Study: Half of Calif.’s trees at risk of dying

By Ezra David Romero, Capital Public Radio

Half of California’s vegetation is at a risk of dying because of warming temperatures, according to new UC Davis research.

“We’re seeing that in California just in the last five or six years,” said James Thorne, a research scientist with the Department of Environmental Science and Policy at the university. “We had a five-year long drought and then we had double precipitation. In the meantime, we’ve also seen some very large wildfires.”

Even if greenhouse gas-emissions are reduced today, Thorne says around a quarter of the state’s trees and plants will be climate stressed by the end of the century.

Read the whole story

Chase from Truckee ends in SLT with parolee jailed

By Lake Tahoe News

A chase that started in Truckee on Wednesday involving a stolen vehicle ended in South Lake Tahoe with a Bay Area man taken into custody.

Raheem Ahmed Hanif, 35, of Rodeo was booked on grand theft auto, evading a police officer and resisting arrest. He was on

parole, but for what was not immediately known.

The incident started the morning of Jan. 31. Truckee officers were alerted to a Jeep Renegade having been stolen from Reno. It was being tracked by its GPS system. Truckee officers stopped the vehicle, but then the suspect fled as they approached.

Truckee officers stopped the pursuit when the vehicle left the town limits.

GPS then traced the Jeep to Highway 89 south in Tahoe City, where California Highway Patrol officers joined the chase. The suspect refused to stop.

CHP and El Dorado County sheriff's deputies deployed spike strips that deflated the Jeep's tires. But the suspect kept going.

CHP officers then used a maneuver to force the fleeing vehicle to turn sideways. The vehicle came to a stop on Highway 89 near Eighth Street.

The suspect refused to surrender.

"CHP officers eventually approached the Jeep, broke out the right front window, and unlocked the door. Hanif was then taken into custody," officers said.

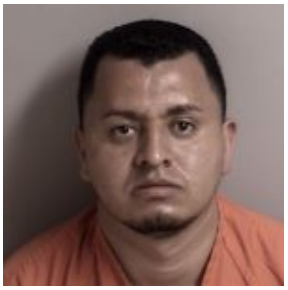
Bail was set at $30,000.

183-year prison sentence for

ex-SLT hotel worker

A former South Lake Tahoe hotel maintenance worker is going to prison for the rest of his life for the assault of 22-year-old exchange student.

Manuel Ovidio Ramos-Munoz was sentenced this month to 183 years to life this month.



Manuel Ovidio Ramos-Munoz

“The young woman, who had only been in the country for a little more than a week, was sitting on the front steps of her hotel room talking on the phone when Ramos-Munoz snuck up behind her and put a knife to her throat. Ramos-Munoz dragged the victim across the street into a dark parking lot, behind large metal containers at the rear of the parking lot. He threatened to kill the terrified victim if she did not remain silent. Once concealed behind the large containers, Ramos-Munoz repeatedly and violently physically and sexually assaulted the victim, causing injuries to her head, face, and body,” according to the El Dorado County District Attorney’s Office.

A jury last fall found Ramos-Munoz guilty of seven felony counts, including kidnapping for the purpose of committing a sexual assault, as well as six additional counts and numerous special allegations relating to the subsequent sexual assault of the victim with the use of a knife.

At the sentencing Judge Kenneth Melikian called Ramos-Munoz's actions "beyond reprehensible" and stated that on the day of the crime Ramos-Munoz had "put the victim in hell," adding that it was a hell she had probably not yet escaped.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Task force to boost oversight of casino emergency plans

By Jeff German, Las Vegas Review-Journal

State officials have created a task force to spur oversight of casino emergency response plans following the Oct. 1 massacre outside Mandalay Bay on the Las Vegas Strip.

The effort is a result of a *Review-Journal* investigation last month that found the Nevada Division of Emergency Management for years had not reviewed the plans for most casinos in Nevada.

The task force will conduct its first meeting next week, Caleb Cage, the division's chief, told members of the Nevada Homeland Security Commission on Monday.

Read the whole story

Thunder Valley bets $56M in upgrades to beat competition

By Mark Glover, Sacramento Bee

Thunder Valley Casino Resort on Friday showed off $56 million in upgrades and additions to its hotel and casino, a massive effort to retain long-time visitors, attract high rollers from all corners of the nation and get a leg up on future competition.

On Friday, resort officials took media members on a hard-hat tour of the ongoing construction efforts in the casino area. That included a new 25,000-square-foot, smoke-free poker room and bingo hall, plus a planned expansion of the current poker room to new a high-limit slots area.

Officials also confirmed completion of the previously announced effort to finish three floors of its 17-story hotel, adding 111 rooms to the property.

California Indian casinos have long had an impact on Tahoe and Reno establishments.

Read the whole story

LTCC awarded 7-year accreditation

Lake Tahoe Community College received accreditation for seven years, the highest level of accreditation possible from the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges,

Western Association of Schools and Colleges.

It means LTCC substantially met or exceeded all of the eligibility requirements, accreditation standards and commission policies of the ACCJC.

The evaluation team found that the college had a comprehensive, well-written self-evaluation document and related evidence developed through broad participation from all groups on campus – staff, students, faculty, and the administration. In addition, the visiting team found that the college had done its job of identifying gaps and issues on its own, and had taken the initiative to draft its own action plans for continuous improvement.

A college's accreditation status is important for several reasons. For one, all federal financial aid funding is tied to a college's accreditation status. In 2016-17, LTCC handed out approximately $1.75 million in federal financial aid to approximately 600 students. Accreditation is also important because it ensures that the credits a student earns at LTCC are transferable to other colleges or universities.

The next full review will be in fall 2024.

North Shore has plan to improve weekend skier traffic

By Tony Bizjak, Sacramento Bee

The snow is falling, and the ski season is about to hit high gear heading toward the big Presidents Day weekend. Will Tahoe roads be ready to handle the traffic?

Probably not. The surge of traffic on Friday nights and Saturday mornings is intense, notably on Highway 89, the only route to Squaw Valley and Alpine Meadows ski areas. Highway 89 was a parking lot at times last year, as were some Truckee streets.

The California Highway Patrol will station officers at key highway intersections, in some cases to guide traffic, in other cases just to send the message to drivers not to try anything crazy.

Read the whole story

California pays out millions for sexual harassment

By Marjie Lundstrom, Sacramento Bee

Four young men who were locked in a youth correctional facility in Southern California accused a male staff counselor of coercing them into sex acts in exchange for contraband and special treatment. The cost to taxpayers to settle their lawsuit: $10 million.

At CSU Fullerton, a female student in her 20s reported that her professor encouraged her to drink whiskey with him in his office and advised her to masturbate during the week to relax, then report back to him on her progress. The cost? The CSU system paid $92,000 to settle her case, while the student became fearful and anxious after the encounters and her "quality of life declined," her lawsuit contended.

And at California State Prison-Corcoran, which has housed the

likes of Juan Corona and Charles Manson until his recent death, a female correctional officer said a fellow guard repeatedly made explicit sexual comments, stared at her breasts and crotch, touched her with his hands and pelvis and called her at home, according to court documents and interviews. The state settled her case for $750,000.

Read the whole story

TRPA board not in sync regarding VHRs

By Kathryn Reed

The Tahoe Regional Planning Agency's future involvement with vacation home rentals is up in the air based on comments from Governing Board members.

The board received an update about VHRs on Jan. 24 from the bi-state regulatory agency's staff. Part of it included going over what the city and each county in the basin are doing.

About 10 years ago the board made VHRs an allowable use in residential neighborhoods, and for the most part has let individual jurisdictions regulate them how they want. But not everyone agrees with how the local entities are handling the situation so they've asked TRPA to take a more active role.

The Local Government Committee of the TRPA was tasked with delving into the issue a bit. A report was completed in December, with the findings presented this month to the full board.

The report concluded, "Each local jurisdiction is addressing

VHRs according to the characteristics and circumstances in each locale: preservation of neighborhood character, permanent resident quality of life, safety and enforcement. The local jurisdictions are acting responsibly to resolve VHR issues so that the concerns of residents and stakeholders, and policies of the Regional Plan are addressed."

The recommendation was to bring annual updates to the whole board.

"I definitely think this is a local issue," Austin Sass, South Lake Tahoe's rep on the board, said Wednesday.

He disagreed with fellow board member Clem Shute who advocated for using the residential allocation process to curtail the proliferation of VHRs. Sass's rationale is that there are so few allocations left that it won't address the issue in any meaningful way. He believes the voters, at least in South Lake Tahoe, will make the ultimate decision regarding the future of VHRs. It's possible competing VHR initiatives will be on the November ballot.

"I will ask RPIC (Regional Plan Implementation Committee) to ask staff to amend the code to limit how our allocations can be used for vacation rentals," Shute said. He wants the allocations to be used for work force/affordable housing — "things that matter to the public."

It was suggested there be a joint meeting between the RPIC and Local Government Committee, to which Executive Director Joanne Marchetta said would really mean bringing the VHR topic back to the whole board because the two committees combined are a majority of the members.

Five members of the public spoke at the meeting. Jesse Patterson with the League to Save Lake Tahoe called VHRs a "pervasive issue" and that his agency supports a "regional assessment."

Jessica Tucker-Mohl, California deputy attorney general, sided with Shute and the League.

The other three were also not big fans of the current VHR situation in the basin.

Sue Novasel, who represents El Dorado County on the TRPA board, recused herself as she awaits a decision from the Fair Political Practices Commission as to whether she has a conflict of interest. Douglas County Commissioner Nancy McDermid was absent from the meeting.

Nevada marijuana sales dip in November

By Colton Lochhead, Las Vegas Review-Journal

Nevada marijuana sales continue to soar well above the state's projections, with dispensaries selling $33.4 million in marijuana and the state bringing in more than $5.5 million in taxes in November.

Sales dipped from October's massive $38 million in sales, according to data released Monday by the Nevada Department on Taxation. But November's totals were $11 million more than the state projected for the month.

The 10 percent retail excise tax brought in over $3.3 million for the month, down from $3.8 million in October. In the first five months of marijuana sales in Nevada, which started in July, that excise tax has brought in nearly $16 million. All of that revenue goes into the state's rainy day fund.

Read the whole story