Winter Trails Day events on both ends of the lake

On Jan. 7 from 10am–2pm the Tahoe Rim Trail Association will partner with local businesses and organizations to kick off the winter season with the free Winter Trails Day family event.

While this is a national event, TRTA is putting on events on both ends of the Lake Tahoe Basin.

National Winter Trails Day is all about introducing folks to the joys of winter trails and using them safely.

South Lake event – Snowshoe through the newly opened Van Sickle Bi-state Park, outdoor gear demonstrations and a Warming Party (with food donated by Stateline Brewery and Baja Fresh) at Explore Tahoe after the hikes.

North Lake event – Snowshoe hikes on themes ranging from winter animals to avalanche awareness, winter survival demonstrations and activities.

Participants are encouraged to register in advance. Register online or call (775) 298.0012 or email Tom at programs@tahoerimtrail.org.

These events are subject to cancellation due to winter weather.

North Shore man arrested in BASE jumping incident

By Ed Fletcher, Sacramento Bee

A second Olympic Valley BASE jumper has found himself behind bars after a nighttime attempt off Placer County's Foresthill Bridge.

Authorities, responding to a reported suicide attempt Wednesday evening, spotted a man parachuting off the span.

"We got a call saying that she was at the bridge and was going to jump. That is what led us out there," said Sgt. Dave Johnson of the Sheriff's Department.

It turns out the woman was not at the bridge and did not make an attempt on her life, authorities said.

Wednesday evening, authorities say, the Placer County sheriff's helicopter crew spotted Aaron McGovern, 39, of Olympic Valley just as he was about to jump from the span.

Read the whole story

U.S. slopestyle, halfpipe teams named

By USSA

COPPER MOUNTAIN, Colo. -– With a host of new action sports

events on the docket for the 2014 Olympics in two years, the U.S. Ski and Snowboard Association formally announced 2011-12 U.S. Snowboarding and U.S. Freeskiing teams Friday.

The announcement includes first year teams in slopestyle snowboarding and skiing, as well as halfpipe skiing – all the result of decisions by the International Olympic Committee earlier this year to bring the events into the 2014 Sochi Olympics. The USSA named 21 athletes to U.S. Snowboarding halfpipe and slopestyle teams, and 17 to U.S. Freeskiing.

Halfpipe athletes have had outstanding training in Copper's early-opening 22-foot pipe preparing for the Sprint U.S. Grand Prix opener this weekend at the Colorado resort.

Olympic halfpipe bronze medalist and multi-event threat Scotty Lago, along with Sprint U.S. Grand Prix and Euro X Games winner Chas Guldemond of Reno, were among those selected. Holding the coaching reins for the 2012 slopestyle crew is former U.S. Snowboarding athlete Bill Enos, who comes to the team from Waterville Valley.

One of the most recent sports to be added to the winter Olympic lineup, slopestyle snowboarding features a stylized course featuring kickers, rails, boxes and other freestyle features that riders will incorporate into their runs.

The team roster includes a group of athletes known for their slope abilities including Dew Tour slopestyle champion Sage Kotsenburg, X Games silver medalist Eric Willett and 14-year-old slopestyle phenom Ty Walker on the women's side.

The season kicks off for slopestyle snowboarding Dec. 15 when the Winter Dew Tour touches down in Breckenridge. Key events in the season including the Sprint U.S. Grand Prix in Mammoth Mountain, X Games, Dew Tour and the Feb. 10-19 TTR World Championships in Oslo, Norway.

Four Olympic medalists headline the U.S. Snowboarding Halfpipe

Pro Team. In addition to his slopestyle team spot, Olympic halfpipe bronze medalist Lago heads a talented U.S. men's halfpipe team joined by fellow 2010 Olympian Greg Bretz of Mammoth Mountain. The U.S. women boast one of the strongest groups in snowboarding history with Olympic and X Games gold medalist Kelly Clark, four-time X Games gold medalist and Olympic silver medalist Gretchen Bleiler and Olympic and X Games champion Hannah Teter of South Lake Tahoe leading the way. Clark was the dominant force in the sport last season, taking down all the major titles.

Joining them for her second year on the Pro Team is 2010 Euro X champ Kaitlyn Farrington, who picked up an opening win in the Copper Grand Prix a year ago as well as second in X Games, plus two-time Olympian Elena Hight of South Lake Tahoe. Matt Ladley moves up from Rookie to Pro Team following his big win in the Sprint U.S. Grand Prix in Mammoth Mountain.

The Pro Team opens its season in the Sprint U.S. Grand Prix this weekend. In addition to the Grand Prix, the comp lineup for the season will be the Dew Tour, X Games, U.S. Open and other major international competitions.

Nine athletes were confirmed on the U.S. Freeskiing Halfpipe Pro Team including X Games champions Jen Hudak and Simon Dumont. The IOC gave the green light to halfpipe skiing last April.

In slopestyle, 10 athletes were confirmed to the U.S. Freeskiing Slopestyle Pro Team. The inaugural team is headlined by AFP Slopestyle Tour Champion Bobby Brown, World Championship gold medalist Alex Schlopy, World Championship bronze medalist Keri Herman, X Games gold medalist Sammy Carlson, Dew Tour winner Tom Wallisch and reigning U.S. halfpipe champ Devin Logan.

Slopestyle skiing was incorporated as an Olympic sport this past July. Athletes are judged on runs in which they perform

tricks on a series of jumps, rails, boxes and other features of a manmade slopestyle course.

Comments sought on Rubicon Trail EIS

A draft environmental impact statement that analyzes Rubicon Trail resource improvements and issuing an easement to El Dorado County for the operation and maintenance of the road is available for public review and comment.

Copies of the draft EIS are available on the Eldorado National Forest website and by contacting the Eldorado National Forest Supervisor’s Office in Placerville.

The final EIS is scheduled to be completed in spring 2012.

The Rubicon Trail is a historic road that passes through the Eldorado National Forest. The DEIS analyzes the environmental effects of granting an easement to El Dorado County for segments that cross National Forest system lands.

The preferred alternative allows the county to construct a bridge at Ellis Creek, replace a bridge constructed by the Friends of the Rubicon Trail and construct erosion control features. The preferred alternative also authorizes the

construction of six toilets at various locations along the trail, construction of a low water crossing at Buck Island Lake outlet, rehabilitation and closing of specified two miles of unauthorized routes, designation of access areas for dispersed recreation and the addition of one half mile of new routes to provide dispersed recreation opportunities.

Open houses will be hosted by the Forest Service regarding the draft EIS in Placerville at the Forest Supervisor's Office on Dec. 14 and Jan. 11 from 5-8pm.

Mixed reaction to Lahontan OKing chemicals in Tahoe

By Kathryn Reed

Public health is one of two reasons the Lahontan Regional Water Quality board on Wednesday voted to allow chemicals to be used to rid Lake Tahoe of invasive species – plant or animal. Public safety is the reason people who supply drinking water to thousands of people in the basin spoke against the decision.

Allowing pesticide use at Tahoe is practically revolutionary for the water board. The decision is a 180-degree turnaround from years of not allowing anything potentially harmful from being added to the pristine water.

Staff told the board that the long-term benefits of applying chemicals would outweigh any short-term degradation to the lake.



Tahoe Keys homeowners association is excited to be able to use herbicides to get rid of milfoil. Photo/TRPA

County vector control units have been using chemicals for years with Lahontan's knowledge, but also in violation of its rules.

Vector control is also a health and safety issue.

Karen Bender with the El Dorado County Environmental Management Agency told *Lake Tahoe News* vector control rarely sprays in the Lake Tahoe Basin; it's mostly larvae sites that are treated. She has volumes of records Lahontan could have checked at anytime. The board's decision likely means Lahontan staff will be getting reports of all future chemical applications assuming pesticide use passes state and federal boards.

While water purveyors lost the battle to keep dangerous chemicals from the drinking supply of thousands, they did get the board to agree to notify all of them when an application will take place so all could comment on the proposed project.

There are 18 water purveyors around the lake, with 21 intakes between them. There are other water purveyors in the Lake

Tahoe Basin, like South Tahoe Public Utility District, that use groundwater.

An issue for water purveyors is if the chemical is detected in the drinking water supply it must be mitigated. That can create problems downstream, so to speak. None of those concerns, though, were brought up at Wednesday's meeting.

Nor was it discussed how one chemical might react with another.

In passing it was acknowledged the chemical to treat the problem could create problems for other aspects of the ecosystem. For instance if milfoil is eliminated, it could impact any species that uses it for habitat.

Besides public health, the other reason chemicals could be put into Lake Tahoe is for ecological preservation.

Three Tahoe Keys representatives spoke at the three-hour meeting at Embassy Suites on Dec. 7 – citing the need for chemicals to eradicate milfoil that is clogging the canals. The South Shore homeowners' group years ago asked Lahontan for exemptions and was denied each time.

It may still be years before any herbicides are applied. This is because more boards need to approve the Pesticide Basin Plan Amendment. The final overseer to vote will be the federal EPA – maybe in July 2012.

An environmental impact report will need to be done by the Tahoe Keys Property Owners Association before Lahontan votes on that specific project.

All potential projects will undergo a rigorous vetting process, according to Lahontan staff.

"If the project qualifies, then the applicant takes their case to the board," Mary Fiore-Wagner, Lahontan environmental scientist, told the board. "There will be robust monitoring,

and tracking and recovery of species."

All projects must also meet California Environmental Quality Act requirements.

One issue the board had some problems with was that chemicals under rare circumstances might be used without board approval. They understood emergency criteria – as in if the governor of California issues a mandate to do something. But what took some understanding was the "time sensitive" project that the executive director could approve on behalf of the board.

Staff explained "time-sensitive" could be the introduction of an invasive species to Lake Tahoe that would not reach the level of a state emergency. There are 36 species that have been identified as being a threat to Lake Tahoe, with 20 of them already in the water.

Another issue that changed from earlier versions of the amendment is chemical detection will be allowed to last for more than a week. This is based on how some chemicals are released.

Dan Sussman, Lahontan environmental scientist, said monitoring still must begin one week after the initial application of the chemical.

Any treatment could mean temporary prohibition of swimming, boating and fishing or other recreational activities.

Lauri Kemper, second in charge at Lahontan, after the meeting told *Lake Tahoe News*, that via CEQA, project applicants are supposed to document past, current and future projects that could impact theirs. Kemper said even if that does not take place, her agency would be aware of what is going on in Tahoe to know if application of one chemical could interfere/conflict with another.

While the decision by Lahontan affects the whole lake –

because water moves – the agency only has oversight of California's portion of the lake.

It is the Nevada Division of Environmental Protection that oversees what goes into Lake Tahoe in the Silver State. They follow requirements outlined by the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System.

Bob Loding, water-wastewater specialist with Tri-state Water Operations in Zephyr Cove, told *Lake Tahoe News* that water purveyors are told by NDEP of anything going on with water – including being consulted before the rubber mats were put down to study the Asian clams.

He does not know of any time when chemicals have been allowed to be used in Lake Tahoe originating in Nevada.

Al Tinney, chief of water pollution control for NDEP, was not available for comment.

Downed trees a problem in Eldorado National Forest

By Frank Mosbacher

Many roads and trails throughout the Eldorado National Forest are blocked by trees the wind blew over. Forest Service

personnel and visitors are reporting that many roads and trails within the Eldorado National Forest are not passable due to trees that fell during recent high winds.

As a result, travelers may find themselves on a road or trail that appears to be open but is impassable due to fallen trees.

“I am concerned about the safety of forest travelers when they are traveling on any forest roads or trails,” says Eldorado National Forest Supervisor Kathy Hardy. “I am also concerned that people will attempt to drive around blocked routes and cause environmental damage. This week we are reviewing the situation and looking at our options.”

Hardy says woodcutters with a fuelwood permit can cut trees that are on the ground and blocking roads. The permits can be purchased at all Eldorado National Forest district offices.

Currently, the seasonal closure of dirt roads and trails, due to wet weather conditions, is not in effect. This could change with a major change in the weather or if too many routes are blocked by trees which cause unsafe conditions for forest visitors. Visitors should check the Eldorado National Forest Service website for seasonal road and trail closure information.

“Our funding to pay for removing downed trees to open roads and trails is rather meager, to say the least,” said Hardy. “We anticipate that some roads and trails will remain blocked into next year and maybe beyond. Visitors will need to do their part in protecting forest lands by not driving around trees that are closing routes.”

Frank Mosbacher works for the Eldorado National Forest.

Vonn wins before hometown crowd; Mancuso 8th in super G

By USSA

BEAVER CREEK – Calling it the most memorable of her 46 career Audi FIS Alpine World Cup wins, Lindsey Vonn of Vail fulfilled the dream she had a child and won at home in the inaugural women's race on Beaver Creek's Birds of Prey. Despite a less than perfect run, Vonn took a 0.37 victory over Swiss Fabienne Suter to the roar of packed finish stadium.

Vonn became the first American to win four World Cup races in a row and tied German superstar Katja Seizinger for the most career World Cup super G wins with 16. Vonn has now won 14 of the last 19 super G's, never finishing lower than third.

Julia Mancuso was eighth; Leanne Smith 11th.

Vonn spent 45 minutes signing autographs for the legions of young fans after the race.

"This morning I woke up and I was really anxious and nervous. My stomach has been in a knot all day. When I got to the start I was totally freaking out. I wanted to win in front of my home fans so badly; mentally I was a wreck," Vonn said.

Economists: Parks will

bolster economy

By Jim Robbins, New York Times

Challenging the notion that protecting public land locks it up, more than 100 economists, including three Nobel laureates, are calling on the president and Congress to create more parks and other protected preserves in the West as a way to bolster state economies.

The economists also urge the creation of something similar to the Depression-era Civilian Conservation Corps, which built trails and maintained infrastructure in national parks.

“We urge you to create jobs and support business by investing in our public lands infrastructure and establishing new protected areas such as parks, wilderness and monuments,” they wrote in a letter. Such areas “attract innovative companies and workers, and are an essential component of the region’s competitive advantage,” they added.

The drafting of the letter was organized by Headwaters Economics, a nonprofit organization that studies the economics of natural resources, with a tilt toward preservation. Ray Rasker, an economist with Headwaters, cited a study by his organization that found that Grand County, Utah, home to the tourist mecca of Moab, has been doing quite well: jobs there grew at a 7 percent annual rate in the 1990s and have been growing 2 percent annually during the current recession.

“In the last 40 years, the fastest growth in the West has been in communities adjacent to protected public lands,” Rasker said. “This is what’s creating jobs currently at a time of high unemployment — we need policy that creates jobs.”

The idea of expanding preservation does not go over well among everyone. Many people in Western states see the creation of new federally protected areas as putting land off limits to

mining, logging and other uses and potentially harming the economy.

Read the whole story

U.S. men do well in GS; Jitloff places 10th

By USSA

BEAVER CREEK – Three-time Audi FIS Alpine World Cup giant slalom champion Ted Ligety of Park City stormed from behind Tuesday to win the second Audi Birds of Prey GS in Beaver Creek. It was his second win in three GS races and vaulted him into second in the overall Audi FIS Alpine World Cup standings.

After sitting fourth with a 0.14 deficit in the first run, Ligety won the second run by 0.72 for the 10th victory of his career and second in Beaver Creek.

Tim Jitloff of Reno was 10th, Tommy Ford of Bend, Ore., 15th and Bode Miller of Franconia, N.H., 29th as four Americans landed in the top 30.

“I felt really good and this was a good result for me. I wanted to be in the top 10 and I did that,” Jitloff said. “It’s always a positive sign when you see the green light after crossing the finish line.”

World Cup women will take their first race runs on the famed Birds of Prey track Wednesday with a super G, featuring local hero Lindsey Vonn of Vail who enters the race after sweeping three World Cup races last weekend in Lake Louise, Alberta.

Crustaceans to be commercially harvested from Lake Tahoe

By Jeff Delong, Reno Gazette-Journal

A Nevada man could begin pulling crayfish out of Lake Tahoe's waters by next spring following action by state wildlife officials.

On Saturday, the Nevada Wildlife Commission unanimously approved regulations authorizing the commercial harvest of crayfish from Tahoe's Nevada waters.

While approval from other agencies is required, the action should clear the way for Fred Jackson of Yerington to pursue his plan to harvest crayfish in 2012. Others could also apply for permits to do so at a cost of $500.

"I think it's great for everybody," Jackson said. "It's a win for the lake and a win for the economy."

Millions of crayfish skitter along Tahoe's bottom in what Jackson views as an untapped, tasty resource. Crayfish, also known as crawdads, are not native to the lake and were first introduced there in the late 1800s, according to research

conducted by scientists at UNR and UC Davis.

By 1932, crayfish were “thriving in the lake and its tributaries” and numbered about 55 million in 1967, scientists estimate. Today their numbers are put at 220 million or more.

Crayfish may be associated with algae blooms at Tahoe and could also be linked to a 72 percent decline in the population of mayflies, stoneflies and other native invertebrates in the lake, said Sudeep Chandra, a freshwater science expert at UNR.

Read the whole story