Lack of snow forces Sierra to close

What may be a record year for lack of snowfall in the Lake Tahoe area has claimed another ski resort. Sierra-at-Tahoe will not open Monday.

“There is absolutely a chance of reopening. We are fully committed to resuming operations if we receive the adequate amount of snowfall,” Thea Hardy, resort spokeswoman, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

March 15 is not the earliest final day for Sierra. Hardy said in the 1970s there was an earlier date.

Sierra has received one-third of its normal snowfall this winter. The resort near Echo Summit receives on average more than 400 inches of snow each winter.

“After exhausting all possible tools – even with snowmaking at every opportunity and strategic movement of snow, Mother Nature came up short,” General Manger John Rice said in a statement. “This isn’t goodbye; it’s see you soon.”

Sierra’s Equinox Spring Festival that was to start March 21 is still a-go. The subsequent concerts are on standby. For more info, go online.

Other closed resorts in California include: Homewood Mountain Resort, Donner Ski Ranch, Badger Pass, Dodge Ridge, Mountain High, China Peak, Soda Springs, Mt. Baldy, Mount Shasta and Tahoe Donner.

Normal closing date is mid-April for most resorts.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Special Olympian: No challenge she can’t face

By Alyx Sacks, KRNV-TV

In a week, locals will be braving the cold and plunging into the freezing waters of Lake Tahoe all in support of Special Olympics.

Events like the Polar Plunge support athletes like 31-year-old Maria Delgado.

Delgado is focused on what she can and will do, never considering there could be something she can’t do. That attitude is part of what makes her a Special Olympian.

“She didn’t really have a good prognosis when she was born and they didn’t think that she would be able to do half the things that she is doing now,” her mom Carmen Delgado says.

Read the whole story

Sierra, Northstar ski resorts may be sold

By David Sharp, AP

A real estate investment trust that’s considering getting out of the snow business could sell more than a dozen ski resorts

from Maine to California that are worth hundreds of millions of dollars.

CNL Lifestyle Properties owns 16 resorts including Northstar, Sierra-at-Tahoe, Sunday River and Sugarloaf in Maine, Bretton Woods, Loon Mountain and Mount Sunapee in New Hampshire, Okemo Mountain in Vermont, Crested Butte in Colorado, and Brighton in Utah.

If CNL sells them all to one buyer, industry officials say it would be the largest single ski resort transaction in the history of the sport – though skiers might not notice the sale at all.

"CNL Lifestyle Properties bought Sierra and Northstar a few years ago. Booth Creek Resort Properties manages the resort – the assets and special use permit are property of CNL. I work for Booth Creek, we pay rent to CNL," Sierra General Manager John Rice told *Lake Tahoe News*.

In October 2010, Vail Resorts acquired the stock of the companies that operate Northstar from Booth Creek and other sellers for $63 million. Vail also runs Northstar Village, which is owned by CNL. No one from Northstar or Vail Resorts was available for comment.

Rice said change in ownership would have no affect on Sierra.

"Whoever owns the permit would still need a tenant. Sierra is the tenant. A new owner of the assets would be our new landlord, if you will," Rice explained.

CNL will evaluate options for its remaining properties including ski resorts, theme parks and marinas "in the near future," said Steve Rice, senior managing director of CNL Financial Group, and no relation to John Rice. Besides selling them, alternatives include a private buyout or listing on a publicly traded exchange.

“We’re taking a studied and careful approach,” Rice said.

REITs are an investment vehicle for a variety of properties including hotels, office buildings and malls, but they are new to the ski industry in the last 15 or so years.

There’s only one other REIT that’s a big player in the ski industry, Missouri-based EPR, said Michael Berry, president of the National Ski Areas Association.

CNL Lifestyle Properties was valued at as much as $3 billion in 2012 with ownership of more than 100 water parks, ski resorts, marinas and senior housing developments before the value dropped in the aftermath of a real estate downturn. The REIT is nearing the end of its projected lifespan and anticipates having an “exit strategy” in place by Dec. 31.

In June, CNL agreed to sell 48 golf properties for $320 million. In December, it announced an agreement to sell its senior housing for $790 million.

Ideally, the remaining ski properties, theme parks and marinas would be sold, and the company enlisted Jefferies LLC, an investment bank, to evaluate options.

Any sale wouldn’t have any significant impact on skiers because the resort operators’ long-term leases will remain in place even if the properties change hands.

“At the end of the day, from a customer standpoint, it’s not going to alter reality that much,” Berry said.

Ski resorts, which are at the mercy of weather and the economy, can be good investments as long the owners have a long investment horizon, said Michael Krongel from Mirus Resort Capital in Burlington, Mass., who’s been involved in buying, selling and developing ski resorts for 45 years. REITs like Florida-based CNL bring in revenue through rent paid by ski resort operators.

Lake Tahoe News contributed to this story.

Conditions prime for controlled burns in Tahoe

Tahoe Douglas Fire Protection District and the U.S. Forest Service may conduct prescribed fire operations around the Tahoe basin beginning March 16, weather permitting.

Operations may take place southwest of Meeks Bay, on Gardner Mountain near South Tahoe High School and off Gardner Street, Luther Pass near Grass Lake, Ski Run Boulevard near Heavenly, Edgewood Canyon on lower Kingsbury Grade and near Logan Creek Drive on the East Shore. Operations may last through the next several weeks as conditions allow.

Smoke from prescribed fire operations is normal and may continue for several days after an ignition depending on the project size. Agencies coordinate with state and local county air pollution control districts and monitors weather conditions closely prior to prescribed fire ignition. They wait for favorable conditions that will carry smoke up and out of the Basin. Crews also conduct test burns before igniting a larger area, to verify how effectively fuels are consumed how smoke will travel.

Before conducting prescribed fire operations, agencies may post road signs around affected areas and make email or phone notifications. The Forest Service updates the local fire information line at 530.543.2600, ext. 6.

Group predicts $9 bil. in March Madness wagers

By J.D. Morris, Las Vegas Sun

The American Gaming Association is again using a major athletic event to draw attention to sports betting, this time estimating that Americans will wager upwards of $2 billion through more than 70 million brackets on this year's March Madness college basketball tournament.

The Washington, D.C.-based trade group for the casino industry announced its predictions in research released today.

Beyond just the amount bet through brackets, the association expects the total amount wagered will reach $9 billion, including $240 million bet at sports books in Nevada.

Read the whole story

Climbing area at Donner Summit being protected

The Truckee Donner Land Trust and the Access Fund, a national climbing advocacy organization, have signed an agreement with a private landowner to purchase a significant climbing area on Donner Summit.

The 10-acre acquisition will protect the popular and historic

Black Wall, Peanut Gallery, and Road Cut climbing areas, as well as the access trail to the popular Space Wall, Shark Wall, and Grouse Slabs, all easily accessible from Old Highway 40.

The climbing routes were established more than 50 years ago and range from deep chimneys and low-angle slabs for beginners, to overhanging test pieces for experts, and splitter cracks and sport routes for all skill levels.

The property has been privately owned since the mid-1800s, but concerns about liability have led to the current owner's need to sell the property. The Land Trust and the Access Fund are working with the landowners to protect this climbing resource and landmark forever. Truckee Donner Land Trust has a purchase and sale agreement to fundraise and acquire the property by December. Access Fund has a lease agreement to address liability concerns raised by the private landowners and assist in stewardship.

An adjacent 65-acre parcel owned by the Land Trust will also provide access to Black Wall and adjacent crags as part of Truckee's trail network. The parcel has a creek that typically flows year-round and will be part of a multi-use non-motorized recreational trail from Donner Lake toward the climbing wall and continuing up to the summit area.

With support from the Access Fund and local climbers, the Land Trust will steward and provide public access to the property, minimize environmental and visual impacts from climbers, build new trails and trailheads, provide informative signage, and protect nesting peregrine falcons in the area. The Land Trust and the Access Fund will work with the local climbing community to create a volunteer climber coalition that will help implement a recreation and stewardship management plan for the greater Donner Summit area to ensure best practices.

The Land Trust has raised $50,000 toward the total fundraising

goal of $280,000.

Wise finishes second in World Cup halfpipe

By USSA

TIGNES, France – The final stop of the FIS World Cup halfpipe tour wrapped up under the lights in Tignes, France, with David Wise (Reno), Alex Ferreira (Aspen) and Brita Sigourney (Carmel) all snagging podium spots and Wise walking away with his first crystal globe as the halfpipe tour title winner.

A much anticipated men's final lived up to its hype with Wise taking an early lead and continuing to increase his score by landing a right double 1440. The crowd thought he had nailed the win, but on the last run, Canadian Mike Riddle outdid Wise to win the World Cup, knocking Wise to second place. X Games bronze medalist, Ferreira claimed third, stomping a clean first run.

"It always plays out interesting at the end of the season for the World Cup title," Wise said. "There's so much that goes into it. It's not just one event. It's not just one run. It's the whole season. So to come down with the crystal globe for the first time in my career is an amazing feeling."

Gus Kenworthy (Telluride, Colo.) who was also in the running to win the World Cup title in both halfpipe and slopestyle, fell during training and did not start in finals, settling for sixth place. Despite not competing in the Tignes finals, Kenworthy still held on for second place in the World Cup halfpipe title. Kevin Rolland of France took third.

On the women's side, Sigourney put down an impressive third run to earn third place behind Ayana Onozuka of Japan and Canadian Cassie Sharpe, respectively. Onozuka threw down one of the most impressive women's runs in history – going higher than most of the men on her second-to-last hit of the night – and won the World Cup title and the crystal globe.

Devin Logan took fifth in the halfpipe finals, which sat her third place in the World Cup title chase for halfpipe. Annalisa Drew (Andover, Mass.) was eighth in Tignes.

Betting on simulated horse races will soon be a reality

By J.D. Morris, Las Vegas Sun

Nevada race books will soon start offering wagers on events that never happen in real life.

The Gaming Commission authorized betting on virtual events last month, at the same time it approved Olympics wagering. Now, race and sports book operators are seeking regulatory approval for the technology to facilitate virtual races.

William Hill led the push, and several other companies filed letters in support of the idea. It's already legal in the United Kingdom.

Joe Asher, CEO of William Hill U.S., said virtual events could be "filler content" between real horse races, which have

declined in popularity over the years in part due to a shrinking fan base and the rise of other, more popular forms of gambling and entertainment.

Read the whole story

Mothership Classic at Squaw benefits High Fives

On March 30, Squaw Valley's KT-22 chairlift will host the Mothership Classic.

People are invited to join in a monthlong fund-raising campaign culminating in an on-snow phenomenon of skiers, snowboarders and retro mountain adventurers lapping the chairlift as many times as they can from 9am-4pm. Participants will obtain per-lap sponsorships. Throwback gear, vintage equipment and costumes are part of the program as a to tribute the lively history of Squaw Valley and Lake Tahoe's mountain lifestyle.

There is no fee for entry into the event and donations raised will benefit the local nonprofit High Fives Foundation.

Interested participants should sign up using the online pledge platform.

Tahoe City boat ramp repairs delayed

The Lake Forest boat ramp replacement project keeps getting more expensive and longer to complete.

When Tahoe City Public Utility District went out to bid on the project in February 2014 it was supposed to cost a little more a half million dollars and be finished in December that year.

Now the price tag is more than $1 million and sometime in May is when what is usually a year-round ramp will reopen.

The latest problem is that precast concrete panels don’t meet TCPUD or state specifications. Those are now being replaced.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report