

El Dorado water district ends drought restrictions

By Tom Miller, KCRA-TV

El Dorado County's largest irrigation district is telling its customers the effects of the drought have subsided so much that they can stop conserving water.

The El Dorado Irrigation District, which has approximately 40,000 customers, voted to rescind all water restrictions Monday.

"Now that the drought stage has been rescinded, currently our customers no longer need to conserve," district spokesman Jesse Saich said.

[Read the whole story](#)

BLM stops Nevada mustang fertility project

By Scott Sonner, AP

The Bureau of Land Management has pulled the plug on a public-private partnership in Nevada aimed at shrinking the size of a wild horse herd southeast of Carson City through the use of contraceptives.

Unlike most mustang conflicts pitting protection groups against ranchers, the dispute in Nevada's Pine Nut mountains is fueled largely by a division among horse advocates

themselves over the use of fertility drugs on the range.

BLM approved a pilot project in 2014 working with the American Wild Horse Preservation Campaign and a neighborhood group to treat a herd that a federal judge has forbid the agency from gathering.

But an internal email obtained by the Associated Press shows BLM suspended the project Monday after leaders of Friends of Animals threatened to sue. That group says the drug harms horses and violates the judge's order.

Warming-fueled wildfires are increasing

By Seth Borenstein, AP

Alberta's unusually early and large fire is just the latest of many gargantuan fires on an Earth that's grown hotter with more extreme weather.

Earlier this year, large wildfires hit spots on opposite ends of the world – Tasmania and Oklahoma-Kansas. Last year, Alaska and California pushed the U.S. to a record 10 million acres burned. Massive fires hit Siberia, Mongolia and China last year and Brazil's fire season has increased by a month over the past three decades.

It got so bad that in 2009, Australia added a bright red "catastrophic" to its fire warning index.

"The warmer it is, the more fires we get," said Mike Flannigan, a professor of wildland fire at the University of Alberta.

Last week, temperatures pushed past 90 degrees Fahrenheit in Alberta, which is unusual for May in northern Canada.

It's not quite so simple though. Many factors contribute to the complex increase in big fires, Flannigan and several experts said. They include climate change, the way people use land and firefighting methods that leave more fuel – trees and brush – to burn.

But the temperature one stands out, Flannigan said.

"The Alberta wildfires are an excellent example of what we're seeing more and more of: warming means snow melts earlier, soils and vegetation dries out earlier, and the fire season starts earlier. It's a train wreck," University of Arizona climate scientist Jonathan Overpeck wrote in an email.

Worldwide, the length of Earth's fire season increased nearly 19 percent from 1979 to 2013, according to a study by Mark Cochrane, a professor of fire ecology at South Dakota State University.

Fires had steadily been increasing, but then in the late 1990s and early 2000s, "we've suddenly been hit with lots of these large fires we can't control," Cochrane said.

In terms of acreage burned, the worldwide total may be dropping because of better firefighting, but in North America and Siberia "fires have grown quite a bit due to warming," Columbia University climate and ecology scientist Park Williams wrote in an email. "My estimate is that global warming has been responsible for about half of this increase."

For the entire U.S., the 10-year average number of acres burned in wildfires has more than doubled from about 3 million acres in the mid-1980s to 7 million acres now, according to an analysis of government data by the Associated Press.

Twelve years before the Fort McMurray fire set northern

Alberta ablaze, a study by Flannigan and University of Victoria climate scientist Andrew Weaver found that “human-induced climate change has had a detectable influence” on a dramatic increase in wildfires in Canada. Flannigan said the area burned in Canada has doubled since the 1970s “and we think that’s due to climate change.”

“Globally we are seeing more fires, bigger fires, more severe fires,” said Kevin Ryan, a retired U.S. Forest Service scientist who is now a fire consultant, with a recent stint in Indonesia, where fires were big last year.

Fires in some places, such as Indonesia and Canada, are bad when there’s an El Nino – a warming of parts of the Pacific that changes weather worldwide – because it triggers drought in those regions, Ryan said. In Indonesia, changes in land use are a bigger factor than climate, Ryan said.

But elsewhere, it’s temperature and moisture, too much of one and not enough of the other, scientists said. As the air warms, it gets “more efficient at sucking the moisture out of the fuels” which makes them more prone to burn, Flannigan said. Then add in lightning. A study found that lightning increases 12 percent with every degree Celsius and that can trigger more fires. Flannigan said there’s evidence of fire-triggered clouds in Alberta causing at least two more fires because of lightning.

The U.S. National Academy of Sciences earlier this year in a study determined that “climate warming has resulted in longer fire seasons.” But other factors, such as the way fires are fought and land use, make it difficult to scientifically attribute individual fires and regional fires to climate change, the report and other scientists said.

“This is absolutely a harbinger of things to come,” said Canadian climate scientist Weaver, now a Green party legislator in the British Columbia parliament.

Squaw-Alpine gondola project raises questions

By Kathryn Reed

OLYMPIC VALLEY – Planners and landowners must balance recreation, economic development and protection of natural resources as they consider whether to allow the proposed gondola that would link Squaw Valley and Alpine Meadows ski resorts.

Eight members of the public voiced their concerns Monday at the initial scoping meeting for the environmental documents.

Resort owners want to build a gondola that would go from the base of Alpine, have two midstations, and end at the base of Squaw.

(KSL Capital Partners bought Squaw in November 2010. JMA Ventures bought Alpine in 2007. Squaw Valley Ski Holdings Inc. was created in September 2011 to operate both resorts.)

For decades there has been talk of combining the resorts. One of the main stumbling blocks has always been the private landholding. An agreement was reached with Tony Caldwell in April 2015 to have the towers erected on his land near the Granite Chief Wilderness Area.

Building anything so close to a wilderness area is one of the more controversial aspects of the project. While the gondola is designed to only operate during the winter, the towers would always be there. The eight-person cars would be detachable.

Already portions of the two resorts are visible while **hiking**

in the area.



Proponents have images of what the visual impacts may be if the gondola between Squaw and Alpine were built.
Photo/LTN

Judy Bruner, who lives part time in Alpine Meadows, questioned the permanent loss of wilderness area if the gondola goes in. Caldwell's property is technically in the wilderness area, but he was there first. If he were to sell the land and the gondola is there, it could never be wilderness area again.

"I believe the visual quality will forever be impaired," Bruner said at the May 9 meeting at the Resort at Squaw Creek. Eleven of the 37 towers are slated to be on Forest Service land.

She would like the project proponents to create state-of-the-art modeling to better visualize the impacts.

For Dan Heagerty of the Granite Chief Wilderness Protection League, he worries Placer County will be as receptive to concerns of locals as the agency has been to the Squaw Valley base plan – which in his estimation has been silence.

Resort officials say the gondola will reduce by 100 the number

of vehicles on the road between the resorts.

Heagerty challenged that assertion, saying, "This \$35 million project is clearly designed to induce visitor visits to both resorts."

He also brought up the proposed chairlifts in the Alpine master plan and Caldwell's desires.

Heagerty and others want the gondola project not to be studied in isolation, but with consideration of projects already in the pipeline as well as those being bandied about.

Isaac Silverman, attorney with Sierra Watch, contends some of the lift proposals would not get built without the gondola because the midway station would provide access to them.

Joe Flannery with the Forest Service told people during the breakout session that the assumption is skiers-snowboarders will be able to get off at the midstations. This means new terrain would be accessible via the gondola.

One person asked why a joint EIR-EIS wasn't being created. No answer was given. The speaker said having to review two documents was more cumbersome for the average person.

Placer County will be dealing with the environmental impact report and California Environmental Quality Act issues. The USFS will handle the environmental impact statement and National Environmental Policy Act requirements.

Comments must be made to both organizations. The feds hope to have the draft EIS done by the end of the year or early 2017, while the county wants the EIR completed sooner.

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Notes:

- The project overview is **online**.

- Comments to Placer County may be emailed to cdraecs@placer.ca.gov. The deadline is May 23.
 - Comments to the U.S. Forest Service may be emailed to scoping_comments@squawalpinegondola-eis.com; deadline is May 31.
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Flying? Budget hours, not minutes, for security

By Jad Mouawad, New York Times

Security lines at airports are getting longer – much longer – and wait times could reach epidemic levels when air travel peaks this summer, according to airlines, airports and federal officials.

A combination of fewer Transportation Security Administration screeners, tighter budgets, new checkpoint procedures and growing numbers of passengers is already creating a mess at airports around the country.

While federal security officials say they are hiring and training hundreds of additional screening officers, matters are not expected to improve anytime soon.

Airline and airport officials have said they feared that the current slowdown would last through the year, and could cause summer travel chaos when more than 220 million passengers are expected to fly during the peak travel months of July and August.

[Read the whole story](#)

EDC, auditor prevail in 'frivolous' lawsuit

"Frivolous" is how El Dorado County Auditor Joe Harn described a lawsuit filed by a political consultant.



Joe Harn

A Sacramento County judge essentially agreed when he ordered Dan Dellinger to pay Harn's attorney fees (\$14,392.42) as well as the county's (\$30,681.53). Dellinger had filed the lawsuit in May 2015.

Harn and Dellinger have been squabbling for years. The latest incident stems from Dellinger believing he had a right to money from the Pioneer Fire District. The district hired Dellinger as a consultant. This was all part of **grand jury investigation**.

However, at no time has the district asked the auditor to pay Dellinger any more money. Dellinger was seeking \$12,000.

Harn told *Lake Tahoe News* the lawsuit was "political retribution."

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*

Report: 1 in 5 plant species face extinction

By Ben Guarino, Washington Post

Plants pervade almost every part of human life – not only do we eat them and wear them, we use plants for fuel, medicine, building materials, poisons and intoxicants.

To limit the world's plants to those that meet a human need, however, would be doing the leafy kingdom a disservice. In fact, according to a report from the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew, in the United Kingdom, only a slice of plant life is “useful” to humans. In what Kew is calling the first comprehensive assessment of plant life – the first annual “State of the World's Plants” – researchers determined that some 30,000 plant species had a documented use.

As many as one in five plants may be at risk of extinction, the scientists say, due to invasive species, disease and changing landscapes.

[Read the whole story](#)

Brown orders long-term conservation measures

By Matt Stevens and Bettina Boxall, Los Angeles Times

Gov. Jerry Brown issued a sweeping executive order Monday that permanently prohibits certain forms of water waste and makes monthly water-use reporting an ongoing requirement.

The order comes as some urban water suppliers have suggested the drought is over and called for the state's drought rules to be weakened or eliminated. Brown's order, though, rebuffs the notion that California can ever fully escape from drought.

"Californians stepped up during this drought and saved more water than ever before," Brown said in a statement. "But now we know that drought is becoming a regular occurrence and water conservation must be a part of our everyday life."

Read the whole story

Lawmaker: TSA should focus on intelligence, not screenings

By Andrew Becker, Reveal

To prevent terrorist attacks against planes, railways and travelers, the Transportation Security Administration needs to focus on intelligence to identify and address threats – and leave screening to private contractors, a lawmaker said.

Rep. John Mica, R-Fla., described the agency as an unmanageable bureaucracy that can barely staff itself. The agency's intelligence shortcomings are "absolutely scary," he told Reveal from the Center for Investigative Reporting the day after an explosive House oversight committee hearing in April on TSA misconduct.

"The most important thing is the intelligence and analysis

part – the government part: handling classified information, information on terrorists, the ability to track people, to make sure the (terrorist) watch list is up to date, so people are identified even before they get to the airport,” Mica said. “That is how we connect dots.”

TSA Administrator Peter Neffenger should not expend more resources to inspect people at airport checkpoints who don't pose a risk, Mica said. Rather than managing the screeners themselves, he said, the TSA should supervise the screening process. He blamed a small group of fewer than 20 embedded, highly paid bureaucrats who protect the status quo, their positions and their salaries but don't get the job done.

“It is a scenario of ‘The Three Stooges’ the way some of the operations operate,” the 12-term congressman said. “It's not a pretty picture.”

Both a champion of the creation of the TSA nearly 15 years ago and a frequent critic, Mica said he was writing to Neffenger to express his concerns and expects to question him during an upcoming hearing.

It was a tough day for the beleaguered agency, as the TSA faced sharp criticism from three of its senior managers at the hearing. Media coverage highlighted the troubled intelligence office and reports that a top official in Minneapolis was instructed to target Somali Americans for screening as potential terrorists.

Saddled with low morale, high turnover and poor performance, the TSA has seen its checkpoint security lines grow. The agency has refocused on security after covert testing found a 95 percent failure rate to detect fake bombs and other weapons. Mica pointed out that the TSA's performance has worsened in the last decade, despite an increase in screeners.

Several airports around the nation, including Atlanta,

Minneapolis and Seattle, have begun to explore or are considering a shift to private contractors to conduct checkpoint screenings. The long screening lines, expected to get longer during the busy summer travel season, also pose a security risk, experts say.

Neffenger has traveled the country to address aviation industry concerns. He also was in Brussels around the time of the March 22 terrorist attacks that killed 32.

He turned his attention inward, as the agency tried to fend off the criticism. In an email sent to all TSA employees, a copy of which was obtained by Reveal, Neffenger praised the agency, which he said should not be distracted by media reports on long security lines and allegations of misbehavior.

"I am confident that we're on a sound trajectory, and I'm optimistic about the future," he wrote.

Whistleblowers have highlighted misconduct among top leaders and allegations of retaliation for drawing attention to various issues, from security gaps to discrimination.

Mica said the managers who testified were "three of the most incredible witnesses we've seen testify at TSA ever."

"The degree of intimidation has gagged everyone," he said. "I consider them very brave, and their testimony confirmed some of our worst suspicions."

But the Florida lawmaker also said Congress bears some responsibility for the agency's shortcomings. Lawmakers who hold the agency's purse strings haven't examined it closely enough, Mica said. He said a relatively inexperienced House of Representatives and a general lack of understanding about or interest in aviation security issues also played a part.

"I don't think Congress does all it should in changing the M.O. (modus operandi) of TSA and DHS," he said, also referring

to the TSA's parent agency, the Department of Homeland Security. "You can't just blame the agencies. You have to put some of the blame on us. We will raise some Cain, but it is up to Neffenger to change."

Driver dies in 2-vehicle accident in Truckee



One person died and another was seriously injured May 8 in Truckee. Photo/Provided

An Arizona man died Sunday night in a two-vehicle accident in Truckee.

Patrick Wayne Smiley, 36, of Chandler, Ariz., was going east on Glenshire Drive near Old Highway 40 when his Suzuki drifted across the centerline and struck a 26-foot truck, according to Truckee officers.

"Based on the initial information gathered, excessive speed appears to have played a role in the collision. It is unknown at this time if intoxicants were involved but that will be investigated further," Sgt. Russ Walsh said in a statement.

Smiley was pronounced dead at the scene. Amber Harder, 30, of Truckee was a passenger in the vehicle. She sustained major injuries and was airlifted to Renown Medical Center in Reno after the 7:21pm May 8 collision.

The two occupants of the box truck were not injured.

The cause of the accident is under investigation.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report