SnowGlobe tops residents' concerns at mayor's talk



South Lake Tahoe council members Brooke Laine and Wendy David, center, listen Feb. 21 to people's concerns. Photo/LTN

By Kathryn Reed

While the mayor wants a discussion, the people of South Lake Tahoe want answers. And those answers were not always forthcoming because usually it's staff who has them, not the electeds.

Resident William Dickert attended last week's gathering organized by Mayor Wendy David at the senior center. He told her that facts are what's needed and she ought to have the people there who can answer the questions.

Police Chief Brian Uhler and PIO Tracy Sheldon were in the back scrambling to text/email other staff for the answers. Some they got, other questions went unanswered.

This was somewhat of the same frustration at David's **inaugural gathering** in January. Lots of questions, few answers.

This is in part because South Lake Tahoe has a city manager-

led government, not a strong mayor form of leadership. It means the electeds, while they are in office to set policy, seldom actually retain the minutia of detail staff does. This is because it is staff who is doing the work and is intimately familiar with what is going on. These sessions are often done in election years, such as this. David's term is about to expire.

SnowGlobe dominated much of the conversation, with many complaining about the noise, and believing the economy at New Year's would be just fine without the three-day music festival.

Dickert, though, pointed out that with SnowGlobe and anything the city is involved with has trade-offs. Eliminating a revenue source means having to get rid of an expense. That line item could be public safety personnel or snow removal or something of importance to people.

Scott Blasser, president of the South Lake Tahoe Firefighters Association, spoke of how SnowGlobe is an improvement for first responders compared to the chaos at Stateline in years past.

"Yes, it's a drug event. All concerts are. It's on the safer end," Blasser said. "The drugs being used there don't kill people unless it's egregious. It's not like heroin."

Councilwoman Brooke Laine was David's guest at the conversation. They both said the damage to the field is not acceptable.

Blasser assured those with concerns about the fireworks that the fire chief would not let them be shot off if there were a threat to a forest fire.

Nevada marijuana sales continue to take off

By Colton Lochhead, Las Vegas Review-Journal

Nevada has brought in more than $30 million in tax revenue from marijuana in its first six months of legal recreational sales, according to the revenue numbers released Friday by the Nevada Department of Taxation.

About that $19.5 million of that has come from the special 10 percent sales tax on the nearly $200 million worth of recreational marijuana sold across the state.

Read the whole story

Complaints hit Nev. sports betting mutual funds

By Todd Prince, Las Vegas Review-Journal

Former clients of Bettor Investments, one of the first sports betting mutual funds in Nevada, are accusing its founder of going “radio silent” and not responding to requests to return their money.

Nine clients said Reno-based Matt Stuart has not responded to emails and calls to pay back promissory notes, according to a January email chain the investors shared with the *Las Vegas*

Review-Journal.

Two clients have filed a complaint with the Nevada secretary of state and the attorney general.

Read the whole story

Deceased person found outside SLT business

Police officers say the death of a South Lake Tahoe man found on a local sidewalk Sunday is not suspicious.

An autopsy on Douglas Knapp, 55, is scheduled to determine the exact cause of death.

His body was found about 6:45am Feb. 25 on Emerald Bay Road in front of Enchanted Florist.

Overnight temperatures have been well below freezing in the basin.

— Lake Tahoe News staff report

Scientists investigate fire, long-term resilience

By Sherri Eng

As the state recovers from devastating fires in the north and south, a team of California-based scientists is taking a deeper look at forest resilience in the face of future fires.

A collaborative team of multidisciplinary researchers from the California Academy of Sciences and the U.S. Forest Service's Pacific Southwest Research Station are investigating a forested Northern California watershed—and its birds—to determine how prescribed fire may contribute to healthier forest ecosystems and reduce the risk of high intensity wildfires. By surveying birds and local conditions in a forest targeted for prescribed fire, the team will capture a multi-year picture of what fuel-heavy ecosystems look like before a fire, how they respond to prescribed fire in the near-term, and how they might change if a wildfire occurs down the road.

"California forests are treasures to the wildlife and people of our state," says Durrell Kapan, senior research fellow at the California Academy of Sciences and a co-leader of the resiliency project. "There couldn't be a more important time to research the impacts of forest fires—especially the role of supervised, prescribed fires to reduce the risk of extreme burns. Our group is interested in understanding how to manage forests in a healthy way so we can avoid the devastating megafires that often follow drought and disease."

The first survey results point to the importance of regular prescribed burns to keep healthy forests thriving and nearby communities safer from catastrophic wildfires. The five-year scientific survey and outreach program, which launched this past spring on the 20,236-acre Caples Creek watershed along the South Fork of the American River, will continue in spring 2018.

Fire, climate, and a 'study' forest

The frequency and intensity of the West's wildland fires is increased by global climate change. Earth's changing climate

has contributed to more variable bouts of extreme wet or drought, which can include drier soils and longer fire seasons—conditions that increase the likelihood of intense, more dangerous fires that are difficult to control. Combined with our country's long history of suppressing fire in our forests, current conditions are making way for severe, record-breaking wildfires up and down California.

In the face of climate impacts, widespread regional tree death, and longer, more catastrophic fire seasons across the state, scientists from the academy and PSW teamed up to identify a study region that might be used as a stand-in for forests elsewhere. Unlike some forests in its nearby neighbor, the Lake Tahoe Basin, much of the forest land in the Caples Creek watershed has been fire-free for more than 80 to 100 years, meaning the forest floor has a large amount of "fuel"—dead trees and layers of vegetation built up over time—and is susceptible to major fires in the future.

"The Caples Creek watershed has a long history of fire suppression, but otherwise it has not been significantly altered by people," says Pat Manley, PSW's Conservation of Biodiversity research program manager. "It has incredible natural resources, biodiversity, and a variety of forest types that are a great fit for this type of study of how to use prescribed fire to maintain and enhance forest resilience."

Birds as ecosystem indicators

In summer 2017, scientists from the Academy—including Kapan and Jack Dumbacher, curator of ornithology and mammalogy—joined PSW in surveying the birds of the Caples Creek study area before any scheduled prescribed burns. The team is interested in how birds currently depend on the watershed's diverse habitats, as well as how they will respond to future fire. Eighty-three study sites throughout the 20,236-acre watershed were chosen both inside and outside the area planned for prescribed fires. Over the course of the

first summer survey, the team detected 45 bird species (from 1,700 individual birds) and measured vegetation at each site to see how fire changes ecosystems over time.

“There’s a method to the madness of surveying forest birds,” says Dumbacher. “We spend 10 ultra-quiet minutes in each site, and watch and listen for any birds around us. When we look at the data from the first pre-burn survey, we see that different birds depend on all different parts of a healthy forest to survive. We’ll return to these sites to see what changes in the years to come as prescribed burns roll out and the ecosystem changes.”

A five-year plan

One way to reduce severe fires is to decrease fuel wood by reintroducing smaller fires to the forest at the right time of year—during times when the forest floor and woody vegetation have a lot of moisture from rain or snow. This past fall, the Forest Service launched its five-year project of prescribed fire in the Caples Creek watershed with hand tools and careful planning. Managers take into account winds, moisture, and temperature to minimize the risk of burning more than accumulated forest fuel.

“Forests need fire to thrive and keep our human communities safer,” says Kapan, “but we need a better understanding of how certain management techniques impact wildlife. Forest managers, scientists, private landowners, and communities, you name it—we’re all adapting to a new climate and fire reality in California. Forests are always cycling and changing, and we want to help identify the most natural, cost-effective path to lasting resilience.”

Following a pre-survey this spring, academy and PSW scientists will return for the second year of bird surveys during late spring. The academy, an institution with a history of more than 150 years of California biodiversity research, and the team from PSW hope to continue monitoring the impacts of

multi-year fuel reduction on the forest ecosystem—birds, trees, and more—through 2022.

Sherri Eng is with the Pacific Southwest Research Station of the USFS.

Sound wall built to protect homes that don’t exist

By Joe Hart, KRNV-TV

As sound walls go, the new one on the south end of the Carson City freeway is impressive. It stretches for roughly half a mile and is decorated with artwork to make it aesthetically pleasing.

Construction costs came in just shy of $1 million. The wall borders the southern stretch of the new freeway on one side, and acres of dirt and sagebrush on the other side.

“I’ve never seen a wall extend that far with absolutely nothing that it’s protecting,” said Carson City resident Gary Kolb. “I mean, if you look over there, there’s nothing there.”

Read the whole story

Analysis: Trump’s attack on

renewable energy, EPA hurts Nev.

By Ric Anderson, Las Vegas Sun

On the morning after his State of the Union address, in which President Trump told the nation that his administration had "ended the war on American energy," he made news that suggested otherwise.

Citing draft budget documents it obtained from the White House, The Washington Post reported that the Trump administration was proposing to cut federal funding for renewable energy research and development by 72 percent.

"This couldn't have been worse for this state," said Robert Lang, an economic development expert and executive director of Brookings Mountain West, during a panel discussion examining the State of the Union address. "This is an actual assault on something that was one of the state's largest job producers, one of the gainers in our economy, one of our points of pride."

Read the whole story

Flying with pot not the best idea

By Harriet Baskas, USA Today

In January, California joined the growing list of places where the sale of recreational marijuana is allowed, and now one in

five Americans lives in a state where buying pot can be a tourist activity.

But if you're considering traveling with pot, be careful.

Marijuana is still an illegal drug under federal law and post-security areas at airports are ruled by federal agencies. So, as in Oregon, Washington, Colorado, Alaska and Nevada, bringing legally purchased pot past a security checkpoint in the country's most populated state can still trigger a law enforcement response.

Read the whole story

Some fear Calif. drought cuts could erase water rights

By Jonathan J. Cooper, AP

A proposal to make California's drought-era water restrictions permanent could allow the state to chip away at long-held water rights in an unprecedented power grab, representatives from water districts and other users told regulators Tuesday.

Members of the state Water Resources Control Board delayed a decision about whether to bring back what had been temporary water bans from California's drought, spanning 2013 to 2017. The plan is part of an effort to make water conservation a way of life, with climate change expected to lead to longer, more severe droughts.

It comes after U.S. officials declared that nearly half the state, all of it in the south, is back in drought just months after emerging from it.

Read the whole story

Grocery Outlet step closer to opening in Truckee

Truckee’s planning commissioners this week gave the green light for a Grocery Outlet to be built at Donner Pass Road and Vista Avenue.

The town is on pace to go from **two grocery stores to five**.

The expansion comes with controversy. The proliferation is one concern, traffic at this specific site is another.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report