

Small wildland fire burning on East Shore

A small fire is burning near Genoa Peak on the East Shore.

About one-quarter acre had been consumed by 2:30pm June 11.

According to the U.S. Forest Service, it first started about Memorial Day when the basin experienced a number of thunder and lightning storms. It is believed a single tree was struck and that Saturday's wind whipped it into a full-fledged fire.

Aircraft are being used to suppress the fire.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Dotty's casino chain settles ADA suit for \$3.5M

By Associated Press

RENO – A Nevada company that operates the Dotty's casino chain has agreed to pay \$3.5 million to settle a disability discrimination suit.

The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission filed the lawsuit earlier this year accusing the Las Vegas-based Nevada Restaurant Services of violating the Americans with Disabilities Act.

There is a Dotty's in Stateline.

Read the whole story

Experts: N. Nev. may be hurt by lax pollution rules

By Benjamin Spillman, Reno Gazette-Journal

Republican President Trump's efforts to loosen vehicle pollution standards at the federal level could mean less healthy air and more local regulations in Northern Nevada.

That's according to air quality experts who say communities in Nevada and around the U.S. would face pressure to offset increased pollution from cars with regulations on other sources of pollution.

Additional pollution from tailpipes and other sources would also put people at greater risk of health problems associated with breathing polluted air.

Read the whole story

Equipment changing landscape of fire prevention



The Spider looks like a Transformer ready to tromp through the forest. Photo/Susan Wood

By Susan Wood

POLLOCK PINES – Relying heavily on prescribed burns as fuel reduction among forest officials may be steeped in tradition – but the practice isn't enough to fight the types of raging infernos the West is seeing year after year.

Much of the challenge often lies in fire prevention over steep terrain requiring a cross between the old and the new. It takes oversized Tonka trucks and Transformer-type heavy equipment.

California is coming off a series of drought years, then one of the worst seasons ever for wildland blazes on the 25th anniversary of the Cleveland Fire. The mega blaze burned more than 24,000 acres in 30 hours, closed a 50-mile stretch of Highway 50, killed two people and injured 72. The hot fire that roared eight miles east of Pollock Pines along the Peavine Ridge north of Riverton at Ice House Road presents a

painful reminder of what could be.

Another more recent blaze nearby – the King Fire of 2014 – scorched more than 97,000 acres in El Dorado County and destroyed 80 structures. The fire’s cause was arson, but the damage is still visible from the highway and restoration is ongoing.

The terrain is thick, steep and unforgiving to get to off the roads.



CalFire Deputy Chief Stewart McMorrow looks at the chewing teeth of the TimberPro attachment. Photo/Susan Wood

“We’ve spent \$6 million to restore 11 Pines Road, and it’s still closed,” Eldorado National Forest Supervisor Laurence Crabtree told *Lake Tahoe News* preceding a tour last week from the Ice House Resort 10 miles up from Riverton.

The U.S. Forest Service spends over half its budget on fighting fires, knowing prevention is where the emphasis needs to be.

Forest managers were joined to view the equipment and results up close by small groups of residents, Sierra Pacific Industries and CalFire officials, who declared a suspension to burning starting today in El Dorado, Amador and Alpine counties. Some see the declaration as the official start of fire season. Others would agree fire season has turned into a yearlong event.

Crabtree estimated at least 35 percent of the burn area with a mix of conifer trees such as fir, pine and cedar from the King Fire is steep, posing a hazard to property owners – especially as more build in the wildland interface. In the last five years, Forest Service officials have negotiated agreements with private property owners to establish firebreaks on their land.

Among them is Sierra Pacific Industries – which manages the resources on 1.8 million acres in California.



The excavation machine made by Pacific Tech handles the steep terrain of the Eldorado Forest. Photo/Susan Wood

“We need to manage fire; we don’t need it to manage us,” Sierra Pacific spokesman Mark Luster summarized about the tree-clearing demonstration.

Take an overgrown forest with mass pockets of dead trees in timber-dry conditions, an excess of fuel following wet winters while throwing in windy conditions, and California is ripe for a no-win perfect storm of fire capable of producing the kind of huge complexes that ripped through the Wine Country last year.

Firefighters regionwide are quite aware of how vulnerable the rugged, woody Sierra Nevada Mountain Range is – especially in hard-to-get-to, steep terrain.

Fire science proves flames burn faster up steep slopes.

Unfortunately, this terrain makes it difficult for firefighters to cover the ground necessary to build a perimeter to contain and control fires that hop from low-lying brush, to ladder fuels up to the crown.

That's one reason managing the resources ahead of the worst time of year in fire season may seem like a never-ending task when other forces like drought and bark beetle stack on the obstacles.

Sometimes it's just as hard to manage the people doing the work of clearing the debris.

Contractor Jeff Holland quipped that his company of 30 machines and 25 people said his company has grown increasingly busy since 1983 since the forest has been "mismanaged."

To that, Luster countered that the job is overwhelming anyway.

"If you look at how much acreage, there's so much volume, it's hard to keep up with the amount of volume," he said.

CalFire Deputy Chief Steward McMorrow, who works out of Sacramento, agreed.

"What we're doing here is rearranging the fuels on the lower forest floor," McMorrow said as he glanced over a cleared segment of acreage where the Timberpro harvester had gone through. He contends that environmentally chewing the trees and leveling the land also helps to stimulate the fungal process.

The goal of the equipment demonstration: To witness how the latest and greatest in excavating, skidding, moving and mulching equipment can clear a fire prone region in steep terrain by digesting woody debris in ways unheard of decades ago. The key is in the equipment attachments assembled to address the job, the level of fineness and the terrain.

Some of these heavy-equipment machines look like something out

of an animated space film – such as one called the “spider.”

The walking excavator made by Menzi of Switzerland essentially crawls down the hills with the use of four independently-operated mega wheels, front stabilizers and a loader appendage that helps it crawl up and down a slope of at least 40 degrees with ease. The 30,000-pound machine looks like a living thing when it lays flat or arches its back.

“It can collapse down to 7-feet wide,” said equipment operator Eric Monson, whose Atascadero-based Stroles Tri Service company contracts with Sierra Pacific and the U.S. Forest Service to clear the thick forest in hard-to-treat fuel reduction regions.



CalFire Deputy Chief Stewart McMorrow surveys the land cleared by a tree harvester. Photo/Susan Wood

Down the road, Brian Kile, the western regional manager of Fecon, explained how his agile track mulcher can handle steep slopes of 45 degrees. The finished byproduct looked like something homeowners might be happy with in their own back

yard. The mulcher was put to the test during the West Yellowstone fires, serving as an emergency fire break.

“This thing can blow dirt and can (at times) put a low-ground fire out,” Kile said with pride.

Bruce Jackson, displaying ASV’s skid steers and track loaders, noted to the tour group how pleased he is with the performance of his equipment in the steep terrain of the Eldorado Forest.

“You have to do something drastic to flip it,” he said.

Jackson also insisted the cooling system makes his machine superior in that it can work for prolonged periods without overheating.

All in all, the heavy equipment of today isn’t your grandfather’s and plays a more important role in human survival than dirt excavation.

This is a **video the *Sacramento Bee*** shared with *LTN* showing the equipment in action.

Gambling addiction may follow national wave of sports betting

By Richard N. Velotta, Las Vegas Review-Journal

Advocates for responsible gaming are worried that addictive gambling behavior could balloon with the arrival of nationwide sports wagering.

And the state lawmakers who could make a difference by

requiring the implementation of new programs aren't doing much to help.

"With the exception of New Jersey, none of the states that have either drafted bills or moved forward, including Delaware, have come close to adopting even one of our recommendations," said Keith Whyte, executive director of the National Council on Problem Gambling, based in Washington.

Read the whole story

Environmental measures were big winners in Calif.

By Paul Rogers, Bay Area News Group

Most voters already know that Gavin Newsom and Dianne Feinstein – who easily advanced to the November general election in their races for governor and U.S. senator – were among the big winners in Tuesday's California primary election.

But there's another group also popping the champagne this week: environmentalists.

Across California and the Bay Area, environmental groups had one of their best elections ever. They won nearly every major race they contested, securing billions of dollars for Lake Tahoe, parks, beaches, water projects and public transportation, and at the same time helped kill plans to develop Silicon Valley hillsides and a proposal to change the way the state spends money from its greenhouse gas auctions.

Read the whole story

Federal cannabis bill would help businesses get banking

By Kimberly Veklerov, San Francisco Chronicle

A bipartisan effort in Congress to ease federal restrictions on cannabis, which President Trump said Friday he is inclined to support, would solve a few of the biggest problems facing the nascent industry in California, experts say.

Most important, they say, the bill introduced Thursday – which gives states the authority to create their own marijuana laws – would open the door to banking for businesses by declaring that cannabis activities that comply with state rules do not constitute “trafficking” and their proceeds, therefore, are not the fruits of illegal transactions.

“It’s a really elegant solution,” said Hezekiah Allen, executive director of the California Growers Association, an advocacy group for hundreds of marijuana farmers, business owners and patients in the state. “It doesn’t go all the way, but it does alleviate some of the day-to-day challenges we face.”

Read the whole story

Grand jury wants EDC to better deal with CalPERS

Updated 8:45am:

By Kathryn Reed

From the El Dorado County Grand Jury report that was released last week one might conclude only one entity in the county has an issue with CalPERS.

This would be because the grand jury only investigated El Dorado County. It didn't touch on the two cities in the county – South Lake Tahoe and Placerville – or utility, fire and other special districts that have obligations to the state retirement system. And if the grand jurors had wanted to take it a step further, they could have delved into CalSTRS, the teachers' retirement system.

Jurors did not explain why the county was the target of the investigation.

Here are the findings from the grand jury:

- The unfunded CalPERS liability for El Dorado County is \$346 million as of July 2016.
- El Dorado County pays annual CalPERS payments monthly, resulting in interest charges payable to CalPERS.
- El Dorado County pays only the minimum amount due to CalPERS; it does not make additional payments to reduce the UAL [Unfunded accrued liability.]
- El Dorado County has an established policy to set aside additional funding for post-employment benefits, but not specifically for CalPERS obligations.

Historically, El Dorado County has not provided information to the public about its CalPERS obligation in a way that clearly illuminates the scope of the pension obligation.

The grand jury recommended increasing contributions to CalPERS to pay down the debt, and creating a dedicated trust just for that purpose.

There were no suggestions as to where this added money would come from.

It is not true that the county has not provided information about the issue. CalPERS has been an agenda topic for supervisors, and is part of the annual budget discussions. Plus, the auditor annually provides information about CalPERS.

Lake Tahoe News has written about the county's CalPERS quagmire as well.

The county also isn't alone in having to contend with obligations that keep escalating. Unfunded liability is an issue for every public agency that is part of the system.

"I have read the report. I have not studied the report. I am in general agreement with the report. I have been bringing this issue to the supervisors and the public for years. (CEO) Don Ashton has discussed this matter with the supervisors for the past two years," county Auditor Joe Harn told *Lake Tahoe News*. "I am glad that the grand jury is bringing this matter to the supervisors' and the public's attention again now. It is important to note that this problem is a statewide problem, not just an El Dorado problem."

Supervisor Sue Novasel told LTN, "I agree with their assessment concerning the CalPERS obligation. Our CAO has been very proactive in identifying and addressing this issue. He specifically spoke at length about these issues during our town hall budget talks that we held throughout the county. We

have already placed millions of dollars into a special reserve fund for the underfunded retirement system and we plan to identify more as our budget for 2017-18 is developed this month.”

It will be the supervisors who must come up with a response to the grand jury per state law. The topic will be on a future agenda.

“Overall, the grand jury report appears to be balanced and fair, highlighting the current board is taking significant steps to set aside funding for future year CalPERS payments and funding for a pensionable trust. However, as the report highlights CalPERS costs will continue to be a significant challenge that will influence other policy decisions in the future and it is critical for county leadership to continue to explore a variety of options in how to handle these cost increases,” CAO Don Ashton told *Lake Tahoe News*.

CDC: Suicide rate on the incline in U.S.

By Melissa Healy, Los Angeles Times

More than a decade of steadily rising rates have made suicide the nation’s 10th leading cause of death and one of only three causes of death – including Alzheimer’s disease and drug overdoses – that are increasing in the United States, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

In a report that examines trends in suicide at the state level from 1999 to 2016, the CDC reports that suicide rates have increased in nearly all states. In half of the states, the

agency found the rate at which people took their own lives rose more than 30 percent.

In releasing the report, one day after fashion designer Kate Spade was found dead by suicide in New York, CDC officials underscored that more than half the people who died by suicide – 54 percent – did not have a known diagnosed mental health condition at the time of their death.

Read the whole story

Pot businesses are on a hiring spree

By David Goldstein and Anita Chabria, Sacramento Bee

Eight years ago, Samantha Miller was earning six figures a year as a product developer for a LED lighting company in Northern California when a high school friend called to ask a favor. Would Miller be able to help her friend's boss at a medical marijuana dispensary figure out how to use a new machine purchased to analyze the quality of pot?

Miller passed on the job, but offered some free advice. With her background in machinery design and lab supervision, she told the dispensary folks: "You need (to hire) a scientist because you are going to ruin that piece of equipment if you don't know how to run it."

The dispensary owner ignored her warning and sure enough, Miller soon received a call that the machine had gone kaput. Fed up, the owner offered to give the high-tech device to Miller if she could repair it – and would be willing to test

the dispensary's marijuana for free.

Read the whole story