

El Niño's winter storms no cure-all for drought

By Michael Doyle, McClatchy Washington Bureau

The El Niño storms drenching California won't suffice to solve the state's drought and won't permanently save the Central Valley's vulnerable salmon, federal scientists are cautioning.

In an apolitical assessment that comes amid a highly political time, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration experts stress that this year's El Niño bounty is both useful and limited. It might well be followed, moreover, by a swing back to a different kind of weather complication called La Niña.

"Not all water demands are going to be met, 100 percent, by the recovery we're seeing relative to the last four years," NOAA research meteorologist Martin Hoerling said Wednesday in a news briefing. "There are systemic issues with water supply that go beyond precipitation in any given year."

In particular, Hoerling cited a "drawdown in groundwater in many places in the state that's not sustainable" and must be addressed "as a long-term policy issue."

Read the whole story

Reno airport posts 1st passenger growth in decade

By Jason Hildago, Reno Gazette-Journal

New flights and an improving economy helped the Reno-Tahoe International Airport post its first annual growth in passengers in a decade.

The Reno airport reported serving 3.43 million passengers in 2015, a 3.9 increase from the previous year.

The numbers include especially strong traffic during the holiday season. Reno-Tahoe International saw 286,432 passengers in December, an 8.6 percent increase from the same month in 2014. The airport also reported seven straight months of passenger growth.

Read the whole story

South Tahoe man admits to shooting bear



This bear was killed last summer.. Photo/Toogee Sielsch

A South Lake Tahoe man today admitted to illegally killing a bear near his home in July 2015.

Gilbert Wetenkamp pleaded no contest March 11 to unlawfully

taking an animal.

El Dorado County Superior Court Judge Suzanne Kingsbury is scheduled to sentence him on March 18. The maximum penalty is one year in jail and a \$1,000 fine.

The 2½-year-old bear was shot in the backside with buckshot from a shotgun.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

SLT figuring out how to spend surplus funds

By Kathryn Reed

Tourists are rediscovering South Lake Tahoe. While that might be evident by the number of vehicles on the roads, it is even more pronounced when looking at the city's coffers.

When the City Council convenes March 15 the five electeds will be tasked with allocating the revenue surplus of \$5.4 million – a 16 percent increase over this year's fiscal budget.

The hotel tax for the first quarter of this fiscal year, which started Oct. 1, is 20 percent higher than what it was 2014. Even if revenues stay flat the rest of the 2015-16 year, it will generate \$2.3 million more than the previous fiscal year, according to city documents.

Earlier this year the council gave staff direction regarding how to allocate the projected revenue surplus. Tuesday's

meeting is about approving the game plan.

“This is the single largest mid-year appropriation of funds that the city has made since the Great Recession,” City Manager Nancy Kerry told *Lake Tahoe News*.

She said it reflects the increase in tax revenues, which include hotel, sales and property taxes, as well as reducing expenses, most notably health care costs.

The bulk of the money – \$1.5 million – is expected to be used to repave roads. About the same amount is being allocated to the community play fields, where a soccer field will be installed close to where the field at Lake Tahoe Community College is located.

Moving the public works yard from Rufus Allen Boulevard to the industrial area will cost \$1 million.

The airport will get more than \$600,000 worth of improvements, which include a new heating and air conditioning system, making it compliant with the Americans with Disability Act, as well as renovating the facility to make it more like a visitors’ center than its current vacant, open waste of space lobby-like area.

While the city and El Dorado County have not come to an agreement regarding ownership of the property where the senior center is located, the city plans to set aside \$100,000 to upgrade that facility.

Kerry stressed that all of this money is one-time funds.

“With capital needs, community investment and operations, we are tackling all of these things a little at a time,” Kerry said.

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Notes:

· The City Council meets March 15 at 9am at Lake Tahoe Airport.

Calif. on cusp of raising smoking age to 21

By Associated Press

California lawmakers voted Thursday to make the nation's most populous state the second to raise the smoking age from 18 to 21 as part of a sweeping package of measures they are considering to crack down on tobacco.

Democratic Gov. Jerry Brown still must sign off on the legislation the Senate approved to make California the first state after Hawaii with the higher age limit. His spokesman said last week that the governor generally does not comment on pending legislation.

The bills also would restrict electronic cigarettes the same as tobacco products. The increasingly popular devices are not regulated by the federal government.

The higher age limit got approved despite amid intense lobbying from tobacco interests and fierce opposition from many Republicans, who say the state should butt out of people's personal decisions, even if they are harmful to health.

The six bills, which the Assembly has already backed, represent California's most substantial anti-tobacco effort in nearly two decades, the American Cancer Society said.

"With California having such a huge population, it's going to

be very impactful nationwide,” said Cathy Callaway, associate director of state and local campaigns for the American Cancer Society.

The Senate vote comes just more than a week after San Francisco officials opted to raise the tobacco buying age to 21, making it the largest city to do so after New York. Nationwide, more than 120 municipalities have raised the smoking age, according to Tobacco 21, a group that advocates the policy shift nationally.

Hawaii was first to adopt the higher age limit statewide. New Jersey’s Legislature voted to raise the smoking age from 19 to 21, but the bill died when Republican Gov. Chris Christie decided not to act on it before a January deadline.

Advocates note that the vast majority of smokers start before they are 18, according to data from the U.S. surgeon general. Making it illegal for 18-year-old high school students to buy tobacco for their underage friends will make it more difficult for teens to get the products, they say.

Critics say adults are trusted to make weighty decisions to vote or join the military once they turn 18. In response, Democrats changed the bill to allow members of the military to continue buying cigarettes at 18.

“You can commit a felony when you’re 18 years old and for the rest of your life, be in prison,” Assembly Republican Leader Chad Mayes said. “And yet you can’t buy a pack of cigarettes.”

Another bill would classify e-cigarettes, or “vaping” devices, as tobacco products subject to the same restrictions on who can purchase them and where they can be used.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration proposed regulating e-cigarettes but the rule has not taken effect.

Anti-tobacco advocates fear that vaporizers are enticing to

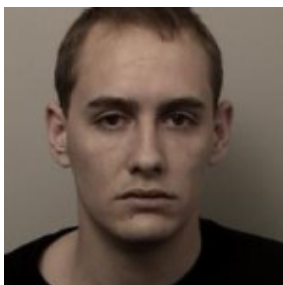
young people and may encourage them to eventually take up smoking. Others say they are a less-harmful, tar-free alternative to cigarettes. They have not been extensively studied, and there is no scientific consensus on their harms or benefits.

The package of bills would expand smoke-free areas to include bars, workplace breakrooms, small businesses, warehouses, and hotel lobbies and meeting rooms. Smoking bans would apply at more schools, including charter schools, and counties would be able to raise their own cigarette taxes beyond the state's levy of 87 cents per pack.

Anti-smoking groups are collecting signatures for a November ballot initiative that would raise the cigarette tax to \$2 a pack and direct the money to health care, tobacco-use prevention, research and law enforcement.

Carson City man accused of robbery in Camino

By Cathy Locke, Sacramento Bee



Aaron Friesen

A man accused of armed robbery of a Camino business was taken

into custody Thursday following a search that included area school campuses.

A man brandishing a gun robbed the Wine Country Station off Highway 50 in Camino about 5:30am, according to an El Dorado County Sheriff's Office news release.

A witness outside the store saw the man leaving the area in a vehicle and was able to provide information to deputies responding to the robbery report. That information led them to a vehicle that had crashed at the intersection of Broadway and Smith Flat Road, just east of Placerville.

Read the whole story

Storms lined up to soak Tahoe



More powder days are in Heavenly's near future – as well as at all Tahoe resorts. Photo Copyright 2016 Carolyn E. Wright

While snow is in the forecast for Friday, the National Weather Service in Reno is calling this weekend's storm "potent".

A lake wind advisory has been issued for March 11 from 9am-6pm.

A winter storm watch has been issued for the basin from March 12 at 4pm through March 14 at 11am. A foot of white stuff could fall at lake level and a couple feet above 7,000 feet. Wind gusts could reach 45 mph at lower elevations and 100 mph on ridges.

Overnight lows for the next few days are expected to hover around freezing in South Lake Tahoe, while highs will gradually be declining from 48 on Friday to 37 on Monday.

The next completely sunny day isn't expected until next Wednesday.

Push to raise Nev. minimum wage halted

By Megan Messerly, Las Vegas Sun

Amid the fervor of caucus season – the day that Democratic presidential candidates Hillary Clinton and Bernie Sanders visited union workers on a picket line outside of Sunrise Hospital, the day that they addressed Nevada issues at a town hall in front of a national audience on television, and two days before the Nevada Democratic caucuses – the minimum wage ballot initiative was quietly withdrawn.

The initiative, first put forward in November, would have gradually raised the minimum wage in Nevada to \$13 an hour by 2024 from its current level, \$8.25. The group backing the initiative, the Committee to Raise the Minimum Wage, would have needed to gather more than 55,000 signatures of registered voters by June 21 to get it on the ballot.

But a couple of weeks before the caucuses, the initiative's supporters decided to withdraw the petition, said Laura Martin, associate director for the Progressive Leadership Alliance of Nevada, known as PLAN, one of the main advocates of the initiative.

Read the whole story

DUI checkpoint in SLT on St. Paddy's Day

St. Patrick's Day has become one of the nation's deadliest holidays.

From 2010 to 2014, almost three-fourths of the drunk-driving fatalities during this holiday period involved drivers who had blood alcohol levels well above the 0.08 limit, with 266 drunk-driving fatalities total nationwide, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

To help lower deaths and injuries, South Lake Tahoe police officers will be deploying extra officers on overtime targeting problem areas with high numbers of DUI collisions and DUI arrests. These DUI patrols along with routine nightly patrols will be looking for the tell-tale signs of impaired driving to include weaving and crossing the center line. Officers will also be conducting a DUI checkpoint on March 17 from 7pm to 2am.

Walking while intoxicated can also be deadly, as lack of attention could put a person at risk of getting hit by a vehicle.

Tips to be safe:

- Designate a sober, reliable driver to get you home safely. Find the name of a taxi company (or two), and keep their numbers in your phone, or download the California Office of Traffic Safety DDVIP (Designated Driver VIP) mobile app. Or order a sober ride from Uber, Lyft or Curb.
- Before you take your first sip of green beer, leave your keys at home or give them to a friend. Ensure your designated driver has committed to a sober evening. If you're the designated driver, do not drink.

This enforcement campaign is funded by a grant from the California Office of Traffic Safety, through the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. The next special DUI campaign is set for Cinco de Mayo.

Voting rights group threatens Nevada with possible DMV lawsuit

By Sean Whaley, Las Vegas Review-Journal

CARSON CITY – Voting rights advocates said Monday they have sent a pre-litigation notice letter to Nevada officials, warning that the Nevada Department of Motor Vehicles is failing to meet its federally mandated voter registration obligations.

Attorneys representing Mi Familia Vota Education Fund and Nevada resident Eleanor Newell sent the letter to Nevada Secretary of State Barbara Cegavske and Terri L. Albertson, director of the DMV.

The attorneys are threatening litigation if the state does not comply with the law.

Read the whole story