

Calif. targets pot farms polluting waterways

By Kathryn Reed

Chemicals – some of them banned substances in California – are flowing into streams, trees are being cut down without a permit, garbage is strewn about, human waste is not properly disposed of and the soil is so contaminated nothing may grow there again.

This is going on throughout California as people find out-of-the-way places to grow marijuana for medical purposes, and drug cartels consolidate their operations so the product is grown closer to the user and doesn't require crossing international borders.

But now those marijuana growers have another watchdog – the California Water Board and the regional offices, including Lahontan based in South Lake Tahoe.



Illegal pot grows in California are causing the state to intervene.
Photo/Shasta County Sheriff's Office

"It is a serious statewide water quality problem – mostly on

the north coast and Central Valley, but we do have illegal grows in our region,” Lauri Kemper, assistant executive director of the Lahontan Regional Water Control Board, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Cris Carrigan with the state agency told the regional board Jan. 14 about the dangers of grows on private land, while Lahontan engineer Eric Taxer spoke about what is going on with public lands.

“All sites have water quality and water diversion issues,” Carrigan said.

Growers are siphoning off water from streams for their crop. Some of the diversions are more impactful to the environment than others. Part has to do with the material used for the diversion.

Of the grows they have come across, Carrigan said, at minimum all are degrading water quality by adding sediment to the system. But most are also adding pollutants.

“This heretofore was an unregulated activity. Law enforcement has not worked,” Carrigan said.

He said the number of grows is five times greater than in 2010.

“These types of things don’t have to happen. They need a business plan,” Carrigan said of the growers. And they need a sustainable ecological plan.

The water board has the authority – and is now using it – to stop these growers from polluting waterways. They are getting warrants to access properties. Property owners, operators and contractors doing the work are all being targeted by the state.

Fines will be levied and abatement plans instituted. The problem the state may have after this pilot program runs out

of money is sustaining the enforcement. The goal is fines that are collected will keep the program going.

These grows – whether for medicinal or illegal sales – are wreaking havoc on the environment, officials say. This includes the land, water, fisheries and wildlife habitat.

Not all grows are illegal. Some jurisdictions allow outdoor cultivation of medical marijuana. But they still might not be employing practices that are in accordance with the state Water Board.

Taxer has found illegal pot grows at elevations as high as 11,000 feet as well as in the barren desert.

“A lot of cartels or drug trafficking organizations seek out-of-the-way places for grows,” he told the Lahontan board.

And because of their remoteness it is often hard for the agencies to cleanup and restore the site because of limited resources.

“Because of climate change there are more pot growers in our area,” Taxer said.

The Sierra has water, while other locations are drying up.

Taxer showed a photo of a bust in Alpine County in August where 4,000 plants growing among the pines were seized.

Suit challenges medical pot dispensaries in Washoe County

By Associated Press

A legal battle is brewing over the licensing of medical marijuana dispensaries in Washoe County.

One of the license applicants has filed a lawsuit against the state that says the state ranking system undermines a part of the law intended to guard against monopolies.

Lawyers for Washoe Dispensary LLC told the *Reno Gazette-Journal* that Tryke Companies Reno LLC should not be awarded two licenses – one in Sparks and one in unincorporated Washoe County.

They also challenge plans to issue three of the total five licenses allowed in the unincorporated county at north Lake Tahoe – in Incline Village and neighboring Crystal Bay.

The suit says the state failed to follow the law requiring that local governments have the final say about where the dispensaries should be located.

Father faces murder charge in death of infant

Trent Getty of Douglas County has been charged with first degree murder in the death of his 2-month-old daughter.

He is expected to appear in East Fork Justice Court in Minden on Jan. 16.

Getty waived extradition to Nevada after being arrested in Sacramento on Jan. 13.

He was being held without bail.

Caesars bankruptcy won't affect day-to-day operations at its 2 Lake Tahoe casinos

By Howard Stutz, Las Vegas Review-Journal

Caesars Entertainment Corp. placed its largest operating division into bankruptcy Thursday, taking the initial steps to eliminate almost \$10 billion of debt and restructure the casino operator's troubled balance sheet.

The pre-packaged filing covering Caesars Entertainment Operating Co., has been agreed upon by 80 percent of the company's senior bondholders. It was filed in the U.S. Federal Bankruptcy Court in Chicago. The company hopes to emerge from bankruptcy later this year.

The iconic 4,250-room Caesars Palace is the only Las Vegas property covered by the CEOC bankruptcy filing.

Company officials have said the bankruptcy filing and financial restructuring will not impact day-to-day operations of its hotels and casinos, its interactive gaming operations or the company-owned World Series of Poker. The reorganization will not disrupt Caesars' Total Rewards customer loyalty program, which has more than 45 million members.

The plan is to seek the court's approval to convert CEOC into a publicly-traded real estate investment trust. CEOC is the largest of Caesars' operating units and controls the flagship Caesars Palace, Caesars Atlantic City, Harrah's Reno and more

than a dozen regional properties including Harrah's Lake Tahoe and Harveys in Stateline.

Read the whole story

Homeless count to include those not in shelters

By Kathryn Reed

Counting the number of people in shelters has been going on for years. This is the first year communities are required by the Department of Housing and Urban Development to count the homeless who are not in a shelter.

This means people living on the street or in their cars or some other substandard setting.

The count will occur Jan. 30 throughout the United States.

Cheyenne Lane with Tahoe Youth & Family Services is leading the charge on the South Shore.

Questions people will be asked include, but are not limited to:

- Where will you sleep tonight?
- Have you been homeless more than four times in the last three years?
- Why are you homeless?
- Have you been in the military?

- What is your income?
- Do you have children?
- What services could have prevented you from becoming homeless?

Volunteers will be looking for homeless people behind Safeway, Raley's at the Y, Harrah's near Van Sickle Bi-State Park, Meek's, Kmart, at the old Ace Hardware, South Lake Tahoe Library, churches, campgrounds, underpasses, transit centers and on buses.

There is no homeless shelter in the Lake Tahoe Basin. People on the South Shore are still trying to open a warming room in South Lake Tahoe. A shelter usually is permanent and has an array of services, while a warming room is more temporary – opening when overnight temps get to a certain level. They may not even have cots.

A meeting about the warming room this week proved advocates are still uncertain exactly what type of facility the area needs or what they are capable of providing.

A commitment from the Salvation Army, Del Oro Division still needs to be put in writing. From there the local advocates will know what type of funding may be forthcoming.

Research unearthed that many homeless who have vehicles spend the night at the KOA campground in South Lake Tahoe. It has rest rooms and laundry facilities, and heaters can be placed in vehicles for warmth through the night. A commercial real estate agent has been contacted about possible properties that could be turned into a warming room. Temporary trailered showers like those used at Burning Man are a possibility.

Finding out what the local homeless population wants is another desire. Not everyone wants off the street. And some won't leave their belongs – be it in a vehicle or shopping

cart.

Vail Resorts doing well except in Tahoe

By SportsOneSource Media

Vail Resorts reported season-to-date total lift ticket revenue at the company's nine mountain resorts, including an allocated portion of season pass revenue for each applicable period, was up 9.3 percent compared to the prior year season-to-date period.

Season-to-date ancillary spending increased over prior year, with ski school revenue up 9.2 percent and dining revenue up 6.8 percent at the company's nine mountain resorts. Additionally, retail/rental revenue for resort store locations was up 10.4 percent compared to the prior year season-to-date period.

Season-to-date total skier visits for the company's nine mountain resorts were up 1.8 percent compared to the prior year season-to-date period.

Read the whole story

Carson City man dies in Hwy. 50 accident



One person died Jan. 14 in a single-vehicle accident on the South Shore. Photo/NHP

A Carson City man died early Wednesday morning when the 2001 Jeep Wrangler he was driving overturned on Highway 50 near Glenbrook.

Joseph David Winters, 27, died at the scene. The accident occurred about 2:10am Jan. 14.

Nevada Highway Patrol officers said Winters was going east when he drove off the roadway and onto the right shoulder and struck the guardrail twice.

"Mr. Winters' vehicle rotated and crossed both the east and westbound travel lanes of U.S. 50 and struck a raised curb. The vehicle overturned, ejecting Mr. Winters," NHP said in a press release.

Troopers also said Winters was not wearing a seat belt and they suspect alcohol to be a factor.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Businessman at center of CalPERS scandal commits suicide

Updated 2:12pm

By Dale Kasler, Sacramento Bee

SAN FRANCISCO — In failing health and facing up to 30 years in prison, one-time Stateline businessman Alfred Villalobos apparently committed suicide before going on trial in connection with the bribery scandal at CalPERS.

Villalobos' attorneys, appearing at a pre-trial hearing in U.S. District Court on Wednesday, disclosed that Villalobos died the day before. His death ends the government's criminal case against the Nevada businessman —and largely closes the books on a corruption scandal that roiled the nation's largest public pension fund.

Lt. Albert Snover of the Reno police department said Villalobos' death is being investigated as a suicide. No further details were available.

Villalobos' death leaves one matter outstanding in the criminal case stemming from the CalPERS corruption probe. The pension fund's former chief executive, Fred Buenrostro, who has admitted taking more than \$250,000 in bribes from Villalobos, is still scheduled to be sentenced in May for his crime.

Read the whole story

Caesars bankruptcy filing expected this week

By Matt Jarzemsky, Peg Brickley and Kate O’Keeffe, Wall Street Journal

Caesars Entertainment Corp. ’s largest unit is preparing to file for bankruptcy protection as soon as Thursday, the final gambit of a yearslong attempt to salvage a soured buyout.

Caesars Entertainment Operating Co.’s Chapter 11 filing would launch the final stage of Apollo Global Management LLC’s effort to save some of its \$1.7 billion investment in the company, which it took private in 2008 with fellow buyout firm TPG.

Caesars is the parent company of Harrah’s Lake Tahoe and Harveys in Stateline.

[Read the whole story](#)

WHS striving to provide students more options

By Kathryn Reed

ZEPHYR COVE – Dreaming big, with an eye toward reality. That has been the focus of a committee tasked with coming up with ideas to make Whittell High School more than it is today.

There was a time when it looked like the two remaining Douglas County School District schools at Lake Tahoe would be merged into one K-12. This committee has determined that is not fiscally doable or responsible, nor would it be good for the students.

On top of that, the district is going through an enrollment upswing after years of decline. That is something committee members at their final meeting on Monday acknowledged and want to stress to the board – staffing concerns are going to need to be addressed to handle the student population boom that is going to start next school year. The current sixth-grade class at Zephyr Cove Elementary is 38 students.

The group wrapped up its work – for now – on Jan. 12. Facilitator Nancy McMillan will be putting the ideas into a working document in the next week. There will be a special workshop Feb. 19 at 4pm for the committee to present its ideas to the board. The location has yet to be determined, but it will be at the lake.

The committee came about because last spring the school board started taking programs away from the Zephyr Cove school. Parents filled meetings, expressed their concerns, sought equity compared to valley schools and desired a voice in the process.

The committee became that voice.



Whittell High School Principal Crespin Esquivel, from left, makes a point Jan. 12 while ZCES Principal Nancy Cauley, DCSD employee Rommy Cronin, and school board member Ross Chichester listen.

Working on a memorandum of understanding with Lake Tahoe Unified School District so students can cross the state line to go to school in each state is a suggestion. The desire is to make it feasible to pick and choose classes or to be a full time student in the other state. As it is now, Nevada students can go to the California school, but not the reverse.

Working on dual credits with area community colleges is a goal, but some of that will be up to state lawmakers in Nevada and California.

Committee members know not everything can happen at once, so some recommendations include more study of an idea or putting it on the back burner until money is not an obstacle. But having things on the public record will give the concerns validation and put it in the archives for future reference.

The committee wants Douglas County School District board members to offer online classes – aka e-learning. But the district needs to file an application with the state to allow this to happen. And depending on what is offered and when, it

could affect the district financially based on not being reimbursed by the state.

Then there was the discussion of using the word “empowerment” versus “autonomous”. The former is now more closely associated with underperforming schools, which WHS is not. (The middle school is considered a five star school – the top honor, while the high school last year was recognized by *U.S. News and World Report* as 80th best high school in the nation.)

Seeking a little more autonomy is desirable.

While Whittell is a 7-12 school, it is operated more like two schools within one building. This continues to present challenges the committee wants addressed.

A mentoring/intern program could provide youngsters with an opportunity to get hands-on experience that a traditional classroom cannot offer. Intensive intersessions would allow more in depth study of a topic.

Today the dean is also the athletic director. A dean and vice principal have different duties and limitations. Changing titles may get Whittell more of what it wants/needs.

Principal Crespin Esquivel and ZCES Principal Nancy Cauley agreed they could easily share an instructional coach.

The complete list of recommendations and priorities will be presented next month to the board. At that time it's expected the board will direct staff to work on what it sees as doable for the 2015-16 school year. The public will also have an opportunity to weigh in at the February meeting.