

CalFire worried about early fire season

By Dave Marquis, News 10

CalFire, the largest firefighting agency in the world, is cautioning that without enough winter rain and snow an intense, dangerous fire season could start as early as April.

“In my 27 years of doing this, I’ve never seen, this far north, fires continue to occur through the winter,” said CalFire Battalion Chief Fred Lopez at his station along Cook Riolo Road in western Placer County.

In Big Sur on the California coast, flames burned homes and property in an unusual late-season fire in mid-December.

The problem in the spring, Lopez said, is that without enough precipitation, heavier fuels that burn longer and hotter, will become dangerously dry.

Read the whole story

Calif. motorists face new laws in 2014

By Cathy Locke, Sacramento Bee

The California Highway Patrol is alerting motorists to a number of new transportation-related laws or changes to existing laws that will take effect in the new year.

Most will become effective Wednesday. Among the new or amended

laws are:

- A law prohibiting motorists from passing a bicycle with less than 3 feet between any part of the motor vehicle and any part of the bicycle or driver.
- Counties will be authorized to increase registration fees by \$1 for passenger vehicles and \$2 for commercial vehicles to fund programs related to vehicle theft crimes in those counties.

Read the whole story

GED exam about to get tougher

By Theresa Harrington, Contra Costa Times

CONCORD – Every time a bell rings in the holiday movie, “It’s a Wonderful Life,” an angel gets its wings. In a similarly heartwarming gesture, every time teacher Christine Paynton rings a bell in her Mt. Diablo adult education class, it means a student has earned his or her GED high school equivalency certificate.

As classes came to an end this month, Paynton excitedly rang her bell four times, proudly introducing graduates who passed their high school equivalency exams in the nick of time, before new tests are unveiled in January. Across the country, thousands of adults have been scrambling to finish the tests and earn their certificate – an important academic milestone for those without a high school diploma – or else begin anew with more rigorous, computerized assessments next month.

The GED Testing Service updated the exams to better prepare students for college and careers. The new tests will condense

five subject-matter exams into four and will include more difficult questions aligned with new Common Core Curriculum Standards that promote critical thinking and problem-solving, said spokesman Armando Diaz. To get ready, some centers have begun offering the soon-to-be-obsolete 2002 test on computers.

Read the whole story

Nevada to be test site for commercial drones

By Kristy Totten and Steve Tetreault, Las Vegas Review Journal

WASHINGTON – Look to the skies. Nevada was chosen Monday as a coveted base for the emerging drone industry.

The Federal Aviation Administration announced the Silver State as one of a half dozen authorized to become test sites for the commercial development of unmanned aerial vehicles, or UAVs.

The winners now get an early start – along with the federal government's lucrative seal of approval – to cash in on the vision of drones populating U.S. skies alongside piloted aircraft.

Nevada officials have projected the creation of 15,000 well-paying jobs in the state directly tied to the industry, as well as thousands more in feeder industries.

Read the whole story

Inspectors keep invasive mussels out of Lake Tahoe

Diligent inspectors have helped keep Lake Tahoe free of quagga and zebra mussels.

During the 2013 boating season Tahoe Resource Conservation District workers inspected more than 14,000 vessels entering either Lake Tahoe, Fallen Leaf Lake or Echo Lake. Half were new inspections, while the remainder had intact Tahoe-issued inspection seals.

Thirty-six of the inspected watercraft were harboring aquatic invasive critters including plants, mussels and snails. TRCD decontaminated 4,221 watercraft with hot water to prevent invasive species from entering Tahoe's waters.

Invasive aquatic species are getting closer to the basin. This summer Nevada Department of Wildlife confirmed New Zealand mudsnails in sections of the Truckee River from Mayberry Park in Reno to the Sparks area.

"Clean, drained and dry" is the motto of the program.

TRCD inspectors also staffed Boca, Prosser and Stampede reservoirs and partnered with the Truckee Donner Recreation and Park District to provide watercraft inspectors at Donner Lake. Truckee inspectors screened more than 3,500 vessels for aquatic invasive species.

Prevention efforts for more than 7,000 paddlers occurred at U.S. Forest Service kiosks, boat ramps and Fallen Leaf Lake. They were assessed for their risk of transporting aquatic invasive species from previously visited water bodies.

Information about the boat inspection program, including hours of operation for boat launches and snow closures, is available

online or by calling 888.824.6267.

GOP proposes shortening 2016 primary season

By S.V. Date, NPR

A year after losing the popular vote for the fifth time in the last six presidential elections, the Republican Party has crafted a series of rules tweaks designed to regain control of – and dramatically shorten – its presidential nominating process.

The subcommittee charged with looking for fixes has approved five proposed changes for review by the Republican National Committee's rules committee at its January meeting. The full RNC would then need to pass the changes by a three-quarters supermajority.

February 2016 would be set aside for the traditional early states: Iowa, New Hampshire, South Carolina and Nevada. The other states could start as soon as March 1, but could not hold winner-take-all contests before March 15. Larger states that violate either of those rules would lose all but nine of their delegates to the summer nominating convention, not counting their three RNC members who are automatic delegates. Smaller states would lose two-thirds of their delegates, not including the three RNC members.

[Read the whole story](#)

Record dry year for Lake Tahoe Basin



Lack of moisture means there is more beach area surrounding Lake Tahoe.
Photo/Kathryn Reed

By Kathryn Reed

Lake Tahoe and many parts of California and Nevada are setting records for being so dry.

Tahoe City receives on average 31.55 inches of precipitation each year. It has received 8.08 inches for 2013. Records date to 1910.

The last significantly dry year was in 1976 when 9.34 inches of precip fell.

South Lake Tahoe's numbers are not as old and are not as detailed. But the entire basin, Truckee, Reno and Carson areas all in the same dry predicament.

"The high pressure could leave us in a dry pattern in the Sierra for another week or two," Jessica Kielhorn,

meteorologist technician with the National Weather Service in Reno, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

That ridge of high pressure is just sitting off the California coast, which is causing the dry spell. Storms keep going north and northeast of here.



Source: National Weather Service

Statewide electronic readings show the snowpack water content is 20 percent of normal for the date. The first manual reading of the season near the entrance to Sierra-at-Tahoe is Friday. A year ago the snowpack was 150 percent of normal for this time of year.

The official water year ends June 30, so there is time for the water year to be salvaged.

However, the lack of moisture throughout California and Nevada makes this the third year in a row for below normal precipitation.

Snowpack provides for about one-third of California's drinking and irrigation water.

Normally the hills in the Bay Area and land in the Sacramento Valley are a vibrant green at the start of a new year. That won't be the case for 2014. They aren't even the golden brown of summer. The land is barren; not even suitable for grazing.

Department of Water Resources Director Mark Cowin on Dec. 13 mobilized a drought management team “to offset potentially devastating impacts to citizen health, well-being and our economy.” Four days later, Gov. Jerry Brown set up a Drought Task Force. Drought conditions are being felt in 94.25 percent of California, according to the U.S. Drought Monitor.

For now, farmers are likely to receive 5 percent of the water they expected. This means some fields will be fallow, while plantings will be scaled back elsewhere. This in turn affects produce prices and unemployment numbers. Both will increase.

The lack of snow is clearly impacting the Lake Tahoe Basin when it comes to tourism. Usually it’s near impossible to get a hotel room this week. But there are several vacancy signs along Highway 50 in South Lake Tahoe.

While ski resorts are open, the bulk of the slopes are covered with man-made snow. Even then, no resort has 100 percent of its terrain open.

If the snow and rain stays away, the other threat to worry about will be wildfires.

Carson City woman dies after Heavenly ski accident

A 56-year-old Carson City woman died from the injuries she sustained while skiing at Heavenly Mountain Resort.

Dana Tuttle died Dec. 22 at Renown Medical Center in Reno one day after the accident.

Heavenly on Dec. 30 said the woman was found unresponsive on

Tamarack Return at 10:26am Dec. 21. Ski patrol provided advanced life support until CalStar arrived to fly her from the mountain to Renown.

Tuttle was not wearing a helmet, according to the resort. However, a Heavenly spokeswoman had no further details as to what led to Tuttle being injured.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Fire destroys 2 residences at Granlibakken

By Kathryn Reed

A father of five escaped with minor injuries when a fire swept through their Granlibakken home in Tahoe City.

Gabrielle Cuevas was trying to help his kids about 4:30am Dec. 30 when he was burned on his hands and suffered smoke inhalation. He was treated at Renown Medical Center in Reno.

North Tahoe Fire Protection District crews were still on the scene late Monday afternoon trying to determine the cause of the blaze. No dollar amount has been put on the loss of the structure or personal belongings. The family lost everything, including just opened Christmas gifts.



A father saved four children from a fire at their Granlibakken home Dec. 30.
Photo/Provided

Granlibakken and North Tahoe firefighters are going to Toys for Tots in Reno on Tuesday to find toys to replace some of what was destroyed. The Red Cross is also helping the family.

The father and four children ranging in age from 5 to 10 were at home. A 2-year-old was elsewhere for the night. A couple who lived next door is also in need of other living arrangements.

"It's what they call the dormitory. It's an older building where some of the workers stay," Dave Zaski with North Tahoe Fire told *Lake Tahoe News*. Cuevas is a maintenance worker at the resort.

Zaski said the good thing is his department worked with the resort a few years ago to make sure there were smoke detectors in all structures. The other thing that helped the family is the children had been taught by local firefighters about how to stay low to the ground when there is smoke and to change the battery in the smoke detectors.

Granlibakken is open for business. A spokeswoman did not return a call.

Donations of clothes and money for the family may be dropped off at Granlibakken or the fire station at 222 Fairway Drive,

Tahoe City.

Stateline casino revenue drops, statewide it's up

Gaming revenues were off by 2 percent in Stateline for November compared to 2012. But that's an improvement over the 23 percent drop in October.

The South Shore casinos collected \$17 million.

The Nevada Gaming Control Board on Monday said revenues increased 11.9 percent statewide for the month. Gamblers lost \$875.9 million.

Revenue in Reno was up 17 percent or \$43 million.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report