

# **Court: Groundwater pumping fees are not taxes**

**By Carolyn Whetzel, Bloomberg**

A decision by California's highest court could give a boost to local water agencies grappling with how to implement the state's landmark groundwater management law.

The California Supreme Court ruled that the charges Ventura must pay to a local water district for groundwater conservation activities aren't taxes or fees that require approval by property owners or voters.

Because the United Water Conservation District's charges aren't for property-related services, they don't require approval either by property owners or two-thirds of area voters, the court said, affirming a 2015 lower court ruling.

**Read the whole story**

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# **It's not only trees – wildfires imperil water too**

**By Emily Benson, High Country News**

The Fourmile Canyon Fire, sparked by a backyard burn west of Boulder, Colo., in 2010, caused \$220 million in damage and destroyed 168 homes. It also scorched nearly a quarter of a watershed that supplies water to the nearby community of Pine Brook Hills. The problems didn't end there: Long after the blaze was put out, intense rainstorms periodically washed

sediment and other particles downstream, disrupting water treatment and forcing the local water district to stop pulling water from Fourmile Creek, leaving it reliant upon water already collected in its reservoir.

“The water coming down Fourmile Creek would get so dirty that we simply would shut down moving any water (from the creek),” for days or even weeks, says district manager Robert de Haas. “If we hadn’t built the reservoir” – in 2006 – “we’d have been in big trouble.”

Now, research suggests that such water-quality problems might become more frequent across the West. Climate change is already causing a surge in wildfire activity. As a result, scientists expect to see a rise in erosion in most of the region’s watersheds in the coming decades. Sediment and ash running off burned hillsides into streams can clog reservoirs, smother fish and disrupt municipal water supplies.

**Read the whole story**

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## **Communitywide approach to disaster preparedness**

**By Kathryn Reed**

When home is on the other side of a wall of fire that is headed your direction the choices can seem bleak.

This was what several people encountered during the South Shore’s 2007 Angora Fire. They were working at Camp Richardson on that Tuesday in June when the fire jumped Highway 89.

The marina fired up the Sky King, an 18-passenger boat it uses

as a water taxi, and ferried employees and guests to the Tahoe Keys Marina – out of harm's way.

This is what it means to be prepared and not have to rely on others to be rescued.

With catastrophic disasters becoming more common, South Lake Tahoe officials aren't waiting for the next Angora – or worse – to occur here. City Manager Nancy Kerry on Dec. 8 convened dozens of leaders to talk about having a communitywide approach to disaster preparedness and not just a government response.

"I want to be as efficient and coordinated as we can be," Kerry told *Lake Tahoe News*. She said collaboration hasn't always been a strong suit here, with people operating in silos.

An immediate outcome is South Tahoe Public Utility District is going to hold off on purchasing new communication's equipment to see what direction the city decides to go in next year. This is ideally so they would be compatible with one another.



South Lake Tahoe Fire Chief Jeff Meston talks Dec. 8 about the catastrophic threats to the region. Photo/Kathryn Reed

Fire Chief Jeff Meston lamented how inadequate communications systems are within the city as well as between key players in California and Nevada. While cell phones can work, they are limiting at times because service here can be sketchy. And without cell towers that can survive a fire, that line of communication can be eliminated.

Last winter the city opened its emergency operations center more than once because of the dangerous weather. Gaps in knowledge, information and communications were revealed. Internally changes have been made.

Friday was about working on external changes. At the meeting were reps from private business, religious organizations, lodging, California Tahoe Conservancy, Lake Tahoe Unified School District, Tahoe Transportation District, Tahoe Regional Planning Agency, Lake Tahoe Visitors Authority, STPUD, El Dorado County, and Barton Health.

The city is hoping to create written partnerships with many of these people. It could be as simple as Camp Richardson pledging boats when needed or a hotel offering lodging for evacuees.

"We are always willing to help out with any of our vessels when we can for public needs," Bob Hassett, who owns Camp Rich Marina, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Having the written agreements helps with federal reimbursements. It also prevents price gauging in the moment.

Meston listed sobering statistics about how much public safety personnel exists throughout the South Shore. That's why he says it's imperative residents be prepared to fend for themselves for 72 hours in a disaster because it could take that long for help to arrive.

More disturbing is that help from outside the area may not arrive – at least not in a timely manner. Meston pointed out how during this fall's Wine Country fires 305 fire engines were requested and only 130 responded in the first 12 hours. Resources eventually came from as far away as Australia.

In 2012 there were 134 unfilled mutual aid requests. In 2017 there have been 6,000.

There are more situations, resources are stretched thin and local areas worry more about needing to protect their own. Then there is the fact the disasters are more horrific – think the current conflagration in Southern California.

Meston said there have been 15 catastrophes this year that each has exceeded \$1 billion in destruction.

“The common denominator is climate change. That's not going to change anytime soon,” Meston said. “Hurricanes and wildfires are the most catastrophic. Climate change has really changed our business.”

Fire season, especially in California, is now year round.

While fire is one of the biggest threats to the Tahoe basin, it's not the only one. A seiche, or lake tsunami, is a very real possibility if any one of the earthquake faults moves in a significant manner. The lake water would act like a bath tub, sloshing back and forth in a deadly manner.

Terrorism is possible. In August 2001, Earth Liberation Front claimed responsibility for trying to bring down the Heavenly gondola by tying logs to the cable.

While the presentation was sobering, the goal was hopeful – prepare now as a community so the impact is less and the healing can begin that much sooner.

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# LT Humane Society case in DA's hands

South Lake Tahoe police detectives this week concluded a 10-month investigation into the nearly \$100,000 that went missing from the Lake Tahoe Humane Society.

At the center of the investigation is Niki Congero, who was **fired in March** as executive director of the nonprofit.

All of the paperwork is now with the El Dorado County District Attorney's Office. No one from the office would say when a decision would be made whether to press charges against anyone.

Congero started with the South Lake Tahoe nonprofit in December 2013. It is believed the alleged embezzlement began the following summer and escalated as time went on. She has since left the state.

*– Lake Tahoe News staff report*

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# Nev. competes in 'hotly contested' federal drone program

By Nicole Raz, Las Vegas Review-Journal

State officials are hoping to get Nevada one of five guaranteed spots in a federal drone program.

The Federal Aviation Administration sees the program as a way to speed innovation in integrating drones with national airspace. Nevada officials see the program as another way to solidify the Silver State as a key hub for the drone industry.

In response to a White House executive order, the FAA developed an Unmanned Aircraft System Integration Pilot Program. It aims to have state, local and tribal governments partner with private-sector drone entities to test advanced drone operations, like flying over people or flying a drone outside an operator's direct visual line of sight.

**Read the whole story**

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## **4.1 earthquake strikes Mammoth area**

The Mammoth Lakes area was rocked by a series of earthquakes on Friday, with the highest being 4.1.

It struck at 2:19pm on Dec. 8. The epicenter was less than five miles southwest of South Landing.

The other temblors were 3.7 and 2.9.

At this time there have been no reports of damage.

*– Lake Tahoe News staff report*

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# Latest phone scam targeting grandparents

The Washoe County Sheriff's Office has received more than a dozen reports regarding phone contacts from callers claiming to be a person's grandchild.

The phone number identification accompanying most of these calls is 775.328.3001, which is the front desk number for the sheriff's office.

Typically the scammers identify themselves as a person's grandchild in need of financial assistance because they are in jail or have been involved in an accident. It is not unusual for scammers to use personal information about a potential victim's family members in order to sound credible. This type of information is often easily obtained via the internet or social media.

Unless you are 100 percent sure of whom you are talking with over the phone, never give out personal information and never send money. Gather what information you can and then hang up. Take the time to double-check the story with another family member before proceeding.

Anyone who has suffered a loss as a result of this scam is encouraged to contact the Washoe County Sheriff's Office at 775.328.3001, ext. 7.

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# Placer County extends deadline for firehouse ideas

Placer County is giving people more time submit a letter of interest for the redevelopment of the old Tahoe City firehouse properties. The deadline is now Feb. 28.

The lakefront property offers access to recreation and proximity to the Tahoe City town center, transit hubs, bike trails, ski resorts, marinas and residential communities.

The county-owned Tahoe City firehouse properties include three buildings: the former North Tahoe Fire Station 51, Tahoe Community Center building and the former visitor center building.

To review background materials and request for information, go **online**.

*– Lake Tahoe News staff report*

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## Report blasts CalPERS' environmental, social 'activism'

By Adam Ashton, Sacramento Bee

The nation's largest public pension fund is leaving money on the table by favoring environmental and social causes in its portfolio, a business-backed nonprofit argues in a study it's releasing Tuesday on the California Public Employees

Retirement System.

The report by the American Council for Capital Formation criticizes CalPERS' sustainable investing strategies, which include engaging with companies to encourage them to address climate change, pressuring companies to diversify their boards of directors and investing in certain funds that nurture companies with those priorities.

The report argues those strategies have not paid off and that CalPERS would do better to focus solely on making money to protect the pensions of 1.8 million California public workers and retirees.

**Read the whole story**

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## **Sandoval touts Nevada's repayment of federal debt**

**By Colton Lochhead, Las Vegas Review-Journal**

It took nearly the entirety of Gov. Brian Sandoval's two terms as Nevada's governor, but the state has finally paid off a nearly \$800 million debt to the federal government.

During the Great Recession, the state saw 175,000 jobs dry up and the unemployment rate soar above 14 percent. The state was forced to borrowed some \$773 million from the feds to cover unemployment benefits for out-of-work Nevadans.

**Read the whole story**