Heavenly to play key role in women’s cycling event

The inaugural Amgen Tour of California women’s UCI stage race will kick off with a 74-mile ride that starts and ends at Heavenly Mountain Resort on May 8.

It will be a counter-clockwise race around the lake. The day will end with the climb up the 15 percent grades of Keller Street back to Heavenly.

The race starts at 10am.

Race and tourism officials are hoping there won’t be a repeat of 2011 when the Amgen men’s tour was snowed out. It was to start in Stateline and end in Northstar.

Leg two is May 9 with a start time of 10:30am. It will start and finish at Heavenly, but will be 50 miles.

This 25-mile circuit will be tackled twice. After a quick descent from Heavenly, they will ride out to Meyers. The second half of the course features the switchbacks of Apache Avenue, followed quickly by the climb back up to Heavenly on Ski Run Boulevard to the finish line.

Fourteen of the top women’s cycling teams from around the world will compete.

The four days of women’s competition will be staged in conjunction with the men’s eight-day race.

Critics try to ban coyote hunting in Nev.

By Jeff DeLong, Reno Gazette-Journal

Critics of coyote hunting contests hope to ban the controversial practice in Nevada, insisting it amounts to little more than wanton slaughter of wildlife.

Hunters counter that it is a legally protected sport that may help keep in check a soaring coyote population increasingly posing threats to livestock, pets and people.

Don Molde of Reno and Fred Voltz of Carson City have petitioned the Nevada Board of Wildlife Commissioners for regulatory changes that would outlaw contests awarding cash or other prizes for killing coyotes.

Read the whole story

Sierra ramping up events for March

Sierra-at-Tahoe’s second annual Equinox Spring Festival is March 21. This free festival features live bands on three consecutive weekends, events for all ages and competitions on

and off the mountain.

Competitions including the Van’s Hi-Standard Series and 9th annual Buckle Up Big Air will be taking place on-mountain, while the 8th annual Salsa Showdown will happen in the base area.

Scott Pemberton and Sierra Jorts Party play March 21. Rainbow Girls and New Belgium’s Slow Ride Competition is March 28. Family Crest and Sierra Pillow Fight is April 4.

For more info, go online.

Daily dose of nature good for kids

By Cynthia Orlando, Statesman Journal

Today more than 80 percent of the U.S. population lives in urban areas. It’s therefore fortunate we now understand many of the physical and psychological benefits healthy trees provide urbanites: Our parks and trees are more than aesthetically pleasing areas that help address pollution problems.

Unfortunately, life for everyone these days can be demanding — even for children. School, societal pressures and even relationship challenges with family members or friends can be stressful for kids and young adults. Also, children are spending more time than ever indoors and on electronic devices, including laptops, cell phones and electronic games.

In the last 10 years or more, the medical field has found these sorts of habits and stresses are unhealthy and can affect the immune system.

A renewed focus on the many health benefits children receive from exposure to nature and play in the natural environment is called for.

Read the whole story

Living history snowshoe on the South Shore

The Tahoe Rim Trail Association is hosting a historical snowshoe on Feb. 28 from 10am-1pm on the South Shore.

(If there is no snow, it will be a hike.)

During this event people will follow in Snowshoe Thompson's winter tracks. Steve Hale of Comstock Characters will be acting as Thompson in a Chautauqua performance. It will be like trekking during the winter of 1865, but with modern equipment.

Thompson carried the mail back and forth from Genoa and Placerville for two decades in the mid-1800s.

The hike is free, but reservations are necessary. Sign up online.

Workout junkies flock to CrossFit, shun fitness centers

By Allison Prang, Bloomberg

Elizabeth Johnson is giving the fitness-center industry cause for concern.

The 24-year-old reporter in Sarasota, Fla., ditched her membership at the local Youfit health club and in May joined the Seaward CrossFit studio. Since signing up at the club, which she says has about 40 members and runs classes of 10 or fewer people performing exercises in unison, she's lost 40 pounds and gained the support of a crowd of like-minded fitness fanatics.

"I felt like they wanted me to be there," Johnson said in a phone interview. "I like the small, community feel."

CrossFit, SoulCycle and other programs luring consumers like Johnson are hurting fitness-center operators such as Town Sports International Holdings Inc., which has posted losses and falling sales recently. While the large companies use warehouses of gleaming exercise equipment to draw members, the upstarts are creating tribal followings in small spaces at fractions of the cost. That's prompted the big operators to fight back by cutting prices or starting their own studio-like concepts.

Read the whole story

Olympic wagering recommended for approval

By Mason Levinson, Bloomberg

The Nevada Gaming Control Board recommended that the state's gaming commission legalize gambling on the Olympics when it meets this month.

The proposal, brought by a group of Nevada casinos, was discussed Feb. 11 at a meeting in Carson City and was referred to the Nevada Gaming Commission.

Wagering would be legal in Nevada for "Olympic sporting or athletic events sanctioned by the International Olympic Committee, subject to limitation by the chairman or the chairman's designee in his sole and absolute discretion," under the language recommended to the commission, Marie Bell, the board's executive secretary, said in an e-mail.

The commission, which will meet Feb. 26, has the right to choose different language, such as allowing only gambling on events that don't involve judges.

Read the whole story

Drought prompts early fish stocking in Nev.

By Associated Press

The drought is prompting early fish stocking again in the

Truckee River in Northern Nevada.

Nevada Department of Wildlife spokesman Chris Healy says the first of 35,000 rainbow trout will be released on Wednesday, about a month earlier than usual for the second straight year because of another dry winter.

He says the Truckee must have a decent flow before it can be stocked with trout, and the early fish release will occur due to low flows expected later this year.

Last year's stocking of fish was the earliest since 1994.

The wildlife department usually stocks the Truckee with about 70,000 trout, but only about half of that is scheduled to be stocked this spring because of low flows expected by early summer.

The Truckee flows over 100 miles from Lake Tahoe to Pyramid Lake in the Nevada high desert.

Prescribed fires slated for Lake Tahoe Basin

The U.S. Forest Service may continue prescribed fire operations in numerous areas around the Lake Tahoe Basin beginning Feb. 17.

On the South and West shores of Lake Tahoe, operations may take place north of Tahoma near Elizabeth Drive, southwest of Meeks Bay, on Gardner Mountain near South Tahoe High School and Gardner Street, Christmas Valley, Luther Pass near Grass Lake, and Ski Run Boulevard near Heavenly. On the East Shore, operations may take place near Logan Creek Drive and off

Highway 28 north of Spooner Summit. Operations will last through the next several weeks as conditions allow.

Fall and winter bring cooler temperatures and precipitation, which favor prescribed burning. Each operation follows a prescribed fire burn plan, which considers temperature, humidity, wind, moisture of the vegetation, and conditions for the dispersal of smoke.

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.

Family-owned Calif. ski resorts struggle from drought

By Scott Smith, AP

With California entering its fourth drought year, even some big resorts with millions of dollars in modern snow-making equipment don’t have all their lifts running.

The midsized and family-owned resorts struggling most had hoped to reopen for the Presidents Day holiday, traditionally the year’s biggest weekend for skiing.

A recent winter storm that washed over the state originated in the tropics and dropped more rain than the much-needed snow. While any wet weather is welcome in California, the storm didn’t end the drought or put all the dormant resorts back in business.

“We’re basically the canary in the coal mine,” said Janet

Tuttle, who owns Donner Ski Ranch northwest of Lake Tahoe and one of about seven resorts forced to close mid-season. “It’s kind of a sad state here in California.”

A stingy snowfall had left Donner’s mountain face marked with brown patches of exposed dirt and rock. Tuttle and her husband, Marshall, closed the resort’s six chairlifts and two beginner runs by mid-January. They reopened Wednesday with a little boost from the recent storm, hoping to keep the lifts running this weekend.

She worried about more warm weather in the forecast. “I’m not very happy about that,” she said.

California’s 27 resorts – and two in neighboring Nevada – make up the nation’s second-most-popular destination for skiers and snowboarders after Colorado, said Bob Roberts, executive director of the California Ski Industry Association.

China Peak Mountain Resort east of Fresno was among the latest ski areas forced to suspend business, following others in Northern California such as Donner Ski Ranch, Dodge Ridge and Yosemite’s Badger Pass. Mt. Baldy Ski Lifts near Los Angeles also closed.

Homewood Mountain Resort at Lake Tahoe suspended skiing early this month but also plans to open for the Presidents Day weekend with a few inches of fresh snow from recent storms.

Ski season started strong with heavy snowfall in December blanketing California’s mountains. Resorts opened before Christmas, earlier than the previous year, with raised hopes that more snow would follow.

But January set records as the driest and the second warmest in recorded history, said Michael Anderson, a climatologist with the state’s Department of Water Resources. The Sierra Nevada this January received 2 percent of its normal precipitation, with an average high temperature of 53 degrees,

he said.

In an unsettling trend, four of California's 10 driest Januaries have occurred since 2007, said Anderson, adding that several days recently at Lake Tahoe have reached the mid-60s. He spent last weekend with his family in the Sierra's Donner Summit, where it rained.

"When it's raining at the top of the mountain, it's awful hard to build a snowpack," he said.

Other Western states have gotten their share of snow this year, said Michael Berry, president of the National Ski Areas Association, noting favorable skiing in Colorado, Utah, Wyoming and Montana. He said storms have hit Washington, but the warm temperatures pushed the snow level to higher elevations.

Meanwhile, much of California remains locked in extreme drought.

Tim Cohee, owner of China Peak Mountain Resort, thought he could keep the lifts running through Presidents Day weekend. But Cohee said that only the beginner skiing hill and a slope for sleds and inner-tubes would be open for the holiday.

China Peak has snow-making machines, but the warm weather gave Cohee few opportunities to turn them on. The recent rain made the mountain blotchy, so he suspended skiing. Cohee said China Peak and other small resorts are facing serious financial hardship.

"Name a business that could go through four years of this," said Cohee, who has owned and managed ski resorts in California for 22 years. "I've seen a couple wimpy years before, but nothing like this – nothing even close."

At the large Heavenly Lake Tahoe, a little more than half of the ski runs were open Tuesday, but spokeswoman Rachael Woods

of Vail Resorts said those runs are long and well-groomed, providing skiers and boarders with great conditions.

The runs are fully open at Kirkwood Mountain Resort, owned by the same company, and one of California's highest in elevation, said Woods, adding that Kirkwood, Heavenly and Northstar all received well over a foot of snow from the recent storms.

Cold overnight temperatures at the high elevation ski areas have allowed for making snow, she said, adding, "There are many resorts that are doing well."

Berry, the National Ski Areas Association's president, said ski resort operators are optimists by nature; they have to be, he said, adding that a powerful storm may still hit California deluging the mountains and turning the season around in 24 hours. He ran Kirkwood Mountain Resort for 13 years and has seen it happen.

"Mother Nature can be cruel," Berry said. "She can also be incredibly generous."