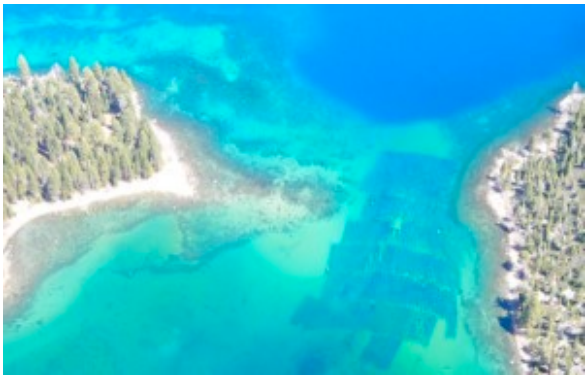
Aquatic invasive species a constant struggle

By Kathryn Reed

MEYERS – What's living and growing in Lake Tahoe wasn't always here. Some of the non-native or aquatic invasive species were intentionally introduced to the waters and others were surreptitiously brought here.

No matter their course of arrival, the AIS as they are better known, are altering the ecosystem. The Eurasian milfoil that is so prevalent in the Tahoe Keys is a breeding ground for warm water fish like big mouth bass. Neither of these two organisms is native to Tahoe.

At the fifth annual AIS Forum at Lake Tahoe Golf Course on May 21 various people spoke about what is being done to deal with some of the AIS that are here and how to keep out ones that aren't. The major AIS already calling the lake home are curly leaf pondweed, Eurasian milfoil, warm water fish, Asian clams and bullfrogs. The three AIS that could be most devastating to the lake are New Zealand mud snails, Quagga mussels and zebra mussels.



Mats at the mouth of Emerald Bay suffocated invasive clams. Photo/LTN file

A multi-year project that ended six months ago with the removal of the mats from Emerald Bay showed a 80 percent mortality rate for the Asian clams. While it was deemed a successful project, it was also called expensive.

This fall a different mechanism will be used to help eradicate the clams from a spot at Emerald Bay. Aqua Treasures has been hired to use a Zamboni-like machine that will remove the shells as they are separated from the substrate.

The Tahoe Keys Property Owners Association expects to have the draft Integrated Weed Management Plan done in September, with associated environmental documents completed in February 2017 and implementation of the plan beginning in mid-2017.



The Tahoe Keys is blamed for the spread of milfoil to other parts of the lake. Photo/LTN file

Milfoil is choking more than 80 percent of the lagoons in this South Lake Tahoe enclave. Harvesters have been the traditional method for pulling up the weed, but it is costly and ineffective. In 2014, 18,600-cubic-yards of milfoil were removed from Keys. In 2007, 4,400-cubic-yards were taken out. Herbicides and bottom barriers are being considered as alternative methods.

Scientists at UNR and the Desert Research Institute did tests

on Quagga mussels from Lake Mead with water from Lake Tahoe. Eighty percent of the adults and 80 percent of their offspring could live in those waters. Various tests were done with different amounts of calcium in the water. These mussels need calcium to survive and Tahoe has pockets that could provide habitat.



Clam shells at Lakeview Commons in South Lake Tahoe. Photo/LTN file

Quagga and zebra mussels multiply quickly, encrust watercraft and infrastructure, and compete for food with native fish. They are spread from one body of water to another attached to nearly anything that has been in an infested water body, or via standing water from an infested water body entrapped in boat engines, bilges, live-wells and buckets. That is why the boat inspection programs at Tahoe and other nearby water bodies were established.

“Our state’s natural resources are facing unprecedented threats today,” California Department of Fish and Wildlife Director Charlton Bonham said in a statement. “Preventing the spread of Quagga and zebra mussels, as well as other invasive species, is something everyone can take an active role in, thereby helping to protect the fish, wildlife and the habitats

on which they depend.”

Quagga mussels were first detected in the Colorado River system in January 2007 and were later found in San Diego and Riverside counties. They are known to be in 29 waters in California, all in Southern California. Zebra mussels were discovered in San Justo Reservoir in San Benito County in January 2008.

Tree planting sets Guinness World Record

People of all ages and backgrounds from across the U.S. and Canada came together May 20 to break the Guinness World Record for the most trees planted in one hour by small teams.

Organized by the Sustainable Forestry Initiative Inc., more than 200,000 trees were planted simultaneously in 28 communities. The old record was 52,598 trees.

The record attempt involved more than 1,100 participants, including those from the Sugar Pine Foundation, across four time zones. Each team of 25 to 100 people planted trees simultaneously for one hour.

Official confirmation from Guinness World Records is expected six to eight weeks.

Lake Tahoe trying to inflate cycling economy

By Kathryn Reed

Riding a bike isn't just about getting from Point A to Point B. For some it's more than getting exercise and seeing pretty scenery. Cycling is a big business.

The Outdoor Industry Association's 2012 report found that cyclists spend $81 billion annually. The bulk of that figure – $70 billion-plus is on trips, the rest is on gear.

Cyclists tend to spend an average of $75 a day when they travel compared to other tourists who shell out $60, they span the age spectrum, they usually stay at least three nights, and it could be individuals, friends or families traveling together.



Lake Tahoe would like to better capitalize on the growing number of cyclists. Photo Copyright 2015 Carolyn

E. Wright

A panel of four spoke May 20 at Lake Tahoe Community College about the South Shore cycling scene – its evolution and what more needs to be done.

Gary Bell, who owns Sierra Ski and Cycle Works and founded TAMBA, said when he moved to South Lake Tahoe in the late 1970s mountain biking didn't exist here. Now people from outside the area come to his shop asking about specific trails they've heard about. The Flume Trail and Mr. Toad's are the most popular.

He notices it's not just twentysomething year olds either. All ages – including families – are on their bikes.

The May issue of *Bike* magazine did a 10-page spread on Tahoe, which Bell is quoted in.

Day trips are huge for cyclists – no matter their tire width. This is something that was pointed out that Tahoe should capitalize on.



"As a premier biking destination we don't have good signage." – *Carol Chaplin, LTVA executive director*

Photo Copyright 2015

Carolyn E. Wrightt

The fact that one-quarter of the people who volunteer at TAMBA trail days proves those outside the area care enough about Tahoe mountain biking to give back.

Carol Chaplin, who heads the Lake Tahoe Visitors Authority, has the job of promoting the region for all levels of cyclists – including the pros. A large amount of credit for bringing the women's Amgen Tour of California to Tahoe can be given to Chaplin.

"We were in it for the PR part of it," Chaplin said. She won't reveal a dollar amount regarding how the town benefitted. She said it cost more than $200,000 to be the host venue for two days.

Curtis Fong, who organizes the June and September rides around the lake, said combined his events have brought in $150 million to the community. This is from participants and their friends staying and eating in town as well as spending money on other things.

But it's also up to businesses to take the initiative when events like this occur. When the men's Tour of California almost happened here in 2011 Sprouts had a welcoming sign and the restaurant was hopping with the riders.

In terms of an overall welcome for cyclists, Jason Collin – Lake Tahoe South Shore Chamber of Commerce board member – said promoting an environmentally friendly and healthy lifestyle does this.

Chaplin said in partnership with the chamber businesses have been told it would be advantageous to have bike racks, a place for cyclists to hose or wipe down their bikes – especially for mountain bikes, and laundry capabilities.

In the end, the speakers agreed there is room for improvement

if Lake Tahoe is going to be among the elite destinations for all cyclists.

“As a premier biking destination we don’t have good signage,” Chaplin said.

This, though, is a difficult endeavor on any of the state highways because Caltrans and NDOT make the rules. There are groups like the bike committee that is part of Measure S/R and the Lake Tahoe Bicycle Coalition that are working on wayfinding on paths and side streets.

It was also acknowledged that a survey should be conducted to gather more input about who is cycling here. It was pointed out that various agencies from the Tahoe Rim Trail Association to the U.S. Forest Service to Tahoe Regional Planning Agency do various surveys but the data has not been coalesced nor is it readily available to the public.

Chaplin said a detailed user survey is something the LTVA could do, though it costs money. The LTVA marketing committee will be discussing the 2015-16 budget at its May 26 meeting. Chaplin said important information to find out is the gaps the area has when it comes to cycling so those can be addressed.

Time to get in gear for Tahoe Bike Challenge

Participants in the Tahoe Bike Challenge, which runs from June 1-14, will track their miles in a friendly competition for prizes and bragging rights.

The kickoff celebration is May 30 at Moe’s Original BBQ in

Tahoe City, featuring group rides, live music, a bike tire changing contest, and bicycle decorating competition.

Information on the Tahoe Bike Challenge may be found online, including a calendar of events and details on how to register and log miles ridden during the challenge.

Water efficiency workshop targets landscapers

To help professional landscapers improve water use efficiency, the Department of Water Resources and the California Center for Urban Horticulture at UC Davis will conduct three workshops, including one in South Lake Tahoe.

The workshops will feature indoor presentations and outdoor demonstrations. Additional materials will be provided to all attendees after the event.

The $20 registration fee includes an attendance certificate that may be used to obtain continuing education units.

The local workshop is June 5 from 7:30am-noon at Lake Tahoe Community College.

For more information or to register, go online or call 530-752-6642.

Book, movie spur record numbers on PCT

By Sam Stanton, Sacramento Bee

Last September, Andrew Tavalero was within days of completing his six-month hike of the 2,650-mile Pacific Crest Trail when he stopped in a remote Washington town.

Tavalero, 22, struck up a conversation with some other hikers, who told him his Siskiyou County hometown of Weed had been hit with a devastating wildfire. A phone call to his mother confirmed that the blaze had destroyed his family home.

“I remember standing on the side of this road thinking, ‘I could hitchhike home now; I could get a bus ticket,’ ” Tavalero said. “I sat there for 10 minutes and thought, ‘I’ve come this far and I’m going to quit 50 miles from the Canadian border?’

“There’s no way I’m going to quit. You get that kind of attitude, that I’m going to crawl to the finish line if I have to.”

Tavalero made it, and is listed on the Pacific Crest Trail Association’s “2,600-miler list” as one of 3,430 people who have successfully completed the trek between the Mexican and Canadian borders along the Sierra Nevada and Cascade mountain ranges, most of it through wilderness areas.

In recent weeks, as many as 1,500 other people began the arduous journey to add their names to that list.

Most will drop out or postpone finishing until another year.

But hundreds likely will finish. The number of people trekking the PCT has grown steadily for years as the Internet and, more recently, the book and film “Wild,” about author Cheryl Strayed’s experience on the trail, have stoked interest.

Read the whole story

Players signing on for Tahoe celebrity golf tourney

Returning champions, fan favorites and newbies are gearing up for the 26th annual American Century Championship at Edgewood Tahoe Golf Course.

First-timers for the July 14-19 event include: former fashion model and actress Kim Alexis; former tennis star and author James Blake; former MLB All-Star pitcher David Cone; country musician, rapper and southern rock anthem songwriter Colt Ford; Notre Dame head football coach Brian Kelly; actor comedian Rob Riggle of the “Daily Show,” “Saturday Night Live” and “22 Jump Street”; Carolina Panthers head coach Ron Rivera; and Brandon Weeden of the Dallas Cowboys.

Defending 2014 champion Mark Rypien, the Washington Redskins’ former Super Bowl XXVI MVP (1992), who won the very first American Century Championship in 1990, returns this year as well as past winners, three-time champion Billy Joe Tolliver, and eight-time champion Rick Rhoden.

Retired U.S. Army Corporal Chad Pfeifer, an Iraqi War Veteran and amputee whose golf-centered rehabilitation turned him into

a top-tier tournament player, joined the field in 2014. Pfeifer returns this year along with retired Army Sgt. Maj. Rodney Gorman who won the Bush Center's fourth annual Warrior Open at Las Colinas Country Club in October.

For the second year, the American Century Championship is offering complimentary tickets for all U.S. military. All active duty, reservists, National Guard and veterans may receive two complimentary tickets, including one for a guest each day of the tournament. All service men and women can apply by going online. At the events, participants must show photo ID along with the ticket voucher at tournament gates to receive the complimentary ticket(s).

For more info about the tournament, go online.

The cold hard facts of freezing to death

By Peter Stark, Outside

When your Jeep spins lazily off the mountain road and slams backward into a snowbank, you don't worry immediately about the cold. Your first thought is that you've just dented your bumper. Your second is that you've failed to bring a shovel. Your third is that you'll be late for dinner. Friends are expecting you at their cabin around eight for a moonlight ski, a late dinner, a sauna. Nothing can keep you from that.

Driving out of town, defroster roaring, you barely noted the bank thermometer on the town square: minus 27 degrees at 6:36.

The radio weather report warned of a deep mass of arctic air settling over the region. The man who took your money at the Conoco station shook his head at the register and said he wouldn’t be going anywhere tonight if he were you. You smiled. A little chill never hurt anybody with enough fleece and a good four-wheel-drive.

But now you’re stuck. Jamming the gearshift into low, you try to muscle out of the drift. The tires whine on ice-slicked snow as headlights dance on the curtain of frosted firs across the road. Shoving the lever back into park, you shoulder open the door and step from your heated capsule. Cold slaps your naked face, squeezes tears from your eyes.

You check your watch: 7:18. You consult your map: A thin, switchbacking line snakes up the mountain to the penciled square that marks the cabin.

Breath rolls from you in short frosted puffs. The Jeep lies cocked sideways in the snowbank like an empty turtle shell. You think of firelight and saunas and warm food and wine. You look again at the map. It’s maybe five or six miles more to that penciled square. You run that far every day before breakfast. You’ll just put on your skis. No problem.

Read the whole story

How to be fast after 50

By Bradley Stulberg, Outside

Fifty is America’s favorite age. According to a recent Harris Interactive poll, if we could “skip time and live forever in good health at a particular age,” Americans, on average,

choose 50.

Athletes, however, might think differently: 50 isn't exactly associated with peak performance. But it's still a damn good age to be an athlete, says Joe Friel, one of the world's foremost experts on endurance sports. You can, in fact, be fast after 50. That happens to be the title of his latest book, "Fast After 50".

We had a chat with the endurance guru, who's now pushing 70 himself, to find out how athletes can thrive after hitting the half-century mark.

Read the whole story

The other Audubon: The one that allows golf courses to kill birds

By Rachael Bale and Tom Knudson, Reveal

The long, emerald-green fairways of the Dairy Creek Golf Course double as a serene nature haven where birds are celebrated and protected. The course, in the California coastal town of San Luis Obispo, even has the credentials to prove it: Audubon International has certified it as a sanctuary.

But golfers and bird-watchers beware: It's not what you think. When American coots do the things American coots do, like pull up grass and poop, they get shot and killed.

Data from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service show that Dairy

Creek Golf Course has intentionally killed more than 1,000 of the small, black duck-like birds over the past three years, making it one of the most deadly golf courses for birds in the country.

And Audubon International, as it turns out, is not affiliated with the venerable, bird-friendly National Audubon Society. It is something else entirely – a third-party certification organization funded by the entities it certifies: golf courses.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service data show that Dairy Creek Golf Course in San Luis Obispo has intentionally killed hundreds of migratory birds over the past three years.Credit: Stuart Palley for Reveal
Audubon International has certified as environmentally friendly more than a dozen golf courses that have killed nuisance birds. Those golf courses, mostly in California, have killed nearly 4,000 birds from 2011 through 2013, according to data from the Fish and Wildlife Service.

In all, more than 30,000 birds – most of them coots and Canada geese, but a handful of double-crested cormorants, too – were killed on golf courses during that time.

While that's no threat to coot, goose or cormorant populations, killing birds is only supposed to be a short-term, last-ditch option for golf courses under an international treaty designed to protect migratory birds.

But the data show that many golf courses rely on lethal methods year after year. In addition, some biologists say the killing doesn't accomplish anything because more birds will rush in to occupy real estate – full of big open spaces and ponds – that's perfect for birds.

"You're not reducing the population. You're just moving them temporarily," said Brooke Maslo, a wildlife specialist at Rutgers University's Cooperative Extension program.

More than a dozen golf courses – certified as environmentally friendly by Audubon International – killed nearly 4,000 nuisance birds, including American coots, from 2011 through 2013.Credit: Tom Knudson/Reveal

For years, the National Audubon Society and its local chapters have been fighting against the confusion the Audubon International name causes. Often, they say, they oppose the very developments that the golf course group blesses.

“Audubon International is one of the worst examples of somebody trading on a name that is disingenuous,” said Bob Sallinger of the Audubon Society of Portland. “From my perspective, it’s a golf course industry front organization to some degree.”

Much of Audubon International’s financial support does come from the golf industry. Funders include the U.S. Golf Association as well as turf, irrigation and landscaping companies, according to their online list of sponsors. But most of the funding comes from the golf courses themselves – they pay anywhere from a few hundred dollars for an annual membership to upwards of $7,000 to get certified.

Audubon International was founded in 1987 by Ronald Dodson, a former regional vice president of the National Audubon Society in the 1980s. After he was laid off at the National Audubon Society, he launched Audubon International and its programs for golf courses.

In 1991, the National Audubon Society sued Audubon International over the name. Audubon International often certifies golf developments the National Audubon Society opposes, and the similar names cause confusion. The National Audubon Society’s suit was not successful.

Audubon International’s stated mission is promoting good stewardship of the environment. It requires golf courses to implement plans for water and chemical use as well as for

biodiversity. This includes encouraging courses not to irrigate in the middle of the day when water can be lost to evaporation, limiting pesticide use and landscaping low-traffic areas with native plants to create wildlife habitat.

To award the highest level of certification, known as a Signature Sanctuary, the organization sends a representative to survey the golf course. For the Cooperative Sanctuary level, it relies on the course's word.

One of the main elements of its certification process is helping golf courses create good habitats for wildlife. But when those habitats attract wildlife the golf courses don't want, Audubon International doesn't require them to have a plan.

In fact, asking about nuisance wildlife management isn't part of the certification or recertification process at all, said Audubon International's Tara Pepperman, who runs the Cooperative Sanctuaries program for golf courses.

"We don't really touch that topic," Pepperman said.

Audubon International's executive director, Doug Bechtel, said the organization does have educational materials on how to deal with nuisance wildlife but that the final decision on how to handle problem birds to protect their property is up to the golf courses.

"If they need to protect that investment," Bechtel said, "it's not our best interest as a third-party independent organization to deny them their private property decisions."

The killings are sanctioned by the federal government. The 96-year-old Migratory Bird Treaty Act, a landmark international agreement that prohibited killing many species of native migratory birds, allows birds to be intentionally killed under certain circumstances. If those birds are damaging property or pose a threat to human safety, anyone from a golf course to a

vineyard to an airport can get a depredation permit to kill the birds.

More than a dozen golf courses – certified as environmentally friendly by Audubon International – killed nearly 4,000 nuisance birds, including Canadian geese, from 2011 through 2013.Credit: Tom Knudson/Reveal
More than 1.6 million native migratory birds have been killed under depredation permits from 2011 through 2013, a Reveal analysis of Fish and Wildlife Service permit data found. Conservationists and some biologists have criticized the permit system for allowing needless killing of migratory birds and weak enforcement of Fish and Wildlife Service's own policies to ensure lethal methods aren't overused.

Dairy Creek Golf Course's superintendent, Josh Heptig, said shooting the birds is a last resort. His course has tried remote-controlled boats, laser pointers, dogs and fences. But the course is on a migration path. And there are ponds next to the course that it doesn't own, so there are always coots around.

Heptig said the coots do up to $10,000 in damage to the grass and expose more than 50,000 golfers to feces annually. Bird feces can carry certain infectious diseases, but public health experts say the risk to golfers isn't great.

"The hypothetical risk is there, but we've never documented that it's a major problem," said Dr. Kirk Smith, a public health expert and veterinarian who co-chaired a 2013 project about preventing human-transmittable diseases from animals in public places.

Still, the economic damage and health concerns have allowed Dairy Creek to continue renewing their permit to shoot coots.

Heptig acknowledged that the lethal method doesn't solve the problem, either. When the shots ring out, Heptig said, many of the coots temporarily relocate to other ponds. Once it quiets

down, they return.

The coot killings at Dairy Creek Golf Course came as a surprise to Michael Stiles, the outgoing president of the nearby Morro Coast Audubon Society. Stiles said the golf course attracts them.

“They put ponds in. They have green open space,” he said. “They attract the birds and then (kill) them. It’s not good.”

Collette Adkins, a biologist and lawyer with the Center for Biological Diversity, said it’s great that the golf courses set up an environment that attracts wildlife, but that doesn’t mean they’re environmentally friendly.

“Use of nonlethal methods of controlling nuisance birds – and showing some tolerance – would reflect a true commitment to the environment,” she said.