenders who commit the majority of crimes in order to have the most significant impact on public safety,” Dzurenda said in a statement.

Part of the plan is to develop a data management system that allows the Department of Corrections to share information more easily between agencies.

Nevada is also starting a partnership in 2017 with the New York-based Vera Institute, which runs a Safe Alternatives to Segregation Initiative. The institute has a \$2.2 million federal grant to work with states over 21 months and help them reduce the use of solitary confinement.

The new initiatives come after the department changed its mission statement earlier this year. Its new goal is to incorporate “proven rehabilitation initiatives that prepare individuals for successful reintegration into our communities.”

“In the past it was just supervising and watching offenders assigned to us by the court,” Dzurenda said.

Gov. Brian Sandoval, who chairs the Board of Examiners that approved the grant-related spending, applauded the new direction.

“I think this is extraordinary,” he said at the meeting. “It

makes for a safer community but it also allows those individuals to have a second chance.”

Dozens evacuated from Heavenly chairlift



Comet chair at Heavenly is popular with skiers on the Nevada side. Photo Copyright 2017 Carolyn E. Wright

By Kathryn Reed

No one was injured New Year's Day when the entire Comet Express chairlift at Heavenly Mountain Resort had to be evacuated.

It came to a stop in the late morning because of mechanical problems.

“Heavenly lift maintenance personnel are currently assessing the mechanical issue and stoppage, and will continue to work in conjunction with state and regulatory agencies until all issues are resolved,” Coop Cooper told *Lake Tahoe News* in a prepared statement.

It is not known when the lift, which is one of the more popular chairs on the Nevada side, will resume operations.

A witness said it appeared to be an orderly evacuation of the lift, with no one seeming to panic. Heavenly did not release how many people were on the chairlift when it stopped.

While this chair appeared to have people in every seat, overall the mountain was not very crowded on New Year’s Day.

Per the resort’s agreement with the U.S. Forest Service, Heavenly’s personnel must be able to handle such an evacuation on their own. And that’s just what happened on Sunday. No outside agencies were involved with the rescue.

“Between each pole they seemed to have a separate team of about three people. They looped a rope and some sort of harness, I’ll call it a T-bar,” Steve Haerr of South Lake Tahoe told *Lake Tahoe News*.

He and family members watched as ski patrollers helped skiers and snowboarders to the ground. The skiers put a rope across their chest and sat on what looked like a T-bar.

The detachable quad chairlift is 20 to 40 feet off the ground. When it was installed in 1988, Comet was the resort’s first high-speed lift.

Calif. enacts stricter phone-driving rules

By Tony Bizjak, Sacramento Bee

Starting today, drivers no longer will be allowed to hold their cellphones in their hands for any reason, including using any of a phone's apps, such as music playlists.

"The whole idea is you don't have the phone in your hand, period," said Assemblyman Bill Quirk, D-Hayward, author of the new law, which he says should make it easier for officers to stop and cite drivers for illegal phone use.

Quirk's bill, AB1785, plugged what safety officials called a major loophole in the state's groundbreaking hands-free cellphone laws. Those laws ban talking and texting on handheld phones while driving. But any other handheld use of a phone, such as shooting videos or scanning Facebook, has been technically legal.

Under the new law, drivers can still use their cellphones if they do it hands-free, which often means voice activated and operated.

Read the whole story

6 Round Hill residents displaced by NYE fire



A duplex in Round Hill is destroyed by fire on Dec. 31.

Photo/Provided

Two dogs and a cat died New Year's Eve in a residential fire in Round Hill.

Tahoe Douglas firefighters arrived at about 8pm Dec. 31 to a duplex on McFall Way that was engulfed in flames. No people were inside the side that was burning.

The neighbors on the adjoining unit smelled smoke, saw the flames and then called 911.

Crews were able to stop the flames from spreading. It took about 20 minutes to knock down the fire.

"The exterior is standing. Basically it is just a shell," Eric Guevin with Tahoe Douglas fire told *Lake Tahoe News*.

One unit was completely destroyed by the fire, while smoke, water and fire ruined the other side.

The two families consisting of six people – all full-time

residents – are being helped by Red Cross.

The cause of the fire is under investigation.

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*

End of an era for Sens. Boxer, Feinstein

By Sarah D. Wire, Tribune Washington Bureau

In 1992, Dianne Feinstein and Barbara Boxer pitched themselves to California voters as the dynamic duo, as “Thelma and Louise,” as “Cagney and Lacey.”

They were trying to persuade voters to do something no state had ever done: Elect two women to represent them in the U.S. Senate.

Feinstein, a former mayor of San Francisco, was a consensus builder willing to buck her own party at times to reach a compromise. Boxer, who served 10 years in the House before coming to the Senate, was a bit of a flamethrower, more rigidly ideological and staunchly devoted to the environment and women’s health care.

The 76-year-old Boxer is retiring in January, leaving behind a 24-year working relationship with Feinstein that was by all appearances in sync until its last days, when an argument over water policy played out in public.

Starting Jan. 3, Feinstein will have a new partner in Democrat Kamala Harris, who has a blend of Boxer’s progressive ideology and Feinstein’s pragmatism.

Read the whole story

Nev. to test elementary school water for lead

In the wake of national issues involving lead in drinking water, the Nevada Division of Environmental Protection secured U.S. Environmental Protection Agency grant funding to begin a voluntary testing program for Nevada elementary schools.

The money will cover laboratory analytical costs to initiate drinking water sampling in all 408 Nevada public schools, including public charter schools, with a kindergarten or pre-K program.

If a water fountain or old culinary fixture is contributing lead to school drinking water, the grant also provides money for replacement of fixtures until the funds are depleted.

Gaming lobbyists happy with new IRS rules

By Thomas Moore, Las Vegas Sun

Gaming lobbyists claimed a “big win” Thursday after the IRS released new rules about how slot winnings should be reported.

“(The) final IRS regulation is a big win not only for gaming companies and millions of casino visitors, but also for state and local governments who would have received fewer gaming tax dollars,” American Gaming Association President and CEO Geoff Freeman said.

The rules, as they were proposed last year, would have meant significant changes for people winning slot jackpots. According to the AGA, the tax regulations would be very difficult and costly for casinos to apply.

Read the whole story