

Rim Fire effects to last for decades

By Bettina Boxall, Los Angeles Times

TUOLUMNE — Tourists stopped at the Rim of the World overlook on California 120 earlier this month to take photos of the panoramic view — just as they always have.

But they stared in silence at the ashen hues of a landscape swept by the largest wildfire to burn in the Sierra Nevada in more than a century of recordkeeping. Steep canyon walls and mountain slopes that had been robed in chaparral and oak were now draped in black, spreading to the horizon in a funereal scene.

To the north, miles and miles of forest were still and lifeless, the earth scoured by flame. Millions of charred trees stood naked, their needles incinerated.

The huge Rim fire, ignited Aug. 17 by a hunter's illegal campfire, is likely to have transformed large swaths of the Stanislaus National Forest for decades to come.

Remote sensing satellite images indicate that virtually all of the vegetation is dead on nearly 40 percent of the area of the 401-square-mile blaze, which burned from the national forest into the western portion of Yosemite National Park, where it continues to smolder.

Burned chaparral and oak will quickly resprout. But where large patches of trees were killed, ecologists say it could take 30 to 50 years for the forest to reestablish itself in the shrub fields that are the first to grow. If there are more fires in the meantime, the land could permanently convert to chaparral.

Read the whole story

Online poker companies know where players are

By Ed Komenda, Las Vegas Sun

People call him the “sheriff of online gambling,” but Rip Gerber says he’s more like border patrol.

As CEO of Locaid, a San Francisco technology company, Gerber makes sure gamblers are where they say they are. Locaid verifies the location of online gamblers for Ultimate Poker, William Hill and the newest entrant into Nevada’s online poker industry, the World Series of Poker.

On what Locaid does ...

We are the world’s largest location company. We created what’s known as “location as a service.” We provide location information to all industries, from financial services to health care to hospitality and gaming.

What the regulators are saying about mobile and Internet gaming is, “I’m OK with it as long as you can verify that that person placing the bet on that device is in my state.” What we do is locate those devices.

On how his company locates devices ...

We can locate more than 5 billion devices anywhere on the planet through multiple location sources.

Read the whole story

‘Made in America’ becoming vogue again

By Virginia Harrison, CNN Money

The “Made in America” revival is gaining momentum with a majority of manufacturing executives now ready to consider pulling some production back from China.

A new survey published Tuesday showed a big jump in recent months in the number of companies considering “re-shoring” production from China, once favored for its low costs.

Boston Consulting Group said its survey found most large U.S. companies now plan to move some production to America from China, or are “actively considering” the move.

The number of firms that have shifted manufacturing to the U.S. from China, or will do so in the next two years, has nearly doubled over the past 18 months.

The survey found the three main drivers of the trend are labor costs, product quality and a desire to be closer to customers.

Read the whole story

LTCC board contemplates 2014

bond measure

By Kathryn Reed

The bulk of the buildings on the 164-acre campus of Lake Tahoe Community College have been funded by the state of California. But that might change next year.

For more than a year college board members have been discussing the possibility of asking local voters to pass a general obligation bond that would help create new facilities. John Palmer with Orrick, Herrington & Sutcliffe law firm discussed the legal implications, process and options with the board on Sept. 24.

At the Oct. 8 meeting the board will likely vote on a reimbursement resolution. This would not obligate the college to go forward with the bond, but it's the next step in the process.



LTCC President Kindred Murillo, from left, talks about a possible bond as board members Karen Borges and Roberta Mason listen. Photo/Kathryn Reed

LTCC is one of eight college districts in the state to have never gone to voters with a general obligation bond.

The college is looking at possibly asking voters in November 2014 to approve a bond of probably no more than \$38 million that would be paid back in 25 years.

The college has a list of \$43 million worth of improvements, but doesn't believe the higher amount is something the voters would stomach.

Another concern is the other tax measures that could be on that ballot. South Lake Tahoe is contemplating a snow removal tax hike and the local library is expected to ask voters to renew that tax.

When local voters went to the ballot in spring 1974 they agreed to tax themselves 72 cents on every \$100,000 of assessed property value. (This was pre-Proposition 13.) Voters were asked to create the college district, approve the tax that would buy the land, and select the board members. (Roberta Mason and Fritz Wenck were on the original board and are still board members.)

Hazel Hoak, who was El Dorado County's assistant superintendent of schools, became the interim president until the board that September hired Jim Duke to be the college's first full-time president. (Hoak will be at the college's 40th anniversary celebration in June.)

Classes started in fall 1975 at a motel on Highway 50. In 1988, the first building opened on the campus people know today. It is state dollars that have funded most every building on campus. There was a local capital campaign for the Haldan Art Gallery and library. The debt on that is paid for from money the college receives through redevelopment money and rent from the U.S. Forest Service.

And it is state money that would help LTCC achieve what it wants for the next decade. Kindred Murillo, college president, said the goal is to double what taxpayers approve through matching dollars from the state.

Today when the state gives money for facilities it expects the college to come up with half of the funds for the project.

LTCC is going forward with plans to make improvements. It has made the short list with the state for a remodel for efficiency grant. The bond money would provide the needed matching funds. The plan is to modernize the science lab, upgrade technology on campus and make energy upgrades.

LEED certified buildings were brought up at last week's visioning session, which points to the community already wanting the college to be a leader in energy efficiency.

The college has also asked the state for money to build a public safety training facility. This would go close to where the U.S. Forest Service offices are. The college is also talking to city officials about this project because it could include a fire station. (The city has long wanted to update the outdated station across from South Tahoe Middle School.) It's also possible the college site could be a command center in the event of a major emergency like the Angora Fire.

Murillo would like part of the safety piece to also include another exit point in case of an emergency. This might be via South Tahoe Public Utility District. Putting in automatic door locks and being able to communicate with every classroom in the event of an emergency are other foreseeable improvements. So are cameras in the parking lot.

Other facilities the college would like to construct include residential housing for students. A public-private partnership is possible.

An environmental science building could have multiple uses – including being a university center for a four-year program.

Another upgrade would be the possibility of creating an early childhood development center that could incorporate the Child Development Center on campus with Tahoe Parents Nursery

School.

While a decision has not been made, the bond counsel on Tuesday touted the option of going the route where only 55 percent of the voters need to say yes. More requirements come with that type of bond compared to the usual two-thirds needed for a tax measure, but it can also be easier to pass.

Truckee man arrested in death of motorcyclist

By Bill Lindelof, Sacramento Bee

The Sacramento County Coroner's office has released the name of a motorcyclist killed Monday when a car pulled in front of him on Greenback Lane near the entrance to Negro Bar State Park.

The motorcyclist was identified as 41-year-old Shane Curtis Clark. His hometown was not available.

Folsom police determined that the driver of the car, Kaman Tate Hobbs, 23, of Truckee was operating his vehicle while in possession of a suspended California drivers license. Also, Hobbs' young son was in the vehicle and not properly restrained.

Read the whole story

Obama lenient with Indian gaming

By Julie Bykowicz, Bloomberg

As President Obama began his first term in January 2009, an Arizona Indian tribe saw a long-awaited opportunity to jumpstart a plan to build a 225,000-square-foot casino not far from the Cardinals' football stadium.

Five years earlier, through a special company, the Tohono O'odham Nation purchased land outside Phoenix, 160 miles north of the tribe's Sells city headquarters on its Tucson-area reservation. Now, having waited out a freeze on casino construction on property distant from a tribe's reservation by President George W. Bush's administration, it submitted the project to Obama's U.S. Department of the Interior – eight days after Inauguration Day.

Tohono found this White House friendlier. The tribe won initial federal approval and then overcame lawsuits filed by state and local officials and competing tribes. There's one last obstacle: Congressional legislation that would scuttle the project.

The U.S. House last week approved the legislation, and it now moves to the Senate.

"The Bush administration would not have gone in this direction," said Representative Trent Franks, an Arizona Republican who sponsored the bill. "Obama is trying to gain favor with tribal entities. They seem to believe that all of the negatives associated with gambling are subordinate to the political advantage that they believe it brings them by approving these projects."

Read the whole story

Climate change scientists on the spot

By Monte Morin, Los Angeles Times

It's a climate puzzle that has vexed scientists for more than a decade and added fuel to the arguments of those who insist man-made global warming is a myth.

Since just before the start of the 21st century, the Earth's average global surface temperature has failed to rise despite soaring levels of heat-trapping greenhouse gases and years of dire warnings from environmental advocates.

Now, as scientists with the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change gather in Sweden this week to approve portions of the IPCC's fifth assessment report, they are finding themselves pressured to explain this glaring discrepancy.

The panel, a United Nations creation that shared the 2007 Nobel Peace Prize with Al Gore, hopes to brief world leaders on the current state of climate science in a clear, unified voice. However, experts inside and outside the process say members probably will engage in heated debate over the causes and significance of the so-called global warming hiatus.

"It's contentious," said IPCC panelist Shang-Ping Xie, a professor of climate science at the Scripps Institution of Oceanography at UC San Diego. "The stakes have been raised by various people, especially the skeptics."

Though scientists don't have any firm answers, they do have multiple theories. Xie has argued that the hiatus is the result of heat absorption by the Pacific Ocean – a little-

understood, naturally occurring process that repeats itself every few decades. Xie and his colleagues presented the idea in a study published last month in the prestigious journal Nature.

Read the whole story

Gaming Expo lacking on innovation

By Ed Komenda, Las Vegas Sun

Call it the year of movie-themed moneymakers.

Gambling insiders expect this year's Global Gaming Expo to be light on breakthroughs but heavy on pop culture. The convention's most-anticipated games this year center around popular movies and pop stars of the last century.

And while the subjects are wildly popular, analysts say manufacturers' growing reliance on such a tried-and-true formula dampens investors' interest in the industry.

"The show is becoming a little less mandatory," said Chad Beynon, an analyst with Macquarie Research in Manhattan. "Now, so many of the companies are coming up with products similar to their peers."

G2E opened today at the Las Vegas Sands Convention Center.

Read the whole story

Crews go to great lengths to save Rim Fire big trees

By Diana Marcum, Los Angeles Times

YOSEMITE NATIONAL PARK – Each afternoon the fire's thunderous plume rose.

At night, helicopter crews at the Crane Flat lookout watched a line of orange burning across the horizon. The line kept drawing closer.

By the last week of August, every effort to halt the Rim fire before it moved deeper into the national park had failed. The blaze now had a clear path to the Tuolumne and Merced groves of giant sequoia, and the Rockefeller grove, one of the last stands of giant sugar pine untouched by logging.

On Aug. 30, a Friday, a group of firefighters gathered at the lookout to launch a risky plan to protect some of Earth's oldest and largest living organisms.

Even Ben Jacobs, the division commander, was nervous.

Jacobs, 55, had fought wildfires and managed prescribed burns at Sequoia Kings Canyon National Park. But he had seen crews take chances earlier in the week trying to save family camps and businesses. If they'd gambled for buildings, what would they do for living giants?

He also worried that if crews lost control of the backfires they were about to ignite, flames could spread for miles, even as far as the Merced River, west of the park's famous valley.

"Listen," he said. "Nobody wants to be the guy who burned down

Yosemite.”

Read the whole story

Contentious Sierra land battle ends

By Jane Braxton Little, Sacramento Bee

SUSANVILLE – Dyer Mountain, the site of a planned, controversial four-season resort near Lake Almanor since 1999, is instead heading toward a future of timber production and harvesting.



This is a rendering of what Dyer Mountain was going to become. Artwork/Vita Planning & Landscape Architecture

Federal Bankruptcy Judge Thomas E. Carlson approved the sale of 7,000 acres proposed for development to Sierra Pacific Industries, an Anderson-based forest products company.

Once the sale has been completed, SPI will acquire the land

near Westwood for \$17.2 million, according to bankruptcy court documents.

Mark Pawlicki, an SPI spokesman, said the timber company has no interest in pursuing the proposed development, which included ski facilities, golf courses, 600,000 square feet of commercial space and more than 4,000 residential units.

The Dyer Mountain project is one of the most contentious and protracted land use battles in the Sierra Nevada.

Read the whole story