

Flash flood watch issued for Lake Tahoe

A flash flood watch has been issued for the Lake Tahoe Basin from 2-10pm today.

The National Weather Service in Reno says Truckee, Reno, Carson City and the Carson Valley are also under the same watch for Aug. 21.

Thunderstorms like the one that rolled through South Lake Tahoe on Aug. 20 will return. That storm dumped nickel-size hail that covered city streets to make it look like it had snowed in mid-August.

Hail 1-inch in diameter could fall today. Waves on Lake Tahoe may reach 3 feet.

Recent wildfire burn scars and locations near steep terrain are prone to flash flooding and debris flows. Flooding of streets and intersections in urban areas with poor drainage may also occur, warns the Weather Service.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Human-caused American Fire still growing

Tahoe National Forest officials believe a person started the 15,738-acre American Fire, but what's not known is if it was deliberately set.

Forest Supervisor Tom Quinn at a public meeting on Tuesday said a late model pickup was in the area and two men were hitchhiking out of the area. The investigation is ongoing.

The blaze is 63 percent contained, with full containment expected on Sept. 1.

On the extreme south end, firefighters will begin building a very steep hand line today, which descends to the river. The west side of the fire was relatively inactive. Mop-up is occurring in this area, which involves checking the interior of the fire.

The fire is burning in steep terrain about 10 miles from the town of Foresthill. Smoke continues to mar the air in the Placerville, Truckee and Reno areas.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Santiago travels extensively on taxpayers' dime

By Kathryn Reed

El Dorado County Supervisor Norma Santiago likes to travel – at least based on the expenses she accrues.

For the 2012-13 fiscal year, Santiago had \$12,755.99 worth of travel expenses that the county reimbursed her for.

The next highest figure was \$1,509.33. That was for Supervisor Ron Mikulaco. However, only \$637.80 was accrued after he was sworn in. He and Supervisor Brian Veerkamp have expenses for a conference that first-time supervisors attend after being

elected but before being seated.

But these figures don't necessarily reflect anyone's total travel bills. Many elected officials sit on other boards where those agencies would foot the bill. And then sometimes special interest groups pick up some of the costs.



Norma Santiago travels more than any other El Dorado County supervisor.
Photo/Kathryn Reed

The latter was the case for Santiago when she went on a trip in July 2012 to Santa Fe, N.M. Several West Slope chambers of commerce went to the Urban to Rural Connection conference. The cost was \$2,100 per person just for the four-day seminar. On documentation from the July 30, 2013, Board of Supervisors meeting handwritten is "\$1,000 previously paid by 3rd party sponsor."

But a sponsor or any monetary gift must be documented on what's called Form 700. Santiago has not done so.

Supervisor Ray Nutting had a criminal complaint filed against him by the district attorney in part for not filing a Form 700 for money he received. District Attorney Vern Pierson did not return a phone call.

Santiago was not available for comment.

In addition to the questionable funds, Santiago violated

county policy by asking for reimbursement after the fact and then months after the trip occurred.

On the July 30 Board of Supervisors' consent agenda was an item to reimburse Santiago for her July 2012 trip to Santa Fe and her March 2013 trip to the National Association of Counties meeting in Washington, D.C. The board approved them 5-0.

The 2013 trip had been preapproved by the board, while the 2012 one had not.

Santiago traveled on the county's dime to Washington a month later for the Capitol-to-Capitol event. That cost \$4,104.10.

Judi McCallum, Santiago's assistant, defended her boss, saying that she is the most sought after supervisor in El Dorado County for study missions, especially economic ones.

"They are excited to have Norma along. It translates to opportunities and action here," McCallum told *Lake Tahoe News*.

She added, "Sometimes access is everything and she is always knocking on doors."

McCallum pointed out how access helped Meyers keep its speed limit below what Caltrans originally wanted it raised to.

But something like that would require a phone call, maybe a trip to Marysville where the Caltrans district office is, or at best a trip to Sacramento. It really had nothing to do with spending taxpayer dollars, but more to do with Santiago just doing her job as a county supervisor.

McCallum said Santiago has been able to bring back dollars to the county – not just spend them. But she did not have specifics to share.

Agents tracking down illegal guns in Calif.

By Richard Gonzales, NPR

In California, officials are ramping up a unique program that identifies and seizes guns from people who are prohibited from keeping them. Under state law, a legally registered gun owner loses the right to own a firearm when he or she is convicted of a crime or becomes mentally ill.

Last year, state agents seized nearly 2,000 firearms, but implementing the gun seizure program is a painstaking job. In a recent operation, a caravan of four unmarked trucks traversed the bedroom communities of San Francisco's East Bay. The trucks carry nine state agents wearing bulletproof vests and armed with .40-caliber Glock pistols and Tasers. They'll spend the next six hours looking for illegal guns, explains Special Agent Kisu Yo of the California Department of Justice.

Yo's team will visit the homes of 11 people who are considered Armed and Prohibited Persons, people on the so-called APPs list. They are all people who at one time purchased firearms legally, but have since run afoul of the law, Yo says. "Such as maybe a felony conviction, mental health commitment, they received a restraining order, domestic violence restraining order – some type of a misdemeanor conviction that prohibits them from possessing firearms."

Beginning In 2007, California officials began collecting names from court records, medical facilities and lists of known or wanted criminals, then cross-referenced them against the federal instant criminal background check system for gun-buyers. The list is updated every day.

Read the whole story

Poll: Half of Californians have difficulty paying health insurance

By David Siders, Sacramento Bee

Half of California voters say they are paying more for health care than they were a year ago, and the same percentage of voters say their health care costs are hard to afford, according to a new Field Poll.

Fifty percent of California voters say the amount they pay for their family's health care has increased in the past year, while 41 percent of voters say they are paying about the same, according to the poll. Just 5 percent of registered voters say their health care costs declined.

The poll, sponsored by the nonprofit California Wellness Foundation, comes as the state prepares for major changes under the federal health care overhaul next year, including a requirement that nearly all Americans have health insurance or pay a penalty.

Read the whole story

Parolee accused of skinning raccoon in S. Tahoe

A parolee and registered sex offender was arrested Monday in South Lake Tahoe with blood on his hands from allegedly skinning a raccoon in the middle of town.

Police officers said Kevin Burroughs, 37, ran from them when they approached him in the city owned open lot across from Sno-Flake Drive-In on Harrison Avenue.



Kevin
Burroughs

Burroughs ran, but was subsequently caught at the baseball fields next to South Tahoe Middle School.

The knife has not been recovered.

The dead raccoon was disposed of by Lake Tahoe Wildlife Care.

Burroughs had a felony warrant for being a parolee at-large.

He was booked on a Fish and Wildlife Department charge of possessing a creature unlawfully taken, and penal code charges of resisting arrest, failing to register as a sex offender, a sex registrant on school grounds and parolee at-large.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Fire damages Lake Tahoe Pizza Company



Fire damages Lake Tahoe Pizza Company in South Lake Tahoe. Photo/LTN

Men were on the roof of Lake Tahoe Pizza Company in South Lake Tahoe this morning assessing the damage from an overnight fire.

The doors to the restaurant were covered with caution tape on Aug. 20 and no one could be reached for comment.

Lake Tahoe fire officials said the blaze started at 11:09pm Monday. The fire was contained to the attic area. The extent of the damage is unknown.

The cause of the fire is still under investigation.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Full containment of American Fire likely Sept. 1

More than half of the American Fire burning in the Tahoe National Forest is contained.

Firefighters expect to have the fire fully contained on Sept. 1. It has burned 14,822 acres in rugged terrain near Foresthill.

Efforts have held the fire in place along Deadwood Ridge and the Foresthill Divide Road on the western flank of the fire. The fire remains active on the eastern and southern ends.

Cloud cover on Monday helped firefighters, but a red flag warning remains in effect until 11pm Wednesday.

The cause of the fire is still under investigation.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Climate change dominates Tahoe summit talks

By Kathryn Reed

INCLINE VILLAGE – Under skies as clear as the near shore, nearly 700 people gathered Monday at Sand Harbor for what was essentially a bipartisan rally to keep protecting Lake Tahoe.

Former Vice President Al Gore returned to the Lake Tahoe Environmental Summit after having launched the initial one in 1997 with then President Bill Clinton.



Former Vice President Al Gore talks climate change Aug. 19 at the Lake Tahoe Environmental Summit. Photo/Kathryn Reed

While speaker after speaker touted how the lake is clearer – having improved 11 feet since the first summit – what was not addressed was the near shore. Much of Tahoe's shoreline is murky. And the smoke in the air from the American Fire that is 30 miles away was adding to the degradation as particles filtered down.

Sudeep Chandra, professor at UNR, was on Capitol Public Radio the morning of the summit. He spoke of how clarity is measured in the middle of the lake, not at the water's edge.

He told CPR the health of the near shore has declined dramatically in the last 15 years.

"We are also talking about the dramatic loss of biodiversity at the bottom of the lake," Chandra told CPR. "It could be an early warning sign for the overall health of the lake."

He added, "We don't have good monitoring for the near shore."

Chandra told the radio station there has been a 72 percent decline of all native species on the bottom of Lake Tahoe. Reasons are related to climate change, less light coming through and more invasive species in the lake.

Climate and biological related projects are planned to get a better handle on the near shore problems.

He and others believe climate change is here to stay. And Gore believes it can be stopped.

"Today we will put 90 million tons of global warming pollution into the atmosphere as though it's an open sewer," Gore told the audience of nearly 700. (Usually a couple hundred people attend these summits.) "Here in Lake Tahoe an increase in air temperature means more precipitation that falls as rain and not snow. Snowsports are threatened. Ski resorts all over the world are threatened."

He noted that the centerpiece of Lake Tahoe's economy is tourism and that without snow and a pristine lake, that economy evaporates along with the snow and clarity.

Scientists predict the air temperature in the basin could increase by as much as 10 degrees in this century.

Gore said as temps increase in the West the number of wildfires will dramatically rise.

"Eleven states are fighting 35 gigantic fires as we meet here today," he said.

While Gore said Tahoe should invite the world for a summit to show what it is doing, he never offered solutions for global warming. Nor did anyone else.

What the senators and governors from California and Nevada all pledged was to work together and keep spending money for the sake of Lake Tahoe. Nearly \$2 billion has been spent in 15 years on projects to improve Lake Tahoe's clarity, with another \$415 million sought through the Lake Tahoe Restoration Act.

Spate of bear attacks on humans

By CNN

Bears rarely attack humans unless they feel threatened or territorial. But a 12-year-old girl jogging in Michigan is among the latest victims in a spate of bear attacks that has left seven people mauled in five states since Thursday.

Wildlife officials are running tests on a bear they killed to see if it's the same one that mauled Abby Wetherell on Thursday evening. The girl from Cadillac, Mich., was out on her nightly jog when she was ambushed by a black bear.

"On her way back this time, a bear just kind of came out of nowhere and attacked her from behind, knocked her to the ground," her mother, Elizabeth Wetherell, told CNN affiliate WXMI.

Abby tried to get up, but the bear kept charging.

"At that point, she didn't know what to do because she had been injured severely and couldn't get up, so she decided ... to just lay there and play dead."

Authorities also reported attacks in Alaska, Colorado, Wyoming and Idaho.

The Michigan incident was an anomaly, officials said.

Read the whole story