

Tahoe trip part of reason Stanford band silenced

By Jenna Lyons, San Francisco Chronicle

Stanford University marching band has played its last tune for the rest of the school year.

University leadership temporarily suspended all activities of the ensemble on and off campus from Friday through spring 2017, citing “constant and repeated violations of policy” suggesting a “systemic cultural problem.”

A Dec. 1 review from the panel found that the band broke alcohol rules at gatherings and used band funds to rent a cabin at Lake Tahoe, violating the travel ban, according to a letter to band leadership from Greg Boardman, vice provost for student affairs.

Read the whole story

Wet start to season puts dent in Calif. drought

By Ellen Garrison, Sacramento Bee

October was wet, November dry. And December? The soft but steady rains this weekend were enough to push the Sacramento region to 155 percent of normal precipitation for the season.

And there's more to come. After a break between storms, wet weather is expected to return Tuesday, according to the

National Weather Service. The wet system should linger over the region through Thursday, dropping 2 to three 3 of rain in Sacramento and 5 to 8 inches of rain and snow in the Sierra.

So what does that mean for California's drought, now entering a sixth year? While Northern California has seen a wet start to winter, the situation is more complicated across the state. Central and Southern California continue to experience unusually dry conditions. And even in the north state, it's not clear how the rest of the rainy season will shape up.

Still, the early-season rains are making a dent. A year ago, the U.S. Drought Monitor listed all four counties in the Sacramento region as being in "exceptional drought," the worst classification. This year, the drought monitor's weekly report shows conditions in Sacramento and Yolo counties have been upgraded two categories to "severe drought," while El Dorado County is another step up in "moderate drought," and parts of Placer are listed as just "abnormally dry" – the least severe category.

Read the whole story

Historic Rainbow Lodge drying out

By Sara Zendehnam, Fox 40

SODA SPRINGS – In the 40 degree weather, the cool breeze of fans work to dry out the Rainbow Lodge basement in Soda Springs.

The pressure of South Yuba River's heavy floodwaters Saturday

was too much for the lodge's stone foundation. Water seeped its way through the basement. Parts were under five inches of water.

"I wasn't scared, it was more 'oh my goodness, what area we going to do now?'" said general manager Randy Kure.

Read the whole story

Kirkwood Mountain Resort, state water board reach settlement in contamination case



A slope at the parking lot of Kirkwood's cross country ski area is covered with asphalt grindings that were blown there during snow removal operations. Photo/Provided

By Susan Wood

Vail Resorts' Alpine-Amador county ski resort known for its deep snow got out of deep trouble with the state water board this ski season by reaching a tentative settlement to clean up the parking areas adjoining Kirkwood Creek and wetlands. The environmental agency had found asphalt grindings were contaminating sensitive zones.

Upon a tip, the Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board found Kirkwood Mountain Resort staff spread the petroleum-based grindings measuring between 2- and 4-inches in diameter in the Timber Creek, Nordic Center and Red Cliffs areas. Specifically, the resort used the gravelly mixture in the parking lots at chairs 7 and 9 (TC Express and Funny Bunny, respectively) and the Red Cliffs Day Lodge, as well as

in nearby maintenance yards.

In October, Vail was facing a \$4.44 million fine in civil liabilities for a violation of the Federal Clean Water Act and the California Water Code. The practices and subsequent legal wrangling date back to the 2014-15 season.

The California Department of Fish and Wildlife described one of the wetlands and creek areas as “a black snow field.” The agency informed *Lake Tahoe News* that the asphalt-laced snow removal resulted in no fish kill in the creek.

The two parties reached a preliminary agreement a few weeks ago after the board staff made a Nov. 9 site visit and determined the ski area was implementing best management practices in its restoration efforts.



This area has been cleaned-up and is ready for restoration. Kirkwood is proposing to use this area for snow storage. The water board and CDFW staff have concerns based on its

proximity to the meadow. Photo/Provided

Roughly 700 cubic yards of debris were collected in the off-season restoration, which equates to 70 loads in a standard dump truck, water board Assistant Executive Officer Andrew Altevogt reported.

"They've done as much as they can do this year," Altevogt told *LTN* on a conference call with the water board's environmental project manager Wendy Wyels. His main concern lies in the surface and ground water quality. The duo has been compiling reams of documents related to the contaminants pulled from the California Department of Transportation's resurfacing piles from Highway 88.

"We know (Kirkwood has) taken asphalt grindings for multiple years in the cross country areas," Wyels added.

The site visit produced an additional finding of asphalt grindings discharged into the creek near Chair 1 "Snowkirk" and "evidence of erosion was observed in the drainage between the lower Red Cliffs parking lot on the east side of Kirkwood Meadows Drive," a report written by water resource control engineer Mike Fischer stated. "Board staff recommended that the drainage be stabilized."

Overall though, the clean-up work plan appears headed in the right direction.

One example: a barrier made of concrete bin blocks was installed on the north end of the parking lot to block access and snow storage in the area closest to the meadow.

Vail brought in San Francisco-based Kennedy/Jenks Consultants to oversee the cleanup operation. It noted Kirkwood staff performed removal of the grindings by hand in the meadow – a mitigation that took hours to complete.

A full assessment of the ongoing efforts will be made next

spring because the ski season bore down on work crews this year.



In August the meadow at Kirkwood was still covered with soil. Photo/Provided

For one, crews will need to return to the maintenance yard across from the Timber Creek beginners area identified as Site 4C.

The work seems hardly over, but the snow removal practices of the past appear to be.

Further mitigation calls for Kirkwood staff to identify adequate alternative snow storage areas and procedures. In a memo addressed to the board and obtained by *LTN*, Kirkwood stated it plans to remove snow “at least 35 feet from wetlands and naturally functioning riparian vegetation areas,” and measures will be made during snow removal “to prevent asphalt grindings and other sediment from entering surface waterways

and groundwater.”

The Vail-hired consultant piled on further concessions made or those needing to be made. Beyond the physical work, staff training on how to handle snow removal near wetlands is expected to be implemented.

The work as planned will continue into 2017.

“Since the drainage culvert at Site 4C appears to be a relic from past drainage configurations, the culvert system is essentially plugged, and given the time constraints leading up to the impending winter season, Vail Resorts does not intend to disturb the existing drainage structure at Site 4C and will cover the drainage system to restore grade in the area. Backfill material will be sourced from the stockpiles of material removed from Sites 1 through 4. The removal process has generated stockpiles comprised of a mixture of varying degrees of asphalt and soil materials. Stockpile material largely comprised of soil, with only a small proportion of asphalt grindings will be used to backfill the culvert at Site 4C,” Kennedy/Jenks supervising engineer Rick Teczon wrote in an email to involved parties.

The legal issue serves as a black eye of sorts for a ski resort giant that prides itself on eco-friendly business practices.

Part of the water quality report indicated Kirkwood used the asphalt grindings for traction in its parking lots.

But when asked why the ski area used petroleum-based materials there, Kirkwood spokesman Coop Cooper told *Lake Tahoe News*, “Grindings are a commonly used material for dust mitigation.”

When asked for a further explanation, he did not respond to *LTN*.

Kirkwood would also not respond to questions about the

settlement.

Cooper did explain what measures the ski resort was making to alleviate future contamination.

“Since receiving notice of this issue on May 6, 2016, we have worked closely with the Central Valley Regional Water Quality Board and other agencies to implement immediate remediation actions that we believe have contained any environment concerns,” he shared in an email. “It’s important to note that the samplings the agencies asked us to conduct did not demonstrate any impact on groundwater.”

Cooper added that Kirkwood – which ushered in new General Manager Doug Pierini last summer – and its parent company “take seriously our role in responsibly stewarding the environment and the public land in which we are entrusted.”

Crews recover body of skier at Mt. Rose

Search crews on Sunday recovered the body of a skier who died at Mt. Rose ski resort.

This is the first fatality of the season at a Tahoe area resort.

The name of the victim has not been released pending notification of next of kin.

Two men in their 60s went skiing at the resort on Dec. 10. They were in a closed area. The chutes had not opened and were only accessible by hiking there. One went in and the other called 911 after seeing his buddy get covered by an avalanche.

The victim was found in 10 feet of snow on Dec. 11.

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*

Heroin deaths in the U.S. surpass gun homicides

By Associated Press

More than 50,000 Americans died from drug overdoses last year, the most ever.

The disastrous tally has been pushed to new heights by soaring abuse of heroin and prescription painkillers, a class of drugs known as opioids.

Heroin deaths rose 23 percent in one year, to 12,989, slightly higher than the number of gun homicides, according to government data released Thursday.

Deaths from synthetic opioids, including illicit fentanyl, rose 73 percent to 9,580. And prescription painkillers took the highest toll, but posted the smallest increase. Abuse of drugs like Oxycontin and Vicodin killed 17,536, an increase of 4 percent.

“I don’t think we’ve ever seen anything like this. Certainly not in modern times,” said Robert Anderson, who oversees death statistics at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The new numbers were part of the agency’s annual tally of deaths and death rates in 2015.

Overall, overdose deaths rose 11 percent last year, to 52,404.

By comparison, the number of people who died in car crashes was 37,757, an increase of 12 percent. Gun deaths, including homicides and suicides, totaled 36,252, up 7 percent.

As part of its annual report the CDC also found that rates for 8 of the 10 leading causes of death rose last year, causing the nation's life expectancy to go down for the first time in more than 20 years. Drug overdoses were a significant factor, but an unexpected increase in the death rate from heart disease, the nation's No. 1 killer, was another major reason.

Sierra opening store in South Lake Tahoe

By Kathryn Reed

Sierra-at-Tahoe is expanding its footprint.

The ski resort close to Echo Summit is about to have a storefront in South Lake Tahoe. It will be two doors down from Big 5 in what is now called The Crossings shopping center at the Y.

"Hours of operation have not been determined yet. With that being said, the store its likely to operate into the evening to accommodate guests arriving to Tahoe," Thea Hardy, spokeswoman for the resort, told *Lake Tahoe News*. "Information, reservations, ticket fulfillment and retail options will be available to them."

The plan is open before the holidays.

Buying tickets online is the norm now because it's usually the least expensive option. Going to the store in town means not

having to wait in a line to redeem them at the resort.

Today when people call the resort after hours there is no one to take that call. That all changes when the storefront opens.

There will also be a retail component to the space. Mostly it will be outerwear and accessories – not equipment. Hardy, though, stressed the merchandise will not compete with Big 5 in terms of type of apparel available. Plus, there will be a slew of Sierra logo items for sale.

During the non-ski periods resort staff will be talking up Sierra as a wedding venue, and still selling clothing and other stuff.

The Crossings is in the midst of a seven-figure renovation that includes redesigned retail areas, at least one restaurant and a connection to area bike paths.

It may be legal, but pot use can still get you fired

By Chris Kudialis, Las Vegas Sun

Although passage of Question 2 will make recreational marijuana use legal for people 21 and older in Nevada as of Jan. 1, employees can be fired for testing positive for the drug, state lawmakers said.

Sen. Tick Segerblom says that while he believes the testing practice isn't always fair, preventing impairment in the workplace is important. Segerblom spearheaded 2013 legislation to establish the state's framework for medical marijuana dispensaries.

A staunch advocate of Question 2, he cited jobs in construction and others that involve operating motor vehicles and heavy machinery as examples of work in which a positive marijuana test may warrant firing. But he distinguished between smoking on the job and using marijuana days before a potential test – both of which can produce positive results.

Read the whole story

Pedestrian dies after being struck by vehicle

A 32-year-old man died Saturday night after being struck by a vehicle on Highway 50 in South Lake Tahoe.

The name of the victim is being withheld until next of kin are notified. Police say he has ties to South Lake Tahoe and Idaho.

The accident occurred just before 11:30pm Dec. 10 near the Town and Country Center.

Peng Shao, 33, of San Jose was driving west in the right lane when the victim ran in front of him. Shao was going between 35 and 40 mph. He immediately stopped his vehicle to check on the welfare of the pedestrian.

The victim was running north and was not in a crosswalk. There is a crosswalk about 100 yards from the scene of the accident.

The pedestrian was taken to Barton Memorial Hospital where he underwent surgery and died.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

EDC in quagmire over development fees

By Dawn Hodson, Mountain Democrat

El Dorado Hills property owners who paid the Public Safety Development Impact Fee will have to wait a bit longer for promised refunds.

At Tuesday's El Dorado County Board of Supervisors meeting Chief Administrative Officer Don Ashton and County Counsel Mike Ciccozzi told the board refunds will be delayed as the county recently received a claim for payment from an attorney who's representing an El Dorado Hills couple that sued the county and several special districts, alleging that the entities were in violation of the California Mitigation Fee Act.

Ashton and Ciccozzi said they need time to evaluate the claim before making further recommendations.

El Dorado County Auditor Joe Harn said, "We wouldn't have to pay any attorney's fee if we had just followed the law."

Read the whole story