

Bad air quality lingers in basin, western Nevada

Updated 2:25pm:

A dense smoke advisory is in effect for until 5pm Thursday for the greater Lake Tahoe area and the Carson Valley.

The National Weather Service in Reno is discouraging people in the basin, Alpine, Douglas and northern Mono counties from outdoor activities. Visibility is expected to be less than 3 miles and the air quality is expected to get worse as the day goes on.

Lake Tahoe Unified School District officials are monitoring the air throughout the day to determine if students, who returned to school on Monday, should be outside for recess and if athletes should be practicing outdoors.

The heavy smoke is coming from the Rim Fire, which is burning near Yosemite National Park. It has burned 179,481 acres and is 20 percent contained. It is the largest fire on record to burn in the Sierra Nevada and the sixth largest in California's history. At least two dozen structures have been destroyed. The reservoir that provides drinking water for San Francisco remains in jeopardy.

The American Fire burning near Foresthill is almost fully contained. Full containment is expected Thursday – three days sooner than originally predicted.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

El Dorado County, union close to agreement

By Kathryn Reed

What was going to be a protest during today's El Dorado County Board of Supervisors is now expected to be more of an employee rally.

This is because labor negotiations suddenly took a turn for the better on Monday.

"We are cautiously optimistic we are going to be able to reach a settlement that is fair and equitable to everyone," Richard Boyd, senior business agent for Local 1, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

The nearly 800-strong Local 1 has been negotiating with the county since February to come up with a contract. The bargaining unit has been working without a contract since June 30 when the previous three-year contract expired. An unfair labor practice charge was filed with the Public Employees Relations Board.

Boyd said the county has been negotiating in bad faith up until Aug. 26 and that it had violated various bargaining rules, which is why the charge was filed with PERB.

"Regarding the unfair labor practice grievance filed by Local 1, the county is aware of the claim. The claim is baseless and we find it surprising given the progress that the parties are making at the bargaining table," Terri Daly, the county's chief administrative officer, told *Lake Tahoe News* on Aug. 26.

Boyd believes filing the charge spurred the county to come to the table Monday with a more reasonable offer. That offer has not been made public. The union and county are slated to sit down again Sept. 9.

The union represents almost all county employees except for sworn officers and management.

In the contract that expired nearly two months ago no raises were given and the big item was that employees had to pay 3 percent into their retirement via the Public Employee Retirement System.

Now Local 1 is asking for a four-year contract with wage increases each year starting with 5 percent this fiscal year and 3 percent each of the subsequent years.

It's not that county isn't giving raises, but they are for higher ups. Kelly Webb, interim information technology director, went from step 3 on the pay scale to step 4 on July 23, and then to step 5 on Aug. 6. The electeds approved these raises on 5-0 votes.

On July 31 the rate of pay for the human resources director was \$124,821. CAO Daly asked for it to be bumped to \$157,810 and the supervisors said OK on Aug. 1. Then Daly hired a friend of hers for that position.

On today's agenda is an item talking about hiring a communications specialist at \$100,000, even though it's not in the budget.

This chart details who the top salary earners are in El Dorado County.

A class and compensation study is also something the union wants.

"The county has agreed they are not competitive and because they are not competitive they have monumental recruitment and retention problems," Boyd said.

What the union is upset about is what it calls cherry picking individuals for raises – like the IT and HR directors.

“For us, it gets down to a justice and fairness argument,” Boyd said.

4.2 temblor hits near Reno

People as far away as Folsom said they felt the 4.2 earthquake that hit Northern Nevada on Monday night.

The U.S. Geological Survey said the temblor hit about two miles northeast of Spanish Springs at 5:51pm Aug. 26.

No damage has been reported.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Baby boomers may lack caregivers in old age

By Walter Hamilton, Los Angeles Times

Baby boomers may have no one to care for them in their old age.

Shifting demographics mean that aging boomers will have fewer friends and family members to take care of them as they get into their 80s, according to a new study by AARP.

In other words, even though you may be supporting your own elderly parents, the chances of someone being there for you are numerically diminished.

Read the whole story

Smoke dissipates; American Fire meeting set

Smoke continues to be a problem in some parts of Tahoe and the surrounding area. While the South Shore awoke to blue skies on Monday, the Woodfords area was smoky.

Smoke from the Rim Fire is now mostly going south of the Lake Tahoe Basin.

The Rim Fire near Yosemite is at 15 percent containment, having burned 149,780 acres. It is the 13th largest fire in California's history.

There will be a community meeting in Foresthill on Aug. 26 at 7pm regarding the American Fire. The meeting is at the Veterans Memorial Hall, 24601 Harrison St.

The fire is 81 percent contained. It has burned 24,408 acres.

Part of the Tahoe National Forest remains closed.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Calif., Nev. recommit to

focus on Tahoe fire issues

By Kathryn Reed

“With all of the major fires burning across California, and the corresponding inundation of smoke in the Tahoe basin, complacency is at an all time low again.”

And that has Gareth Harris, chief of Lake Valley Fire Protection District, worried. His colleagues throughout the Lake Tahoe Basin are worried as well.

Most people in the firefighting world would like to see more resources devoted to prevention because that is more effective in terms of manpower, resources and forest health compared to suppressing a fire once it has ignited.

Even though the South Shore lost 254 houses in June 2007 to the Angora Fire, it has left people questioning why the U.S. Forest Service has embarked on a multi-year project to thin 10,000 acres here.

While the Forest Service’s forest, fuels and fire management policies have changed through the years with much debate and criticism, fire officials in other agencies are on board with the belief that prevention is key. Political figures agree.



Govs. Jerry Brown, left, and Brian Sandoval at the Aug. 19 Lake Tahoe Environmental

Summit. Photo/Kathryn Reed

Govs. Jerry Brown and Brian Sandoval re-upped that commitment a week ago before the Lake Tahoe Environmental Summit at Sand Harbor. A bi-state fire commission was convened in 2008 after the Angora Fire to look into what could be done to prevent another such devastating fire in the basin. Many of the findings are in place.

With the California and Nevada governors signing the proclamation, it reaffirmed the states' commitment to recognizing the importance of fire prevention, and the effects a fire could have on the environment and economy of Tahoe.

Most of the basin's fire chiefs were in the front row at the summit. And while people like Sen. Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif., each year point to the need for a healthy forest, those that appropriate money to make that happen aren't always in agreement, nor are individuals in the basin doing what they can via defensible space techniques.

Keeping fire issues in the front of people's minds is what fire officials hope is one of the outcomes of the proclamation.

"It's important because it refocuses and keeps awareness of the Tahoe basin and the needs we have to protect our resources and our jewel here," Eric Guevin with Tahoe Douglas Fire Protection District said of the agreement. "Some of that is political and some of that is economic. It drives the economic engine that keeps these prevention programs in place so we can do much more."

Money is an ongoing concern. Southern Nevada Public Lands Management Act money is drying up. And it's not cheap to do these projects.

In fiscal year 2012-13, the USFS spent almost \$800,000 on hazardous fuel reduction projects on nonfederal lands, about

\$500,000 went to residents and landowners through the California Fire Safe Council, and approximately \$1.67 million was given to South Tahoe Public Utility District to improve water systems for fire protection.

“One of the biggest issues which a number of the points in the proclamation address is funding for fuel reduction projects. We have the crews ready to work, we have the plan in place, we have regulatory approval, we just need sustainable funding sources in order to get the fuels reduction work done. Reauthorization of the Lake Tahoe Restoration Act would represent a substantial move in the right direction,” Harris told *Lake Tahoe News*.

USFS, El Dorado sheriff pledge to work together

By Cathy Locke, Sacramento Bee

Anticipating an influx of visitors over the Labor Day weekend, the El Dorado County sheriff and U.S. Forest Service officials seek to assure the public that, despite recent tensions between their agencies, they are working together to ensure public safety and protect natural resources.

In June, Sheriff John D’Agostini announced that he was suspending the authority of Forest Service officers to enforce state laws in the county. A sheriff’s office spokesman said D’Agostini had received complaints from citizens about the officers.

The suspension took effect July 22, a week before Laurence Crabtree assumed the post of forest supervisor for the

Eldorado National Forest.

D'Agostini announced last week that he had met with Crabtree and Capt. Frank Aguilar of Forest Service law enforcement to get acquainted and discuss issues.

Crabtree, in a telephone interview, said he has worked in many places where peace officer authority was not granted to Forest Service officers.

Read the whole story

Smoke slowly being blown out of Tahoe

While the American Fire burning near Foresthill is at 78 percent containment, the Rim Fire near Yosemite is at 7 percent containment.

Both are continuing to bring smoke into the Lake Tahoe Basin, Truckee and western Nevada. Winds helped blow some of the smoke out of the basin on Saturday, but the smell remains this morning even though there is more blue sky compared to the last few days.

A dense smoke advisory from the National Weather Service in Reno remains in effect until 8pm Aug. 25 for the basin and points east, including parts of Alpine County. A lake wind advisory is in effect for the same time period

The American Fire has burned 24,135 acres. Crews are being released to go fight other fires as full containment is expected Sept. 1.

The Rim Fire is at 133,980 acres.

“The Rim incident is expected to continue to exhibit very large fire growth due to extremely dry fuels and inaccessible terrain. Rapid fire growth and extreme fire behavior are hampering suppression efforts,” fire officials said.

Nearly 5,000 structures remain threatened.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Report: High school students not ready for college

By Anita Hofschneider, Wall Street Journal

First, the bad news: Nearly 75 percent of 2013 high school graduates who took the ACT college readiness exam aren't fully prepared for college, according to a report by the organization that administers the test.

Now, the (moderately) good: Student performance has improved slightly since 2009, when just 23 percent of high school graduates tested met all four of the exam's benchmarks for college readiness, compared with 26 percent this year.

The report, out Wednesday from the ACT, shows that American high school students are making slow progress toward college readiness and raises concerns about whether they'll have the skills necessary to fill jobs in the future, said Jon Erickson, president of educational division of the ACT.

More than half of all 2013 high school graduates in the U.S. took the exam, which assesses proficiency in English, reading,

math and science.

Read the whole story

Placer County sets record with TOT collections

The Tahoe area of Placer County is reporting increases in hotel and sales taxes.

Revenues from transient occupancy tax are up approximately \$1.6 million over the previous year, a 15 percent increase. Sales tax for the winter quarter (January, February, March) of 2013 is up a 22.5 percent over the previous year.

Despite a fourth quarter where TOT revenues were actually down, overall, the county had a banner year. TOT for fiscal year 2012-13 for the Tahoe area was \$11,290,565; while it was \$9,828,896 the previous year. This represents the largest TOT collections in Placer County history. The highest recorded collection period was FY 2010-11, at \$10,504,078 countywide, \$10,137,704 in the Tahoe area.