

Tahoe's summer heat ties at fourth hottest

By Susan Wood

It's been hot this summer at Lake Tahoe – to the tune of fourth in ranking since records were taken 123 years ago at an average of 62.1 degrees. It ties with 1981's figure. Keep in mind, this is the average from day to night.

The record was set in 1988 at 62.4 degrees – the same year in which Tahoe experienced its hottest day on record at 99 degrees on July 22, the National Weather Service reported this week. The “summer” officially ends its quarter on Aug. 31 for the federal agency.

As a comparison, this summer's hottest day occurred on June 19 at 90 degrees – at a time when some people were still skiing.

And so it goes with our topsy-turvy climate.

Even though this year missed the record by 0.3 degrees, the significant aspect of the data shows that four of the five record years have fallen in the last five years. Case in point, 2014 was second in line for the record at 62.3 degrees; with 2015 close behind at 62.2 and 2013 at 61.8 degrees.

This year goes down as having continuously hot days. And if you remember especially in July, the variance wasn't as great from day to night as it traditionally is in Lake Tahoe's surrounding air. Hence, we were near a record average for the 24-hour days.

Reno hit a record of 108 degrees this July – a month that will go down as the 10th hottest in the United States. The contiguous U.S. averaged 75.7 degrees in July. That's 2.1 degrees above average. Even the northernmost state, Alaska,

experienced a hot July with 56.2 degrees. That's 3.5 degrees above the long-term average.



Lakeview Commons in South Lake Tahoe is a popular spot to beat the heat. Photo/Kathryn Reed

Is this the new normal?

“What contributed to our hot summer is the month of July. And (in Lake Tahoe), there were more days in which we were warm,” Evan LaGuardia, meteorologist with the National Weather Service meteorologist in Reno, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Even the water temperature in the lake shows an abnormal result. The lake temperature within 2 meters down is fluctuating between 69 and 70 degrees. Albeit the water temp being normal for the summer, it shouldn't necessarily be true this summer given the aftermath from our uncharacteristically dramatic snowfall from last winter.

“With a 69- to 70-degree average, it's significant this summer because of the water that's been added from the snowmelt,

(which should be taken into account,)" LaGuardia said. In other words, the water temperature should be colder with the high lake level.

Another factor in warm surface water temperature: "There hasn't been the storms to churn up the water making it cold," the meteorologist added. Storms mix up the surface with the deep water of Tahoe through upwelling.

"It has been warm. Who knows what the future holds," LaGuardia said.

To that, Western Regional Climate Center climatologist Dan McEvoy provided a glimpse.

"There's definitely a climate change signal pretty much all around the region with our warm days," McEvoy told *Lake Tahoe News*.

We've been seeing this every year. We can't put our finger on any one thing, but we should see warmer temperatures, in general, as we've seen in the last few decades," he said.

What does this mean?

"What we're going to see doesn't contribute to drought, but it intensifies the impact of those droughts," he said, listing the wildfire danger and bark beetle infestation.

McEvoy pointed out that most of the 10 coolest summers of the last 100 years have occurred in the first half of the 1900s. Records show the last cool summer occurred in 2011 at an average of 58.3 degrees – the coolest in the last decade. The coolest average summer in the years of record keeping was in 1980 at 54.5 degrees.

So the decade of big hair showed big temp swings in summer as having the coolest and hottest for our region.

"The last summer when the temperature in Reno was below the

20th century average was in 1999,” said Jake Crouch of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. “While the upward trend is likely to continue, indicating that warm summers will occur more often than not, we can still experience cool summers in an overall warming world.”

Still, it’s hard to ignore that warm is the new normal, all data and climate stakeholders say.

For example, the 20th century’s average summer temperature for Reno was 71.2 degrees, while this one has already dwarfed it at 74.2 degrees. And, there are 83 years left to sizzle.

With that, utility companies are keeping an eye out and doing their record keeping.

Energy use represents a mixed bag for South Lake Tahoe. Liberty Utilities shows no spike in California electricity this summer compared to previous ones, with kilowatt hours holding steady this last July at 47.66 million. The highest in the last five years came in at 49.05 million in 2013, company spokeswoman Kathy Carter dictated.

And water use is usually higher in the summer, according to the South Tahoe Public Utility District, for obvious reasons.

And these numbers could fall for not-so-obvious reasons, with STPUD in the process of installing more than 1,000 meters this summer. The effort encourages water conservation.

“July is always the month of peak production, followed closely by August,” STPUD spokeswoman Shelly Thomsen said for now. “The district’s water production doubles to triples in summer months, mainly due to landscape irrigation.”

However, many homeowners have elected to forego grass in their Tahoe yards – with hundreds waiting to be called up for the turf buy-back program. So conservation efforts should continue to keep in line with increasingly hot summers.

This trend may represent good news for businesses such as Nixon's. The local HVAC company has experienced a doubling of calls this summer inquiring about air conditioning during our heat waves in contrast to previous years.

"Before, people here would pass on AC. Now it seems we're putting in AC units in every Tom, Dick and Harry unit. Lots of Bay Area people who are buying and have the means to put them in are opting to have them," said Wendy Pierson, who works for Nixon's.