

# Storms significantly boosting Sierra snowpack



Frank Gehrke is the state's official snow survey taker.  
Photo/LTN file

## By Lake Tahoe News

It doesn't matter that the water content of the snow near Echo Summit is 130 percent of average; officials aren't about to say the drought is anywhere near over.

"While the recent rains and growing snowpack are wonderful to behold, we won't know until spring what effect it will have on the bottom line for California's unprecedented drought," Felicia Marcus, chair of the State Water Resources Control Board, said in a statement. "Until we can tally that ledger, we have to keep conserving water every way we can. Every drop saved today is one that we may be very glad we have tomorrow."

The manual reading was taken this morning in the snowfield near the entrance of Sierra-at-Tahoe. The snow depth was 76.2 inches, with the water content at 25.4 inches.

Those numbers are significantly higher than a year ago and above normal for this time of year. In 2015, the water content was 2.5 inches. Water content has averaged 19.5 inches for the

last 50 years.

The last time this area recorded these kinds of numbers was in 2005 – snow depth was 77.1 inches, water content 29.9 inches.

Statewide the water content is 20.4 inches, which is 114 percent of normal for Feb. 2.

Snow is so vital because in normal years it supplies about 30 percent of California's drinking and irrigation water. Most reservoirs in the state remain below average for this time of year.

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## **Calif. partnership to increase controlled burns**

**BY Olga R. Rodriguez, AP**

Environmental groups and federal and state agencies have formed a partnership to increase the use of prescribed fires to improve the health of California's forests and watersheds and minimize the effects of increasingly devastating wildfires.

The agreement signed by the CalFire, U.S. Forest Service and other federal and state agencies and several environmental groups, including the Sierra Club and The Nature Conservancy, will enable the sharing of resources and expertise among the signatories, who will have their first working meeting Tuesday.

"This allows us to bring key parties together and have a more organized approach to addressing some of the impediments that we face on using fire to restore our natural landscapes," said

Jim Branham, Executive Officer for the Sierra Nevada Conservancy, one of the state agencies that endorsed the memorandum of understanding.

Prescribed fires are not without controversy because of the air pollution they create but the groups and agencies involved agreed to find ways to better manage smoke during controlled burns. They also agreed to train personnel in agencies that don't have the staff for prescribed burn because of strained resources.

The agreement comes after several massive wildfires largely fueled by extremely dry vegetation scorched hundreds of square miles of forests and destroyed hundreds of homes in drought-parched California.

In Lake County last year, a wildfire burned so hot that the flames generated their own wind and blew out embers that started spot fires ahead of the blaze.

Supporters say controlled burns are one way to prevent wildfires that quickly explode in size and intensity.

"The last couple of years have been kind of a wakeup call that we need to figure out how to put (prescribed fires) back on the landscape in a more sophisticated way than we've done in the past," Braham said.

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## **Study: 1 in 11 shopping for guns online in Nevada can't**

# legally possess one

By Wesley Juhl, Las Vegas Review-Journal

Nearly one in 11 people shopping for guns online in Nevada is prohibited from possessing a firearm, according to a study by Everytown for Gun Safety released Friday.

Everytown for Gun Safety, a national gun control advocacy group, researched listings for firearms on four websites: Armslist, Gunlistings, Backpage and Facebook, where private-party sellers in Nevada used dozens of dedicated pages to arrange gun sales.

The study, called “The Wild Wild Web,” evokes Nevada’s frontier history:

“Frontier days seem distant in Nevada, where the rugged landscape has recently acquired a 21st-century sheen. Cities have sprouted in its deserts. Technology companies like Tesla Motors and Faraday Future vie for the state’s workforce,” the report said. “But invisible to most Nevadans, an unregulated commerce in firearms continues. And it’s facilitated by the same digital platforms driving the economic boom.”

**Read the whole story**

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## AG: IVGID violated open meeting law

By Cy Ryan, Las Vegas Sun

CARSON CITY – Attorney General Adam Laxalt says the board of

the Incline Village General Improvement District violated the open meeting law and failed to correct it.

Laxalt said the move to reorganize the board at North Lake Tahoe in August is void because of the violations.

**Read the whole story**

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# Pennsylvania groundhog 'predicts' early spring

**By Associated Press**

PUNXSUTAWNEY, Pa. — The handlers of Pennsylvania's most famous groundhog, Punxsutawney Phil, said the furry rodent failed to see his shadow at dawn Tuesday, meaning he "predicted" an early spring.

"Is this current warm weather more than a trend? Per chance this winter has come to an end? There is no shadow to be cast, an early Spring is my forecast!," read Jeff Lundy, vice president of the Inner Circle of The Punxsutawney Groundhog Club.

Lundy is one of the top hat-wearing group that announces the forecast every year.

A German legend has it that if a furry rodent sees his shadow on Feb. 2, winter will last another six weeks. If not, spring comes early.

The forecast was delivered with temperatures in the low 20s, on a clear day when the high temperature was expected to reach the unseasonably mild mid-40s.

The Inner Circle congratulated the mid-week crowd of about 10,000 revelers, which the group said was one of the largest for a weekday celebration. Many of those in attendance had stayed overnight and partied into the wee hours waiting for the groundhog's forecast.

Truth be told, Phil's handlers don't wait to see if he sees his shadow – which he almost certainly would have Tuesday. Instead, the Inner Circle decide on the forecast ahead of time and announce it on Gobbler's Knob, a tiny hill near the town for which the groundhog is named, about 65 miles northeast of Pittsburgh.

Records going back to 1887 show Phil has now predicted more winter 102 times while forecasting an early spring just 18 times. There are no records for the remaining years.

Tuesday's celebration was billed as the 130th forecast by Phil.

In New York, Staten Island Chuck agreed with Phil: An early spring is coming.

The groundhog did not see his shadow as he emerged from his home at the Staten Island Zoo early Tuesday.

New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio missed this year's annual Groundhog Day commemoration. The Democrat had gone to Iowa to stump for Hillary Clinton for that state's caucus.

Traditionally, the city's mayor attends the festivities. De Blasio dropped the groundhog in 2014, the first year he attended the ceremony as mayor. The groundhog died a few months later.

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# Lawmaker pushes for all-gender restrooms

By Melody Gutierrez, San Francisco Chronicle

SACRAMENTO – Transgender people may find a bit of relief in a bill being proposed by a California lawmaker Friday that would make all public single-stall restrooms gender neutral.

Assemblyman Phil Ting, D-San Francisco, said AB1732 would require all single-occupancy restrooms in private businesses and government buildings to be “all-gender,” instead of one restroom for men and another for women. Supporters of the bill say it would allow transgender and gender nonconforming people to pee in peace, without verbal or physical threats when they are seen entering a restroom for the gender they identify with.

The bill builds on a restroom access bill signed into law in 2013 that allows transgender K-12 students to use the school restroom corresponding with the gender they identify with.

**Read the whole story**

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## Loop road may cost STPUD customers \$10 mil.



Shannon Cotulla, STPUD assistant general manager, talks about water-sewer lines in the loop road area.  
Photo/LTN

### By Kathryn Reed

Ten million dollars. That's what it could cost to move South Tahoe Public Utility District's water and sewer lines if the loop road goes through.

"It could have devastating impacts for our utility," Shannon Cotulla, STPUD assistant general manager, said of the relocations process.

Cotulla and General Manager Richard Solbrig explained at the Feb. 1 South Tahoe Chamber of Commerce meeting at the Cantina restaurant that while many questions remain to be answered, the easements are what are most important.

"If they give us the easements for the facilities, then it would be up to the developer to come up with the cost to relocate the lines," Cotulla said.

The district has encroachment permits, but not the easements.

Solbrig put a preliminary estimated price tag of between \$5 million and \$10 million to move the water and sewer lines. Part has to do with whether the road would be lowered to mitigate noise issues. Digging down, like what the **Nevada**

**Department of Transportation** is doing in Carson City, is a normal engineering tactic.

With STPUD having gravity lines in this area bordering Nevada, it would become more costly to have to put lines deeper than if they operated in a different manner.

Last week South Tahoe PUD finished mapping its assets in the proposed project area. An exact dollar figure is hard to pinpoint because it's not known how far the lines would have to move. Just to plan such an endeavor costs about \$300 per foot.

The district officials said a 30-year loan would likely be needed to foot the bill. This in turn would equate to about a 10 percent rate hike. Solbrig envisions that cost being spread out among all customers in the district.

It's not just the water-sewer lines that would need to be relocated if Highway 50 were routed behind Harrah's Lake Tahoe and MontBleu and the current highway becomes a city-county street through the Stateline casino corridor. Cable television, gas, electric and phone infrastructure would also need to be moved. And those rates would then likely spike.

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## **Notes:**

- There will be a meeting about the loop road on Feb. 10 from 4:30-7pm inside South Tahoe Middle School's multipurpose room.

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# Nev.'s net metering rules may alter energy strategy

By Sean Whaley, Las Vegas Review-Journal

CARSON CITY – Nevada government and business leaders may have to shift at least part of their established economic development focus from renewable energy to other opportunities if new net metering rules drive the rooftop-solar business out of Nevada as predicted by industry officials.

Rooftop solar was only very recently identified as a priority for Gov. Brian Sandoval's Office of Energy. A rooftop-solar initiative implemented in 2012 had a goal of getting 5 percent of all single family homes and businesses in Nevada to use rooftop-solar systems. The office also had a goal of seeking to make solar electricity cost-competitive with other forms of energy.

The office received a \$765,000 grant in 2011 for its Nevada Rooftop Solar Initiative from the U.S. Department of Energy.

**Read the whole story**

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## Things to know before buying a winter vacation home

By Daniel Goldstein, MarketWatch

If homeownership is the first cornerstone of the American Dream, then a quiet cabin by the lake (if not a beach house with a view of a breathtaking sunset) in the mountains as far

away from a Wi-Fi hot spot as possible probably runs a close second.

Indeed, overly-wired and Internet-saturated Americans are looking to the peace and quiet of a cabin again. Zach Klein, the co-founder of Vimeo and the current chief executive at DIY.org, an online school for kids, recently wrote a best-selling book on the thousands of Americans who have gone to the backwoods to build their own.

Of course, you don't have to saw your own logs to get the log-cabin effect. Heather Barbosa, a 44-year-old architectural project manager in Fullerton bought a two-bedroom cabin in Big Bear near the popular ski resort in 2003 with some money her grandmother left her.

She uses it four times a year, but rents it out for eight to 10 weekends a year as well. "It's really a staple of our family now and a cheap vacation for us, " she said. "Now that we've paid it off it becomes positive cash flow for us too."

**Read the whole story**

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**Tahoe Vista time-share  
project still alive**



Spindleshanks comes down on Oct. 7, 2015. Photo/Ellie Waller

**By Kathryn Reed**

The much-maligned property in Tahoe Vista where Spindleshanks used to be might still be turned into 39 time-share units.

Tim Wilkens, who owns the 6-acre parcel, has been given an extension by the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency until May 1 to start the construction process.

“The determination was based on information that the permittee was unable to follow the approved construction schedule due to a requirement by Placer County in mid-2014 that the project be held until appropriate measures could be implemented to mitigate the presence of a protected bat species at the site,” Tom Lotshaw, spokesman for TRPA, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

If Wilkens does not get an approved updated construction schedule before May 1, the permit will expire.

The project was first proposed in 2006. Wilkens at that time with Joe Lanza and Rafe Miller had formed Lake Tahoe Partners. The plan was to develop 49 timeshares, with Wyndham to manage it. Wyndham is no longer involved, nor are Lanza and Miller.

A lawsuit was filed in 2008 by Friends of Tahoe Vista and the League to Save Lake Tahoe against Placer County and the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency. The plaintiffs' contention was this was way too much density for the site.

The 2010 settlement called for reducing the plan to 39 units and having 50,000 square feet less coverage.

The land is practically in the middle of Tahoe Vista on the mountain said of this North Shore community.

The Spindleshanks building had to come down last fall because it could not be brought up to code. It was originally constructed in 1927 for what was known as the Sandy Beach Resort and campground. Its last incarnation was the Spindleshanks restaurant. The restaurant has since moved to the Brockway Golf Course.