

Megafires are remaking U.S. forests

By Laura Parker, National Geographic

Twisp, Wash. – The largest fire in state history swept through the eastern slopes of the Cascade Range with explosive force last summer. The Carlton Complex Fire burned more than 250,000 acres, devouring everything in its path at the hypersonic pace of 3.8 acres per second.

Until then, the top slot in the state's fire rankings belonged to the Tripod Fire, which burned up 175,000 beetle-infested acres in two months on the same slopes in 2006.

Carlton and Tripod are “megafires,” part of a wave of extreme fires that are transforming the great forests of the American West. By the end of the century, scientists say, megafires—conflagrations that chew up at least 100,000 acres of land—will become the norm. Which makes them of critical interest to researchers.

These infernos, once rare, are growing to sizes that U.S. Forest Service Chief Tom Tidwell describes as “unimaginable” two decades ago. Five alone have consumed more than 5 million acres in central Alaska since June. Washington, Oregon, California, Arizona, New Mexico and Colorado also experienced their worst wildfires in the past seven years.

So far in the Lower 48, none of the thousands of fires that have burned across the 11 Western states have grown into megafire size. But the most perilous weeks of fire season are still ahead.

Read the whole story

8 people running for TPRID board

The incumbents on the Tahoe Paradise Resort Improvement District board are being challenged to force an election in November.

For years this parks board has been appointed by sitting members. Four of the five seats are supposed to be elected, with the fifth being appointed by the El Dorado County Board of Supervisors. The District 5 supervisor usually fills that seat.

Four seats will be open on the Nov. 3 ballot. The terms of Judy Clot and Pete Nelligan are expiring. Those are for four-year terms. The other two seats are for terms that expire Dec. 1, 2017. Joe Cardinale and Victor Babbitt are in those seats.

Running for the full term seats are Babbitt, Clot, Brandie Jordan-Griffith and Diane Verwoest. Cardinale, Nelligan, Jan Roman-Gonzales and Frank Jones are vying for the short-term seat.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Poll: Not all agree about

slavery's role in Civil War

By Samantha Ehlinger, Tribune News Service

WASHINGTON — A century and a half after the war ended, Americans still fundamentally disagree about slavery's role in the Civil War and what to teach schoolchildren about it, according to a new McClatchy-Marist Poll.

Fifty-four percent of respondents think slavery was the main reason for the Civil War. A sizable minority, 41 percent, do not think slavery was the main reason, the national survey found.

Echoing that divide, they also are split over what to teach children. A majority, 54 percent, believe schools should teach that slavery was the main reason for the war; 38 percent think they should not teach that.

Read the whole story

El Nino meets 'the blob' — but will it help?

By Jeff DeLong, Reno Gazette-Journal

There's El Nino, and then there's "the blob."

Both are phenomena associated with warm water in the Pacific. Both could have some impact on the weather, including building hopes for a big winter that might help pull the West out of protracted drought.

No one really knows.

“This is a little bit of an unprecedented situation,” said Kelly Redmond, deputy director of the Western Regional Climate Center in Reno. “It’s like two sets of dice that influence the atmosphere. But do these sets of dice have a string connecting them?”

El Nino is characterized by warmer-than-normal surface water temperatures in the equatorial Pacific stretching from the coast of Peru to west of the international dateline. After a year of anticipation, conditions came together last March for an El Nino to be officially declared, with scientists now saying there’s a better than 90 percent chance the condition will stick around into next winter.

Read the whole story

Mom killed, husband arrested in EDC crash

By Sarah Heise, KCRA-TV

A solo vehicle crash in Georgetown killed a mother of two and resulted in her husband being arrested on DUI charges, according to the California Highway Patrol.

The family of four from the Georgetown area was driving about 10:30 p.m. Sunday on Wentworth Springs Road, east of Quintette Court, officers said.

The father, 32, was driving their pickup when he lost control of the vehicle and it overturned, CHP said.

Charges likely in personal watercraft collision

By Kathryn Reed

Four people from the Bay Area were injured in a personal watercraft accident in Zephyr Cove, with one man lucky to be alive.

Antonio Villobos, 26, of San Francisco and Scott Alexander, 26, of Campbell were driving and the women – Marisa Borelli, 22, of San Francisco and Erica Sempolski, 26, of San Ramon – were their passengers.

“I don’t think it will be fatal accident. We weren’t sure that was always going to be the case,” Ed Lyngar, boating education coordinator with the Nevada Division of Wildlife, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Villobos sustained the most serious injuries. The others at a minimum were bruised and banged up.

“Right now it appears there will be charges for both operators of the Jet Skis. Call it a textbook case of reckless operation,” Lyngar said. “This is a common occurrence when Jet Skis buzz each other and spray each other.”

Nevada law dictates vessels must stay five lengths from the next closest vessel. In this case that would have been 50 feet.

Investigators are still trying to determine who turned into

whom.

The accident occurred Aug. 1 at 3:15pm about one-quarter mile from shore. The watercraft were rented from the marina at Zephyr Cove. Lyngar noted the resort is not at fault and that employees there are good about giving the safety briefing to people who rent watercraft of any kind.

Alcohol wholesalers push for Nev. recreational pot law

By Conor Shine, Las Vegas Sun

Alcohol wholesalers play a crucial role in providing the Nevada economy with an important lubricant – and they have the political clout to match.

Now, many of those same companies are angling for a piece of what could be Nevada's next big vice – recreational marijuana.

The 2016 ballot will feature a measure that would fully legalize marijuana.

Read the whole story

Treasures revealed as Calif.

drought drains lakes

By Javier Panzar, Los Angeles Times

The Lakeview Motel's name is false advertising these dry days.

The same thing is true for the Paradise Cove Lodge down California 178.

That's because the water level in man-made Lake Isabella has dropped about 59 feet since the last big wet year in 2011. There are 32,632 acre-feet of water in the lake – 5.8 percent of the lake's capacity, according to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

The water level is low enough that dozens of ghostly white cottonwood trees at the bottom of the lake have emerged from the water.

The roads leading to three submerged towns beneath Lake Oroville are being slowly exposed as well, said Mike Hubbartt, a state park interpreter at the lake. Officials are checking to make sure hikers don't steal old artifacts there, he said.

In many ways, unearthing the past is a ritual of the drought cycle.

Read the whole story

Fallen USFS firefighter on

his first fire

By Dana Griffin, KCRA-TV

A rookie U.S. Forest Service firefighter killed while fighting a fire near Lake Tahoe was remembered as a hard worker who sacrificed his life for others.



Michael
Hallenbeck

Michael Hallenbeck, 21, of Shingle Springs, died when a tree came crashing down on him Saturday evening while he was battling the Sierra Fire in Eldorado National Forest.

Hallenbeck was based out of the Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit.

"There's hazards everywhere, and the Forest Service is always trying to have that balance of protecting our wildland firefighters," USFS spokeswoman Cheva Gabor said. "Their safety is of utmost importance to us."

Read the whole story

Shingle Springs man dies fighting fire

Updated 8:20pm:

Michael Hallenbeck, 21, of Shingle Springs is the firefighter who died Saturday fighting a small fire near Sierra-at-Tahoe.



Michael
Hallenbeck

He was a member of Organized Crew 36 on the Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit.

Hallenbeck was struck by a tree at approximately 5:30pm during the initial attack on the Sierra Fire, just inside the LTBMU boundary south of Echo Summit.

“Our hearts go out to the family, friends and fellow crew members of this brave firefighter,” Randy Moore, U.S. Forest Service Pacific southwest regional forester, said in a statement. “The loss of any member of our Forest Service family is a tragedy. The grief we are feeling at the sudden loss of two of our firefighters; Dave Ruhl last week on the Modoc National Forest and now Mike Hallenbeck on the basin, reminds us of the sacrifices these men and women make every day.”

The Sierra Fire is one of several dozen lightning-caused fires that began on multiple national forests in Northern California

on Aug. 8.

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The blaze in which a U.S. Forest Service firefighter died was caused by lightning in the backcountry of Sierra-at-Tahoe.

The firefighter's name has not been released pending notification of family. He was struck by a tree on Aug. 8.

The fire burned about one-tenth of an acre in "very rugged terrain," Lisa Herron with the U.S. Forest Service told *Lake Tahoe News*. The Sierra Fire was not burning in the ski resort boundaries.

Officials said there was no spread overnight, but crews are returning today to make sure no hot spots developed.

— *Lake Tahoe News staff report*