Authorities trying to curtail human-bear interactions

Human interactions with bears at the Taylor Creek Visitor Center during the Kokanee salmon spawn have become a public safety concern.

The California Department of Fish and Wildlife, Nevada Department of Wildlife and the U.S. Forest Service are asking visitors to keep their distance when encountering bears.

Visitor center staff routinely encounter unsafe situations when guests ignore posted instructions and get close to bears to take photos and videos. Bears are unpredictable wild animals and may attack if they feel threatened. Wildlife authorities may kill bears if they attack people.

The federal and state agencies do not encourage visits to see bears and advise the public to stay away from bears, as they are dangerous wild animals. At Taylor Creek, visitors should stay on trails, respect wildlife and keep a safe distance if bears are present. Never approach bears for any reason, including a photo opportunity.

If visitors continue to disregard directions to stay away from bears at Taylor Creek, the Forest Service may close the area for public safety.

Grant will pay for Tahoe

Water Trail signs

Sierra Business Council has been chosen as a recipient of a Tahoe Truckee Community Foundation grant in the amount of $7,500.

The money will be used to support the planning process for educational Lake Tahoe Water Trail wayfinding signage to help paddlers have a safe and fun adventure, and to protect natural resources.

The grant provides much needed funds to allow the Sierra Business Council to work with lakewide public access land managers and recreation providers to discuss the process for development and installation of coordinated educational signage at primary public launch locations.

The goal is to have the signs in place for the 2016 paddling season.

Signage will provide water safety and resource conservation tips, and navigable paddle routes and distances to locate public beach access to shoreline businesses, nearby hiking trails, historic sites, lodging and campgrounds.

Nevada ‘rock crawler’ wants to revive rugged sport

By Benjamin Spillman, Reno Gazette-Journal

Imagine the vertical world of rock climbing combined with the power and sound of off-road racing.

Now you understand rock crawling.

The small-but-compelling niche of off-road motorsports involves driving heavily modified 4x4s up and over boulders that would be difficult to climb on foot, let alone with a couple thousand pounds of steel and rubber.

It’s essentially the logical extension of weekend trail driving for people willing to spend tens of thousands of dollars and countless hours working on their 4x4s.

Read the whole story

Ironman calls it quits at Tahoe after 3 years

Ironman has decided three years at Lake Tahoe is enough.

The triathlon, which has been on the North Shore, had its last hurrah on Sunday.

“After careful consideration, Ironman Lake Tahoe will not be extended. We appreciate the efforts and support of the city, volunteers, sponsors, and everyone else involved in putting on this triathlon. We would also like to thank all of the athletes who have raced with us here,” Ironman said in a statement on its website.

The event spanned Kings Beach, Tahoe City, Truckee and Squaw Valley.

In the 1980s there was an Ironman on the South Shore. Before it started on the North Shore in 2013, California had not had the triathlon since 2001.

Weather – as in snow and subfreezing temperatures the first year, and massive traffic issues – which resulted in course changes in subsequent years – contributed to the organization not wanting to continue with Lake Tahoe as a location.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

‘Reading’ the history of California’s climate

By Valerie Trouet

In 2005, I moved to the United States from Belgium to study the influence of climate on wildfires in the Sierra Nevada over the last five centuries. As part of this work, I traveled for three months all around the mountain range to collect samples of trees and tree stumps. I stayed in remote service barracks and spent my days tromping through meadows and hiking up steep creeks to find trees that were scorched by past fires. On more than one occasion, I found myself wondering whether a nearby roar I heard was from a mountain lion or a bear. In urbanized Belgium, nature had been a thing I only learned about in school. The Sierra’s snowy peaks, vast forests, and towering trees—Giant Sequoias, I learned, actually are giant—all made a lasting impression.

Thanks to the ample snows that usually fall, the Sierra have been California’s most efficient water storage system. In normal years, the mountain range’s snowpack provides 30 percent of the state’s water. It is the primary source for reservoirs that supply drinking water, agriculture, and hydroelectric power. But this year, the snowpack was at just 5 percent of its 50-year average. This statistic, which was

announced by the California Department of Water Resources on April 1, became the poster child for the extreme drought conditions that have plagued California for the last four years. When Gov. Jerry Brown declared the first-ever mandatory statewide water restriction, he chose a Sierra Nevada snow-measurement station as his backdrop. For the first time in 75 years, that station was surrounded only by dirt.

For me, Brown's announcement worked as a call for action. After my time in the Sierra, I had realized that my main research interest—the interaction between climate and forest ecosystems—could best be pursued amidst the majestic landscapes of the American West, so in 2011, I became a professor at the University of Arizona in Tucson, where I now lead a team that uncovers the past climate of California by studying its trees. I knew my research could put this year's 2015 snow drought in a much longer context.

While there are no written documents about the climate in California from centuries ago that anyone knows of, nature itself has been writing the story of its past in many places—caves, shells, lakes, and, of course, trees. My job as a paleoclimatologist is to decipher this story. Trees are remarkable creatures: In California's Mediterranean climate, they form a growth ring every year, and the width of that ring depends, to a large extent, on that year's climate. After a wet winter, the ring that forms is relatively wide; after a dry winter, the ring is narrow. By measuring the widths of these rings in trees that have lived for centuries, my team can "read" what the climate was like in each year over that time span. And we can extend this outlook even further by collecting older dead wood.

The amount of snow on the ground at the end of the snowy season in the Sierra is largely determined by two climate components: how much precipitation fell during winter, and how warm or cold the winter was. Temperature determines how much of the precipitation that fell was rain versus snow, and

affects the speed of snowmelt. We put two tree-ring data sets together to represent precipitation and temperature over the last 500 years. By measuring the width of the rings of more than 1,500 blue oak trees in central California, some of the most climate-sensitive trees on the planet, we were able to reliably trace Pacific Ocean storms that have traveled east over central California and brought precipitation to the Sierra Nevada. We complemented this data with a 500-year-long winter temperature record derived from tree-ring data from a variety of trees throughout the American West, which was provided by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

By comparing these two data sets to Sierra Nevada snowpack records dating back to the 1930s, we were able to reconstruct the history of snowpack in the region all the way back to the year 1500. The results, which we published last week, made national headlines: The mountain range's 2015 snowpack level is the lowest it has been in the last 500 years.

To put that in perspective, this means this winter has been the worst since the first European explorer, Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo, explored California in the 1540s—about 150 years before the first mission was established. When my team started our work, we thought this year's snow drought would be extreme, but we did not expect it to be the absolute lowest.

Sadly, while this research sheds light on the past, it's actually not a very good barometer for the future. It very likely will not take another 500 years to reach the next record snowpack low. California temperatures are only projected to rise over the coming century. Even if the projected strong El Niño in the Pacific dumps loads of rain on Southern California this year, chances are that the Sierra Nevada snowpack will be a less reliable water source for the state going forward. This means fish and wildlife communities will suffer and, of course, California's growing population of farmers, gardeners, skiers, and residents are only going to

keep wanting more, much more.

As I write this, the summer monsoon is rolling in over Tucson, and I am reminded that it brings a chance of redemption after a dry winter in Arizona. But California doesn’t have monsoons. Instead, in the last few days, my Twitter feed has been filled with pictures and stories of the Butte and Rough fires. To me, they demonstrate the well-studied link between low snowpack, earlier spring snowmelt, and the increased risk of wildfire.

Now the ancient Giant Sequoia trees that left me in awe when I first saw them are at risk of being felled by drought, and even under the immediate threat of the Rough fire. To a tree-ring scientist, these 3,000-year-old trees are the enigmatic face of the power and resilience of nature. They have doubtless survived many threats and disturbances that we are not even aware of. To walk amongst these giants for the first time was a dream come true. Little did I realize then that I’d be keeping my fingers crossed for their survival less than a decade later.

Valerie Trouet is an associate professor in the Laboratory of Tree-Ring Research at the University of Arizona. She received her doctorate in bioengineering at the KU Leuven in Belgium. She wrote this for Zocalo Public Square.

Class covers more than safe hunting

By Benjamin Spillman, Reno Gazette-Journal

On a recent Sunday the classroom in the Verdi library was filled with people who wanted to go hunting in Nevada.

But it took the story of an African lion hunt from the 1960s to illustrate how when it comes to hunting there's an incredibly fine line between success and disaster.

The story was a recollection from Gary Speegle, a volunteer hunting safety instructor for the Nevada Department of Wildlife.

Speegle, whose family lived in Ethiopia from 1955-65, recalled it during a portion of the class that entails learning the myriad parts of a firearm and how they work together before and after a shooter pulls the trigger.

Read the whole story

Feds reject endangered status for sage grouse

By Rich Landers, Spokesman-Review

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has determined after a four year-study that the greater sage-grouse does not warrant protection under the Endangered Species Act as long as states and ranchers work to improve the plight of the bird on 60

million acres of sagebrush lands across 11 western states.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s decision to give state and federal conservation efforts an opportunity to save the sage grouse and its habitat offers a reprieve from stifling restrictions that could have been inflicted on ranchers and local economies that depend on this Western landscape.

Interior Secretary Sally Jewell made the announcement today backed by state governors at the Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge near Denver. Federal officials say the greater sage grouse won’t need the protections of the Endangered Species Act because of the safeguards in state and federal conservation plans and work by private landowners.

Read the whole story

Night bike ride competition set for this weekend

Night Series will conclude with the final races of the season on Sept. 26.

These family-friendly cross country night bike races feature a custom illuminated course that runs through the Lake Tahoe Golf Course, over fairways, into the rough, through sand traps and over bridges with the occasional cart path. The course is approximately 3 miles per lap, with most classes riding two laps.

Tahoe Game Bike Night is free to attend, with a $15 competitors entry fee. Registration will

open at 7pm. Races will begin at 9pm with three heats based on respective classes
and age groups.

In addition to the top three riders for each class, awards will be given out to the
“Most Awesome” and “Best Glow.” An after party with food and drink specials and disc jockey will
keep the festivities going inside the clubhouse.

Hikes to retrace Donner Party footsteps

Walk in the footsteps of early emigrant’s as they traversed the Sierra Nevada Mountains by participating in the 23rd annual Donner Party Hike.

The hike provides people with spectacular Sierra Nevada scenery combined with interesting history.

The hikes are Oct. 3-4.

Participants may choose from six hikes on Saturday, and a walking tour on Sunday. All hikes offer interesting insight into emigrant history from local area guides, along with invigorating recreation and beautiful scenery.

Space is limited for all events and reservations are required. Go **online** for details and registration.

Woodward Tahoe putting on community day

Woodward Tahoe is putting on a community day on Sept. 26.

The 10am-6pm event is for kids of all ages.

They will have the opportunity to to tour the Woodward indoor facility, jump in foam pits, bounce on trampolines, meet local pros Corey Duffel, Erik Roner, Tanner Fox and Martin Söderström.

The cost is $10. It is free for Bunker passholders and CORE members. Children 6 and younger must be accompanied by a parent. Helmets are required.

Woodward Tahoe is at 19749 Boreal Ridge Road, Soda Springs.