Lake Lahontan water level creates boating hazards

By Reno Gazette-Journal

SILVER SPRINGS—As water levels drop at Lake Lahontan, large rocks and sandbars become exposed and pose a danger to operators of high speed boats or those on personal watercrafts, state park officials cautioned this week.

Ranger Supervisor Tony Beuregard reported that state park staff has pulled the boat ramps out on the Silver Springs side of the reservoir because water levels are getting too low, making the ramps unusable.

“Boating is not recommended for high speed boats or personal watercrafts because there are sandbars, rocks and tree stumps that are exposed,” Beuregard added.

Read the whole story

Removal of watermilfoil from Emerald Bay a success

Officials doing the work to clear Eurasian watermilfoil from Emerald Bay say the efforts were successful.

Eurasian watermilfoil is a fast-spreading aquatic invasive weed that has been on the rise in Lake Tahoe since its introduction more than a decade ago.

A partnership between Tahoe Resource Conservation District,

California Department of Parks and Recreation, Tahoe Regional Planning Agency, UC Davis Tahoe Environmental Research



Eurasion watermilfoil

Center, and subcontractor A.C.E. Diving covered approximately 8,500 square feet of lake bottom near the pier and swimming beach of Emerald Bay using 8 feet x 40 feet reusable bottom barrier strips in June and hand removal of remaining weeds. On Sept. 14, the barriers were removed to reveal just sand, with no signs of invasive weeds below the barriers.

“We’re very optimistic about the initial results of this pilot project because it demonstrates that it is possible to eradicate the majority of an infestation in a specific locale,” California Department of Parks and Recreation environmental scientist Dan Shaw said in a statement. “These findings will help us establish a control plan for aquatic invasive weed populations in Emerald Bay and other afflicted areas of Lake Tahoe.”

Surveys will be conducted in subsequent seasons to document the long-term success of the removal efforts.

TVES teacher honored by Schwarzenegger

Tahoe Valley Elementary School teacher Seth Martin was one of many honored in Sacramento today by Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger.

The Sept. 17 event was to recognize the winners of the 2010 Governor's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports Spotlight Awards that is presented by the Anthem Blue Cross Foundation to organizations, events, park programs, parent associations and schools that positively impact the physical activity, fitness levels and well-being of California children.

Franklin Elementary School (Santa Barbara), Charles W. Eliot Middle School (Altadena) and Katella High School (Anaheim) were announced as winners of the 2010 Governor's Challenge Competition as the council's elementary, middle and high schools of the year, respectively. The three schools will each receive new fitness activity centers.

They were selected from more than 2,400 schools and more than 1.3 million students who engaged in physical activity 30-60 minutes a day, at least three days a week for four weeks during the previous school year.

The other honorees are:

• Teacher – Seth Martin, Tahoe Valley Elementary, South Lake Tahoe

• Principal – Jason Romero, Sunset Elementary, San Ysidro

• Nonprofit Organization – 100 Mile Club, NorcoEvent – Summerfest 2010, VenturaPark and Recreation Program – Fun on the Run – City of San Clemente

• Parent Association – Overland Avenue Elementary Parent

Teacher Association, Los Angeles Schools –

• County of the Year – Orange County

A full listing of the gold, silver and bronze medalists, plus the eleven regional award winning schools in the 2010 Governor's Challenge Competition can be found at www.CalGovCouncil.org.

Frog native to Sierra protected by wildlife officials

By Matt Weiser, Sacramento Bee

State wildlife officials voted to consider the declining mountain yellow-legged frog as an endangered species. But they said the Pacific fisher, a forest carnivore, should not get that consideration.



The California Fish and Game Commission took those actions at its meeting Wednesday in Sacramento. The vote to consider the frog for protection under the state Endangered Species Act means it now becomes a "candidate" species under the law.

The frog, a native of the Sierra Nevada, has declined in population by more than 90 percent, according to surveys conducted since 1995. It is threatened by a variety of human activities, from the state's own fish-stocking practices to dam operations, water diversions, logging, pesticides and a

deadly fungus.

Read the whole storoy

Fall hikes sponsored by Tahoe Rim Trail

Join the Tahoe Rim Trail Association for a series of short Saturday hikes in September and October that encourage people of all ages and abilities to get outside this fall.

These hikes are designed to be family friendly and are all less than seven miles. The hikes are scheduled each weekend to travel counter-clockwise around the lake, promoting the diversity of the TRT from each shore. Everyone is welcome. To learn more about this program visit the website.

All hikes begin at 9am.

Sept. 18 – Tahoe Meadows Ridge Hike, 3.8 miles

Sept. 25 – Fall Hike to Galena Falls, 6 miles

Oct. 2 – Tahoe City Tromp, 6.8 miles

Oct. 9 – Page Meadows Poetry and Nature Journaling, 3 – 4 miles

Oct. 16 – Dardanelles Lake Day Hike, 6.8 miles

Oct. 23 – Spooner Summit South, 6 miles

Oct. 30 – Crazy Costume Fun Run in the Tahoe Meadows, 1.2 miles.

Walk raises awareness about condition of farm animals

On Sept. 25, Truckee Tahoe will host its Third Annual Walk for Farm Animals, an event taking place in more than 75 cities across the United States and Canada to promote compassion for factory farmed animals and raise vital funds to support the lifesaving rescue, education and advocacy work of Farm Sanctuary, the nation's leading farm animal protection organization.

This year's national salk spokesperson is celebrity trainer and television personality Bob Harper from NBC's hit show "The Biggest Loser."

"Animals raised for food in the U.S. spend their entire lives in filth and darkness, kept in such severe confinement they cannot turn around, lie down or extend their limbs," Gene Baur, president and co-founder of Farm Sanctuary, said in a press release. "No one likes cruelty and when people learn about the abusive conditions inside factory farms, they are appalled and a growing number are getting active to raise awareness about these intolerable cruelties and put an end to the unnecessary suffering. For nearly 25 years, Farm Sanctuary's Walk for Farm Animals has provided a forum for people from all walks of life to spread a powerful message of compassion for farm animals in their own cities and hometowns. The exponential growth of the Walks is a very positive sign. This year, we are thrilled to have Bob Harper's support as our national spokesperson for the 2010 Walk for Farm Animals. Bob is as passionate about animal protection as he is about health and fitness, and with his support, the biggest winners this year will be farm animals."

The Truckee Tahoe Walk for Farm Animals starts at Plumas Bank in Truckee. Registration is at 9am Sept. 25, and the walk begins at 10am. Those interested in registering for the 2010 Walk can learn more at walkforfarmanimals.org. Participants will receive a special limited-edition 2010 Walk t-shirt designed by vegan fashion house Vaute Couture, and special prizes will be awarded to walkers who reach fund-raising milestones.

Farm Sanctuary is the nation's leading farm animal protection organization. Since incorporating in 1986, Farm Sanctuary has worked to expose and stop cruel practices of the "food animal" industry through research and investigations, legal and institutional reforms, public awareness projects, youth education, and direct rescue and refuge efforts.

Prop. 84 money to fund regional outdoor projects

Lake Tahoe area projects are recipients of Propositions 84 grant dollars for rivers and parkways, it was announced Sept. 14.

Proposition 84 was approved in 2006. The Safe Drinking Water, Water Quality and Supply, Flood Control, River and Coastal Protection Bond Act authorizes $5.388 billion in general obligation bonds to fund safe drinking water, water quality and supply, flood control, waterway and natural resource protection, water pollution and contamination control, state and local park improvements, public access to natural resources, and water conservation efforts.

Area recipients are:

• Placer County Department of Public Works – Snow Creek Wetlands Restoration – $1,000,000. Restore 2.4 acres of wetlands and riparian habitat and create 0.6 miles of raised boardwalk Class 1 trail.

• Placer Land Trust – Canyon View Riparian Restoration and Trail Project – $334,662. Restore one linear mile of Sierra Canyon Creek and create a 1.5-mile loop trail with visitor amenities.

• Truckee River Watershed Council – Coldstream Canyon Floodplain Restoration – $271,260. Expand existing floodplain in the Truckee River watershed from 3.8 to 6.3 acres, and restore riparian habitat at Cold Creek by excavating 15,200 cubic yards of stream bank material to slope the stream and form benches.

– Compiled by Kathryn Reed

3-day outdoor expo in Placerville

Lovers of the great outdoors in El Dorado County can gather at the fairgrounds in Placerville this October for the first Gateway to the Sierra Sportsman's Outdoor Expo.

The Oct. 1-3 expo celebrates the rich and plentiful opportunities for outdoor recreation in El Dorado County, from fishing and hunting to boating, archery, biking, barbecuing and more.

The expo will provide information and resources about the things people love to do in this region.

Highlights of the three-day expo include seminars and hands-on demonstrations in such topics as fly fishing, bear hunting and river guide services, as well as special hands-on demonstrations for children. Also featured are vendors in outdoor sports offering the latest know-how and equipment, clothing and accessories. A gun show will also be presented by the Buck Shop.

Barbecue fans are invited to come watch how the pros do it in the KCBS sanctioned Smokin' for Gold BBQ Cook Off on Oct. 2. This competition features teams competing for prize money and the grand champion trophy.

On Oct. 3 everyone is invited to try their hand at the grill in the "just for fun" Open BBQ Cook Off. Following each event, expo attendees are welcome to sample the cooks' creations during People's Choice tasting events, five tastes for $10.

On the evening of Oct. 2, the expo presents live music and dancing on the green featuring the country tunes of the popular regional band Hired Guns. The music, from 7-11pm is included with admission to the expo or come to the concert only for $5.

Visit the website for a full list of Expo activities, vendor information and daily schedules.

El Dorado County Fairgrounds is at 100 Placerville Drive in Placerville.

Tickets: Adults $8 • Children (6-12) $5 • Under 6 free • 3-Day Pass: Adults $20 • Children (6-12) $12 • Concert only $5.

Heavenly season pass becomes interactive device

Vail Resorts is offering a way for skiers to stay connected without pulling out their smart phone on a chairlift.

EpicMix, dubbed a first-of-its-kind online and mobile application, debuts this season. It allows riders at Heavenly, Vail, Beaver Creek, Breckenridge and Keystone to use technology to digitally capture their ski and ride experience and share it with friends and family.

EpicMix is a digital application guests access online, at their computer or via a free mobile application that can be downloaded for the iPhone, Android or other smart phone. EpicMix automatically captures the activity of guests throughout each of its resorts through radio frequency scanners at each lifts. An RF-enabled chip embedded in Vail Resorts' season passes and PEAKS lift tickets will automatically track guests' lift rides, calculating vertical feet skied and days on the mountain and will recognize special achievements and accomplishments by granting guests commemorative, collectible digital pins.

EpicMix will allow guests to share their statistics and accomplishments through updates on Twitter and Facebook. Skiers and snowboarder can create special EpicMix leader boards with their Facebook friends. The EpicMix mobile application will alert guests when any of their Facebook friends are skiing and where they are on the mountain. The application will also allow guests to send messages to their private groups of Facebook friends on the mountain.

The mobile application will also provide trail and grooming information, snow and weather reports, as well as resort news and traffic updates.

EpicMix will also have a special website for kids under the age 14..

There is nothing to buy.

The company says no information collected through EpicMix will be shared unless a guest “opts in” and specifically chooses to share their information. All information collected through EpicMix is subject to the strict privacy policies of Vail Resorts. Guests can choose to disable the RF chip in their pass to prevent any scanning.

For more information and to watch a demo video of EpicMix, click here.

CTC celebrates 25 years of protecting Tahoe lands

By Joann Eisenbrandt

Environmental Emergency Room. That could just as easily be the name on the sign outside the California Tahoe Conservancy’s offices on Third Street, just a long block from Barton Memorial Hospital in South Lake Tahoe.

On Sept. 16, at Commons Beach in Tahoe City the Conservancy will celebrate a quarter-century of bandaging Lake Tahoe’s fragile and wounded environment. On California’s books since 1970, a 1982 voter-approved bond measure provided $80 million in funding for this independent agency within the state’s Natural Resources Agency. Funding for Lake Tahoe Basin projects began in spring 1985.



Cove East along the Upper Truckee River where it opens into Lake Tahoe is an ongoing project for CTC. Photos/Kathryn Reed

Conservancy Deputy Director Ray Lacey explains the rationale behind its formation, “The easiest parallel is with the Coastal Conservancy, another early California conservancy, which was formed out of fear that California’s coastline would become privatized because of intense real estate pressure. In Tahoe, there was state, national and international recognition that there were real problems. Water quality was declining and something had to be done quickly to turn it around. This was beyond the means of local governments and nonprofits without external assistance. The Conservancy became a conduit for those external financial resources.”

When the Washoe first summered along Tahoe’s pristine shores, they used the land but did not consume it. The track record of those who have followed has not been as stellar. Competing public and private interests, clear-cut logging, haphazard urbanization and overlapping regulatory layers have muddied the waters. Tahoe’s stable environmental balance was lost, and that began impacting the lake’s clarity.

“Tahoe was developed at the worst time in history,” Lacey explains. “Older developed areas were pedestrian-friendly. Tahoe was developed in the postwar (World War II) era, when it was all about the car. That’s difficult to retrofit.”

Unlike the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency, the Conservancy is not a regulatory body. Its mission – to protect the Lake’s legendary clarity, increase public access and recreational opportunities, and preserve Tahoe’s wildlife – is accomplished in two ways: “One,” Lacey explains, “as a conduit for both technical and financial resources to overwhelming local needs (grant projects); second, actual land acquisition and ongoing management of those lands (direct projects).”

The CTC’s initial funding was targeted primarily at the acquisition of parcels on the California side of the lake. To date, the Conservancy has acquired more than 5,400 parcels.

“Twenty-five years ago,” Lacey explains, “the basin was subdivided for a population of 400,000 people, even though that wasn’t sustainable. TRPA had begun deeming some parcels unbuildable. We provided the ‘out’ for property owners who were otherwise caught between a rock and a hard place.” All the Conservancy’s property acquisitions are from willing sellers.

Since that initial bond, there have been a variety of funding sources: appropriations from Environmental License Plate Fund; offshore oil revenues collected by the federal government and given to the state of origin to offset the effects of offshore drilling; as well as statewide voter-approved bond measures – propositions 12, 40, 50 and 84 – for “clean air, clean water, and parks.”

This money also funds CTC grants to local governments and private nonprofits to match local funds and enhance the scope of environmental projects. One highly-visible example is the Lakeview Commons project at Highway 50 and Lakeview Avenue,

now in the first of three phases. The $6 million the Conservancy allocated will provide improved beach access, a better Highway 50 crossing, a non-motorized boathouse, picnic tables, terraced seating and new vegetation. As with other CTC grants, implementation of the project falls on the local partners. In this case the city of South Lake Tahoe and El Dorado County. Those entities commit to a definite completion timeline and the maintenance of the project for a set number of years. According to Lacey, the CTC has never had to seek legal recourse against a grant-funded project for failure to perform.

El Dorado County Supervisor Norma Santiago, who is on the CTC board, speaks highly of the Conservancy as a partner with local government.

“The Conservancy allows the county to work together on joint projects to meet our obligations as good stewards of the lake – for projects like the bike trail or erosion control – we formulate a real partnership in meeting our mutual mission of water quality, air quality, and sustainable communities,” Santiago said.

Other notable Conservancy direct and grant projects include:

• Commons Beach in Tahoe City: Site of the 25th anniversary celebration, the Conservancy provided $6 million to restore Tahoe City’s lakefront to its original condition. The land had been deeded “to the people of Tahoe City” by President Ulysses S Grant. “It’s a shining example of the Conservancy working with local entities,” Lacey explains.

• Upper Truckee River Restoration: The Upper Truckee River from Meyers to Lake Tahoe is now under public ownership (CTC, California State Parks, U.S. Forest Service, or the city of South Lake Tahoe), with the exception of one privately-held parcel. The Conservancy is working with its public partners to restore the entire river system because scientists say

restoring a single piece isn’t effective in significantly decreasing the flow of sediment into the lake.

• Upper Truckee Marsh Restoration: The Draft Environmental Impact Statement is expected to be out for review this fall for the meadow and river area in the center of South Lake Tahoe.

• Sunset Stables River Restoration: A part of the Upper Truckee River project on Conservancy-owned land. The goal is to return the straightened streambed to its natural meandering course to slow down the flow and facilitate more frequent dumping of sediment and nutrients onto the surrounding marshland. The Conservancy expects implementation to begin in 2012.

• South Tahoe Greenway Shared Use Trail: The creation of a continuous 9-mile-long bike trail from near the junction of Pioneer Trail and Highway 50 in Meyers to Stateline, using the old Caltrans freeway right-of-way. Purchased by the Conservancy about 10 years ago, all the parcels have been inventoried and design parameters are being explored. An EIS will come out in late 2010. This project is seen as a major step in making South Lake Tahoe a bicycle-friendly town. “Every new segment we complete,” Lacey emphasizes, “will increase exponentially the value of the network as the segments are now starting to connect.”

• Van Sickle Bi-State Park: With land donated by the late Jack Van Sickle in Nevada and Conservancy-owned land in California, it will bridge two states, which the Conservancy believes is appropriate as the watershed that is impacted covers California and Nevada.

• Angora Fire Resource Damage Assessment and Restoration Plan: The 2007 Angora Fire affected 177 Conservancy lots. An assessment was done to evaluate levels of damage to soils, forest, vegetation and wildlife on these lots, and establish

priorities for restoration and protection of water quality impacts on the Lake. The Conservancy is in the midst of a forest-thinning project on some of these lots. Regarding residents' complaints about the process, Lacey responded, "Our lands are subject to the same rules as those homeowners face. We made no money on the timber cutting, as all the wood was of a low grade and sold to a firewood supplier to defray the costs of the project, which were from $3,000 to $6,000 per acre."

Moving forward

During the last 25 years, the Conservancy's focus and goals have changed. Land acquisition has largely been completed, with close to a thousand parcel acquisitions a year now down to a dozen that are mainly project-driven.

"Simply purchasing the land wasn't the end," the CTC deputy director explained. The focus now is on "realizing the potential of those 5,000 plus parcels."

The CTC's granting role also continues, but is now enhanced by a third, new role – as a grantee. Because of a proven 25-year track record the Conservancy has successfully secured grants from federal agencies such as the Bureau of Reclamation and the Army Corp of Engineers. Given the current economic climate in California, relying only on money from Sacramento is no longer possible.

Another offshoot of this realization is the Tahoe Fund, a nonprofit launched in August 2010 to raise private money to match public funding for projects already "on the ground" in the Lake Tahoe Basin. Largely the idea of CTC Executive Director Patrick Wright, the nonprofit believes it fills a void in the environmental funding landscape. Its goal is, as its website explains, "To leverage public and private investments." Unlike other organizations that are either watchdog groups or focus on one specific program, the Tahoe

Fund, “will fill this void by enlisting the local community, visitors, and opinion leaders to support or contribute to a broad range of environmental, recreational, and educational projects.”

The board consists of a mix of private and public figures, with the two public members, Wright and Jim Lawrence, administrator of the Nevada Division of State Lands, being non-voting members. Donors to the Tahoe Fund may specify which projects their donations will go to.

Also part of the new reality is the proliferation of gaming and the resulting dilution of Tahoe’s drawing power as a gaming-only destination.

Supervisor Santiago agrees, “There is obviously a changing dynamic in the basin. It is through environmental redevelopment we can create greater prosperity in the basin, make us more geo-touristic . . . The larger work is to attract the capital investments to make the large infrastructure changes that need to be made.”

In the late 1990s, the realization began emerging that the only sustainable future for Tahoe must be built around what makes Tahoe unique – its natural attractions. Years of credible scientific research had shown lake clarity was quickly approaching a point of no return. Recognition of this led to the 1997 Environmental Summit, bringing President Bill Clinton and Vice President Al Gore to the lake. The resulting financial commitment is what Lacey calls a “watershed” moment in terms of political influence, with economic and environmental interests lobbying together in Washington rather than separately.

Understanding the CTC

But how well does the public understand the Conservancy’s role and how it fits into Lake Tahoe’s acronym-riddled environmental matrix. Anyone who’s lived in Tahoe a while

knows the term “Conservancy lots,” and recognizes the rough-hewn, low-slung timber fencing that often surrounds them. Some may have even dumped a dead refrigerator or moldy mattress on them in the dark of night. But often that’s as far as it goes.

“We’re not well-enough understood,” Lacey agrees. “Conservancies are meant to be locally-based. Our board is comprised of both local and state representatives intentionally. We need to be much more approachable.”

Bob Kingman, currently Mt. Lassen area manager for the Sierra Nevada Conservancy, agrees with the need for enhanced public education. The SNA is a sister agency to the California Tahoe Conservancy, which unlike it, “doesn’t have any one particular resource we are mandated to conserve or protect. We focus on the economic, social and environmental well being of Sierra Nevada communities in 22 counties, specifically excluding the Lake Tahoe Basin.”

Kingman worked for more than 20 years in various positions at the CTC, and while there developed a class at Lake Tahoe Community College aimed at introducing the local community to all of the organizations and government agencies in the basin, giving a primer on the mission of each, its jurisdiction and how these entities all fit together.

Public education about the environment is a priority for CTC Executive Director Wright as well. The CTC website is being reconfigured to be more interactive and user-friendly. The Conservancy would like to see visitor centers at every entrance to the lake. It helps with the seasonal centers in Meyers and owns land for one in Tahoe City. There is also a Conservancy-funded $1.8 million Explore Tahoe visitor center in Heavenly Village near Stateline, created in cooperation with South Lake Tahoe and others.

Like Kingman, who says his class at LTCC was “very well received,” Lacey believes the public is anxious to learn more

about the environment and how to protect it.

“The environmental damage people do,” he says, “is not willful, but out of ignorance and lack of awareness. People are generally eager to learn. If you tell people, ‘You’re here at the gateway to Tahoe, tread lightly,’ they’ll listen. We have an important role to play so that when people do visit, they become good stewards of the landscape.”

The future role of the Conservancy is seen by the agency as a work in progress. Lacey terms it “adaptive management,” not holding on to a plan, but revisiting it as circumstances change. He acknowledges that the outcome is not in the Conservancy’s hands alone, as they have no regulatory power, yet he remains optimistic. “The single most momentous change is the coming together of the environmental and economic communities and recognizing we have a common goal.”

Party on Sept. 16

The Conservancy’s 25th anniversary celebration on Sept. 16th at Tahoe City’s Commons Beach is seen as an opportunity for all who love Lake Tahoe to come together. “Our constituency is the citizens of California and around the world. Everyone has an inherent right to enjoy these resources,” Lacey says.

The event will include food, music, speakers and commemorative gifts. The Conservancy’s redesigned Lake Tahoe environmental license plate will also be introduced. The celebration is free to the public and begins at noon.

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