Paving the way to lake clarity

By Andrea Buxton

Keeping roads in good condition in the Lake Tahoe Basin has always been a struggle, especially when winters wreak havoc on the asphalt surface.

While diligently removing snow so that we may all travel safely, heavy snow removal equipment with large tires covered in hefty chains chew up the surface of the road. Road sand, critical in keeping vehicles from sliding on icy roads, combined with normal vehicular traffic, also grind and crush the pavement surface. The frequent freeze-and-thaw process contributes to asphalt cracking. Dodging pot holes is a requirement for driving safely in the Tahoe Basin. In turn, poor road conditions damage vehicles, increasing the cost of vehicle maintenance.

“Vehicle wear such as popped tires and worn shocks and struts are costs the public pays for inadvertently, and may be greater than or equal to the cost of investing in improving the road surface,” says Russ Wigart, storm water program coordinator with El Dorado County.

It is obvious that poor road conditions lead to more dangerous driving and cycling conditions, unsightly roads, more wear and tear on vehicles, and higher maintenance costs. However, there is a new reason to care about the condition of our roads—water quality. Degrading pavement contributes to an increase in fine sediment particle concentration in storm water runoff. Fine sediment particles are the leading cause of lake clarity decline.

When the pavement surface gets destroyed by heavy equipment, chains, and normal vehicular traffic, the degraded asphalt

gradually gets ground into smaller and smaller particles, resulting in very small sediment particles. When these tiny particles get into Lake Tahoe via storm water runoff, they stay suspended in the water column because gravity is not strong enough to settle them to the bottom, making the lake look cloudy.

A recent study, conducted by El Dorado County, UC Davis, and Texas Southern University collected storm water samples from two roads in South Lake Tahoe to identify the major sources of clarity-reducing fine sediment particles in urban runoff. Molecular markers were used to calculate the fraction of fine sediment particles that came from each source. The major sources were roadside soil, pavement wear, and traction abrasives (road sand). There were no significant differences between the two sampling sites.

“The results of our study suggest that pavement wear is the second largest source of fine sediment in urban storm water runoff and fine sediment directly affects Lake Tahoe’s clarity,” says Wigart.

Depending on the time of year and type of precipitation, the contribution of fine sediment particles to urban stormwater runoff from roadside soil ranged from 20 to 70 percent, pavement wear ranged from 18 to 53 percent, and traction abrasives ranged from 7 to 21 percent.

Additionally, a smooth road in good condition is much easier to sweep. Road-sweeping machines are much more effective at picking up fine sediment if the road surface is not covered in cracks and potholes that retain sediment.

Asphalt mix design has come a long way in the last decade and is now engineered for better durability. Adding polymers to the mix increases surface elasticity, allowing the road surface to better resist temperature changes and wear and tear from tire chains and heavy equipment. This mix not only limits

the production of fine sediment particles from the road surface, but reduces the cost of road upkeep as well. The city of South Lake Tahoe has been using polymer-based asphalt for the last several years, but it is estimated that less than 10 miles of roads have been repaved with the new mix to date.

These findings imply that maintaining pavement in good condition not only improves public safety and decreases vehicle damage, but could positively impact urban storm water quality and ultimately lake clarity. El Dorado County and the Tahoe Resource Conservation District would like to continue investigating the relationship between high-quality roads and reduced fine-sediment particles in urban storm water runoff.

“Our ultimate goal is to get good pavement condition recognized as a best management practice for improving urban storm water quality in the Lake Tahoe Basin,” says Wigart. “The results would be a win for lake clarity and a win for public safety. Combining better roads with responsible snow removal and sanding operations could be the future for improving driving experience, reducing vehicle wear, and improving lake clarity.”

Andrea Buxton is the storm water program manager at the Tahoe Resource Conservation District and has worked on storm water research and policy in the Tahoe basin for 16 years. This article is republished from the winter 2017 edition of ***Tahoe In Depth****.*

Future of 3 parcels on

Riverside Ave. undetermined

Parking vs. affordable housing. That is likely to be the battle over three properties on Riverside Avenue in South Lake Tahoe.

The city is going forward with purchasing the lots at the corner of Merced Avenue that were once part of the Redevelopment Agency.

Two appraisals, the last being in March, values the land at $225,000. The city must purchase it at fair market value. The money will come from unassigned reserves.

While staff has been talking to business owners in the Harrison Avenue area about what they would like done with the land, it isn't up to them. It will be the City Council's decision. Business owners want parking. They have learned the hard way that by not having paid parking in the area like the city originally planned means people leave their vehicle for hours, but aren't necessarily spending money at their places.

Parking would require amendments to planning documents.

Some on the council want the parcels to be turned into affordable housing. Combined they could fit five units, individually one unit each.

Housing is an allowable use.

The council in early 2018 is expected to make a decision about how to develop the land. Other options could be brought forward from the public, electeds or staff.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

California suffering unusually dry winter

By Rong-gong Lin II, Los Angeles Times

California's dismally dry autumn paints a bleak outlook for the state's rainy season, unless the weather this winter makes a big about-face.

The situation is a major turnaround from last year, when Northern California was battered by a series of "atmospheric river" storms that helped end the state's five-year drought. When it was over, California's northern Sierra Nevada experienced the wettest winter on record, with some ski resorts staying open through the summer.

The dry conditions are partly to blame for the worst fire season on record in California. Low humidity and lack of rain coupled with high winds fueled destructive wildfires from Mendocino down to San Diego this fall. In wine country, more than 40 people died and more than 10,000 homes were lost. To the south, the Thomas fire in Ventura and Santa Barbara counties became the largest wildfire on record in California.

Read the whole story

Feds aim to find deposits of critical minerals in Nev.

By Gary Martin, Las Vegas Review-Journal

WASHINGTON – Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke launched a campaign Thursday to identify deposits of critical minerals in Nevada and other states to break dependence on foreign supplies of raw materials needed for military equipment and consumer goods like cellphones and computers.

Zinke said the campaign would focus on a mapping, much of it aerial, to find the minerals, increase geological data, and streamline the application process to expedite domestic mining and production.

Read the whole story

Lawsuit alleges price fixing by snow removal firms

By Kathryn Reed

Thousands of Tahoe Donner residents could have been the victims of a price fixing scheme involving two snow removal companies in Truckee.

A lawsuit was filed in Nevada County Superior Court last week against Elements Mountain Company – Jamie LeGare – formerly known as Jamie Waltman, Joanne Waltman and Matthew Warren.

Ten counts have been listed in the suit. Allegations are that from 2008-17, Snowtech and Waltman companies were in collusion regarding how much they would charge people for snow removal in the Truckee subdivision. In March 2017, the companies merged and became Elements Mountain. The individuals named above worked for the companies.

“I think this case is quite straight forward and more so than

most price fixing cases I've been involved in," Stuart Gross with the Gross & Klein law firm in San Francisco told *Lake Tahoe News*. "Fundamentally this case is about ensuring basic principles that govern fair competition are protected."

No one from Elements Mountain Company returned a phone call.

Michael Cramer and Brian Paddock are the named plaintiffs in this class-action lawsuit. Between 5,000 and 7,000 people in this housing development may have been victims during the time span stated. The lawsuit alleges the infractions occurred from April 2010-March 13, 2017.

Included in the court documents are emails between the individual companies.

In an email dated April 26, 2010, Warren who was the principal at Snowtech and became the new company's secretary, wrote, "In the interest of placating homeowners on pricing, we'd be willing to take a $30 price increase if you took a $25 price increase. This gives the perception that there is a little bit of competitive pricing happening in TD. We will still maintain our Price Guarantee policy." This was sent to Jamie Waltman, who was the president of Waltman and is president of the merged company.

The lawsuit contends that starting in 2011 the defendants met in person to decide on the prices.

"When the agreed pricing and services were memorialized in a bullet-point list, the list would be destroyed after being used for this purpose," the lawsuit alleges.

The two companies are also accused of keeping out competition, which further allowed them to set prices. Those prices are alleged to be much higher than other locations in the greater Truckee-Tahoe area.

"In some ways price fixing is quite simple. This case is a

good example of that. We have explicit agreements between these two competitors to fix the minimum price and then how to calculate it for other customers," Gross said.

The lawsuit claims violation of the Cartwright Act, which deals with fair competition; false advertising; breach of contract; intentional interference with the contract; unfair competition; and aiding and abetting.

The plaintiffs are seeking monetary damages—hoping to "recover compensatory, punitive, and threefold the damages determined to have been sustained by them as a result of the conduct of defendants," the suit states.

Laws to change Jan. 1 for Calif. employers

By Dan Eaton, San Diego Union-Tribune

In exactly one week, 2018 begins. Those who manage California businesses should take the following steps during this shortened last workweek of the year.

Starting Jan. 1, applications for employment in California may no longer ask applicants to disclose their criminal history or their salary history.

The reason to "ban the box" asking whether an applicant has a criminal record is to avoid perpetuating the stigma of prior convictions and the premature disqualification of applicants who otherwise may have the right credentials for a particular job.

The reason to ban discussion of an applicant's prior salary,

unless the applicant volunteers the information, is to avoid perpetuating past salary levels that may have been influenced by gender.

Read the whole story

U.S. launches plan to battle rangeland wildfires

By Keith Ridler, AP

BOISE, Idaho — Federal officials have launched a two-pronged plan to stop a vicious cycle of rangeland wildfires in a wide swath of sagebrush country in the West that supports cattle ranching, recreation and is home to an imperiled bird.

The U.S. Bureau of Land Management on Friday said it will create an environmental impact statement concerning fuel breaks and another on fuels reduction and restoration for Idaho, Oregon, Nevada, California, Utah, and Washington.

The agency said the documents when finished will help speed the process for future landscape-scale projects in the Great Basin by providing a blanket approval for similar areas that will likely just need minor additional environmental reviews to proceed.

Read the whole story

Too drunk to drive? Calif. law may provide a free ride

By Daniel Wilson, Sacramento Bee

It’s an all-too-familiar scene in Sacramento. A group of friends heads to midtown for a night of partying and drinking, but one friend has to miss out on the fun and stay sober to be the designated driver.

A new law that takes effect Jan. 1 may not only let everyone join in on the fun, but it’ll also mean more money for the bubbly.

Under Assembly Bill 711, alcohol manufacturers and licensed sellers can offer free or discounted rides to transport drinkers home safely through ride-sharing services, taxicabs or other ride providers.

Read the whole story

Lawsuit could force Nev. to alter education funding

By Meghin Delaney, Las Vegas Review-Journal

A nationwide education trend might be coming to Nevada, but it’s not necessarily one that overseers of the public school system will welcome.

Nevada could soon join the ranks of states that have been sued over the way they fund public education. Education activist

groups and other parties already have filed such court challenges in 45 states, and several public school advocates active in Nevada have indicated they are considering such a step.

The lawsuits essentially allege that state lawmakers aren't meeting their responsibility to provide an equal education for all students as required by each state's constitution. A majority of the challenges have been successful in getting courts to force legislative changes that pump more money into education and often change how the funding is distributed.

Read the whole story

Gaming industry mergers could hit a record next year

By Todd Prince, Las Vegas Review-Journal

The U.S. gaming market experienced several blockbuster deals in 2017.

The SLS Las Vegas, Alon project and Pinnacle Entertainment were all scooped up by competitors.

But 2018 might hold even more mergers in store for the industry as a strong economy, low borrowing costs, lack of new licenses, and the use of real estate investment trusts drive further consolidation, according to Deutsche Bank in a 2018 Gaming Outlook report.

Read the whole story