Mother Nature delays opening of some resorts

Even though a storm is rolling into the basin, it won't be bringing enough moisture to allow for Heavenly, Northstar and Kirkwood to open this week.

Heavenly and Northstar have pushed their opening back five days to Nov. 23. Kirkwood has not set another opening date. While it usually has the most real snow of the three Vail Resorts' owned ski areas, it has the least amount of snowmaking capability.

Last year Heavenly and Northstar opened on Nov. 14, six days sooner than originally planned.

A warming trend in the first part of this month impacted the ability to cover the slopes with manmade white stuff. The forecast going forward is for cooler weather, which is conducive to firing up the snowmaking guns.

It's possible when people in the basin wake up Wednesday morning that there will be a couple of inches of snow on the ground. Above 6,500 feet about 4 inches is in the forecast. The high for the next two days is expected to be 39 degrees in South Lake Tahoe.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Smoke in basin from West Slope controlled burn

Expect smoke to continue to fill the Lake Tahoe Basin and Reno areas. It’s coming from the Eldorado National Forest.

The U.S. Forest Service so far has burned 159 acres in the Pack Saddle Pass-Silver Fork Road area south of Highway 50 near Kyburz.

Smoke sensitive individuals are encouraged to reduce their exposure by staying indoors. Anyone driving in smoky conditions should use extra caution.

For more information on the prescribed fire program, go **online**.

NDOW denies relocating bears to hunting areas

By Terri Hendry, KRNV-TV

Lake Tahoe Basin bears are at the center of a unique controversy. Some animal advocates are claiming the Nevada Division of Wildlife is putting relocated nuisance bears into hunting areas. It is a claim NDOW flatly and firmly denies.

Bear advocate Carolyn Stark said, “A majority of the bears are relocated out of the Tahoe basin and into the high desert hunting areas.” She added, “It is to stalk up the bear hunt. They hoping by moving these bears to hunting areas. some will stay in the area.”

NDOW spokesman Chris Healy said, “We haven’t done that. I can continue to say we don’t do it, we don’t do it, we don’t do it. Then I could follow that up with a we don’t do it. That is not how this works.”

Read the whole story

Multiple controlled burn projects planned

The North Lake Tahoe and Tahoe Douglas fire protection districts and the U.S. Forest Service may continue prescribed fire operations this week in several areas around Lake Tahoe. If conditions are favorable, operations may begin today and may continue through the week.

Operations may take place at Stillwater Cover near Crystal Bay, off Logan Creek Drive, near Cave Rock, Zephyr Heights and Round Hill, and on urban lots near Heavenly Mountain Resort, off North Upper Truckee Road and near Big Meadow off Highway 89.

Operations will continue as conditions allow.

Smoke from prescribed fire operations is normal and may continue for several days after an ignition depending on the project size and environmental conditions. Agencies coordinate with state and local county air pollution control districts and monitor weather conditions closely prior to prescribed fire ignition.

To receive prescribed fire notifications, send an email to pa_ltbmu@fs.fed.us

Search calls surge with wilderness rookies



After running from law enforcement, the SAR team rescued two suspects who suffered from hypothermia. Photo/Provided

By Kathryn Reed

Inappropriate clothing and shoes, no plan for if things go wrong, and unrealistic expectations that a cell phone will reach help that is nearby.

This is increasingly what search and rescue teams with El Dorado County are finding. It's the result of more people in the woods and so many of them being unprepared. The movie "Wild" has helped perpetuate the idea that inexperienced hikers will survive.

This fall two women had to be rescued near Cascade Falls because they weren't prepared for the storm that came in even though forecasters had been talking about it for days. They said they didn't know about the pending storm and thought spandex leggings would be sufficient. They got disoriented and told rescuers they were going to die. They didn't – thanks to volunteers who brought them back to safety.

That's a routine call.

The number of calls El Dorado County search and rescue crews go on has doubled since 2010. In 2015, EDSO SAR was called 89 times. (That doesn't mean they went out each time.) In the first 10 months of 2016, SAR has been called 130 times. Most of those people don't live in the area.



Training is necessary to keep the team sharp. Photo/Provided

"People are coming to the area without physical fitness or the experience to recreate safely," sheriff's Deputy Greg Almos told *Lake Tahoe News.*

Almos runs the El Dorado County Sheriff's Department SAR program. It's made up about 30 volunteers in Tahoe; of those about a dozen are active on a regular basis.

Eagle Falls is where they go to the most; with twisted ankles a routine issue. Many people are less than a mile from the trailhead. Their lack of fitness contributes to the initial injury and then not being able to make it out, Almos said. The altitude and weather are other contributing factors.

The veteran SAR leader is an advocate for getting people outdoors, but he also believes there needs to be responsibility and common sense. This means education before getting on the trail.



A hiker who suffered a foot injury this summer at Eagle Falls is carried to the trailhead. Photo/Provided

People go for day hikes without bringing another layer for when the temperatures in the mountains drop. They don't have packs with the essentials – like enough water, food, a flashlight, even a map. Nor do they have a plan in case they don't make it out.

“It’s amazing how many people I talk to when I discuss a save your life plan over the phone and they cannot fathom why we are not there. When I say it will take several hours to get there and that they need to make preparations to survive, and I tell them what to expect and say it could be four hours, I get arguments,” Almos said. “After 20 minutes they call to say ‘where are you?’ I ask them how long it took to get to the top of Tallac. They say six hours. I’ve had people straight up say where is the helicopter. This isn’t Uber. People have a hard time understanding that.”

Then there are the times when people don’t know where they are. It’s getting harder to trace cell phone numbers because of privacy laws. Search warrants can sometimes be obtained after the fact. That is why dispatchers ask for consent to track people’s phones.



The helicopter arrives to transport a lost person from Maggies Peak in February. Photo/Provided

A relatively new phenomenon searchers have been dealing with is “meet-up groups.” These are Internet-based groups where random people meet for a certain activity. They aren’t abiding

by the basic protocols of hiking at the speed of the slowest person and making sure everyone returns to the trailhead.

“We are getting people who are leaving people out there. This is an epidemic I think we are going to see an awful lot more of,” Almos said.

Descriptions of what they were wearing or looked like are often vague.

Compounding the problem is friends and relatives back home who might call to report the person overdue often don’t know where the person was exactly going or with whom.

About a dozen of these calls are now happening annually.

Nothing is routine, and it’s not unusual for rescues to require technical skills – especially at Lover’s Leap and the cliff area at Vikingsholm. Climbers get stuck.

Their rescuers aren’t getting paid. Search team members provide their own gear.

It’s not unusual in the busy summer season to get back-to-back calls. Sometimes they are on a call for consecutive days. They receive training, but they all come to the “job” with a love for the outdoors and a desire to help others.

All of the volunteer search and rescue members are on-the-ground team. There is the management team that runs the command post and sets up the coordination, a Nordic team, snowmobile group, mountain rescue unit that handles extreme weather backcountry cases, and K-9 teams. The West Slope has an equestrian group and OHV.

And the people they rescue are not charged a dime.

Ski exec: California industry thriving

By Kathryn Reed

TRUCKEE – Those living in Lake Tahoe know the ski industry is big business. But it's also a lucrative industry for the state of California with a $1.3 billion annual impact.

Michael Reitzell, executive director of the California Ski Industry Association, and Daphne Lange with Visit California, the state tourism agency, spoke at the Truckee Chamber of Commerce breakfast this month about trends in the industry.

California averages nearly 7 million skier visits a season. Colorado's average is 20 million. Nationally the average is 56 million.

Half of those skiers in California are going to the Tahoe-Shasta area, while 30 percent are hitting the Central Sierra slopes – which includes Mammoth. What makes this market different, according to Reitzell, is that people spend more money in this region. This area captures 57.1 percent of the skier-boarder dollars or $742.8 million a year.

"Participation is strong and steady," Reitzell told the group. One thing that is changing is people are doing more than just skiing – they are participating in the other activities resorts offer.

In recent years there have been more skiers on the slopes, while the number of snowboarders is decreasing. Seventy percent of those skiers are younger than 50.

Reitzell in part attributed the increase in skiers to better

equipment, newbies seeing their friends and family members on skis, and the Olympics introducing more exciting events that in the past had been dominated by snowboarders.

Snow clearly is what makes the difference in whether people are coming to Tahoe. Last season there were 7.3 million skier visits in the state – so more than average. Even though it was normal snow-wise, it came after three years of substandard snowfall. The 2014-15 skier visit total in California was 4.4 million.

When it comes to marketing the area, Tahoe falls under the High Sierra region for the state. Ninety-three percent of the trips to the state are domestic travelers, but the international travelers account for 20 percent of the spending.

Half of the visitors to California come from either Washington, Oregon, Nevada, Utah, Colorado or Arizona, according to Lange.

The 2015 tourism numbers improved over 2014:

· Total direct spending – $2.7 billion – 5.7 percent change

· Tourism supported jobs – 29,400 – 3.1 percent change

· Local tax receipts – $108 million – 9 percent change

· State tax receipts – $110 million – 1. 8 percent change.

While promoting the resorts in the state is one of the ski association's main responsibilities, safety and sustainability are the other two key platforms.

"Our resorts even in normal times can be right around where the snow is. We have to be concerned if the snow levels rise," Reitzell said.

His agency is also worried about the rising number of fires as the climate changes. Because of this the association is working with the U.S. Forest Service in regards to fire suppression funding. Most of the state's ski resorts are on Forest Service land.

Snowshoe, stargazing experience at Northstar

Tahoe Star Tours will host a series of evenings under the stars that pair stargazing with a snowshoe tour in North Lake Tahoe.

Each event is led by local astronomer Tony Berendsen, who writes the monthly Star Guide column for *Lake Tahoe News.*

Each tour features a lively science-based talk about the cosmos and poetry reading. Guests of all ages will enjoy an easy to moderate snowshoe walk with an unobstructed view of the cosmos, followed by the opportunity to view constellations through high-powered, professional telescopes manufactured by Celestron, the world's leading telescope manufacturer, from the Fireside Terrace at the Ritz-Carlton. The telescopes use leading edge computerized technology enabling sharp, accurate pointing and tracking, with optics for clear, clean images.

The stargazing snowshoe tours are Dec 21, Dec. 28, Jan. 14 and Feb. 11, weather and conditions permitting. Tours are approximately 2-2.5 hours in length, starting at 5p, at Northstar's cross-country center, and ending at the Ritz-Carlton.

Reservations are recommended, and can be made **online**. Tickets

are $63 for guests ages 13 and older, and $45 for kids ages 10-12. Snowshoe rentals are available for $21 per person.

Incline ski racer makes impression in World Cup opener

By USSA

KITTILÄ, Finland – Mikaela Shiffrin (Eagle-Vail, Colo.) overcame Audi FIS Ski World Cup slalom opener nerves, skiing two clean and solid runs en route to her first World Cup victory of the 2017 season. Switzerland's Wendy Holdener grabbed second, 0.67 seconds out, while Slovakia's Petra Vlhova rounded out the podium in third, 0.75 seconds behind Shiffrin.

It was a beautiful, crisp day up in Lapland, with a picturesque sunrise and perfect rock-hard conditions on the race track. Starting lucky No. 7, Shiffrin laid down a smoking first run, finishing 0.72 ahead of 2016 World Cup slalom title holder Frida Hansdotter and Switzerland's Wendy Holdener. The battle between Shiffrin and Hansdotter ended when Hansdotter straddled on the pitch second run and skied out. Shiffrin knifed the bulletproof pitch and maintained her lead all the way to the finish, earning herself another prize Lapland reindeer and a buddy for her 2013 prize reindeer Rudolph. His name? Sven.

The final American starting in Saturday's slalom and a relative newcomer to the World Cup circuit, Lila Lapanja (Incline Village), had solid top splits that would have had

her well into qualification for a second run but struggled moving forward coming on to the pitch, causing her to get low and behind. She'll walk away knowing that she has the speed to hang with the top 15.

Funding available to remove dead trees

The Natural Resources Conservation Service has money to help California property owners remove dead trees.

NRCS will allocate $4 million for tree mortality projects. Funding is available through the NRCS Environmental Quality Incentives Program.

Landowners with dead trees on non-industrial private conifer forestlands in Amador, Calaveras, El Dorado, Fresno, Kern, Lake, Los Angeles, Madera, Mariposa, Nevada, Placer, Riverside, San Bernardino, San Diego, Tulare and Tuolumne counties may be eligible for financial assistance. The minimum size forestland property is 1 acre and at least 100 feet wide.

The Forest Tree Mortality Initiative is focused on removing dead trees on larger, severely damaged, private forestlands.

Eligible landowners should contact their local county NRCS service center for more information and to apply:
Amador – 209.223.6535; El Dorado – 530.295.5630; Nevada – 530.272.3417; and Placer – 530.885.6505.

Star Guide: Telescope tips for the experienced

By Tony Berendsen

Through all the years of my interest in telescopes and astronomy I've met many amateur astronomers who have progressed from novice to advanced. The usual progression involves purchasing larger and large apertures to see fainter and fainter objects through the eyepiece. I call this the search for the largest light bucket.

I have to say that I understand that journey. But telescope systems today offer much more than aperture. It's not just about the light bucket anymore.

A couple decades ago I would have never ever thought of purchasing a computerized telescope. I was completely abhorred with the idea of doing anything less than pulling out my Norton Star Atlas and star hopping through the cosmos for hours, guided by paper charts. I, too, was on the light bucket path, until I bought a computerized Celestron telescope, and the cosmos became bigger than ever, even with a modest size aperture.

Computerized telescopes not only offer a built in catalog of thousands of objects to pick from, they can take you on a computer automated tour of the night sky, providing information about what you are seeing through the eyepiece, and even suggesting interesting objects near to where the scope is pointing. I had no idea what I had been missing.

So for this Christmas, for someone with a solid intermediate interest in observing, I'd suggest purchasing a **Nexstar telescope**. For a modest price the Nexstar mount is very solid, and 6 inches of aperture will give good views of the best deep sky objects. If you add a **SkyPortal Module**, the scope can be

operated with a smartphone using the SkyPortal app enabling celestial navigation by touching a digital star map.



Telescopes help the experienced star gazer see better. Photo/Celestron

For the advanced interest in observing, I recommend the scope that changed my mind about owning a computerized telescope, the **CPC 1100 Deluxe HD**. I purchased a CPC 1100 about 10 years ago and it has accompanied me flawlessly to share views of the cosmos to thousands of people. From snow laden slopes of 18 degrees to warm summer temps on the shore of Lake Tahoe the scope has been rock solid. Its aperture of 11 inches offers about 1,600 eyeballs of light gathering power, and since its optical tube and mount are one piece, it is amazingly simple to setup. It’s not the 16-inch light bucket I’d been dreaming of having some day, but it is the scope that exponentially expanded my knowledge of our galaxy and beyond.

Finally, don’t under value the need for a quality telescope mount, for if a telescope’s optical tube is its eye, the mount is its mind and body. It’s not just for steady and accurate pointing for visual viewing, but for successful astrophotography. Celestron has fulfilled that need this year with a re-engineered German Equatorial Mount, the CGX.

Here’s what Celeston’s product manager Bryan Cogdell had to say about their new mount: “For me the best thing about the mount overall is the load capacity to weight ratio of the mount. That was a key design goal. In other words, for its size, it holds a lot more telescope than other mounts of this size range. The ergonomics are my second favorite part of the mount. From the carry handles to the new polar alignment adjustment that can be made with a full instrument load on the mount, I find it easier to setup and align the CGX than other mounts of this size, and on the performance side, the smoother drive system, with belt driven worms, the mount slews smoothly and more confidently even if the telescope is unbalanced.”

So, if you are looking to put something under the tree this holiday for an astronomy enthusiast, think about a telescope, or a new mount. Also, be prepared to be amazed with views of the cosmos with your proud backyard astronomer.

Tony Berendsen runs Tahoe Star Tours. He may be reached at 775. 232.0844 or tony@tahoestartours.com.