Paddlers encouraged to learn how to not transport invasive species

A coalition of local and visiting Lake Tahoe paddlers, business owners and Tahoe basin environmental groups are helping to stop the spread of aquatic invasive species by becoming Tahoe Keepers.

Tahoe Keepers are paddlers who inspect and decontaminate their boats and gear every time they haul out and move between new waterbodies. Nonnative species, such as quagga and zebra mussels, the New Zealand mudsnail and the spiny waterflea, could irreparably damage the Lake Tahoe watershed, and their transport is illegal. These invasive species are spread through water and debris that can collect in cockpits and hatches, cling to outer hulls, rudders and paddles, and even hide out on footwear and gear long after paddling.

Paddlers can learn online how to self-inspect and decontaminate their canoes, kayaks, paddleboards and inflatables. Those who successfully complete the free 10-minute online training program will become members of the Tahoe Keepers stewardship community, and will receive “proof of training credentials” and a membership sticker.

Crayfish harvest at Lake Tahoe to begin this month

By Jeff Delong, Reno Gazette-Journal

Pursuing a vision to make a buck while helping to improve Lake Tahoe's clarity, a Nevada man hopes to begin harvesting crayfish from the lake's waters within this month.

With all but one key permit expected to be in hand this week, Fred Jackson and Tahoe Lobster Co. Inc. are ready to get to work. Chefs across the Reno-Tahoe area are lined up to receive a savory product they expect to be well received by customers.

"I'm ready to go. It's time to make the move," Jackson said.

Jackson plans the first commercial operation to sell live crayfish trapped from Tahoe's waters, a venture he said could aid the lake. His company's motto: "Clarity by cuisine."

Crayfish don't belong in Lake Tahoe, but they love the place. Introduced in the area in the late 1800s, Tahoe's crayfish population is now estimated in the range of 200 million to 300 million.

They're causing problems and could be associated with a dramatic decline in the lake's native invertebrates, said Sudeep Chandra, a freshwater science expert at University of

Nevada, Reno.

Crayfish could also be linked to algae blooms diminishing Tahoe’s famed clarity.

“When they poop, they stimulate algae growth,” said Chandra, who is working with Tahoe Lobster Co. to track potential ecological benefits in parts of the lake through removal of crayfish.

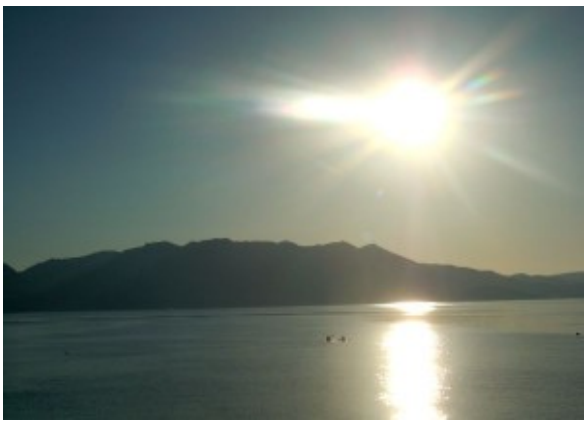
Read the whole story

Records may fall today; cooling trend on the way

While no temperature records were broken Thursday in the region, that could change today.

The National Weather Service in Reno is calling for a high of 80 in South Lake Tahoe. The record for June 1 was set in 1992 at 79 degrees.

Reno on Friday is expected reach 95 (2007 record of 94), Carson City may hit 93 (1960 record of 91), and Virginia City could tie the 2001 record of 86 degrees.



Expect record heat in Lake Tahoe today. Photo/Kathryn Reed

Truckee is slated to hit 86 degrees, but the record for this date was set in 2001 at 88 degrees.

Jessica Kielhorn, meteorologist technician with the Weather Service, told *Lake Tahoe News* a cooling trend is in the forecast starting Saturday. Temps are likely to drop about 5 degrees.

She said starting Sunday night and into mid-week it will be much cooler than it has been the past couple days.

– Kathryn Reed

Budget constraints taking toll on national parks

By Claire Veyriras, California News Service

WASHINGTON – Visitors to California's national parks may

notice more trash on the trails, longer lines at service booths and fewer rangers this summer as the pinch of the federal government's budget problems grows increasingly difficult to overlook.

Unlike the state's park system, which is scheduled to close 54 parks for lack of money this summer, the vast resources of the U.S. Park Service will prevent Yosemite or any of the state's national parks from shutting their gates for now.

Still, park enthusiasts warn that Washington's budget squeeze – after consecutive years of cuts – will be felt from Redwood's old growth forests to Death Valley's barren dunes.

"The cuts will significantly decrease the quality of the experience visitors have in the national parks," said Ron Sundergill, Pacific Region director of the National Parks Conservation Association, an advocate for the parks in Washington.

President Obama's proposed 2013 spending plan calls for no increase to National Park Service's $2.75 billion annual budget, which it uses to oversee its 397 parks, 582 natural landmarks and 2,461 historic landmarks.

To meet growing demand and prior obligations, some programs will need to be cut. For instance, the newest budget strips $3 million from the funds that pay for visitor centers, information booth, cleaning and safety.

Read the whole story

Dogfight over proposed ban on treeing prey

By Peter Fimrite, San Francisco Chronicel

A proposed ban on using hounds to tree bears and bobcats has provoked yet another tussle between hunters and conservationists, who have already squared off this year over wolves and mountain lions.

The proposed law, which passed the state Senate last week, would prohibit using dog packs to chase bears and bobcats into trees, where hunters then stroll up and shoot the exhausted and helpless predators to death.

“It is an inhumane practice,” said Ted Lieu, D-Torrance (Los Angeles County), who introduced SB1221. “It’s been likened to shooting animals at the zoo. I think that’s a good analogy.”

Lieu, the chairman of the Senate Labor Committee, said he learned that hounding bears and bobcats was still legal after Daniel Richards, the president of the California Fish and Game Commission, created a furor by killing a mountain lion that had been chased down by dogs in Idaho. The commission voted Wednesday to change its process for selecting presidents and could decide in August whether to remove Richards from his post.

The legislation on dog packs, which passed 22 to 15 in the Senate, is expected to be taken up by the state Assembly’s Water, Parks and Wildlife Committee within the next few weeks.

The proposed ban has raised the hackles of hunters, who say the booming bear and bobcat populations in the state must be controlled. There are about 70,000 bobcats and an estimated 30,000 black bears in California, at least five times the number of bears that existed in 1980, according to the

California Department of Fish and Game.

Read the whole story

Infected waters pose quandary for those not wanting to spread invasive species

By Henry Brean, Las Vegas Review-Journal

The enemy is invisible to the naked eye and exists in numbers hard to comprehend – hundreds of trillions of them at every depth and in every cove.

In the five years since they were first discovered in Lake Mead, the population of invasive quagga mussels has grown tenfold.

UNLV researcher David Wong estimates that more than 1.5 trillion adult quaggas and 320 trillion microscopic mussel babies now populate the reservoir.

That's 80 to 160 quaggas for every gallon of water in the nation's largest man-made lake. If mussels were dollars, there would be enough of them to pay off the national debt 20 times over, with a few trillion bucks to spare.

"They are everywhere in the lake," says Wong, one of the nation's leading experts on the aquatic invader. "Almost every single rock has some mussels on it."

With no hope of eradication, Wong and other researchers are focused on protecting vital underwater infrastructure and

keeping quaggas from spreading to other waterways.

Last weekend, the chips were stacked against them.

Memorial Day marks the first big boating weekend at Lake Mead, and it falls smack in the middle of a huge reproductive spike for the mussels.

Read the whole story

Paved trail through Martis Valley would connect Truckee-Lake Tahoe

By Barbara Barte Osborn, Sacramento Bee

A window of opportunity is starting to close for the public to comment on the environmental effects of a controversial plan to pave a 9.5-mile recreational trail through the scenic Martis Valley.

North Fork Associates, an Auburn consulting firm, completed a massive draft environmental impact report on the Martis Valley Trail in April, triggering a 45-day comment period that will end June 11.

The eastern Placer County trail would cut through the breathtaking open vista that lies between Truckee Tahoe Airport and the Village at Northstar. If approved, the trail – rising in elevation from 5,880 feet to 7,280 feet – would eventually end at Forest Service Road 73, which leads into the

Lake Tahoe basin. The total cost of the project has yet to be calculated.

The idea is to eventually connect existing and planned trails so that a regional trail system links Truckee, Northstar, north Lake Tahoe communities, Squaw Valley and Alpine Meadows, said Wally Auerbach of Auerbach Engineering, who was hired to plan and design the Martis Valley Trail.

Cleared of vegetation for a minimum width of 15 feet – to accommodate a 10-foot-wide paved trail with 2-foot shoulders – the Martis Valley trail currently is intended for bicycles and all pedestrian uses. Horses would not be allowed, and the only motorized use would be powered wheelchairs.

So far, only about a dozen comments have been received on the environmental report – some at a May 16 meeting attended by about 50 people and a few afterward, said Katherine Waugh, a senior planner with North Fork Associates.

Read the whole story

Brackett wins first SUP race of season at El Dorado Beach

More than 40 people competed in the standup paddleboard race Wednesday night at El Dorado Beach.

Some were hunched over as they paddled hard to the marker and back to the shore.

Lake Tahoe was calm and the air warm as they competed.

The May 30 race was close, with Julianne Brackett placing

first and Tom Gandt a close second.

El Dorado County girl completes SF Bay swim

By Bill Lindelof, Sacramento Bee

Nine-year-old Jordan Freer succeeded in her swim from Alcatraz to San Francisco on Memorial Day.

The third-grader from Lotus in El Dorado County is one of the youngest people to make the swim. Her father, Tom, who swam with his daughter, said all went well.

“Tough conditions but they were met with determination,” he said of his spunky daughter who swam with several hundred adults in the 1.5-mile organized swim.

Jordan has been on a swim team since she was 4 years old. To prepare for Monday’s swim, she trained at Folsom Lake.

Jordan’s swim was a fundraiser for Nothing But Nets, which distributes insecticide-treated nets to families throughout Africa.

Development vs. conservation in Utah ski country

By Sallie Dean Shatz, New York Times

SALT LAKE CITY – The Wasatch Range, towering over an arid, urban sprawl of a million people, provides two important assets that are increasingly at odds – a vital supply of water for residents and pristine snow for a ski industry that rakes in $1.2 billion a year.

Now, two competing bills in Congress are setting up a new skirmish in the West's perennial battle between conservation and development.

One bill, involving an ambitious project known as SkiLink, was filed by Representative Rob Bishop, a Republican from northern Utah. It would allow developers to bypass some jurisdictional and environmental protections to build a gondola linking the base of the Solitude ski area in Salt Lake County and the upper part of the Canyons ski area in Summit County.

The bill would override some federal and local restrictions on ski areas in the Wasatch Range and would require the United States Forest Service to sell 30 acres of public land to accommodate SkiLink.

The competing bill, the Wasatch Wilderness and Watershed Protection Act, was created after two years of public meetings and was introduced by Representative Jim Matheson, a Democrat who represents the area. It would preserve the same tract of Forest Service land for its "wilderness quality" and watershed.

For more than 100 years, the towering range has been protected as a watershed. Expansions of ski areas in the central Wasatch are not allowed under multiple jurisdictional management

plans, which the resorts say inhibit their ability to compete.

Ski areas now cover 6,294 acres of the central Wasatch, though Bishop’s legislation could create a legal precedent that could pave the way to more than double that, encompassing the watershed’s headwaters and affecting Big and Little Cottonwood Canyons, which are home to four ski areas and supply 60 percent of Salt Lake City’s water.

Read the whole story