

Wind may be an issue at SnowGlobe



Cold temps and wind could be trouble for those attending SnowGlobe on Dec. 30. Photo Copyright 2014 Carolyn E. Wright

By Kathryn Reed

Wind could affect Day 2 of the SnowGlobe music festival in South Lake Tahoe.

"We will be monitoring the winds out there. If there are prolonged gusts in the 40 mph range, we will shut it down. That is in the emergency operations plan. It would not be a surprise to anyone," Fire Chief Jeff Meston told *Lake Tahoe News*.

The temporary structures for the three-day concert are engineered to sustain 70 mph winds. However, a concern if winds ever got that strong, is that trees could topple.

The National Weather Service in Reno has issued a wind advisory for the area until 4am Dec. 31. The northeast winds are expected to be 15-30 mph, with gusts of 45 mph. Above 8,000 feet the gusts could reach 100 mph. Waves on the lake

may reach 3 to 5 feet.

There is a weather station at the top of the main stage that officials are monitoring. Wind gauges that are used for fire weather forecasting are also utilized. Meston said because the winds are not expected to be as gnarly as earlier forecasted, Tuesday's show might not be in jeopardy.

Firefighters are also watching the wind to make sure it does not pose a threat to the fireworks show that takes place each night at the close of the concert.

"The fireworks are in really good shape. I was standing underneath them yesterday and as soon as they hit the ground there are little embers, but they died out right a way," Meston said.

The humidity, air temperature and snow on the ground are good conditions for fireworks. But if the winds are whipping, that could force officials to cancel the pyrotechnic show.

Buses added to keep SnowGlobers out of cold

Sound checks for the annual SnowGlobe music festival in South Lake Tahoe have been rattling windows for the past two days.

Neighbors of the Lake Tahoe Community College ball fields, where the event is staged, are sensitive to the loud bass because the first year it was so bad pictures fell off walls in houses.

City Manager Nancy Kerry told *Lake Tahoe News* the sound was pushed higher for a few minutes during the checks, but that

promoters will be held to their contracted decibel levels once the show begins at 3pm today. (It ends at 11 tonight, is from 2:30-11pm Dec. 30 and from 2:30pm Dec. 31 to 1:30am Jan. 1.)

City officials are also warning people to dress appropriately because temps will be in single digits and teens the next three nights.

More buses have been added to transport people between the venue and casino area so standing around in the cold should not be an issue. Every 30 minutes buses will leave MontBlue at 2:30pm Dec. 29 and ending 1am Dec. 30, between 2:30pm Dec. 30 and 1am Dec. 31, and 3:30pm Dec. 31 and 2am Jan. 1.

To also help with transit issues, BlueGo Route 53 will have additional buses during the festival.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Feinstein's role as water referee complicated by drought

By Evan Halper, Los Angeles Times

The long-range weather forecast is the biggest wild card in the battle over every available bucket of water in drought-stricken California – but a close second may be Dianne Feinstein.

In a dispute in which positions have hardened after years of fighting, the state's senior U.S. senator, who is expected to broker any deal that reallocates water supply, is one of the

few remaining enigmas. The only thing consistent about Feinstein's role as water referee is that the fights have left bruises on the exacting and thick-skinned senator over the years. The last few weeks have been particularly rough.

A year that started with Central Valley figures branding her a radical environmentalist and Bay Area dilettante ended with accusations from once-friendly colleagues and liberal editorial boards that the 22-year veteran of the Senate was shilling for Big Agriculture.

For months, Feinstein had tried to craft a compromise drought relief bill by negotiating a water deal behind closed doors with the state's major agricultural interests. Late in Congress' lame-duck session, those talks collapsed. No legislation got passed.

Yet Feinstein is eager to get back in the ring as soon as Congress picks up again in January.

Read the whole story

Cheaper gas makes Christmas merrier for U.S. retailers

By Lauren Coleman-Lochner, Bloomberg

After a rocky start to the holiday shopping season, U.S. retailers benefited from cheaper gas prices and an improving job market in the weeks leading up to Christmas, raising optimism that sales reached a three-year high.

Customer Growth Partners President Craig Johnson, who tracks the retail industry, now expects holiday sales to grow about

3.9 percent, a faster clip than he had previously projected as his “base case.”

The biggest payroll gains since 1999 and the lowest gasoline prices in five years are prompting consumers to spend more liberally. The decline in gas prices, which are down 22 percent this month, could free up \$3 billion in holiday consumption, Johnson said. The money has largely gone toward hard lines, such as televisions, headphones and toys, he said.

Read the whole story

Slew of California laws take effect Jan. 1

By Associated Press

SACRAMENTO — California’s historic drought prompted the Legislature into action in 2014, leading lawmakers to regulate groundwater for the first time and override homeowners associations that fine members for replacing lawns with more drought-tolerant landscaping.

The most populous state also becomes the first to set a “yes means yes” standard for sex between college students and the first to ban single-use plastic bags, a law the plastic bag industry is seeking to overturn through a voter referendum.

Those are among more than 900 bills passed in 2014 by the Legislature and signed by Gov. Jerry Brown, who also vetoed 143.

Most of the laws take effect Jan. 1. That includes a bill allowing driver’s licenses for people who are in the country

illegally, another that will influence the 2016 ballot by modernizing California's century-old initiative process and others addressing everything from teacher tenure to massage parlors.

Also taking effect with the new year is a ballot initiative approved by voters in 2008 that restricts the confinement of egg-laying hens, breeding sows and veal calves.

The state's biggest ongoing story of the year led to a series of bills designed to have a lasting effect on California's water supply.

In the midst of a third year of drought, the Legislature and governor closed a gap in the state's water oversight that dated to the Gold Rush days, passing and signing bills to regulate groundwater use for the first time.

Although the drought is beginning to ease with early rain and snow, Brown's signing of SB1168, SB1319 and AB1739 by Assemblyman Roger Dickinson, D-Sacramento, and Sen. Fran Pavley, D-Agoura Hills, ends the state's pump-as-you-please policy. It also brings California's groundwater rules in line with those of other Western states.

Specifically, the bills require water districts and other local entities to develop plans to manage their groundwater and allow the state to intervene if necessary.

Brown's call on Californians to reduce water use by 20 percent led some residents to run afoul of their homeowner association rules. Lawmakers responded by approving bills that prevent associations from punishing residents who cut back on water use, allow plants to die or install drought-resistant landscaping.

"There are moments in legislative time when folks sort of rise to the occasion and we get something done on water," said Felicia Marcus, chairwoman of the State Water Resources

Control Board.

She also noted that lawmakers worked together to craft a bipartisan, \$7.5 billion water bond measure that voters approved in November. It will let the state expand storage and develop water management plans.

With the new year also comes a first-in-the-nation standard for investigating sexual assaults on college campuses.

SB967, by Senate President Pro Tem Kevin de Leon, D-Los Angeles, requires “an affirmative, conscious and voluntary agreement to engage in sexual activity,” meaning silence or a lack of resistance can no longer be deemed consent.

The California State University and University of California systems already adopted similar consent standards, which will now apply to all public and private post-secondary schools that receive state money for student financial aid.

The statewide plastic bag ban, SB270 by former state Sen. Alex Padilla, D-Los Angeles, will be phased in starting in July at large grocery stores and supermarkets, unless opponents force a delay while voters consider repealing it. It could be May before the secretary of state’s office – headed by newly elected Padilla – determines whether the industry gathered enough valid signatures to place a referendum on the November 2016 ballot.

Proposition 2, the 2008 ballot initiative restricting the caging of certain farm animals, goes further than any other state when it is coupled with a law signed by former governor Arnold Schwarzenegger that extends the space requirements for egg-laying hens to out-of-state suppliers, said Wayne Pacelle, president and chief executive officer of The Humane Society of the United States. The measures helped trigger “a cascade of legislative and corporate reforms” nationwide, he said.

Other laws taking effect include:

- AB215 by Assemblywoman Joan Buchanan, D-Alamo, which makes it easier for school districts to fire abusive teachers. The bill gained traction as a compromise between teachers unions and some education-reform groups after a headline-grabbing case of misconduct in Los Angeles highlighted how difficult it can be to remove problem teachers. The Los Angeles Unified School District paid elementary school teacher Mark Berndt \$40,000 to drop the appeal of his dismissal after he was charged with spoon-feeding semen to his students and other lewd acts.
- SB505 by Sen. Hannah-Beth Jackson, D-Santa Barbara, which requires law enforcement agencies to develop policies that encourage officers to search the state's database of gun purchases as part of routine welfare checks. The bill was prompted by sheriff's deputies failure to detect the danger posed by a man who weeks later embarked on a deadly rampage in May near the University of California, Santa Barbara.
- AB1147, by three Democratic lawmakers, allows local governments to revoke the license of any massage parlor that violates the law. It is intended to make it harder for massage parlors to operate as fronts for prostitution.
- AB2048 by Assemblyman Brian Dahle, R-Bieber, gives property owners in fire-prone areas a few breaks on paying the state's annual \$150 fire-prevention fee. It eliminates a requirement that the fee will increase each year based on inflation, lowers the 20 percent late payment penalty to 10 percent and permits exemptions for homes destroyed by natural disasters.
- SB926 by Sen. Jim Beall, D-San Jose, gives sex-abuse victims more time to pursue criminal charges against offenders. It raises the age ceiling from 28 to 40 for childhood sexual abuse victims to file criminal complaints.

Pope's edict on climate change may anger deniers, U.S. churches

By John Vidal, Observer

He has been called the "superman pope", and it would be hard to deny that Pope Francis has had a good December. Cited by President Obama as a key player in the thawing relations between the US and Cuba, the Argentinian pontiff followed that by lecturing his cardinals on the need to clean up Vatican politics. But can Francis achieve a feat that has so far eluded secular powers and inspire decisive action on climate change?

It looks as if he will give it a go. In 2015, the pope will issue a lengthy message on the subject to the world's 1.2 billion Catholics, give an address to the UN general assembly and call a summit of the world's main religions.

The reason for such frenetic activity, says Bishop Marcelo Sorondo, chancellor of the Vatican's Pontifical Academy of Sciences, is the pope's wish to directly influence next year's crucial UN climate meeting in Paris, when countries will try to conclude 20 years of fraught negotiations with a universal commitment to reduce emissions.

Read the whole story

Nevada – the driest state – has no statewide water plan

By Jeff DeLong, Reno Gazette-Journal

Nevada is suffering from a debilitating drought, experiencing the impacts of a warming climate and, some say, is deficient when it comes to long-term water planning for the state as a whole.

Debate is mounting over the need to begin development of a comprehensive water plan taking into account available water supplies, drought, climate projections and development that will tap limited water resources across the nation's most arid state.

Planners and elected officials have water resource plans in place across the state – in Reno-Sparks, Las Vegas, the Carson River Basin and elsewhere. But a number of experts are now pushing for a more holistic approach addressing water supply issues statewide, efforts similar to ones taken by neighbors of the Silver State including Utah, Arizona and California.

Read the whole story

Older people urged to get high-dose flu vaccine

By Cynthia H. Craft, Sacramento Bee

Older people, believed to be at greater risk for developing severe flu symptoms this season, should seek a high-dose

vaccine instead of the standard dose even if they are frail and in long-term care, researchers say.

Federal officials approved the high-dose vaccine for people ages 65 and up about five years ago. It was first tested on independent, healthy older adults with an average age of 73 years – and proved successful at triggering stronger immune responses.

Now, new data show that the high-dose vaccine outperformed the standard dose in residents of long-term care facilities with an average age between 86 and 87, according to University of Pittsburgh researchers. The findings are considered promising, as the predominant virus has already mutated, making for a challenging flu season for ailing older people.

Read the whole story

1 person killed, 1 hurt in Strawberry snowmobile crash

By Nick Houser, KCRA-TV

STRAWBERRY – A Folsom man was killed and a second man was hurt in a snowmobile crash Friday night, according to the California Highway Patrol.

The CHP said the snowmobile was going about 50 mph on Pack Saddle Pass Road when the driver took a curve too fast and hit a tree.

It is suspected that alcohol played a factor in the crash.

Read the whole story

Study: Colorado sees increase in pot smokers

By John Ingold, Denver Post

As marijuana legalization took hold in Colorado, the estimated percentage of regular cannabis users in the state jumped to the second-highest level in the country, according to new federal data.

When asked, roughly one out of every eight Colorado residents over the age of 12 reported using marijuana in the previous month. Only Rhode Island topped Colorado in the percentage of residents who reported using marijuana as frequently.

The results come from the National Survey on Drug Use and Health and represent the average of estimates gathered in 2012 and 2013.

The numbers are among the first measurements of marijuana use in Colorado to be released after it became legal in late 2012 for people over 21 to use and possess marijuana in the state.

Read the whole story