Wandering Oregon wolf's tracks to be retraced

By Jeff Barnard, AP

GRANTS PASS, Ore. – Wildlife advocates are preparing to retrace the 1,200-mile path of a wandering wolf whose trek in 2011 across Oregon and California attracted worldwide attention, hoping their upcoming journey will help build greater acceptance of wolves as they reclaim lost territories across the West.

The wolf, dubbed OR-7 and wearing a GPS-equipped collar, became a celebrity at 2 years old after leaving a pack in northeastern Oregon in September 2011, just days after the state issued a kill order for his father and a sibling for preying on livestock.

"It is only through walking it that anyone can truly understand that journey," said Jay Simpson, who plans daily blog posts of panoramic photos and interviews with people the Wolf OR-7 Expedition contacts along the way. "It's not a thing you can understand on Google Earth."

Using traditional storytelling, real-time multimedia blogging, time-lapse photography and a documentary film, they hope to offer new insights into what the spread of wolves across the West means for the people who live here, inspire new attitudes that ease conflicts in ranch country and recognize conservationists working to protect wolves.

On his route, OR-7 passed through where the last Oregon wolf was killed by a bounty hunter in 1946, and where the last known California wolf was killed in 1924.

OR-7's trek is standard procedure for young wolves trying to establish new territories. That's how wolves came to Oregon in

the late 1990s from Idaho, where they were re-established as part of a federal endangered species program.

“OR-7 is really a pioneer,” said David Moskowitz, a wildlife biologist, tracker and photographer. “He is offering a first glimpse of the new story unfolding about what it is going to be like for wolves returning” to a changed landscape.

Unlike five Oregon wolves that migrated east to Idaho, OR-7 has not been shot, noted Amaroq Weiss of the conservation group Center for Biological Diversity. Idaho has allowed wolf hunting since Endangered Species Act protection was lifted in 2011.

The expedition was the brainchild of Portland storyteller Rachael Pecore-Valdez. She was in Berlin, where her husband was studying renewable energy, when she talked to a South African friend, Galeo Saintz, about a trek he had done to raise awareness for endangered rhinos. She decided to do something similar for OR-7.

“For me the expedition is really about learning by talking to other people and asking questions and less about my opinions and thoughts about wolves,” Pecore-Valdez said.

Saintz is founder of the Wild Peace Alliance, which uses expedition adventure to ease conflicts between people and wildlife and celebrate successful work by conservationists.

“Wolf OR-7 inspires me, because he highlights that the ordinary is often remarkable if we just give it the right attention and appreciate what it means,” he said in an email. “He is the ultimate lone wolf on an unknown quest to make the most of his one precious life, and I just love that.”

Pecore-Valdez contacted Moskowitz, whose wildlife tracking class she had taken, and they were rolling.

Filmmaker Daniel Byers is shooting a documentary along the

way.

The core of the expedition – 300 miles of hiking and 900 miles of biking in 40 days – is sponsored by a $5,700 grant from Sculpt the Future Foundation. It was matched by Xplore, which funds projects that exhibit passion with aspects of play. The expedition launched a Kickstarter campaign to raise $21,000 for a documentary and multimedia.

They plan to start at a spot overlooking Hells Canyon in Northeastern Oregon in mid-May, and follow OR-7's general route, biking where they can, hiking where they have to, taking note of landmarks, such as where the wolf crossed Interstate 5 north of Yreka.

None of them wants to actually stumble across OR-7, who now resides in Southern Oregon, for fear of putting more stress in his life.

"These creatures are living very close to the bone," Moskowitz said. "As humans add more challenges to the landscape, it makes that proposition even more amazing."

Squaw to honor 2014 Olympians

Squaw Valley will celebrate the return of Lake Tahoe's athletes from the 2014 Winter Games in Sochi with an Olympic Homecoming Celebration on March 21.

It will include live music, parade, fireworks.

The welcome home party begins at 6:30pm at the KT Base Bar in the Village at Squaw Valley.

Friday evening's festivities include the athlete parade,

national anthem sung by Sara Mancuso, welcome home video presentation, athlete Q&A, fireworks show, and concert by Drop Theory and West Water Outlaws.

The event is free and open to the public. The event also serves as the highlight of the 2014 Nature Valley U.S. Alpine Championships being held at Squaw Valley March 19-23.

Athletes attending include Julia Mancuso, Mikaela Shiffrin, Andrew Weibrecht, Travis Ganong, Marco Sullivan, Nate Holland, Jared Goldberg, Tim Jitloff, Nolan Kasper, David Chodounsky, Stacey Cook, Julia Ford, Megan McJames, Laurenne Ross, Leanne Smith, Resi Stiegler and Jaqueline Wiles.

Ski resort accidents difficult to verify

By Elyce Kirchner, Kevin Nious and Jeremy Carroll, NBC Bay Area

Unlike accidents on our highways, waterways, and theme parks, there is no system for independently tracking accidents at ski resorts, despite the fact that in California, most resorts are on federal land.

Instead, accident tracking is left up to the ski industry to self-report, with little transparency.

The NBC Bay Area Investigative Unit analyzed injury data from the National Ski Areas Association from 2005 to 2012.

According to the NSAA, during those eight seasons, an average of 47 people were seriously injured (defined as paralysis, broken neck or back, traumatic brain injuries, and other

serious injuries) at resorts nationwide. That’s 47 serious injuries out of more than 50 million annual visits to ski areas.

It’s a stellar safety record that NBC Bay Area was unable to verify. The Investigative Unit asked for details showing exactly how the industry tracks and defines these injuries and was repeatedly told that information is confidential.

Read the whole story

200-mile Tahoe trail run fills up in 1 week

By Heidi Mills, Outdoor

Back when race director Candice Burt first dreamed up a 200-mile trail run around Lake Tahoe, she figured it would take time to build an audience for such an over-the-top concept. Its culmination, the Tahoe 200, will be in early September. At a price tag of $850, the run gives hopefuls a full 100 hours to complete its rugged course.

Burt needn’t have worried about instant success: after the event had been open to applicants for only a week, 187 runners entered the lottery for one of just 75 available spots. And if the U.S. Forest Service renews its permit going forward, Burt thinks she can easily attract 200 racers yearly.

While most Americans probably can’t even imagine running 200 miles, a small contingency of runners seems eager to go the distance. In Europe, the 5-year-old Tor des Geants, a 330-kilometer (that’s 205 miles, for the metric-averse) point-to-

point race in the Italian Alps, fills all 660 slots immediately. If registration for the Tor des Geants and the Tahoe 200 is a reliable indicator, there's an unmet demand for point-to-point 200's.

Read the whole story

Olympic-size party for Sierra's 3 super stars

By Susan Wood

TWIN BRIDGES – It truly takes a village.

The Olympic dream continued into March at Sierra-at-Tahoe on Saturday when thousands of family, friends and dignitaries hit the street and the ski resort to celebrate the roots and return home from Sochi of three local Olympic gold medalists.

Jamie Anderson, Maddie Bowman and Hannah Teter, who all hail from Meyers, started their day at South Tahoe High School and made their way in a grand-scale procession through the South Shore on a 1947 fire truck. Anderson's brother, Luke, from Lake Valley Fire was at the helm.

Ribbons, flags and signs were spotted along Highway 50 – with a huge crowd awaiting the parade at the entrance of Sierra-at-Tahoe. The fire truck cranked its horn, people screamed and the three women on top glowed as bright as a blaze. Even a small rock slide that delayed the procession couldn't curb the enthusiasm or the drive to celebrate the special occasion.

"The guys in the front moved the rocks," Teter told *Lake Tahoe*

News when asked about the little challenge – proof again of the community support. She proceeded to scamper down the stairs to the newly created plaza where hundreds of cheering fans awaited the athletes.

“This is the most amazing moment of my life,” Anderson told the attentive crowd. “This was the day care I had growing up,” she said fondly of Sierra. “I grew up outside appreciating nature and the beautiful place we live in.”

She thanked Sierra and her family for the opportunities she’s had over the years.

Anderson won gold last month in slopestyle with her board on a massive course with one jump named after Russia’s highest mountain, Mount Elbrus. Bowman did the same on skis in the halfpipe. Teter placed fourth this time in snowboard halfpipe, but she took home silver in 2010 at Vancouver and gold at the 2006 Games in Turin, Italy.

Anderson and Bowman carry the distinction of being the first gold medalist in the slopestyle snowboard and freestyle halfpipe ski events, respectively. Bowman turned her first-place run into an emotionally-charged glaring tribute to Canadian skier and friend Sarah Burke, who tragically died in a fall on a training run a few years ago.

Sierra-at-Tahoe General Manager John Rice got some giggles when he mentioned the joy of watching the guys at Sierra try to keep up with Bowman.

Rice winced a little when he considered how high Anderson could fly and “land like a butterfly” on her snowboard. He also mentioned being proud of Teter’s year-after-year accomplishments, including the World Vision charity she uses to help a Kenyan village through proceeds of her line of maple syrup from Vermont, where she grew up.

“The best moment of my life was moving to South Lake Tahoe and

riding Sierra," Teter said of her big move from the East nine years ago. The crowd, which more than adopted her, was hushed by the sentiment.

"I want to live here forever," she said.

All three women came across humble and grateful, and the fans held on to each word and each moment.

Through heartfelt speeches, high-fives and hugs all around, much of this day was about the power of place. And proven once again was that the people make the place. South Lake Tahoe and beyond showered them with gifts from the business community, resolutions and special passes from the state of California, city acknowledgements and proclamations from El Dorado County.

"Is this on top of the *cha cha* scale or what?" El Dorado County Supervisor Norma Santiago asked the screaming crowd gathered around the stage. "Sierra-at-Tahoe – it's unbelievable. There's got to be something in the water."

Santiago pointed out how fitting that El Dorado translates to "the golden one" and called the county "the most gold-winning community per capita in the world." The crowd roared.

South Lake Tahoe Mayor Hal Cole joined the sentiment with admitting he felt he was "watching family members on television" when the women performed their medal-deserving runs.



Jamie Anderson, Maddie

Bowman and Hannah Teter celebrate their achievements March 15 with the South Shore. Photo/Kathryn Reed

“I swelled up with pride,” Cole said, choking back tears.

Also on hand with state resolutions, state Sen. Ted Gaines saying he was “so impressed with what the athletes had done and what John (Rice) had done.”

Lake Tahoe Unified School District board member Sue Novasel attributes part of the Sierra athletes’ success to Rice’s “straight A season pass program” in which 300 students have benefited. Bowman, in particular, held a grade point average of 4.3 when she graduated. Anderson has returned the philanthropy by sponsoring economically-challenged students in full gear and time on the slopes.

Bob Roberts, California Ski Industry Association executive director, told the attentive audience he was blown away by the support in Tahoe and compared it to the time he attended Squaw Valley’s 1960 Olympics.

“It had nowhere near the ability to turn out the community love like this one. This is truly amazing,” Roberts said before passing out California gold passes with no black-out dates and transferable rights. Bowman’s buddies standing feet away yelled for Bowman to pass it to them.

Also reflecting on the past, Lake Tahoe South Shore Chamber of Commerce Executive Director B Gorman noted the last time she was on stage with an Olympian was in 1968 with skier Nancy Greene and felt nostalgic about how the experience inspired her.

“Keep it up kids. It’s a great way to spend your life,” she said, delivering a special message to the many children in the audience who may be the next set of budding Tahoe Olympians.

Former Sierra-at-Tahoe staffer Megan Waskiewicz felt nostalgic too. She left the ski resort in 2001, but made sure she brought her three children with husband Christian to witness the spectacle.

“It’s really making Sierra-at-Tahoe stand up and stand out,” she said, adding the importance of Anderson’s profile that aired on NBC around the globe during the Olympics. The television clip showed the beauty of the lake and Anderson on a rail with the Sierra logo prominent.

Chloe Waskiewicz made it clear she would like to be an Olympian, too.

The same goes for 11-year-old Annie McCully. Her brother, Levi, 5, welcomed the Olympians with a sign of support almost larger than he is tall.

With its longtime reputation of community activism and cultivating spirit, Sierra-at-Tahoe showed how it successfully nurtured these athletes who at a young age identified it as their home resort.

“I think I teared up when I saw her first (Olympic) run,” Anderson’s longtime coach Brady Gunsch said after the ceremony. He coached her for 12 years from age 5 and witnessed her work ethic.

“She’s worked for everything she’s got,” he said.

Longtime Sierra ski instructor Donna Vano teared up as well when she thought about the years she taught Teter and drove Anderson to her events.

Rice, who received numerous accolades, admitted to having goose bumps, chills and tears watching the athletes he’s known over the years take to the world stage last month. When he went out to dinner the other night, many locals shared how they either changed diapers, taught or helped the girls stay

out of trouble.

That must have been good news to Anderson’s dad, Joe.

“I pretty much knew all along,” he said of his daughter’s spiritual grounding and fighting spirit.

It takes a lot of focus and maturity to work hard and win in that one moment of time, Rice pointed out.

“A true champion has to be the best when the best is called for,” Rice quoted his mentor. “This was not an accident. These women have the secret sauce.”

He shared specific messages to all three as Olympians, philanthropists, friends and people.

What comes around, goes around.

Rice brought the first celebrated Sierra Olympian Travis Cabral to the stage early on. Cabral proceeded to mention how proud he is of the three women, who exude modesty and love of community. The hometown boy is now a city police officer serving the community. The cycle of goodness continues.

ngg_shortcode_0_placeholder (Click on photos to enlarge.)

Prescribed fire operations to resume in basin

U.S. Forest Service fuels management crews may continue prescribed fire operations in numerous locations around the Lake Tahoe Basin on March 17.

Activity may continue through the week and possibly the

weekend if weather, staffing, and conditions allow. Prescribed fire operations may take place on Spooner Summit and in the Luther Pass Campground off of Highway 89. On the West Shore, operations will take place off Tahoe Park Heights Drive in Ward Canyon, the west side of Highway 89 near Tahoma, and near D.L. Bliss State Park.

Locations may vary due to changing conditions.

All prescribed fire projects are conducted in accordance with an approved prescribed fire burn plan. Burn plans describe specific conditions under which operations are conducted including the weather, number of personnel, opportunities to minimize smoke impacts, and available burn days.

Smoke from prescribed fire may continue for several days after the initial ignition. Smoke that settles in low lying areas in the morning usually lifts out of the area during normal daytime heating.

Incline Village segment of Stateline-to-Stateline bike trail whittled down to 2 options

By Kathryn Reed

Riding closer to the lake or being more in the woods. That is what people are being asked to decide when it comes to developing the first three miles of the Incline Village segment of the Stateline-to-Stateline Bikeway.

The environmental documents for the project are in circulation. Two options plus a do nothing alternative are proposed. The Tahoe Transportation District, the lead agency, has not picked a preferred route.

“There is give and take in both based on user experience and environmental and regulatory constraints,” Alfred Knotts, lead planner with TTD, told *Lake Tahoe News*. “Either the mountain or lakeside are both pretty much 100 percent public lands.”



The South Shore demo bike path is meeting expectations of developers. Photo Copyright 2014 Carolyn E. Wright

Easements would still need to be obtained, along with a special use permit from the U.S. Forest Service.

This segment is part of a more than 30-mile bike trail that one day will connect Crystal Bay in the north to Stateline in the south. The Stateline demo project is finished. It goes from Kahle Drive to Round Hill Pines Beach. It has already proved to be a popular trail. Douglas County tallied the users with 10,768 on the trail in July. The peak day was July 4 with 963 people. The total for August was 7,842 users; peak was Aug. 8 at 405.

This summer the Laura Drive connection will be built. Still to come is the path involving Edgewood Tahoe Golf Course.

Eventually that will link to the Greenway Trail that will go from Meyers to Stateline.

For now, the focus is getting the paperwork done for the Incline segment and then looking for the funding once the final alignment is determined. It's estimated to cost $12 million if the lake version is chosen. This is the more expensive alternative.

"It would be separated from the highway and would be depressed," Knotts explained.

It's likely the project would be broken into segments. In part this has to do with money, but also because the building season in Tahoe is so short. Next year is the earliest it could start.

No matter the preferred alternative, the first segment is the same – going from Incline to Tunnel Creek.

The mountain version then goes from Tunnel Creek to Memorial Point then to Sand Harbor.

The lake version would cross Highway 28 at Tunnel Creek, go to Memorial Point and end at Sand Harbor.

A 30-space parking lot is proposed for the area near Tunnel Creek Café.

Studies have shown it's not just Tahoe residents and visitors riding at Lake Tahoe. A substantial number of people from Reno bring their bikes to the basin to ride.

"We've identified recreation is the economic driver of Lake Tahoe. Facilities will help bring that to reality," Knotts said.

Once the comment period closes, the agency will review them, incorporate changes and address issues. By the end of June it's likely the project will have been before the TTD, Tahoe

Regional Planning Agency and Federal Highway Administration boards for approval.

As work is being done on these three miles, the section of the larger trail is being discussed. This could come to fruition years sooner than once believed possible. This is because the Incline Village General Improvement District has to do work on an export line. IVGID has expressed interest in working with TTD to have the bike trail go in at the same time.

—-

Notes:

• Comments will be taken until April 11. Send them to Brian Judge, TRPA, P.O. Box 5310, Stateline, NV 89448.

• Washoe County commissioners will have a public hearing March 25 at 6pm at 1001 E. Ninth St., Bldg. A, Reno.

• Tahoe Transportation District's board will have a meeting April 11 at 9:30am at Sierra Nevada College, 291 Country Club Drive, Room 141, Incline Village.

• The project document may be found online.

U.S. second in World Cup team competition

By USSA

LENZERHEIDE, Switzerland – The U.S. Ski Team, captained by Mikaela Shiffrin (Eagle-Vail), Julia Mancuso (Squaw Valley), David Chodounsky (Crested Butte, Colo.) and Tim Jitloff

(Reno), powered to second in the Audi FIS Alpine World Cup Finals Nations team event Friday.

Anchored by Shiffrin and Chodounsky, who won every dual on the faster blue course, the team rolled past France in the opening round and Austria in the semifinal before losing on a tie break to Switzerland in the final.

The tie break was decided by the fastest run in the final, which went to Switzerland’s Reto Schmidiger with a time of 25.78, a mere 0.15 faster than Chodounsky’s final run time.

Austria defeated Italy in the small final to finish third.

Wise to be honored at Northstar

In celebration of David Wise’s gold medal in men’s halfpipe skiing, his dedication to family and being a huge supporter of the Boys & Girls Club, the Wise family and the Village at Northstar on March 15 will host kids from the Boys & Girls Club of Northern Nevada and North Lake Tahoe chapters for lunch; followed by activities for adults and kids on and off the slopes.

Olympic themed events will be happening from 11:30am-7pm, including a group ski and photo with Wise at 2pm and an autograph signing at 4pm.

Tips for placing NCAA bets

By Case Keefer, Las Vegas Sun

The biggest sports betting weekend of the year is so near, it feels like lines are forming already at sports books' windows while bad beats roll out on the televisions overhead.

Las Vegas casinos annually book more action during the beginning of the NCAA Tournament than any other event. Bettors have 52 games to gamble on before the tournament breaks ahead of the Sweet 16.

With that kind of volume of options, it's important to come prepared. That's why we've pored over the past five years' worth of opening-weekend tournament data and spreads to present eight tips and trends worth considering.

Read the whole story