

CalFire ramping up for early fire season

By Len Ramirez, KPIX

While the calendar says February, CalFire is getting an early start on making sure it has enough staff to battle this year's wildfires.

One by one, applicants walked in to CalFire headquarters in Morgan Hill for their job interviews wearing business suits. What they really want to wear are fire coats, helmets and goggles, battling wildfires up and down the state this summer.

About 1,200 applied to become firefighters. Three hundred are getting interviews, but only a very select few will get a job.

[Read the whole story](#)

SLT to resume commercial fire inspections

South Lake Tahoe is getting back into the fire inspection business.

In 2011, the fire marshal position was eliminated. For a time Lake Valley Fire Protection District took on the responsibilities, but fire codes in the jurisdictions were not the same at the time so that was not a good fit.

"Inspections have not occurred as they should have," Fire Chief Jeff Meston told the City Council on Feb. 17.

The staff report said, "Some businesses have neglected to maintain basic safety items such as working fire extinguishers, working smoke detectors, fire sprinkler maintenance and fire extinguisher systems over cooking appliances, creating unsafe conditions for the public."

Because no one in the department is qualified to do this job the city will be looking to hire someone from the outside. But what will be unique is that the person will also be a building inspector and will work in that department. The person will have to have the necessary certifications to do both.

The theory is one person can do both inspections at the 960 commercial establishments. The goal is to have the fees pay for the position. Businesses with less than 10,000 square feet will be charged \$234 for the fire inspection.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

UFOs were not always a laughing matter

By Matthias Gafni, Bay Area News Group

It was 1964. Late at night. The Northern California man had lost his hunting buddies in the woods near Lake Tahoe and climbed a tree to sleep.

Awakened by a glowing object landing on a nearby ridge, the man was soon fighting for his life against two neckless creatures and a robot before the beings emitted a noxious gas and knocked him out.

A tall tale? Drunken binge? Drug-induced hallucination (it was the '60s, after all)? No matter. That Placer County UFO sighting and thousands more were studiously collected and meticulously researched as part of the Air Force's strange, long-shuttered Project BLUE BOOK, a government program on the hunt for little green men – or perhaps Soviet spies; no one is saying for sure.

For 22 years, the military seemed to spare little expense in chronicling humans' reported otherworldly encounters with glowing orbs, spinning spheres, flying ice cream cones, and more.

All of it had been hidden away in archive files until a UFO enthusiast posted 130,000 documents worth of BLUE BOOK material in a free online database for the first time last month. Dozens of Bay Area close encounters were included in the trove.

Read the whole story

Judge: Claiming to cure homosexuality is consumer fraud

By Samantha Michaels, Mother Jones

In a blow to the controversial practice of gay conversion therapy, a New Jersey judge has ruled that therapists who claim that homosexuality is a curable mental disorder are committing consumer fraud.

The ruling, issued on Tuesday by Superior Court Judge Peter F.

Bariso Jr., is part of an ongoing lawsuit filed on behalf of four men who say they were subjected to humiliating treatments by therapists affiliated with Jews Offering New Alternatives for Healing (JONAH), a gay conversion therapy referral service based in Jersey City. Bariso said it violates the state's Consumer Fraud Act to advertise conversion therapy services by describing homosexuality as a mental illness, disease, or disorder.

"This ruling makes clear that when conversion therapists lie about the nature of homosexuality in order to lure these vulnerable clients into their services and their programs, they're committing fraud," says David Dinielli, deputy legal director of the Southern Poverty Law Center, which filed the lawsuit for the plaintiffs. According to the SPLC, this marks the first time a US court has found that homosexuality is not a mental disease.

Read the whole story

Vacation rental rules changing in South Tahoe

By Kathryn Reed

Vacation rental owners are likely going to have to pay more money to get a permit in South Lake Tahoe as well as contend with other new regulations.

The South Lake Tahoe City Council on Feb. 17 spent the bulk of the meeting talking about how to revise the 2003 ordinance that was amended in 2011.

The council is going to have a public workshop soon to gather more input. After that, a revised ordinance is expected to come back to the council for adoption in April.

Noise is the No. 1 complaint about vacation renters. Some of the proposed ordinance changes are the result of those complaints.

Of the 1,574 permitted vacation rentals in the city, there were 158 calls to 911 complaining about a vacation rental. Not everyone who spoke Tuesday believes that is enough of a problem to warrant changes. But those also don't account for all of the complainers.

"The city routinely receives complaints. The number of calls about general complaints are not tracked, as they come into various offices within the city," City Manager Nancy Kerry told *Lake Tahoe News*.

A major issue still to be resolved is what to do with Airbnb like rentals where people are in their residence renting a room, a bed or even a mattress. There was no consensus among the council members as to whether those types of rentals should be subject to paying the transient occupancy tax.

What the council did agree to is to change the code so only two people may stay in a room unless the occupants are 10 years old or younger.

When it comes to occupancy limits, the word "overnight" will be removed. This means groups that rent multiple houses on a street cannot legally visit one another. If the house sleeps eight – then only eight people are allowed in the house no matter the time of day.

It was pointed out, though, that all enforcement regarding vacation rentals is complaint driven. Police officers aren't going to be peeking in windows to see how many people are gathered around the dinner table.

Outdoor hot tubs will be off limits after 10pm. This came about because people were complaining of loud talkers after that hour. Part of the problem is people tend to raise their voices when the jets are on.

But, again, cops aren't going to be looking over fences to see if people are soaking after hours unless neighbors complain.

While some members of the public suggested requiring rentals have a kill switch for the bubbles at 10pm, the council went with the more restrictive "no hot tubing after 10pm" mandate. And for those who want to violate that policy, the penalty starts at \$250 and could escalate to the owner losing his or her vacation rental permit.

Amplified music after 10pm is going to be a no-no, too, with the same punishment for not following the rules.

The council opted to forego the staff recommendation to provide free parking permits to neighborhoods impacted by the vacation rentals.

Forcing renters to park immediately in front of the home will be removed from the code because it's not enforceable.

Still to be decided is how many bear boxes a rental might need to install if and when there are trash violations.

The exact fee structure is also up in the air. Those who manage their own rentals will pay more than those that are locally managed. "Professionally managed" was changed to "locally managed" to accommodate owner-occupied Airbnb'ers as well as people who live in the area and have vacation rentals.

The issue is that out-of-town owners who don't use a management firm tend to have more infractions. The higher fee is designed to be an incentive for them to turn control over to someone locally.

The city said increasing fees is necessary so more enforcement

personnel may be hired. The part-time compliance auditor position is going to be full time, and a full-time enforcement officer will be hired. Those salaries will be paid with the fees.

While the council agreed to the above recommendations, the electeds can still change their minds before the vote. (Councilman Tom Davis recused himself from the discussion and direction to staff because of his affiliation with Tahoe Keys Resort.)

Marsolais takes over as chief of LTBMU

Jeff Marsolais has lost the “deputy” in his title. He is now officially forest supervisor for Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit.



Jeff Marsolais

He takes over for Nancy Gibson who retired in January.

Marsolais has been named deputy forest supervisor in February 2011. Prior to that he was acting supervisor for LTBMU for 120 days starting in December 2010. He temporarily left his job as recreation and land staff officer in the Inyo forest to lead

the Lake Tahoe office.

He has worked on seven forests since the mid-1990s. Before that Marsolais worked for the Bureau of Land Management.

In 2014, he served as special assistant to the regional forester, providing strategic guidance and direction on hiring efforts for the Pacific Southwest Region.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Echo Summit closure may be worse than '11

By Kathryn Reed

When Caltrans closed Highway 50 over Echo Summit in 2011 to replace the dilapidated rock wall that was put in just after World War II, the powers that be came unglued. There were countless meetings, a media blitz let people know the South Shore was still in business and that the best route was not through the North Shore, state lawmakers got involved, the Amgen bike race was affected and ultimately everything worked out.

Caltrans is again going to close the same span – but not until 2019. But this next time could be much longer than 10 days.

This time the state transportation agency will be replacing a bridge on top of Echo Summit that was built in 1939. The concrete is starting to crack and break off.



The Highway 50 bridge at Echo Summit is crumbling.
Photos/Caltrans

“A lot of it is from the salt that is put down. It starts to corrode the surface and get inside the concrete,” Steve Nelson, spokesman for Caltrans, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Caltrans is in the notice of preparation phase, which will last until early March. The environmental phase is expected to be finished in summer 2016, with design and right-of-way issues (U.S. Forest Service land may be needed depending on the width), with construction starting in 2019.

The current bridge is 24-feet wide.

Four alternatives are being considered:

1. Working 126 days in one season with 66 of those days a full closure of Highway 50 and the other days would be one-way traffic control.
2. Two seasons with 31 days of full closure, 55 days of one-way traffic control.
3. Two seasons with one-way traffic control.
4. Two seasons with one-way traffic control with workers doing 10-hour shifts instead of eight.

Nelson said the bridge work was not part of the wall project because the funding sources are different and that the bridge

was not ready to go at the time the wall was rebuilt four years ago.



Concrete is failing so the Highway 50 bridge needs replacing.

The entire project will cost \$9 million, with \$5 million for construction of the half-mile long bridge.

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Notes:

- For more info, go online.
- A meeting about the notice of preparation is on Feb. 26 from 6-8pm at Lake Tahoe Airport. An overview will be given and then it will be more like an open house format.
- Comments will be accepted until two weeks after the Feb. 26 meeting.

Pedestrian killed in S. Lake

Tahoe identified

The pedestrian killed Feb. 13 has been identified as Craig Davis.



Craig Davis

The 44-year-year South Lake Tahoe resident was in a crosswalk Friday about 6:30pm at Larch Avenue and Ski Run Boulevard in South Lake Tahoe when he was struck and killed by a vehicle. Alcohol was not a factor in the accident, according to police officers.

This is an area without much lighting and it's not the first time a pedestrian has been hit there by a vehicle.

Davis was a meat cutter at Safeway. He enjoyed the outdoors and was an avid disc golf player.

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*

Nevada government is an

insiders' game

By Kyle Roerink, Las Vegas Sun

CARSON CITY — Many of the state's elected officials have professional relationships that extend outside the Legislature, creating a web that reveals the close-knit nature of Nevada politics.

Lt. Gov. Mark Hutchison, for instance, represented Sen. Mark Lipparelli in front of the state's ethics commission in 2013. Lipparelli, a tech executive and former gaming regulator, filled Hutchinson's vacant state senate seat the following year.

Hutchison, who practices law by trade, said the business link between the two had no influence on Lipparelli's appointment to Hutchison's Senate seat.

But the business connection, disclosed in public documents, highlights the dual roles and relationships fostered in the private-public world of state politics. It also underscores Nevada's revolving-door of officials who bounce from one government post to the next in an insular world that's hard for a layperson to breach.

[Read the whole story](#)

Funding approved for Incline Creek restoration



Improvements to Incline Creek should be finalized this year. Photo/Provided

Money has been secured for IVGID to complete the final phase of the Third Creek and Incline Creeks Restoration Project.

The Incline Village General Improvement District board on Feb. 13 unanimously approved a \$267,250 funding agreement between IVGID and Nevada via the Nevada Department of State Lands that provides the 25 percent local match to \$801,750 in federal funding from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. The entire project costs \$1.069 million.

The final phase will include design and construction work to restore the stream environment zone and improve fish passage in Incline Creek at Highway 28. Construction should start by September.

From 2008-12, four phases of the restoration work were completed on Third and Incline Creeks to enhance fish passage and habitat, while addressing stream bank erosion, channel stability, and overall water quality. A total of 6,500 linear feet of stream environment zone has been restored; three undersized and failing culvert crossings have been replaced with open bottom CON-SPAN structures; and 11 barriers to fish passage have been addressed to date.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report