Snowpack water content more than triples in a month



Alec Bowman enjoys the powder at Sierra-at-Tahoe. Photo/Brian Walker

By Amy Graff, San Francisco Chronicle

A series of supercharged storms that blasted the Sierra in March has bolstered the snowpack that was alarmingly low before the start of the month.

The National Weather Service in Sacramento tweeted Saturday that the water content of the snowpack has more than tripled in the past month.

On Feb. 22, an average of 4.6 inches was measured and on March 23 an average of 15.5 inches was recorded, going from 16 percent to 56 percent of the April 1 average.

Read the whole story

EDC wants help in dealing with homelessness

By Kathryn Reed

El Dorado County is trying to get a handle on homelessness by creating a continuum of care for those in need.

Daniel Del Monte, deputy director of the Community Services Division of the county's Health and Human Services Agency, was at last week's South Lake Tahoe City Council meeting painting a bleak picture about housing and homelessness.

He spoke about the desire to create a homeless coordinator position. While a dollar amount was not talked about at the March 21 meeting, it will be on a future council agenda.

Barton and Marshall hospitals, the cities of South Lake Tahoe and Placerville, and El Dorado County are each being asked to contribute $20,000 a year for the homeless coordinator position. The hospitals have said yes. The county wants a two-year commitment from every entity.

Hospitals suffer financially when homeless people choose to use the emergency room when a doctor would suffice, or if when what they really need is mental health services, or even a warm place to stay.

"The primary purpose of the homeless coordinator is to provide proper administrative support, strategic planning, HMIS administration and capacity building for our partners. Counties who invest in their continuum of care receive significantly more money than El Dorado County has received," El Dorado County CAO Don Ashton told *Lake Tahoe News*. "If successful, funding the homeless coordinator will bring in more federal money to manage the homeless population. By establishing a multi-agency MOU and partnership with the

county, city of Placerville, Marshall Hospital, Barton and the city of South Lake Tahoe, we could share the cost and share in the benefit. We haven't discussed specific deal points, but conceptually any additional funding the county realizes as a result of the homeless coordinator would be shared based on a formula between the West Slope and East Slope."

Del Monte pointed out how California has about 40 million residents, with housing for 25 million.

"From 2007 to 2015 was the lowest eight-year economic development period in the last 60 years. It comes at a time when the state population is at its highest," Del Monte said.

On one slide in the PowerPoint presentation De Monte posed the question: What can be done to increase person centered housing options?

The answers:

· Regions strive to create system responses to housing crises.

· Responses that can help to prevent individual from becoming homeless.

· Responses that maximize the ability to get homeless individuals rehoused with needed supports.

· One that maximizes self-sufficiency for each individual based upon their unique needs.

· One that produces the best results for the individual and the community.

However, how to accomplish those goals was never revealed. Nor were they explained further to get through the government-speak. And the council members, other than Mayor Wendy David, were not very engaged in the presentation.

The thrust behind the continuum of care is to find housing quickly and then provide the support network so the person doesn’t return to the street.

Del Monte said in El Dorado County it costs $47 a day for supportive housing, up to $155 for a detox facility, $115 for jail, $850 for a bed in a psychiatric facility, and $4,000 a day at Barton Memorial Hospital for a 24-hour psych stay.

A continuum care approach is supposed to lower the costs of helping someone – and provide them with actual help.

Del Monte said the homeless coordinator would be used to leverage state and federal money. He said that person would manage the system.

He admitted, “Ultimately we will need more housing and more services.”

Federal wildlife protection board stuffed with trophy hunters

By Michael Biesecker, Jake Pearson and Jeff Horwitz, AP

WASHINGTON – A new U.S. advisory board created to help rewrite federal rules for importing the heads and hides of African elephants, lions and rhinos is stacked with trophy hunters, including some members with direct ties to President Trump and his family.

A review by the *Associated Press* of the backgrounds and social media posts of the 16 board members appointed by Interior

Secretary Ryan Zinke indicates they will agree with his position that the best way to protect critically threatened or endangered species is by encouraging wealthy Americans to shoot some of them.

One appointee co-owns a private New York hunting preserve with Trump's adult sons. The oldest son, Donald Trump Jr., drew the ire of animal rights activists after a 2011 photo emerged of him holding a bloody knife and the severed tail of an elephant he killed in Zimbabwe.

Read the whole story

Most Calif. cannabis growers don't have licenses

By Riley McDermid, San Francisco Business Times

A report has found that less than 1 percent of California's cannabis growers have registered with the state's new legal licensing system, because the costs associated with new regulations and a host of local laws banning grows are too prohibitive.

The massive 38-page report from the California Growers Association, titled "An Emerging Crisis: Barriers To Entry In California Cannabis," warns that many of the regulations and zoning laws put in place by California towns have put a deep freeze on the industry going legal, because growers must register with their local municipalities before they can receive state licenses.

Read the whole story

Comments being taken on NV Energy proposal

The Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest has released the NV Energy Bordertown to California 120 kV transmission line project draft record of decision and final environmental impact statement for a formal objection period until the end of April.

Objections will be accepted only from people who have previously submitted specific written comments regarding the proposed project during scoping or other designated comment periods.

The purpose of the NV Energy project is to construct an electrical transmission line which will provide backup service to the west Reno/Verdi area in Nevada. Installing a power line between the Bordertown and California substations will allow NV Energy to provide the power needed to meet reliability requirements of their electrical system.

The draft ROD and final EIS for this project are available **online**.

Calif. housing problems spilling across its borders

By Conor Dougherty, New York Times

A growing homelessness crisis. Complaints about traffic congestion. Worries that the economy is becoming dominated by a wealthy elite.

Those sound like California's problems in a nutshell. But now they are also among California's leading exports.

Just ask the citizens of this city, where growing numbers of Californians and companies like Tesla have migrated to take advantage of cheap land and comparatively low home prices. A four-hour drive from Silicon Valley, across a mountain range and a state line, Reno is finding that imported growth is accompanied by imported problems.

Read the whole story

Calif. billionaire to spend big bucks on Nev. races

By James DeHaven, Reno Gazette-Journal

Democratic megadonor Tom Steyer says a closely watched U.S. Senate race and a much-anticipated governor's race will be the top targets of his new multimillion-dollar push to get young Nevadans to the polls.

The San Francisco-based hedge fund tycoon said Thursday that the $2 million millennial-focused voter turnout effort will look to oust vulnerable Sen. Dean Heller, R-Nev., and keep Republican Attorney General Adam Laxalt out of the governor's mansion.

Read the whole story

Man makes off with cash from SLT Wells Fargo



Police are looking for this suspect.

Police are looking for a man who robbed the South Lake Tahoe Wells Fargo Bank on Saturday.

The suspect entered the Emerald Bay Road on March 24 just before 1pm, presented a teller a note. He left with an undisclosed amount of cash.

No weapon was seen.

The suspect is described as a white or Hispanic, approximately 40, black goatee, wire frame glasses, wearing blue jeans, a tan beanie, dark green or brown zip-up jacket and black gloves.

The FBI is also involved in the investigation

Anyone with information should call the South Lake Tahoe Police Department at 530.542.6100, or to remain anonymous Lake Tahoe Secret Witness at 530.541.6800.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

SLT residents try to find answers to housing issues

By Kathryn Reed

Solutions to South Lake Tahoe's housing woes were in short supply during a talk about the issue on Wednesday.

Mayor Wendy David's monthly gathering was focused on housing last week, with planning staff (Kevin Fabino and John Hitchcock) there to provide the bulk of the information.

"There are a lot of things we could potentially do, but we need to always remember what TRPA will allow," Fabino told the group gathered at the South Lake Tahoe Senior Center on March 21. What he didn't share is what the city would/could do if the bi-state regulatory agency weren't in the picture.

One of the reasons the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency was created in the 1960s was to stop local jurisdictions from unregulated growth, especially after the most sensitive marsh in the basin was paved over to create the Tahoe Keys – in South Lake Tahoe.

Fabino and David pointed to the successes of turning some of the rundown hotels into more livable residential units.

"It's a good short-term solution. I'm not sure it's a long-term answer," Fabino said.

To build affordable housing as it's defined by the state where income needs to be verified and units are deed restricted is

actually more expensive to build than market rate housing because of all the state requirements.

Land is a premium in the basin. Then there are the costs to do business. Of the $60,000 in development fees the city collects, only $6,300 of that is the actual building permit fee. The rest is money that goes to other entities like the TRPA, sewer-water district, schools and air quality mitigation.

Heidi Hill Drum, who runs the Tahoe Prosperity Center, said that is why it would be better to look at assessing fees based on the square footage of a structure instead of a flat fee.

South Tahoe Public Utility District has reduced its sewer connection fee. That board is now contemplating allowing sewer hookups to be transferred, which would reduce the cost of construction.

Others at the talk advocated for businesses to provide housing for workers.

A representative from Heavenly Mountain Resort said of the approximately 1,500 winter employees the ski resort has there are beds for 72. This housing is at the bottom of Keller Road.

A former city worker suggested creating a higher transient occupancy tax for vacation home rentals and then using that money to create work force/affordable housing.

Someone else suggested dorm-style housing for workers. This is done at the CCC building in Meyers.

‘Rewilding’ missing carnivores may help restore landscapes

By Joanna Klein, New York Times

If you’re lucky, you can spot a gray wolf in Yellowstone National Park. But a century ago, you’d have been hard pressed to find any there. Poisonings and unregulated hunting obliterated nearly all of these majestic canines from Canada to Mexico, their original home range.

Then the rewilding began.

Since their reintroduction to Yellowstone and Idaho in the 1990s, gray wolves have done so well that they’re reclaiming other parts of the northern Rockies.

In the places where they returned, wolves tidied up explosive deer and elk populations, which had eaten valleys barren. That helped bring back trees and shrubs. Birds and beavers, as well as the animals that live in dams, also returned. The wolves ate coyotes, freeing up their prey for others. Bears and raptors came back for carrion. With more trees controlling erosion, the flows of some rivers were less chaotic, forming pools that became new habitats.

Read the whole story