Editorial: Feinstein’s water bill flows to the money

Publisher’s note: ***This editorial is from the May 17, 2014, Modesto Bee.***

Water flows uphill … toward money. That’s as true now as it was the first time it was uttered by some now unknown cynic. Sen. Dianne Feinstein is proving it.

Our senior senator introduced a drought-relief bill in February that included $300 million for conservation and efficiency measures, aid to low-income farmworkers who are indisputably being harmed by the drought, new tools to help farmers weather this dry year and emergency projects to help ensure the safety of drinking water in poor San Joaquin Valley communities. These were noble goals, especially considering that no such provisions were included in the bill the House passed – which was nothing more than an old-fashioned water grab.

So it was disappointing when the $300 million for those efforts was stripped out of Feinstein’s bill in an effort to get support from Republican senators.

What didn’t get stripped out, though, were two provisions that will help those who are a great deal better off than farmworkers or thirsty kids in poor farming towns.

Read the whole story

Letter: Libraries are contemporary, not old-fashioned

To the community,

“Nobody goes to the library,” said Steve.“Libraries are old-fashioned.”

I have great respect for Steve. He’s a smart guy, devoted to our community.If you agree with Steve, this letter is for you.You, like Steve, will hear me out.

Fact: 1,700 people visit our library in the average week.

Fact: In 2012, 130,868 books were checked out, a 23 percent increase over 2011.

People do use the library.

What is old-fashioned? Surely, not knowledge, nor great stories. Steve must be talking about the actual books, the paper and ink format.

Fact: 62 percent of teens choose traditional books over e-books.

For those and others like them, the library buys best-sellers in paperback and large print.

The remaining 38 percent borrow that best-seller as an Mp3, an audio book, or download it on a checked-out iPad.

Steve buys all the technology he wants. Some like him come to the library to use the free Wi-Fi in this tranquil island at the heart of frenzied, modern life. But the library means much more to others. It means access to the World Wide Web.

Fact: At times, 20 people wait to use one of the nine computers.

Fact: According to a 2013 Pew Research Center poll, 63 percent of Americans aged 16 and older say that the closing of their local public library would have a “major” impact on their community.

Vote yes to pass Measure L. Renew this small tax, an investment in our community, that buys so much for so many.

Bonnie Turnbull, South Lake Tahoe

Opinion: Bears and trash don’t mix well

By Catherine Cecchi

As the days get longer and temperatures rise, our local black bears are becoming more and more active. While some bears that have learned to “supplement” their diet with human food from garbage cans and dumpsters may not have hibernated during this mild winter, many bears are just beginning to wake up from their wintertime slumber and they are hungry. Bears are typically very active in their search for food in the springtime, and at Clean Tahoe we’ve seen a dramatic increase in animal-in-trash incidents in recent weeks.

This is a terrible situation for the bears as well as for all of the neighbors in an area where a bear has been feasting on human food waste. A bear that has frequent access to human food will likely lose its natural fear of humans and also may damage property in its quest to reach the food source,

oftentimes resulting in a death sentence for the animal – “a fed bear is a dead bear.”

Here are a few tips for ensuring bears don’t get into your garbage:

• Put all food waste in bear-resistant twist-lid cans (available at Scotty’s Hardware at the Y) or metal bear bins. If you have regular trashcans, keep food waste inside your house (not your garage) until the morning of trash pick up. South Tahoe Refuse recently pushed back residential trash pick up time by two hours, so you don’t have to put trash out the night before.

• If you own a vacation rental or second home, consider installing a metal bear bin. It’s worth the investment. Find options online.

• Keep dumpsters locked at all times. “Locking” a dumpster can be as simple as sliding a carabineer clip into the hole securing the lock bar in place.

• If you see a trash problem in your neighborhood, please report it to the Clean Tahoe Program at 530.544.4210. There are ordinances in the city and the county prohibiting animal access to garbage. We will post a warning notice at the property, and recommend a citation for repeat offenders.

We should all do our part to keep our community clean and protect local wildlife.

Catherine Cecchi is executive director of the Clean Tahoe Program.

Letter: How a developer can prepare an area plan

Publisher's note: ***The following is an exchange between Tahoe Vista resident Ellie Waller and Placer County Planning Director Michael Johnson regarding the Martis Valley Area Plan.***

Johnson: I have provided responses to your inquiries below. It appears there is some mis-information being circulated, as the county is not a part of the preparation of the "Martis Valley West Area Plan". As noted below, there is nothing in county law that prohibits a property owner from preparing an area plan. Should a property owner chose to prepare such a plan, the plan would be subject to the same extensive public review as any other document submitted to the county. For further clarification, I have provided responses below. Let me know if you have any questions.

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Waller: I found out that Placer County is the lead on the Martis Valley West Area Plan. Placer (?) has enlisted Lew Feldman, attorney for the project and Kurt Krieg, the applicant for the project to complete the draft Martis Valley West Area Plan before the public has opportunity to participate and comment. Placer County has not retained the services of Lew Feldman or Kurt Krieg. The applicant is preparing the Martis Valley West Area Plan as a part of its application – there is nothing in county regulations that prohibit an applicant from preparing such a plan. As is customary, any submitted applications/documents will be processed through the county, and a full public review will be included.

1). When was Mr. Feldman and Mr. Kreig asked by Placer County

to start this process?

Johnson: As noted above, the county did not retain the services of Mr. Feldman or Mr. Krieg. This is an applicant-initiated project.

Waller: 2). Why wasn't the public asked to participate? Being this is the first Resort Recreation District-based area plan amendment to the Regional Plan update separate from the RPU EIS, I believe Placer and TRPA must be even more diligent in engaging the public.

Johnson: Once an application is submitted to the county, the public will be engaged in the review process. At this time, the county has no documents for the public to review.

Waller: Further, while the proposed specific plan is a project, the proposed area plan is an amendment to the TRPA Regional Plan. This process will set a precedent for all future area plans, master plans, and other special plans which may be proposed to the TRPA Regional Plan and/or Placer County's future area plan, and it would be in all of our best interests to ensure the public is sufficiently notified, engaged, and included in these plan processes.

Johnson: As with all county and TRPA projects, the public will have more than sufficient opportunity to review and provide comments prior to any public hearings.

Waller: Mr. Feldman stated the area plan document will possibly be released in two weeks. He also stated that because there are no adjacent private property owners this is a non-traditional area plan, and the area plan process did not warrant notification to people in North Shore.

Johnson: I cannot attest to Mr. Feldman's statements. As will all county projects, a robust public review process will be included, and residents of North Shore will have adequate opportunity to review and comment on the proposal.

Waller: As several members of the public stated, the project that is driving this area plan will mean development in the Lake Tahoe Basin that all of us can see forever, and traffic all of us will be impacted by. I request Placer County notify and engage all who will be impacted by this project, including residents, second homeowners and visitors who currently enjoy the mountain ridgeline views along North Shore.

Johnson: Until such time that the visual analysis is completed as part of the environmental review, it is premature to conclude what impacts may or may not result. A visual impact analysis is being prepared as part of the environmental document for this project, and the visual analysis will assess impacts that may be created by the project.

Waller: Finally, I have been asking for updates to the process since September 2013. Therefore it was even more surprising to learn that East-West Partners and others have already started the Martis Valley West Area Plan process behind closed doors. This is yet another precedent that Placer County should not be allowing. As you are aware, North Shore communities are already frustrated with finding out about new Plans and projects and what they mean "after the fact."

Johnson: As noted above, there is nothing that prohibits a property owner from preparing/submitting an area plan as part of its application. Should such a document be submitted, that document will be subject to extensive county and public review. Accordingly, there will be plenty of opportunity for the public to review and comments on submitted documents prior to any public hearing.

Letter: Time to rally behind Barton Ranch

To the community,

I would like to thank everyone who contacted the Lake Tahoe Historical Society and myself regarding the Barton Ranch property. I have had such a wonderful response from members of our community who would love to see this property saved rather than demolished. It is unfortunate that the Lake Tahoe Historical Society cannot just write a check and save the property, but perhaps the community can find a solution that is agreeable to the owners and involves our city and the community in a joint effort to maintain this piece of property.

The LTHS has been working on this project behind the scenes since late last fall. When it seemed that more was needed, a letter dated March 21 was sent to Shelly Aldean, the Governing Board chair at Tahoe Regional Planning Agency. On March 28, the "Notice of Availability of Negative Declaration" was published. On March 29, the LTHS sent a copy of the March 21 letter to Shelly Aldean at TRPA and to Nancy Kerry, city manager of the city of South Lake Tahoe. To date we have not received a reply from Ms. Aldean at the TRPA nor from Ms. Kerry at the city of SLT.

The closing date for comments on this negative declaration is April 25 at 4pm. I am asking everyone who is interested in preserving this property to please send a comment to Hilary Roverud, Development Services director for the city of South Lake Tahoe. She is also the city of South Lake Tahoe's representative to the Advisory Planning Commission of Tahoe Regional Planning Agency. I am not sure if this may be a conflict of interest or not. However, her address is below in the letter that the LTHS sent by certified mail.

If you care about this historic piece of property and its role in our history, then please send a letter to show your support and the community's interest in preserving the Barton Ranch. We know that TRPA considered this property "historic" and prevented the buildings from being torn down once before, so how can they walk away now?

Catherine Whelan, president Lake Tahoe Historical Society

Letter: State creates Kings Beach parking debacle

To the community,

Did you know Placer County cut a deal in December 2013 with State Parks and their partner California Tahoe Conservancy to utilize 40 percent of the Kings Beach State Recreation Area Parking for more than two years to house/stage construction equipment for Kings Beach Core Improvement Plan project? Most of us didn't either, until this past week. Now that we know, we have some questions.

How much was State Parks paid for the utilization of the parking area? What is State Parks doing with that money? Building the community center ADA facilities? If not, why not?

Who's considering the impacts to the loss of revenue this summer/fall to the NTPUD for maintenance due to the parking area being downsized? I believe State Parks takes over in November.

Who's considering the impacts of this deal on other areas nearby Kings Beach on the North Shore? That said, I strongly

urge State Parks to provide additional staff to police Moon Dune Beach and Speed Boat Beach (due to the lack of parking at KBSRA) as there will certainly be increased usage that will exacerbate the weekend crowds that visit those locations and are already parking along residential streets.

This is just one example of our agencies making decisions that will impact our communities without telling us. Last month approximately 200 community members passionately and definitively voiced objection to State Parks taking over the maintenance of the KBSRA parking at a public hearing hosted by state Sen. Ted Gaines and Assemblyman Brian Dahle, yet this new agreement was never mentioned.

Why wasn't the public made aware? What an opportunity the agencies passed up to truly engage the community with over 200 of us there. It makes us wonder if they really wanted us involved. Where is the local jurisdiction transparency on this contentious issue? Why such secrecy?

The KBSRA parking is equally essential for public and local access to the beach, the lake, and parking for the community center operations.

Ellie Waller, Tahoe Vista

Letter: Girl Scouts make Bread & Broth dessert

To the community,

Bread & Broth would like to thank the "Daisies" Girl Scout Troop 31 for the seven dozen cupcakes they made and decorated

for B&B’s dinner guests on April 14.

The members of Troop 31 are kindergartners and first-graders who meet at St. Theresa School. They made the delicious cupcakes as a special treat, which they personally delivered to the dinner.

Thank you for making the dinner special with your desserts and proud and happy faces.

Carol Gerard, Bread & Broth

Letter: Heavenly works hard at Bread & Broth

To the community,

Heavenly Mountain Resort’s product sales and services team members had a very busy night serving the 98 guests who attended Bread & Broth’s dinner April 14.

The hard working volunteers representing the PSS team were Paul Hopkins, director; Kelly Carmichael, manager; James Mitchell, assistant manager, Jimi Herbst, manager; and Jolena Hearn, greeter/host manager.

“It is always a joy to work with the crew at Bread & Broth,” said Paul Hopkins. He and his fellow Heavenly crew members have all previously volunteered at B&B dinners and their experience and helpfulness also makes them favorites with the B&B volunteers.

Bread & Broth applauds Heavenly Mountain Resort and its employees for their generous contributions of time and money

to our Adopt A Day of Nourishment program and the less fortunate.

“This is a great opportunity to give back to the community in which we live,” said Jimi Herbs.

You can tell by the smiles, thanks and appreciative words of our dinner guests, that they too are very thankful that Heavenly Mountain Resorts and its employees are so involved and committed to helping their community.

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

Carol Gerard, Bread & Broth

Opinion: Organic standards being eroded

By Ronnie Cummins

The Organic Consumers Association has a long history of defending the integrity of organic standards.

Last September, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, under pressure from corporate interests represented by the Organic Trade Association, made our job harder.

They also made it more important than ever for consumers to do their homework, even when buying USDA certified organic products.

Without any input from the public, the USDA changed the way the National Organic Standards Board decides which non-organic materials are allowed in certified organic. The change all but guarantees that when the NOSB meets every six months, the list of non-organic and synthetic materials allowed in organic will get longer and longer.

The USDA's new rule plays to the cabal of the self-appointed organic elite who want to degrade organic standards and undermine organic integrity. For consumers, farmers, co-ops and businesses committed to high organic standards, the USDA's latest industry-friendly move is a clarion call to fight back against the corporate-led, government-sanctioned attack on organic standards.

The NOSB, a federal advisory committee appointed by the Secretary of Agriculture, decides what is allowed on the National List of non-organic materials approved for use in organic. Prior to last September's new ruling, each non-organic material on the list had to be reviewed every five years, using what's called the "sunset process." Under this process, five years after a non-organic material was added to the National List, it would be automatically removed, unless a two-thirds majority of the NOSB board voted to keep the material on the list.

The intent behind this process was clear. Maximize flexibility for the organic industry, minimize the use of non-organic materials in organic, and encourage continuous improvement of the organic standard.

But last September, the USDA reversed this process. Now, instead of automatically coming up for review after five years, each non-organic material will automatically – and indefinitely – stay on the National List unless a two-thirds majority of the NOSB board votes to remove it. And that's not likely to happen, given that the 15-member board of the NOSB is stacked with industry reps who consistently vote with

industry against consumers.

Should you just give up on the organic label? Absolutely not. With all its flaws, USDA Organic is still the only credible and comprehensive certification program in the natural foods marketplace. The new rules mean you'll have to scrutinize labels more carefully than ever. But even then, you won't get the whole picture when it comes to non-organic substances in organics.

Certain non-organic or synthetic materials can be used in up to 5 percent of a "USDA Organic" product, and in up to 30 percent of a "Made with Organic" product.

Under the new rules, the list of non-organic or synthetic ingredients allowed at those percentages will likely grow. But here's something most consumers don't realize: The National List isn't just about synthetic and non-organic ingredients that are allowed in food. The list also governs every non-organic material or synthetic material used in the production of organic food, from farm to fork. As that list, too, grows, organic standards will continue to erode. And as a consumer, you'll have a difficult time identifying those materials as they won't be listed on the product's label.

What non-organic materials should you look for on food labels? Here are a few of the worst ones:

• Carrageenan, an additive linked to gastrointestinal inflammation and higher rates of colon cancer.

• Synthetic nutrients including DHA and ARA which have beenlinked to severe gastrointestinal distress, prolonged periods of vomiting and painful bloating.

• Sausage casings made from processed intestines.

What won't you find on food labels, but should be aware that the NOSB has approved for organic? And because of the new

rule, likely won’t revisit?

• Synthetic methionine: In 2001, the NOSB approved the synthetic version of methionine, a sulfur-based essential amino acid, for use in livestock feed – but only, as the Rodale Institute points out, after organic poultry farmers realized the substance was already in the feed they were using. As long as synthetic methionine remains on the list of approved substances in organics, organic farmers can continue to keep chickens confined. Why? Because, again according to the Rodale Institute, synthetic methionine keeps confined chickens healthy. Take the synthetic out of the feed, and you have to allow the chickens access to outdoor pastures in order to maintain their health. But wouldn’t that be a good thing?

• Genetically engineered vaccines: Genetically modified organisms, and the genetic engineering process itself, are not allowed in certified organic products. But there’s one exception. Genetically engineered vaccines can be used in organic livestock production, on the condition that the vaccines are included on the National List. So which genetically engineered vaccines did the NOSB approve for the National List? All of them. Instead of reviewing the safety of each vaccine individually, as the law clearly intends, the NOSB included all genetically engineered vaccines on the list, as a single group of “synthetic substances.” Now that the sunset process has been weakened, what are the chances of getting genetically engineered vaccines off of the list of approved substances? Next to none.

• Antibiotics: Under organic standards, antibiotics can’t be used in animals. But there’s a little-known loophole applicable only to poultry, that says the standard doesn’t take effect until “the second day of life.” So as it turns out, the eggs that hatch into organic chickens are routinely injected with an antibiotic called gentamicin, which is also used to treat bacterial skin infections in humans. Because of the loophole, the use of gentamicin in organic poultry

production has never been subject to the NOSB's sunset process. The process does, however, govern the use of antibiotics sprayed on apple and pear trees to control something called fire blight. Under the old rules, the NOSB voted to end the use of those antibiotics – tetracycline and streptomycin – as of Oct. 21, 2014. But industry is fighting that ruling. If it succeeds, and the NOSB ever re-lists those antibiotics, the changes to the sunset process will make it more difficult than ever to get tetracycline and streptomycin off of the National List of approved substances.

• Mutagenesis: There's another loophole in the "no genetic engineering in organics" standard. It's called mutagenesis. In 2011, the NOSB approved synthetic DHA and ARA for use in organics. As mentioned above, these synthetic nutrients, used in baby formula, are linked to side effects. But what you won't learn from reading the labels on baby formula, or any other product containing DHA or ARA, is that these synthetic nutrients are derived from mutated microorganisms, created through a process called mutagenesis. We believe mutagenesis is a form of genetic engineering, and others support our position. But when Martek Biosciences Corp., the manufacturer of synthetic DHA, argued that mutagenesis should be allowed because the process is nothing more than a form of classical seed breeding, the NOSB sided with the company. So while consumers can see DHA and ARA on product labels, few will know that they are produced using a technique that has dangers similar to genetic engineering.

The NOSB meets again April 29-May 2. For the first time, it will be operating under the new rule. The USDA didn't give the public an opportunity to comment on its change to the sunset process, but that doesn't mean the agency is immune to public outcry. Starting with President Obama and USDA Secretary Vilsack, we need to press USDA leadership to reverse this disastrous new rule.

Ronnie Cummins is director of Organic Consumers Association.

Opinion: Ruling makes it easier for public officials to keep secrets

By Joyce Terhaar, Sacramento Bee

Remember the $2.8 billion movie studio proposed for Dixon? The one that turned out to be a mirage because the woman behind it had a long history of bad debt, broken promises and angry investors, who were out millions?

The reporting by Sam Stanton and Marjie Lundstrom revealed information vital to Dixon residents and city officials. In the resulting public glare, Carissa Carpenter and her company left town. The deal died.

Yet one issue that came up in their reporting remains a concern for all who believe that work done by public officials, on behalf of the public, ought to be open to scrutiny by the public.

That hasn’t always been the case when public officials – in Dixon or elsewhere – use personal cellphones or other electronic devices.

On March 27 in a published decision, the 6th District Court of Appeal determined that San Jose city officials could keep private any texts or emails about city business that they had sent on their personal cellphones or other electronic devices.

The appellate court reversed a Santa Clara Superior Court decision that would have made the records publicly available after activist Ted Smith sued. Several media organizations,

including the *Sacramento Bee*'s owner, the McClatchy Co., the California Newspaper Publishers Association, the Los Angeles Times Communications LLC, the First Amendment Coalition and California Broadcasters Association supported Smith's case.

Read the whole story