Letter: Sierra Valley Electric helps at B&B

To the community,

Bread & Broth, a nonprofit all volunteer organization, serves evening meals on Mondays at St. Theresa Church Grace Hall and Fridays at the Lake Tahoe Community Presbyterian Church. B&B is funded by our generous donors, jar collections at local businesses and our Adopt A Day of Nourishment program.

On April 13, Sierra Valley Electric Inc. donated $250 to be the Adopt A Day sponsor and provide over 100 meals to the evening's dinner guests. Locally owned and operated, Sierra Valley Electric's owners and employees have a strong sense of community and serving with B&B is just one of the of many community functions that they support.

"It was an honor to be part of such a wonderful program for our community," said Ralph Duron, a Sierra Valley Electric team member. "It is nice to see all the volunteers and the smiles on the faces of the people we served."

Helping to bring those diner's smiles were fellow teams members Bryan Kambitsch, Sandy Herback, Roy Umana, and Kaylee and Nick Chandler. B&B would like to thank Sierra Valley Electric Inc. and its employees for their commitment to the community and their continued support of helping B&B feed members of our community who struggle with hunger.

Kaylee Chandler said, "Helping the community is a joyful experience and seeing the smiles of every person we served was absolutely priceless."

Carol Gerard, Bread & Broth

Opinion: No one dealing with bloated budget

By Larry Weitzman

At the April 15 special meeting of the El Dorado County Board of Supervisors' meeting, whose main purpose was a CAO budget update presentation to address the continuing county annual deficits, the operative word was "bloated." During the meeting CAO Pamela Knorr admitted that the budget was bloated and she said it more than once. While Knorr admits the problem, she effectively refuses to solve the problem and three members of the BOS refuse to take the necessary action to solve this most critical EDC problem, a severe case of overspending.

Only Supervisors Shiva Frentzen and Ron Mikulaco apparently can see, as said by Mikulaco, the elephant in the room.



Larry Weitzman

And this is not the first time that the BOS and CAO were advised that the EDC budget was heading full steam for an iceberg. Auditor Joe Harn, in an email to the board on March 25, 2014, warned that the county was deficit spending and to continue to do so "will result in the necessity of draconian spending cuts next summer (of 2015)."

At the end of the FY 12-13 (6/30/13), the county had a cash balance of $54,461,348. By June 30, 2014, it was $45,106,043 and by June 30, 2015, that number is projected to be about $29,000,000 and perhaps as low as $25,000,000. Although this number goes up and down at the end of each month, the general fund cash balance which could be called a surplus will be depleted by as much as $30 million by the end of this fiscal year. The county has been living on savings for two years. Without these savings, the county would be upside down by that number.

And last week the CAO admitted the cause; bloated county budget spending. The main cause of the bloat was massive hiring by the prior CAO (about 170 general and non general fund employees, including many administrative employees) and a three-part 15 percent raise. From the June 2010 to June 2013 the county spent approximately $118 million on salaries and benefits annually. But when the cost of the new hiring hit, general fund spending on salaries and benefits grew to $132 million by June 2014 and will grow to about $141 million by the start of fiscal year 2015-16. Most of this increased spending is from hiring and not the raises that aren't fully implemented until July 1 this year.

Salaries and benefits are about 70 percent of EDC's general fund spending and the most significant, if not the only cause of the growth in county spending. When private businesses get in trouble, the first place they cut is their biggest expense, labor (employees). Governments across the nation have done the same thing. What is most interesting is that the growth in public safety spending for EDC has been minimal comparatively speaking. Since June 2013 the sheriff's office has grown by two, probation has not grown, public defender is up by five and the District Attorney's Office is down by two. Public safety departments have not grown. Total new county hiring since that date as said by a county official at the meeting was 134 employee.

Knorr made another significant comment about correcting this growing problem when she said, “The work force is the last thing we look at.”

The other source of significant county expense is the hiring of consultants, but there is little growth in that expense. Where else are we supposed to cut? Pens and pencils? The county is a service business; it doesn’t buy raw materials and manufacture products, except for some raw materials for road repair. At a BOS meeting last September, the prior CAO and chief financial officer could only point to a senior day care center with two employees as to any increase in county services.

What about revenue growth? County general fund revenues have grown from June 2006-14 at a rate of less than 1 percent annually ($185 million to $197 million), and the new forecast the county is using is a 4 percent growth for sales and property tax, but still not close to the pace of general fund spending. For four straight prior years (June 2010-13) revenues exceeded expenses by a total of $30 million. With the growth in spending from July 1, 2013, the deficits started and for the next fiscal year the annual deficit will touch $20 million if spending is not drastically reduced.

“For the last 12 months spending has exceeded revenues by about $1.3 million a month, and during the next fiscal year starting July 1, 2015, most county employees are going to receive a five percent raise,” said County Auditor Joe Harn. You can do the math. We have an accelerating deficit.

When BOS member Frentzen recently asked for analysis of that new hiring for the last three years or so by the county, the rest of the BOS gave her no support. Too bad for the county. Knorr didn’t do it on her own saying the BOS didn’t direct her to do so. In business do the shareholders have to vote to get the CEO to take action?

In the past when discussing the budget problem I mentioned that you should watch your wallets for increases in taxes and fees. Such a recommendation was part of CAO Knorr's presentation when she suggested that a fee study should be done regarding fees charged by the Community Development Agency, HHSA, Treasurer/Tax Collector, Clerk/Recorder and the Surveyor. In more pulling at straws, Knorr even suggested cutting infinitesimally small programs like saving $13,200 annually by cutting the Perks Court Transitional Housing program. How's that for saving the molehill while giving up the mountain? That's rich (no pun intended); we're going to balance the county budget that has had its salary and benefits balloon by $38 million by cutting a $13,200 program. If we could only cut about 1,500 Perks Court type programs, we would be at a $20 million saving. Perks Court is not the problem.

Unless spending is cut, and hopefully cut in an intelligent manner, this county will be facing those draconian cuts within six to 12 months. Next time you call the sheriff's office, I hope it's not recorded music.

Larry Weitzman is a resident of Rescue.

Opinion: Tightening vaccine rules may backfire

By Brendan Nyhan

In a number of states, parents are allowed to opt out of legal requirements to have their children vaccinated before entering school by claiming a "personal belief" or "philosophical" exemption. These provisions have raised a great deal of concern since the Disneyland measles outbreak, including in

California, where it began. Unfortunately, the blundering approach state legislators there have taken shows how direct attacks on exemptions can rally the anti-vaccine cause.

Senate Bill 277, which would eliminate the personal belief exemption, passed the Senate Health Committee on a 6-2 vote last week and heads to its second hearing in the Education Committee on Wednesday. The bill is scheduled to go through multiple committees, which is creating numerous opportunities for opponents to promote misinformation about the supposed dangers of vaccines.

Robert F. Kennedy Jr., an anti-vaccine leader, compared the issue to the Holocaust in comments in Sacramento before the screening of a scientifically unsubstantiated anti-vaccine film last week. An anti-vaccine group from Minnesota financed the airing of a television ad showing an infant having a seizure. Other vaccine opponents made similarly dubious claims about the risks of immunization in testimony to the Health Committee and jeered vaccine advocates from the audience.

Read the whole story

Letter: TAP says thank you

To the community,

Tahoe Arts Project would like to extend a tremendous thank you to our Dancing with the Tahoe Stars participants and to the community for making our biggest fund-raiser such an enormous success. The event was lively and entertaining and the audience amazing. The funds raised will enable TAP to continue to bring professional performing arts into the schools and community of South Lake Tahoe.

A huge thank you to the 10 couples who put so much time and energy into their dancing: Jenn Boyd and Josh Comprendio, Rita Wang and Jorge Orozco, Joe Laub and Robyn Lindner, Corinna Osborne and Adam Hopkins, Howie Nave and Michelle Langlois, Jason Collin and Rhonda Keen, Ginger Nicolay-Davis and Dino Elias, Paul Bruso and Catherine Arens, Martin Goldberg and Sarah Guzman, and Lisa McDaniel and Sebastiani Romagnolo. You were all incredible.

The event wouldn't have been complete without our illustrious judges: Don Bosson, Joan Elias, Paul Middlebrook and Marcia Sarosik and of course the applause queen herself, Roberta Benvenuto. Thank you to MontBleu and their crew for hosting the event and to Dreu Murin and his team for producing such an unforgettable show. We had wonderful entertainment provided by Marcia Sarosik Dance Studio, Forever Dance Studio, South Tahoe High School drama students and dance team, Drought Relief, Angie Zajac and Prestige Productions. Thank you to Lauren Lindley for the wonderful photos and thank you to Taylor Flynn for publishing them in the *Mountain News*.

Peggy Blowney, TAP executive director

Opinion: Reason to be optimistic about lake clarity

By Joanne Marchetta

UC Davis and the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency recently released their yearly water clarity readings for Lake Tahoe. The good news: Mid-lake water clarity improved significantly in 2014, with an average reading of 77.8 feet. That's 7.5 feet greater than the average reading for 2013, and almost 14 feet

greater than the 64.1 feet measured in 1997, Lake Tahoe's lowest recorded clarity.

Water clarity averaged 78.7 feet in summer months. That's a yearly increase of 13 feet and the highest summer average recorded since 2002. Average winter clarity improved by about one foot, continuing a pattern of steady improvement since 1997.



Joanne Marchetta

Mid-lake water clarity is the depth to which a 10-inch white disk, called a Secchi disk, remains visible when lowered below the lake's surface. Clarity readings have been taken at Lake Tahoe each year since 1968, one year before TRPA was created. We have one of the longest continuous records for water clarity anywhere in the world.

Water clarity is an iconic indicator of Lake Tahoe's environmental wellbeing. Science tells us that clarity is heavily influenced by fine sediment pollution, and that about 70 percent of the sediment washing into Lake Tahoe with stormwater comes from roads and other developed areas. Most of the development around the Tahoe basin was built before stormwater treatment systems were required, or is located on environmentally sensitive land where it would not be allowed today.

Last year's improved clarity readings are yet another sign that our public and private work to reduce stormwater pollution and erosion through the Environmental Improvement

Program has successfully halted the long-running decline in water clarity at Lake Tahoe. But they should not be interpreted as a victory in our mandate and collaborative work to restore its famed clarity levels that once measured 100 feet.

Last year's clarity readings were also influenced in part by the severe drought now entering its fourth year. Reduced precipitation means less stormwater and less fine sediment pollution flowing into the Lake, and warm winter weather causes shallow seasonal mixing of the Lake's water, both of which can improve annual clarity readings.

There is reason for optimism about these improved clarity readings. Public and private projects completed over the last two decades to improve water quality and restore sensitive environmental areas such as streams and wetlands are having a positive impact on mid-lake clarity and other key environmental indicators at Lake Tahoe. That success is no small feat for a lake that holds 39 trillion gallons of water and a watershed that takes about 650 years for an average drop of water to flow into the lake and out the Truckee River.

Environmental improvement program projects continue to be implemented around the Lake Tahoe region and incorporated into the area plans local governments and TRPA are designing to both restore our natural environment and revitalize and improve our communities. They also are being incorporated into the Lake Tahoe Total Maximum Daily Load Program, which requires all local jurisdictions to reduce their fine sediment, phosphorus, and nitrogen pollution loads.

Even with this progress, we have not lost sight of other challenges already upon us at Lake Tahoe. Funding to continue the collaborative Environmental Improvement Program is stretched thin and meeting our restoration mandates will stall without new resources. That's why TRPA is working closely with our federal delegation to introduce and pass the Lake Tahoe

Restoration Act, which would ensure that adequate federal funding remains available to leverage with state and local funding and private investment for continued environmental gain.

The potential long-term impacts of drought and the continued warming of air and water temperatures also pose new questions for the future. While we're moving in a positive direction on mid-lake clarity, we remain concerned about the shoreline's nearshore waters which are fouled with increased algae growth, reduced water quality, and the spread of aquatic invasive species. TRPA remains strongly committed to leading the collaborative partnership in the Tahoe basin to tackle these challenges head on and we thank you for working with us for the benefit of the lake and our communities.

Joanne Marchetta is executive director of the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency.

Opinion: Why I quit high school football

By Rian Bosse

I wore football pads, real pads, like the pros wear, for the first time when I was 12 years old, walking out onto the practice field at the start of my seventh-grade season, moms and dads cheering the entire team on before we ran our first wind sprint. I felt so much anticipation before heading out on to that field. I made sure the foam guards fit snug around my knees and thighs and that the contraption wrapped around my shoulders and chest wouldn't give. I saw the world through a facemask when I put my helmet on, something I'd only

experienced through toy helmets up to that point in my life.

All I could think about was how I had waited my whole life for this. I could feel the glory of doing something big, making some catch or tackle in a varsity game in the years to come. I had no idea that I'd be done with football only four years later, that I'd leave the game by my own choice before I finished high school. I quit organized ball my sophomore year without giving any reasons to my coaches or ever really coming up with one for myself.

It wasn't until the weeks leading up to my graduation from college in 2012 that I found my reason, something I think I knew all along. One of my favorite players, one of the most energetic and enthusiastic linebackers of all time, Junior Seau, was found dead after taking his own life. It sparked a national conversation about the physical toll the game takes on players, especially on professional players who dedicate years to what is potentially killing them. For me, it was a realization of how much I hated the pain everyone experiences playing. Of course, Seau experienced a lot more pain than I ever did. Tests revealed he suffered from CTE, a type of chronic brain damage that was later found in many other players, most likely caused by repetitive hits to the head. But I was finally honest with myself. I quit playing football all those years before because I was afraid of getting hurt. I couldn't tell anyone at the time, including myself, because of the stigma against quitters, against those who couldn't take the pain required to play, especially in the conservative part of rural Minnesota where I grew up. There's so much ritual, so much rite of passage associated with playing junior high and high school football, that quitting is almost akin to leaving a cult.

With how important football is to my family, I remained a loyal fan of both my college and professional teams, but I never played another down. In a family ingrained with football culture that is especially difficult. My father loves to tell

stories about the game. From watching his favorite team, the Browns, as a kid growing up in Ohio to attending some of the greatest games in the Orange Bowl when he moved to South Florida as an adult. Even more, he loves telling stories from his days playing.

My older brother, who also quit before he finished high school, likes to talk about the time he broke the leg of the coach's son in a tackling drill during a summer practice his final season. Though he's in his thirties now, I can see whenever he tells it that the story still carries a sense of achievement for him.

These two men taught me the game, my father who threw me routes in our back yard, who told me to always come down with the ball whenever it was thrown too high, even if it meant a terrifying hit from a defender. And my brother, who chased me all through the house, picked me up, and threw me down wherever he could, always trying to hit me hardest so I'd be ready for the real thing someday.

Yet I have no football stories to tell, at least no stories of personal glory, no big games that I helped win or hard hits I put on other players. The only memories I really have of the game are times I felt terrible pain, times I really questioned why I even played at all.

The first time was eighth grade, in a game we lost by some large margin, which was how most of our games turned out. I ran with the ball toward the sideline when an opposing player dove and caught my shoulder pads at the back just below the neck, what's known as a "horse collar" tackle. My full sprint stopped immediately, shoulder pads pulled up to my throat, the full weight of the player cutting off the air in my windpipe.

When I popped up in front of my coach, gasping for air, eyes already watering from the sudden pain, he knew immediately that I wanted to sit out the next few plays.

Frustrated by the score, maybe misreading how hurt I actually was, he yelled, “Fine! Get on the bench!”

I walked over, gasping, trying to breathe through thick mucus that had suddenly formed in my throat, what I thought was blood. I started to cry. To this day, I can’t remember if I played again in that game. I do remember an odd wheeze in my throat for a week or so after.

Still, I pressed on for two more years, that dream of playing in a big game taking me back to the first practice each summer, until another incident when I was a player on the junior varsity. It happened during tackling drills we ran as a team with the older juniors and seniors. In one line was the offense that, one by one, picked up a ball and sprinted over three tackling dummies before trying to avoid a single defender on the other end. The defense, in the other line, took turns popping up off their backs after the whistle, trying to tackle the guy coming at them with the ball.

Somehow I paired up with one of the biggest defensive seniors on the team. He was, I remember, always a nice enough guy outside of football, but turned agitated and mean with the excitement of the drill. After the coach blew the whistle, I only made it to the last dummy. Trying to take the last step over, I caught this senior’s shoulder pad in mid air just above the chest. My helmet popped half off, the chin guard caught on my throat. The world went black for a second and, once I staggered to my feet, I “saw stars” for the first time in my life. Head ringing, I stumbled back to the end of the line. For what it’s worth, the coach complimented my bravery getting back up.

A year later, I tried to forget the whole thing as I sat at home alone while another round of summer practices started a new season. I never wanted to feel pain like that again.

Reflecting on this aspect of my past after Seau’s death and

the national discussion on head trauma that followed made me realize that I am part of the last generation to play football before its serious injuries, especially head injuries, were ever a consideration. Between 2010 and 2012, years that coincide with what many consider to be the "concussion crisis" in the NFL, participation in the youth football program Pop Warner dropped 9.5 percent, according to ESPN. I graduated high school in 2007. As someone who really does love the game, it's difficult to see the number of young players entering high school drop across the country. It's even more difficult to know I was one of them.

But if the game is going to survive, it's important to realize that people like me do have stories to tell, just not the ones of glory and triumph. It's not to make accommodations for weaker players, but to realize the game's dangerous potential and make changes to an ultra-competitive culture that desperately needs it.

I don't think you can ever make football entirely safe. I don't think you ever need to. But a game isn't enjoyable when it becomes something more than a game, especially something that leaves so much destruction and defeat behind.

Rian Bosse is a graduate student at Arizona State University's Walter Cronkite School of Journalism. He no longer plays the game, but he enjoys watching and rooting on the Minnesota Vikings. He wrote this for Zocalo Public Square.

Opinion: Dead lawn isn’t so terrible

By Joe Mathews

Forgive me for bragging, but my front lawn looks a lot worse than yours.

As the drought deepens and the state Water Board revises plans for mandatory restrictions, California’s lawn culture has flipped, dirt-side up. Your local community pillars, once celebrated for lawns and gardens even greener than their money, run the risk of becoming social outcasts.



Joe Mathews

On the other side of this flip is your columnist, who is allergic to lawn watering and pretty much all other forms of lawn maintenance. Now, at the dawn of this drier California era, I have become an accidental avatar of civic virtue. It used to be that if you didn’t keep your lawn a pristine green, you didn’t care. Now, you don’t care if you do.

“More and more people want to move away from having to spend weekends mowing lawns,” Sierra Club California Director Kathryn Phillips told KQED recently, thus heralding my own aversion to lawn care as forward-thinking. She also said: “It’s sort of a learning moment for all of us.”

And so I hope my own story can teach those who may be

wondering whether life can go on when your green grass starts to turn to dust.

When we bought our home in South Pasadena four years ago, schools for our kids – not lawns – were on our minds. The house itself was, and remains, a mess. But we also inherited a lovely lot with several fruit-giving trees and an unpretentious Bermuda grass front yard served by an automatic sprinkler system.

Then came the shocking water bills – nearly $200 in some months. We cut back watering to twice a week. We installed low-flow toilets and a washing machine. But the bills stayed high. The problem was that our small city has raised water rates more than 170 percent over the past seven years to fund updates to a long-neglected water infrastructure.

So last year, I stopped watering altogether.

Money was the biggest motivator. Lack of time was another – with three kids and a demanding job, lawn care wasn't a priority. The drought provided a justification for a shut-off. And my own travels through this water-stressed state, particularly in the San Joaquin Valley, reinforced my determination to avoid watering my Southern California lawn.

As a descendant of Okies, I was prepared for the front lawn to go full Dust Bowl. But, on the south side of the lawn, the grass still grows green, protected by shade from a neighbor's trees and a magnolia along the street. But the sunbaked north half is now a mix of yellow grass and dirt. Weeds have a foothold. Relatives and neighbors agree: My lawn looks awful.

At first, I felt guilty. But that didn't last. Two people on the block sold homes for high prices, so I wasn't hurting property values. And my bills have come down to about $70 a month.

Now, with the full force of the state Water Resources Control

Board and Gov. Jerry Brown's mandatory 25 percent reduction behind me, I feel pride when I look outside my front door. When the state disclosed that my city was using too much water and would be required to cut down by 35 percent, my pride swelled. Some of us need an intervention, but not in my household.

Yes, I can hear the horrified screams of the gardeners and homeowners associations and the good neighbors across our state: Not watering is not an answer! You can't just let your lawn become an eyesore! I know. I know. The change in lawn culture will require more from me.

But what exactly is required? After months of investigating the possibilities, I'm uncertain.

Many water agencies will pay Californians to take out their turf and replace it with drought-resistant landscaping, which sounds good. Except that the reimbursement rates cover only a fraction of the cost. If you do what's most responsible and aesthetically pleasing, it could run $20,000 for even a smaller lawn. Cheaper options typically replace grass with unsightly plantings that annoy neighbors and hard surfaces that add to the "heat island" effect of cities. And then some experts argue that the right kind of grass, maintained with little watering, is environmentally better than some drought-resistant landscaping.

Reading the contradictory advice, you can see that the arguments during this shift in lawn culture will be as much about ideals of beauty as about water. That's fine, but for the legions of us who don't care about looks, the water worthies need to get their stories straight and give clear guidance. How do I — cheaply — keep the front of my house presentable and water-wise?

If no answer is forthcoming, I'm perfectly happy to keep the water off. Let others bemoan the eyesore I've created. I'll be

celebrating my civic-mindedness.

Joe Mathews wrote this Connecting California column for Thinking L.A., a project of UCLA and Zócalo Public Square.

Letter: Groomers take at turn at Bread & Broth

To the community,

Members of Heavenly Mountain Resort's grooming crew volunteered at Heavenly's Bread & Broth's Adopt A Day dinner on April 6. Just like the snow they make into corduroy, the Heavenly grooming team was awesome.

Representing Heavenly's crew were Todd Rudis, manager; supervisors Lupe Barrientos and Kyle Henderson; and leads Tyler Lehman and Daniel Huizar. Also joining the grooming crew was Heavenly's environmental manager, Frank Papandrea. S

erving the community is the focus of the Vail Epic Promise Grant program. The funding B&B receives from the program sponsors six Heavenly Mountain Resort and six Kirkwood Mountain Resort Adopt a Day of Nourishments a year. The sponsorships provide Heavenly and Kirkwood employees the opportunity to serve the community.

"It has been a rough year for all of us, so getting the opportunity to give back to those who really need the help puts things into perspective," said Kyle Henderson. "If you can put a smile on someone's face when they need it, it helps you realize how good you have it, even if there is no snow."

In addition to Heavenly's dinner sponsorship, the American Legion brought bags of clothing and boxes of shoes for the B&B guests. By the end of the evening, most of the donated clothing/shoes found new homes. Heavenly Mountain Resort, its employees and the American Legion are just three of the reasons that make the Lake Tahoe South Shore community so great.

For more B&B information, go online or find us on Facebook.

Carol Gerard, Bread & Broth

Opinion: Safety comes with fire adapted communities

By Ed Smith and Elwood Miller

A fire adapted community is one where the people have joined together to adequately prepare themselves and their homes for the occurrence of wildfire. They share the goal of mutual protection and creating a community that can survive wildfire with little or no assistance from firefighters. They perceive their community as vulnerable and constantly think about and discuss the threat of wildfire while individually and collectively taking action to mitigate the threat.

Residents of fire adapted communities:

• Acknowledge that their community is vulnerable to the destructive force of wildfire.

• Understand those landscape and structural characteristics that increase the probability of ignition.

• Understand the limitations of fire suppression efforts and accept responsibility for preparing their home through pre-fire activities.

• Understand the importance of a fuel break where firefighters, when available, can safely defend life and property.

• Are knowledgeable about how weather, topography and fuels influence wildfire behavior.

• Work with their neighbors and the local fire service to develop a community action plan that details high priority needs and projects (e.g., Community Wildfire Protection Plan).

• Routinely assess their house in terms of vulnerability to wildfire and take corrective action.

• Actively communicate about the wildfire threat and promote actions necessary to reduce the threat within the community.

• Share their knowledge and perspective with newcomers to the community.

• Understand that they share their level of wildfire risk with their neighbors (i.e., if one house is inadequately prepared, the risk to the whole neighborhood increases.)

• Know that mitigating the wildfire threat to their homes is not a one-time effort, but must be ongoing.

Creating a fire adapted community is an ongoing process that requires acceptance of a real wildfire threat and a collective determination to increase community survival by reducing that threat. Take that first step in becoming a fire adapted community today by talking to your local fire service, or contacting us at millere@unce.unr.edu or going online.

Ed Smith and Elwood Miller are with the University of Nevada Cooperative Extension.

Opinion: Coping with year-round fire season

By Robert Westover

There was a time when fire season for Western states meant only certain months out of the year. Not so long ago the U.S. Forest Service considered it primarily a summer problem with a few regions breaking the trend in early spring and late fall.

But climate change, according to most wildland fire experts, has turned fire season into a year-round issue.

What used to slow down fire season was winter – a long and cold time of year with lots of snow that killed off many invasive or destructive pests and filled rivers and reservoirs with ample water to supply the needs of millions living in the West.

Now winter is shorter and has far less snow accumulation in many areas. Case in point is California with near tinderbox conditions of dry wood from a decade long drought that is being recognized as one of the worst in the state's history – if not the worse. The snowpack this year was so sparse in the Golden State that some scientists from NASA are concerned that the state has literally only one year of water left.

If this dire prediction proves true, California could witness a natural resource disaster no state since the dust bowl years of the Great Depression has ever had to face. However, many other Western states in the coming years may face similar crises of water resource depletion.

To help mitigate the effects of climate change on our forests,

the Forest Service is asking that visitors follow all rules to avoid starting uncontrolled fires in our national forests and grasslands. Information about what you can do to help is available online.

The agency is also reducing hazardous fuels across 2 million to 3 million acres per year to help make wildfires easier to control. Additional information is available online.

It will take years to slow and hopefully reverse the effects of climate change on our wildlands, but it’s not impossible — we just all have to pitch in.

Robert Westover works for the U.S. Forest Service.