

Nev. food stamp program expects federal fine

By Riley Snyder, Associated Press

CARSON CITY — Nevada health department officials are expecting a financial penalty from the federal government over simmering issues with the state's food stamp program.

Welfare program administrator Steve Fisher told a legislative budget committee Wednesday he expects the penalty due to delays in processing food stamp applications and a high error rate.

States are required to hit certain benchmarks for accuracy and timeliness to receive food stamp grants. Nevada's error rate on food stamp applications hovers around 8 percent, which is nearly twice the national average, Fisher said.

An administrator with the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food and Nutrition Service sent a letter to Nevada in September detailing the program's issues and threatening to withhold federal grant funding if the state Department of Health and Human Services didn't submit a corrective action plan.

Fisher said the health department is taking steps to fix the program's problems, including hiring more full-time workers and reworking the method used to estimate the number of cases.

Legislators expressed apprehension over the department's plans and asked for more information about future hiring.

"It does us no good to give you positions when you don't have people in place," Assemblywoman Marilyn Kirkpatrick, D-Las Vegas, told Fisher.

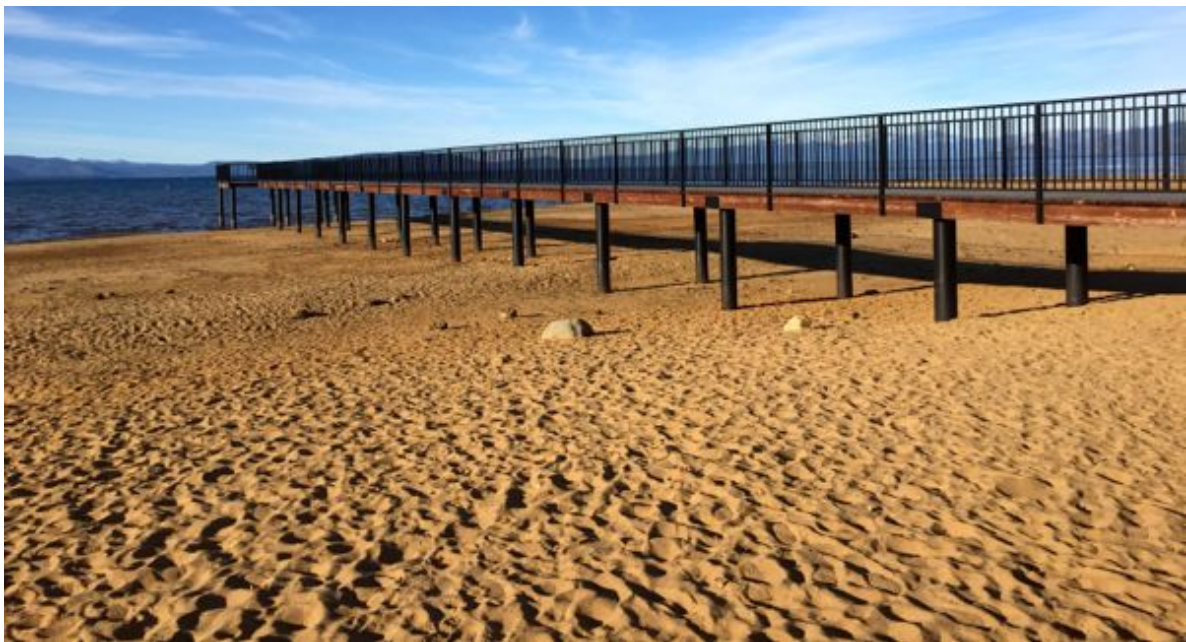
Fisher said he didn't know the amount of the penalty because

federal officials were still compiling data from the last fiscal year. The program was fined \$144,000 when it was sanctioned in 2010.

Food and Nutrition Service spokesman Michael Ladd said the federal agency will take action sometime between April and July, depending on when the food stamp information is fully processed.

Food stamp applications have increased significantly over the last decade, with more than 450,000 Nevada residents expected to be enrolled in the program by 2016.

January on course to be record dry month



Two pilings of the Tahoe Keys pier remain in the water.
Photo/Kathryn Reed

By Kathryn Reed

January is destined to be a record for the weather books. And it might be for some companies in the Lake Tahoe Basin, too.

No snow means no money for many businesses, which in turn means no paycheck or a smaller one because of reduced hours for employees. And with locals not making money, it then means less being spent throughout town.

For the first 20 days of the month the city has recorded a trace of moisture, according to the National Weather Service in Reno. The driest January was in 2003 when 0.03 inches fell.

Tahoe City hasn't recorded any wet stuff this month. The record low precip for January was in 1991 with 0.08 inches.

It is the water equivalency that the Weather Service measures.

If the storm that is on the horizon for Jan. 27-28 materializes, this January may not be a record. But it will still likely be one of the worst on record.

Rain is what is being predicted for 8,500 feet and below. That means water on most of the already sketchy ski slopes.

For consecutive seasons Tahoe area resorts have been unable to open all of their terrain. This means not being fully staffed. And now hours are being cut. Tahoe Donner Cross Country, Dodge Ridge, Donner Ski Ranch, and Badger Pass have closed in the last week. That could change if Mother Nature comes through.



The only snowmen in Tahoe right now are inflatable, like this one at Tulare Avenue and Highway 50 in South Lake Tahoe. Photo/Toogee Sielsch

Tennis nets are back up in some places. Bikes were never put away for the season.

Vacancy signs were the norm last weekend – a three-day weekend that in the past often had lodging properties full.

While last summer was good for so many businesses in and around Tahoe, the same may not hold true for 2015. If snow, rain, and runoff don't fill Lake Tahoe, the boating season could be over before it starts. It's hard for most boats – except human powered – to access most of the marinas.

Tahoe Keys Marina owners have not taken out a dredging permit. It's up to Aramark – operators of the Tahoe Queen – to dredge the Ski Run Marina. No permit has been sought and the Queen is not operating because of the low water level.

While there are plenty of things to do besides be on the lake in the summer, it is a big draw.

The only benefit of the low lake level may be larger beaches to accommodate more people. But one beach this month became off limits. Tahoe Keys Property Owners Association has put a fence up so only homeowners can access the sand and pier.

It's going to be near beach-like weather this weekend.

Other records being set are for heat. It was 58 degrees in South Lake Tahoe on Jan. 18 – a record. The previous high was 57 in 1985. Another record may be set this Sunday where the forecasted high is for 62 degrees. The previous high was 57 in 1982.

Tahoe City on Jan. 25 may break the 1984 record of 51 degrees.

“It just continues to be mild and dry,” Jessica Kielhorn, meteorologist technician in Reno, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Reno-NY nonstop flight could be game changer

By Bill O'Driscoll, Reno Gazette-Journal

Talk about liftoff.

JetBlue Airways' coming nonstop flights linking Reno and New York City promise to elevate not only the future of Reno-Tahoe International Airport but also the broader economy in northern Nevada.

From filling hotel rooms to luring new business to the sheer prestige of “New York” and “nonstop” in the same sentence, Reno-Tahoe stands on a new level of opportunity, officials say.

“If we want to leverage Reno-Tahoe, it really helps to have the top name to point to, and that’s what we have,” Chris Baum, CEO of the Reno-Sparks Convention & Visitors Authority, said of the new connection to the nation’s most populous market and financial epicenter. “Talk about instant credibility.”

In the broader marketplace, it brings attention at a time of growing economic recovery in the region. Among the recent items providing a boost to northern Nevada: Tesla’s \$5 billion battery gigafactory, the just-announced \$1 billion Switch data center and continued shrinking unemployment and rising home prices.

Read the whole story

Atmospheric rivers could end Calif.’s drought

By Tony Barboza, Los Angeles Times

California’s drought crept in slowly, but it could end with a torrent of winter storms that stream across the Pacific, dumping much of the year’s rain and snow in a few fast-moving and potentially catastrophic downpours.

Powerful storms known as atmospheric rivers, ribbons of water vapor that extend for thousands of miles, pulling moisture from the tropics and delivering it to the West Coast, have broken 40 percent of California droughts since 1950, recent research shows.

“These atmospheric rivers – their absence or their presence –

really determine whether California is in drought or not and whether floods are going to occur,” said F. Martin Ralph, a research meteorologist who directs the Center for Western Weather and Water Extremes at the Scripps Institution of Oceanography at UC San Diego.

The storms, which flow like massive rivers in the sky, can carry 15 times as much water as the Mississippi and deliver up to half of the state’s annual precipitation between December and February, scientists say. Though atmospheric rivers are unlikely to end California’s drought this year, if they bring enough rain to erase the state’s huge precipitation deficit, they could wreak havoc by unleashing floods and landslides.

Scientists using a new type of satellite data discovered atmospheric rivers in the 1990s, and studies since then have revealed the phenomenon’s strong influence on California’s water supply and extreme weather.

Read the whole story

1882 rifle sparks archaeological quest in Nev.

By John M. Glionna, Los Angeles Times

In a remote Nevada park, a team finds an abandoned Winchester rifle from 1882. Who left it there?

There it was, abandoned for the ages, propped up against a juniper tree in far-eastern Nevada’s Snake Mountains, a Winchester Model 1873 repeating rifle: the gun, as legend goes, that won the American West.

For archaeologist Eva Jensen, it's something much more – a mystery that continues to baffle the staff at Great Basin National Park: Who owned it? A luckless hunter or miner? Maybe an outlaw on the run?

And how on earth did it get there?

The search for answers has taken the 57-year-old veteran scientist out of the field and into tiny research libraries – scouting out old newspapers, 130-year-old bills of sale, family histories and yellowed letters in several Western states.

Read the whole story

Motorcycles collide, 1 person dies

A motorcyclist died Jan. 19 after colliding with another motorcyclist on the Geiger Grade.

Nevada Highway Patrol officers said a Harley Davidson motorcycle ridden by 34-year-old Reno resident Trenton Michael Perry for reasons unknown crossed the center line and into the northbound lane. He collided with a 2014 black Harley Davidson motorcycle traveling north being ridden by Jerald Allen Bailey, 35, of Reno. Each rider was thrown from his bike.

Both were transported to Renown Medical Center in Reno. Bailey had non-life threatening injuries. Perry died at the hospital.

The investigation is still ongoing.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Reward offered in attempted shooting of deputy



A \$25,000 award is being offered for information that results in the arrest of the person who shot at an El Dorado County sheriff's Deputy on Oct. 17, 2014.

At 8am that day a deputy working patrol found a truck in a turnout in the area of Cable Road and White Mountain Ranch Road. While walking down a trail from the turnout the deputy came in contact with a male subject who refused to comply with verbal commands. A physical struggle ensued between the two.

The suspect was able to retreat to his vehicle where he retrieved a handgun and fired it at the deputy, but didn't hit him. The deputy returned fire, but it's not known if the suspect sustained any injuries.

The suspect is described as a white male, approximately 6-foot-1-inch to 6-foot-2-inches tall, weighing 200-250 pounds, with a goatee, wearing a flannel shirt, dark pants and boots. The suspect was last seen driving away on Cable Road in a mid-1990s to early 2000s white Dodge single cab truck without a license plate.

The sheriff's office is asking anyone with information to

contact either Detective James Peterson at 530.642.4713 or Detective Ken Barber at 530.642.4710.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

South Lake Tahoe council salaries to double

For the first time since 1998, South Lake Tahoe City Council members are receiving a raise.

The five current members voted themselves a raise Jan. 20. The pay goes from \$452 a month to \$946. If they work 20 hours a week, this comes to less than \$12 an hour.

The state dictates how much the salary may go up – 5 percent per year. Going forward the council will bring this to a vote every two years instead of waiting so long. Raises may only be given after a new council member is seated – another state rule.

The annual cost per council member will be \$8,358. This includes workers' comp, CalPERS, Medicare and the like. The cost to taxpayers is \$41,790 for the five.

In their discussions all five hope this bump in pay will help attract younger, full-time workers in the future who might now be able to afford to take a day or two off work for council commitments.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Mixed-use retail likely at Ski Run-Hwy. 50



A developer bought this parcel from South Lake Tahoe for \$1.1 million. Photo/LTN file

By Kathryn Reed

One of South Lake Tahoe's prime pieces of real estate may be more than a plot of dirt 18 months from now.

Halferty Development Corporation out of Pasadena has until June 1, 2016, to obtain a building permit for the nearly 1.5 acres at the corner of Highway 50 and Ski Run Boulevard and still retain incentives from the city.

The City Council on Jan. 20 unanimously agreed to sell the parcel to the developer for \$1.1 million. For that amount the city is also throwing in 12,000 square feet of commercial floor area (CFA) if the developer follows an agreed-upon timeline.

The property did not have any CFA or tourist accommodation units (TAU). It does have coverage and 88 parking spaces in

the garage next door. How many more parking spaces it will have depends on the building and the design.

CFA and TAUs are commodities the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency came up with years ago to regulate growth, but instead have backfired a bit by creating a less than free market for development and value in items that don't exist elsewhere in the world.

The city acquired this property from the South Lake Tahoe Redevelopment Agency for \$800,000 after the state dissolved redevelopment agencies. At that time the council borrowed the money from reserves with the intent that it be returned to that pot. However, City Manager Nancy Kerry pointed out that this council may do what it likes with the \$1.1 million. The council did not discuss where the proceeds would go.

A mixed-use retail center with the possibility of tourist units on the second floor is one concept. The city has been promised a drive-through drug store will not be going there. Other developers have wanted to build one, and Halferty has experience doing so.

James Halferty was not available for comment. He was one of three developers vying for the land.

Mayor Hal Cole told *Lake Tahoe News* the Southern California firm was chosen because it has the most experience, has the ability to start right away and came up with a price the city liked. Plus, Halferty was willing to give the city more control than the others.

"The most important thing is that it needs to look nice," Cole said.

He knows tenants will change through the years, but he wants a building that will last 50 years, not look dated and rundown. During council member comments Cole expressed his frustration with the Auto Zone and BevMo buildings looking like they could

be built in any town. He wants a more rigorous design standard so there is more of a mountain feel to what is built going forward. He is proposing the Planning Commission have more input into design.

How many millions of dollars Halferty will invest remains to be seen.

And if lodging is part of the project, he will have to obtain TAUs. Kerry said the city would work with smaller hotels and those wanting to buy them to help make that a reality.

A possible use is some sort of food court that would be attractive to the summer beach crowd and winter skiers. It could be grab and go, as well as have areas to sit around fire pits.

“He said to the negotiating committee, ‘What do you really want and I’ll build it’,” Kerry said. But with its being a small parcel, the options are somewhat limited.

There will be entrances off both streets. And pedestrians will get a crosswalk from this site to Ski Run Marina across Highway 50.

LTCC denied 4-year pilot school status

By Kathryn Reed

Lake Tahoe Community College is not one of the 15 two-year institutions that will be part of a pilot program to offer a four-year degree.

LTCC was one of 36 schools vying for this opportunity.

“The board, faculty, staff, students and administration are disappointed, although remain supportive of the California Community College baccalaureate pilot,” LTCC President Kindred Murillo told *Lake Tahoe News*.

The University of California and California State University systems need to find ways to accommodate more students. Allowing community colleges to offer four-year degrees would do that.

LTCC proposed a public safety administration degree.

The campuses and programs approved Jan. 20 are:

- Antelope Valley College – airframe manufacturing technology
- Bakersfield College – industrial automation
- Crafton Hills College – emergency services and allied health systems
- Cypress College – mortuary science
- Feather River College – equine industry
- Foothill College – dental hygiene
- Mira Costa College – biomanufacturing
- Modesto Junior College –respiratory care
- Rio Hondo College – automotive technology
- San Diego Mesa College – health information management
- Santa Ana College – occupational studies
- Santa Monica College – interaction design

- Shasta College – health information management
- Skyline College – respiratory therapy
- West Los Angeles College – dental hygiene.

The setback does not mean LTCC won't offer four-year degrees at some point. This has been Murillo's mission since arriving in South Lake Tahoe a handful of years ago.

"LTCC will continue our efforts to bring public undergraduate and graduate degree programs through the university center model," she said.

Through a more than \$5 million donation from Lisa Maloff the college within the next two years plans to begin construction on a standalone 5,500-square-foot university center. A university center is a location on a community college campus occupied by staff from four-year colleges who offer their programs locally.