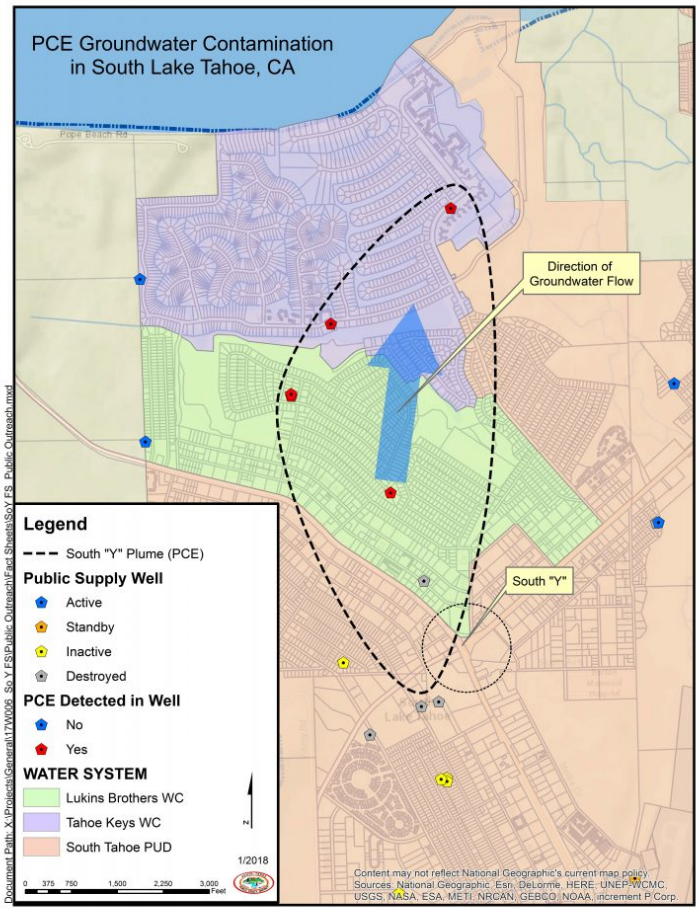
Toxic plume a concern for SLT water companies

By Kathryn Reed

Cleaning up the groundwater contamination at the Y area of South Lake Tahoe is moving at a glacial pace.

And while more than 60 people last week attended a meeting at Lake Tahoe Airport about PCE, or tetrachloroethylene, not much new was presented by the three water agencies affected by the solvent nor the regulatory agency responsible for overseeing the cleanup.



The arrow designates the direction of the PCE plume, while the circle is

the area it’s believed to be in.
Map/STPUD

Representatives from South Tahoe Public Utility District, Lukins Brothers Water Company and Tahoe Keys Water Company all gave a spiel about the contaminant. Also at the meeting was Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board members. That state agency is responsible for determining who is responsible for the contamination, the cleanup method and overseeing that it is done.

While PCE has been written about for years by *LTN* and has been a known issue in town for decades, the plume continues to percolate beneath surface, polluting the groundwater. Remedies have been elusive.

Instead, the water companies have each had to shut down wells. Lukins is getting some of its water from STPUD.

Nothing new came out of the meeting. For the public, it was an opportunity to have all of these agencies in one room answering questions.

It was stressed by everyone that what flows from the spigot from each of the water purveyors is safe. There is no PCE in the water being delivered to any customer serviced by these three water companies. Someone would have to be regularly drinking PCE contaminated water for 70 years for there to be health risk, according to Lahontan.

STPUD accounts for 87 percent of the groundwater use on the South Shore, Tahoe Keys 10 percent, Lukins 5 percent, private wells 2 percent, and small water systems 1 percent.

It is believed PCE got into the groundwater from a dry cleaner at the Y. It is also used as a degreasing agent. It’s heavier than water, so it sinks.

“Because it is not soluble in water, it can be more easily

removed," Richard Solbrig, STPUD general manager, said at the meeting.

Nonetheless, it hasn't been removed. This in part is because the culprit, while identified as the Lake Tahoe Laundry Works, may not be the only contributor to the problem. Then the state has been slow in mandating action be taken.

The status today is that a consultant is putting together a feasibility study.

Sachi Itagaki, an engineer with Kennedy/Jenks consultants, said her firm will be looking at alternatives for soil and groundwater remediation, how to dispose of the contaminant, coming up with what needs to be built to remove the product, and establishing a cost to build whatever is needed as well as the operating expense. An implementation plan is also part of the contract.

The report should be done this summer, with another community meeting likely to take place then.

Cleanup will be done vertically and laterally.

In the meantime, the three water companies are working together and independently to ensure their product is safe as the toxic plume continues to hover in the Y area.

Dry, hot winter closes ski resorts, stalls wildflower

blooms and revives drought fears

By Paige St. John, Rong-gong Lin II and Sarah Parvini, Los Angeles Times

TRUCKEE — In the Sierra Nevada, snowpack levels are running below even the darkest days of the drought, with cross-country ski resorts closed and mountain biking becoming the sport of choice until the snow returns.

In the Bay Area, cities like San Francisco, San Jose and Santa Rosa are experiencing the hottest starts to a year on record.

And Southern California remains in the grip of unprecedented dry and hot conditions, despite a weak storm that moved in Monday.

February is historically a wet month, but not this year. And the long-term forecast offers little hope for relief.

Read the whole story

Tahoe funding source at risk under Trump plan

By Benjamin Spillman, Reno Gazette-Journal

A Nevada-based program that’s generated more than $300 million to improve Lake Tahoe would take a funding hit under one federal budget proposal.

On Monday the Interior Department published a budget brief that includes a proposal to take $230 million from the Southern Nevada Public Land Management Act over the next three years.

The act funds conservation and recreation projects around Nevada, including in the Tahoe basin.

Read the whole story

Death in Tahoma declared a homicide



Jeremy David Virgo

By Cathy Locke, Sacramento Bee

A suspicious death reported Sunday in Tahoma has been ruled a homicide, and the El Dorado County Sheriff's Office has identified the suspect as 47-year-old Jeremy David Virgo.

Virgo was arrested on suspicion of murder, according to a Sheriff's Office news release. The victim's name has not been released pending notification of family.

Read the whole story

California ski resorts embrace renewable energy

By Hugo Martin, Los Angeles Times

In the peaks near Lake Tahoe, the Squaw Valley and Alpine Meadows ski resorts are hoping to draw skiers and snowboarders with some upgrades that have nothing to do with snow.

The two resorts, owned by the same Colorado parent company, plan to become the country's first resorts to operate entirely on renewable energy by December. Squaw Valley also plans to build a mountain-side structure that will contain batteries to store some of that energy.

Other California ski operations also are becoming more environmentally friendly.

Read the whole story

SLT council prolongs city manager chaos



Former South Lake Tahoe Mayor Hal Cole, right, gives his opinion Feb. 12 about the city manager debacle. Photo/Kathryn Reed

By Kathryn Reed

Nancy Kerry remains the city manager of South Lake Tahoe, but at this point it is in name and paycheck only.

The City Council on Feb. 12 discussed her future for about 2½ hours in closed session. The only item on the agenda was "public employee discipline/dismissal/release." There was no reportable action.

"She is the city manager and is getting paid as the city manager. She has not been terminated and if she is, that will be reportable action," interim City Attorney Nira Doherty told *Lake Tahoe News.*

Under the Government Code reportable action includes change in employments status, salary increases/decreases and a settlement.

At this point, it's likely a settlement will be the ultimate outcome. Kerry per her contract is guaranteed nine month's

severance if she is let go without cause. Like all employees, she is also entitled to any unused sick time and vacation days.

Expressions on the five council members' faces upon the end of the session Monday ranged from anger to sadness to frustration. All briskly walked past *Lake Tahoe News.*

What has led to the bad blood has not been disclosed to the public. If it were a criminal allegation, that would have been handled differently.

All the public has been told is that **Mary Egan of Municipal Resource Group** came in last October to assess the culture of the city. Sources have told *Lake Tahoe News* this was spearheaded by then-Mayor Austin Sass who had a vendetta against Kerry. City officials have said Egan did not give them a written report. She talked about her findings in closed session Jan. 23.

Two weeks later Kerry's evaluation was again on the closed session agenda. It is not known if new information came forward in that time period or if council wanted to digest what they had heard from Egan. The outcome of the **Feb. 6 meeting** was that Kerry was immediately placed on indefinite paid leave, with Fire Chief Jeff Meston stepping in as acting city manager.

It was obvious by comments before the public was kicked out of the council chambers on Feb. 12 that not all the council members are happy with how the city's business is being conducted.

"I'm not even sure why we are here. You need the employee," Councilwoman Brooke Laine said. She hinted to being surprised about finding out about the meeting on Friday.

"We had a discussion that we would bring this back March 20. Why are we here?" Councilman Tom Davis said. "I want the

opportunity to see if she wants this in open session."

Kerry was not invited to the Feb. 12 session – with or without her own legal counsel.

It is up to the employee being disciplined whether she would want the hearing in open or closed session. The council legally cannot unilaterally make the decision for open or closed.

Sass questioned whether having it in open session would violate the rights of others.

To that, Davis said, "No employees have come forward."

To this date there have been no complaints filed against Kerry. The only former employee to have sued the city during Kerry's five-plus tenure was Stan Sherer, who was the Community Services director. That case was **settled in 2014**.

There are protocols in place if someone wants to file a grievance against the city manager. The Human Resources Department and city attorney would do so. Complaints can also go to council members, who are the boss of the city manager. Whistler-blower laws and other state and federal laws are also in place to protect employees from their boss.

After the curt exchange among the council, Mayor Wendy David with the assistance of Doherty said it was time to go into closed session so as not to violate the Brown Act.

There is a question, though, whether that in itself was a violation of the open meeting law. Discussing the merits of the meeting, whether the accused should be in the meeting and whether it all should be heard in the open do not fall under the protections of the Brown Act. Litigation and personnel are closed session items. Policy surrounding all of that is not completely protected.

Five people were in the audience Monday, with three speaking.

Public comment was taken before going behind closed doors.

Former Councilman Bruce Grego advocated for the dispute to be aired in public.

David Kurtzman, who years ago was elected to the local school board and therefore understands these processes, said it would best for the city to retain outside counsel – not the current law firm on retainer – to sort through the chaos.

This might bring trust and transparency to a process that has been shrouded in secrecy and innuendo.

Former Mayor Hal Cole spoke of how during his 20-plus years on the council consultants were brought in to do evaluations of the city manager, but all had a defined scope of work. He questioned where that was the case with Egan.

“I have never seen one done with such haste or so disrespectfully,” Cole said.

He spoke of how he was a member of councils that got rid of city managers and city attorneys, but it “was done respectfully.”

It is not known when the council will discuss the issue further. Nor is it known if the direction given was for the city attorney to negotiate a deal with Kerry.

Also not known is why all of this is happening after Kerry had only received positive evaluations, as recently as June 2017.

Truckee families face eviction at mobile home park

By David Bunker, Moonshine Ink

Javier Gomez has lived in Truckee for 19 years. He's raised a family here, put his children through school, and slowly saved enough to buy a mobile home in Sunset Inn I mobile home park in 2014. Now, that life, his family's home, and their tight-knit neighborhood is on the verge of being erased from Truckee.

New ownership at the mobile home park, dramatic rent increases, and what he and his neighbors allege is a concerted effort to displace Truckee families from their homes, is close to turning him and his family out into one of the most merciless housing markets in Tahoe/Truckee's history.

The last hope for Gomez and nine other families who live in Sunset Inn I appears to be a lawsuit that was filed in November in the Nevada County Superior Court, alleging the actions of the new owner are illegal.

Read the whole story

Woman found dead in West Shore residence

Updated 7:22pm:

El Dorado County sheriff's detectives are investigating a suspicious death of a woman at a Tahoma residence.

Deputies were called to the area of Timber Wolf Drive and Alder Street at 12:40pm on Feb. 11 because of shots fired.

Deputies arrived and said they heard gunshots “from the area of a known felon’s address.”

The suspect fled, with a pursuit ending at Homewood Mountain Resort. Deputies used spike strips to stop the vehicle.

Although EDSO must release the name, hometown and age of the arrested person, as well as the charges he was booked on, they have not done so.

The deceased was reportedly a romantic interest of the suspect’s at some point.

— Lake Tahoe News staff report

South Lake Tahoe man dies in house fire

Updated 6:30pm:

A South Lake Tahoe man died in a house fire on Sunday afternoon.

The name and age of the victim have not been released.

The fire was first reported at 1:42pm Feb. 11 at 933 Brockway Ave.

The fire did not do that much damage to the structure. The origin of the fire was near where the victim was on the couch,

Fire Chief Jeff Meston told *Lake Tahoe News.*

He said the cause of the fire was a “cigarette into the couch.”

An autopsy is scheduled.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Placer County, NLTRA responsibilities change

By Sage Sauerbrey, Moonshine Ink

It’s been just less than one year since Placer County stunned the North Lake Tahoe Resort Association with the announcement that it was cutting the organization’s duties in half, and in turn drastically reducing its funding. In truth, it was the culmination of more than a decade of cutbacks to the resort association’s contract with the county, and long simmering tensions boiled over.

The latest cutbacks were staunchly opposed at first, but in the latest contract and the upcoming fiscal year, the changes are sticking. The dust has settled, and while the relationship between the resort association and the county appears by all means to be amicable, there is no doubt the county has firmly established control.

Of the association’s original three departments – marketing, transportation, and capital projects – the latter two have been eliminated and the responsibilities associated with them divvyed up, leaving NLTRA primarily as a marketing organization, now dubbed “tourism development.”

The entities that will fill the gap in the resort association’s former duties will have a primarily advisory role in the county’s allocation of its rapidly growing fund of lodging tax collections. For the county, the changes signal success in restructuring an organization it believed was incapable of handling its duties. For many locally, the newest hierarchy represents a shift of tourism-related tax funds away from the community and an unnecessary and expensive divide-and-conquer strategy to oversight.

Read the whole story