Washoe County, TRPA change permitting process

Washoe County and the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency are working to streamline project permitting for their customers.

People working on projects in the Washoe County portion of the Tahoe basin must now submit requests directly to TRPA planners.

Washoe County will continue to issue building permits and to provide the standard project review required under International Building Codes. Washoe County and TRPA are working together on this permitting transition.

Starting this month TRPA will make a planner available one day a week at Washoe County's Incline Community Center to accept and review project applications for conformance with TRPA regulations that apply to residential additions and modifications, new construction of single-family and multi-family residential structures, commercial projects, and qualified-exempt residential activities.

Project applications submitted to Washoe County prior to Dec. 5, 2017, will go through the process with Washoe County handling the review and will not have an interruption in their approval process. TRPA permit reviews are done on a first-come, first-served basis.

Questions about TRPA permit applications and regulations can be directed to Aly Borawski at 775.589.5229 or aborawski@trpa.org.

Poison at Truckee golf course nearly kills family pet

By Linda Fine Conaboy

Late fall was an unfortunate time for Bob, a Bernese Mountain dog. He didn’t know that big danger prowled as he cavorted near the golf course close to his family’s home at Schaffer’s Mill in Truckee. Bob was less than a year old when he happened upon, and ingested, zinc phosphide, a poison so lethal that it requires multiple permits just to have it in possession.

It’s generally used to kill rodents—that’s what Schaffer’s Mill Golf Course had in mind. Like many other golf courses, its use is just business as usual to get rid of varmints who burrow and plow the greens pursuing for food and making homes for themselves.

Bob is a well-loved member of the Daniel family. According to Bob’s master, Mike Daniel, on this fateful day early in November, Bob picked up a scent and was off in search of something known only to him. Along the way, he found and ingested the poison, and the rest of the story has become an all too familiar saga in the war against burrowing pests. Bob became seriously ill, hovering near death for several days.



Two months after ingesting poison, Bob is still on the mend. Photo/Mike Daniel

When Daniel realized how sick Bob was, he started a **GoFundMe account** to help defray the nearly $12,000 it would take to nurse Bob back to health. As it turns out, to date, close to $3,500 has been donated for Bob's cause.

According to Daniel's GoFundMe page, Bob was treated by internal specialists, receiving plasma infusions and untold numbers of additional medications. At one point, as the family prepared for the worst, Bob started to improve, ever so slightly and miraculously was able to go home. He's now known as Bionic Bob by the veterinarians who treated him.

In mid-December, Daniel told Lake Tahoe News that Bob was doing well at home, although he continues to need additional lab work. "He drained my entire back account," Daniel reported. "The bills are still going up, not to mention the travel costs." He added that to his knowledge, at least one other dog was harmed, not to mention that many wild animals may also have ingested the poison.

"Our main goal is to stop Schaffer's Mill Golf Course from

using this pesticide. It’s apparent that other animals are eating it,” he said, in reference to pictures of tracks leading to and from the site of the scattered pesticide pellets on the ground.

“We live in a place that is extremely environmentally conscious and to be using this stuff that is potentially harming our wildlife is not good. The wildlife in the area don’t deserve this all in the name of gophers,” Daniel said.

At Lake Tahoe and Truckee, not much golf is played this time of year, but winter’s cold doesn’t keep pesky critters, like voles and gophers, from going about their daily lives. It’s just that when the ground is covered with snow, no one really knows what they’re up to.

Whether it’s your lawn, someone else’s lawn or a golf course, when the snow melts, the evidence presents itself—vole trails of freshly milled earth loop around the grass looking like a drunken waiter dribbling hot chocolate on his way to the kitchen—and then there’s the gopher holes, not to mention those fuzzy creatures called marmots scurrying around always on the prowl in search of their next ration of chow.

The internet is fraught with vendors offering traps, poison and bait to ward off these pests; judging from the plethora of ads, lawn owners need not suffer holey or roughed-up lawns; there are a multitude of ways to get rid of the culprits.

But in the case of Schaffer’s Mill, the poison of choice is highly lethal and not selective in who or what it may kill.



The poison used for rodents at the Truckee golf course. Photo/Mike Daniel

According to Joshua Huntsinger, Placer County agricultural commissioner, his office is responsible for the regulation and the use of poisons such as zinc phosphide, an inorganic compound that combines phosphorous with zinc and is used for rodent bait.

The National Pesticide Information Center states that when an animal eats the substance, the acid in the animal's stomach turns it into phosphine, a highly toxic gas. The phosphine then crosses into the body's cells and stops the cells from producing energy, causing them to die. It affects all cells, but targets specifically those in the heart, lungs and liver.

It's been used in the U.S. for rodent bait since 1947 and is made to ensure that it will attract pests such as gophers, ground squirrels and field mice.

Some of the signs of zinc phosphide poisoning include headache, dizziness, vomiting, difficulty breathing as well as potential liver and kidney failure, convulsions and delirium. It affects animals the same way it does humans.

Because it is a highly toxic substance California closely regulates it.

"Schaffer's Mill has a restricted materials permit,"

Huntsinger told Lake Tahoe News, adding that in addition to the permit, two other restrictions on users are in place: 1) the materials must be used by a certified pesticide applicator, or be supervised by a certified applicator, and 2) prior to application, the permit holder must file a notice of intent.

“It’s site specific and permits are evaluated for appropriateness,” said Huntsinger. “If it’s a spray, we would check the weather and maybe disallow it.”

In addition, the methodology on the label must be strictly followed, the application rate is carefully spelled out and should a carcass be discovered, it must be quickly disposed of to eliminate spread of the poison.

In general, Huntsinger said, standards of care—was it applied in a careful and specific manner under proper conditions to avoid contamination—are stringently enforced.

“This can’t be used if persons, animals or property may be damaged,” he said. “An applicator shall not make or continue application if there is a reasonable possibility of non-targeted animals [being harmed].”

Huntsinger said he’s aware of the complaint that was made and that his office is investigating whether a dog was actually harmed. “We need to satisfy all aspects,” he said.

“Did a violation really occur? Maybe the golf course did everything right. Maybe the dog’s owner was negligent. If there is a complaint about affected wildlife, we would investigate it. In this case, wildlife could have been involved.”

Fast forward to late December, at the investigation’s conclusion when Huntsinger contacted Lake Tahoe News to deliver the outcome of the investigation.

It was concluded, he said, that although Schaffer's Mill does have the necessary permit in hand and does have a certified person to apply the poison, they failed to file a notice of intent in a timely manner.

In addition, "It (zinc phosphide) was lying on the surface and it was ingested by one or two dogs. The question is, did Schaffer's Mill follow the rules and the label? Were there violations of the California law and regulations?"

Of the outcome of the investigation, Huntsinger said his office was unable to evaluate the pesticide for appropriateness or weather conditions. "In general, with restricted material, wind is not an issue. We're more worried about secondary poisoning. Is there a carnivore in danger?"

He added that the investigation concluded that the applicator complied with the label instructions at the rate of 1 teaspoon per burrow, placed inside the burrow and covered up.

"Rodents evidently pushed some of the bait on to the surface, but the golf course did monitor for dead rodents and bait on the surface. They did comply with the label's directions," Huntsinger said.

It was concluded that although dogs are prohibited on the golf course, Schaffer's Mill failed to enforce the prohibition. "The golf course knows dogs walk on the golf cart path. In this case, the dog was off leash, which is illegal in Placer County, and it strayed to an area where it shouldn't have been. Even though the golf course made an effort to do due diligence, it was the dog owner's negligence," Huntsinger said. "The bottom line in the case revealed one violation of the California Code of Regulations. But the larger issue is that the golf course appears not to be at fault. They did take specific steps to keep the bait out of the reach of dogs.

"We take it seriously when people don't comply. Our typical response is to issue administrative civil penalties when

violations of this nature are documented."

As of today, no judgment has been issued; however, Huntsinger said his agency is required to take action.

"Although we haven't issued anything yet, typically, this is a Class B violation carrying a fine of between $250 and $1,000. It may be many months before anything is actually resolved, even though action will be taken against Schaffer's Mill," Huntsinger said.

Repeated calls to Schaffer's Mill have gone unheeded, although Lake Tahoe News spoke with Brent Haygarth, the organization's general manager, who said he would prepare a statement for Lake Tahoe News addressing the situation.

No statement has been forthcoming.

There are several questions that come to mind regarding the future use of zinc phosphide—mainly, will Schaffer's Mill continue to use the stuff? Do they feel a responsibility for the injured animals and do they worry about other wild creatures that may have also been harmed or killed?

According to Daniel, both Lahontan Golf Course and Martis Camp Golf Course have suspended use of the substance, but calls to course managers to verify this have not been returned.

U.S. to crack down on legal marijuana



Stores like NuLeaf in Incline Village could be targeted by the feds. Photo Copyright 2018 Carolyn E. Wright

By Kevin Johnson and Trevor Hughes, USA Today

WASHINGTON – As part of a crackdown on legal marijuana, the Justice Department is set to roll back an Obama administration policy to not challenge state laws that allow people to use pot for medical and recreational uses an official familiar with matter said Thursday.

The move represents a dramatic shift in marijuana enforcement policy. The official, who is not authorized to comment publicly ahead of a formal announcement, said details of the new policy to reverse a 2013 Obama administration directive of non-interference would be outlined later Thursday.

Read the whole story

VHR moratorium in Tahoe basin before EDC supes

El Dorado County may enact an ordinance placing a moratorium on vacation home rentals in the Lake Tahoe Basin.

The agenda for the Board of Supervisors' Jan. 9 meeting in Placerville includes the proposal for such an urgency ordinance. It would mean no more VHR permits for the unincorporated portions of the county located within the Lake Tahoe Basin.

The justification for the ordinance is to "preserve public peace, health or safety."

If the board decides to go this route, the first reading of the ordinance would be scheduled for Jan. 23. It will require a four-fifths vote.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

West may never look the same after wildfires

By Kurtis Alexander, San Francisco Chronicle

As hotter and bigger fires blaze through the West and yet another year passes with a disastrous toll, America's wildlands are having a harder time bouncing back. Some spots,

from the singed valleys of Wine Country to the steep slopes of the Sierra, may never look the same.

The fiercer fires are killing more of the vegetation needed to provide seeds for regrowth, and scientists are learning that even when new trees sprout, many are struggling with the warmer and more extreme weather wrought by climate change.

While wildfires have historically benefited the natural landscape, cycling soil nutrients and clearing space for new plants, for example, scientists say more burned areas are likely to end up devoid of trees and populated instead with weeds and grasses. This new vegetation is even likelier to burn, setting in place a vicious cycle of only more fire and less forest.

Read the whole story

Calif. lawmakers not done with housing legislation

By Angela Hart, Sacramento Bee

California lawmakers are preparing new housing legislation this week, just months after Democrats in both houses pushed through the biggest legislative package on housing in decades.

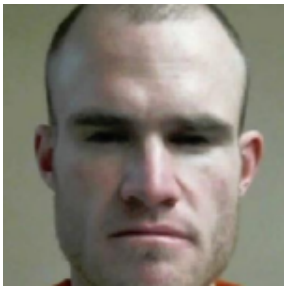
As the Legislature returns for session, state Sen. Scott Wiener, a San Francisco Democrat, will unveil his 2018 proposals.

Wiener, author of a new law passed last year that allows developers to fast-track construction projects, is planning to announce a trio of bills Thursday aimed at requiring cities to

build taller, denser housing near transit, boosting the supply of farmworker housing and ensuring cities and counties are planning for their fair share of housing to meet demand associated with jobs and population.

Read the whole story

Inmate who left Incline work crew in custody



Steven Timothy Grant

A Nevada inmate on work detail near Incline Village on Tuesday decided to take a break at the Hyatt.

Steven Timothy Grant, 30, left the work crew about 2pm Jan. 2. He was located at the hotel-casino about four hours later.

The minimum security inmate crew with the Nevada Department of Corrections was working in the forest on a fuel reduction project on Tuesday when Grant walked away.

Grant is in prison for burglary and grand larceny of a motor vehicle.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Bleak results in first snow survey of 2018



Frank Gehrke on Jan. 3 finds little snow to measure near Echo Summit. Photo/Kathryn Reed

By Kathryn Reed

PHILLIPS STATION – A major component of the first snow of the year was missing – snow.

Even so, there was something to measure. On Jan. 3 the California Department of Water Resources recorded an average depth of 1.3 inches of snow in the field adjacent to the entrance of Sierra-at-Tahoe. This equated to a water content of 0.4 inches. This is 3 percent of the long-term average for

this location at this time of year.

Throughout California the snowpack is dismal. Statewide, the snowpack water equivalency is 2.6 inches, or 24 percent of the Jan. 3 average.

Dry brown grass dominated the local field, while patches of snow were intermittent. It wasn't even cold. It felt more like fall than winter.

"There is still a lot of winter left," Frank Gehrke, who conducts the survey near Echo Summit, said on Wednesday. "January, February and into March are frequently productive."

He pointed out how while last January was better than now, it was the first quarter of 2017 that produced the abundance of snow. This is often the case. Still, California traditionally receives about half of its annual precipitation during December, January and February. And December was a dud.

Snow is an obvious economic driver for Lake Tahoe this time of year. But that's not what the survey is about. The measurements that are taken throughout the Sierra are about water content for users downstream – people and farms.

The good thing is that the abundance of moisture last winter has the state's reservoirs still sitting with plenty of water. At the end of December, the state reservoirs were at 110 percent of average for the end of the year. This is the highest since December 2012.

Grant Davis, director of the state Department of Water Resources, was also at the Echo Summit snow survey. He wouldn't talk about his anxiety level at this juncture in the water year, but instead pointed out how the state and feds need to work together to come up with better precipitation information.

He pointed out that a 72-hour forecast is 70 percent accurate, while looking out two weeks the accuracy plummets to 7 percent.

Davis said better seasonal forecasting will be better for water management.

“That is where science needs to go,” Davis said. There is an effort under way to improve medium- and long-range forecasting. This involves supercomputers and new radar to better predict when atmospheric rivers will occur and where they will land.

Michelle Mead with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration was also at the survey. While the region is expected to get some precipitation starting today and extending into the following weekend, there are no big atmospheric rivers on the horizon.

As Davis pointed out, “California’s great weather variability means we can go straight from a dry year to a wet year and back again to dry. That’s why California is focusing on adopting water conservation as a way of life, investing in above- and below- ground storage, and improving our infrastructure to protect our clean water supplies against disruptions.”

2017 Calif. wildfires – staggering losses

By Phillip Reese, Sacramento Bee

2017 will go down as one of the worst in California wildfire

history, the latest state fire statistics show.

Large wildfires destroyed or damaged more than 10,000 structures in California last year, a higher tally than the last nine years combined. Large wildfires had killed 43 people – 41 civilians and two firefighters. That's higher than the last 10 years combined, state figures show.

Several fires were among the worst ever recorded in the state.

Read the whole story

Heller opposed Trump in '16, now feels closer to president

By Debra J. Saunders, Las Vegas Review-Journal

WASHINGTON – Sen. Dean Heller, R-Nev., readily admits he "wasn't one of the biggest supporters" of President Donald Trump during the 2016 election. "I didn't know him. He didn't know me."

But now that the two know each other better, Heller told the Review-Journal, they have a "much closer relationship."

Perhaps no other candidate running for re-election in 2018 has more to win and more to lose because Trump is in the White House. Heller vehemently opposed Trump in 2016 and is the only GOP senator running for re-election in 2018 in a state won by Hillary Clinton.

Read the whole story