USFS to pile burn throughout Tahoe basin

U.S. Forest Service fuels management crews may resume prescribed fire operations in several locations around the Lake Tahoe Basin beginning Feb. 18.

Operations may take place in the Luther Pass Campground off of Highway 89 near South Lake Tahoe, on the west side of Highway 89 near Tahoma, and in Slaughterhouse Canyon on Lake Tahoe's East Shore.

Prescribed fire crews may continue operations through the weekend, weather, staffing, and conditions permitting. 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. This information is used to decide when and where to burn.

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.

Last summer's wildfires serve as

Forest Service staff will post road signs around the areas affected by the prescribed fire, send email notifications, and update the local fire information line at (530) 543.2600, No. 6. To receive prescribed fire notifications, send an email to pa_ltbmu@fs.fed.us.

Fish stocking to start earlier than normal in Nev.

It’s been 10 years since Nevada Department of Wildlife officials needed to stock rivers so early with fish.

It’s all because of the drought that stocking will start this month instead of the end of March.

“Mother Nature is not being very good to us this winter so we’re trying to look ahead,” Kim Tisdale, supervising fisheries biologist for the Nevada Department of Wildlife, told the *Reno Gazette-Journal*. “If we don’t, we’ll end up with a hatchery full of fish and no place to put them.”

The department will start with the Truckee River next week. Then it will stock Topaz, Spooner and Marlette lakes, as well as other smaller water bodies.

Tisdale told the *RGJ* that Lake Tahoe will likely receive more stocked trout than normal.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Court: Inbounds avalanches an inherent risk of skiing

By Karen E. Crummy, Denver Post

Avalanches within the boundaries of open runs at Colorado ski resorts are an inherent danger, and operators do not have to warn skiers or close runs, even when risk is high, the Colorado Court of Appeals ruled Thursday.

The 2-1 decision, which immunizes resorts from claims after avalanche-related deaths or injuries, is the first of its kind in the country, said Jim Chalat, a Colorado ski attorney. He said the decision is likely to influence courts in other states with similar ski-safety laws.

“There hasn’t been a prior case where an avalanche (on an open run) is considered a statutory inherent risk of skiing,” said Chalat, who has practiced ski law for more than three decades.

Read the whole story

Mancuso 8th in super G

The U.S. has collected one medal after five alpine events.

Julia Mancuso of Squaw Valley was unable on Saturday to add to the bronze she won in the super combined. At one point Mancuso was in second in the super G. She finished in eighth with a time of 1:27.04.

On the podium were Anna Fenninger of Austria taking gold (1:25.52), Maria Hofl-Riesch of Germany silver (1:26.07), and Nicole Hosp of Austria winning bronze (1:26.18).

Stacey Cook of Mammoth was one of many skiers who did not finish the course.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Placerville mine to temporarily open to public

By Tom DuHain, KCRA-TV

PLACERVILLE – A 49ers-era gold mine, usually closed to the public, will open this weekend for guided tours in Placerville.

The Priest Mine is one of the few surviving “hard rock” mines.

Started in 1850, it was completely dug by hand picks. No dynamite was used in the small mine.

“The rock was a little too soft for that. If they blew, it could cave in,” tour guide Charlie Basham said. “So they actually dug an arched cavern, which is stronger, much like the Roman arches.”

The mine is fairly shallow but historic because of its age and because every cut in the rock was made by a miner’s pick.

Read the whole story

Terrain-based ski lessons speed learning process

By Holly Ramer

NORTH CONWAY, N.H. – Allison Willette’s first few skiing

lessons left her with a sore butt and aching knees but not a lot of skills. But one day's worth of terrain-based learning made all the difference.

"Yesterday was probably the first day that I enjoyed it," she said.

The instruction Willette got at Cranmore Mountain Resort is a new approach that uses sculpted zones to control students' speed and reduce fears and falls. Without worrying about sliding down the mountain out of control, students can focus on building skills because the banks, berms and bumps naturally slow them down.

That means less emphasis on "snowplowing," or pointing the skis into a wedge shape to slow down. Less time learning to stop, more time learning to go.

"Back in the good old days, we used to get people into a wedge right off the jump, but the wedge was more of a defensive posture, something to slow down and stop with," said instructor Dave Bartlett. "But we were kind of resisting the forces we're working with."

The new method puts the emphasis on shaping those forces, Bartlett said, getting students more comfortable more quickly.

Willette, of Hadley, Mass., tried it out last month with her 8-year-old son. He had never been on skis; the few times she had she'd always felt intimidated. Both made quick progress.

"It allowed you to physically feel what the turn should feel like, and then you just naturally push in the right direction. So you kind of disengage your brain, and you can do it," she said. "I learned quickly how to make turns there, and I was able to apply that to the flatter field."

Students start out on flat snow, getting a feel for their skis. The next zone is a mini-pipe, where they slide down one

side of a gentle, U-shaped slope and part way up the other. The slope is a bit steeper in the “roller” zone, which is followed by a short section of trail with banks and berms that guide students through three turns. The “traverse trax” zone includes eight turns and is the last stop before students head to the chairlift to try out a beginner trail.

Cranmore, along with Vermont’s Bromley Mountain and Jiminy Peak in Massachusetts, is one of three New England resorts that partnered with the consulting firm Snow Operating LLC to start terrain-based learning this year. Others that have adopted the approach in recent years include Breckenridge and Vail in Colorado, Northstar in California and Mountain Creek in New Jersey.

Kelly Coffey, training manager for the Breckenridge Ski and Ride School, said he has seen a marked improvement in his students, sometimes even before they actually try out the course. A family of four who took a lesson around Christmas were visibly nervous when they put on their skis, but by the time he finished explaining the zones, they were more relaxed.

“I could just see the tension in their bodies just flow out,” said Coffey, who also is a freestyle specialist for the Professional Ski Instructors of America. “From then on, I was able to get them to move a lot easier, and more gracefully, and we could progress more quickly. There were times I wanted them to turn, and they didn’t accomplish it, but they didn’t panic.”

Karen Dolan, director of Cranmore’s snowsports school, said she has seen many trends come and go during her 40 years in the industry, but she believes terrain-based learning has sticking power because it makes learning more fun. And boosting the fun factor makes it more likely that students will return – a key motivator for Cranmore and other resorts given that nationally, 85 percent of skiers never try it again after their first outing.

Mountain Creek saw its so-called conversion rate rise from 17 percent to 65 percent after implementing terrain-based learning. It remains to be seen whether Cranmore will see a similar increase, but Dolan said that kind of improvement would more than justify the $37,500 expense of building and maintaining the new terrain zones. In the meantime, the entire resort, including groomers, snow-makers, instructors and managers, is getting used to the new program.

“They all have to be part of this culture change and understand why we’re doing it. It’s everybody’s job to convert skiers and riders,” she said. “They’re here, marketing spent a lot of time getting them here, so let’s make sure that they’re having fun.”

First-time skiers and snowboarders can try terrain-based learning for free on March 9 at the three New England resorts if they register in advance. The promotion, limited to 150 people at each resort, includes equipment rental, helmet rental, a lesson and a beginner’s lift ticket.

Sarah Burke inspires freeskiing Olympians

By Elliott Almond, San Jose Mercury News

KRASNAYA POLYANA, Russia – It was difficult not to cringe as Canadian freeskier Yuki Tsubota bounced off the icy slopes Tuesday at Rosa Khutor Extreme Park.

It was difficult not to think of Sarah Burke, a Canadian pioneer whose campaign propelled the women’s freeski movement.

“We wouldn’t be here if not for her,” said Canada’s Dara Howell, who won the women’s slopestyle gold medal Tuesday with a flying first run no one could touch.

Tsubota escaped serious injury but in a high-risk sport the question always lingers after a horrific crash.

It lingers because Burke’s fatal day two years ago makes it impossible not to.

The four-time X Games champion died nine days after a training crash in Park City, a potent reminder of the dangers of flinging off jumps while attached to skis and snowboards.

Read the whole story

Teter misses podium; 2 U.S. medals in halfpipe

It was nearly a sweep for the U.S. women in halfpipe in Sochi on Wednesday.

Hannah Teter of Meyers just missed the podium as she placed fourth with a score of 90.50. She nailed that on her first run. She fell on her second.

Teter, who rides for Sierra-at-Tahoe, was sitting in silver medal contention with only a handful of riders to go. In 2006, Teter earned a gold in halfpipe in Turin, and in 2010 she road to silver in Vancouver.

Kaitlyn Farrington of Salt Lake City brought home the gold with a score of 91.75. Elijah Teter coaches Farrington and his sister, Hannah Teter.

Torah Bright of Australia on Feb. 12 took silver with a 91.50.

Kelly Clark of Vermont, but who rides for Mammoth, duplicated her Vancouver efforts with a bronze at these Winter Games.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Northstar rider questions slopestyle judging

By Jeffrey Weidel, Examiner

Although Lake Tahoe snowboarder Chas Guldemond loved competing in Sochi, he can't help but think – what if the judging was easier to understand for competitors?

Guldemond missed the finals after finishing seventh in the semifinals on Saturday, posting a score of 79.75. But Guldemond felt like he performed well, successfully landing a difficult triple cork – three flips. Yet Guldemond, who calls Northstar his home resort, missed out on the top four who advanced to the finals by a full five points.

While not complaining about his individual score, Guldemond said he still isn't sure what the Olympic judges wanted.

The 2014 Winter Olympics uses judges that are from the International Ski Federation (FIS), and they typically judge World Cup events. Guldemond, a member of the World Snowboard Tour board of directors, believes the tour brings judges in three times a year to update them the state of the sport. But the FIS does not.

Read the whole story

Mancuso 8th in downhill; U.S. women don’t medal

The U.S. women were not able to claim any medals in downhill in Sochi on Wednesday.

Julia Mancuso of Squaw Valley, who earlier this week claimed bronze in the super combined, was not able to duplicate her efforts. Four years ago she took silver in the downhill at the Vancouver Games.

Mancuso finished in eighth place on Feb. 12 with a time of 1:42.56.

Tying for gold were Tina Maze of Slovenia and Dominique Gisin of Switzerland. They each had a time of 1:41.57. Taking bronze was Lara Gut of Switzerland, at 1:41:67.

Other U.S. finishers:

• Laurenne Ross of Bend, Ore., 11th place, 1:42.68.

• Stacey Cook of Mammoth, 17th place, 1:43.05.

• Jacqueline Wiles of Aurora, Ore., 26th place 1:44.35.

The weather in Sochi has been getting warmer and the conditions declining. The training run for the downhill had been canceled to preserve the integrity of the course.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report