

Building El Nino could soak parched Calif.

By Christopher Weber, AP

These latest wet storms aren't expected to provide much, if any, relief from California's historic drought. But there is hope for a serious drenching next year in the form of El Nino, a tropical weather pattern over the Pacific Ocean that typically brings rain to the West Coast.

Climatologists say the system forming near the equator looks like a big one that has the potential to provide relief from the yearslong dry spell.

Here are some things to know about El Nino:

What is it?

An ocean-warming phenomenon that builds in the Pacific during springtime. Moderate-to-strong events typically bring winter rain and snow to California and the rest of the southwest.

Wasn't there one this year?

Yes, but it arrived too late to help the drought. There's a 90 percent chance the current El Nino will last through the summer and a greater than 80 percent chance it will stick around through the end of the year, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. While NOAA says it's too soon to determine the strength, other scientists say it's turning out to be quite strong.

Is next year's El Nino a sure thing?

Definitely not, says climatologist Bill Patzert of NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory. But he says the increasingly warm temperatures in the Pacific along the equator recall

conditions back in the spring of 1997, the prelude to a record El Nino year that brought heavy rains to California. “It’s definitely a couple of notches above where we’ve been. Right now it looks like there might be some potential, but there are no guarantees,” he said.

What’s the deal with La Nina?

El Nino’s flip side, La Nina, is a cooling of the central Pacific. It’s been much more common for the past decade or so. From 2005 to 2014, there have been twice as many months with a La Nina than with El Nino, weather records show.

Geography lesson helps clarify drought

By George Skelton, Los Angeles Times

Many of us could use a refresher course in California geography as we debate how to manage the drought and prepare for an uncertain water future.

For starters, calling the hardest-hit farm region the Central Valley is much too simplistic.

Second, agriculture per se is not the issue – not the culprit guzzler. Rather, it’s the location of the agriculture, which gulps 80% of California’s developed water. Almonds, for example, make a lot of sense in some areas; a lot less in others.

Too often we try to wrap it all into convenient, simple packages – Central Valley and nut orchards – when more specificity is required to grasp the nub of the problem.

What part of the vast Central Valley? How dry is it and what's being grown there?

Read the whole story

Nev. committee OKs PERS cost-cutting bill

By Associated Press

CARSON CITY — An Assembly committee has passed a bill aimed at saving the Nevada Public Employees Retirement System \$1 billion every 10 years.

The Assembly Government Affairs Committee voted Friday to pass SB406, which is sponsored by Republican Senate Majority Leader Michael Roberson.

The bill got the support of the state teachers' union and other labor groups, who said it was more reasonable than other PERS overhaul bills moving through the Legislature.

It seeks to slightly reduce benefits to new recipients and prevents public workers from collecting benefits after certain felony convictions, among other provisions.

An amendment added Friday extends benefits to survivors of public employees killed on duty in the past two years, including three Las Vegas police officers, a Sparks Middle School teacher and a Nevada Department of Transportation worker.

STPUD cuts sewer connection fee 25%

By Kathryn Reed

By early June anyone building or remodeling in the South Tahoe Public Utility District sewer boundary will see a break on connection fees.

The board this month rolled back the sewer connection fees by 25 percent. This means the fee is now \$3,660 per sewer unit instead of \$4,930.

“The board heard from people in the community and realized it is a significant cost of new construction whether it’s a home or business, or business remodel where they are adding sewer capacity. It can be a significant part of the start up,” Richard Solbrig, general manager of South Tahoe PUD, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

The vote was 4-0 to make the fee change. Board member Jim Jones was absent, but said he would have voted against the proposal.

The loss to the district is expected to be about \$200,000 a year. Paul Hughes, CFO for the district, said the cutbacks will come from the capital improvement budget.

While the change takes effect June 7, it is likely to have a negligible impact on the current budget that goes through June 30. Hughes said it is too soon to know what exactly on the to-do list will be delayed because of the hit to future budgets.

The connection fee will remain this price until the board takes further action. In 2009, the district produced a report

saying how much the sewer connection fees should go up. The board had not increased the fee for the last three years.

The district is hoping the change will help stimulate growth in the area, which means there may be no adverse economic impact if there is more development. This would mean new customers.

For big projects this change in the price structure will be a significant savings. Lake Tahoe Wildlife Care, which is embarking on a state-of-the-art animal rehabilitation facility in South Lake Tahoe, will save about \$40,000 with the new pricing.

The average three-bedroom, two-bath home has three sewer connections. This is because the kitchen is considered a connection. For that type of house it will be a savings of \$1,270.

Commercial structures are calculated differently. It depends what the business is. For instance, a restaurant requires more sewer units than an office building. For restaurants it's based on the number of seats.

Solbrig said the sewer connection was changed because in doing comparisons the district was higher than other agencies, whereas the water connection fee is less than many other areas.

**Proposed Calif. budget
allocates \$2.2 bil. for**

drought

By Matt Stevens, Los Angeles Times

As Californians prepare to confront the coming hot, dry summer months, Gov. Jerry Brown proposed more than \$2 billion in additional drought funding Thursday as part of his revised state budget.

The surge in funding comes mostly from Proposition 1, a \$7.5-billion bond measure for water projects approved last year by voters.

Under Brown's proposal, the money would be spent on water conservation, emergency response and programs aimed at protecting and expanding local water supplies.

Read the whole story

Gaming, tech and solar team up to promote policy changes

By Kyle Roerink, Las Vegas Sun

In response to a bevy of controversial energy issues emerging in the state, a coalition of gaming, tech and energy companies will align to promote more consumer choice in what's shaping up to be a long battle against the state's dominant power company, NV Energy.

The Nevada Coalition to Protect Ratepayers includes Switch, Wynn Resorts, Las Vegas Sands, SolarCity and Sunrun. The group's formation follows weeks of debate about a disputed

rooftop solar policy that reduces power bills for ratepayers and a 2001 law that allows large companies to generate and purchase power without the utility.

The crux of the coalition's concerns reside in the Legislature and highlights myriad frustrations that energy-reform advocates have had this session. The companies, which include some of the state's largest employers and emerging industries, have been pushing for policy changes they say will benefit homeowners and employers. But their efforts have come with little success, as well as opposition from NV Energy.

Read the whole story

NV Energy seeks to replace valley to Tahoe line

NV Energy wants to build a 60-kilovolt line that would go from Foothill Road in the Carson Valley to Tramway Drive at the top of Kingsbury Grade.

The U.S. Forest Service has released a notice of public scoping for an environmental assessment.

The line will be a combination of single-pole and double-pole H frame structures that will be strategically placed within approximately the middle third of the alignment to allow the transmission line to span numerous road crossings and canyons along the alignment.

It will go from 30 single poles to seven H frame.

SPPCo is the environmental consultant for the project.

For more info or to provide comments, email Juliana Prosperi at juliana.prosperi@amecfw.com.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Boating deaths in U.S. increase in 2014

Despite an increase in injuries and deaths from boating in 2014 compared to 2013, last year had the second-lowest number of boating fatalities on record, according to the U.S. Coast Guard.

The U.S. Coast Guard on May 13 released its 2014 recreational boating statistics.

From 2013 to 2014, boating deaths increased from 560 to 610, an 8.9 percent increase, injuries increased from 2,620 to 2,678, a 2.2 percent increase and the total number of accidents increased from 4,062 to 4,064, a 0.05 percent increase. Even with these increases as compared to the record low year of 2013, 2012 to 2014 collectively set record lows for accidents, deaths and injuries.

The fatality rate of 5.2 deaths per 100,000 registered recreational vessels reflected a 10.6 percent increase from the previous year's rate of 4.7 deaths per 100,000 registered recreational vessels. Property damage totaled approximately \$39 million.

The publication states alcohol use was the leading contributing factor in fatal boating accidents; it was the main culprit in 21 percent of the deaths. Operator

inattention, improper lookout, operator inexperience, excessive speed and alcohol use ranked as the top five primary contributing factors in accidents.

Where the cause of death was known, 78 percent of fatal boating accident victims drowned; of those drowning victims, 84 percent were not wearing a life jacket. Where boating instruction was known, 77 percent of deaths occurred on vessels where the operator had not received boating safety instructions.

The most common types of vessels involved in reported accidents were open motorboats, personal watercraft and cabin motorboats. The vessel types with the highest number of fatalities were open motorboats, canoes and kayaks.

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*

Lahontan seeks ideas to combat climate change

By Kathryn Reed

Climate change is going to bring bigger floods, warmer waters, less snow and more rain to the Lake Tahoe Basin, according to scientists.

And then what?

The Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board is asking that and other questions.

"We have tools. But the big question is what tools don't we have to deal with climate change?" Patty Kouyoumdjian, executive officer of Lahontan, posed to her board at a May 14 workshop.

She said in 2005 when California began to seriously look at what could be done to combat climate change officials thought there was plenty of time to find solutions. That's not the case. The problem is here. The Round Fire near Mammoth in February destroyed 40 houses. It was the snow line that stopped it. A reality of climate change is that wildfires won't be seasonal, but instead will be year-round.

More floods means structures will be threatened or damaged, and wetlands will be overrun with water. Water quality ultimately will be impacted. That is why Lahontan is involved. The California agency deals strictly with water issues.

As Lake Tahoe and other bodies of water continue to warm, assuming predictions come true, there will be more harmful algal blooms, an increase in invasive species and a stressed aquatic system.

With less snow comes a drying of wells, unhealthy forests and less recharge.

The state has tasked the regional water boards with needing to come up with ways to deal with climate change. Lahontan had two public workshops in the last year, the board workshop on Thursday and staff will now devise a draft report that is expected to be completed this summer, with the final done by the end of the year.

Out of the 100 comments submitted at the public workshops came 400 ideas. The four main themes were protecting resources and providing resiliency; improving water supply and water quality; communicating, collaborating, and streamlining processes; and other considerations and opportunities.

The board (Kimberly Cox was absent) is most interested in looking into having the whole jurisdiction comply with stream environmental zones – better known as floodplains and wetlands outside the basin – in the same manner Lake Tahoe and Truckee are mandated to.

Protecting the groundwater supply – aka the aquifer – also is a top concern.

“We don’t want to lose aquifer capacity. We need to protect the groundwater recharge,” board member Amy Horne said.

With flooding usually being short term, that was less of a concern for her.

“Maybe stormwater needs to be looked at as an asset instead of a pollutant,” board member Eric Sandel said. “We need the water. Just because it may have something in it we don’t like we can deal with that later.”

The board recognized that whatever solutions are put on the table that there could be political, financial and jurisdictional constraints. It was stressed that working with other agencies as well as the public is going to be imperative to accomplishing many of the goals. A large part of this has to do with Lahontan not having the ability to dictate land use policy.

Board member Peter Pumphrey stressed the need to be “nimble” so whatever is ultimately decided as the focus can be altered as science evolves and other changes take place.

Borrowing from the total maximum daily load requirements when it comes to adaptive management was suggested.

CalPERS retirees flee California

By Jon Ortiz, Sacramento Bee

This city's Spanish name recalls grassy, spring-fed meadows that nourished the first farms here and gave laborers relief from desert heat.

Now Las Vegas draws a new generation of settlers epitomized by California transplant Joe Beck: CalPERS pensioners who have made Sin City their No. 1 destination for retirement outside California.

"Compared to California, Las Vegas was a no-brainer," said Beck, a former Southern California school district maintenance administrator who moved here in 2000. "I decided that if I could handle the heat three months out of the year, I needed to move to where my retirement check would be tax-free."

About 15 percent of the 561,000 pensioners in the California Public Employees' Retirement System live their golden years outside the Golden State, according to a first-of-its-kind analysis of fund data by the *Sacramento Bee*. The vast majority have flocked to low-tax or no-tax states, creating a veritable river of cash that flows out of California and into cities such as Las Vegas; Reno; Tucson, Ariz.; and Grants Pass, Ore.

Read the whole story