

Spooner State Park wildland fire contained

Updated 8:58pm:

A fire broke out late this afternoon at Spooner Summit.

A multi-jurisdictional crew of firefighters, including the Super Scooper airplane, was able to contain the fire to 0.58 acres.

The Sept. 20 fire was reported at 3:58pm. The fire was northwest of Spooner Lake right near the lake.

The cause is under investigation.

This is one of nearly a dozen fires in about a month's period that have been suspicious. Most have been on state or federal land. In this case, it was Nevada State Parks property that burned.

Authorities are not saying if they are looking for one or more people who may have started the various blazes.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

SLT working to clear properties of blight



Zehren's before clean up.
Photos/Provided



Zehren's after the city came in
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South Lake Tahoe is getting working cleaning up the town even if property owners won't.

On Sept. 19 the Tiger Team began a pre-organized cleaning-abatement of the exterior of the former Zehren's Nursery at the corner of Pioneer Trail and Ski Run Boulevard.

Tiger Team began in January 2015 to respond more efficiently to code compliance issues, complaints and successfully resolve cases.

With the aid of a Cal Recycle Grant and cooperation from other

agencies, city officials hope the Zehren site is one of many to come. This was a multi-agency project with the city as the lead agency. Other participants were the California Conservation Corps and South Tahoe Refuse.

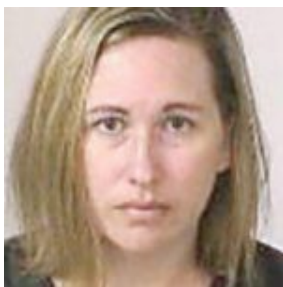
Cleanup is expected to be finished today.

Prison time in death of Douglas County grandma

By Associated Press

A Nevada woman has been sentenced to up to six years in prison for neglect causing the death of her 93-year-old grandmother, whose feet were gnawed by rodents before she died in her trash-filled, urine-stained home.

A Douglas County district judge sentenced Jamie Dawn Lummus last week to 28 to 72 months for the death of Nola Moder.



Jamie Dawn
Lummus

Lummus had cared for Moder for eight years before she was arrested in June and charged with felony neglect of an elderly person resulting in death.

Sheriff's deputies say Lummus blamed the neglect on memory loss caused by her pain medication.

Deputies responding to the Caron Valley home where the two lived said the smell of urine was overwhelming. They found food boxes and trash piled in the corners, urine- and blood-stained carpet, rodent feces on almost every surface of every room, and a dead rodent in the closet, according to a police report.

Lummus' attorney, Jamie Henry, said that Moder loved her granddaughter and Lummus stepped up to help when no one else would. He said Lummus would take her grandmother to appointments and help clean her up as needed.

Lummus has no prior criminal history, but District Court Judge Tom Gregory said the case was one of the most extreme he'd ever seen.

Suspicious fire in SLT quickly extinguished

Firefighters responded to another suspicious fire on Monday night.

It started near the South Lake Tahoe fire station at Pioneer Trail and Ski Run Boulevard. About 100-square-feet of land burned.

The fire on Sept. 19 was reported about 11:10pm.

"The fire was put out quickly and the cause is under

investigation,” Lisa Herron, U.S. Forest Service spokeswoman, told *Lake Tahoe News*. She added that she didn’t know if this fire is related to the rash of fires that have occurred on the South Shore in the last month.

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*

Payouts coming from bankrupt Nevada Fire Safe Council, but accounting questions remain

By Susan Wood

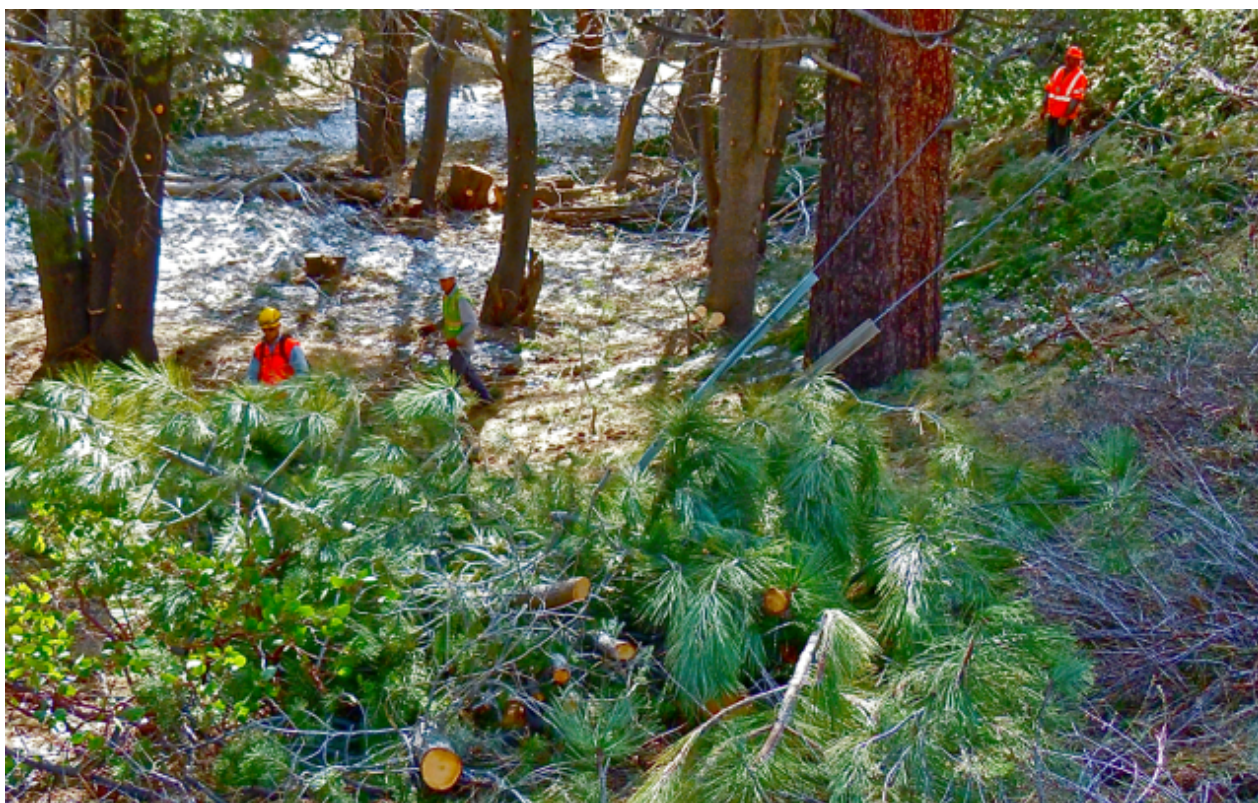
After five years of wrangling between parties, Lake Tahoe businesses and fire agencies left burned by shoddy accounting practices from the bankrupt Nevada Fire Safe Council are expected to see reimbursements for fuel reduction efforts.

U.S. Bankruptcy Court of Nevada Judge Bruce T. Beesley ruled in favor of approving a settlement with the U.S. Department of Justice a few weeks ago to disburse a total of \$2.02 million to claimants. Property owners, fire units, contractors and vendors had performed work to protect against wildfire destruction through U.S. Forest Service and federal Bureau of Land Management grants managed by the NVFSC.

The Forest Service won’t comment about the settlement.

Allen Dutra, trustee for the estate of the Nevada Fire Council, estimated he might know the exact allocations for the claimants in about 45 days. All those with money due for

hazardous fuel reductions work will have 30 days to file a request form for the \$1.4 million and \$613,003 in claims. Allocations will be determined by how many claims are filed.



The Lake Christopher fuels reduction project in South Lake Tahoe got tied up with the Nevada Fire Safe Council bankruptcy. Photo/LTN file

Some claimants appear confused, disheartened or weary about their allocations as word begins to trickle out about the payouts.

“They’ll receive nothing if they don’t file. Others who do file will get theirs,” Dutra told *Lake Tahoe News*. “It’s unfortunate, but it’s called bankruptcy.”

In November 2012, the NVFSC filed for **bankruptcy** – which resulted in the federal agencies freezing all grant funds.

The matter was dragged into the courts when upon a tip the U.S. Department of Agriculture Office of Inspector General found in its investigation the NVFSC violated several federal

regulations. It co-mingled federal grant money with other funds, allowed one person to handle the money and failed to conduct annual audits.

Lake Tahoe News in 2011 broke the story about the accounting discrepancies.

The OIG report recommended the Forest Service recover \$2.7 million of the \$9.8 million it awarded the nonprofit. Gaps in grant money collected and reimbursements either paid or due to be paid out remain a mystery. The work amounting to \$3.4 million began as early as 2010.

“The report found that the debtor did not properly account for the grant funds awarded by the Forest Service, including the \$3.6 million Recovery Act grant and also a \$6.2 million non-Recovery Act grant. The OIG also found that funds from the Recovery grant and non-Recovery grant were co-mingled with debtor’s own funds and used to pay unauthorized expenses,” bankruptcy court documents obtained by *Lake Tahoe News* read.

The report indicated that Andrew List, a Carson City attorney who served as the NVFSC executive director between 2006-11, was responsible for handling the grants.

The NVFSC board pledged to the OIG it would hire an interim director, develop new accounting practices and turn to an accounting firm to manage its grants. About a year later, the fire safe council went under.

“I didn’t know I was doing anything wrong. I was just running it like previous directors,” List told *Lake Tahoe News*. “I’m proud of the work we did. I’m sorry it got caught up in some accounting irregularities, but not one penny was spent on anything not related to fuel reduction.”

But former board member Ann Brown, who served on the 11-member NVFSC from 2005-11, said she was concerned when contractors were paid in earmarked reimbursements from the same account

employees were paid in salaries and benefits. She knew something wasn't right.

That's Accounting 101.

"We were getting a sense of something wrong in 2011. I think (List) got in over his head. There was no proof he did anything wrong," Brown said of the former director. "It was bad oversight."

Brown has a few regrets. She told *Lake Tahoe News* it's unfortunate "the settlement does not pay everyone." She said she has worked hard to not drop the ball on the claimants.

"There's no way I'd feel comfortable not to do my utmost to try to get contractors paid," she said.

"It's a double-edged sword. We had to settle to get a pro-rated share of the bankruptcy money. It's a no brainer we had to say yes. Now we are eligible for a share of this money," Lake Valley interim Fire Chief Jeff Michael said about the lawsuit during its Sept. 8 meeting.

Lake Valley stands to get about \$280,000.

The newly hired chief, Tim Alameda, attended that meeting as fire marshal for the North Tahoe Fire Protection District. He shared a similar sentiment.

"At first we said we would not accept the agreement. Our lawyers said if we go another step, we'll lose everything for everybody," Alameda said of fighting the compromise. "The good part is the work is done. It created a fuel break. We did good honest work."

Ditto from North Tahoe Fire Chief Mike Schwartz.

"The fire district respects the Department of Justice's approved payments and the Bankruptcy Court's settlement. The payment amounts vary, but not the outstanding forest fuels

management work that was accomplished through these grants,” he said.

And there lies the one glimmer of light from the messy accounting debacle – especially when hazardous fuel reduction is a must in an area that lost 254 homes in the devastating Angora Fire of June 2007.

South Lake Tahoe homeowners like Susan Swift are all too familiar with that constant threat hanging over the eaves of those trying to make a life in Tahoe.

One of her claims amounting to \$750 for tree removal, gravel laying and other work performed almost four years ago was finally approved by the judge. She’s gratified with the latest news, but feels like the other fire districts that more should be paid out. She’s due \$2,500 from two different properties.

“They kept saying, ‘Don’t worry’,” Swift said, further admitting to having a trust issue with the money disbursements. “We still don’t have an answer where it all went.”

Mammoth area fire not spreading

Expect smoke from the Owens River Fire to remain an issue today in the Tahoe-Truckee area.

This is day four of the fire that is burning near Mammoth.

Crews have been able to keep the blaze to 6,050 acres, with containment remaining at 20 percent.

Firefighters are focusing their efforts along the Owens River Road to protect nearby private developments and ranches. The Big Springs Campground, Clark Canyon climbing area, and nearby ranches and developments have been evacuated.

Four uninhabited outbuildings and several pieces of heavy equipment have been destroyed.

The exact cause has not been disclosed, but officials believe it is human caused.

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*

Cyclist hospitalized after being hit by truck

A bicyclist was taken to Barton Memorial Hospital on Monday afternoon after being struck by a vehicle in Meyers.

According to the California Highway Patrol, the female cyclist did not sustain life-threatening injuries.

The Sept. 19 incident is under investigation to determine who was at fault. No one was cited at the scene.

“I witnessed the female bicyclist doing a complete head-over-heels cartwheel into the air after the collision,” a local resident told *Lake Tahoe News*. “The bicyclist was riding down the bike path toward Lake Tahoe Golf Course and the truck was turning onto Country Club from Highway 50.”

The names and hometowns of the people involved in the crash have not been released.

Gamesmanship impacts SLT Knights Inn project

By Kathryn Reed

The animosity between the California Tahoe Conservancy and city of South Lake Tahoe was palpable last week at the state agency's board meeting.

Tom Davis, who is the city's rep on the CTC board, said it's time to clarify what the staff can do and what should come to the board.

The acrimony is about the CTC staff, Executive Director Patrick Wright in particular, deciding without the board weighing in to pull funding for a city project on Highway 50 near Ski Run Boulevard.

At the **March CTC board meeting**, the state put \$4 million aside for the project that in some circles is known as Bijou Park Creek Watershed and SEZ restoration project, to some it's the Knights Inn project and to others it is the Whole Foods project. It was to be on the September agenda. Instead, the agenda item was a \$397,900 planning grant to study an even larger swath of land beyond the Knights Inn parcel.

While the CTC board approved it, the City Council could turn it down.

Razing the Knights Inn, bringing the stream that is piped underground to the surface, and other improvements paired with work at the neighboring parcel at Highway 50 and Ski Run would

prohibit about 11,000 pounds of sediment a year from reaching Lake Tahoe.

While City Manager Nancy Kerry gave the CTC board a fast, detailed rundown of the last six months, Wright stared in the opposite direction at the screen that showed the text for the item the board would vote on. Then while City Councilman Austin Sass spoke, Wright stared at him intently. The hostility was evident from everyone.

The hang-up appears to be over bonus units, which is yet **another commodity** the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency has created. The bi-state regulatory agency allocates extra tourist accommodation units (TAUs) when stream environmental zones are restored. These TAUs have value – and the city and CTC each have a pot. They can be sold; and Placer County is an eager buyer because it has so few TAUs.

While Wright's written report to the board questioned whether Proposition 1 money would be appropriate for this project, this is just the sort of thing Prop. 1 dollars have been used for in the past. And in March it was all but a done deal; the exact dollar amount was more of the question than whether a check would ever be written.

In August, Wright would not return phone calls to *Lake Tahoe News* to talk about the project and board Chair Larry Severson had no idea what was going on. Last week Severson said maybe something could be worked out at the December meeting. Otherwise the board was silent.

After everyone spoke Sept. 15, Wright said, "We will do everything we can to make this work." This was also after Kerry and Sass had left the room, and Davis had made his statement.

The city intends to go forward with the development. What remains to be seen is if Pradip Patel, who owns the Knights Inn, will abide by the tentative agreement or keep asking for

more money. It's Halferty Development out of Southern California that wants to buy both parcels and essentially do one project.

A private developer, though, is under no obligation to do the environmental upgrades. That is why government dollars were being sought – to make this not just an economic project, but also an environmental one.

Mammoth area fire brings smoke to Tahoe-Truckee

Smoke filling the Lake Tahoe Basin and Truckee areas is from the Owens River Fire burning near Mammoth.

More than 200 people are fighting the blaze that started Sept. 17. While no cause has been given, officials say it was human caused.

It remains at about 6,000 acres and 20 percent containment.

A surge if mid-level moisture is in the forecast for late Tuesday through Wednesday which could result in thunderstorms. While the rain would be good, the threat of lightning strikes is not.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Reno-bound flight rolls off Denver runway

By Mike Higdon, Reno Gazette-Journal

On the way home from Denver on Sunday, my airplane made an unscheduled departure from the runway. No one was injured, according Denver International Airport.

The brakes of an United Airlines' Airbus 319 failed as the airplane taxied toward the runway, said the pilot of Flight 296. The pilot announced he reversed engines to slow the airplane. The plane, heading to Reno from the Denver airport, came to rest intact with rear wheels on the tarmac and front wheels on the surrounding grass.

When the pilot first explained the sudden roaring engines and abrupt stop, many people laughed. Passengers remained jovial and light hearted during the incident.

[Read the whole story](#)