

Scientists measure snowpack with laser-equipped plane

By David Bienick, KCRA

High above the Sierra Nevada mountains, scientists on board a propeller plane wear oxygen masks as they stare at computer screens.

When they pull a cord, a door in the belly of the plane slides open and reveals a large lens.

As the plane reaches a certain point above Yosemite National Park, mirrors behind the lens begin to spin and fire invisible laser beams at the snow-covered peaks below.

Every second 800,000 laser beams, a technology known as LIDAR, hit the snow's surface then bounce back up to sensors on the plane.

"This is basically what's measuring the distance from the plane to the ground," explained Brandon Benjamin, an engineer from NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory.

By comparing that distance when the mountains are bare to when they are covered in snow, Benjamin and other scientists are able to create 3-D maps that show snow depth to within about a half-inch.

Read the whole story

3 arrested in stabbing death of Placerville man

By Bill Lindelof, Sacramento Bee

Three people have been arrested in the stabbing death three weeks ago of an El Dorado County man.

On Feb. 3, El Dorado County sheriff's deputies responded to a residence in the 3200 block of Sand Ridge Road in unincorporated Placerville where they found the body of 55-year-old Pete Thomas.

Thomas was dead from a stab wound to the chest, according to sheriff's Lt. Tom Murdoch. Since then, detectives executed 17 arrest and search warrants during the investigation into the death of Thomas.

Read the whole story

'Career criminal' guilty of burglary

A jury this week found an El Dorado County man guilty of three felony counts of first-degree residential burglary and two counts of attempted burglary.

Bradley Zaun, 27, went on a drug-induced crime spree in October and November 2013 between Single Springs and Pollock Pines. El Dorado County District Attorney's Office called him

a “career criminal”. Sentencing is set for April 10. Zaun faces 26 years in prison, as well as additional time for violation of his parole.

The two-week trial in Placerville ended Feb. 18.

Alexander Cochran, 21, has pleaded guilty to similar charges. Other suspects are awaiting trial.

According to the DA’s office, the suspects would knock on the front door of a residence and if the homeowner answered the door, the defendants would leave. If no one answered the door, the defendants would gain entry through an unlocked door or force entry. On at least one occasion the residents were home and the defendants were able to avoid arrest under voter approved Proposition 47, which allows some convicted felons to have certain drug and theft, related offenses reduced to misdemeanors, thus allowing for reduced sentences or immediate release from custody.

“The above mentioned case involves Prop. 47 and has created numerous obstacles during court proceedings,” the DA’s office said in a statement.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

States leaving standardized tests behind

By Haley Sweetland Edwards, Time

If you had wandered late last year into Matthew Tosiello’s third-grade science class at Abingdon Elementary School in Virginia, you would have encountered an army of frogs. Origami

frogs, that is—palm-size critters made of green index cards, each equipped with a tongue made of either masking tape or water-sodden paper.

Tosiello had asked his 8- and 9-year-old students to design an experiment to determine which natural adaptation—a sticky tongue or a wet tongue—was better for lapping up flies, a role played by eraser-size chads left over from a three-hole punch. The kids then had to describe their hypotheses, methods and findings in a lab report.

It may not have looked like it from a distance—there were no blue books or timed segments, and the classroom was far from silent—but the origami-frog project was actually an exam. A Virginia law that went into effect this year eliminated a handful of mandatory, fill-in-the-bubble standardized tests in public schools, including one for third-grade science. Instead, the law asked teachers to perform “alternative assessments”—performance-based projects to monitor students’ progress.

In the origami-frog unit, for example, Tosiello was able to determine which students were struggling with mathematical concepts like symmetry or measurement (frogs had to be folded precisely, with their tongues exactly 6 cm by 2.5 cm) and which grasped the more complex scientific ideas. “It’s a more appropriate way of looking at a student’s growth,” explained Joanne Uyeda, the principal at Abingdon Elementary. “It’s more authentic.”

Read the whole story

Hoteliers' quarterly earnings soar

By Charisse Jones, USA Today

Boosted by the strengthening U.S. economy, Marriott International Inc. posted a \$197 million profit in the last three months of 2014, 30 percent more than during that quarter in 2013.

The hotel company's earnings of 68 cents per share was a 39 percent improvement over earnings during that period the previous year.

"Business is looking very good," said Laura Paugh, Marriott's senior vice president, investor relations, who noted that the company expects revenue per available room to grow between 5 and 7 percent in North America and also worldwide this year.

Confidence that strong travel trends will continue was also reflected in the 39,000 rooms that Marriott added to its inventory in 2014, and the 240,000 that were in the pipeline at the end of the year.

Read the whole story

**Douglas inches toward
revamping Stateline**



The event venue on this South Shore Vision Plan rendering, in blue on the right, is being studied. Rendering/Design Workshop

By Kathryn Reed

STATELINE – A 6,000- to 7,500-seat indoor-outdoor event center on the South Shore is gaining traction.

The South Tahoe Alliance of Resorts has put up \$100,000 for feasibility and blight studies for the project. The blight study is because it would be considered a redevelopment project. Within the next few months a decision is likely as to whether this is something worth pursuing.

“It needs to be walkable to Stateline from California,” Mike Bradford, with STAR, told *Lake Tahoe News*. That is one of the preliminary findings.

This has a lot to do with if the venue were to be used as a convention center-meeting place, because California agencies must rent rooms in the state even if they convene elsewhere.

That is why the original Chateau project in South Lake Tahoe was going to have a convention center – to attract the business-tourist market.

In the South Shore Vision Plan that was created in 2011, and funded by STAR, it calls for such an event center to be built behind what is now Lake Tahoe Hard Rock. But a plot of land behind MontBleu is now also under consideration.

Originally, it was to be completely an indoor facility, but that thinking has changed. It could be more similar to what those on the North Shore envision to be built at Northstar.

Bradford said Harrah's-Harveys is on board with the idea, knowing the outdoor concert series at Harveys' parking lot would move to the new venue. A bit of irony is Harrah's at one time was going to be the driving force behind the convention center project in South Lake Tahoe, but declined to do so.

The new facility could possibly generate more than \$20 million in annual revenue. More exact numbers will come from the feasibility study. Who would own and operate it are other factors to be worked out.

If things pencil out, then STAR will take its findings to the Douglas County commissioners.



Support for the loop road and better connectivity was voiced Feb. 19 at the Douglas County Commission meeting. Rendering/Design Workshop

On Feb. 19 this events center was alluded to more than once as commissioners received updates on the Countywide Connectivity Transportation System, and Recreation and Tourism Plan.

All 13 speakers want the commissioners to go forward with the connectivity plan – namely the loop road that ties Douglas County and South Lake Tahoe in the casino area – and the greater South Shore Vision Plan. And while the electeds support the idea, they question whether the broader community will support the plan when it comes to funding.

Commissioner Greg Lyon expects a “hurricane” of backlash to come from the valley. That is because raising taxes is how it will likely be paid.

Douglas County has the Nevada Legislature's permission to implement a 2.5 percent utility operator fee that would raise \$2 million, a 5-cent fuel tax to generate \$900,000 and a 25-cent sales tax to raise \$1.5 million. The money would benefit the lake and valley.

County officials say that nearly \$5 million could become \$50 million after bonding and then it could be used as a 25 percent match. (Gone are the days where state and federal dollars come without the need for local dollars.) This was then broken down to be \$4.84 per month per resident (not household), with one-third of the money coming from tourists.

Commissioners took no action Thursday.

Staff, though, envisions one of the top priorities being the loop road. Every Stateline casino is behind it based on testimony Feb. 19, as are Edgewood Companies, Lake Tahoe Resort Hotel and Heavenly Mountain Resort.

Other priorities are: Highway 395 Main Street revitalization, an alternate truck route, Ranchos connectivity path, and airport multi-modal regional transit. The county would need \$22 million, with the remainder from other sources, according to staff.

The event center also ties into the recreation plan as a venue.



Kahle Community Park is a

money generating facility at Stateline.

Douglas County used the same consulting firm – MIG out of Oregon – as South Lake Tahoe and El Dorado County did for their recreation master plan. They were done at the same time in order to look at the greater needs of the entire South Shore.

Cindy Mendoza with MIG gave a presentation to the commissioners on Thursday, saying the No. 1 key project is the event center.

Signage is another important thing to let people know where recreation facilities are and then to explain to people where they could get to on a particular trail and what the mileage is.

While Kahle Community Center's long-term plan was to have an aquatic center, Mendoza said with South Lake Tahoe looking at a leisure type swimming pool at its rec center then Douglas County might instead consider expanding its gym.

The goal is to have the recreation facilities on both sides of the state line be for everyone on the South Shore, and then be used in a coordinated manner to attract athletic events.

Scott Morgan, who heads the recreation department for Douglas, would not say if the vacant Kingsbury Middle School might still be an option for the county when it comes to expanding facilities. That Stateline site has sat vacant for years with not one person or entity putting in an offer to buy it.

Indoor tennis courts at Zephyr Cove Park are still on the books. Morgan told *Lake Tahoe News* the new library director does not oppose such a scenario, but added that it would not happen anytime soon. The library last year allowed the Zephyr Cove Tennis Club Foundation to transform part of the building, which sits next to the courts, into a pro shop.

Child porn lands El Dorado County man in prison

An El Dorado County resident was sentenced Feb. 19 to 12.5 years in prison for possession of child pornography.

According to court documents, Nicholas Robert Bowen, 63, of Grizzly Flats and a female companion were arrested by Davis police officers after the female was caught exposing herself to 10- to 12-year-old boys while Bowen filmed the encounters using a spy camera built into his glasses. A subsequent search of Bowen's phone and his computer, including in a folder called "boys," discovered more than 600 images and videos of minors engaged in sexually explicit conduct.

U.S. District Judge Troy Nunley at sentencing said the conduct was "egregious," and that Bowen was an "active individual" in the offense, further noting that Bowen's actions have had a "huge impact" and potentially "ruined" the childhoods of the victims in this case.

Charges remain pending against Bowen in Yolo County Superior Court.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Calif. may revamp school

construction funding

By Allen Young, Sacramento Business Journal

California's legislative analyst on Tuesday proposed a new system for funding school facilities: grants to districts based on enrollment.

The grants would be adjusted depending on local resources. The state would require schools to adopt five-year accountability plans.

The report addresses an issue that is critical not only to public schools, but California's construction industry. It arrives as California's building community and educators have raised concerns that the current school construction-funding program – which relies on statewide voter-approved bonds – is out of money.

[Read the whole story](#)

Calif. considering new drought restrictions

By Fenit Nirappil, AP

As the California drought drags on, water officials are considering expanding mandatory outdoor water restrictions on homeowners and adding new limits on restaurants, hotels and decorative fountains.

At an informational meeting Tuesday, the State Water Resources Control Board also appeared ready to extend existing rules

imposed last summer to boost water supplies.

That would mean Californians still won't be able to wash cars with hoses that don't shut off and must limit watering their lawns.

The emergency regulations also authorized agencies to fine water wasters up to \$500 a day, though such stringent enforcement has been rare.

Possible new rules under consideration include a ban on running outdoor water fountains and prohibiting lawn watering during cold and rainy periods.

"The key is to get away from very light mandatory restrictions," said Felicia Marcus, chairwoman of the board.

Other ideas presented Tuesday targeted businesses such as requiring restaurants to only serve water on request and telling hotels not to automatically provide guests with fresh towels and sheets every day. Some cities have similar rules already in place.

The board has considered making some water restrictions permanent with the prospect of future droughts looming.

"We definitely need permanent regulations," said Frances Spivy-Weber, the board vice-chairwoman. "I just don't see how we can enter the next 30 years with climate change without them."

The board has the power to define unreasonable water use. That power can also be used to ban golf course and cemetery owners from using drinking water to maintain landscapes when recycled water is available, but Marcus said the board isn't targeting those areas now.

The board could consider the extension of restrictions next month and take up other possible regulations later in the year.

Wet March may be on tap for California

By Tim Hearden, Capital Press

SACRAMENTO – After a fierce mid-February storm system kept most areas near or above their normal seasonal rainfall totals, Northern California could be in for a wet March.

A weak system coming down from Canada this weekend could provide some mountain rain while helping to break down the high-pressure ridge over the region, setting up a possible barrage of storms from the Pacific, National Weather Service meteorologist Eric Kurth said.

“The ridge does seem to be breaking down to where we might be seeing some systems in early March,” Kurth said. “The very long-range models are showing a shift to a wetter pattern in early March. ... There do seem to be some hints in that directions.”

AccuWeather’s long-range forecast goes as far as to predict as many as 23 days of rain in Redding in March, punctuated by some thunderstorms, with high temperatures in the 50s and low 60s.

Read the whole story