Opinion: Storage – Calif.’s most important water issue

By Dan Walters, Sacramento Bee

The release last week of detailed plans for building water tunnels beneath the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta touches off a legal and political battle that could take years to resolve.

The tunnels, however, are merely one aspect of securing an adequate and dependable water supply for the state – and perhaps not even the most important aspect.

The tunnels, if built, would allow some Sacramento River water to bypass the environmentally stressed Delta on its way to the head of the California Aqueduct near Tracy.

However, a more fundamental issue is whether there will be enough water, when needed, to satisfy the 25 million Californians who draw water from the aqueduct and farmers, while enhancing the Delta’s deteriorated habitat for fish and other Delta wildlife.

The state’s largest reservoir, by far, is the snowpack that accumulates in the Sierra during winter months and is released into the Sacramento-San Joaquin river systems as warmer spring and summer weather melts the snow.

Read the whole story

Opinion: Eating habits start in the womb

By Kristin Wartman, New York Times

The solution to one of America's most vexing problems – our soaring rates of obesity and diet-related diseases – may have its roots in early childhood, and even in utero.

Researchers at the Monell Chemical Senses Center, a nonprofit research organization in Philadelphia, have found that babies born to mothers who eat a diverse and varied diet while pregnant and breast-feeding are more open to a wide range of flavors. They've also found that babies who follow that diet after weaning carry those preferences into childhood and adulthood. Researchers believe that the taste preferences that develop at crucial periods in infancy have lasting effects for life. In fact, changing food preferences beyond toddlerhood appears to be extremely difficult.

"What's really interesting about children is, the preferences they form during the first years of life actually predict what they'll eat later," said Julie Mennella, a biopsychologist and researcher at the Monell Center. "Dietary patterns track from early to later childhood but once they are formed, once they get older, it's really difficult to change – witness how hard it is to change the adult. You can, but it's just harder. Where you start, is where you end up."

This may have profound implications for the future health of Americans. With some 70 percent of the United States population now overweight or obese and chronic diseases skyrocketing, many parents who are eating a diet high in processed, refined foods are feeding their babies as they feed themselves, and could be setting their children up for a lifetime of preferences for a narrow range of flavors.

The Monell researchers have identified several sensitive periods for taste preference development. One is before three and a half months of age, which makes what the mother eats while pregnant and breast-feeding so important. “It’s our fundamental belief that during evolution, we as humans are exposed to flavors both in utero and via mother’s milk that are signals of things that will be in our diets as we grow up and learn about what flavors are acceptable based on those experiences,” said Gary Beauchamp, the director of the Monell Center. “Infants exposed to a variety of flavors in infancy are more willing to accept a variety of flavors, including flavors that are associated with various vegetables and so forth and that might lead to a more healthy eating style later on.”

Read the whole story

Letter: Heavenly provides cheer at Bread & Broth

To the community,

Decked in Santa Claus hats and reindeer antlers, the volunteer crew from Heavenly Mountain Resort brought holiday cheer and served a hot and hearty meal to the dinner guests at Bread & Broth’s Dec. 16 evening meal. “Volunteering with B&B is a humbling experience while giving back to our community, especially during the holidays. Santa sent us to spread joy and cheer and we did!” said Wren Buxton, Heavenly’s dispatch supervisor.

Joining Buxton in spreading the spirit of the Christmas season were her fellow base operations teammates Gary Silva,

dispatcher; Jessie Sota, dispatcher; Shaneen Murdock, administrative Assistant; and Tom Fortune, Director of Base Operations. This fun group of sponsor volunteers exemplified the holiday spirit and were willing to help the B&B volunteers wherever they were needed.

With funding provided by Vail's Echo Foundation, Heavenly/Kirkwood Resorts sponsored their 12th Adopt A Day of Nourishment event for the year 2013. Bread & Broth would like to salute Heavenly Mountain Resorts for their participating in and sponsoring services for the people of the south shore community. Buxton summed up Heavenly's involvement in B&B's program, "It's always a pleasure and we look forward to serving with B&B in the future."

For more information about B&B's programs, check our website or friend us on Facebook.

Carol Gerard, Bread & Broth

Letter: Donations made for a Merry Christmas

To the community,

Tahoe Community Church Food Pantry would like to say thank you to the community as we feed the hungry in our community.

This Thanksgiving we fed 183 households a turkey and bag of all the fixings. We are feeding record numbers each Friday afternoon at the Food Pantry, and have fed over 7,500 people this year.

Our thanks to American Century for their generous donation

which helps us to give a generous amount of food each week to those in need.

Thanks to the Salvation Army for the 100 turkeys, and to MontBleu and its employees for turkeys, fixings, and pies. Thanks to Harrah’s-Harveys for the use of their freezer to store our turkeys. Thanks to the Cub Scout Troop 592 for their service in helping to carry the Thanksgiving Dinner Bags to the cars of our clients. A special thanks to all our volunteers.

Thank you to the 4H Club for the donated produce and to Heavenly resort for the cases of hoagie rolls.

Thank you to the Whittell High School students for donating the 1,500 canned and boxed non-perishable foods from their Food Drive just before Christmas. They also donated coats and warm clothing, and toys for the children which we were able to distribute before Christmas. Thank you to the Tahoe Douglas Christian Preschool for the 90 canned and boxed non-perishable foods also donated just in time for Christmas. Our shelves were filled.

This community partnership is very important to us as we feed the those in need in this community.

Thank you!

Kathy Pavich, Tahoe Community Church Food Pantry

Editorial: NSA vs. U.S. Constitution

Publisher's note: ***This editorial is from the Dec. 18, 2013, Los Angeles Times.***

Six months after Edward Snowden revealed that the National Security Agency was indiscriminately collecting the phone records of Americans and holding on to them for years for possible use in terrorism investigations, a federal judge has rightly ruled that the program probably violates the 4th Amendment's ban on unreasonable searches and seizures.

In a powerful opinion released last week in Washington, U.S. District Judge Richard J. Leon castigated what he called an "almost-Orwellian technology that enables the government to store and analyze the phone metadata of every telephone user in the United States." Yet Leon also noted that the government had not cited "a single instance" in which the data had stopped an imminent attack.

Read the whole story

Letter: CTC land deals need closer scrutiny

To the community:

The California Tahoe Conservancy (CTC) is studying for implementation Tahoe Sustainable Communities Investment Program (TSCIP).

From board meeting executive summary: “The 2012 Regional Plan promotes clustering development in the basin’s town centers to create more walkable, bikeable, and transit-oriented communities. The Regional Plan also includes a Sustainable Communities Strategy (SCS).

“TSCIP will refocus the Conservancy’s land acquisition and marketable right programs to: 1) acquire and restore aging developed properties on environmentally sensitive lands and retire or transfer the development rights to town centers; 2) sell, lease, or exchange vacant Conservancy land in these town centers; and 3) acquire the remaining private properties in several of Lake Tahoe’s roadless subdivisions to remove the threat of development.

“Acquiring development rights: Some stakeholders have recommended that the Conservancy become more active in buying and selling development rights directly rather than acquiring them incidentally through purchases of land.

“Acquiring any developed properties: Other stakeholders have recommended that the Conservancy not limit itself to acquisitions of developed property on environmentally sensitive land, since retiring or transferring the marketable rights of any developed commercial property, particularly those outside of town centers, could help to reduce and/or cluster development.

“Acquiring residential properties: The Conservancy has also been urged to consider acquiring developed residential properties on sensitive land (in addition to commercial and tourist accommodation properties) since the floor area of these properties can also be converted into other marketable rights and transferred to town center locations.”

To completely understand this newly proposed program: Tahoe Sustainable Communities Investment Program (TSCIP) and how execution of the TRPA Code of Ordinances is implemented the

CTC along with the Regional Plan Implementation Committee must sponsor a joint workshop for the public's benefit and understanding of the complexity of the program. Many of us dug into the details and still do not completely grasp the TDR (Transfer of Development Rights) program or why the Conservancy should become a commodities broker.

I strongly urge that all community members read the entire proposal.

Additionally the CTC has a program not highly publicized called "Asset Lands Program" that merits communities' attention.

What are potential asset lands?

Potential asset lands are properties that can be considered for possible sale or trade at some point in the future consistent with the Conservancy's adopted Asset Lands Program Guidelines. They are not restricted from sale by law or Conservancy board policy.

What types of properties does the Conservancy own that may be considered potential asset lands?

Potential asset lands fit into several broad categories:

• Easement Protected Lands (4): Lands where Conservancy ownership of a conservation easement would be more cost-effective than full fee title ownership.

• Area Plan Asset Lands (17): Developable parcels in highly urbanized areas that could support sustainable compact development consistent with local area plans.

• Highway 50 Right of Way Lands (85): Developable parcels along the former Highway 50 right of way that could be used to support the South Tahoe Greenway bike trail or be sold or leased to help fund the trail.

• Bulk Acquisition Lands (73): Developable lands acquired as part of “bulk acquisition” of conservation and developable lands from a single seller.

• Residential Land Coverage Parcels (154): Developable lands purchased to acquire land coverage for mitigation purposes or for bike trails or other development projects.

How many Conservancy properties could be considered potential asset lands?

Three hundred thirty-three of the over 4,800 properties fall into the categories above, but only six have been selected by the Conservancy for consideration for sale. Of these six properties, only two have been listed for sale. For a current list of properties for sale go here.

Ellie Waller, TIMBY: Tahoe is my Backyard, my home is in Tahoe Vista

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Opinion: Merry Christmas – or whatever

By Kathryn Reed

It’s OK to say Merry Christmas. It’s OK to say Happy Holidays.

Do we really need to fight and be offended when someone is being nice?

It’s more important to look at the intent of the words. Someone is wishing you a good day, a good season. If you are Christian or not, is it that hard to embrace “good will to all men – and women”? And one would think the Christian thing to

do would be to welcome a Happy Holidays and wish the person the same instead of coming unglued they didn't say Merry Christmas.

As I write this I'm listening to Barbra Streisand, who is Jewish, singing Christmas songs.

There was a time when I didn't sing the songs in church because I didn't agree with the words. Then I caught myself singing the lyrics to some inane song while I was driving. I really didn't agree with those lyrics. And sometimes we belt them out with heartfelt emotion. Does it matter?

But if you want to be upset over the whole Christmas thing, let me add some fuel to a fire beyond Merry Christmas/Happy Holidays.

Let's just do away with how the majority of people in the United States celebrate Christmas. Really, what is the point? A whole lot of money is spent on crap that no one wants. And what is the point of giving gifts? If there are pearly gates at the end, they aren't going to open wider based on the gifts you gave to someone.

We heard cries from charitable groups that there weren't enough gifts for youngsters. Why don't we look at why we are teaching them to expect gifts from a fictional character and in the name of another? Where is the logic in that?

We've allowed Christmas to become more than a day. It is a season unto itself that for shoppers started before Halloween this year. And for those who really want a bargain, it will mean even better deals tomorrow compared to what you found on Black Friday.

I have no problem celebrating the holiday season starting with Halloween and lasting through New Year's Day. I love the festiveness of it all. There's a distinct change of seasons. Why not celebrate the Winter Solstice?

For those who can find the joy and not the stress, it’s a great time. People, for the most part, actually seem happy. I think they are the ones who have realistic expectations for the whole season.

Having that good vibe all fall, into winter … well, it’s a great way to launch a New Year.

I like seeing all the outdoor decorations, even though I have no desire to do the same. I love baking and receiving goodies. The same goes with writing cards. I don’t see them as Christmas cards per se, but a year-end wrap up to what went on in my life or theirs for the past 365 days – especially when it comes to family and friends who don’t live in Tahoe.

I suppose in the end the holidays – whichever you celebrate – are what you make of them.

If you are celebrating Christmas today, then a very Merry Christmas; Kwanzaa starts tomorrow, so Happy Kwanzaa; the winter solstice was Saturday, so let’s celebrate it and the fact that the days are getting longer.

But it shouldn’t matter what you celebrate because our differences are what make the world unique. A little more tolerance – that’s all we need.

Happy Holidays …

Opinion: Time to rethink using palm oil

By Joel Brinkley

What’s so wrong with palm oil, from the palm trees that bear fruit, not coconuts?

Well, if you listen to environmentalists and animal-rights advocates along with nutrition and health experts, they’ll tell you it’s something close to poison.

Once the United States and other Western countries began condemning and banning trans-fat oils a few years ago, palm oil became a popular substitute. You can find it in shampoo, lipstick, soap and a host of snack and other foods, including some ketchups, margarine, chewing gum, candy bars and cooking oil.



Joel Brinkley

Oil-palm trees, as they’re called, are grown primarily in Indonesia and Malaysia, and that’s where the problems begin. To create oil-palm farms, the two states have cleared millions of acres of tropical forest. In all of the 1980s, Indonesia cleared 674,000 acres, but by 2009 the total had reached 18 million. The two states, together, have clear cut an area roughly the size of Denmark, an environmental journal reported — all to plant oil-palm plantations. And they say they plan to double that acreage in the years ahead.

Well, that alone enraged environmentalists and animal-rights activists. After all, trees are important air-quality filters. Photosynthesis absorbs carbon dioxide and emits oxygen. But when you cut down a tree, nearly all of that stored carbon dioxide is released back into the atmosphere.

When you cut down millions of trees, as Indonesia and Malaysia have in recent years for oil-palm plantations, the plantations are “projected to contribute more than 558 million metric tons of carbon dioxide to the atmosphere” by 2020 — exacerbating the world’s climate-change conundrum, a Stanford University study reported.

But what about the animals and indigenous people who lived in these former forests? Animal-rights advocates are publicizing strident declarations about the possible pending extinction of the orangutan, 80 percent of which live in Indonesia. Only an estimated 50,000 to 60,000 are left.

“What we see is a contest between orangutans and palm oil for home,” Sri Suci Utami Atmoko of Jakarta’s National University, said, talking to Thailand’s Nation newspaper.

To make this point, Greenpeace created a grotesque online advertisement showing an office worker sitting at his desk, opening a Kit Kat candy bar. Instead of pulling out a bar of chocolate, he finds a hairy orangutan finger.

“Nestle, maker of Kit Kat,” Greenpeace says, “uses palm oil from companies that are trashing Indonesian rain forests, threatening the lives of local people and pushing orangutans toward extinction.” (The ad notes that in the U.S., Nestle, a Swiss company, does not license or produce Kit Kat candy bars.)

All of that’s bad enough. Trans fats are dangerous food additives that lead to coronary-artery disease, numerous studies have shown. Palm oil is not a trans fat, but it is 40 percent to 50 percent saturated fat, another unhealthy substance. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration warned recently that “palm oil is not a healthy substitute for trans-fats” because a government study showed that the saturated fatty acids found in palm oil “are associated with elevated heart-disease risk factors.” The World Health Organization

came to a similar conclusion.

But most products simply list their palm oil as “vegetable oil,” so customers have no idea what they’re eating. Some countries are trying to change that and require palm oil to be described as what it actually is.

Decrying the many complaints about palm oil, an organization called the Rainforest Action Network is staging loud, public campaigns against Smucker’s, Heinz, Kellogg’s, Pepsi, Campbell Soup, and Mars and Hershey candies, among other food companies. The organization says the campaign is intended to remove what it calls “conflict palm oil” from “America’s snack foods.”

Some companies are already listening. Unilever, a British company that manufactures soap, shampoo and margarine using palm oil, announced last month that it intends to trace the source for all its palm oil by the end of 2014. The company is said to be working to ensure that its oil comes from so-called “sustainable” sources. Proctor & Gamble and Nestle have made similar promises.

And Saetre, a Norwegian biscuit maker, says it has stopped using palm oil in its Digestive and Marie biscuits because of the associated environmental problems. It’s using sunflower-seed oil instead.

Trans fat was bad enough. But to replace it with a product that produces such manifold health, environmental and other problems is a crime. The industry’s largest trade group acknowledged last month that “the palm oil industry has suffered from a bad reputation” and promised to find ways to reform.

I wish you the best of luck.

Joel Brinkley will not be writing for a while because he has left Stanford University and moved to Washington, D.C., to

work for the Special Inspector General for Afghan Reconstruction.

Letter: Realtors give to Christmas Cheer

To the community,

The South Tahoe Association of Realtors board of directors held a special vote at their December meeting in response to news of flood damage from a burst pipe at the Christmas Cheer facility.

STAR donated $3,000 to Christmas Cheer to alleviate some of the financial impact to operations before the holiday.

Natalie Yanish, president-elect of the South Tahoe Association of Realtors said, “STAR allocates a budgeted amount each year for donations to local nonprofits, and now that we are at the end of the year, we expended all of those funds. When we heard about the water damage we felt we needed to step up and help, especially at Christmastime.”

Sharon Kerrigan, STAR executive vice president

Opinion: Coca-Cola fights for

farmers

By Joel Brinkley

Many Southeast Asians and others around the world owe their thanks to the Coca-Cola Company.

No, I'm not expressing gratitude for the sugary drinks that can help make people fat. But to make those drinks, Coke is one of the world's largest sugar consumers. The company buys sugar from distributors all over the world.



Joel Brinkley

Well, it happens that some of the largest growers and distributors are in Thailand and Cambodia. And as a recent lawsuit made clear, much of the Cambodian sugar is grown on large plantations that used to be farmland for hundreds of poor family farmers.

Across Asia, many countries are guilty of baldly seizing their citizens' land without significant compensation and then selling it to corporations or developers, leaving the owners homeless and often destitute. Arguably, however, Cambodia has the biggest problem. Over time, the Cambodia Daily newspaper reported recently, the government has seized almost 5 million acres – about 10 percent of the nation's entire land mass.

In Cambodia, human-rights advocates and others are now calling the crop produced on this illegally seized land "blood sugar." (Sometimes landowners who refuse to leave their property are

jailed – or shot and killed.)

The Cambodian government contends that the land seizures are actually lifting citizens out of poverty because the companies that buy the land create jobs. But in truth, it's a net loss because the landowners are thrown off their property and most often find themselves unemployed.

It happens that the sugar grown on the seized land in question was processed first in Cambodia and then in Thailand until finally it wound up with Tate & Lyle Sugars, Britain's largest sugar marketer.

Earlier this year, Mark Moorstein, a Northern Virginia land-use lawyer, took on a "blood sugar" case as pro-bono, charitable work. He and a partner firm in London sued Tate & Lyle. The suit claimed that "pursuant to Cambodian law, the claimants," 200 villagers, "are the owners of the land" and "are entitled to the sugar cane." Tate & Lyle, it added, "knew that the villagers were the owners of the raw sugar or ought to have known."

As soon as the lawyers filed their suit, Tate & Lyle seemed to panic. Very quickly, it sold its entire sugar-production unit to American Sugar Refining, better known in the United States for its name-brand product: Domino Sugar. That company became the defendant.

Enter the Coca Cola Company. As the lawsuit rolled forward, the company apparently realized that its soft drinks were being made with "blood sugar." Or perhaps the company already knew that – but grew contrite. After all, a Thai sugar-producing giant, Mitr Phol, gets much of its sugar from Cambodia and is one of Coke's top three suppliers.

"The Coca-Cola Company commits to zero tolerance for land-grabbing," the company announced in a statement last month. Coke committed to hire third-party investigators to look at its sugar suppliers to be sure none of them is buying "blood

sugar."

Cambodian human-rights groups lauded the move. "Coke's statement is a watershed moment for the communities" victimized by land grabbers, said Eang Vuthy, executive director of Equitable Cambodia. But he and others said they hoped that forceful action will follow Coke's laudable statement.

Land-grabbing is endemic to Asia, including China, Myanmar, Laos and Vietnam. All those nations, including Cambodia, are thoroughly corrupt with court systems that often do nothing but mirror the government's view.

In fact, a Cambodian human-rights group filed suit against a sugar-farm seizure in 2007, and to date the court still has not issued a judgment. Now, as one major Cambodian human-rights organization puts it: "In Phnom Penh and the 12 provinces" around it "land-grabbing has affected an estimated 400,000 Cambodians since 2003, helping to create a sizable underclass of landless villagers with no means for self-sustenance."

That's why Coke's decision – if in fact the company follows through – is quite important.

Following Coke's lead, PepsiCo investors filed a shareholders resolution urging that company to account for alleged land-rights violations in Cambodia, where much of its sugar comes from as well.

"As shareholders we want to know what PepsiCo is doing to ensure that its suppliers are behaving responsibly and preventing land conflicts from undermining its reputation and operations," a shareholders group said. These people promised to bring up the resolution at Pepsi's annual meeting early next year.

All of this holds the potential to benefit tens of thousands

of poor Southeast Asian people whose governments are mercilessly victimizing them. The corporate “blood sugar” customers hold the greatest power to put a stop to these vile acts.

Joel Brinkley, a professor of journalism at Stanford University, is a Pulitzer Prize-winning former foreign correspondent for the New York Times.