

Heavenly makes pitch for summer expansion



The four-line zipline being built near Tamarack Lodge will open in summer 2015. Photo Copyright 2014 Carolyn E. Wright

By Kathryn Reed

STATELINE – Snow isn't the only thing Heavenly wants to be known for. The South Shore resort is making substantial efforts to be a playground in the summer, too.

The Tahoe Regional Planning Agency Governing Board on Sept. 24 got a taste for what Heavenly Mountain Resort wants to become.

"Guests want more than a sightseeing experience," Heavenly COO Pete Sonntag said.

When the gondola opened in 2000 it was about getting skiers at the state line bed base onto the mountain without driving. A viewing deck near the top was about being a scenic lookout.

Gradually the resort has added non-winter activities, with this summer being the inauguration of three ropes courses and the resurrection of a zipline. But the resort is just beginning.

Ziplines, canopy tours, sky cycles, alpine coaster, and a mountain bike park are part of the resort's plans that are being studied in environmental documents.

The TRPA board heard a presentation Wednesday about the multi-million dollar on mountain transformation.

The mountain bike park will be on the Nevada side, outside the Lake Tahoe Basin – therefore outside TRPA's jurisdiction. It will not be as difficult as Northstar's park. It will have a connector route to the Tahoe Rim Trail and access via Van Sickle Bi-State Park.

A Governing Board member questioned how Heavenly would be able to manage capacity if people are in the park who have not paid. Andrew Strain, government affairs chief for the resort, said that is part of the monitoring that is being worked out.

A member of the public wondered if air quality issues had been addressed when it comes to taking people on guided mountain tours via vehicles. The roads to be used for this are ones that already exist.

Most of the development will be in three primary hubs that already are considered disturbed land because of the ski resort. The alpine coaster will be a modern day version of an alpine slide. It uses gravity to whisk people through the trees on an elevated course. The sky cycle has people pedaling 20 or 30 feet off the ground in the forest. It is proposed to go near the top of the gondola. A replica of a fire lookout will be constructed and used as a way to teach people about fire.

Education is a component Heavenly wants to weave into many of

its summer activities.

“It’s a different market for us than winter. For some it’s the first time they’ve set foot on a national forest,” Strain told the board. “We are partnering with the Nature Conservancy. They will drive the education experience.”

Ryan Galles, principal of Sierra House Elementary, said he could see how this will benefit his students. The school, which has an emphasis on fitness, already partners with Heavenly in the winter. He hopes to have similar opportunities when snow isn’t on the ground.

“Learning happens inside and outside the classroom,” Galles said.

Strain said careful planning has been done to ensure the structures that are built don’t impede the experience of skiers and snowboarders. Resort officials realize they are still primarily a winter destination. Most of the structures will be in the ground year-round even if they aren’t used.

“We will not be operating the ropes courses or ziplines this winter,” Sally Gunter, resort spokeswoman, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

That could change in future winters.

The mountain at complete build-out could handle 17,000 skiers a day. Today Heavenly sees about 10,000 a day at peak periods. This compares to summer where about 108,000 visit the resort all season. Projections are for that number to grow to 160,000 with the added amenities.

Most of the 13 people who spoke at the meeting had favorable things to say and recommended the board approve the project. (A vote will come after the final EIR/EIS are released. Comments on the draft are being taken until Oct 27.)

Besides the construction dollars that could start to flow to

the region next summer if the project is approved, it means an economic stimulus in other ways. What the current summer operations – one zipline and three ropes courses – have meant is 120 full-time jobs that didn't previously exist.

"We were able to take our best winter employees and offer them year-round employment," Sonntag said.

Besides transitioning from a gaming-dominant economy to recreation, another emphasis of the powers that be has been on providing more than seasonal employment.

If the project is approved in the spring, construction would begin in phases in summer 2015. Some features would open in summer 2016, others the following year.

Letter: EDC budget approval a bad idea

Publisher's note: *This letter was given to the El Dorado County Board of Supervisors last week.*

Board of Supervisors,



Joe Harn

Please consider this communication my formal warning that the Budget that your Board directed be finalized on September 23rd by a 3 to 2 vote will lead to a severe drop in the financial position of the County. The General Fund Contingency Appropriation based on your Board's actions during the Budget Hearings has dropped to just below \$3.9 Million. At the end of the Budget Hearings one year ago, our General Fund Contingency Appropriation sat at \$10.2 million. \$3.9 million is the lowest Contingency number in 10 years. This is a dramatic drop. This will result in a much lower general fund carry-forward at June 30, 2015, and will result in the necessity of draconian spending cuts next summer.

Further, because of the King Fire, if there was ever a year when we needed a large contingency, this is it. Further, the Forced Salaries Savings budget balancing gimmick will also lead to a much lower general fund carry-forward at June 30, 2015.

I must conclude that the spending plan adopted by your Board on September 23rd is irresponsible.

Joe Harn, El Dorado County auditor-controller

Calif. limits sales of Confederate flag

By Dan Brekke, KQED-TV

Gov. Jerry Brown has signed a bill that bars state agencies from selling or displaying the Confederate battle flag or any other items that bear the Civil War-era insignia.

The governor signed the bill, AB2444, by Assemblyman Isadore Hall, D-Compton, without comment.

Hall reportedly was inspired to propose the measure after his mother saw replica Confederate currency for sale at a state Capitol gift shop.

Hall's bill passed easily in the Assembly and Senate. Assemblyman Tim Donnelly, R-Twin Peaks, a tea party conservative, cast the only "no" vote in the lower house, saying the proposal would violate the First Amendment guarantee of free speech.

Read the whole story

Recycling material available for artists

The Nevada Division of Environmental Protection is making materials available to participants in the statewide Recycled Art Contest.

Recyclables, including plastic bottles, newspapers, aluminum cans and steel cans, may be picked up in the lobby of the Bryan Building, 901 S. Stewart St., Carson City on Oct. 3. Call 775.687.9466 to schedule a time.

The art contest is open to all Nevada residents. Projects must be composed of used recyclable materials.

Submission of entry form and photos of artwork are due Oct. 31. Winners will be announced prior to America Recycles Day, Nov. 15.

King Fire inching toward full containment

Update 7:15pm:

The King Fire is at 89 percent containment, with the help from 1 to 3 inches of precipitation in the last few days. Crews are continuing to hold the spread of the fire, with acreage burned at 97,099.

Now structures on White Meadows Road are being monitored for possible mud and debris flows. However, warmer and dryer weather conditions are expected to return this week. This means smoke and visible fire.

Where fuels remain thick in the Eldorado and Tahoe national forests there is still more that could burn, but officials say this should be within the fire perimeter.

Structures are still threatened, however evacuations have been lifted.

Several road closures remain in place including Mosquito Road from Wentworth Springs Road to Stope Drive, and Ice House Road at Highway 50. The Tahoe National Forest has issued a route closure that includes Mosquito Ridge Road, Forest Service Road 22, as well as Western States trail, and Tevis Cup trails. Eldorado National Forest is off-limits in the burn area.

While there are still more than 4,400 people working the fire, a substantial number of crews have headed home. Firefighters from as far away as Florida had been fighting this fire that was allegedly started by an arsonist Sept. 13 near Pollock Pines.

In the two weeks it has been burning six people have been injured, 12 houses lost and 68 other structures destroyed.

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*

Family value lecture with roots in ecology

Rick Grosberg, a professor of evolution and ecology at UC Davis and founding director of the Coastal and Marine Sciences Institute at the Bodega Marine Laboratory, will deliver a different approach to family values on Oct. 16.

His research focuses on how species of marine invertebrates, ants and fungi use competition and cooperation to maintain genetic variety.

Families are a unique arena where conflicts of interest often arise between males and females, between parents and offspring, and among siblings. Family members may often die for each other, but given the right circumstances they will also harm each other. What are the basic rules that in the rest of life that govern whether individuals should harm or help each other? In this talk, Grosberg considers this question using an evolutionary foundation from research on the family dynamics of snails, seahorses, ants, birds, and bees.

The program will begin at 6pm at 291 Country Club Drive in Incline Village on the campus of Sierra Nevada College. Cost is \$5.

Drought reduces California harvest

By Dale Kasler, Sacramento Bee

It's harvest time in much of California, and the signs of drought are almost as abundant as the fruits and nuts and vegetables.

One commodity after another is feeling the impact of the state's epic water shortage. The great Sacramento Valley rice crop, served in sushi restaurants nationwide and exported to Asia, will be smaller than usual. Fewer grapes will be available to produce California's world-class wines, and the citrus groves of the San Joaquin Valley are producing fewer oranges. There is less hay and corn for the state's dairy cows, and the pistachio harvest is expected to shrink.

While many crops have yet to be harvested, it's clear that the drought has carved a significant hole in the economy of rural California. Farm income is down, so is employment, and Thursday's rain showers did little to change the equation.

An estimated 420,000 acres of farmland went unplanted this year, or about 5 percent of the total. Economists at UC Davis say agriculture, which has been a \$44 billion-a-year business in California, will suffer revenue losses and higher water costs – a financial hit totaling \$2.2 billion this year.

Read the whole story

Analysts: Nevada overstating Tesla's economic benefits

By Chris Kirkham, Los Angeles Times

When Nevada Gov. Brian Sandoval announced a \$1.3-billion package of public subsidies to lure a Tesla Motors battery factory, he stressed that the huge sum would be dwarfed by an economic windfall for local residents.

The electric car maker will create \$100 billion in economic benefits, he said, and "change Nevada forever."

"Even the most skeptical economist would conclude that this is a strong return for us," Sandoval said during a news conference this month with Tesla Chief Executive Elon Musk.

Economists who reviewed Nevada's economic benefit estimates for the Los Angeles Times concluded something quite different. They pointed to flawed assumptions and inflated projections in the state's promises of job creation, tax revenue and overall spending created by the \$5-billion lithium-ion battery facility.

The projection, for instance, counts all future tax revenue, but makes no allowance for government spending to serve the influx of residents. It counts every dollar of workers' salaries as if they were unemployed or lived out of state before Tesla arrived. And more than half of the estimated economic jolt relies on the assumption that the bulk of the factory's supply chain will relocate to Nevada.

Tesla plans to hire 6,500 workers, and the estimate counts a projected 16,000 additional jobs from suppliers and other local business to serve the new workforce.

Read the whole story

Snippets about Lake Tahoe



- Tahoe Douglas fire is offering a free hands only CPR and AED class at Kahle Community Center on Oct. 1. The class is for ages 13 and older. Sessions are form 9:30-11am and 1-2:30pm. RSVP by Sept. 30th by calling 775.586. 7271.
 - The North Lake Tahoe chamber/resort association member lunch (which is open to non-members) is Oct. 17 at 11:30am at the North Tahoe Event Center in Kings Beach. Improving the business climate of North Lake Tahoe is the theme. Go online to register.
 - Tahoe Nordic Search & Rescue receive a community fund grant from the Ironman Foundation.
 - The South Lake Tahoe Planning Commission on Oct. 9 at 3pm will have a public hearing about a two-story storage facility being built on Emerald Bay Road. At the same meeting commissioners will discuss the first phase of the Greenway Bike Trail that will go from Sierra Tract to Van Sickle Bi-State Park.
 - Here are the El Dorado-Tahoe and Sierra roadwork schedules from Caltrans for the coming week.
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Federal judge refuses to halt fracking in Nev.

By Scott Sonner, AP

RENO – A federal judge has refused to block the release of oil and gas leases in Nevada that critics say will be used for hydraulic fracturing that could harm sage grouse and cause more environmental damage than the Bureau of Land Management admits.

U.S. District Judge Miranda Du ruled she has no authority to grant opponents' request for an emergency order that would prevent the BLM from formally issuing the leases in an area stretching across about 270 square miles of central Nevada.

Glade Hall, a lawyer representing the Reese River Basin Citizens Against Fracking, said this week they are considering refiling their complaint.

The coalition of ranchers, farmers and others says the BLM has abused its authority by limiting public comment and failing to conduct an adequate review of the potential impacts of the fracking.

Fracking involves blasting water, sand and chemicals deep into underground rock formations to free oil and gas.

Some of the drilling could occur near key habitat for the sage grouse, which the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service currently is considering protecting under the Endangered Species Act.

"The new fracking threat in Nevada further imperils the greater sage grouse, making ESA listing even more needed and likely," said Dan Patterson, a Nevada-based ecologist for the Center for Biological Diversity, which petitioned for the listing and is protesting the development.

The citizens group based in Battle Mountain says that besides wildlife threats, the fracking could suck millions of gallons of water from Nevada's high desert and undermine the region's seismic stability about 160 miles northeast of Reno.

Hall said BLM's assumptions there will be little impact are based almost exclusively on unrealistic expectations that the little interest shown in Nevada's oil and gas historically will continue. He said the government is ignoring a recently discovered shale deposit running from southeast Nevada into Utah that some believe could become one of the nation's most valuable.

BLM argues that while it completed the sale of the leases in July, it retains discretion as to whether it will actually issue any of them.

"There currently is no proposal to engage in hydraulic fracturing," Justice Department lawyer Dominika Tarczynska told Du in federal court in Reno earlier this month. She said the agency is still considering protests challenging the leases and could place additional stipulations on any development.

"Until that is completed, there is no final agency action," she said.

Hall insisted BLM's argument that it may not actually follow through with issuing the leases is a legal smoke screen. He said BLM has supplemented some of the flawed environmental assessment with additional information that was never subject to public comment.

"It is simply a prop for a decision that already has been made," Hall said.

Du acknowledged in her Sept. 8 ruling the claim that BLM's actions to date suggest "it is prepared to defend its inevitable decision to issue the leases."

But “until BLM completes its decision-making process, its decision is not subject to judicial review,” the judge wrote.

Hall told The Associated Press that Du was “correct in her ruling.”

“But the game the BLM played in this case does not serve the public interest in being informed about environmental consequences of federal actions at a point in time when the public can intelligently participate in the decision-making process,” he said.