Opinion: Battle over school money is just one issue

By Dan Walters, Sacramento Bee

As chronicled here and in other venues, there's a fierce battle under way between competing factions over how to spend billions in extra state school funds to improve the education of poor children.



Dan Walters

The education establishment is demanding "flexibility" in rules being considered by the state Board of Education, while civil rights and business-backed reform groups want more specificity and tighter monitoring.

A subset of the larger conflict is how the targeted students are being defined, because their concentrations govern how much extra state money school districts would receive. The new law defines them as those eligible for free or reduced-price school meals, "English-learners" and foster children, and by offering big bonuses, the state is creating a financial incentive for districts to beat the bushes to qualify as many as possible.

Read the whole story

Opinion: Let Rim Fire terrain heal naturally

By Monica Bond and Richard L. Hutto

Hardly anyone rejoices when they hear of a catastrophic fire raging through a forest. And yet the fact is that the hottest, most severe fire is as ecologically necessary and beneficial for Western forests as rainfall or sunlight.

The announcement Dec. 6 by the Stanislaus National Forest that it plans to conduct clear-cut logging and artificially replant the Rim Fire burn area near Yosemite is predictable, but ignores the fact that severely burned forests are living, thriving habitats that always have been a natural part of Western forest ecosystems.

Anyone having the opportunity to experience a severely burned forest like the Rim Fire is blessed with a cacophony of birdsong, the hum of insects, and a wildflower and pollinator show like nowhere else on the planet. Where else to harvest a fire morel or to see fire moss?

Fire-killed trees attract legions of insects that flourish in the wood beneath the charcoal bark and in the new shrubs and flowers. Many bird species seek out severely burned forests specifically for this rich insect food source. One species in particular, the black-backed woodpecker, is found in vastly greater numbers in severely burned than in unburned forests.

Along with other woodpecker species, black-backs excavate their nest holes in the dead trees, which then provide nesting sites for other animals that can’t make their own nest cavities. The species is the best-adapted woodpecker in the

world for extracting beetle larvae from fire-killed trees, and has become an icon for the ecological importance of severely burned forests.

Unfortunately, it's hard to dispel the myth that forest fires are nothing but bad. And the myth perpetuates expensive, ecologically damaging and unnecessary fire suppression and logging (all funded by taxpayers, of course) in places far from where fire threatens human lives and property.

It's time for the media to provide an ecologically literate perspective on forest fires. Forest "restoration" after severe fire is completely unnecessary because severe fire itself restores habitat for fire-dependent species. More to the point here, post-fire salvage logging – an activity perpetuated by fire hysteria, and demanded by House resolutions 1526 and 3188 – always inflicts serious ecological damage to the forest system, as dozens upon dozens of studies have shown. We encourage everyone to visit the Rim Fire area and see for themselves the transformative power of severe fire and nature's exuberant response.

We need to look at the science, rather than listening to outdated and sometimes self-serving myths about the villainy of forest fire. Severe fires create an important and rare habitat – one that we should celebrate and protect. This will only happen if enough people learn the truth and speak out in its defense.

Write or call the U.S. Forest Service to ask foresters to leave the Rim Fire area near Yosemite unlogged and natural.

Write or call your congressional representative to say you support the 250 forest scientists who signed a letter opposing any new legislation, such as HR1526 or 3188, which would harm these unique burned-forest systems.

Monica L. Bond is a principal scientist with the Wild Nature Institute and Richard L. Hutto is a professor of biology and

wildlife biology at the University of Montana.

Letter: Tahoe issues need to be vetted in Tahoe

To the community,

Last week the Placer County Community Plan Team members received notification of a county-initiated board item (see below). This issue must be vetted properly by the Placer County Community Plan Team members as well as the Tahoe public at large.

> *Happy New Year to all of you –*
>
> *The purpose of this email is to inform you of a county-initiated board item that will be presented to the Placer County Board of Supervisors on Jan. 7 in the Auburn Board Chambers. The board item is a proposal of an interim urgency ordinance prohibiting certain uses within the existing Community Plan areas of Tahoe City, Kings Beach, and North Stateline, which currently make up the TRPA Town Center areas within Placer County. The interim urgency ordinance would place a temporary prohibition on specific uses until updates to the Community Plans have been adopted. The proposed prohibited uses would include: hospitals, day care center/preschools, churches, schools – business and vocational, schools – colleges, schools – kindergarten through secondary, animal husbandry services, collection stations, single-family residences, service stations, auto repair and services, and contract construction services.*
>
> *As most of you are aware, redevelopment of Town Centers has*

been identified as a high priority in TRPA's updated Regional Plan. In Placer County, the Town Centers of Tahoe City, Kings Beach, and North Stateline have been targeted as receiving areas for development in a manner that concentrates densities within the Town Centers to create vibrant communities, while also fostering environmental threshold gain in the basin. Therefore, redevelopment with appropriate land uses within the Town Centers of Placer County is critical for revitalization, to foster sustainable communities, and to remove development off environmentally sensitive lands within the Basin.

Placer County appreciates and values the considerable input your Plan Teams have provided in the Community Plan Update visioning process. With the visioning efforts completed to date, the county also recognizes the importance of ensuring that the community's vision for the Town Center areas is reflected in the Community/Area Plans in order for it be realized in the built environment. That said, with the establishment of an interim urgency ordinance, the Tahoe basin stakeholders and residents can be assured that Placer County is committed to honoring the communities' investment in visioning, Area Plan and Community Plan Policy Framework efforts.

As the county moves forward with the Community Plan update process, county staff has determined that certain uses currently allowed within the Special Area districts of the Tahoe City Community Plan, the Kings Beach Community Plan and the North Stateline Community Plan are not in keeping with the visioning efforts of the Area Teams, conflict with the TRPA Regional Plan and the Placer County Tahoe Basin Community Plan Policy Framework. As a result, the county has concluded that certain land uses have the potential to impact the public health, safety and welfare of the residents of the North Lake Tahoe Region. Therefore, per Government Code Section 65858 (a), county staff is proposing

an interim urgency ordinance prohibiting certain uses until the compatibility of such uses within the Town Centers can be appropriately addressed in the Community Plan update. The interim urgency ordinance will authorize the county to refuse to accept new applications for the term of the ordinance and to focus on finalizing its updates to the Tahoe City, Kings Beach and North Stateline Community Plans that are currently under way. Updates to said Community Plans will include review of existing allowed land uses for compatibility, and developing criteria and standards for such uses that may be appropriate in light of the character, purpose of, and Regional Plan requirements for the Town Centers within Placer County.

For your reference, I have attached the staff report and ordinance for this Jan. 7 board Item. You can also find the staff report package and Board of Supervisor's meeting agenda online.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact either myself or Paul Thompson, Tahoe CDRA at (530) 581.6200.

Thank you,

Crystal Jacobsen, supervising planner Placer County Community Development Resource Agency.

I sent the following email to each Board of Supervisor member:

With all due respect, this item should be removed from BOS agenda Jan. 7 and rescheduled as a Tahoe "special" meeting. The short notice as well as the importance of the ordinance should be discussed with as many of the Area Plan Team members as possible. This is a formal request to schedule a Tahoe location meeting with enough advance notice to allow Area Plan team members as well as the Tahoe general public at large to attend.

I also sent this link to all Community Plan team members 20 pages for your review link to staff report.

Community Plan team members and public at large please join me in requesting this be heard in Lake Tahoe – the proper venue for this issue to be vetted. Send email to bos@placer.ca.gov as soon as possible, but no later than Jan. 6 at 5pm.

Thank you in advance for your support.

Ellie Waller, North Tahoe West Plan Team member and concerned citizen

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Letter: Hope Lutheran helps at Bread & Broth

To the community,

Feeding the hungry of the South Shore is the goal of the Bread & Broth program and Hope Lutheran Church of the Sierra has been supporting B&B's program since its inception.

Hope Lutheran Church has been donating $250 twice a year to sponsor two Adopt A Days annually and members of the church are regular Bread & Broth volunteers who donate their time to cook, serve and cleanup for the Monday evening dinners.

Bread & Broth would like to thank Hope Lutheran Church of the Sierra for their continued support by sponsoring the Dec. 30 evening dinner. Helping their fellow church members serve the dinner were Linda Amundson, Mort Meiers, Diane Martin, Julia Martinez and Cathy Haynes. "If you haven't helped serve food at B&B, I highly recommend the experience. You get to be around fun and grateful people. Give it a try in 2014!" said

Linda Amundson.

The evening’s dinner was attended by approximately 80 Lake Tahoe community members. Their gratitude and enjoyment for their tasty and filling meal was very evident in their overwhelming response to the “call for seconds” and “to go servings”. These meals would not be available to those in need without the generosity of donors like Hope Lutheran Church.

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

Carol Gerard, Bread & Broth

Letter: Liberty Utilities redefines convenience

To the community,

I paid most of my bills online (yesterday), and most companies today make paying online pretty easy, such as Southwest Gas. On the other hand, Liberty Utilities, which has been trying to tell us we need so many new utility lines and are groping for more expenses, charges a $3.50 convenience fee if you want to pay your bill on their website. They should be ashamed.

We should be charging them a “convenience” fee since they don’t have to manually answer the phone, input data, give a confirmation number, etc., when we give them a payment online.

I am not very impressed with Liberty Utilities. Their outage over the Thanksgiving weekend (Friday) on Sierra Boulevard and for miles around, was an unbelievable inconvenience and blamed on their new underground lines on Sierra Boulevard. How did we

know this? Not from any information you could get from their non-info recording for sure – only by tracking down a service truck to see what the story was.

Liberty Utilities: get a grip and start learning how to "engage" with your customers, and start by accepting online payments without gouging your customers for "convenience" – which is all your.

Judi and Terry Allen, South Lake Tahoe

Letter: Bread & Broth ends year with special dinner

To the community,

Bread & Broth would like to recognize the generosity of all the donors and volunteers who made our Dec. 23, Monday evening dinner a very special holiday meal for our guests.

With Christmas just two days away, a festive meal was served with baked ham as the main course accompanied by sweet potatoes, broccoli, salad, rolls and desserts.

A special thanks is to be given to Jeanette Shippee and her Culinary Arts Program at the El Dorado County Jail. Shippee and her culinary crew baked delicate Christmas cookies and tasty warmed rolls to be served with the ham and sweet potatoes that they purchased for the evening meal. The money for their purchases came from their "sweet roll" fundraisers which were held earlier in the year.

Bread & Broth would also like to acknowledge the evening's hosting Secret Santa. This generous donor was really thrilled

to be sponsoring B&B's Christmas dinner. Not only hosting the Christmas dinner, but a regular B&B volunteer, our sponsor said, "It's my pleasure. I personally get a lot out of it."

Finally, to those who volunteered at the Christmas dinner and all the dinners throughout the year, giving your time is as valuable as giving money. Your dedication, smiling faces and kind words are an amazing gift of kindness not only in this holiday season but throughout the entire year.

Carol Gerard, Bread & Broth

Opinion: A few ideas for Lake Tahoe in 2014

By Kathryn Reed

While it's not possible to wipe the slate clean, it is possible to approach things from a different perspective. That is in a lot of ways what New Year's resolutions are about.

Here, in no particular order, are some resolutions, ideas, and thoughts I have for 2014 for the greater Lake Tahoe area:

• Let's not artificially start the ski season before Thanksgiving. Mother Nature seldom has. I remember growing up in the Bay Area and many a year the skiing was not good at Lake Tahoe at Christmas. This was long before climate change and global warming were in our vocabulary. Let's promote fall in Tahoe; then ramp up the snowmaking – if need be – so there is a white Christmas on the slopes.

• Let's have elected officials set the example for how to behave properly. This means no screaming at people getting

signatures for petitions, no accosting reporters at meetings, no disrespect to people whose opinion you disagree with, no bullying. You are elected to lead and to represent everyone, even those who did not vote for you and those you don't like.

• Let's put locals first. I've long advocated that if we create an area where people want to live and work, then tourists will follow. Most tourists want an authentic experience, not some make believe village or Disneyland-esque venue. Tourist traps, jacked up prices, crappy service – no one wants any of that.

• Let's take pride in what we have. How hard would it be to at a minimum once a month do something to improve your business and your residence? This includes people who don't own, own but don't live here, and part-timers. It could be cleaning the windows, raking, shoveling, taking out fire-prone juniper, a fresh coat of paint, building morale with a company event, closing for a half day and letting employees use that time to volunteer in the community, getting neighbors together to help each other with a project – the possibilities are endless.

• Let's broaden our horizons by getting out more. Visit a store you haven't been to before. Take a walk, a hike, a bike ride some place new. Eat at a different restaurant, have a beer someplace new. Go to an event you've never been to. Tahoe might have more to offer than you realized.

• Let's help our local businesses by writing reviews on Yelp, Trip Advisor, Open Table and the like. Have family and friends do the same. And if you have had a bad experience, talk to the manager or owner and tell that person what happened so the same negative thing doesn't happen to someone else. That's more helpful than complaining to friends or writing a bad review.

• Let's take a hard look at how much we really need. We claim to want to build things because we need more tourists – aka

more money. Bigger isn’t necessarily better; just as change is not necessarily bad. Let’s make decisions based on the merits of the project. Not all development is bad; just as not all redevelopment is good just because it looks pretty. And just because something has been on the books for X number of years is not a reason to go forward with that idea.

• Let’s learn the arts of listening and compromise. Everyone has a right to his or her opinion. Instead of challenging it, just hear what that person has to say. That does not mean you have to agree with it. It’s good to know what you want, even better to give a little so even more people get what they want. That is compromise. Listening and compromising can be hard, but both are rewarding.

• Let’s remember that Lake Tahoe means different things to everyone. Each section of the basin has something special to offer locals and visitors. It belongs to all of us. No one person, no one business, no one agency is more important than another. Yes, there are different visions and even more ways to create those visions. But we’re all here only briefly. Let’s make the best of it instead of being so divisive.

Happy New Year, Lake Tahoe!

Opinion: SnowGlobe 2013 – one local’s opinion

By John Spinola

Below is my 2 cents about the SnowGlobe festival that has our town somewhat divided (and for some of us sleep deprived). As someone who lives relatively close to the event and has their

life and routine disrupted by it, I just feel the need to vent. I consider myself to be a reasonable person and am well aware that tourists are the lifeblood to this community. I have lived here continuously since 1976.



South Lake Tahoe's SnowGlobe ends at 12:30am New Year's Day. Photo/Lesia Witkowsky

Now on with my rant:

To the people that say – "Just pack up and leave for 3 days"

I say – You are aware that most of us have jobs and or businesses that we need to be at during the week between Christmas and New Years. It is the busiest part of the month for this town and as a local we cannot just pack up and leave during this time. We have commitments to our employers and customers. That might be the only week that we make $ within the month of December

To the people that say – "Just get some earplugs"

I say – You are aware that earplugs do not stop the boom, boom, boom that the bass creates. Earplugs do nothing to stop my deck from vibrating under my feet or the constant thump, thump, thump that permeates my house during the SnowGlobe event. Should I really be required to wear earplugs in my own house?

To the people that say – "If it's too loud, you're too old"

I say – That’s a tired cliche and has been around since the ’50s. It’s got nothing to do with it being too loud. It’s got to do with the event not having a proper venue and that the noise (actually bass level) being disruptive to myself, my family and my dog. I am all for people having a good time and enjoying themselves, but when it invades my house I feel I have a legitimate complaint.

To the people that say – “Quit complaining and get over it”

I say – Dismissive comments like that do nothing to solve the issues that this event present. All this tells me is that you are ignoring me or anyone else who wants to voice an opinion that differs from yours.

To the people that say – “It brings a lot of good to the area”

I say – No. It just brings money to the area – which is a good thing. But I am not sure how much because you have to figure in the extra man hours that are spent on the city side preparing for, policing and cleaning up after this event. It has also divided our locals as to whether it is a good or bad thing. It really doesn’t present the best image of a family-friendly mountain town. And, yes, I know we are a 24-hour town with gaming, drinking and access to illicits.

To the people that say – “We are tourist town and it brings $ to the area”

I say – Yes, I know this is a tourist town and I know that it brings $ to the area. Again, it needs a proper venue that isn’t disruptive to the people that live here or even the ones that are vacationing here. I have seen vacationers cut their visits short because of it. I live with the fact that tourists overtake our town on all the big holidays and during most of the summer months. I live with them overrunning this town and clogging up the highway, grocery stores and restaurants. I’m OK with this. It’s why I am able to live here. But again, when they invade the peace and quiet that is my household, I feel I

have a legitimate complaint.

To the city –

City says – “We set up a hotline”

I say – You set up a number that goes to a token recording that does nothing to address concerns or grievances.

Recording states – “We are aware that the noise is louder than last year. The lack of snow is the reason for this.”

I say – Have them turn it down because of the lack of snow.

Recording states – “Some have addressed concerns about fireworks. Fireworks are shot off over the paved/parking areas and fire personnel are on scene.”

I say – Paved parking is covered with buses, vendors and staff parking. There are also islands between all the parking areas that have trees and underbrush.Trees and underbrush also surround the parking areas. There is a reason that we shoot off fireworks over the lake and not in the woods.

City says – “They are taking over the play fields and college.”

I say – They also took over Bijou park and eliminated any access to the gazebos, play areas and dog park.

City says – “They have a curfew.”

I say – They regularly play past their supposed curfew.

I will end this letter by stating once again that I am all for having events here in the area that bring people and money to the area. We do need to offer more than just gaming. We need people to come to South Lake Tahoe and not just Stateline. I am all for SnowGlobe. It just needs a proper venue that isn’t disruptive to the populace and the rules imposed by the city need to be enforced.

I’m hopping off my soapbox.

John Spinola is a resident of South Lake Tahoe.

Letter: South Tahoe’s priorities are upside down

To the community,

Some things are upside down in our city. For instance, the city recently raised the cost of having a telephone with charging an annual fee for 911 service. It doesn’t matter if a person ever dials 911 or not. The fee is really a general tax. If it were a fee, it would be for using the service.



Bill Crawford

And the city has put parking meters around town, which is a real user fee. You pay to park. But the city has been less than truthful about why parking meters. First, the revenue would be for hiring two cops that the city claims are needed. Now it’s said by a council member that the revenue is needed for things like toilet paper for places like Regan Beach. Really, I kid you not.

What’s the point? What’s upside down? Heavenly pays next to nothing for operating the gondola in the city. There’s no tax

on ticket sales. Heavenly gets off scot-free.

The city puts the bite on locals and visitors with a fee for parking. And the city takes another bite out of local pocketbooks with a tax on telephones. And the city's less than honest about where the money will go. But the city will not go for a tax on Heavenly's operations in the city.

On taxation, locals really are first in the city. The tax base is upside down.

Also, the city is a minimum wage town for too many in the work force. But the city manager and city attorney's salaries are in the top 5 percent of earners in the nation, which may not be upside down, but it's whacky in a city with a population of under 25,000. Why? At best it's excessive. At worst it's a rip off. Another example the division between the haves and the have nots.

Bill Crawford, South Lake Tahoe

Editorial: Rain dances are not a winning water strategy

Publisher's note: ***This editorial is from the Dec. 22, 2013, Fresno Bee.***

People are uttering the D-word again.

Sen. Dianne Feinstein, Rep. Jim Costa and many other lawmakers in the Democratic and Republican parties want Gov. Jerry Brown to declare a state drought emergency.

The first 10 months of 2013 were the driest on record in

California, dating to 1895, according to the National Climatic Data Center.

That record follows two years of dry conditions, so several Northern California reservoirs are now at less than 40 percent of capacity, including Shasta and Oroville at 37 percent, and Folsom at 21 percent.

Read the whole story