

2 small wildfires ignite in Tahoe basin



Firefighters make quick work of a fire June 8 at Incline Lake. Photo/USFS

Firefighters spent part of today fighting two small wildland fires.

The first was reported about 10am June 8 at Incline Lake. It burned about one-quarter of an acre.

The cause is under investigation, but is presumed to be human caused because there has been no lightning.

The U.S. Forest Service and North Lake Tahoe Fire District personnel knocked down the blaze.

Then crews doused a 10 foot by 10 foot plot on Glen Eagles Road and Pioneer Trail near Meyers about 4pm Monday.

The Forest Service believes it was started by a vehicle's catalytic converter.

"People need to make sure their vehicle is maintained properly. That would keep things like this from happening," Steve Burns, assistant fire and fuels management officer, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

This ties into this year's mantra of "one less spark" – which also includes lawn mowers, power tools, campfires and fireworks.

This fire was on state recreation area land. USFS, CalFire, Lake Valley and South Lake Tahoe fire responded

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*

Nev. Legislature guts elk bill, then targets predators

By Benjamin Spillman, Reno Gazette-Journal

There's an adage in politics that says if you're not at the table, you're on the menu.

During Nevada's recent legislative session, that message applied to coyotes and mountain lions as much as it did to lobbyists, at least when it came to Assembly Bill 78.

The bill started life in late 2014 as a request from the Department of Wildlife to authorize the Wildlife Commission to increase by \$5 a fee that's applied to elk hunting tag applications.

Cash from the increase would have been used to beef up a state program that repays farmers and ranchers for damage elk sometimes inflict on private property.

By May 27 when Gov. Brian Sandoval signed it into law, however, the elk tag fee was long gone and replaced by a mandate to dedicate at least 80 percent of another fund to pay for lethal predator control. Revisions also called for reports

from state wildlife officials to county-based wildlife advisory boards whenever the state officials act contrary to the advice of the county-level boards.

Read the whole story

GOP seeks to speed up tree removal

By Kevin Freking, AP

WASHINGTON – Drought has killed about 12 million trees in California's national forests. In the Rocky Mountain region, an epidemic of pine beetles has damaged trees over a stretch of 32 million acres. Altogether, up to 40 percent of the entire national forest system is in need of treatment to reduce the threat of catastrophic wildfire and disease. As the national forests suffer from drought, density and infestation, House Republicans are resurrecting efforts to thin more quickly millions of acres and take down dead trees.

It's not a new battle by any means, but this time some of their proposals are winning positive feedback from the Obama administration, even as some environmental groups and House Democrats express concerns.

House Republicans have long sought more aggressive tree removal from national forest lands. Legislation in the last Congress would have required the government to increase significantly the amount of timber it offers for sale each year. The lawmakers say more aggressive timbering would make for a healthier forest and improve rural economies. But such mandates went nowhere in the Senate and prompted a veto threat from the White House.

This year, the Republican-led push is focused on excluding

certain projects from an environmental review and by making a lawsuit to stop a project potentially much more expensive to file. The goal is to speed up timber harvests and the removal of underbrush the U.S. Forest Service deemed necessary. The House Natural Resources Committee is expected to vote on the bill on Wednesday.

When the U.S. Forest Service currently wants to undertake major work on a national forest, it talks with stakeholders such as the timber industry, local residents and environmental groups to develop a plan that addresses their concerns and uses the best science available. But, the process often takes too long and ends in a lawsuit, said a memorandum written by Republican staff for the House Natural Resources Committee.

"These policies may be making environmental law firms rich, but they are killing our national forest," said Rep. Tom McClintock, R-Calif., chairman of the House subcommittee that oversees federal lands issues.

Democrats say they worry the legislation eroded hard-fought protections and will allow major projects to go forward without a proper review on the effect on the environment.

Under the proposed legislation, many projects fewer than 15,000 acres would be excluded from the required environmental review if the projects were designed to reduce hazardous fuel loads and disease, protect watersheds or improve critical habitat. That's five times the current limit of 3,000 acres.

Also, groups suing the federal government over a thinning project would often have to buy an insurance bond in the event they lose so that the federal government could recoup the expense of defending itself in court.

Tom Tidwell, chief of the U.S. Forest Service, did not take a position on the legislation during a hearing last week, but said he was encouraged by some goals of the bill.

Robert Bonnie, an undersecretary who oversees the Forest Service, told the Associated Press that some of the GOP's approaches are "interesting and we want to engage in the conversation."

But both men emphasized that the biggest problems they face are budgetary. Fires are eating up so much of the agency's budget that it has 39 percent fewer employees than it had nearly two decades ago.

"We're taking people out of the field that put together the projects to reduce fire in the first place," Bonnie said. "So even if you give the Forest Service a bunch of new tools and tool boxes, we don't have enough people on the ground to reach the type of scale we need. So we have to fix the fire budget."

Rep. Niki Tsongas, D-Mass., said that limiting environmental reviews can help in specific situations, "but this bill goes too far."

Nearly three dozen environmental groups wrote McClintock and Tsongas to oppose the bill, including the Sierra Club, The Wilderness Society and Defenders of Wildlife. "Under the pretext of 'forest health' and 'collaboration,' the bill does the opposite by moving toward analysis-free, high-risk production-based logging on our national forests and reducing collaboration," the groups wrote.

Kyle Tisdell, an attorney with the Western Environmental Law Center, said groups that end up suing the federal government to stop a project must take part in an extensive public participation process before they can go to court. He said the additional hurdle of requiring an insurance bond would have a substantial chilling effect on the public's ability to engage the government and take their case to a final arbiter.

"These organizations operate on shoestring budgets for the most part," Tisdell said.

The USDA's Bonnie also expressed concern about requiring groups suing the department to acquire a surety bond.

"It's important the public still have the ability to access the courts," Bonnie said. "The best approach we have to reduce litigation is these collaborative efforts on the ground."

Lift ticket revenues boost Vail Resorts in Q3

By Ben Miller, Denver Business Journal

Lift ticket revenue grew by more than 13 percent at Vail Resorts Inc. in the third quarter.

But the company still missed analysts' expectations.

Broomfield, Colo.-based Vail reported third-quarter total revenue grew to \$579.3 million, and earnings were \$3.56 per diluted share, from total revenue of \$543 million, and earnings of \$3.18 per diluted share a year earlier.

Read the whole story

Residential hot tub destroyed by fire

A hot tub in Stateline is no longer usable because of an early morning fire today.

“The skirting of the hot tub burned, the fiberglass melted and the cover burned up,” Eric Guevin, fire marshal with Tahoe Douglas Fire, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

The flames reached the house, but firefighters were able to quickly douse them. They pulled some of the siding off and found that the fire had not extended into the interior.

Someone passing by the house on Seminole Way at 4:48am June 8 spotted the fire and alerted the homeowners.

The cause of the fire is under investigation.

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*

Calif. poised to change traffic ticket payments

By Christopher Cadelago, Sacramento Bee

California court officials plan to let those with traffic tickets across the state appear in court without paying up front.

The new rule, expected to win approval from the state Judicial Council at a special telephone meeting Monday, is viewed by policymakers as a preliminary move in a broader effort to expand access to the court system.

It was spearheaded by Chief Justice Tani Cantil-Sakauye, who pushed for the change on an urgency basis in response to concerns about disparities in how courts notify defendants and handle bail when someone challenges a citation in court.

While many counties, including Sacramento, San Francisco and Los Angeles, generally do not require payment to contest a ticket, some do. Marin County, for example, tells motorists they must post the full bail, considered a guarantee of appearance, before a trial date will be set. El Dorado County requires motorists to first post bail, according to its website. If found not guilty, motorists are refunded the amount in four to six weeks.

Read the whole story

Nevadans can expect tax hikes July 1

By Sandra Chereb, Las Vegas Review-Journal

CARSON CITY – A few pennies here, a couple of dollars – or millions – there.

From higher cigarette taxes, entertainment levies and the state's first gross receipts tax on commerce, Nevada businesses and residents will pay more under tax measures approved by the 2015 Legislature to fund Gov. Brian Sandoval's \$7.3 billion general fund budget.

It's too early to say how far Nevada consumers will have to dig into their pockets. But it's a safe bet things will cost more under the levies, most of which take effect July 1.

"There are too many factors to be able to predict with any certainty how much the impact is going to be," said Bryan Wachter of the Retail Association of Nevada, a trade group that opposed Sandoval's gross receipts tax.

He said a lot will depend on an individual's lifestyle and buying habits but added, "Certainly through consumer goods and utility providers, there will be an increase."

The biggest component of the tax package – and a first in state history – is Sandoval's gross receipts tax on business revenue. The second-term Republican won a hard-fought battle to get his plan through a tax-averse Assembly, a move Sandoval said will provide the state a more stable revenue stream with enough elasticity to expand as the state's economy and needs grow.

Read the whole story

Proposed Squaw Valley high-rises spur controversy

By Brad Branan, Sacramento Bee

A proposed expansion of Squaw Valley USA would create "significant and unavoidable" effects on scenery, noise and traffic at the mountain resort near Lake Tahoe, according to a draft Placer County report released last month.

In a project expected to take 25 years to complete, Colorado-based KSL Capital Partners LLC plans to build hotels, condos, an indoor recreational facility, shops and more at the ski resort that hosted the 1960 Winter Olympics. The expansion would add 10, 100-foot-tall buildings to the Sierra Nevada skyline.

Environmentalists say the draft environmental impact report shows the project should not be built as proposed.

Read the whole story

IRS may lower threshold for reporting slot winnings

By J.D. Morris, Las Vegas Sun

The national casino industry and its allies in Congress are trying to send a message to the IRS: Lowering the threshold for reporting slot winnings is a bad idea.

Geoff Freeman, president of the Washington, D.C.-based American Gaming Association, said in a conference call today that about 13,000 people from across the country had spoken out against the potential threshold change. The IRS has been seeking public input on the possibility of someday lowering the amount at which casinos must report slot winnings from \$1,200 to \$600.

The idea comes as the IRS considers changes that would “update and simplify” gaming-related regulations. The agency plans to keep the current slot winnings threshold in place for now, but it’s accepting comments on the feasibility of a lower reporting requirement.

Read the whole story

Nevada wiretap law covers cell calls, texts

By Associated Press

Nevada's state wiretap law was written before wireless devices came into everyday use.

But a state Supreme Court panel says it still gives police access to cellphone calls and text messages.

The ruling Thursday by a three-justice panel means police can continue to seek and obtain court warrants to intercept calls and texts.

The high court rejected an appeal by Phillip Douglas Sharpe, who's serving 10 years to life in state prison on a Lyon County drug trafficking conviction.

Sharpe's attorney is Paul Quade in Reno. He says he may ask the entire seven-member high court to reconsider the decision.

In the opinion, Justice Mark Gibbons writes that cellular telephone calls and text messages meet the definition of wire communications in state law written in 1973.