

Drought may bring summer brownouts

By Timothy Gardner, Reuters

The West Coast could see power brownouts in coming months as hydro power stations struggle with the four-year drought, and in the longer term climate change could cause additional problems for power plants, the U.S. energy secretary said on Monday.

“That is certainly a risk,” Energy Secretary Ernest Moniz told reporters at a Christian Science Monitor breakfast on Monday, when asked whether the region could see a summer of power brownouts, or reductions in availability of electricity supply.

“Hydro power is a renewable (form of energy) but if you look historically there is actually quite a bit of fluctuation from year to year, depending upon what happens over the winter,” he said.

Read the whole story

Tahoe casinos do poorly in March

Casinos on both ends of Lake Tahoe posted revenue from March that was well below 2014 numbers.

Statewide the gains were also down. The Nevada Gaming Control Board on April 29 said casinos won \$951.2 million last month.

This is a drop of 3.2 percent from last year.

South Shore casinos collected \$13.9 million, a decrease of 6.8 percent from 2014. North Shore clubs brought in \$1.5 million, a 15.3 percent year-over-year decline.

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*

Nevada in running for geothermal lab

By Bill Theobald, USA Today

WASHINGTON – Nevada is in the running for a federal geothermal research laboratory that could be located in Fallon, Sen. Harry Reid said Monday.

The Energy Department announced grants to five western states, including Nevada, to develop research for a national lab, called the Frontier Observatory for Research in Geothermal Energy (FORGE).

Next year, DOE will choose three finalists for the project, said Lynn Orr, energy undersecretary for science.

Read the whole story

Living with devastating reality of year-round fire season

By Julia Prodis Sulek, San Jose Mercury News

BISHOP – The fire came up quickly here in the eastern Sierra Nevada, destroying 35 homes and taking the mountainside community of Swall Meadows by surprise. Who would expect a roiling wildfire – throwing fireballs and whipping up flame whirls through 7,000 acres of sagebrush, piñon and Jeffrey pine – in the dead of winter?

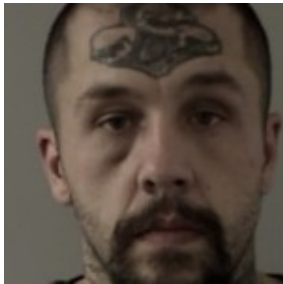
“Three years before, I had 12 feet of snow at my house on that exact date in February,” said volunteer Fire Chief Dale Schmidt, whose Wheeler Crest station in the remote Swall Meadows neighborhood is surrounded by carcasses of burned homes. “Four years ago, they would have had a couple to 3 feet of snow where the fire started. That’s the mental state people were in: Winter is not the season for fire danger.”

As California enters its fourth year of drought, communities across the West are confronting a new reality – a year-round fire season. Perhaps nowhere are the consequences as obvious as in Swall Meadows, where the 300 residents are now shoveling ash instead of snow.

Read the whole story

Deputies apprehend felon after chase

An El Dorado County man was arrested April 24 after leading El Dorado County sheriff's deputies on a chase.



Abram
Sassenberg

Abram Sassenberg, who was wanted on a felony warrant, was spotted by a deputy driving in Pollock Pines. Sassenberg also had a suspended driver's license and was not supposed to be operating a motor vehicle. Deputies said Sassenberg refused to stop.

Sassenberg led deputies on a pursuit through Camino that ended in Placerville. Deputies deployed two sets of spike strips to disable Sassenberg's vehicle.

Deputies said Sassenberg was in possession of ammunition, methamphetamine and a methamphetamine smoking pipe.

He booked into the El Dorado County Jail in Placerville on the felony charges of evading of a peace officer with a disregard for safety of persons/property, felon in possession of ammunition and post release community supervision revocation, and misdemeanor charges of possession of methamphetamine and possession of narcotics paraphernalia.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Dollar Tree settles hazardous waste disposal dispute

By Mark Glover, Sacramento Bee

Dollar Tree Inc. is the latest company to pay millions of dollars to California counties and cities to settle claims that its stores illegally disposed of hazardous waste.

The order for payment of \$2.7 million was issued by Alameda County Superior Court Judge Morris Jacobson and announced Friday by 46 California district attorneys and the city attorneys of Los Angeles and San Diego. Those jurisdictions stand to receive a portion of the funds. The settlement included the district attorney offices of Sacramento, El Dorado, Placer and Yolo counties.

[Read the whole story](#)

STPUD in the market for new vehicle



South Tahoe PUD's hydovac truck is nearly 20 years old. Photo/LTN

South Tahoe Public Utility District has a vehicle that is so old the state Air Resources Board says its days are numbered for being able to legally be on the streets.

It has been around since 1997. By 2017 it has to be pulled from service because the parts to upgrade it to state standards cannot be found.

A business in another state, like Nevada with its less stringent air regulations, is where a buyer for this apparatus will likely be found. Brand new it cost \$174,000. Today the price tag is \$330,000.

"Wherever this goes, it never turns off," explained Randy Curtis of STPUD. That only exacerbates the air quality issue.

He gave the district board a demonstration earlier this month about how the hydovac truck works.

"If we do have a spill, this is what we use to clean it up with," Curtis said.

Another use is excavation work on streets. It can clean out a 4-foot-by-4-foot area down 6 feet without impacting other infrastructure below ground. It can clean up to a 24-inch line.

It sucks all the material out so crews can get the water or

sewer line. The material it collects is then deposited at the district's South Lake Tahoe headquarters in what is called the "bone yard."

The board has yet to approve the expenditure of funds on a new piece of equipment.

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Notes:

- The South Tahoe Public Utility District board of directors will have a public hearing on the budget May 7 from 6-7:30pm in the district board room, 1275 Meadow Crest Drive, South Lake Tahoe.

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*

New California Supreme Court surprises analysts

By Maura Dolan, Los Angeles Times

When Gov. Jerry Brown's two latest nominees joined the California Supreme Court in January, legal analysts foresaw the creation of a more liberal majority.

The first test came in March, when the seven-member court had to decide whether to reconsider a death penalty case. Justices Mariano-Florentino Cuellar and Leondra R. Kruger provided two crucial votes to give the death row inmate another chance to argue that his sentence should be overturned.

But in a case involving a law that some judges said had been

inspired by homophobia, Cuellar and Kruger were on different sides.

Although it is still too early to assess the impact of Brown's appointees, "it tells us they are not voting as a bloc," Santa Clara University Professor Gerald Uelmen said.

Read the whole story

Nev. lawmakers take Colo. marijuana tour

By Trevor Hughes, USA Today

DENVER — With smiles, selfies and a few nervous chuckles, a group of Nevada legislators and policymakers got a first-hand look at Colorado's fast-growing legal marijuana industry this weekend, coming face-to-face with thousands of green growing plants.

The small group is part of Nevada's efforts to understand what legalization could mean. The Silver State has permitted medical marijuana, and now there's talk voters might be asked to legalize recreational pot next year.

The group met its Colorado counterparts, and toured several marijuana stores, including the high-tech, 40,000-square-foot Medicine Man in Denver, one of the state's largest.

Read the whole story

Liberty Utilities to ax coal from power supply

By Kathryn Reed

Liberty Utilities is removing coal from its power portfolio.

On April 24 it filed a request with the California Public Utilities Commission to change its allocation from NV Energy. This came one week after it filed paperwork to add solar.

“... as of Jan. 1, 2016, the resource portfolio available to serve Liberty Utilities’ California customers will be exclusively from hydroelectric, natural gas, or geothermal facilities and, importantly, no longer include any coal-fired generation,” the document says.

Today, Liberty buys all of its power from NV Energy.

In 2011, Liberty bought NV Energy’s service area that includes about 49,000 customers on the California side of the Lake Tahoe Basin, in Truckee, Alpine County and other areas of Northern California. The service agreement expires at the end of the year.

Liberty and NV on April 21 reached an agreement on another contract that calls for the elimination of the coal plant. This will mean Liberty will be paying NV Energy about \$2.34 million less per year. That contract is good through 2022. It is up to the California Public Utilities Commission to approve the service agreement.

“Given NV Energy’s pursuit of non-coal fired energy sources as well as Liberty’s, we believe we will be able to meet our customers’ future demands in an economic fashion without the

dependence on coal-fired energy,” Rich Salgo, vice president of operations for Liberty, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Liberty is also asking for the CPUC to approve the solar projects. It plans to buy and operate two solar plants that combined are 65 megawatt facilities. These facilities will more than replace the coal.

If the solar plants have a glitch, NV will supply the requisite amount of power to Liberty. The contract says Liberty could purchase up to 30.5 percent of its renewable energy from NV if the solar plants are not available.

With all the changes, Liberty expects to save \$200,000 per year.

California law mandates that sellers of electricity must have 33 percent of their load be serviced with renewable energy by 2020. This will help Liberty reach that mandate. As of September 2014, the latest data available, the mix NV supplied Liberty was 52.44 percent natural gas, 21.7 percent renewable, 20 percent coal, 4.45 percent hydro, 1.4 percent nuclear and 0.01 percent oil.

“We will continue to pursue energy sources that will enable us to meet California’s increasing renewable energy requirements through 2020,” Salgo said.

NV in 2013 said it would begin eliminating coal immediately. However, the Valmy plant in Humboldt County, Nev., is expected to be online through 2025. That plant as of next year will not be supplying Liberty customers, assuming the CPUC approves the proposals.

Earlier this month the Tahoe Area Sierra Club had a talk focused on Liberty’s use of coal and the desire to have the power company change its practices.

“We are impressed with the groundswell of local support we

have seen for this initiative to go coal free. Liberty was cooperative throughout our discussions and we congratulate them for coming to a good decision – good for Tahoe, Liberty and the warming planet,” Grace Anderson, lead volunteer for the Sierra Club Beyond Coal Campaign Tahoe Basin, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

The national conservation organization had been putting pressure on the utility to discontinue using Valmy. Sharing the Sierra Club’s point-of-view were the local chapter as well as the Mother Lode and Toiyabe chapters, South Tahoe Citizens Climate Lobby, and Sierra Nevada Alliance.