Will cloud seeding reduce droughts?

By Sophie Quinton, Washington Post

Machines that prod clouds to make snow may sound like something out of an old science fiction movie. But worsening water scarcity, combined with new evidence that "cloud seeding" can work, is spurring states, counties, water districts and power companies across the thirsty West to use the strategy.

Last month, a study funded by the National Science Foundation tracked for the first time how the technology works in nature. The evidence for cloud seeding has been scarce, but recent research has encouraged officials and companies desperate to increase the amount of water in rivers and reservoirs.

Read the whole story

SLT elementary school locked down on false threat

Updated: March 1, 7:42am:

Tahoe Valley Elementary School was on lockdown the afternoon of Feb. 28.

Lake Tahoe Unified School District officials called it a "false alarm."

"It was a planned drill started at LTCC in which Tahoe Valley

was inadvertently called as part of the LTCC automated phone tree. After the drill, Tahoe Valley's phone number was removed from LTCC's automated phone tree," police Lt. David Stevenson told *Lake Tahoe News.*

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Double-digit revenue gain for Stateline casinos

January was a good month for Stateline casinos, which posted revenue gains of 14.83 percent over 2017.

The state win was up 2 percent. The $1.015 billion figure represents the first time in a year the gain has hit the billion-dollar mark.

The *Las Vegas Review-Journal* reports, "It was the 36th time the state has recorded more than $1 billion in monthly win, a level first achieved in March 2005. The highest monthly win ever came in October 2007, when the state recorded $1.165 billion. January's win total wasn't among the top 10."

North Lake Tahoe and the Vegas Strip were the only sectors reporting a decline in January.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Mountaintop camera network tracked 240 fires in 2017

By Mike Wolterbeek

Mountaintop cameras from UNR spotted or tracked 240 fires in Nevada and California in 2017. This helped to keep firefighters more situationally aware and able to mount appropriate responses more rapidly over tens of thousands of square miles of forests and rangelands, including rural communities.

This is a new and expanding tool for fire managers who oversee the wildland and wildland urban interface.

“The success of our system lies in our ability to deploy wireless, microwave technology to enable high-speed internet out in the wilderness,” Graham Kent, director of the Seismological Laboratory Lab in the College of Science, said. “We call it the internet of wild things or wilderness internet.”

The high-definition near-infrared night-capable fire cameras are part of the AlertWildfire network, conceived, developed and implemented at the Nevada Seismological Lab. The network has grown from the AlertTahoe system that began with a three-camera pilot project at Lake Tahoe in 2015 to four networks with more than 55 cameras. The cameras cover areas of Nevada and California’s Sierra Nevada, and includes San Diego County and Santa Barbara with an eye to Oregon and Idaho coming online soon, with several more states making inquiries.

The prototype AlertWildfire system uses the backbone of the Nevada Seismo Lab’s earthquake monitoring network, with its 200 seismograph stations in Nevada and eastern California,

leveraging technology for public safety with the high-tech mountaintop cameras linked into the network.

Fire managers can manually rotate, tilt, pan and zoom the cameras. YouTube channel, nvseismolab, has a library of videos captured from the network.

Mike Wolterbeek works for UNR.

Dry winters cost ski industry $1 billion

By J. Weston Phippen, Outside

It’s been a bad winter for skiing. And more than just being a drag on weekend plans or limiting some resorts to operating with only a few runs (if any), less snow on the mountains is a big hit on the economy. People make fewer trips to the resort, which means resorts hire fewer staff. The local restaurants, bars, and hotels all feel a little empty.

A new report by Protect Our Winters (POW), a climate advocacy group based in Colorado, says a low-snow year can cost the ski resort industry more than $1 billion and 17,400 jobs, compared to an average season. These numbers result from comparing snowfall records with spending habits from 2001 to 2016, so they don’t even account for this winter, which has been the worst along the Rockies since the 1960s, when researchers started keeping detailed snowpack records. POW’s data has serious implications for the snow-sports industry. As climate

change worsens and snowfall becomes less reliable, resorts see less business. If it gets too bad, some resorts might close altogether, which would have economic consequences far beyond the slopes.

Read the whole story

SLT council names vendors for Lakeview Commons

By Kathryn Reed

Tie goes to the local, at least when it comes to awarding bids in South Lake Tahoe.

That was one of the reasons the City Council used this month in voting for which business would get the next three-year contract to operate the boat launch facility at Lakeview Commons.

While Tahoe City Kayak and Paddleboard had 169.17 points, South Tahoe SUP had 168.80. The council voted for the latter. The room was also full of supporters for the South Lake Tahoe business.

Also on the Feb. 20 agenda was the food and beverage concession. That decision was less controversial.

While Lakeview Café had been the operator and bid again, it is Sierra-at-Tahoe that the council elected to be the new concessionaire. Out of a possible 100 points in the staff assessment, Sierra received 92 and Lakeview Café 80.3.

Councilman Tom Davis voted against this decision. It was more

of a vote for the current vendor because there was no evidence presented that it had done anything wrong to not to keep operating.

Sierra-at-Tahoe General Manager John Rice told *Lake Tahoe News*, "While this new venture will be mutually exclusive from the Sierra brand, we are excited to provide the same excellent service and guest experience that is synonymous with our winter offering. We believe in quality recreational experiences and plan to deliver excellent service to the guests that enjoy the Commons Beach area."

Sierra goes beyond the normal ski resort food as **this story proves**. What the menu at Lakeview Commons will be this summer is still being worked out.

"Sierra-at-Tahoe has primarily been a winter recreational business, and have hosted a few summer events over the 25 years we have been here. We hire a group of very talented individuals, many of whom we can't offer full time employment to," Rice said. "We see recreational opportunities in our community as matching the level of talent we have on our team and providing employment opportunities. We plan to have about 12-15 people rotate through the food concession as well, some of us on salary taking a shift or two."

Prior to the meeting a protest to the bid process was submitted by Day Go Adventures regarding the boat launch. The owner claims the current unrest in the city necessitates holding off on awarding a three-year contract to anyone. However, City Manager Nancy Kerry was never directly involved in the process.

Nonetheless, the protest should be on the March 6 council agenda. The electeds will have the choice to stick with their decision, award the contract to the protester or reject all bids.

Also expected at that meeting are the actual contracts for the

concessionaires.

The contract for the boat launch could not be awarded at the last meeting because findings needed to be made as to why the council was going with someone other than the high bidder.

Those findings included:

· South Tahoe Stand Up Paddle's experience, proven record, and knowledge of the local area.

· There being less than one point separating South Tahoe SUP from the high bidder, Tahoe City Kayak and Paddleboard.

· Council wanting to support people who reside in the city limits.

· South Tahoe SUP branding of local events like Lake of the Sky race.

The other companies that bid on the boat launch concession contract were Sierra-at-Tahoe, Kayak Tahoe and SUP Tahoe.

EDC's newest judge comes from Public Defender's Office



Mark Ralphs

El Dorado County is down one less judge with the gubernatorial appointment of Mark Ralphs to the bench.

The 57-year-old from Diamond Springs has been an assistant public defender at the El Dorado County Public Defender's Office since 2007, where he has served as a deputy public defender since 1997. He is based in the South Lake Tahoe office.

He was a sole practitioner from 1990 to 1997.

"On behalf of the El Dorado Superior Court, I am delighted to hear that Gov. (Jerry) Brown has appointed Assistant Public Defender Mark Ralphs to our bench. He is a longtime resident of our county who has raised his family here. Mark's work as an attorney in private practice as well as for the government have provided him with the diverse skills necessary to handle the challenges of being a judge," El Dorado County Presiding Judge Suzanne Kingsbury told *Lake Tahoe News*. "For the past several years, Mark has been assigned to the South Lake Tahoe branch of the Public Defender's Office, and I have had an opportunity to observe his excellent work. He will be a hard working, fair and unbiased jurist."

Ralphs fills the vacancy created by the retirement of Superior Court **Judge Nelson Brooks** last March. The term expires in 2022.

El Dorado County is still down two judges because of **Steve Bailey's resignation** last year as well as Jim Wagoner's.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Nevada DMV proposes gender policy change

By John Potter, KTVN-TV

Transgender Nevadans will score a victory if a proposed policy change at the DMV takes effect. The gender shown on their driver's license could be of their own choosing. It's part of the recent national trend, of state and local governments better accommodating transgender people.

The Nevada DMV now wants to let those folks decide if it should be an "M" or an "F" on their own driver's license. That one letter change on the driver's card means a world of difference. You use your driver licenses for ID while shopping, or job interviews. But the issue comes up when your appearance says one thing and your driver's license says another. The difference can generate ridicule or distrust.

Read the whole story

Ski towns and their housing issues

By Megan Michelson, Powder

A pervasive housing shortage is afflicting mountain towns from Stowe to Telluride. The issue is not just a question of locals being able to afford million-dollar homes—it's also about availability.

"There is very little vacancy for ownership or rental units,

and what is vacant is very unaffordable," says Stacy Stoker, housing manager for Wyoming's Teton County Housing Authority, which oversees affordable housing in the Jackson Hole area. "Less than three percent of the land in the county is able to be developed. This means that there is not a lot of land for building affordable housing."

Aspen, Colo., has a vacancy rate of less than 1 percent for rental units; in Steamboat Springs, Colorado, it's zero; in Mammoth Lakes it's less than 2 percent.

Breckenridge, Colo., houses 50 percent of its workforce—so half of the town's employees commute from elsewhere. Vail and Aspen house less than 30 percent. Truckee shelters 41 percent of its employees. Mammoth and Jackson are doing well by comparison, each housing around 63 percent of its workforce.

Read the whole story

Multiple powder days in the immediate forecast

Mother Nature appears to be making up for lost time.

The storm that should arrive on Thursday in Lake Tahoe could have snow accumulations measured in feet instead of inches.

The National Weather Service in Reno is calling for 3-5 feet above 7,000 feet, and a couple feet at lake level.

A winter storm watch is in effect from March 1 at 4am through March 3 at 10am.

Temperatures are going to remain in the 20s and 30s as highs, with lows in the teens much of the week.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report