

Pot growers taxing U.S. electrical grid

By Jennifer Oldham, BloombergBusiness

Pot's not green.

The \$3.5 billion U.S. cannabis market is emerging as one of the nation's most power-hungry industries, with the 24-hour demands of thousands of indoor growing sites taxing aging electricity grids and unraveling hard-earned gains in energy conservation.

Without design standards or efficient equipment, the facilities in the 23 states where marijuana is legal are responsible for greenhouse-gas emissions almost equal to those of every car, home and business in New Hampshire. While reams of regulations cover everything from tracking individual plants to package labeling to advertising, they lack requirements to reduce energy waste.

Some operations have blown out transformers, resulting in fires. Others rely on pollution-belching diesel generators to avoid hooking into the grid. And demand could intensify in 2017 if advocates succeed in legalizing the drug for recreational use in several states, including California and Nevada. State regulators are grappling with how to address the growth, said Pennsylvania Public Utility Commissioner Pam Witmer.

Read the whole story

Tahoe tour boat extracted from lake



The Woodwind II at Zephyr Cove on Jan. 6 after being pulled from the rocks. Photo Copyright 2015 Carolyn E. Wright

The Woodwind II will no longer ply the waters of Lake Tahoe.

The severe windstorm on Dec. 11 dislodged the catamaran from its mooring at Zephyr Cove. For days it rested upon the rocks near the South Shore marina. Now it is in the parking lot at Cave Rock boat launch.

Tahoe Cruises, which operates this vessel and the Safari Rose, did not return phone calls.

According to the company's website, the tour boat would carry up to 50 people between April 15-Oct. 15.

The low water level of Lake Tahoe and lack of dredging at marinas where it could be repaired meant the boat had to be extracted from the lake via a tow truck on Jan. 7.

Because the custom-built boat doesn't fit on a trailer it will have to be destroyed and hauled away. The boat is 55-feet-long and 40-feet-wide.

DUI suspect weaves way through South Shore

A vehicle swerving through Meyers on Wednesday afternoon took some time to pull over.

“The driver was so intoxicated he didn’t know he had to pull over,” CHP Officer Jeff Gartner told *Lake Tahoe News*.

The suspect’s blood alcohol content level was not released.

Jay Welch, who is in his late 50s and lives in Minden, was arrested on charges of driving under the influence.

Another driver had called to alert law enforcement of the impaired driver. Gartner said CHP officers found the vehicle near the bug station in Meyers on Jan. 7 about 3:55pm, weaving toward the side, then back to the travel lane. But he wasn’t pulling over.

Not knowing if a pursuit would take place, other agencies got involved. The suspect was finally stopped on Highway 50 near Sawmill Road.

Calif. decreases water use, but falls short of goal

By Paul Rogers, San Jose Mercury News

After two months in a row of declining conservation, Californians are doing better at saving water, but they remain far short of a goal set by Gov. Jerry Brown last January.

Statewide, residents cut water use by 9.8 percent in November, compared with November 2013, according to new state figures released Tuesday. That's an improvement from October, when the reduction was only 6.8 percent. And it compares with the 11.5 percent savings in August, and 10.2 percent in September .

Last January, in declaring a drought emergency, the governor asked Californians to voluntarily cut their water use by 20 percent.

Many parts of the state are at or near that goal now.

Read the whole story

USFS yanks \$10 mil. contract to boost its image

By Associated Press

GRANTS PASS, Ore. — The U.S. Forest Service has abruptly

decided not to spend \$10 million on a five-year nationwide public relations campaign to brand itself as a public agency that cares about people and nature.

The agency was planning on the campaign at a time when it's struggling to pay for fighting wildfires, maintaining trails and offering timber for sale. It has also faced a major public backlash in the West over plans to close trails and roads to motorized vehicles due to a lack of money for maintenance, as well as to prevent erosion and protect fish and wildlife.

The Forest Service issued a statement Tuesday saying that it had not accepted any contract bids and would look for other ways to enhance the public's access to national forests and understanding about what the agency does.

The agency wouldn't say why it withdrew the contract.

Andy Stahl, director of the watchdog group Forest Service Employees for Environmental Ethics, said he thought the agency's leaders "finally listened to Forest Service employees, and no one thought this was a good idea."

Stahl said that after he learned of the contract, he sent an email to 25,000 Forest Service employees, and about half of them opened it. He got about 50 replies, all critical, suggesting the money could be put to better use on recreation programs, revising forest management plans, restoring ecosystems, hiring more employees, and lifting a three-year wage freeze.

Forest Service retirees also objected. Al Matecko, retired chief of public and legislative affairs for the northwest region and head of the Old Smokies, which represents about 950 retirees, said he received 50 emails from members who were strongly opposed. He passed on those objections to Forest Service leaders, Matecko said.

"Retirees were just amazed that at this time of shrinking

budgets, the Forest Service could find \$10 million," he said.

Jim Golden, a retired deputy regional forester for the northwest region and chairman of the board of the National Association of Forest Service Retirees, said he warned Forest Service Chief Tom Tidwell in an email on Saturday of the "growing firestorm" among retirees unless the agency got out some information explaining the campaign. But Tidwell never came through with a promised briefing paper. Golden said.

"Our primary reaction was one of suspicion," he said. "Not many retirees believe the Forest Service needs a new brand. Most of us believe the simple (motto), 'Caring for the land and serving the people,' is pretty effective."

Last fall, the agency awarded a \$526,799 no-bid contract to Metropolitan Group of Portland for a branding campaign titled "Valuing People and Place" in Forest Service regions covering Oregon, Washington, southern Idaho, Utah, Wyoming and Nevada, according to the federal website FedBizOpps.gov. It was the only no-bid contract issued by the U.S. Department of Agriculture out of more than 3,000.

Another federal website, USAspending.gov, shows the Forest Service has paid Metropolitan Group \$3.6 million since 2011, much of it for the Valuing People and Place campaign.

The area covers national forests where the Forest Service has faced intense public backlash to plans to close roads and trails on national forest to motorized traffic.

Metropolitan Group's Portland office did not immediately return a phone message asking for comment. Its website describes the company as a "full-service social change agency that crafts and integrates strategic and creative services. We help our clients with strategic communication, multicultural engagement, organizational development and resource development to build a just and sustainable world."

The website describes the company's work for the Forest Service as helping it reflect on its roots, discover its future, and "rediscover the meaning behind (Forest Service founder) Gifford Pinchot's early direction to 'find the greatest good.' "

The website adds that Metropolitan Group was helping train Forest Service employees to deal with the public on the agency's so-called Travel Management plans, which refers to the road and trail closures.

The Forest Service filed notice Nov. 28, the day after Thanksgiving, that it was soliciting bids to expand the campaign nationwide at a cost of \$10 million over five years. Bids were to close Dec. 26.

"It's called the 'Take out the trash season'," Stahl said. "It's when government does things it doesn't want people to know about."

Stahl sent out his email Dec. 26, and the Forest Service filed notice it was extending the bid period to Dec. 29. A week later, it announced it was not accepting any bids.

Established in 1905, the Forest Service manages 154 national forests, grasslands and other units covering 193 million acres in 40 states.

Woman killed leaving El Dorado County bar

By Gamaliel Ortiz, KCRA-TV

EL DORADO HILLS – A woman was fatally shot by a 41-year-old

suspect as she and another woman were leaving a bar in El Dorado Hills about midnight, authorities said.

The two women were approached by the suspect – identified by the California Highway Patrol as Anderson Swift of Oakland – in the parking lot of 36 Handles off White Rock Road.

When Swift encountered the women, he demanded money, officers said.

“They left right about closing time when they were approached by a man with a gun who demanded keys and money,” said Lt. Tom Murdoch with the El Dorado County Sheriff’s Department. “The two ladies turned back around and ran back to the bar when the man with the gun shot and killed one of the ladies.”

The other woman was not injured, authorities said.

Read the whole story

Brown seeks green regulations in historic fourth term

By Chris Megerian, Los Angeles Times

In an inaugural address drawing on his family’s deep roots in California, Gov. Jerry Brown called for expansive new environmental regulations that would protect the state for future generations.

The governor also pledged not to stray from promises he has made to strengthen California’s finances, invest in the \$68-billion high-speed rail system and major water infrastructure projects.

“While we have not reached the Promised Land, we have much to be proud of,” Brown told the California Legislature in the Capitol.

Brown’s speech hewed mostly to familiar themes of fiscal restraint and increasing local control over schools and criminal justice. But he announced an ambitious new proposal to reduce carbon emissions for years to come.

Read the whole story

Traffic deaths on the rise in Nevada

Preliminary data shows that 284 traffic fatalities occurred on Nevada roads in 2014, an increase of 18 deaths compared to the previous year.

Statewide, traffic fatalities have slightly risen over recent years after trending down from an all-time high of 432 in 2006.

Traffic fatalities in many rural counties have increased, with a more than 200 percent jump seen in Churchill, Lander, Storey and Humboldt counties.

Pedestrian and motorcycle-related deaths have also risen, with a nearly 2 percent increase in motorcycle fatalities and one more pedestrian death than 2013.

“These are so much more than numbers. Every death and serious injury on Nevada roads is a tragedy,” NDOT Director Rudy Malfabon said in a statement. “That is why the state’s traffic safety goal is zero fatalities, and that’s why transportation,

safety, enforcement and other groups continue working together to implement life-saving road safety advances.”

The Nevada Strategic Highway Safety Plan brings Nevada traffic and safety advocates together to implement enforcement, engineering, emergency medical and educational strategies for cutting the yearly traffic fatality average in half by 2030, with the ultimate goal of zero fatalities on Nevada roads.

Names released of victims in fatal accident

Updated Jan. 8 7:30am:

Names of the people involved in the New Year's Day fatal accident on Mt. Rose Highway have been released.

Hugo Soto-Barrios, 40, died in the accident. He was a passenger in the vehicle driven by Manuel Mejia-Verduzco, 34.

Nevada Highway Patrol troopers found Mejia-Verduzco in his apartment, after he had fled the scene on foot. He was hiding in the bathroom suffering from a broken left arm and broken left leg. He was transported to Renown Medical Center in Reno; once released he was booked into jail on charges of driving left of center, hit and run with a death, hit and run with injury, failure to give aid and information, and no valid driver's license.

The vehicle driven by Mejia-Verduzco crossed the center line, hitting an SUV driving by 27-year-old Irma Gouadarram of Sparks, according to the NHP. She was transported via ambulance to Renown with non-life threatening injuries and was

released from the hospital the next morning.

Her passengers, Norea Maria Pelayo-Garcia, 45, and Anna Acosta, 38, both of Sparks, remained at Renown on Jan. 6 in serious condition, but are recovering from their injuries, according to the NHP.

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*

Mom was right – bundle up to ward off a cold

By Sonja Elmquist, Bloomberg

Yale University researchers are on your mom's side when it comes to fighting a cold: put on a sweater.

The immune system doesn't combat cold viruses as well at lower temperatures, according to an early study in mice published today in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences.

Doctors have understood for decades that temperature affects the way cold viruses reproduce. Akiko Iwasaki, a Yale professor of immunobiology who led today's study, now has research, as well as motherly intuition, to bolster the case for staying warm that she makes to her kids.

Read the whole story