

West Slope wildfire fully contained

Two firefighters sustained minor injuries while fighting the fire in El Dorado County's wine country.

The fire that began June 3 near Mount Aukum and Grizzly Flat roads about 5 miles south of Placerville is fully contained. It burned 25 acres.

The cause is still under investigation.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Foes of teacher tenure appeal to Calif. Supreme Court

By Bob Egelko, San Francisco Chronicle

Opponents of teacher tenure and seniority laws in California asked the state Supreme Court to take up their case last week, arguing that an appellate court disregarded evidence that the laws shield incompetent teachers and harm low-income and minority students.

The April 14 appellate ruling upholding the laws “abdicated the long-standing duty of California courts to serve as the guardian of educational opportunity for all,” lawyers for the plaintiffs – nine students backed by a Silicon Valley entrepreneur – said in a filing to the state's high court.

The court will decide this summer whether to leave the lower-

court ruling intact or grant review of the plaintiffs' claims that the tenure and seniority laws violate students' right to an equal education. The case has drawn national attention, including praise from President Obama's then-secretary of education, Arne Duncan, for a trial judge's June 2014 ruling – the first of its kind in any state – declaring the laws unconstitutional.

Read the whole story

Easing drought boosts California hydropower

By Bobby Magill, Climate Central

The easing of California's drought has boosted the state's early spring hydropower generation to its highest level since 2011, helping it to recover from a 15-year low reached last year. But hydroelectricity production is not expected to improve much overall this year, according to the U.S. Energy Information Administration.

The West's four-year drought desiccated many reservoirs in California, the nation's fourth largest hydropower producer, reducing their ability to generate electricity and forcing the state to rely on other renewables and more fossil fuels for its power supply.

Prior to the drought, hydropower produced nearly 40 percent of the state's electricity during wet years, with natural gas producing most of the rest. Today, about 11 percent of the state's electricity comes from hydropower and 52 percent comes from natural gas, with wind, solar and nuclear producing much

of the rest.

Read the whole story

Climber rescued from Donner Summit area

A Truckee woman leading a group of climbers near Donner Summit had to be airlifted to a hospital on Friday.

The 33-year-old, whose name has not been released, sustained major injuries after falling from the rock face at Nova Express on the Snowed Wall.

Calstar flew the woman to Renown Medical Center in Reno on June 3 about 2:45pm after a California Highway Patrol airlifted her from the fall site to the parking lot at Sugar Bowl ski resort.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

JMA Ventures acquires Homewood marina

Homewood Mountain Resort's owners, JMA Ventures, now own Homewood High & Dry Marina.

JMA, which already owns West Shore Café, said the three properties will share management and marketing efforts.

Long-time marina owner David Topol will remain responsible for day-to-day management.

The marina will offer new services and amenities this summer including gourmet grab-and-go meals and provisions for boaters produced by West Shore Cafe, improved parking, and online buoy and dry storage rentals by the day.

After years of lawsuits, Homewood Mountain Resort expects to break ground on a five-star hotel, condos and village in summer 2017. Owners want to make Homewood a year-round destination.

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*

Payday loan rules may benefit Nevadans

By Eli Segall, Las Vegas Sun

A federal agency has proposed new regulations for short-term, high-interest lenders in an effort to end borrowers' "payday debt traps."

The Consumer Financial Protection Bureau said its proposal would require payday lenders, auto-title lenders and others "to take steps" to ensure customers have the ability to pay back their loans.

The agency says it has "serious concerns" that "risky" lending practices are "pushing borrowers into debt traps" – chief

among them, that borrowers “are being set up to fail with loan payments that they are unable to repay.”

Read the whole story

Nevada official responds to Panama Papers request

By Sean Whaley, Las Vegas Review-Journal

CARSON CITY — Nevada Secretary of State Barbara Cegavske responded Friday to a request from a U.S. senator for information about the state’s oversight of companies tied to the Panama Papers, noting that law enforcement officials have not once asked for records in the past three years.

Sen. Ron Wyden, D-Ore., the ranking member of the U.S. Senate Finance Committee, asked Cegavske for information on more than 1,000 limited liability corporations registered in Nevada and linked to Panamanian law firm Mossack Fonseca.

One question asked by Wyden was how many times Cegavske’s office has demanded a list of “beneficial owners” of any entity registered in Nevada that was suspected of illegal activities.

Read the whole story

Poll: Nevadans support solar energy, public lands

By Megan Messerly, Las Vegas Sun

Across the political spectrum, Nevada voters generally support renewable energy, taxing mining companies, and the preservation of public lands, preferring a collaborative approach with the federal government on land issues, according to a poll released Wednesday.

The survey, prepared for the Center for Western Priorities, a nonpartisan conservation organization, asked 700 likely voters in the November election their opinions on an array of issues that affect land rights, the environment, energy policy and economic development.

These issues have been the subject of much attention in recent months, as federal authorities in February arrested Nevada rancher Cliven Bundy (who rose to national attention in 2014 for an armed standoff over grazing rights) and a regulatory decision in December prompted several solar companies to cease sales in the state. With the election looming, such actions have placed issues involving public land and renewables into the spotlight.

Read the whole story

EDC budget not what

supervisors asked for

By Kathryn Reed

El Dorado County's proposed budget that was released this week has zero dollars from the General Fund for roads and no money to build the public safety building for the sheriff's department.

This, in essence, was Larry Combs' parting gift to the county – a budget that does not reflect what the supervisors or department heads wanted. Combs was shown the door last week after nearly a year with the county. He worked part time while living in Auburn.

Now the five supervisors who supported Combs for much of his limited tenure are left to pick up the pieces. Helping them will be Don Ashton whom they hired last week to be the permanent chief administrative officer.

Following a presentation by Laura Schwartz, Chief Budget Officer, the Board provided a prioritized list of unfunded items and directed the Chief Administrative Office to return to the Board with additional details pertaining to those items at the Board's annual Budget Workshop beginning June 6, 2016. The list of prioritized items is as follows (Refer to Attachment A):

\$5,000,000 for Public Safety Facility Debt, Capital Replacement Fund and the Juvenile Hall Match (combined)
\$2,500,000 Roads
\$352,000 Property Tax System
\$150,000 Public Information Officer
\$250,000 Tree Mortality Grant
\$500,000 Marijuana Enforcement
\$100,000 Community Planning Effort
\$320,000 Depot Road Land Acquisition
\$225,000 Southeast Connector
\$25,000 City of Placerville Pool (added)
\$20,000 Fish and Game Commission (added)
\$2,500 Commission on Aging (added)

Supervisors Mikulaco, Veerkamp, Ranalli and Novasel were in favor of the above prioritization list with no exceptions.

Supervisor Frentzen supported all items shown with the following exceptions (not in favor of prioritizing): Public Information Officer, Depot Road Land Acquisition, Southeast Connector and City of Placerville Pool. Supervisor Frentzen also requested a list of services the county provides on Federal lands (pertaining to Payment In-Lieu of Taxes or PILT). Referring to a list of \$10,000,000 worth of contracts that do not come to the Board for approval (those contracts that are under the Purchasing Agent's signature authority), requests the CAO return with analysis of how these contracts are approved and identify any savings therein. Further requested information regarding salary savings achieved from improved efficiencies.

There was no formal vote, only general direction to staff.

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Source: *April 26, 2016, EDC BOS minutes*

"As you know, this is the first step in the annual budget process and between now and September the county will need to make some difficult decisions. During this period, the CAO's office will be presenting the board with options and impacts relative to operating budgets and capital projects, including roads and the public safety facility," Ashton told *Lake Tahoe News*.

What those recommendations will be Ashton did not share with *LTN*.

One of the bugaboos with the sheriff's facility is that to qualify for the grant funding the county must show it has a balanced budget for the next five years. El Dorado County is forecasting a deficit in the coming years.

Neither Ashton nor Supervisor Sue Novasel could answer what this means for the public safety facility.

Technically the county is supposed to approve the budget this month before the start of the next fiscal year on July 1. Per standard operating procedure, adjustments are made through September. Normally planning for the next budget year then commences. That did not occur under Combs' watch. That is part of the reason the county is scrambling to come up with a coherent budget for 2016-17.

It was Pamela Knorr, human resources director, who brought in her friend Combs to be interim CAO. She has been working remotely in Texas where her husband has a job. This is something Combs allowed, but is unusual for any department head, especially one dealing with all employees on a personal level. She recently put her house on the market, signaling she may have seen the writing on the wall now that she does not have a friend as her boss to protect her.

As for the budget, it could still look very different than this first iteration. This document that was released to the public on June 1 was sent to the printer the morning after Combs left the county.

"The proposed budget you are referring to is the CAO's budget recommendations – and just that – recommendations," Novasel told *Lake Tahoe News*. "The BOS has not reviewed nor had a chance to talk about the budget – the budget talks will begin on June 13. At that time, the board will begin a review of the recommendations and start to make changes, revisions, and additions that they feel are necessary. I am going to be asking that we look at adding a PIO position along with including additional funding from the General Fund for road maintenance."

Asked what she would cut to fund the items she wants, Novasel said, "That is something that we will all be looking at – how much money does the county really have to pay for things that we, as a county, feel are most needed. We will be looking at our Strategic Plan as a basis for making those decisions. Of

course, we don't want to make cuts – but we also need to make sure that all programs and processes are in line with our Strategic Plan and the priorities contained within it.”

The budget hearing is June 13 in Placerville, a week later than previously planned – which was decided under the Combs' regime, though the supervisors unanimously agreed to this on May 17.

This means the budget hearings are after the June 7 primary, when they were supposed to be before the election.

Fire burning in EDC wine country

By KCRA-TV

Firefighters made good progress against a wildfire Friday night burning near Placerville in El Dorado County, Cal Fire said.

The Aukum Fire, which was initially reported to be 45 acres, has burned 25 acres near Mount Aukum and Grizzly Flat roads, CalFire said.

Read the whole story