

Washington Fire 45% contained; roads opening



More than 1,100 people are working to suppress the lightning-caused Washington Fire near Markleeville. Photo Copyright 2015 Carolyn E. Wright

Updated 8:15pm:

Firefighters are getting a handle on the Washington Fire burning near Markleeville. It is 45 percent contained, with 17,786 acres burned.

Highway 4 through Markleeville, south over Ebbetts Pass, is open to through traffic. Highway 89 starting at the junction with Highway 4 and continuing over Monitor Pass remains closed, as does Wolf Creek Road

Hotshot crews on the eastern fire edge are constructing a direct hand line in steep and rocky terrain while being

supported by helicopters.

The lightning-caused fire started June 19. It is still three miles from Markleeville in Alpine County.

Updated 12:50pm:

U.S. Forest Service crews are working to extinguish nine small fires resulting from last night's lightning strikes in the Lake Tahoe Basin. Most of the fires are single-tree fires with some ground fire, and the largest is only a half-acre in size.

The Forest Service is staffing all nine fires with the assistance of Tahoe-Douglas and North Lake Tahoe Fire Protection Districts. The fires are scattered between Kings Beach and Cave Rock in hike-in only terrain. A helicopter is assisting with reconnaissance and water drops as needed.

Updated 11:50am:

East Fork Fire Protection District reports that all six fires that were reported June 27 are at 1 acre or less in size and, have been extinguished or have crews on scene mopping up the fires. The crews have orders for full extinguishment.

Concerns are the potential for new fires starts due to the multiple lighting strikes that occurred during Saturday's storm that pushed through the valley. This concern is going to continue through the week.

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While today's afternoon thunderstorms are expected to bring more rain than Saturday's, fire personnel are worried about flash floods in the Washington Fire area that could make roads slick and dangerous, as well as bring debris down from charred slopes.

The 9-day-old fire is 37 percent contained, with 17,697 acres burned near Markleeville.

Keeping the fire from reaching the town is still the goal of firefighters. On Saturday the precautionary evacuation order was lifted for this Alpine County town.

One structure has been lost, but no details have been released about it.

Road and campground closures still exist as nearly 1,200 people continue to battle the fire that is burning in a steep, remote area.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Study: Nevada losing business-friendly status

By Brian Deka, Las Vegas Sun

A cable news channel this week released its rankings of the nation's top states for business, and the results were not kind to Nevada.

The state fell 16 places to No. 45 in this year's CNBC rankings, which evaluate states based on factors such as infrastructure, education, quality of life, economy and the cost of doing business. The study ranked Nevada 46th overall in 2013 and 29th last year.

"The Silver State offers a ready supply of employees, but the workforce is tarnished by the worst education system in the country," the report said.

Read the whole story

Hang-glider found dead near Slide Mountain

By Ian McGibboney, Reno Gazette-Journal

A hang-glider was found dead Friday afternoon near Slide Mountain, Washoe County Sheriff's Office spokesman Bob Harmon said.

The victim has not yet been identified, Harmon said, and has been described only as an adult male. No other information was available.

Dispatch received word of the man going down at 1:30pm June 26. The victim was discovered at 4pm by air south of the Slide Mountain ski area after several agencies and groups of volunteers were unable to locate him through a ground search, Harmon said.

[Read the whole story](#)

Nev. higher ed officials quash critical report

By Bethany Barnes, Las Vegas Review-Journal

When state lawmakers wanted ideas about how to improve the state's community colleges last year, the Nevada System of Higher Education hired a Colorado-based think tank to

scrutinize the four schools.

But when the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems produced a report highly critical of the state's higher education leadership, the study was quashed.

A series of emails between higher education system officials obtained by the Review-Journal through the state's public records law shows state officials feared the report could be used by their critics and suppressed the findings in fear that reforms would dramatically reduce their authority over the schools.

In an email, Constance Brooks, the higher education system's vice chancellor for government and community affairs, remarked to colleagues that the report shed a "very negative light" on the state's Board of Regents and asked if the audience for the report was the system's "antagonists."

"I say we just take what we like out of the report and do away with the rest," she suggested.

Read the whole story

Drought exposing gold in Calif. waterways

By Associated Press

California's prolonged drought has created opportunities for prospectors and miners panning, sluicing, chiseling and diving for gold.

The Sacramento Bee reported this week that gold seekers are wading into formerly deep waterways to harvest flecks from the pea gravel and sediment in crevices that have long been inaccessible.

Long-haul trucker Gary Shaver says he is one of those finding treasures in the receding waters.

He prospects for gold at least 200 days a year, pulling out about three grams a week. An ounce of gold is worth roughly \$1,200, down from nearly \$1900 in 2011, the newspaper reports.

California is in its fourth year of the drought that has dried up water used to irrigate crops and forced drastic water cutbacks for cities and communities.

Markleeville out of danger from wildland fire



Markleeville is out of danger for now from the Washington Fire. Photo

Updated 10:35pm:

This is from the Douglas County Sheriff's Office: "As of 9:35pm, crews are responding to the fires. Two fires have been reported above Jack's Valley, one above Autumn Hills, one above Job's Peak Ranch and one near Fay Luther Canyon. The fires are going to be monitored through the night and will be addressed during the daylight hours. No structures are in danger at this time."

Also, the power is back on in Alpine County.

Updated 9:15pm:

Lightning Saturday started at least six fires on the west side of the Sierra Nevada Mountains.

East Fork Fire with U.S. Forest Service and the BLM have responded to the multiple fires and are working to access each of the fires.

The fire above Job's Peak Ranch was being address via helicopter. The fire south near Faye Canyon has a containment line surrounding the fire with hand crews working on that fire.

Similar weather patterns are anticipated for the next few days.

The power had been restored to Alpine County but is now out again because a pole on the Nevada-California border was struck by lightning. Power is expected to be back on by 10:30pm.

electrical storm rumbling through June 27.

Reggae fans were dispersed from the Lake Tahoe Hard Rock early Saturday evening because of lightning. By 7pm the music was back on.

The Washington Fire is at 17,622 acres, with 29 percent containment. A lightning storm is responsible for starting that fire near Markleeville. It was first spotted June 19, about 10 days after the storm blew threw.

The town of Markleeville and the Grover Springs Hot Springs Campground is no longer under an evacuation advisory and the public may return to these areas.

Highways 4 and 89 are closed in the area.

Much of Alpine County is without power because the lightning and rain in the Carson Valley cut the power coming in from NV Energy. Liberty Utilities, which supplies the county with power but gets the energy from NV, did not have an estimated time when power would be restored.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

BLM wants \$1 mil. Burning Man VIP compound

By Jenny Kane, Reno Gazette-Journal

U.S. Bureau of Land Management officials are asking Burning Man organizers to provide “excessive” comforts such as

flushing toilets, washers and dryers, and vanity mirrors in a compound for high-level government officials staying in Black Rock City.

A Burning Man spokesman estimated the compound would cost the event more than \$1 million, bringing its 2015 permit fees to about \$5 million. The renderings of the compound obtained by the RGJ also show various accommodations set aside for VIP visitors but don't indicate who the visiting dignitaries will be.

The request, unprecedented in Burning Man's history, has turned into a point of contention as organizers negotiate with the agency for their annual permit to stage the event in the Black Rock Desert. No permit has been issued for this year's event, which runs Aug. 30 to Sept. 7. Typically permits are issued in early August.

Burning Man has refused to comply with the BLM's request, which the federal agency submitted on June 1, according to Burning Man spokesman Jim Graham.

Read the whole story

Drought causes spike in insurance rates



The Truckee River near Tahoe City should have enough water for rafts to be floating on it.
Photo/Kathryn Reed

By Michael Bott and Thom Jensen, KXTV

Curb appeal, crime rate and a quality education. Those are the factors most people weigh when buying a home. But, a new investigation found that equation was now influenced by the drought and longer, more intense fire seasons.

Homeowners insurance, once a budget afterthought, was now top of mind for some people.

Residents in a small Placer County community said their premiums are “burning out of control,” and insurance companies are canceling other policies altogether. They lived on the outskirts of Colfax in a heavily wooded subdivision named Alpine Meadows.

Read the whole story

West Nile virus found in El Dorado County bird

A bird found in the El Dorado Hills area tested positive for West Nile virus, the first for 2015.

The bird, a Western Scrub Jay, was found June 16.

So far this year, West Nile virus activity has been reported in 26 California counties, including Sacramento and Placer counties. No human cases of the virus have been reported in California this year.

According to Fred Sanford, supervising environmental health specialist with the El Dorado County Environmental Management Division, it is unusual to see a West Nile positive bird this early in the season.

“We don’t typically get our first report of a West Nile positive bird in El Dorado County until later in the summer,” Sanford said in a press release. “Confirmation of our first West Nile virus positive bird means the virus is circulating between birds and mosquitoes and there is heightened risk of infection in humans. It’s important to take precautions.”

Last year, seven West Nile virus positive birds were identified in El Dorado County. No human cases were reported.

West Nile virus can be transmitted to people through the bite of an infected mosquito. Mosquitoes get the virus when they feed on infected birds. The illness is not spread from person-to-person. While most people infected with the virus show no symptoms, some may have high fever, severe headache, tiredness and/or a stiff neck that can last several days to several weeks.

TPRID on path to continue major changes

By Jessie Marchesseau

MEYERS – With a new fiscal year just around the corner, the Tahoe Paradise Resort Improvement District board of directors is gearing up for a year full of change.

Former park manager, Steve Dunn, is out of the picture and moved out of the house in which he had been residing on the property. Now the board must decide what to do about maintenance, management and event planning, not to mention what to do with the house. The 50th anniversary celebration is coming up, bears are in the trash almost daily, new fiscal year financials need to be discussed and to top it off, it's an election year with four of the five board seats up for grabs.

Applications have already been accepted for the events coordinator and park caretaker positions. The directors will be sorting through those and doing interviews in the coming weeks. A third position is also being discussed for seasonal park maintenance. All three positions will be part time, replacing Dunn's solitary full-time one.

Whether or not living in the on-site house will be offered as partial compensation to any of the new employees is still undecided. For now, the board has opted to list the house's estimated rental market value, \$1,100 per month, as part of the annual revenue in the 2015-16 budget. The house is not ready to be rented right now, as Dunn did not meet his deadline to be fully moved out by May 16 and still has some personal property on the premises. The board was considering a

dumpster to dispose of the remaining items, but since Dunn has made an effort to clean things up in recent weeks, they decided to wait a little longer and then reassess.

Also listed on next year's budget is revenue from site rentals, mainly weddings. However, this number is significantly smaller than it has been in the past, as it only includes rentals already confirmed for this season. The board plans to discuss at a later date whether or not to continue hosting weddings in the park as well as the possibility of raising prices to be more in line with other local venues.

After reviewing the rest of the proposed 2015-16 budget prepared by Peter Nelligan, board treasurer, it was unanimously approved June 25 with a balanced operating budget of \$72,900.

Nelligan has also been in charge of trash at the park in the absence of a caretaker. He said bears are constantly getting into the trash and bear cans are a must, sooner rather than later.

"We're creating bad behavior in bears by allowing them to feed in the park, and it's also a mess to pick up," he said.

He estimates the park needs five boxes. Price quotes are being gathered, and the issue will be revisited at the next meeting with the goal of getting them installed as soon as possible. Board Chairwoman Sue Novasel said they would likely be able to appropriate funds from elsewhere since it was not included on the approved budget.

Jan Roman Gonzales reported that the planning of the 50th anniversary celebration on July 11 is moving along. Bands, vendors and sponsors are lined up, flyers are ready to be distributed, and signs and banners will be arriving any day.

The RID recently received notice from El Dorado County that 2015 is an election year for the board. Since two of the seats

were appointed midway through their terms and two are expiring, all four will be up for election this year. The two expiring seats will be four-year terms, and the other two will be for two years. If no more than four people apply, those applicants will simply be appointed to the seats and no election will be conducted. Any resident registered to vote within the TPRID may put their name in for the election by contacting Kim Smith with El Dorado County at 530.621.7490 between July 13 and Aug. 7.

The next meeting will be July 9.