

Emerald Fire aftermath plagues area residents

Updated Oct. 28, 6:53pm: Power has been restored to Spring Creek. However, power will off Nov. 2 adn Nov. 3 from 8am-5pm to make final repairs.

By Kathryn Reed

The 137 cabins in Spring Creek tract are still without power because of the Emerald Fire. Water is also an issue.

Liberty Utilities is hoping the lights will be back on by Nov. 4 at the latest. Multiple poles were reduced to ash when a fire swept through this area of the South Shore on Oct. 14. Replacement poles were flown in last Saturday.

"We are scheduled to pull wire in this week, but we are worried about the weather if the helicopter can fly," Randy Kelly with Liberty told *Lake Tahoe News*.

While the cabins are on U.S. Forest Service land, the cabin owners are responsible for their own water.

Spring Creek Tract Association water manager Dave Braheny did not respond to an email inquiry from *Lake Tahoe News*.



The Emerald Fire singed nearly 200 acres on the South Shore. Photo/LTN

A generator is being used to access the water from the old tank. This is causing some residents to have water pressure issues. (A few people use the cabins year-round, while most of the 176 cabins are used seasonally. Legally, the cabins cannot be a primary residence.)

“The water supply for the Emerald Fire came from the hydrant system at Spring Creek,” Lisa Herron with the Forest Service told *Lake Tahoe News*. “According to our fire managers, there were no issues with water flow during the Emerald Fire.” In some areas the fire burned on both sides of Highway 89.

Spring Creek has 12 fire hydrants and more than three miles of 8-inch diameter and smaller distribution pipe. There is also a new 80,000-gallon water tank, but that water cannot be used for human consumption.

Residents started the water tank replacement project in 2008, with it being erected in 2015.

“We had to add a few more braces, anchors to the tank because earthquake codes changed,” Jay Tripathi told *Lake Tahoe News*. He has a cabin there and used to be on the community’s board of directors. “The interior of the tank got compromised so we

had to seal it up.”

This meant draining, cleaning, sealing and refilling.

When the fire hit, the housing tract was close to being at the end of the waiting period for the water in the new tank to have settled and for tests to be taken to determine if it is potable. That is why residents are relying on the old tank for drinking water.

Driving through the main area of the housing tract the fire is not evident – just a major thinning project.

“I think all the fire folks did a phenomenal job of keeping us in the loop. It was scary,” Tripathi said. “If it hadn’t rained, I think it would have gone through our tract.”

While CalFire has yet to release an official cause of the fire, evidence points to electrical wires during high winds sparking the wildland fire.

Younger, diverse voters reshaping Calif. politics

By Michael R. Blood, AP

Come Election Day, California could legalize pot. Its new U.S. senator will be black or Hispanic – a first for the state. And voters could end the death penalty and revive bilingual education in schools.

The outcome of voting on Nov. 8 is likely to reflect long-term trends that have seen the nation’s most populous state become increasingly diverse and firmly Democratic in its politics.

A new wave of voters – many young, Hispanic or both – are poised to contribute to generational, demographic and cultural shifts that are reshaping California. Over half of new voter registrations this year are millennials – younger people who tend to be more liberal than older Californians.

The election also could strengthen the argument that California is becoming a one-party state. Most of the new voters are registering as Democrats or independents. And the number of voters aligned with no party is on track to eclipse Republicans, whose registration numbers are in freefall.

A key indicator of the change is the race to replace U.S. Sen. Barbara Boxer, who was first elected in 1992. The contest is a matchup between two Democratic women, Attorney General Kamala Harris, whose father is black and mother is from India, and Rep. Loretta Sanchez, the daughter of Mexican immigrants.

“I think that says a lot about where we are moving,” said political scientist Larry Gerston, professor emeritus at California State University, San Jose.

In addition, policies from past decades, when the state electorate was overwhelmingly white, could be recast or reversed. Voters are being asked to repeal the death penalty, which was reinstated in the 1970s but has not been carried out since 2006.

They could also dial back a 1998 voter-passed law that largely dismantled bilingual education at a time when illegal immigration was surging.

Through mid-October, more than 4 million people registered, or reregistered, to vote in California. Half signed up as Democrats, a meager 19 percent as Republicans and the rest primarily as independents, according to an analysis by nonpartisan research firm Political Data Inc.

Millennials represented over half of the new registrations.

Latino registration, barely out of single digits a generation ago, represented nearly 30 percent of new voters, the data showed.

Democratic pollster Ben Tulchin, who worked for Bernie Sanders in the presidential campaign, said the influence of the new voters is being felt in competitive congressional races, where Republicans in a handful of once-safe districts are being threatened.

For Republicans, the rising influence of Hispanic voters is especially troubling in a year when their presidential nominee is Donald Trump, who has vowed to deport millions of people living in the country illegally.

The GOP's troubles with Hispanic voters in California can be traced to 1994, when voters, with encouragement from Republican Gov. Pete Wilson, approved Proposition 187, which prohibited immigrants in the country illegally from receiving public health care, education or other social services.

The law was overturned, but it left lingering resentment with many Hispanics at a time when the Latino population was becoming increasingly important in elections. It's also played a role in the prominent Democratic tilt to a state that sent Republicans Ronald Reagan and Richard Nixon to the White House but now doesn't have a single Republican elected to a statewide office.

State figures released earlier this month showed the percentage of voters registered as Democrats had increased by 2 percentage points since the 2012 presidential election, while those aligned with the GOP dropped over 3 points. The share of independents, who tend to vote like Democrats, also increased.

The shift can be seen in places such as Riverside County, where Democrats now hold a thin registration edge in what once was Republican turf.

“You can track the progress Democrats have made in registration, and you can quantify the impact,” Tulchin said.

Republicans shuddered after the U.S. Senate primary in June. None of the party’s little-known candidates broke out of single digits in the vote count, allowing two Democrats to claim the two runoff spots in November, a first in the modern era.

In the late 1960s, most Californians wanted tougher laws against marijuana use or strict enforcement of the rules on the books. Over time, those views softened.

Pollsters say millennials are far more likely than other age groups to support passage of the proposal to legalize pot. Most Democrats and independents favor legalization, while Republicans are divided.

Nearly two decades ago, when the state was facing an influx of immigrants who entered the U.S. illegally and couldn’t speak English, Californians voted to dismantle most bilingual education programs in schools. Supporters said the initiative would help newcomers assimilate by forcing them to learn English.

This year, with scant visible opposition, voters are expected to repeal much of the law.

“California is always one of the leading indicators of social and demographic change, and this year seems to be a prime example,” said Darrell M. West, director of governance studies at The Brookings Institution and author of recently published “Megatrend,” which foresees rapid, dramatic political and social shifts in the 21st century.

Research could help predict 'flash droughts'

By Mallory Pickett, Forbes

Debasish PaiMazumder moved to Boulder, Colo., in the winter of 2012 to work as a climate scientist at the National Center for Atmospheric Research. PaiMazumder had spent the past three years in snowy Montreal, so he was pleasantly surprised to find winter in Boulder dry and warm. He was out hiking in shorts and a T-shirt in February, with no snow in sight.

But locals were quick to inform him that this was not a typical Boulder winter. Months later, this strange winter was followed by more exceptional weather: the "flash drought" of 2012-13 that started over the Rockies and went on to devastate agriculture in the Midwest, causing \$30 billion in damage. It was one of the costliest natural disasters in recent history, and no one saw it coming.

The sudden onset and relatively short duration made the 2012-2013 dry spell a "flash drought." Currently, scientists have no good way to predict these kinds of droughts, which can be devastating to farmers.

But in a paper published in Journal of Geophysical Research-Atmospheres this week, PaiMazumder reported a new method that could significantly increase forecasters ability to predict flash droughts. His idea was partly inspired by his warm, snow-free hikes in the winter of 2012.

Read the whole story

Most Nev. casinos post revenue increases

Lake Tahoe casinos helped the state post a revenue gain for September.

The Nevada Gaming Commission today released its figures showing the state took in nearly \$948.49 million, which is a 3.55 percent gain from September 2015.

On the South Shore the win was 2.27 percent higher than the previous year at \$21.7 million. The North Shore casinos did even better with a 6.37 percent year-over-year increase.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

No shortage of housing woes on North Shore, Truckee; solutions harder to identify



Placer County electeds hope an action plan comes out of the housing report. Photo/Linda Fine Conaboy

By Linda Fine Conaboy

KINGS BEACH – A study commissioned by the Placer County Board of Supervisors underscored what most people already know – housing is a problem.

Results from the Tahoe Truckee Housing Needs Assessment were presented to the board on Oct. 25.

Here are some of the statistics for the North Shore and Truckee areas:

- 80 percent of housing units are single-family homes
- 65 percent are vacant and used mostly for vacations
- Nearly half were built before 1979
- Median household income is \$67,000, but median home pricing is \$538,000 (2015 statistics)

- The maximum affordable home price for a family of four in a low-income bracket is \$235,000
- 76 percent of residents spend more than 30 percent of their income on housing (statistically, more than they can afford)
- The wait list for affordable housing is six months to 2 years
- To house the future workforce, 12,160 housing units will be needed
- Nearly 60 percent of employees commute to work
- Nearly 50 percent of residents commute outside the basin for work
- Nearly 50 percent of the region's residents sit between very low to moderate income levels.

It was in January 2015 that supervisors approved \$76,000, Placer County's share of the \$172,000 project cost, to develop a housing needs assessment in conjunction with Nevada County, Truckee and the Tahoe Truckee Community Foundation. TTCF was charged with preparing and presenting the housing needs assessment, and Bay Area Economics was hired to complete the study, prepare findings and make recommendations.

Stacy Caldwell, TTCF chief executive officer said, "This is hard stuff. We're not just talking about housing, we're talking about people."

She called the assessment a regional collaboration and a good opportunity to focus on next steps and solutions. Additionally, TTCF said on its website that the study represents all aspects of housing issues in the North Lake Tahoe region.

Caldwell said now that the facts have been gathered, the

community is looking at how to move forward. She said there is widespread community momentum, hopefully eliminating the possibility that yet another study will be left to gather dust on a shelf in someone's office.

"We need to move forward in a collaborative manner," she said, stating that the Community Foundation has established a \$10,000 housing fund to get the donation ball rolling.

She suggested to the board that permits that raise housing costs considerably could be deferred. "There's a desire for people to use their property to circumvent these barriers."

District 5 Supervisor Jennifer Montgomery said perhaps expensive fees could be waived or deferred. "But it's a challenge because of all the fees," she said. "It is also complicated by TRPA and their rules.

In an **Oct. 21 Lake Tahoe News opinion piece**, Joanne Marchetta, executive director of TRPA, expressed her concerns about the same topic, saying full-time rentals are scarce and often unaffordable.

In her piece, Marchetta said, "Affordable workplace housing is a complex, challenging issue here at Lake Tahoe and elsewhere. We are not alone in facing these issues and there's a renewed spirit today at Tahoe to tackle the challenge."

Additionally, Marchetta expressed a willingness to solve workforce problems. "There is no one silver bullet to solve these complex issues ... but by strengthening our collective will to work together on this important issue and be creative, we can make needed change happen."

For her part, Montgomery said, "I want to get all of the districts together to determine a solution. Let's take all of our resources to get something done. This just can't sit on a shelf."

“There are untapped resources,” Caldwell said. “Like HUD financing. We have baseline information now and we need to gather our resources together.”

Supervisor Kirk Uhler wondered how the town of Mammoth solved its housing problems, intimating that Lake Tahoe is not the only resort area to have reached this crisis.

Uhler also likes the idea of encouraging longer term rentals rather than seasonal. “If there is an inventory of short-term housing, what is it?” he asked. “Maybe people might want to rent their vacation homes to seasonal workers.” He proposed that older homes be rehabilitated and he likes the idea of turning larger homes into multiple housing units as well as freeing up homes that sit vacant.

Montgomery said she would like to see the Contractor’s Board and the Board of Realtors get involved in the conversation, a statement that cued representatives from both the Realtors and contractors’ boards to step forward to pledge their groups’ support.

Several other organizations and private citizens told their stories about housing and promised support.

Montgomery capped the meeting, saying, “We need to move from words to action and no longer have circular conversations. I would like to see more money for this problem. This is not unique to Placer County, it is nationwide. But we don’t want to create large pockets of low-income areas. We, as a community, must come together to support the project—quickly—in the next few months.”

Truckee wants free bus service during holidays

Truckee is working on having a free shuttle service in place during the December holidays.

Traffic is always a challenge between Christmas and New Year's Eve, often to the point of gridlock.

Town staff will be looking to create partnerships to make the shuttle a reality. It's estimated to cost at least \$40,000, but could reach \$70,000. It all depends on how many buses operate and how often.

Plus, an operator still needs to be found. The local service, Tahoe Area Regional Transit, does not have enough buses to operate this temporary service.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Study: Nevada worst state for mentally ill

By Lindsay Holmes, Huffington Post

Mental Health America recently released their comprehensive State of Mental Health Report, where it ranked how well each state handled mental health challenges, primarily through its citizens' access to care and the percentage of people with unmet needs.

And the results are pretty dismal.

Nevada fell last on the list, partly due to a majority of adult residents with mental illness not receiving treatment and a large shortage of care providers.

The rankings were based on 15 different criteria, including the total number of adults and children with a mental illness, how many mental health care professionals were available and the number of adults who were uninsured. Researchers gathered data from 2011 to 2014, which was the most up-to-date information, to reach their conclusion.

Read the whole story

2 Incline residents vie for state higher ed board

By Siobhan McAndrew, Reno Gazette-Journal

Carol Del Carlo and Sara LaFrance are vying for the District 9 spot on the Nevada System of Higher Education Board of Regents.

The Incline Village women both want the post that is part of 13-person board that oversees the state's public colleges including URN and Truckee Meadows Community College.

Del Carlo, 64, and LaFrance, 72, both have strong ties to Nevada and are graduates of UNR before continuing their educations out of state.

Read the whole story

Another bid from China for U.S. hotel

By Associated Press

HNA Group is snapping up a 25 percent ownership stake of the Hilton hotel chain for about \$6.5 billion, the latest attempt by a Chinese interest to acquire real estate in the U.S.

HNA will appoint two directors at Hilton, expanding the board to 10 members, and will have partial ownership of Hilton's planned spinoffs of Park Hotels & Resorts and Hilton Grand Vacations, expected to conclude by the end of the year.

HNA's deal for Hilton is expected to close not long after that, in early 2017.

With real estate investors looking to cash out of a red hot market over the last several years, Chinese interests have stepped in, seeking a safe place to keep cash.

Anbang Insurance Group bought the flagship Waldorf Astoria in New York two years ago from Hilton. It tried unsuccessfully to acquire Starwood Hotels in a \$14 billion deal.

Late last year, the Starwood Capital Group sold the 50-story Baccarat Hotel, just north of Rockefeller Center in Manhattan, to the Sunshine Insurance Group of China.

Last week China Life Insurance Co., the country's biggest life insurance company, took an approximately \$2 billion stake in U.S. hotels owned by Starwood.

HNA Group runs hotels, airlines, airports and financial services and real estate businesses. Earlier this year, a wing

of HNA acquired Carlson Hotels, which owns Radisson, Country Inns & Suites and other chains.

The company is acquiring its stake from the private equity firm Blackstone, which now has an approximately 21 percent interest in Hilton Worldwide Holdings Inc. Blackstone will also control two board seats.

Blackstone led a \$20 billion deal to take Hilton private in October 2007. It brought in new management, expanded its luxury brands, Waldorf Astoria and Conrad. It was aggressive in pursuing growth through franchise deals.

That growth extended overseas and Hilton soon became the world's largest hotel until it was surpassed recently after Marriott International won in the contentious fight with Anbang for ownership of Starwood.

Blackstone typically turns deals around quickly after acquisitions like Hilton, but the recession and an ensuing drop-off in business travel delayed its turnaround plans.

Blackstone took Hilton public almost three years ago. The initial public offering raised \$2.35 billion, surpassing Twitter's IPO the month prior.

It was the second largest IPO of the year and the biggest ever for a hotel chain.

Dugard campaigns against

Calif.'s Prop. 57



Phillip and Nancy Garrido are in prison for the abduction of Jaycee Lee Dugard.

By Jennifer McGraw, CBS-13

It's a case that's hard to forget, an 11-year-old Meyers girl was kidnapped and held hostage for 18 years, but now she is taking to Facebook to stop a proposition on the November ballots.

"The eligibility for parole for Philip Garrido after only 17 years is really a travesty," said James Clinchard, then prosecutor in the Jaycee Lee Dugard case. "I can't imagine how she would feel if the Garridos were eligible for parole at a date before 431 years."

That's how many years Garrido was sentenced to, but Clinchard said with Proposition 57 Garrido could get that hearing after just 17 years.

Read the whole story