

Drought alters the face of Tahoe tourism

By Dale Kasler and Matt Weiser, Sacramento Bee

Drought is reshaping Lake Tahoe and its all-important tourism industry.

Seven ski resorts have shut down early for the season because of a shortage of snow. The latest is Sugar Bowl Resort, which will turn off its chairlifts at the close of business Sunday.

The long-term impact goes deeper. As California's drought stretches into its fourth year, ski resorts, hotel owners and others are scrambling to find new ways to get tourists to the lake. They're relying less on snow and putting greater emphasis on entertainment, fine dining and other forms of recreation. With climatologists predicting long-term declines in snowfall throughout the Sierra Nevada, some resorts are building zip lines, mountain bike trails and even wedding venues, all in hopes of broadening their customer base.



Heavenly Mountain Resort is on track to expand its offerings with more year-round activities that don't depend on snow. Photo Copyright 2015 Carolyn E. Wright

“Resorts have been looking at their business models and seeing we have to be in the mountain recreation business, not the winter business,” said Bob Roberts, head of the California Ski Industry Association.

Tahoe isn’t giving up on traditional winter activities. Squaw Valley Resort, for instance, has spent tens of millions of dollars upgrading its facilities in the past few years, including a \$5 million investment in additional snow-making equipment.

Nonetheless, the tourist attractions are conjuring up different ways to lure visitors. It’s telling that Squaw Valley is hosting its first-ever bluegrass and craft-beer festival this weekend, just a few weeks after it canceled a World Cup skiing and snowboarding tournament because of the poor conditions.

The closures are particularly painful for two reasons: One, the season had gotten off to a good start, thanks to two strong storms in December. Two, the Tahoe tourism industry was just beginning to climb out of a long period of hibernation prompted by the recession and fierce competition from California Indian casinos. Developers have been pouring millions into ski resorts, hotels and other amenities in hopes of weaning Tahoe from its historic dependence on gambling and turning the lake into an international destination and not just a day trip from Sacramento.

Read the whole story

World water shortfall expected in 15 years

By Associated Press

NEW DELHI – The world could suffer a 40 percent shortfall in water in just 15 years unless countries dramatically change their use of the resource, a U.N. report warned Friday.

Many underground water reserves are already running low, while rainfall patterns are predicted to become more erratic with climate change. As the world's population grows to an expected 9 billion by 2050, more groundwater will be needed for farming, industry and personal consumption.

The report predicts global water demand will increase 55 percent by 2050, while reserves dwindle. If current usage trends don't change, the world will have only 60 percent of the water it needs in 2030, it said.

Having less available water risks catastrophe on many fronts: crops could fail, ecosystems could break down, industries could collapse, disease and poverty could worsen, and violent conflicts over access to water could become more frequent.

"Unless the balance between demand and finite supplies is restored, the world will face an increasingly severe global water deficit," the annual World Water Development Report said, noting that more efficient use could guarantee enough supply in the future.

The report, released in New Delhi two days before World Water Day, calls on policymakers and communities to rethink water policies, urging more conservation as well as recycling of wastewater as is done in Singapore. Countries may also want to consider raising prices for water, as well as searching for ways to make water-intensive sectors more efficient and less polluting, it said.

In many countries including India, water use is largely unregulated and often wasteful. Pollution of water is often ignored and unpunished. At least 80 percent of India's population relies on groundwater for drinking to avoid bacteria-infested surface waters.

In agriculture-intense India, where studies show some aquifers are being depleted at the world's fastest rates, the shortfall has been forecast at 50 percent or even higher. Climate change is expected to make the situation worse, as higher temperatures and more erratic weather patterns could disrupt rainfall.

Currently, about 748 million people worldwide have poor access to clean drinking water, the report said, cautioning that economic growth alone is not the solution – and could make the situation worse unless reforms ensure more efficiency and less pollution.

“Unsustainable development pathways and governance failures have affected the quality and availability of water resources, compromising their capacity to generate social and economic benefits,” it said. “Economic growth itself is not a guarantee for wider social progress.”

Lottery proposal: Lifeline for Nev. education or DOA?

By J.D. Morris, Las Vegas Sun

Amid all the discussion in Carson City about improving education, one piece of legislation is refloating an old, but likely ill-fated, idea to help fund Nevada's bottom-tier school system: creating a state lottery.

Assembly joint resolution No. 6 would authorize a lottery through an amendment of the Nevada Constitution, which currently bars the state from running one. The proceeds would support public education as well as “the health and welfare of senior citizens.”

A lottery might seem like a no-brainer for a state with such a vibrant gambling industry. But similar proposals have failed in the Legislature numerous times before, so if history is any indication, this one will be a tough sell, too.

Nonetheless, Assemblyman Harvey Munford, D-Las Vegas, is championing the bill because he said he was approached by many of his constituents wondering why a lottery wasn’t allowed in Nevada. So the longtime legislator – who’s termed out after this session – thought he’d give it a try, despite the issue’s poor track record in the Capitol.

Read the whole story

Women business owners common in Nev.

By Karen Castro, KLAS-TV

LAS VEGAS – A study by American Express says women are the driving force of Nevada’s economy and the new face of entrepreneurship.

The study also showed how the business owners were of different ethnicities. When it comes to women businesses owners, Nevada is among the top five states with the fastest growth.

Economic experts say the state of Nevada has the third highest amount of women business owners.

Read the whole story

ZCES students learn from their surroundings

By Kathryn Reed

With Lake Tahoe – the land and water – being a continual scientific discovery, students at Zephyr Cove Elementary School are stepping outside to learn.

Each grade level is being taught something unique about Tahoe as part of the science curriculum. It's called "place based learning" – something Principal Nancy Cauley and the teachers came up with at the beginning of the year and expect to put into full effect in the 2015-16 school year.

Tahoe Institute for Natural Science is helping to facilitate classes with the regular teachers as well as bringing in grade appropriate instruction. All of this will meet the state science standards.

"The Tahoe Institute for Natural Science is excited to work with Zephyr Cove Elementary School to help with their new focus on the natural environment of the Lake Tahoe Basin," Kirk Hardie, TNS co-executive director, told *Lake Tahoe News*. "Teachers frequently comment that we provide their classes with their favorite guest programs. Two programs we are currently working on are geology and plant identification."

Instruction at each level will focus on:

- Kindergarten – feathers, animals that fly
- First – fur, as in animals with fur
- Second – fins, the fish
- Third – forest
- Fourth – water, the lake, streams and rivers
- Fifth – geology
- Sixth – green energy.

“We feel with TINS they will provide quality, hands-on experiential programs with all six different aspects,” Cauley told *Lake Tahoe News*. “They will teach the children how special these resources are, and to care (for) and cultivate the ecosystem of Tahoe so future generations can enjoy it just as much.”

Cauley said staff started discussing what makes ZCES so special. Location is significant. It is surrounded by forest, with a stream out back. Lake Tahoe is walking distance from the school. The small size is another attribute.

Students don’t have to get on a bus to experience what most kids their age would have to. They can walk outside and be immersed in nature. And that then becomes the classroom.

But there are other nearby places that offer learning experiences. Zephyr Cove students went to Taylor Creek last fall to see the kokanee salmon spawning. Third-graders will be going to Spooner Lake for a hike.

“TINS has been working with area schools since 2010 to improve their science education and nature experience opportunities through hands-on, place-based programs that meet both Nevada and California state science education standards,” Hardie said.

Talking to students about invasive species will be incorporated into water issues.

“This could take off in a lot of different ways. It’s in an embryonic stage,” Cauley said of this new science program.

Top Nev. court extends Whittemore law suspension

By Scott Sonner, AP

RENO — The Nevada Supreme Court ordered a four-year suspension of Harvey Whittemore’s law license Friday, more than doubling the punishment a state bar panel recommended after the ex-lobbyist and developer was convicted two years ago of making illegal campaign contributions to Sen. Harry Reid.

The high court decided the 18-month suspension the state bar association’s Northern Nevada Disciplinary Board recommended after temporarily suspended Whittemore’s license in November 2013 wasn’t harsh enough given the crimes the former political power broker committed.

Whittemore, 61, currently is serving a two-year sentence at a minimum-security prison in California on three felony convictions. He’s scheduled to be released in August 2016.

The newly ordered suspension is retroactive so he’ll be eligible to apply for reinstatement to the bar on Nov. 13, 2017.

The disciplinary panel had recommended its proposed 18-month suspension be extended until Whittemore is released from prison in the event his term expired before the suspension

did.

But Chief Justice James Hardesty said in the order signed by five other justices a longer suspension was warranted.

"We do not agree that the panel's recommended discipline is commensurate with the criminal conduct that Whittemore was convicted of engaging in," he wrote. He noted that one dissenting member of the bar panel would have recommended that Whittemore be permanently disbarred in Nevada.

Dominic Gentile, Whittemore's Las Vegas-based attorney, did not immediately respond to telephone or email messages seeking comment late Friday from The Associated Press.

A federal jury in Reno convicted Whittemore in 2013 of making excessive campaign contributions, making contributions in the name of another and lying to FBI agents.

Federal prosecutors say he used family and employees of his billion-dollar real estate company to funnel more than \$130,000 to Reid's re-election committee in 2007 when the Nevada Democrat was the Senate majority leader. They say he tried to skirt contribution limits by writing the checks to the "straw donors," who would simply hand over the money to Reid's campaign.

Reid was not accused of any wrongdoing, although he had to amend his 2007 report to the Federal Election Commission.

Whittemore argued the checks he wrote to his employees and family members were gifts with no strings attached, and the recipients were allowed to spend it as they saw fit.

The 9th Circuit Court of Appeals denied his appeal in January and earlier this month refused his bid for a re-hearing, rejecting his arguments that the trial court's jury instructions were inadequate and that the campaign limits violated his First Amendment rights.

Hope alive to squeeze money from bankrupt Nevada Fire Safe Council for Tahoe businesses

By Jeff DeLong, Reno Gazette-Journal

Fed up with waiting, Nevada lawmakers are ramping up efforts to have private companies, fire districts and others paid for work conducted years ago to reduce fire danger in vulnerable areas around Lake Tahoe.

The Legislature earlier this month passed a joint resolution urging Congress to pay contractors who performed extensive fuels treatment work in the wake of Tahoe's disastrous Angora Fire of 2007.

More than \$3.4 million is still owed for work conducted through the now-defunct Nevada Fire Safe Council, which filed for bankruptcy in 2012 after a federal audit uncovered financial irregularities in how U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management grants were handled by the nonprofit group.

"It's just really, really frustrating," said Brian Rye, president of Bushwhackers Tree Service, Inc., which is still owed more than \$16,000 for tree thinning and other fuel management work the firm performed several years ago at Tahoe.

Read the whole story

Earth records warmest winter on record

By Chris Dolce, Weather

The winter of 2014-15 was the warmest on record worldwide, according to the state of the climate report released by the National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration on Wednesday.

NOAA says that December through February – for meteorological record-keeping purposes, winter is defined as those three months in the Northern Hemisphere – was 1.42 degrees Fahrenheit above the 20th-century average for all land and ocean areas.

This tops the previous warmest winter of 2007 by 0.05 degrees Fahrenheit. Global temperature records are available for the period 1880-2015.

[Read the whole story](#)

SLT establishes goals for next 18 months

By Kathryn Reed

A to-do list filled a large swath of one wall inside the South Lake Tahoe City Council chambers. These were the marching orders delivered to staff by council for the next 18 or so

months.

Upon completing a multi-day strategic planning session, the electeds a week ago today reconfirmed projects on the list as well as added new things for staff to accomplish. The time period coincides with how long this council will be together until the next election.

While not everyone was in agreement that everything should be done, at least three people said each item is a priority.

A fee study is going to be conducted. This will show what the actual cost of a service is. It will also reveal what is being subsidized by the general fund or some other pot of cash.

Instead of continuing to take a hodgepodge approach to improvements at Bijou Community Park, a master plan for the facility will be created.



Lake Tahoe Airport's lobby doubles as the entrance to South Lake Tahoe's city offices. Photo/Kathryn Reed

Mayor Hal Cole lobbied hard for the airport lobby to be overhauled at an expense of about \$200,000 so it is reinvented into a true city hall.

Councilman Tom Davis sees this as a complete waste of money. Councilman Austin Sass advocated for not only renovating the lobby, but expanding the offerings so Lake Tahoe Visitors Authority has a presence and possibly the U.S. Forest Service.

The latter could issue wilderness permits from there.

Those in support of the upgrade believe this will give locals something to be proud of – a city hall for the first time in the city's 50-year history. Plus, it could be a destination of sorts for tourists.

A sampling of other items in the work plan include:

- Capturing more revenue through vacation home rentals, business licenses and transient occupancy tax;
- Complete Tahoe Valley Plan;
- Improve how the town looks;
- Increase hotel occupancy;
- Analyze return on invest;
- Better retention of employees, especially in the fire department;
- Expand recreation;
- Tackle single room occupancy hotel problem;
- Create events center;
- Decrease the cost of Cal-Tahoe JPA;
- Citywide area plan;
- High quality housing for all income levels;
- Improve stormwater system;
- Broaden public outreach;
- Create better, stronger partnerships.

A piece that has been missing from previous powwows like this is a discussion about how the council would measure success.

The work was placed under one of six categories, with some overlap:

- Fiscal sustainability
- Improve built environment
- Economic development
- Public trust and accountability
- Quality core services
- Partnership development.

City Manager Nancy Kerry wanted the council to look at why they wanted something to be done. It's up to staff to figure out how they get done. The items will be added to the business plan and brought back to the council for adoption in May.

Sandoval pushes bills to help vets

By Ray Hagar, Reno Gazette-Journal

When Gov. Brian Sandoval made Caleb Cage his director of military and veterans policy in 2014, he became the first governor in recent memory to have a someone on staff to oversee veterans affairs.

Cage, a West Point graduate and former Army platoon leader in Iraq, was given a formidable task.

"He said, 'I want Nevada to be the most military and veteran friendly state in the nation, period,' " Cage recalled.

The pro-veteran spirit is seen in Sandoval's aggressive legislative plan for veterans, although it has been foreshadowed at the Legislature by the governor's \$1.1 billion plan of new and extended taxes to fuel his proposed \$7.3 billion general-fund budget.

Read the whole story