

California water conservation slips again

By Dale Kasler and Phillip Reese, Sacramento Bee

Urban Californians used about 1.8 percent more water in October compared with a year earlier, state officials said Tuesday. It marked the fourth straight month in which conservation has slipped following the state's decision to relax drought mandates.

The State Water Resources Control Board said, however, that conservation was better in October than in September, and that it was largely pleased with the efforts Californians were making.

"Californians' continued commitment to conservation shows they don't take water for granted anymore," said board Chairwoman Felicia Marcus in a prepared statement.

Read the whole story

Placer supes green light area plan, TC Lodge

By Kathryn Reed

KINGS BEACH — Tahoe City is one step closer to getting its first new lodging for tourists in decades.

The Placer County Board of Supervisors voted 5-0 on Dec. 6 to approve the Tahoe Basin Area Plan and the Tahoe City Lodge.

Most of the discussion Tuesday centered on Tahoe City and the lodge in particular. This rankled some people because the area plan affects all areas of Placer County in the basin. About one-third of the lake is in the basin.

When the process started a couple years ago people voiced their concern about having the lodge project being studied under the auspices of the creation of an environment impact report for the area plan. Based on Tuesday's testimony from staff, the electeds and public, it was obvious the lodge was driving the document's approval.

Some wonder if the document would have been analyzed to a deeper level if the project that the powers that be wanted had not been part of the equation.

The vote Tuesday was consistent with what the North Tahoe Regional Advisory Council and Placer County Planning Commission said. Both of those bodies approved the area plan and lodge project in November. The Tahoe Regional Planning Agency Governing Board will take up the area plan and lodge on Jan. 25, which will be the last vote.

Much of the public agreed with the policymakers. About 50 people were at Tuesday's meeting at the North Tahoe Event Center, with 23 of them testifying.



An artist's rendering of the proposed Tahoe City Lodge.

Crystal Jacobsen, principal planner with the county, went over highlights of the plan and project, as well as changes since the draft and final environmental documents came out.

She acknowledged that traffic, whether its vehicle miles traveled or level of service, is dismal now. The lodge project impacts are deemed "significant and unavoidable."

"When are we going to deal with these issues?" Jennifer Quashnick with Friends of the West Shore asked.

That's a question that no governing body has been willing to answer no matter what project comes before them. Various entities keep approving development without an answer to deal with congestion affecting the immediate project on the table, let alone the bigger cumulative effect of growth in the basin and Truckee.

This in turn impacts greenhouse gas emissions.

Samir Tuma, the lodge developer, said one way he will be helping to reduce VMT is by giving bus passes to employees and providing a shower to those who bike to work. Plus, he mentioned how there is a bus stop right out front.

The lodge will include 78 condos and 40 traditional hotel rooms. The four-story structure that will front Highway 28 will have a rooftop restaurant.

Tuma said there will be an infusion of \$43.4 million into the community during construction, with \$8.6 million annually coming in via taxes, jobs and other revenue. It will be built at a LEED level, with green business practices implemented.

A representative from the League to Save Lake Tahoe said this is first time in 10 years the conservation group has backed a redevelopment project. The Tahoe City Downtown Association said this is the first project this group has supported.

A bonus to the community is that the Tahoe City Golf Course clubhouse will be rebuilt by Tuma to include a conference center on the second floor.

Supervisor Kirk Uhler was most interested in how the area plan will allow second units to help address the housing crunch in the area. He believes what is proposed is too restrictive and might not be economically feasible with the deed restriction. He said people can pay market rate, it's just that the housing stock is limited.

The Placer County plan calls for these second units to only be used for residents and not as tourist units. They would be deed restricted for affordability for 55 years. Obstacles, though, include needing to have a development right and residential allocation to build one. Combined those can cost about \$20,000.

The Placer plan would require the TRPA to make an exemption to current policy.

Two California laws take effect Jan. 1 to make it easier to convert illegal granny units into legal ones.

Several people who spoke applauded the efforts to make any inroads in creating affordable housing or at least implementing policy to make that a possibility.

Supervisor Jennifer Montgomery in large part agreed with Uhler.

She acknowledged not everyone got what they wanted. But she said the plan and lodge will be better for the environment, the economy and the social fabric.

LTCC hires president from within



Jeff DeFranco in January will become Lake Tahoe Community College's fifth president. Photo/Kathryn Reed

By Kathryn Reed

Jeff DeFranco will become Lake Tahoe Community College's fifth president effective Jan. 3.

He was greeted with applause and a standing ovation from the nearly 20 people at the board meeting after the announcement was made Tuesday night.

The board of trustees on Dec. 6 unanimously approved the hire. DeFranco has been the vice president of Administrative Services at the South Lake Tahoe institution since summer 2012. His contract goes to June 30, 2019. He will be making \$165,000 a year.

"I'm honored and humbled by this opportunity," DeFranco said. He spent about five minutes talking about what this job will mean to him, his immediate plans, thanking the board, those in the audience and all who work at the college.

A special thanks went to outgoing **President Kindred Murillo** for taking a chance on him. Prior to coming to LTCC, DeFranco was the director of communications and facilities at Springfield Public Schools in Oregon. The two will be working together through January, at which time Murillo will leave to be president of a community college in Southern California.

DeFranco, 39, also acknowledged the administrative team Murillo assembled, giving them all kudos for their effectiveness.

"Jeff is one of those people who will not fail," Murillo told *Lake Tahoe News*. "He exceeded my expectations in every sense."

It was while DeFranco was an undergraduate at CSU Chico that he figured out one day he wanted to be a college president. He was on the associated student body board and got a glimpse into the inner workings of higher education.

"I knew how much that experience changed me and I knew my ultimate goal was to be a college president one day," DeFranco

told *Lake Tahoe News*. “A number of steps led me to this.”

However, he also knew it wasn’t just any college presidency that he would want. His grandfather built a cabin in Meyers in the 1960s. Tahoe has been a part of his life since he was a boy.

But it wasn’t until 2010 that he discovered South Lake Tahoe had a community college – and that was a fluke. He went to get a permit that December to cut a Christmas tree. The U.S. Forest Service office is on College Way. That’s how he discovered LTCC. Less than two years later he was working at LTCC.

“I wanted *this* presidency,” DeFranco stressed.

One of most important jobs in his first year to will be to fill his current position.

“My goal is to bring in somebody who is better at the job than I am,” DeFranco said.

He is on a state board for people who have similar jobs as his so he has an insider’s knowledge about potential candidates working in California.

DeFranco at the meeting said some of things he will be working on when his job title changes include continuing student access and success, working on accreditation, ensuring the university center thrives, and facilitating the bond.

Drought legislation creates

friction between Feinstein, Boxer

By Sarah D. Wire and Bettina Boxall, Los Angeles Times

House Republican leaders and California's senior senator announced Monday a new attempt to pass legislation that would increase water deliveries to San Joaquin Valley agribusiness and Southern California.

The 90-page proposal was added to a water infrastructure bill that Congress is expected to vote on this week before adjourning for the rest of the year.

The deal sets Sen. Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif., on a collision course with her colleague, Sen. Barbara Boxer, D-Calif., who blasted the proposal as a poison pill and vowed to do everything she could to stop it, including halting all action in the Senate unless it is removed.

Read the whole story

Education topics will tug hard on Nev. purse strings

By Amelia Pak-Harvey, Las Vegas Review-Journal

Combine educational issues with Nevada's upcoming legislative session and you've got a scene straight from the movie "Jerry Maguire": Show me the money.

When legislators convene in February, they'll have a number of

topics tugging at the state's purse strings.

First, they've got to get an estimated \$400 million deficit squared away.

Read the whole story

Murillo accepts SoCal college presidency

Kindred Murillo, who has been president of Lake Tahoe Community College since 2011, is moving on to Southwestern Community College in Chula Vista.



Kindred
Murillo

Murillo gave her notice to the local board nearly a year ago, with the intent to leave in February 2017. Since that time she has been looking at various presidency and chancellor positions.

Moving to Southern California gets her closer to family.

She will be president of a college that has about 20,000 students a semester, and offers more than 320 associate degree and certificate options. This is a student population that is

about five times larger than LTCC.

"I am looking forward to working with the students, faculty, staff, leadership and governing board at Southwestern College. They are a leader in the state in the area of diversity and equity, two places where I believe community colleges can have the most impact on the State of California's and the nation's socioeconomic success," Murillo told *Lake Tahoe News*.

A final vote by the SCC board is scheduled for Dec. 14; the contract is expected to be confirmed then as well.

She will be leaving LTCC at the end of January.

At the Dec. 6 board meeting, through tears she said, "I just love you guys. It's been the best 5 1/2 years of my life – other than raising my children."

She received a standing ovation from the nearly packed room.

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*

Nev. gun check law could affect suicide prevention

By Wesley Juhl, Las Vegas Review-Journal

If a loved one is suffering from suicidal thoughts, one of the first things to do is remove guns from the home.

But in states across the U.S., universal background check laws – like the one that just passed in Nevada – and restrictions on temporary gun transfers can be an obstacle to getting guns out.

A November report from the Johns Hopkins Center for Gun Policy and Research examined universal background check laws around the U.S. to see how they measure up in terms of suicide prevention.

Read the whole story

Measure T's future not decided

By Kathryn Reed

A decision about whether Measure T will stand will not be decided until the end of January at the earliest.

A hearing on Dec. 5 in Placerville before El Dorado County Superior Court Judge Jim Wagoner lasted about 15 minutes. He set a briefing schedule for the parties and agreed to let Bruce Grego file a motion to intervene.

The case was brought this summer by Jason Collin, who will take the oath of office to be on South Lake Tahoe City Council in eight days, to stop Measure T from getting on the November ballot. He lost that attempt, but the judge said he would determine the validity of the measure if it passed. It did pass.

What proponents of Measure T were seeking was the ability down the road to have the right to vote on a preferred route for the loop road and not leave it up to the City Council. The loop road would reroute Highway 50 behind Harrah's and MontBleu and turn the current highway into a city-county street.

Since the election Collin's attorney has dropped everyone from the lawsuit except the city.

Grego with Laurel Ames and the late Bill Crawford were the trio who got Measure T on the ballot.

"I said from what I hear and see the city of South Lake Tahoe will not defend this. This is why we need to intervene; it's why we need someone to champion this on behalf of the public," Grego told *Lake Tahoe News*. If the judge does not grant his motion to intervene, Grego will not have a right to voice his opinion at future hearings.

City Attorney Tom Watson said there is a state Supreme Court case that says at this juncture, because the voters have spoken, there are no individual rights. He believes that the case now being Collin v. South Lake Tahoe is how it should be.

The City Council at its Dec. 13 meeting will have a closed session item about this lawsuit. At that time Watson will be seeking direction from the four who can partake in the discussion.

"I need the judge to say what the initiative means and stay out of trouble," Watson told *Lake Tahoe News*. "I could see someone claiming that 'you approved a low income housing project and in doing so you supported the loop road because you supported low income housing.' I don't want the council to be in that position."

Collin's attorney at the Monday hearing made a motion for a preliminary injunction of the enforcement of Measure T. The judge said to file a brief.

Collin did not return a phone call.

The next hearing is set for Jan. 27.

2 people arrested after Truckee BofA robbed

Two people have been arrested in connection with the Dec. 3 robbery at the Bank of America in Truckee.

The suspect entered the bank on Donner Pass Road at about 10am Saturday, displayed a handgun and ordered employees to place an undisclosed amount of money in a bag, according to officers.

Working with the FBI, Truckee detectives said they determined bank employee Grant Schaeffer, 20, was in on the heist. The Reno resident was arrested that day on felony robbery and conspiracy charges.

On Dec. 5, Alex Frasier, 19, of Reno was located in Redding. The alleged robber faces the same charges.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Tahoe funding restored to federal water act

By Kathryn Reed

The Lake Tahoe Restoration Act, once thought unable to be approved by Congress this session, has been resurrected.

It was announced Monday that it is now part of the final bicameral Water Resources Development Act (WRDA), titled the Water Infrastructure Improvements for the Nation Act.

In October, it had been removed from the House version of the WRDA.

The House and Senate still need to vote on it, and the president must sign the legislation.

“This is a monumental step in the legislative process for the Tahoe basin. After fighting for years to refocus federal policy on the twenty-first century threats to the Lake, we have ensured important work that preserves the Jewel of the Sierra for future generations will advance. This was a total team effort by both the Nevada and California delegations which required bicameral and bipartisan support,” Sen. Dean Heller, R-Nev., said in a statement.

He was the lead sponsor on the legislation.

The bill would deliver \$415 million to the Lake Tahoe Basin across seven years. The money would be used for wildfire prevention, the environmental improvement program, invasive species management, stormwater projects, Lahontan cutthroat trout recover, and other projects.

“This is great news for Lake Tahoe. TRPA is excited to see such strong and widespread bipartisan support for this comprehensive legislation that is so important for continued environmental conservation and restoration work at Lake Tahoe, one of America’s natural treasures,” Tom Lotshaw with TRPA told *Lake Tahoe News*.

The original Lake Tahoe Restoration Act was passed by Congress in 2000, three years after President Bill Clinton was here for the initial Lake Tahoe Environmental Summit. The bill brought \$300 million in federal money to the basin in 10 years.

Since the 1997 summit more than \$2 billion has been spent in the basin on what officials call environmental projects. This is a combination of federal, state, local and private dollars.

With the U.S. government owning about 80 percent of the land in the basin, that has always been one of the leading arguments that the feds should have a major role in the upkeep of the area.