

Drought costing Calif. farmers billions of dollars

By Elizabeth Campbell and Megan Durisin, Bloomberg

Near the confluence of the Merced and San Joaquin rivers, the heart of the California farm belt, Bob Kelley watches the driest year ever erode water supplies and prospects for the dairy business his family began in 1910.

The amount of water available for the 2,800 acres of corn and alfalfa Kelley grows to feed more than 6,500 cows may drop as much as two-thirds, so fewer crops will be planted and some animals will be sold to avoid the expense of buying grain, he said by telephone from Newman, about 83 miles southeast of San Francisco.

“It would impact us for not just 2014, but all of 2015,” said Kelley, 60, who runs a local water district that will cut output by at least half. “I’m anticipating a very difficult time, and I’m probably the best off of anybody I know.”

The drought in California, the top U.S. agricultural producer at \$44.7 billion, is depriving the state of water needed to produce everything from milk, beef and wine to some of the nation’s largest fruit and vegetable crops, including avocados, strawberries and almonds. Lost revenue in 2014 from farming and related businesses such as trucking and processing could reach \$5 billion, according to estimates by the 300-member California Farm Water Coalition, an industry group.

Read the whole story

Stateline gaming revenues tank as state numbers rise

Despite the lackluster performance of Stateline casinos in December, overall Nevada gaming numbers are up.

The state Gaming Control Board on Friday said December casino winnings were 9.6 percent more than they were in 2012. Revenues were \$1.034 billion, while a year ago the take was \$943 million.

Stateline numbers dropped 25 percent year-over-year to \$16 million.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Homewood dispute settled; project to start in 2015

By Dale Kasler, Sacramento Bee

Developers and environmentalists said Thursday they have settled a lawsuit that blocked a major redevelopment of Homewood Mountain Resort.

The settlement means the project, which will cost \$400 million to \$500 million, will break ground in spring 2015, said Art Chapman of JMA Ventures, the owner of Homewood.

The settlement came a year after a federal judge in Sacramento halted the Homewood project from going forward, saying the environmental impact statement needed revision. Under the

settlement, the project will be scaled back somewhat. Under the settlement, JMA agreed to put certain parcels of land off-limits to development and cancel 13 of the housing units.

While the project was approved by Placer County officials and the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency, it was hit with a lawsuit by the Sierra Club and Friends of the West Shore. U.S District Judge William Shubb halted the project last January, saying there were environmental deficiencies.

Read the whole story

California towns running out of water

By Paul Rogers, San Jose Mercury News

As California's drought deepens, 17 communities across the state are in danger of running out of water within 60 to 120 days, state officials said Tuesday.

In some communities, wells are running dry. In others, reservoirs are nearly empty. Some have long-running problems that predate the drought.

The water systems, all in rural areas, serve from 39 to 11,000 residents. They range from the tiny Lompico County Water District in Santa Cruz County to districts that serve the cities of Healdsburg and Cloverdale in Sonoma County.

And it could get a lot worse.

Areas of South Lake Tahoe without electricity

Trees went into a power line on Tahoe Island Drive in South Lake Tahoe twice on Thursday.

About 100 Liberty Utilities customers remained without power at 9pm after the second incident occurred at about 8:15pm Jan. 30.

Both times the majority of customers were without power for about 30 minutes.

People in the state streets, Tahoe Keys and from Steamers to Fresh Ketch were initially affected Thursday night. So were people in Fallen Leaf Lake, Camp Richardson and Cascade Lakes. Those three areas had been transferred to the same line because of weather related issues so they ended up without power Thursday night.

South Lake Tahoe police officers were dispatched to the street to make sure no one was injured by the live wire.

The storm that settled over the Lake Tahoe Basin for much of Thursday initially brought heavy wet snow that stressed the power lines and brought tree limbs down.

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*

Snowstorm makes ski resorts happy, but water content in Sierra at 12% of normal

A layer of fresh snow cannot disguise the fact that the snowpack is in dismal shape.

The second snow survey of the season on Jan. 30 revealed the snowpack water content statewide is at 12 percent of normal. This sets a record.



A Caltrans plow maneuvers Jan. 30 around stalled cars on Echo Summit. Photos/Kathryn Reed

Prior to Thursday, the lowest snowpack water content readings for this time of year were 21 percent of average in 1991 and 1963, 22 percent in 1976, 25 percent in 1977 and 35 percent in 2012. Recordkeeping started in 1960.

At the Echo Summit reading near the entrance of Sierra-at-Tahoe the measurements were even worse. The water content is 7 percent of normal, with 12.4 inches of snow containing 1.4 inches of water.

"This winter remains dry, making it very unlikely our record drought will be broken this year," Mark Cowin, Department of

Water Resources director, said in a press release. “Now more than ever, we all need to save every drop we can in our homes and places of work.”

While water officials found nothing to celebrate on Thursday, ski resorts were thrilled. With the initial white stuff being heavy and wet, it will make for a good base. What has fallen since the predawn snowfall has been lighter – giving skiers something to be joyful about.



Power and cable lines are sagging in South Lake Tahoe.

The conditions, though, are ripe for avalanches to occur. The Sierra Avalanche Center issued a “high” level threat. This comes after weeks of it being at “low”.

Some ski resorts were waiting for the snow to settle before allowing riders everywhere.

Roads have been a mess. Late-morning spin outs on Echo Summit had the road closed temporarily. The commute into Carson City felt like driving over a washboard.

Power lines are sagging from the weight of the wet snow, but Liberty Utilities is reporting no problems as of 1pm.

Some tree limbs have also fallen because of the added weight.

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*

Arson suspected in South Tahoe house fire



Flames fully engulf a house
Jan. 29 in South Lake Tahoe.
Photo/Denise Haerr

A fire Wednesday night that completely destroyed a house in South Lake Tahoe looks to have been deliberately set.

Police officers had gone to the house in the 1100 block of Long Avenue the afternoon of Jan. 29 on a report of someone forcing their way in. Officers said it appeared someone had slept there. But no suspect was found.

The modified A-frame is being repaired because of damage from burst pipes earlier this winter, so no one was living there. When a repairman was at the house earlier this week he reported to the fire department and Southwest Gas that he smelled natural gas and saw that gas valves on various appliances had been turned on.

The fire was called in at 6:10 Wednesday night. It's estimated

that the loss of the structure is \$300,000 and contents \$20,000. The fire spread to nearby trees, but crews were able to keep the flames from reaching other structures or becoming a forest fire.

South Lake Tahoe police detectives have launched a criminal investigation along with arson investigators from South Lake Tahoe, Lake Valley and Tahoe Douglas fire departments.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Nev. lawmakers reluctant to define gifts

By Andrew Doughman, Las Vegas Sun

Several state legislators took a jaunt to Israel last year, touring the Holy Land and dining beside the Sea of Galilee.

The largest Israeli lobbying group in the United States bankrolled the all-expenses trip, but when it came time this month for elected officials to report gifts they received in 2013, there was no reference to the trip.

The traveling lawmakers were only some of the elected officials in Nevada who accepted gifts sometimes worth thousands of dollars but declined to report them as required by state law.

Some of them dispute whether they legally need to report these gifts – in part because there is no explicit definition of a “gift” in state law.

[Read the whole story](#)

Mini temblors rattle Virginia City

By KOL0-TV

VIRGINIA CITY – A swarm of earthquakes has hit the Virginia City area.

The seismology lab at UNR has recorded 27 tremors since 7:30 Wednesday night. The most recent one, a 2.6 magnitude, occurred about 3:42 Thursday morning.

[Read the whole story](#)

Snow accumulating; most schools open in Tahoe



Snow is falling Jan. 30 in Lake Tahoe. Photo/LTN

The forecasters were right – it's snowing in Lake Tahoe.

Classes will be starting an hour later than usual at Zephyr Cove Elementary and Whittell High schools.

All schools in Lake Tahoe Unified are open and operating on a normal schedule. The same goes for Lake Tahoe Community College. Incline Village schools are open, too.

Truckee Tahoe Unified has called Jan. 30 a snow day.

About 4 inches had fallen in South Lake Tahoe by 6am, with it still coming down. A winter storm warning for the basin remains in effect through 4am Friday.

“Periods of light to moderate snow will continue through mid-morning today,” according to the National Weather Service in Reno. “A break is likely this afternoon with just a few snow showers before another burst of snow tonight.”

Chains or snow tires are required over most mountain passes. For current road conditions, click on the state icons on the home page of *Lake Tahoe News*.

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*