

Crews scramble to stabilize King Fire terrain

By Peter Hecht, Sacramento Bee

Engineering and erosion control crews faced a time paradox Wednesday in a scorched Sierra Nevada region.

For weeks since the devastating King fire burned through 97,717 acres of timberland and watershed north of Pollock Pines, multiple agencies launched a long-term project to protect water supplies and wildlife habitat from destruction due to burned mountain terrain being unable to handle seasonal rains. Agencies including the U.S. Forest Service and the Sacramento Municipal Utility District have been conducting helicopter "helimulching" flights, dropping tons of rice straw to hold fragile hillsides and promote regrowth.

They hope to resume the flights as soon as dry weather returns.

But with a major storm system barreling down, crews Wednesday shifted to more immediate concerns by building earthen berms to help prevent roadways from washing out and to keep sediment from fouling the upper American River and nearby tributaries.

Read the whole story

Slew of warnings issued

before storm arrives

In what is being called one of the worst storms in years is coming with a slew of warnings – from the National Weather Service, departments of transportation, law enforcement, utilities and others.

A winter storm warning has been issued by the NWS in Reno for the Lake Tahoe Basin for a 24-hour period starting 1pm Thursday. Rain will be followed by snow. Up to 3 feet is forecast at upper elevations, with 7-14 inches below 7,000 feet, with up to 24 inches along Highway 89.

Winds are expected to be wicked – with ridge tops seeing 100 mph. Sustained wind of 15 to 25 mph is expected at lake level, with gusts up to 45 mph.

Blizzard conditions are expected on roads in the Sierra. Up-to-date road conditions may be found on the home page of *Lake Tahoe News* by clicking on the state icons on the home page.

Caltrans has mobilized more than 1,500 pieces of storm-related equipment and has 3,000 maintenance employees ready for this week's storm.

Here are various warnings and tips:

Liberty Utilities

- Always keep a flashlight and extra batteries handy.
- Do not use candles in a power outage or other emergency. Camp lights and lanterns may also be useful; however, do not use kerosene lanterns indoors unless you have proper ventilation.
- Turn off or disconnect any appliances or electronics you were using when the power went out. Unplug your computer to avoid the possibility of surge damage when the power returns.

Always use a surge protector for valuable electronic equipment, and you may want to purchase an uninterruptable power supply. A UPS is a battery back-up system that supplies power for about 15 minutes – long enough for you to save all work and shut the computer down.

- Leave one light turned on so you'll know when your power returns.
- If you're cold, put on layers of warm clothing. Never burn charcoal for heating or cooking indoors. Close doors to unused rooms. Use wood-burning fireplaces if available, but ensure the flume is open.
- Leave the doors of your refrigerator and freezer closed as much as possible. Cover a stand-alone freezer with blankets, quilts or sleeping bags to further insulate it and help keep food frozen. Transfer refrigerated food to ice chests filled with ice if outage is prolonged.

Northstar Fire Department

- While no flooding in the Northstar area is expected, if the need for sand bags should arise, contact the fire department at 530.562.1212, ext. 4.
- Wind will impact high-profile vehicles on roads, cause some power outages and trees down, and cause untied objects such as trash cans, deck furniture, and Christmas decorations to become airborne.
- Some creeks and rivers may rise.

Caltrans and NDOT

- Check antifreeze level and make sure it is properly filled and formulated for winter temperatures.
- Check tire pressure and tread.

- Replace the wiper blades and fill the windshield wiper fluid reservoir; be sure to use a winter formula to help de-ice windshields.
- Carry tire chains that are the correct size for your tires, in good working order and practice installing the chains before needing to use them.
- Have a full tank of fuel before traveling.
- Have blankets, extra clothing, food and water, towels, a shovel, a flashlight, an ice scraper, a small bag of sand or kitty litter and road flares.
- When traveling with children, carry small activity packs for them to help prevent driver distractions.
- Have a fully charged cell phone before leaving and carry a car charger.
- Reduce speeds during winter weather and allow for additional stopping time.
- Turn on headlights to see and be seen.
- Turn off cruise control.
- Avoid quick starts, stops and fast turns. Accelerate, brake and steer smoothly and gradually.
- Keep additional distance from other vehicles.
- Watch carefully for snow removal equipment and don't crowd the plow. Only pass snow removal vehicles when a safe, legal passing area is available and sight distance is good.
- Use extra caution on bridges, ramps, overpasses and shaded areas; they may freeze first.
- If your vehicle begins to skid, steer in the direction of slide and slowly remove your foot from accelerator.

- Share your travel itinerary so others know when to expect you.
- Remove snow and ice from all vehicle windows, mirrors, lights, turn signals and license plates.
- Buckle up.
- Avoid quick starts, stops and fast turns. Accelerate, brake and steer smoothly and gradually.
- Reduce speed. Speed limits are based on normal road and weather conditions, not winter road conditions.
- Do not slam on brakes. Apply steady pressure on ABS-equipped vehicles and pump the brakes if necessary on non-ABS vehicles.
- Use extra caution on bridges, ramps, overpasses and shaded areas- they may freeze first.
- Be aware of black ice.
- If parked or stuck in snow, leave window slightly cracked for ventilation and make sure vehicle exhaust system is clear of snow.
- Use caution when following, passing or approaching snow removal equipment. Drive a safe distance behind snowplows. Plows often travel slower than other vehicles to remove snow, apply sand and liquid anti-icers and assist stranded vehicles. Don't travel beside a snowplow.

Truckee Police Department

- Department of Public Works is running day and night snow removal crews. For questions about snow removal operations, call 530.582.7707.
- Sand bags are available free of charge at the U.S. Forest Service parking area located at 10811 Stockrest Springs Road and at Truckee Fire Station 92 at 11473 Donner Pass Road.

Online gaming ban not in federal spending bill

By Steve Tetreault and Howard Stutz, Las Vegas Review-Journal

WASHINGTON – Congress in its final major bill of the year unveiled Tuesday declined to support a call by billionaire casino owner Sheldon Adelson for a ban on legalized Internet gambling.

The \$1.1 trillion measure would fund most government operations through September of next year, making it a must-pass measure. It also contains dozens of individual policy provisions sought by lawmakers and special interests.

But after being flooded by lobbyists from both sides, House leaders declined to get involved in a battle that caused a major split in the casino industry and sparked speculation of an unusual alliance between Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid of Nevada and Adelson, a leading conservative.

The omnibus spending bill did not contain Adelson-sought provisions that would reinstate federal law to ban all forms of Internet gambling. A December 2011 Justice Department opinion held that the relevant law, the Interstate Wire Act of 1961, only outlaws sports betting online.

Read the whole story

House OKs Calif. drought bill that faces Obama veto

By Bettina Boxall and Evan Halper, Los Angeles Times

The U.S. House on Tuesday passed a California drought bill, despite a veto threat from the Obama administration and its expected demise in the Senate in the final days before Congress adjourns.

The 230-182 vote was largely a symbolic gesture in the years-long effort by House Republicans to weaken endangered species protections that have restricted water deliveries from the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta to San Joaquin Valley agribusiness and urban Southern California.

The measure, which was introduced last week after House GOP negotiations with Sen. Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.) fell apart, was opposed by environmentalists, the White House and Gov. Jerry Brown's administration.

"This is no time to re-ignite water wars, move water policy back into the courts, and try to pit one part of the state against another," California Natural Resources Secretary John Laird wrote in a letter Tuesday to the California congressional delegation.

The 26-page bill focused on water operations in the delta and Northern California, directing federal agencies to take steps that would send more delta water south. Proponents of the measure said that endangered fish restrictions had significantly reduced Delta pumping during storms in late 2012 and early 2013.

2 businesses accused of underage alcohol sales

Employees at two South Lake Tahoe businesses are accused of selling alcohol to minors.

Miguel Mancillas working at Alpine Liquors and Daniel Marshall of Chevy's restaurant were cited Dec. 5 by South Lake Tahoe police officers. They face a minimum fine of \$250, and/or 24 to 32 hours of community service if convicted and this is their first violation.

In addition, ABC can take administrative action against the alcoholic beverage license of the business. That may include a fine, a suspension of the license, or the permanent revocation of the license.

Minors working under the supervision of officer attempted to purchase alcohol from 33 establishments in the city.

Officers said they are doing the compliance checks to reduce the availability of alcohol to minors because statistics show people under the age of 21 have a higher rate of drunken driving fatalities than the general adult population.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

El Dorado supes restore pay perks for electeds

By Peter Hecht, Sacramento Bee

Thirteen months ago, El Dorado County supervisors voted to strip generous salary enhancements for seven elected officials amid cries that the county was vastly overpaying its public servants.

On Tuesday, the board reversed itself and restored most of the pay cuts.

Major salary reductions were due to go into effect when officeholders were sworn in for new four-year terms in January. But the board voted to reinstate salary enhancements for professional certificates and years of service for seven elected officials.

Supervisors also voted to give additional pay perks to Sheriff John D'Agostini and Auditor-Controller Joe Harn, boosting their salaries with enhancements that are based on the earnings of their top assistants.

The vote was taken after board Chairwoman Norma Santiago argued that supervisors had to correct an unforeseen equity problem: Under the new pay formula, at least five of the elected officials would be earning less, in some cases significantly less, than top assistants.

Read the whole story

Movement under way for free transit in Tahoe

By Kathryn Reed

Free transit. Regional transit. Transit that goes where people want to go.

These are concepts that many tourist destinations have embraced for years. Lake Tahoe, not so much.

But that could change. Tahoe Transportation District in 2015 plans to make a concerted effort to take the necessary steps to bring free regional transit to the Lake Tahoe Basin.

“If each community in the region is interested in being a competitive resort community, we have to go there (with free transit),” Carl Hasty, executive director of Tahoe Transportation District, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Hasty was at the Dec. 9 South Lake Tahoe City Council meeting giving the electeds an update on transit issues, including the loop road near the state line.

He started out by saying there is a strong correlation between a strong economy and modern infrastructure. Tahoe is lacking that infrastructure and the economy proves his point.

In looking at places like Vail, Whistler and Park City that offer free transit, the funding comes from federal, state and local government entities.

“We need to create funding sources that don’t currently exist,” Hasty told the council.

Hasty did not have a dollar figure for what free transit would cost or what the city’s share would be. But he is simultaneously working with the North Shore to try to tie the

bus services together.

“On free transportation, I’d like a comprehensive network,” Councilman Austin Sass said. He wants it to include biking and hiking trailheads. “I would like it to go from Spooner Summit to Echo Summit.”

Sass also wants to make sure officials from El Dorado and Douglas counties are part of the dialog.

Hasty said a free, expanded bus service would benefit locals and tourists. For tourists, he told *LTN*, it provides a fluid experience, where they don’t have to worry about how to get from point A to point B.

Plus, he added, when a bus service is safe and convenient, it adds to the overall experience.

When TTD has offered free service on BlueGo on the South Shore the ridership tends to double – with more locals and visitors on board. But those opportunities are infrequent and are based on the ability to get outside funding to cover the costs.

Vail Resorts pays TTD to provide free bus service to Heavenly Mountain Resort on certain routes – mainly the ones servicing lodging properties.

Hasty said in 2015 TTD will be actively seeking community input about what it wants in public transit throughout the Lake Tahoe Basin.

Mason says goodbye to LTCC

board



After 40 years, Roberta Mason is leaving the Lake Tahoe Community College board. Photo/Kathryn Reed

“Better things are coming. That is the exciting thing. I almost don’t want to leave.”

Those are the words of Roberta Mason, who on Dec. 9 attended her last Lake Tahoe Community College meeting as a board member.

Mason was the driving force to get the South Lake Tahoe college started and has been on the board since its inception 40 years ago.

During a ceremony to say goodbye to her as well as to Molly Blann (neither ran for re-election in November) Mason was called the mother and guardian of the college.

Mason has had high praise for Jim Duke, Guy Lease and Kindred Murillo, the first, second and current college presidents, respectively.

“Every time I try to say something I start crying,” Murillo said. “I hope I’m like her when I’m her age.”

Mason then gave a special shout out to her best friend – Del

Laine – who was always her campaign manager, and who was at her first board meeting and her last one.

Later Tuesday night at the Lake Tahoe Unified School District meeting Mason was honored with a proclamation. She served on that board from 1969-73.

Larry Green, who is on the LTUSD board and an instructor at LTCC, said, “She is my hero.” And he credited Mason for being instrumental in getting him to run for the board.

Mason is a constant presence at nearly every college event. That likely isn’t going to change. She wants to remain involved; hoping to be on the bond oversight committee.

– Kathryn Reed

NOAA: Climate change didn’t cause drought

By Tim McDonnell, Mother Jones

California is in the middle of a really bad three-year drought that stretches across nearly the entire state. The drought has already wreaked havoc with the state’s agricultural sector, is expected to take a \$2.2 billion bite out of the state’s economy this year alone, and shows no sign of relenting anytime soon.

Climate scientists have warned for years that rising greenhouse gas concentrations will lead to more frequent and severe droughts in many parts of the world. Although it’s

generally difficult to attribute any one weather event to the broader global warming trend, over the last couple of years a body of research has emerged to assess the link between man-made climate change and the current California drought. There are signs that rising temperatures (so far, 2014 is the hottest year on record both for California and globally) and long-term declines in soil moisture, both linked to greenhouse gas emissions, may have made the impact of the drought worse.

But according to research by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, California's drought was primarily produced by a lack of precipitation driven by natural atmospheric cycles that are unrelated to man-made climate change. In other words, climate change may have worsened the impacts of the drought, but it isn't the underlying cause.

Read the whole story

Cole, David to lead South Tahoe council

By Kathryn Reed

South Lake Tahoe is moving forward with continuity and change when it comes to city leadership.

While it is normal for the mayor pro tem to take on the roll of mayor, that could not happen this year with Brooke Laine not being re-elected.

At the City Council meeting on Dec. 9 it was agreed that Hal Cole will continue as mayor and Wendy David will be mayor pro tem.

Cole started the discussion by saying instead of just nominating someone he would prefer those interested in the two positions say why they wanted it.

Cole, Tom Davis and JoAnn Conner each wanted to be mayor. Conner's belief is that the position should rotate and that newcomers should not be in either leadership role.

Her colleagues said the mayor and mayor pro tem need to be a person who treats their fellow members and the public with respect.

Voting for Cole were: Cole, David and Austin Sass. Davis and Conner voted for Davis.

When it came to mayor pro tem, David, Davis and Conner expressed interest in the job. Davis and Conner voted for themselves, while the rest voted for David.

When it came time for the council to make the positions official, those were unanimous votes for Cole and David.

David pointed to her vast experience in running boards, being in the community as well as being the top vote getter on Nov. 4.

There is precedence of the top vote getter becoming mayor pro tem. This happened in 2010 when Claire Fortier was elected to the council with the most votes.

Both terms are for one year.