X Games snowmobiler dies

Updated Jan. 31 11:40am: Caleb Moore died this morning. More details are in this story.

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By Jason Blevins, Denver Post

ASPEN — Rose Battersby snapped a picture from the top of the eight-feature X Games slopestyle course Sunday and tweeted, “Feel the fear but do it anyway.”

Later that night, the 19-year-old New Zealand skier was rushed to a Denver hospital with a fractured back she suffered during practice after coming up short on the second of the course’s four massive jumps. That same night, 25-year-old snowmobiler Caleb Moore’s condition worsened as a cardiac injury he suffered in a crash Thursday night during the X Games freestyle competition led to a brain complication. He remains in critical condition in St. Mary’s Hospital in Grand Junction.

The 17th version of the winter circus of snowsport and the 12th at Aspen’s Buttermilk ski area saw many crashes but few serious injuries. But Moore’s injury has skiing’s, snowboarding’s and snowmobiling’s most accomplished athletes under the microscope as they examine the escalating risks of the vaunted contest.

“When is enough enough?” professional snowmobiler Paul Thacker said was a question he and his competitors talked about.

It’s a heavy question for the 36-year-old Thacker, who once held the world record for jumping his snowmobile 301 feet. He returned to the Winter X Games last weekend to compete in adaptive snowmobile racing after a 2010 training accident left him a paraplegic.

“I’m always asked the question, ‘Where’s the ceiling?’ And every year we are like, ‘It’s not going to get any gnarlier,'” said the Anchorage resident. “They are never going to do a double back. They are never going to do a frontflip. But then it happens.

“It’s kind of like you tell me I can’t do something and I’ll show you how I can. It’s how we are wired.”

Thacker reflected the somber mood blanketing the freestyle family as their friend fights for his life.

“It’s unfortunate that it takes something like this to kind of snap everybody back into reality and show everybody just how gnarly it is, because the guys that are good at it make it look super easy, and it’s not,” Thacker said. “Every time you throw a leg over, it might be the last time.”

Wrestling with the danger is a daily mental game for snowsports athletes, especially X Games competitors who arrive in Aspen ready to set themselves apart.

They train for months, in the gym, on the hill and using airbags, foam pits and trampolines, preparing themselves for the moment where they can shine under the brightest spotlight in their sport. Sometimes that moment can prod athletes to push too far after logging endless hours preparing their bodies to answer that call.

“It’s a gradual slope. We build up very slowly and very carefully,” said Heath Frisby, who at last year’s X Games threw the first frontflip on a snowmobile and this year earned best trick bronze with another first: an underflip on the 75-foot gap jump.

Frisby expressed dismay with best-trick competitor Jackson Strong, a motorcross athlete who trained a mere four hours on a snowmobile before trying – and failing – a pair of audacious backflip tricks. On his first trick, Strong bailed at the apex

of his jump, flailing through the air as he tumbled. His unmanned sled caromed off the course, snagging the wire-lined safety fence and injuring a 13-year-old spectator.

“You can tell he wasn’t ready. It’s not something we are taking on all of the sudden,” said Frisby, who competed Sunday with a Texas flag to honor Moore. “We have rode all our lives. We are not trying to jump in over our heads and do something realistically we have no business doing.”

Moore and his younger brother, Colten, once were those newbies from Krum, Texas – training a mere month on a snowmobile before transferring their lifelong ATV-racing skills onto snow in the 2010 X Games. Caleb won bronze that show. Last year Colten took gold.

“They are still green, but they are very capable of being the best riders in the field,” said Frisby, who has been competing in the X Games for eight years.

In a statement released Tuesday, ESPN X Games officials stated: “We’ve worked closely on safety issues with athletes, course designers and other experts for each of the 18 years of X Games. Still, when the world’s best compete at the highest level in any sport, risks remain. Caleb is a four-time X Games medalist who fell short on his rotation on a move he has landed several times previously.”

Moore family spokeswoman Chelsea Lawson said a website has been set up where fans can help the athletes’ family with support.

“People have been asking for an outlet to help with the medical bills,” she said of the site giveforward.com/calebmoore.

Last year’s X Games was blanketed in grief after the death of freeskiing pioneer Sarah Burke only a week earlier after a seemingly innocuous crash while training in the superpipe in

Park City. She cratered in the pipe, suffering cardiac arrest. She died nine days after the accident.

Assessing and mitigating risk is a big part of the X Games. As athletes explore the very edge of their sports – defying gravity with trickery once considered impossible – they are upping their risk levels.

“As pro athletes doing what we do, I think we all accept and understand that these are inherent risks in the sport, and I wouldn’t do it if I didn’t believe in myself,” said Canadian freeskier Kaya Turski, who has three X Games gold medals in slopestyle. “Still, it is a fine line, and I’ve crossed that line a few times.”

Turski on Sunday spent more than 30 minutes in the starting gate of the slopestyle competition as Ashley Battersby – no relation to Rose – was treated by medics. Ashley suffered a knee injury on the landing of the final jump.

Rose Battersby late Monday night posted on her Facebook page that her spine has been put “back together and I am pleased to say that my toes can wiggle!!!”

Athletes once again raised the bar in skiing, snowboarding and snowmobiling at last weekend’s X Games.

In 2000, Frenchman Candide Thovex won ski best trick with a rare 900-degree spin. This year, Swede skier Henrik Harlaut won big air gold with a 1620-degree spin while backflipping three times. Snowboarder Shaun White not only stuck his signature back-to-back double-backflip 1260s but soared to a record 24 feet above the superpipe. Snowboarder Elena Hight stuck the first double backflip for women in the pipe. Snowmobilers threw first-ever tricks like Joe Parsons’ backward-landing “Gator Hater.”

“We are modern-day explorers,” said Jimmy “Blaze” Fejes, one of the first to backflip a snowmobile. “There are no new

places in the world to see and discover, so you have to try to create new things. That’s who everybody is.”

Fejes said the X Games snowmobile freestyle course “could not have been any safer.” Years of competition have honed ramp positions, landing ramp angles and distances to a science.

The human factor can trump that science. Even the best athletes can hiccup, as Moore did when he underrotated a backflip and flew over his handlebars Thursday night, tumbling with his 450-pound sled. The tiniest bobble or miscalculation can trigger tragedy, especially when spinning and flipping 40 feet above cement-like snow.

“The jumps have never been safer,” Fejes said. “Everything was perfect. Caleb has thrown that trick hundreds of times. It was just a very fluke accident.”

Full moon snowshoe at Squaw

Squaw Valley is offering a guided snowshoe under a winter full moon on Feb. 23.

This is for all ages.

The $18 fee includes snowshoe rentals, but not poles or tram ticket.

Dress appropriately and wear proper boots.

Meet at 5pm at High Camp.

For reservations, call 800.403.0206.

Terrain park competition for young riders

SnowBomb.com’s annual Lil’ Air Mountain Festivals are ramping up the season with kid-friendly terrain park competitions.

Each competition is open to participants 12 and younger, with a $10 registration on the day of the event: Feb. 9 at Homewood, Feb. 23 at Squaw Valley, March 9 at Homewood, and March 30 at Alpine Meadows.

Lil’ Air is geared toward creating a safe environment for kids to go “big” on closed-course terrain park features, specially designed for competitors ages 3-12.

For more info, go online.

Diamond Peak racers do well at Mt. Shasta competition

By Lisa O’Daly

Diamond Peak skier Casey Delaney tore it up to finish second overall in men’s giant slalom on Day 1 of the Far West Race Series at Mount Shasta last weekend, while Payton Norton

charged to take second for the men on Day 2.

Winston Pretti (5th, 9th), and Cory Huber (6th, 11th) joined their teammates in the top 15.

Delaney was in fourth place and on his way to a win on Jan. 27 before dramatically crashing his second run due to an equipment failure. Also on Sunday, Noah Cleary was skiing fast when he hooked a tip and ripped out a gate and panel before losing a ski and sliding down the steep pitch in a spectacular crash.



Incline's Payton Norton competes at Shasta; finishing second overall in the Jan. 26-27 races. Photo/Provided

Of the seven Diamond Peak U14 ladies competing at Shasta, Madison Idso was her team's top scorer, finishing in the top 10 on Saturday, tying for 10th place. On Sunday, Idso (5th) continued her reign in the top 10, joined by teammate Sophia Holm (10th), whose stellar Day 2 performance saw her move dramatically in her rank.

Emily Donahue had consistent results with a 20th on Saturday, followed by a 22nd Sunday. Teammate Bridgette Johnson improved her 24th from Saturday to take 19th on Sunday, right behind Laurel Taylor. Taylor climbed up the scoreboard on Day 2,

jumping from 35th place on Saturday to 18th.

The team ripped it up on a long, steep course on very firm snow. Despite the intimidating conditions, the weekend was marked by outstanding performances by all team members.

“I couldn’t be any prouder of the U14 athletes. They’ve been training hard and it shows,” said coach Mark Norton. Many of Diamond Peak’s 23 men and ladies U14 racers (ages 12 and 13) have been training five days a week, honing their ski racing techniques and tactics.

Lisa O’Daly is a parent volunteer with the Diamond Peak Ski Foundation.

Heavenly’s tram – a 50-year-old tradition

By Susan Wood

One of South Lake Tahoe’s most famous landmarks has carried countless skiers and boarders up the steep slopes of Heavenly Mountain Resort’s lake-facing ridge. It has carried a history with it – one that has stood the test of time.

The tram has been operating for 50 seasons.

From old-timers to modern-day users, the tram in six minutes has whisked riders up to the back slopes. It can cart 600 people an hour up the mountain. Near the top is a restaurant, which has changed names a few times since the lift’s inception in 1962. It’s now a burger joint with a bar called Booyah’s.

South Shore's longtime skier, former Heavenly employee and Olympic volunteer Martin Hollay still makes the tram part of his morning ski ritual. Hollay lives a few blocks away – his home base since going to work for Heavenly in 1964.



Views from the tram are one reason people continue to ride it from Heavenly's California Lodge. Photos/Kathryn Reed

He likes the views from the tram and said he'd be heartbroken if it were taken out. The views are unparalleled, sweeping 180 degrees of the lake's south shore.

"It should be kept because it's a big part of Heavenly's history," Hollay told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Although the tram is documented in the 2007 Heavenly Master Plan, its days could be numbered once the redevelopment plan involving the California Base Lodge is launched. This is according to Heavenly and confirmed by the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency and U.S. Forest Service. A smaller lift situated closer to the ground will replace the tram. It is proposed to land near the top of the Powderbowl chairlift.

"Its removal is no longer tied to the implementation of the gondola," said Andrew Strain, Heavenly's planning chief. The Heavenly Gondola opened in 2000 near Stateline from the Highway 50 street level.

The scenic impacts of the building and towers were discussed by TRPA back then, but never fully addressed. The new plan was approved in 2007 by the regulatory agency.

The U.S. Forest Service, which leases the land to Heavenly, is treating the plan as a "concept document," said Jonathan Cook-Fisher, the Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit recreation special uses regional manager.

Fisher uses the tram because before he hits the slopes he likes "to tinker" with his gear. One can do that while standing in the tram. Other than that, he treats taking the tram versus the other lifts as a difference between an escalator and elevator.

"It has served the ski area well," he said.



Heavenly's tram has been transporting people for 50 seasons.

Tram proponents – including former employees – hope there is as much room for the lift in the town as there is in the hearts of its residents.

Malcolm Tibbetts, Heavenly's former vice president of mountain operations of 32 years, remembers working with the tram like

it was yesterday. However, the place looked a lot different and wasn't owned by Vail Resorts.

"When the tram was first built, it was a separate company, but it didn't stay that way very long," he told *Lake Tahoe News*. "Back then, the lifts were numbered."

There were three chairlifts and two rope tows. The tram was completely rebuilt in 1986 – making the new one faster and larger. The new one doubled the number of passengers to 50.

"As a tourist lift, it was fantastic," said Tibbetts, who still lives on the South Shore. "From a marketing standpoint, it probably paid for itself."

"It's a part of the Heavenly history," he said.

Tibbetts recalled how employees would unwind at the top building known decades ago as the Pioneer Hut.

"It was added onto through the years," he said. "We loved to do our own construction."

The tram turned out to be a bane and a blessing. It needed much maintenance, creating a "huge headache" for the mountain operations workers, Tibbetts added. "It had its quirks," he said.

One morning, all but one member of the ski patrol was caught in the tram when one of the cables "reversed," making it necessary to slow the tram down to a "creeping" speed a half hour before the mountain opened.

The restaurant that came to be known as Monument Peak was a steakhouse where workers and old-timers staged last-minute parties.

Some parties were more memorable than others.

About a decade ago, a spine-tingling version of "God Bless

America” was sung by a host of pioneering South Lake Tahoe families who gathered at the restaurant to honor the late Patsy Gilman Wood. Her husband, Robert Wood, was a founding partner of Heavenly and was on hand to help lead the group in singing her favorite song. (Patsy Wood has a run and lift named after her, but is not related to this reporter.)

The Woods were instrumental in getting the tram off the ground in 1962.

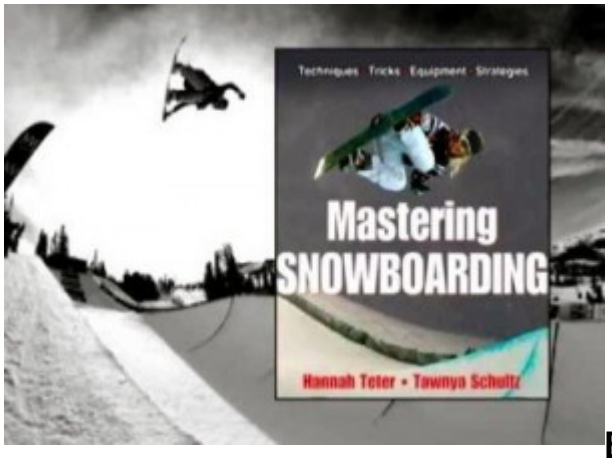
Today’s riders are more than grateful of the effort.

“We always ride the tram,” said local skier Jill Berliner on a recent morning with her son, Bram Sigman.

He noted how many riders are scared to go up the tram because of how steep the ridge appears.

They also know when the gondola is on wind hold, the tram is often a last hold-out to get on the mountain.

Lake Tahoe’s Olympic gold medalist Teter tells the world how to ‘Master Snowboarding’



By Susan Wood

Olympic gold medalist Hannah Teter, who snowboards for Sierra-at-Tahoe and hails half the time from the South Shore, has written a book about her sport.

The “how to” book called “Mastering Snowboarding” reveals its “seven truths” as told by one of the best. Teter has won many awards, including five medals in the Winter X Games in 2003, 2004, 2005, 2009 and 2010. Most notably, she won gold for the United States in 2006 at the Winter Olympics in Torino, Italy – for which she was tapped as the U.S. Olympic Committee’s Sportswoman of the Year.

Now – at a the mere age of 26 as of Jan. 27, she has elected to share the secrets of her craft with beginners and moderates as well as advanced riders.

Everyone has to start somewhere. For Teter, it was the back

yard of her parents' home hitting a jump her brother had built.

"I think I got a little banged up, but I had the bug from (then on) and never looked back," Teter told *Lake Tahoe News*.

When asked why she is giving away her secrets in such a competitive sport, Teter added: "I wanted this book to be something that any rider from the first-day beginner to the up-and-coming pro could pick up some tips from, (ones) that I wish I had been presented with when I was coming up."

This isn't the first time Teter has given back. She is an active philanthropist – especially when it comes to the world's poor. She started Hannah's Gold in 2008, named after her family's maple syrup that comes from her hometown of Belmont, Vt. The charity donates profits from the foundation to the village of Kirindon, Kenya, where the money goes to securing clean drinking water, schools and farming projects. Her efforts got the attention of Ben and Jerry's Ice Cream of Vermont, which labeled a flavor after her – "Hannah Teter's Maple Blondie." (Note: This reporter from Vermont tried it a few years ago on a visit to the company's Waterbury factory and highly recommends it to all sweet tooths.)

This time, Teter gives back by warning snowboarders in her seven truths, that yes, "Everyone fails." It's all a part of the risk one takes to advance in any humbling sport.

"It's easy to get down on yourself when you first start snowboarding," the book says on how to "stay positive" in the "What to expect" chapter highlighting the seven truths. "Practice makes perfect."

The other six truths sound simple and include:

• You are going to feel uncoordinated.

• Feeling embarrassed is optional.

• Visualizing helps.

• You may love or hate snowboarding right away.

• If you are optimistic and focus on having fun, you will enjoy the ride.

• You are going to be sore at the end of the day.

The “Getting the most out of your ride” chapter may reduce the soreness of workouts. Techniques involving crunches, dumbbells, medicine balls and stretches are featured.

The book, which is co-written with *Tahoe Snowboard* magazine founder and editor Tawnya Schultz, highlights a little of the snowboarder’s own language. For example, the “ollie” means to use the momentum of your body on a jump.

There’s also a host of rail tricks with cute names such as the tail and nose taps along with the wall ride. The tricks chapter represents the most compelling tips Teter said she wants readers to take away from the book.

“Some fun tricks in there aren’t super fun to learn,” she said of the challenge.

Once again, most things worthwhile in life don’t come easy.

“There are many tricks to be learned, and they are well diagrammed,” randyw22 posted on Amazon.com, one place where the book can be purchased for $15.17 in softback as a coffee table book and $11.99 on Kindle.

It appears Teter is challenging herself yet again for the upcoming Winter Games in Russia in 2014, telling *Lake Tahoe News* she’s working on a few new tricks.

“I’m hoping to have (them) dialed in before the end of the season,” she said.

What’s the biggest obstacle to honing the craft?

“(It’s) always mental. Once you release that self-doubt (that) is the biggest obstacle to success … the sky is the limit,” Teter said.

Teter knows all about a limitless sky.

She came across the opportunity to write the book through her management. The publishers, Human Kinetics, have come out with a slew of recreation-oriented how-to books on a range of topics – from social dancing and high-scoring baseball to senior fitness and the triathlon anatomy. The Illinois-based company has released seven “mastering” books in the series, which also highlights mountain biking and judo. Beyond Amazon, Teter’s is available through Barnes & Noble and Books a Million.

“We obviously picked her because she’s well known in the sport. It’s great we got someone of her caliber,” the Illinois-based company’s Publicity Manager Alexis Koontz told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Koontz announced Teter’s book a month ago, and it has received rave reviews. One came from the head coach of the U.S. Snowboarding and Freeskiing Association.

“Hannah has not only won Olympic gold and silver medals, but she has also lifted women’s snowboarding to the next level during her 10-year pro career. ‘Mastering Snowboarding’ lays out a clear path so you too can reach your potential, feel great and have fun,” Mike Jankowski said in a statement.

Of course, a girl has to have some fun, and that’s something Teter has come to embrace when she’s not working.

The pro snowboarder, who has perfected the skills of flying through the air above the manicured, hard-packed superpipes, enjoyed the oh-so different experience of carving Tahoe’s recent holiday powder at Sierra-at-Tahoe before hitting the road.

“I had the time of my life. Sierra-at-Tahoe is family to me. It is the most fun mountain to shred in all of Tahoe,” she said.

The ski resort west of Meyers rewards the pro with her own “walk-of-fame-style” preferred parking spot marked by a star just next to the slopes.

When she visited, she dropped off a copy of the book to Sierra General Manager John Rice, whom she mentions in the book’s acknowledgements alongside marketing manager Mindi Befu.

“Hannah has become a true champion in many aspects of life, as a competitive snowboarder and as a philanthropist. Her passion for the sport and for life are what set her apart from other successful athletes. We wish her all the success in the world with her latest project as an author,” Rice summarized.

After a quick read, Rice said he found the book to be “a very complete guide to snowboarding” – from the tricks and gear to health and safety.

In particular, the Sierra chief also liked the way she covered all aspects of the sport, including its origin. “The History of Snowboarding” in Chapter 1 notes “snurfing” in the 1970s from an East Coast surfer sliding on lunch trays strapped to his feet. Snowboarding gurus Jake Burton Carpenter and Tom Sims took notice, and the sport’s popularity took off in the 1980s. In the decade’s second year, the first National Snowsurfing Championships were staged at Suicide Six ski area in Woodstock, Vt. – this reporter’s hometown. The first ski area in the United States was launched within a mile from Suicide Six – Mt. Tom.

White wins 6th superpipe gold at X Games

By ESPN

ASPEN – Shaun White brought X Games Aspen 2013 to a close Sunday night with another emphatic performance in the superpipe he all but owns.

The greatest competitive snowboarder in history routed the field, earning the night's top two scores, including a 98 that began with a record-setting 24-foot, 1-inch backside air above the walls of the Buttermilk Mountain pipe. He rides for Northstar

With his win, White matched snowmobile snoCross racer Tucker Hibbert's six-peat from Sunday afternoon, the first and second time that's been done in Winter X Games history.

White, the oldest competitor in the field at age 26, distanced himself from the youngest athlete of the group, Japanese eighth-grader Ayumu Hirano, 14, who claimed silver in his X Games debut with a 92.33. White landed the same run that earned him a perfect 100 in last year's final, highlighted by back-to-back double cork 1260s on his final two hits.

Finland's Markus Malin earned the first medal of his X Games career with bronze (91.33).

S. Tahoe man one of two to ski Yosemite's Clouds Rest

By Marek Warszawski, Fresno Bee

Extreme skiing can be defined in five simple, morbid words: If you fall, you die.

The terrain these expert skiers seek out is so steep that any slip or stumble almost certainly would send them hurtling toward rocks, cliffs, crevasses … you name it.

In other words, something way beyond your typical black diamond run.

Clouds Rest isn't a ski slope, either. It's an enormous expanse of high-angle granite, nearly a mile high and a mile wide, that sits just northeast of Half Dome in Yosemite National Park.

Few people would even entertain the idea that skiing down Clouds Rest was possible. Jason Torlano is an exception.

Torlano, 37, grew up in Yosemite – his mom worked at the park medical clinic – and was introduced to its wilder ski terrain as a teenager.

Extreme skiers mark their accomplishments with first descents. Torlano has 28 of those in Yosemite, but Clouds Rest was the one he wanted most.

"From our school playground I could always see Clouds Rest," said Torlano, who lives in Foresta, a community of private cabins within the park. "And skiing it was my dream."

On Jan. 16, that dream became a reality. Taking advantage of ideal conditions, Torlano and Jonathan Blair of South Lake Tahoe became the first people to carve ski turns down Clouds

Rest’s massive northwest face.

“This was definitely the most committing line I’ve ever done,” Torlano said. “Five thousand feet of no-fall zone? I’ve never skied anything like that.”

The two-day effort required not only skill, stamina and planning but also a great deal of nerve because of the severe avalanche risk. The descent also involved 500 feet of rappelling — necessary to negotiate cliffs too steep to hold snow.

“Your reaction is, ‘You can’t ski that. It’s vertical. It’s cliffs,'” said Tim Messick, a Yosemite ski pioneer who introduced a teenaged Torlano to the park’s steepest terrain.

“But, yeah. Jason’s doing it.”

It has been quite a winter in Yosemite. December storms covered the valley and its surroundings with a thick blanket of snow, and cold temperatures kept much of it from melting while consolidating the snowpack.

Compared to rock climbing, ski mountaineering and ice climbing don’t draw much attention. But when conditions are prime, like they were this month, possibilities exist for both.

On Jan. 3, Torlano and Greg Loniewski climbed Widow’s Tears — a rarely formed frozen waterfall on the Valley’s South rim. (Four recorded parties climbed Widow’s Tears this month.) The following week, Torlano traded his ice axes and crampons for skis and made a first descent of Quarter Domes.

It was during the first descent of Quarter Domes, granite formations located between Half Dome and Clouds Rest, that his longtime dream came into focus.

“I was looking at Clouds Rest the whole time thinking, ‘Man, if the snow’s good here it must be good up there,'” said Torlano, a former U.S. Army paratrooper in the 173rd Airborne

Brigade who served in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Last summer, Torlano climbed Clouds Rest – not an easy feat in itself – and scoped out a potential ski route that avoided most of the cliffs and other hazards. Now he needed perfect conditions. Too much snow, and the avalanche danger would only increase. Too little, and it wouldn't be skiable.

Torlano also needed a partner, and his friend Blair was itching for some action after missing out on the Quarter Domes descent. (The two met while working for Yosemite Search and Rescue in the mid-1990s but never really had climbed or skied together.)

Mandatory boat inspections coming to Donner Lake

By Cathy Locke, Sacramento Bee

Boats and other watercraft will be subject to inspections before launching in Donner Lake under a Truckee town ordinance intended to protect the lake and other local bodies of water from invasive species.

If established in local waters, invasive species such as quagga mussels and Eurasian watermilfoil could degrade aquatic ecosystems, inhibit recreation, damage infrastructure and equipment, and cause depreciation of property values, according to a town news release.

The new ordinance requires that motorized and/or trailered watercraft be inspected before launching in Donner Lake, as well as other water bodies within town limits.

For more information, call Teresa Crimmens of the Tahoe Resource Conservation District at (530) 587.4911, or email tcrimmens@tahoercd.org.

Hight lands new trick to take home silver at X Games

Elena Hight of South Lake Tahoe landed the first-ever double backside alley-oop rodeo in a halfpipe competition Saturday night.

She scored a 90 in the women's snowboard superpipe final at the X Games in Aspen.

She took silver behind Kelly Clark. Clark had 90.33 points.

Arielle Gold took bronze.

Hannah Teter of South Lake Tahoe placed fifth with 81 points.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report