Nev. pot sales in Feb. outpace projections

By Associated Press

State officials say February was another good month for marijuana sales in Nevada.

A Department of Taxation report issued Monday says taxable sales of adult-use marijuana topped $35.3 million for the month, up 9 percent from January but short of the $35.8 million sold in December.

Read the whole story

Global timber trafficking harms forests

By Kenneth E. Wallen, The Conversation

If a tree falls in the forest, do you care how it was brought down?

Few people think about where the wood in their furniture, floors or doors comes from or how it got there. And few would guess that one of the most illegally traded wild products worldwide is a tree, rosewood (Dalbergia).

Rosewood is so widely trafficked it is called “the ivory of the forest.” Its rich reddish-brown timber is used to make furniture, flooring and musical instruments. Yet many of the trees that produce it are threatened and internationally

protected.

Rosewood is an extreme example of a wider problem. Globally, 15 to 30 percent of timber is taken illegally. According to Interpol, the illegal timber trade is worth $50 billion to $150 billion annually.

This complex issue will not be solved overnight. But I believe that social science can help curb it by showing the damage illegal timber trade causes to humans and forests, and by stigmatizing the sale and purchase of contraband wood products.

The role of rules

My research uses social science to address conservation issues like wildlife trafficking and invasive species. I focus on the role of norms and rules, which guide human behavior by signaling whether an action is common or approved. When people or organizations know that doing something is unacceptable and punishable, they are more likely to refrain from it.

Today, many rules designed to protect against timber trafficking are either not strict enough or poorly enforced. This signals that illegal activity can occur with impunity, although some nations are tightening up regulations in an effort to curb the problem.

A global trade

Illegal timber is estimated to account for 50 to 90 percent of wood harvested from Amazonia, central Africa and Southeast Asia. Interpol estimates that 40 to 60 percent of timber exports from Indonesia, 25 percent from Russia and 70 percent from Gabon are illegal. In 2016 the U.S. Trade Representative’s Office estimated that 90 percent of U.S. timber imports from Peru were sourced from illegal logging.

North America is not exempt. Tree poachers target centuries-

old cedars and redwoods in British Columbia and the Pacific Northwest.

Illegal activities lower global timber prices by 7 to 16 percent, costing source nations up to $5 billion in lost annual revenue. This would suggest governments have a significant incentive to act. But weak regimes, corruption and unresponsive agencies – particularly in source countries – are failing to curb timber trafficking.

Improving enforcement

To protect forests and guide timber use, governments create rules. International treaties and trade regulations restrict timber imports based on quantity or species. Domestic management plans, certification programs and procurement policies dictate how timber should be harvested, bought and sold.

But the effectiveness of these rules often depends on sanctions that penalize rule violators. Many source countries have little capacity to effectively monitor forests or enforce penalties for illegal logging. This makes it easy for traffickers to avoid being caught.

Countries with few or weak regulations also act as trans-shipment points. For example, traffickers send timber from Papua New Guinea to nations like China that do not ban illegal timber. It is then processed and exported as finished products to the United States.

Over the past decade the United States has acted to bolster rules and sanctions against illegal timber purchases. Notably, in 2008 Congress amended the Lacey Act, which prohibits trade in illegal wildlife, fish and plants, to include timber.

Several high-profile sanctions followed. Lumber Liquidators was fined $13 million in 2011 for selling flooring made from illegal Russian timber. In 2015, the Yacu Kallpa, a Peruvian

vessel carrying illegal timber destined for Houston, was detained by Mexico. And in late 2017 the U.S. trade representative blocked timber imports from Peru.

But until source countries can effectively monitor and enforce laws against illegal harvesting, intercepting a single shipment does little. Importing countries – particularly the United States, European Union nations and China – must also initiate actions that reduce illegal timber production. And this is where social science can play a role.

Learning from wildlife trafficking

Timber trafficking has many parallels with illegal trade in charismatic and endangered wildlife, such as pangolins, turtles and rhinos. In both cases, the trade is extremely lucrative, and consumer demand is a major driver of the black market.

To reduce demand, many countries use social science to stop consumers from purchasing illegal wildlife. Social influence approaches attempt to convince us that peers are engaging in or refraining from certain actions, such as recycling or reusing grocery bags. They can also help convince organizations that certain actions are inappropriate and counter to rules and norms.

For example, advocates in China and Hong Kong have reduced pressure on endangered sharks by convincing elites and professionals through public awareness campaigns and political advocacy to eat less shark fin soup. And in Indonesia and Malaysia, Muslim clerics declared fatwas against wildlife poaching to signal social disapproval of it. Using the powerful medium of religion and their role as public leaders, clerics have aligned religious faithfulness with existing rules against poaching. In doing so, they make it easier to peer-pressure others and further stigmatize poaching and illegal purchasing.

Steering consumer choices

Governments and businesses can use similar strategies to address timber trafficking. They can educate consumers about the scale of the contraband trade and which products are likely to be illegally logged, much as ocean advocates are working to steer consumers away from buying fish that are overharvested.

Organizations exist to track, monitor and certify timber and timber products. But awareness is not enough. Stigmatizing or sanctioning the sale and purchase of illegal timber would be a useful further step. For example, governments could destroy shipments of confiscated timber in the same way that the United States and some African countries burn or crush confiscated ivory from slaughtered elephants.

Through events like Arbor Day, many Americans develop a generalized warm glow toward trees and forests. Portraying contraband wood products as harmful and damaging can help shape these views into more focused and sustained opposition to illegal timber trafficking.

Kenneth E. Wallen is an assistant professor of human dimensions of natural resources at the University of Arkansas.

Social media redefines how people plan travel



Travelers want to see people in photos to entice them to visit a destination. Photo Copyright 2018 Carolyn E. Wright

By Kathryn Reed

STATELINE – Social media continues to challenge marketers when it comes to promoting a destination because people are using multiple platforms and how they use them differs. In other words, the exact same message used every place probably isn't going to work.

Geotags are the latest way people are searching social media. It's about tagging a location, not just using a hashtag. Most smart phones can geotag automatically via the GPS device that is built in.

Even with all the technology that is available today, word of mouth is the No. 1 way people get introduced to a destination. According to research done by marketing firm Chute, 57 percent of people rely on word on mouth, with social media being No. 2

at 44 percent.

Geotagging can help combine the two by people looking up on social media what they've heard about from a friend.

Jody Farrar with Chute led a session about travelers' social media preferences and habits during this month's Mountain Travel Symposium at Harrah's Lake Tahoe.

Platforms people are using in order of preference:

2016	2017	2018
Facebook	Facebook	Instagram
Instagram	YouTube	Facebook
YouTube	Instagram	YouTube
Pinterest	Pinterest	Pinterest
Twitter	Twitter	SnapChat
SnapChat	SnapChat	Twitter

Source: *Chute*

Facebook, Instagram and YouTube combined account for 50 percent of travel searches.

Farrar said Instagram's rise to the top could be because "it's easier to find inspiration." She added, "Following a hashtag is easier than following a brand."

Instagram has changed some things on its platform in the last 18 months which allows people to create collections. It's a way to save photos they like.

What Chute researchers are finding is that 75 percent of travelers are not following a destination. The No. 1 reason, Farrar said, is because people don't know they exist. Forty-one percent believe the information is too promotional.

For Tahoe this would mean they aren't following Tahoe South, Go North, Lake Tahoe Visitors Authority or North Lake Tahoe Resort Association.

However, for those who are following a brand, the reasons are

because they are researching a trip (38 percent), have already been there (37 percent), they like the content (25 percent.)

What could make SnapChat appealing for destinations is the ability to reach people once they are in the market. This is because of how people use the platform, but more important is that 80 percent of travelers don't make plans until they get to their destination, according to Farrar.

It's not just pretty pictures people want to see. They want to see others in the photos so they would have an easier time imagining themselves being transported to that spot. Travelers also tend to prefer authentic photos – ones shot by people actually experiencing the destination, and not professionally shot stills or videos.

Farrar said it's important to tell people to use key hashtags, to share collections and to tag other accounts so travelers are spreading the message in a different word of mouth format.

---

1 serious injury in explosion-fire at TRPA building

A fire Wednesday in the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency building could have been a lot worse had there not been sprinklers, according to Tahoe Douglas fire officials.

One person was airlifted to UC Davis Medical Center in Sacramento with second and third degree burns to his face, head and upper extremities.

"There was no damage to the building. Six fire sprinklers

opened and held the fire to the vehicle until the fire department put it out," Tahoe Douglas Fire Marshal Eric Guevin told *Lake Tahoe News.*

The man was working at Ron's Auto & Small Engine Repair on the bottom floor of the Stateline office complex when something exploded. The cause of the incident is still under investigation.

The TRPA Governing Board was meeting at Lake Tahoe Community College at the time of the incident. Staff was evacuated.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Nevadans have less student loan debt than most of U.S.

By Natalie Bruzda, Las Vegas Review-Journal

Nevada usually finds itself at the bottom of national education rankings.

But a new study examining student loan debt in America paints a more positive picture.

Nevada residents carry less student loan debt than a majority of Americans, according to a new report, "Debt in America," from the Urban Institute. The median student loan debt in Nevada is $14,218 – a debt load that's greater than that of only two other states: Utah and Wyoming.

Read the whole story

Serious ‘precipitation whiplash’ predicted for Calif.

By Dale Kasler, Sacramento Bee

It was the greatest flood in recorded California history, 43 days of rain and snow that swamped the state, killed thousands of people and forced the newly elected governor to take a boat to his inauguration at the Capitol.

Now a group of climatologists says global warming will increase California’s risk to repeat performances of the devastating flood of 1862.

In a study published Monday in the scientific journal Nature Climate Change, the scientists say climate change will increasingly expose California to a phenomenon they call “precipitation whiplash,” in which drought or drought-like conditions will alternate with intensely rainy winters. Rain and snow will become concentrated in narrow windows of time at the peak of winter, instead of being spread between October and April.

Read the whole story

Nev. gaming board OKs amendment regarding drug impairment

By Richard N. Velotta, Las Vegas Review-Journal

Gaming regulators are used to tweaking rules to keep up with changes in the industry. Last week the Nevada Gaming Commission took a step toward keeping up with societal change.

Under an amendment unanimously approved by the five-member commission, casinos will be subject to the same disciplinary standards for letting people gamble while impaired by drugs as they are for letting them play while intoxicated by alcohol.

The new rules may result in additional workforce training for floor staff to be aware of potentially impaired patrons.

Read the whole story

California state worker pensions are safe, for now

By Adam Ashton, Sacramento Bee

Future state workers, your pension cost-of-living adjustments are safe, and you won’t get to choose between a CalPERS pension and a 401(k) plan anytime soon.

Both proposals were shot down on Monday by a Senate committee that rejected a pack of bills aimed at reducing the risk

taxpayers face if an economic crisis cripples the state’s public pension funds.

Most of the bills came from Republican Sen. John Moorlach of Costa Mesa and Democratic Sen. Steve Glazer of Orinda, who argue that the rising cost of public pensions could drive local governments into bankruptcy when the next recession hits.

Read the whole story

Lake Tahoe groups support fight against invasive species

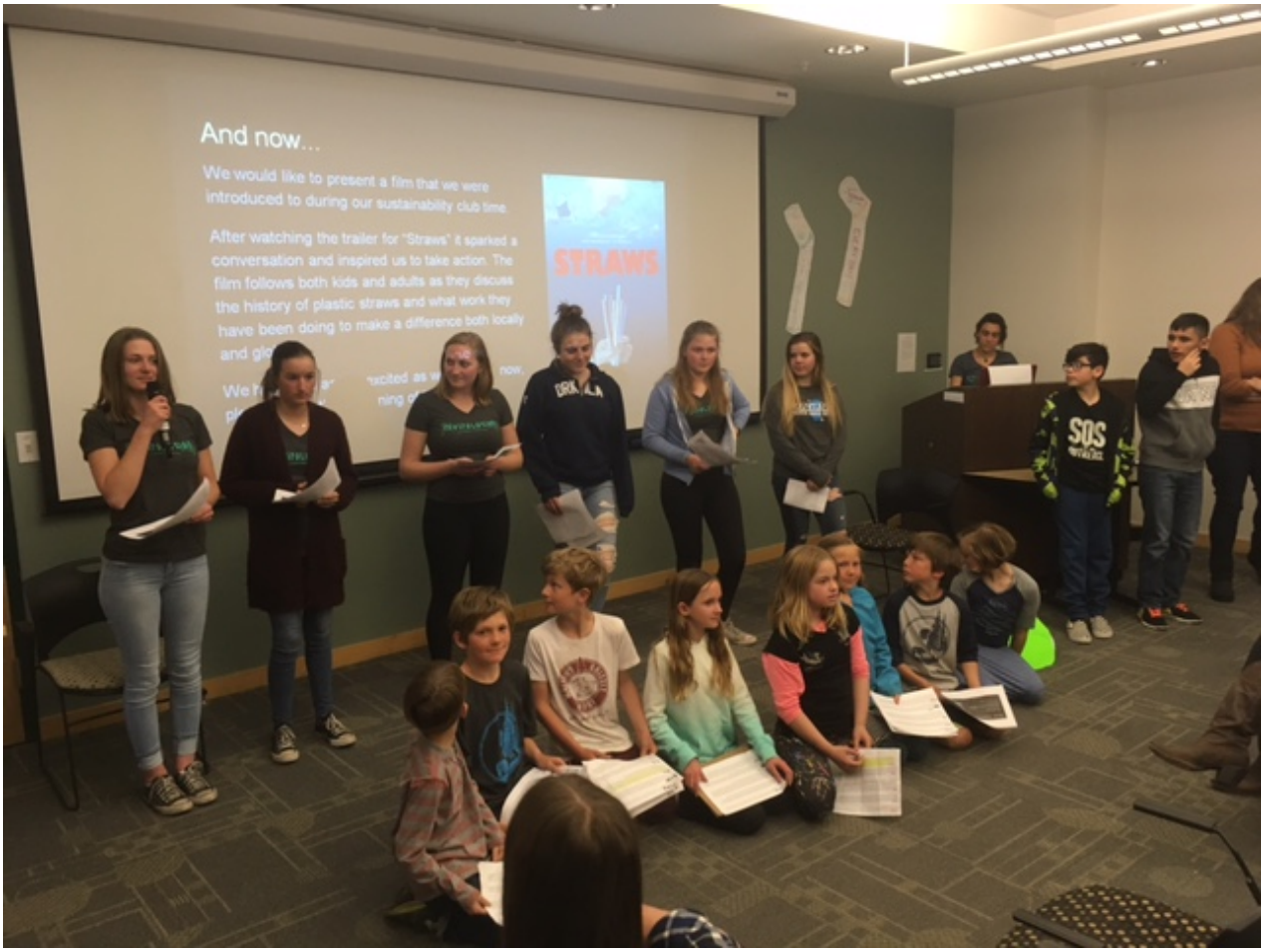
By Associated Press

A conservation group and a coalition of municipal drinking water providers at Lake Tahoe have pitched in to try to stunt the growth of invasive aquatic plants that can degrade water quality and rob the lake of its famed clarity.

The Tahoe Fund and the Tahoe Water Suppliers Association recently reached their fundraising goal to buy more than 150 bottom barriers and other resources to support the Tahoe Resource Conservation District in fighting the invasive animals and plants.

Read the whole story

Students spearhead plastic straw ban in Lake Tahoe



Students explain why plastic straws are bad for the environment. Photo/Terra Breeden

By Terra Breeden

INCLINE VILLAGE – It is estimated that more than 500 million single-use plastic straws are used and thrown away in the United States every day. That's enough straws to wrap around the Earth 2.5 times.

Single-use plastic straws are cheap and easy to produce, but

they are a menace to the environment. Billions of the seemingly insignificant, plastic tubes are buried in landfills and tossed in the ocean annually. Scientists predict that by 2050 there will be more pieces of plastic in the ocean than fish.

Lake Tahoe youths are mobilizing to cut down on plastic consumption. Students from a variety of schools and programs have united to spearhead the movement to raise plastic-straw-awareness and ban the use of other single-use plastics like Styrofoam containers and shopping bags at restaurants and other businesses around Lake Tahoe.

“There are so many people supporting this communitywide movement,” director of SWEP Ashley Phillips said. “But students are smart, creative, and they problem-solve in ways adults don’t. They have powerful voices to use.”

At Sierra Nevada College on April 19, students from the Sierra Watershed Education Partnership (SWEP), SOS Outreach program, and Sierra Expeditionary Learning School (SELS) united with Incline Village General Improvement District, League to Save Lake Tahoe and UC Davis TERC in an event called The Last Straw. The goal was to create plastic-straw-awareness in Lake Tahoe. The event highlighted the student’s work in the community and featured a documentary film on the history of plastic straws.



Youngsters educate adults about plastic. Photo/Terra Breeden

“We were all working on this single-use plastic awareness event in our communities and decided to combine forces. I love giving the kids the ability to showcase their work,” IVGID Resource Conservationist Madonna Dunbar told *Lake Tahoe News.*

The Lake Tahoe youths have done a lot of legwork to further their cause. Students from each of the programs formed coalitions to teach the community about the danger of single-use plastics, going to restaurants and businesses in South Lake Tahoe, Incline Village, Tahoe City, Kings Beach, and Truckee. They went to restaurants throughout the basin with proposal letters and created slogans and logos for their anti-straw campaign. Their goal was to persuade Lake Tahoe restaurants to stop using plastic straws, or at least make them available for guests upon request only.

“The kids did the work. They went out into the community and gave the presentations. They learned how to go from a concept to implementation and have touched all corners of the Lake Tahoe community,” Dunbar said.

Their movement has been a success. Over the past three months, SOS Outreach students have reached out to 45 restaurants in South Lake Tahoe and 12 restaurants in Kings Beach and Incline Village. The SOS Outreach students were inspired by the SWEP youths, who had already taken action by contacting 25 restaurants in Truckee and Tahoe City. Together, students from each of the programs have touched almost the entire Lake Tahoe community.

So far, due to their efforts, Northstar and Mountain Slice Café have agreed to go completely straw-free. Many other restaurants from around the lake have decided to make single-use plastic straws available to guests by request only.

Part of South Lake Tahoe’s Polystyrene ban that the City Council approved this year includes restaurants having to ask people if they want a straw – not having it be automatic.

When 4th- and 5th-graders from SELS heard about the other students’ campaign, they started their own Outlaw the Straw movement and gave a presentation at the Lodge at Tahoe Donner. The 9- to-11-year-olds’ next goal is to attend a Truckee community meeting and get a ban on single-use plastics made into law.

“We believe this is the next step for our eco-conscious town,” 10-yearr-old SELS student Ben Martin said. “Our blue planet is unique and special.”

The event last week was attended by about 100 people. The League to Save Lake Tahoe even provided reusable bamboo straws and water-bottles that were labeled with the logo Drink Tahoe Tap.

The film “The History of Straws” was shown and then students from each of the programs stood up and presented their work. At the end of the event, students asked if the audience would “agree to go straw free,” and as attendees rose from their seats and joined the Outlaw the Straw movement it appeared as if every seat in the room was empty.

The communitywide anti-straw movement continues to grow and reach others. Take Care Tahoe has commissioned for stickers and artwork to be made with slogans like “Straws Don’t Suck,” and “Drink Like a Fish.” Businesses that join the movement to ban straws will be publicized and given stickers to display in their windows that show they are a part of the effort to ban plastic straws in Lake Tahoe.

“Single-use plastics and not drinking bottled water is where this all started for us and it’s growing,” Dunbar told *Lake Tahoe News*. “Now we have the momentum and we have to keep that momentum going and capitalize on the gains we’ve made.”