Tahoe Water Trail group putting on fall paddle

The Lake Tahoe Water Trail Fall Paddle Day is Sept. 20 starting at Pope Beach on the South Shore.

The day begins with a morning-guided tour with interpretive docents who will broaden paddlers' awareness of the unique features of and challenges to the lake environment.

During lunch on the beach people will learn more about the Lake Tahoe Water Trail.

Following lunch there will be beach games, skills clinics or people may participate in an independent afternoon tour.

Discounted rental equipment is available with reservation.

The event costs $30, which includes membership to the water trail and lunch. Parking at Pope is $8, though it's OK to paddle in from another site. Meet at the beach at 8am; paddle starts at 9am.

For more info or to register, go online.

S. Tahoe-El Dorado County draft rec plan released

South Lake Tahoe and El Dorado County's draft Parks, Trails and Recreation Master Plan is now available online for review.

Officials say the plan provides direction for enhancing recreation opportunities for residents and visitors by

increasing collaborative efforts and focusing resources where they are most needed.

The key recommendations are: regional coordination and collaboration, park and facility maintenance, renovations and improvements, new park, facility and trail development, recreation activities, programs and events, and operations and management.

There will be an open house Sept. 25 at 7pm for the public to share ideas on the recommendations within the plan. It will be at the recreation center at 1180 Rufus Allen Blvd., South Lake Tahoe.

A survey about the plan is online.

Mushroom forays in Lake Tahoe Basin

Tahoe Institute for Natural Science is planning a weekend around mushrooms in September.

The last weekend of September, TINS will sponsor excursions into the woods to search for these organisms. People will learn about their ecology and identification. Expert mycologists from Tahoe, Reno, and coastal California will be on hand.

Email Will at will@tinsweb.org to join the Sept. 27-28 forays.

Dixie, Queen to race Labor Day weekend

The annual Great Lake Tahoe Sternwheeler Race is Aug. 30.

California’s Tahoe Queen and Nevada’s M.S. Dixie II will race for four miles starting at 11am.

Boarding starts at 10am. The cost is $25 per person, which includes a buffet brunch.

For more info or to buy tickets, go online.

Is fantasy football online gaming?

By Eddie Pells, AP

Some of the newest incarnations of fantasy football look a lot more like gambling than intricate, outsmart-your-opponent strategy games.

Since 2011, the billion-dollar fantasy market has been infused with dozens of daily and weekly games. Those games allow players to win huge prizes quickly, sometimes in one week, sometimes in just one night. With players betting thousands or even tens of thousands a night, legal experts believe it’s time to review the section of the 2006 federal law that was written specifically to protect fantasy sports from being banned the way online poker was.

“There’s importance in clarifying the law,” says Marc Edelman, a professor at Fordham Law School who studies the law as it applies to fantasy sports. “As long as there’s uncertainty about the legality of these games, some potential businesses that might enter the marketplace stay out.”

Seasonal leagues are largely the domain of billion-dollar companies such as CBS and ESPN, with close ties to the NFL. For now, they have remained on the sidelines of the short-term business, leaving it largely in the hands of companies such as FanDuel, which is expecting to triple its base to 500,000 fans this season.

“We have the most popular fantasy football game going,” said Kevin Ota of ESPN, which boasts an estimated 14 million fantasy players. “It’s been incredibly successful, and we’re focused on improving our game every year. We always keep our eye on opportunities to serve sports fans better.”

ESPN officials say they have no immediate plans for weekly cash games.

Traditional leagues at ESPN and elsewhere received their legal clearance from the 2006 Unlawful Internet Gambling Enforcement Act, which was designed mainly to stop Internet poker. It included an important “carve out” for fantasy football. Meanwhile, most state laws define fantasy football as skill-based propositions, which keeps them legal.

Peter Schoenke, chairman of the Fantasy Sports Trade Association, says daily and weekly games that adhere to the group’s rules also are protected by the 2006 law, and that the NFL and Major League Baseball “have fully embraced fantasy sports in all forms, both free and pay.”

“If a game operator doesn’t follow the UIEGA, the FSTA doesn’t consider the contest to be a true ‘fantasy sports’ contest,” Schoenke said.

Las Vegas-based attorney Tony Cabot, who has practiced gambling law for three decades, said it's easy to argue that season-long games are skill based "because you exercise a great deal of skill in operating a team."

"You have to figure out who to draft, play, trade and all those things to have a successful season," Cabot said. "And because you're doing all that, you're betting on an outcome you can control."

The day-game world can be much different and the skill level needed to "run" a team that exists for only one week is far lower than that for a season-long enterprise.

And a growing number of fantasy sites have games that "look very much like prop bets or parlay cards," Cabot says, with some games as simple as paying an "entry" fee, and then choosing who, between two players, will finish a certain day with more receiving yards.

"It depends on how you run your game," Cabot said. "If you said, 'We're going to do fantasy, quick pick, random drafts,' I say, 'How can that be skill based?' But if it's a daily game where you're doing a draft, have the ability to change players halfway through the game and make all these decisions, then it's much closer to a traditional model."

In 2007, Cabot co-authored a legal paper titled "Fantasy Sports: One Form of Mainstream Wagering in the United States." It offers a point-by-point deconstruction of the federal law that essentially legalized a growing industry that, to some, looks very much like gambling. One of Cabot's key points is that the NFL, seeing the revenue and viewership possibilities of fantasy football, hired a well-paid lobbyist who helped smooth the way for an imperfect bill to become law.

Cabot's conclusion is that the process "ultimately has done a great disservice to reasoned policymaking and, potentially, to the long-term future of the fantasy sports industry itself."

He counts the growing day-game business as one area especially susceptible to confusion. Edelman agrees.

“One can argue whether the fantasy sports carve out applies to the short-duration game, given that, at the time the (federal law) was passed, there was no such thing as daily fantasy sports,” Edelman said.

Day games didn’t get much traction until 2011 – five years after the law was passed.

The games are pretty much unregulated, and they are exploding. They allow anyone over 18 to gamble on sports outcomes online, while traditional sports gambling is available online only in Nevada and, in some forms, in Delaware. The laws in the states take precedence over the federal law and they vary, most of them basing the legality of a game on how much of it is predicated on skill vs. chance. Last year, a federal court in Illinois dismissed a lawsuit alleging day games were games of chance.

A few of the bigger media players – most notably USA Today and Sports Illustrated – have gotten into the day-game business, seeing ample opportunity in an industry that drew an $11 million investment from Comcast Ventures, which plunked the money into FanDuel last year.

Meanwhile, the NFL, which did not respond to questions emailed by the Associated Press, keeps watching the numbers swell, while walking the line between using fantasy football to grow its game and maintaining its long-held, hard-line stance against anything perceived as gambling.

“Part of the problem with entrepreneurial endeavors on the Internet is that some people push the envelope and some cross the line,” Cabot said. “Until there’s some sort of enforcement action on some level, I think you’ll see them keep pushing that line out further and further.”

Community Pub Run on North Shore

Tahoe City’s inaugural Community Pub Run is Sept. 2 at 5:30pm.

Alpenglow Sports has partnered with Hoka One One and Zia Lina to provide a community-oriented evening for North Lake Tahoe. Participants will have the opportunity to test the hottest trail shoe in the industry for free, make new friends, and enjoy a scenic 4 to 6 mile jaunt on the Tahoe Rim Trail.

At the conclusion of the trail run, Alpenglow and Hoka will treat all participants to chilled adult beverages at Tahoe City’s Zia Lina Italian restaurant.

The event is open to trail runners and hikers of all ages and ability levels, is mellow in nature, and designed to be fun and ego-free. Meet at Alpenglow Sports in Tahoe City.

In addition to the fun run Hoka will be at Alpenglow from 10am to 4pm for interested runners to take demos to their favorite trailhead at no charge.

For more info, call 530.583.6917 .

Drying Sierra meadows could worsen drought

By Susan Suleiman, University of California

Carpeting the high valleys of Yosemite and other parts of the Sierra Nevada, mountain meadows are more than an iconic part of the California landscape. The roughly 17,000 high altitude meadows help regulate the release of Sierra snow melt into rivers and streams.

But climate change and California's severe drought threaten to permanently alter these fragile and important ecosystems, according to research by Chelsea Arnold, who was awarded a doctorate in environmental systems from UC Merced in May. Her findings reveal that soil changes already are taking place that could have long-term implications for California's water supply.

Arnold's research found that meadows in the Central Sierra near Yosemite are drying out as a result of several years of unusual variation in climate and snowfall.

"What we're seeing is that all kinds of extreme weather, including one dry winter like the one we just had, can totally change the structure of the soil," Arnold said. "Part of that is an irreversible change."

Under normal conditions, a mountain meadow acts like a sponge. Organic material in the soil allows the meadow to hold water, which is filtered and slowly released to mountain streams. Samples collected by Arnold and her colleagues found that the larger pores which trap and hold moisture are disappearing, to be replaced with smaller, more compact pores through which water doesn't easily flow.

As meadows dry out, flooding in wet years is likely to

increase. And in drought years, parched meadows could result in less snowmelt reaching streams, exacerbating the state's already precarious water situation.

Arnold said that the changes won't be easily remedied. Mountain meadows may act like sponges, but unlike a dry sponge, their ability to hold water isn't reversed when the soil becomes re-saturated.

"It's like with a raisin. You can add water, but all you're going to get is a soggy raisin," Arnold said.

Read the whole story

Northstar combining golf with food pairings

The inaugural Tees and Tastings tournament at Northstar is Aug. 28.

The tournament will feature a two-game, nine-hole tournament with four beer and cuisine pairings throughout the front green of the Northstar Golf Course. Winners will receive tickets to the Wine & Brew Walk event, which takes place Sept. 6 during the 29th annual Lake Tahoe Autumn Food and Wine Festival.

Tournament players will meet in front of the Northstar Golf Course pro shop at 2:15pm for tee-off at 2:30pm. Pairing stations throughout the front nine offer players craft brews with savory appetizers. The final station will be hosted at the Martis Valley Grille at 6pm for après tournament socializing, awards, and beer pairings.

Tickets for Tees and Tastings are available for $100 per

person, and may be purchased online or at the ticket and season pass office in the village at Northstar.

Specific foursomes may be arranged by calling 530.562.3568.

Lake Tahoe bike map updated

The Lake Tahoe Bicycle Coalition has produced an update to the Lake Tahoe Bikeways Map.

It is available throughout the Tahoe region for free.

This map illustrates the many bikeways in the Tahoe/Truckee region with one side dedicated to the South Shore area and the other side the North Shore.

A bikeway is an inclusive term used on the map to describe all facilities that bicycles may use and they include: separated bike paths, dedicated and shared highway bike lanes, neighborhood connector bike routes, and mountain biking trails. Also included on the map are points of interest, safety information, marinas, parks, and campgrounds.

Fifty thousand maps have been printed and are available at bike shops, visitor centers, lodging properties, and resorts through the region.

Maps may also be downloaded in specific geographic locations of interest.

Camp Rich corral permit up for renewal

The U.S. Forest Service Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit is looking to reissue the 20-year special use permit for Camp Richardson Corral.

Comments are being taken until Sept. 22 on the proposal that would reauthorize the operation and maintenance of the corral and outfitting and guiding services. Guided trips on an approved network of National Forest System trails would continue in the Fallen Leaf Lake and Desolation Wilderness areas, along with wagon and sleigh rides in the Fallen Leaf Lake and Tallac Historic Site areas.

For more information, contact Dan Dill at 530.543.2640 or email drdill@fs.fed, or go online.