Tahoe woman striving for Olympic skicross team



Whitney Gardner at a World Cup event earlier this year. Photo/Clément Bucco-Lechat

By Scott Powers, Team USA

Whitney Gardner realized quickly she was overmatched when she first competed in the Audi FIS Ski Cross World Cup.

The competition was stronger and more experienced. The jumps intimidated her. The features scared her. The courses were too challenging. She was constantly falling. She just wasn't meeting her own expectations.

Ever since she transitioned into skicross from alpine skiing, Gardner had strove to someday compete on the World Cup tour. But now that she was there, she had to admit she wasn't ready. That was difficult.

"It was hard because it was my dream," said Gardner, who grew up in a family of skiers in South Lake Tahoe. "I never thought I wouldn't, but it was so distant. It was surreal I was able to compete. I didn't know if I would have the opportunity again, so I took it."

The 21-year-old Gardner is concentrating on her upcoming World Cup season, but somewhere always in her mind is reaching the Olympic Winter Games. Skicross has been contested at the past two Winter Games, but the United States has yet to qualify a women's competitor.

Read the whole story

USFS wants opinions about Tahoe roads, trails

The U.S. Forest Service Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit is seeking comments on a proposal for the management and uses of existing roads, trails and facilities in the basin.

There are four components:

- maintenance and management of roads, trails and facilities;
- authorization of outfitter guide activities;
- authorization of events;
- authorization of special use permits for recreational uses on USFS lands.

The proposal identifies specific criteria and design features to establish thresholds on activities, which may proceed under the proposed analysis.

An environmental assessment will likely be prepared, which will analyze activities considered appropriate, under what conditions those activities may proceed, and any relevant design features that will reduce the risk to environmental,

historic, social and recreational resources.

Comments will be accepted until Jan. 15. More info is **online**.

Ganong less than a second from podium

By USSA

BEAVER CREEK, Colo. – Ted Ligety (Park City) and Andrew Weibrecht (Lake Placid, N.Y.) stood on the podium Saturday, taking second and third place, respectively, at the Audi Birds of Prey super G. It was Weibrecht's first Audi FIS Ski World Cup World Cup podium.

It was a foggy, snowy day at Beaver Creek, with the jury deciding to move the start down the hill for safety. The conditions were tough with soft snow on the side of the course and visibility changing throughout the race. However, the famed Talon Crew course workers were able to get the race off on time, despite the heavy snow that fell.

The early guys had a good go, allowing Weibrecht, Travis Ganong (Squaw Valley) and eventual winner Marcel Hirscher of Austria to lay down solid runs before the snow became thick. Expected winners Aksel Lund Svindal and Kjetil Jansrud of Norway, among others, got caught as the visibility got worse and lost time in the middle of the top 30. But as Ligety's start number of 29 loomed, the sun poked through the clouds and the snow let up, allowing Ligety to throw down in front of the home crowd and ski into second.

“It’s tough when it’s like today—it’s a little bit inconsistent. The top couple guys who ran all had pretty good races and results and then the whole middle bunch were stuck in the brunt of the snow storm. Then during the last 20s, it got nice out again. I got lucky on that,” said Ligety after his finish. “It’s great to get a podium here in Beaver Creek.”

The result tied Ligety’s best World Cup super G, although he did win the FIS World Ski Championships super G in 2013. The last time he stood on a super G podium was in 2009 when he took second in Val d’Isere.

Weibrecht was stoked to step on his first World Cup podium. The racer owns two Olympic medals—a silver and bronze in super G—but the closest he had come in a World Cup was fifth.

Just behind Ligety and Weibrecht was Ganong, who took sixth place. Only two-tenths off of the podium, Ganong is showing his power as a speed skier this season. The other American story was Tommy Biesemeyer (Keene, N.Y.), who took most of the last two seasons off due to knee injuries. He attacked the course, starting 42 to take 11 place.

After winning two NorAms at Copper Mountain this week, Tommy Ford (Bend, Ore.) also skied into the points, taking 28. Wrapping up the rest of the Americans, Steven Nyman (Sundance, Utah) was 35, Tim Jitloff (Reno) 36 and Bryce Bennett (Lake Tahoe) 42. Jared Goldberg (Holladay, Utah) did not finish.

Heavenly plans to tweak ski

experience for ’16



Improvements are in the works to make it easier to get back to the Tamarack lift. Photo/LTN file

By Kathryn Reed

Changes to Heavenly Mountain Resort that are expected to be ready for the 2016-17 ski season are mostly based on what skiers have requested.

The resort wants to:

- Build a permanent 300-square-foot ticket sales kiosk adjacent to the Bear Cave Ski School near Tamarack Lodge;
- Relocate the Red Fir handle tow lift to the right side of the Easy Street Trail to reduce user conflicts;
- Install a nearly 300-foot magic carpet surface to primarily be used for ski school activities on the lower Easy Street Trail near the relocated Red Fir lift;
- Widen Tamarack Return Trail by about 125 feet on 1.3

acres;

· Limb and remove trees under the Blue Streak Zipline to provide easier seasonal removal and installation of the lines.

“This is what guests have asked for,” Russ Pecoraro, spokesman for Heavenly, told *Lake Tahoe News*. “We are constantly looking for ways to improve the experience.”

The U.S. Forest Service, whose land the projects would be built on, is asking the public to weigh in on the proposals.

“This proposal does not amend the master plan. The project is consistent with the vision described in Heavenly’s Master Development Plan,” Lisa Herron with the Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit told *Lake Tahoe News*.

It’s possible as many as 200 trees will be removed. Pecoraro said widening California Trail will make it easier for riders to get back to Tamarack Express.

“With some of the teaching terrain up there we don’t have the lifts in the ideal places to access the terrain for beginners,” Pecoraro said.

The kiosk being built next to the Bear Cave Ski School would also be open in the summer to sell tickets for the ropes courses and other amenities available when there isn’t snow on the ground. It would replace the temporary structures that exist today.

Pecoraro, per company policy, would not reveal what the price tag is for these improvements.

The goal is to secure necessary permits this winter and begin work in the spring after the resort closes for the winter season. It is not anticipated that the construction will impact summer activities, Pecoraro said.

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Notes:

· The deadline to comment is Dec. 21.

· The proposal is available **online**.

· For more info, contact Matt Dickinson at the USFS at 530.543.2769.

Online tool tracks prescribed fires in basin

North Lake Tahoe and Tahoe Douglas fire protection districts, the Nevada Division of Forestry and the U.S. Forest Service will continue widespread prescribed fire operations beginning the week of Dec. 7.

Operations on the North Shore may take place on the west side of Incline Village and in Carnelian Bay. On the South Shore, off South Upper Truckee Road near Meyers, off Columbine Trail and Ski Run Boulevard near South Lake Tahoe, and on Kingsbury Grade. On the East Shore, off Logan Creek Drive, south of Glenbrook, on Spooner Summit, and north of Spooner Lake.

Operations may continue over the next several weeks as weather and conditions allow.

The Tahoe Fire and Fuels Team developed an **online mapping tool** the public may use to view the location and details of each prescribed fire project.

Smoke from prescribed fire operations is normal and may

continue for several days after an ignition depending on the project size and environmental conditions.

Criminal skiers cutting down trees in wilderness

By Heather Hansman, Outside

In late September, a hiker in New Mexico's Santa Fe National Forest encountered a shocking sight: a several-hundred-yard swath of felled trees on a hillside in the Pecos Wilderness. Whoever did it leveled off hundreds of englemann spruce and subalpine fir trees a few inches above the roots and left the cuttings on the ground—a clear indication that it wasn't the act of an illegal timber operation or someone looking for some free firewood.

No, it was most likely perpetrated by backcountry skiers looking to set up a ski run in time for winter.

Felling trees in a national wilderness area violates the Wilderness Act and is a federal misdemeanor. Wilderness areas are the most highly protected federal land: development is prohibited in an effort to keep them as natural as possible.

Whoever is responsible for the cutting, if caught, could face six months in jail or up to $6,000 in fines, depending on the extent of the damage, which investigators are calculating now.

The Pecos incident wasn't an isolated case of so-called glading, which involves cutting down trees to carve out enough space for makeshift ski runs. As backcountry use is increasing—the Snowsports Industry Association says sales of

backcountry gear like touring-compatible ski boots and accessories were up 12 percent from 2013 to 2014—land managers are trying to find ways to encourage recreation while still regulating illegal use.

Read the whole story

U.S. men score World Cup points in Colorado

By USSA

BEAVER CREEK, Colo. – Andrew Weibrecht (Lake Placid, N.Y.) reminded ski racing fans that he is still a threat in downhill, tying for fifth place after starting 34 at the Birds of Prey downhill. Travis Ganong (Squaw Valley) and Steven Nyman (Sundance, Utah) both grabbed top-15 spots, taking 12 and 15, respectively.

The Norwegians, better known as the Attacking Vikings, were unstoppable during Friday's downhill with Aksel Lund Svindal taking his third win in as many speed events. His teammate Kjetil Jansrud was just behind him in second with Guillermo Fayed of France in third.

"I think his wax technician crushed it," said Ganong of Svindal's run. "He was six- to eight-tenths ahead on the top flat which is unheard of. Steve Nyman is the best starter and glider in the world and he got beat by three-tenths on the top."

Overshadowed by the top 30 having finished, the crowd seemed to forget about Weibrecht. He had been on course for 30

seconds before the camera at Beaver Creek panned back to his run on the jumbotron. When he came down in fifth, he pumped his chest, stoked about the result—his best World Cup downhill finish.

“That run felt good. I was definitely hanging it out. A couple of times, I didn’t know if I gave away too much or risked a little too much, but I guess it was right in there,” said Weibrecht after his run. “I skied the way I wanted to all the way down.”

Bryce Bennett (Squaw Valley) also attacked from the back, skiing from bib 53 to take his first World Cup points by finishing 29.

“I haven’t scored World Cup points yet and that has been something I’ve wanted to do—almost too much,” said Bennett. “I had a few mistakes, but I just put everything into it. It was good to get a reward.”

Jared Goldberg (Holladay, Utah) was just out of the points, finishing 31st. Marco Sullivan (Squaw Valley) did not finish.

Vonn, Cook show athleticism in downhill

By USSA

LAKE LOUISE, Alberta – Lindsey Vonn (Vail) collected her 16th-career World Cup victory at Lake Louise in the first of two scheduled downhills, but the run was not without pure athletic spectacle to avoid serious disaster. Vonn clocked the fastest splits all the way to the midsection on course where she

decided to take a little extra risk with a straighter line, and that's where she nearly lost it all.

"I came in (to Fish Net) with a really direct line – probably a little bit too direct, and I caught my edge funny. I did the splits. I thought I was going down, then I somehow managed to stay on my feet," said Vonn. "When I realized I was still in the course, I just got back into my tuck and tried to make up as much time as I could on the bottom. That was not planned. I should probably not do that tomorrow."

Her smile in the finish area told the crowd that one didn't come as easily as the final time indicated.

Vonn lost her 0.40-second advantage over Cornelia "Conny" Huetter of Austria with the critical mistake, but she recovered the lost time and added even more with precise gliding to the finish, ultimately outpacing the Austrian by a truly impressive 0.58 seconds.

For Vonn, the winningest woman in World Cup history, another victory at Lake Louise isn't simply an additional tally mark on her record. She finds value in each and every race at the Canadian resort, even those that haven't ended on the podium.

"I think last year's win was probably the most significant for me coming back from two injuries and being able to win again was an incredible feeling. This year it's just as incredible – I kind of feel old. All the other girls on the podium with me are very young," noted Vonn. "I kind of felt relieved to be on the top step of the podium again today and to reassert myself as someone who's not going away in the speed events."

The 31-year-old speedster was flanked on the podium by two Austrians, the 23-year-old Huetter and 24-year-old Ramona Siebenhofer. It was Huetter's second podium result of her career and the first for Siebenhofer.

Vonn's teammate Stacey Cook (Mammoth Mountain) had an equally

horrifying mishap at high speed when she caught her edge heading into Timing Flats, but she also pulled off a miraculous recovery and held on to finish in fifth.

“I was coming around the last corner, I was really feeling it and then all I saw was fence. I just kind of got caught up in some old tracks, and I was really just trying to let my skis go, and they went in the wrong direction. There are mistakes that you make from taking risks and there are mistakes you make from a bad plan. And this was a mistake from taking risks, so I have no regrets,” said Cook. “Typically the first race is always the weaker one for me. I like more runs on the track – that’s kind of my thing – I start having more and more fun. So hopefullytomorrow is solid from top to bottom.”

Other U.S. Ski Team finishers in the points included Laurenne Ross (Bend, Ore.) in 19, Alice McKennis (Glenwood Springs, Colo.) in 25, and Jackie Wiles (Aurora, Ore.) rounding out the scoring in 30. Breezy Johnson (Salt Lake City) who was racing her first World Cup race finished 41. Anna Marno (Steamboat Springs, Colo.) was 45.

Geminid meteor shower viewing and talk

Tahoe Institute for Natural Science and the Tahoe Rim Trail Association are making an excursion to Tahoe Meadows to see the Geminid meteor shower.

This annual meteor shower regularly puts on a display with frequent shooting stars throughout the night. It gets its name from its trail, which radiates from the constellation Gemini.

Representatives of Space Science for Schools will illuminate the mysteries of the night.

The event is Dec. 13 from 8-10pm. Bring lots of layers to stay warm and blankets. It is dependent on a clear sky.

For more information and to register for the free event, contact Sarah Hockensmith at 775.298.0067 or Sarah@TINSweb.org.

Holiday traditions, history focus of Washoe Lake events

Washoe Lake State Park will offer two opportunities this month to learn about past holiday traditions and local history.

Christmas Past is a family-friendly, Christmas-themed slide show. It will cover past holiday traditions combined with local history from places that include Virginia City, Fort Churchill, Buckland Station and other locations in Northern Nevada. Rangers will also discuss origins of holiday traditions, including Santa Claus, candy canes and Christmas trees.

It is Dec. 13 and Dec. 19 at 1pm. Washoe Lake State Park office is at 4855 Eastlake Blvd. Take Exit 44 from Interstate 580, drive north on Eastlake Boulevard for four miles and the park office is on the right. This event is free; however donations are accepted to support future park programs.

There will be a Christmas Eve Full Moon Hike at Washoe Lake State Park.

This is a moderate, one-mile round-trip hike to the gazebo on

the Deadman’s Creek Trail. Participants should bring good shoes, water, a flashlight and dress for the weather. This program will last approximately one hour.

Dogs are not permitted. This event is limited to 30 participants. Contact Kim Zuch at 775.687.4319 or washoelake@hdiss.net to register.

Meet at the Maze parking lot on Dec. 24 at 5:30pm. Turn left past the fee booth and it is the first parking lot on the right. It costs $7 to park, $5 for Nevada residents.