

Education advocates lobby for good neighbor policy

Representatives from the South Shore testified before a Nevada Senate education committee today regarding the good neighbor policy that would allow some students in California and Nevada to cross the state line to attend college at in-state tuition rates.

“This bill would ensure more of our children can obtain an education from an institution of higher education,” Stacy Noyes, a parent who lives in Stateline, told *Lake Tahoe News*. “It would remove the barriers of the time it takes to travel to WNCC (Western Nevada Community College), the expense of transportation and of course most important reduce the tuition costs. It could be life changing to many to avail themselves of the opportunity to attend LTCC (Lake Tahoe Community College).”

Noyes along with Kelly Krolicki and Kate Krolicki, a senior at Whittell High School, spoke at the March 24 hearing in Carson City.

LTCC President Kindred Murillo and former Trustee Roberta Mason also spoke.

Murillo has been working on this for three years.

“If this doesn’t go this time, I don’t know if it will,” Murillo said at the LTCC board meeting Tuesday night.

She said the focus needs to be on students, not dollars.

State Sen. James Settelmeyer, R-Minden, is the the author of SB414. His counterpart in California, state Sen. Ted Gaines, R-Roseville, has introduced SB605. They mirror each other. The laws would benefit Lake Tahoe Basin students in specific ZIP

codes, and involve Lake Tahoe Community College and Western Nevada Community College. This would be a six-year pilot program.

One member of the Nevada Board of Regents spoke Tuesday, saying the bill would negatively impact WNCC. When a committee member asked how so, she had no financial documents to back up the statement.

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*

Calif. lawmakers seek access to confidential well logs

By Tom Knudson, Reveal

It's not a secret that California is facing a groundwater crisis.

But something else is: a vast repository of state records that scientists and water policy specialists say could dramatically improve our understanding of California's groundwater resources if they were made public.

The records are called well completion reports, or well logs for short. For decades, the California Department of Water Resources has gathered the documents from well drillers and archived them in cardboard boxes in West Sacramento and other locations around the state.

In all other western states, such reports are public and often searchable online. But in California, they are considered confidential under a 64-year-old state law. Many think that should change.

Access to logs could help improve water quality and reveal which parts of California are being pumped the most, experts believe. Laurel Firestone, co-executive director of the Community Water Center, a Visalia-based nonprofit, called the secrecy a huge impediment to understanding the state's groundwater system.

"It's almost like when they black out classified information," Firestone said. "We have no maps of where people are using water, and what people are using water for. It's hugely important. We work with families that have lost their entire water supply, whose wells are going dry."

Opening the state's well log vault is under consideration this spring at the state Capitol, where lawmakers, the governor and state officials are scrambling to find ways to help California cope with a four-year drought that is straining surface and groundwater supplies. Earlier this month, NASA senior water scientist Jay Famiglietti warned that "the state has only about one year of water supply left in its reservoirs, and our strategic backup supply, groundwater, is rapidly disappearing."

State Sen. Fran Pavley, D-Calabasas – author of two of three historic groundwater laws passed by the Legislature last year – has introduced a new bill to make well logs public. A hearing is scheduled for today.

"After four years of a continuous drought, it is about time we get this information ... to better protect California's precious groundwater," said Pavley in a statement.

To a nonspecialist, well logs can appear as dry as the drought-parched California earth. To groundwater scientists, they are a treasure trove of information that can help chart the size, shape and thickness of aquifers and determine how water cycles through and between them. That, in turn, can help predict how much pumping aquifers can withstand without being

depleted.

The state's stockpile of well logs has grown to about 800,000 documents over the past six decades. Laid end to end, that is enough paper to circle Lake Tahoe twice.

While the public can't view those records, the Legislature did create a loophole in 1951 allowing access "to government agencies for use in making studies," making them accessible to some professionals but not others. The passage has been so narrowly interpreted by the Department of Water Resources that even scientists who work for public universities sometimes can't gain access.

This is the third time since 2011 that Pavley – chair of the Senate Natural Resources and Water Committee – has sought to make well logs open to the public. Whether she will succeed this year is anyone's guess. But it is certain the debate will be lively.

A glimpse of the coming drama can be gleaned from letters that have arrived in her office in recent weeks.

East Bay Municipal Utility District, which provides water to more than a million people, wrote to support the bill, saying data in well logs "is central to developing and implementing groundwater management plans."

But in a state where groundwater is tied to private property rights and farmers pump with no restrictions, opposition remains strong in the agricultural community.

"We believe the well log data is available to those entities that have a genuine need to evaluate and utilize it," wrote representatives of three agricultural organizations and the California Chamber of Commerce, in a letter opposing the Pavley bill.

"No beneficial purpose could be gained by making this

confidential data available to the public,” they added. “We believe this measure will only assist those trolling for lawsuits.”

Several environmental and community action groups wrote in support. “As the physical effects of the drought worsen, from loss of water supplies to increased concentrations of groundwater contaminants, the need for reliable and transparent data ... grows,” they said. “The information contained within well completion reports would allow communities to identify new well locations that might yield safe drinking water, a concern affecting thousands across the state.”

The governor’s view is already well known. “California is the only western state that does not provide ready access to well reports,” he wrote in a statement vetoing a 2011 well log access bill he felt was too restrictive. “That should be changed.”

Drugs stolen from Incline Village pharmacy

The Washoe County Sheriff’s Office is searching for a man in connection with an armed robbery at a pharmacy in Incline Village this morning.

At approximately 11:30am March 24 the suspect entered the Village Pharmacy on Tanager Drive and demanded an unspecified amount of pharmaceutical products.

A handgun was reportedly used in the robbery.

The suspect is described as a Hispanic male adult, approximately 6-feet tall and heavy set.

Anyone with any information is asked to call 775.328.3320 or Secret Witness at 775.322.4900.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Realtor boards oppose Tahoe ridgeline development

By Associated Press

Two leading Realtor boards have come out against future ridgeline development in the Lake Tahoe Basin.

The Incline Village Board of Realtors and the Tahoe Sierra Board of Realtors have adopted a joint policy to protect ridgelines from “obtrusive man-modified structures or features.”

Tracy Saunders, president of the Incline Village board, said the groups want to ensure ridgeline protection is addressed by governmental agencies in all future projects.

While a controversial proposal to build 112 luxury homes in a 112-acre gated community on a ridge overlooking Tahoe brought the matter to the forefront, the policy is not directed at any one project, the boards’ representatives said.

“To date, the board has found it imprudent to become entangled in the fine-grained specifics of a given project proposal,” said John Falk of the Tahoe Sierra board based in Truckee. “Our overarching objective is to shape goals, policies,

programs, codes and procedures for the betterment of the community.”

The Martis Valley West Project would have been on forested land now used for backcountry recreation and access to the Tahoe Rim Trail, the Sacramento Bee reported. Instead, its developers agreed in January to cluster all the project’s development within the Martis Valley near Truckee.

Options for the Tahoe property on a Brockway Summit ridge are being analyzed, but no application has been submitted, said Blake Riva, senior partner with project developer Mountainside Partners.

Asked what he thinks of the Realtor boards’ new policy, Riva said, “We are aware of certain organizations making their viewpoints known. We will be following land-use policy as set forth by the governmental agencies. It’s part of the public review process.”

Dredging helps bind together Tahoe marinas



Sand Harbor boat launch is closed. If it does open, it won't be for a full season. Photos/Kathryn Reed

Updated March 24 7:30pm

By Kathryn Reed

While the lake level is said to be the same across Lake Tahoe, marinas are not allowed to dredge to the same depth. That is one of the discrepancies the Lake Tahoe Marina Association is trying to remedy.

Nor are there any studies to prove a difference between new dredging and maintenance dredging when it comes to lake clarity or other environmental issues. Another topic for LTMA to get involved with.

The association first came about in the early 1990s when four North Shore marinas got together to try to be one voice. The union lasted a couple years. Then two years ago the idea to resurrect the group was floated and this time marinas throughout the basin are part of LTMA.

Pat Bagan, vice president of LTMA, said he believes the change

in ownership and younger people will help sustain the association.

One of the biggest issues facing marinas is dredging. The average boat draws about $3\frac{1}{2}$ feet, so the water level needs to be deeper than that. Most tour boats and sailboats need more clearance. The lake is at 6222.83 feet. The Tahoe Regional Planning Agency says marinas can dredge to depths ranging from 6,215 feet to 6,219.3 feet.

Last week Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board granted a dredging permit to the Tahoe Keys Marina and amended the permit for the Tahoe Keys Property Owners Association. No one from either entity was available for comment.

It's estimated to cost more than \$2 million to dredge the east channel or marina side, and more than \$740,000 for the west or homeowners' channel. TKPOA is obligated to pay all costs associated with its channel, while the marina dredging bill is split by the marina owners, TKPOA, and the Beach and Harbor Association.



The channel going to the Tahoe Keys Marins has dropped farther since fall 2014. Photo/LTN file

The dredging for the TKPOA channel will start March 25.

"The goal is to be done by May 21. We are forecasting to finish two weeks prior to that, based on weather permitting," Kirk Wooldridge, TKPOA general manager, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Ski Run Marina has been approved to dredge the mouth of the harbor; work should begin this week.

"There has been discussion of additional dredging in Lake Tahoe to support a channel for the Tahoe Queen tour boat there, but no one has applied for a permit. There is information that would qualify this as maintenance dredging," Alan Miller with Lahontan told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Elie Alyeshmerni, who owns Ski Run Marina, told *Lake Tahoe News* that Aramark – owner of the Queen and the party responsible to dredge the channel – expects to soon apply for a permit.

North Tahoe Marina has a multi-year dredging permit, Tahoe City Marina finished its project, while Homewood Marina, Star Harbor and Fleur de Lac have applied for permits.

Sand Harbor officials don't even know if the ramp will open this season.

"You have to go about 100 feet out from the bottom of the launch lanes now to gain about 12 inches of additional draft," Jay Howard, supervisor of Lake Tahoe State Park, told *Lake Tahoe News*. He oversees Sand Harbor and Cave Rock launches. "The prognosis for Sand Harbor is not good. I think for Sand Harbor to be open we need at least 1½ to 2 feet of water to come off those hillsides above us. That might happen; we might get close to that."

The problem, though, is the snow depth in the Marlette basin is 22 inches when it should be 5 to 6 feet, Howard said.

Normally Sand Harbor opens in early May. That won't happen this year.

Cave Rock is open.

"I think the lake will come up enough where at the end of the season we would not expect Cave Rock to be any worse than it is right now," Howard said.

Bob Hassett, who operates Lakeside, Timber Cove and Camp Richardson marinas, is working on a dredging permit application for Lakeside. He said it would be minor and that work should only take four hours.



Prep work at Ski Run Marina
in anticipation of dredging.
Photo/LTN

"We were operating at Timber Cove Marina in 1992 – the last time the water was this low. Although it will require more care, we expect to operate just fine off the end of the pier. Larger boats may be limited and require a shuttle out to them. We will lose a number of buoys but still expect to have availability," Hassett told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Camp Richardson Marina has the longest floating pier on the lake. A fuel rod will be used to get gas to boaters who are tied up to the floating dock.

"The first two rows of the buoy field will be too shallow to accommodate boats. With those gone, we still expect to have 96 buoys available for seasonal and day use guests," Hassett

said.

The marina association is asking the California Tahoe Conservancy to use money from SB630 to study the differences between new and maintenance dredging. Some of that money is paid to the state from marinas.

Working as a group, marina owners were able to get Lahontan to loosen its requirements for who can test water quality during storms. The state agency will be training marina representatives on March 26.

Alyeshmerni, who is president of LTMA, said the association is also looking to get all marinas certified as a clean marina within the next couple years.

"We want to be good stewards and guardians for the lake," he said.

Those with certificates are: North Tahoe Marina, Sierra Boat Company, Tahoe City Marina and Sunnyside.

Starting this year the LTMA is going to recognize someone who went above the call of duty. On Thursday, Matt Williamson will be honored.

"He dove under the boat and saw someone who was in an air pocket and pulled them out and they were fine," Alyeshmerni said.

A boat rented from Ski Run Marina last year capsized. One person was missing, that is when Williamson dove and found the woman.

"We are also trying to let the public know we are all working together. We want the public to enjoy the experience. What we are working toward as an association is to make it as pleasant and fun as possible at Lake Tahoe," Bagan said.

Calif. overtime tops \$1 bil., hits pre-recession high

By Associated Press

Overtime for California's state workers rose 20 percent last year and topped \$1 billion even though there are 20,000 fewer employees than in pre-recession 2008, the last time the state paid out so much, according to new payroll data.

The increase comes after years of recommendations from the state auditor and budget analyst calling for reducing vacancies, using more relief staff and negotiating less-costly labor contracts for workers in state prisons and hospitals, which generate the most overtime pay.

According to the state controller's payroll data reviewed by the Associated Press, California spent \$1.13 billion in 2014 in overtime pay for its 220,000 workers, compared to \$947 million in overtime for roughly 215,000 workers in 2013. Overall payroll went up 7 percent from \$15.3 billion to \$16.4 billion as California enjoys a second year of budget surplus.

Some of the increase in overtime can be attributed to unanticipated costs, such as last year's severe wildfire season. But departments with the highest overtime were not able to explain what drove the spike beyond usual challenges to fill vacant positions and cover critical shifts when employees take time off.

One taxpayer advocate said it's unfortunate that because the economy is doing well, politicians lack the incentive to adopt personnel practices to restrain overtime.

"California remains the land of milk and honey for public employees," said Jon Coupal, president of the anti-tax Howard Jarvis Taxpayers Association. "It's always been that way."

State officials acknowledged that more needs to be done to minimize overtime, particularly at institutions that treat patients and inmates for psychiatric and medical care. Half of all the overtime billed in 2014 came in the chronically understaffed Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation.

Jim Evans, a spokesman for Gov. Jerry Brown, said the administration is trying to make sure vacancies do not become an issue that drives overtime, but noted that some types of workers are difficult to recruit and retain because there's a shortage of workers for some positions, such as psychiatrists.

Some overtime costs are difficult to budget. CalFire had \$139 million in overtime last year, the most in the past 10 years, according to payroll data. The state battled 5,620 fires in 2014, nearly 1,000 more than the state's five-year average.

But the bulk of overtime charges stem from long-standing vacancy and staffing problems at the 34 adult prisons run by corrections. In 2014, the main department logged more than \$542 million in overtime pay, up 31 percent from \$414 million in 2013. Bill Sessa, a corrections spokesman, said the state experienced a high rate of retirement in recent years while budgets were slashed with the recession. As a result, the department stopped training recruits, further exacerbating the vacancy problem, he said.

Since August, the academy has graduated 3,000 officers, and the goal is to hire 7,000 more over the next three years.

"Our ambition is to minimize overtime, in part, because officers work better when they're not working 16-hour shifts," Sessa said.

The federal court-appointed receiver overseeing inmate health

care is also in the process of reviewing telemedicine capabilities to reduce costly overtime billing by physicians and nurses at prisons, said Joyce Hayhoe, a spokeswoman for receiver J. Clark Kelso. In one year, overtime has more than doubled for this branch of corrections, from more than \$12 million to nearly \$30 million. In all, about 1,500 correctional-related staff billed more than \$100,000 in overtime in 2014, including physicians, psychiatrists, nurses, lieutenant, sergeants and officers.

Hayhoe said California struggles to find enough primary care physicians despite competitive pay, in part, because of the location of prison health care facilities. The Department of State Hospitals, which serves mentally ill patients, most of whom have committed serious crimes, is taking to social media and created a dedicated recruitment unit to attract applicants, spokesman Ken August said. The department charged nearly \$104 million in overtime last year, up 5 percent from 2013.

For years, the California state auditor and Legislative Analyst's Office have made governors and lawmakers aware of staffing inefficiencies and issued recommendations such as hiring more staff, increasing the use of relief staff similar to how substitute teachers are used in schools and re-negotiating labor provisions that require overtime shifts to be offered to senior officers first. Some of the recommendations don't appear politically viable.

"No union will give up the right of seniority," said Nichol Gomez-Pryde, a spokeswoman for the California Correctional Peace Officers Association, which represents correctional officers. The union is among four labor contracts up for negotiation this summer.

Boulder Bay to break ground in May

By Associated Press

Developers say they have secured financing for a major resort at the site of the Tahoe Biltmore in Crystal Bay and hope to begin construction in May.

Boulder Bay was originally approved in April 2011.

The development company had been struggling to come up with financing since winning approval from the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency four years ago and had faced an April deadline to either move forward or let the project permit expire. Terms of the agreement weren't disclosed.

TRPA approved plans for construction of an eight-structure complex at Crystal Bay offering a mix of uses including a casino, 300-room hotel, health and fitness centers, shops and restaurants.

Thinning Sierra forest may help water supply

By Edward Ortiz, Sacramento Bee

With the state entering its fourth year of drought, some conservationists are looking at thinning Sierra forests to

increase the amount of water that flows into area rivers.

The Nature Conservancy issued a report Friday that argues that thinning forests on public lands can reduce wildfire risk in the Northern Sierra. The report also found that such action brings a bonus: water conservation.

Thinning dense forests may lead to a 3 percent to 6 percent increase in mean annual stream flow to some watersheds, according to the report.

The conservancy based its estimates of stream flow on gauge records across 11 watersheds from 1980 to 2000 and found that the Feather River watershed would show the greatest increased water flow due to thinning.

This not the first time tree thinning has been examined for water conservation. However, the conservancy report is one of the first to look into the effect that ecologically based forest thinning would have on water yields in the Sierra Nevada and the economic benefit that could come from it.

Read the whole story

Burning man founders could get \$1.18 mil. tax break

By Jenny Kane, Reno Gazette-Journal

Burning Man's founders are getting tax write-offs for their donations to the new nonprofit organization.

But how plump will the write-offs be?

They could be as much as \$1.18 million.

Each of the six founders donated the majority of each of their shares of the event to Burning Man, which converted to a nonprofit umbrella organization in December 2013.

The sale did not become official until Jan. 1, 2014, so the complete details, most notably the organization's total income, is not present in tax documents released earlier this year.

Read the whole story

California ads highlight vaping dangers

By Jeremy B. White, Sacramento Bee

California has taken another step in its campaign against electronic cigarettes, with the Department of Public Health on Friday releasing video advertisements calling the devices toxic and warning they are being marketed to kids.

While cigarette use has plummeted in California and nationwide as the dangers of tobacco have become well known, electronic cigarettes – also known as e-cigarettes – have emerged in recent years as a popular alternative. Vaping lounges, in which customers can sample different flavors of the liquid within vaping devices, have sprung up around Sacramento.

Public health officials have sounded the alarm, emphasizing that e-cigarettes contain both addictive nicotine and chemicals linked to cancer and birth defects. They warn that the sweet flavors contained in vaping devices, which function

by heating a chemical liquid into a mist that can be inhaled, appeal to young Californians.

Read the whole story