

PG&E's survival hinges on Wine Country fire reports

By David R. Baker, San Francisco Chronicle

Now that California fire investigators have finally started naming the causes of last fall's deadly wildfires, the fate of the state's largest utility – Pacific Gas and Electric Co. – hangs in the balance.

PG&E already faces more than 100 lawsuits blaming it for the fires that swept through Northern California in early October, torching nearly 8,900 buildings and killing 45 people. Late last month, CalFire issued reports on four of the least damaging fires, saying all had been caused by branches or entire trees hitting PG&E power lines during a wind storm.

In three of the instances, investigators concluded that PG&E may not have followed state regulations on trimming trees near electrical lines. They referred their findings to the district attorneys of Butte and Nevada counties for review.

Read the whole story

May smashes U.S. temperature records

By Seth Borenstein, San Francisco Chronicle

Record heat returned to the United States with a vengeance in May.

May warmed to a record average 65.4 degrees in the Lower 48 states, breaking the high of 64.7 set in 1934, according to federal weather figures released Wednesday. May was 5.2 degrees above the 20th century's average for the month.

Weather stations in the nation broke or tied nearly 8,600 daily heat records in May, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration reported. It hit 100 in Minneapolis on May 28, the earliest the city has seen triple digits.

Read the whole story

Caution urged to avoid hantavirus

Health officials are reminding individuals to take precautions when entering cabins, trailers and other buildings that may be infested with rodents.

A Placer County resident recently died from hantavirus pulmonary syndrome (HPS).

HPS is caused by a virus that people can get through contact with the urine, droppings or saliva of wild rodents, primarily deer mice. Breathing small particles of mouse urine or droppings that have become airborne is the most common means of infection. The illness begins with fever, headache, and muscle aches and progresses rapidly to severe difficulty breathing and, in some cases, death.

According the California Department of Public Health (CDPH), a total of 75 HPS cases were reported in the state from February 1980 through November 2017. About a third of HPS cases

identified in California have been fatal.

The last known case of hantavirus in El Dorado County occurred in 2007. That person recovered. Prompt diagnosis and medical treatment increase an individual's chances of recovery.

To prevent HPS, the CDPH recommends the following precautions:

- Avoid contact with all wild rodents, their droppings, and nesting materials.
- Before entering an enclosed area that may be infested with rodents, allow it to air out for at least 30 minutes.
- Do not dry sweep or vacuum areas that rodents have potentially contaminated.
- Surfaces that rodents may have contaminated with urine or droppings should be made wet with a 10 percent bleach solution or a commercial disinfectant following label directions, then mopped up. Promptly dispose of all cleaning materials when done, and thoroughly wash hands and clothes.
- Examine the outsides of all buildings and seal any holes or other openings that would let rodents get inside.
- Store all food items securely in rodent-proof containers

Drought assistance will be needed in Calif. for years

By Tess Townsend, Water Deeply

Gov. Jerry Brown declared the end of California's five-year drought in April 2017 after a wet winter replenished shrinking

reservoirs. But the lingering impact of the drought, especially on groundwater supplies, means some still rely on emergency water tanks while they wait for long-term solutions.

This is particularly true in the San Joaquin Valley, where more than 300 domestic well users whose taps have run dry continue to use tanks provided by the state through a program originally slated to end in June.

With the help of emergency funding requested by Assembly member Joaquin Arambula, D-Kingsburg, whose largely rural district is in the valley, the emergency water supply program will likely continue another year at a cost of \$3.5 million. Also included in the emergency relief efforts is \$10 million to address failing domestic wells and septic tanks, and \$10 million for the Drinking Water for Schools Program that funds treatment solutions for schools that struggle with contamination. New state regulations for contaminants like lead and carcinogen 1,2,3-trichloropropane mean schools will need more money to meet safe drinking water standards.

Read the whole story

SLT pot laws may be bad news for existing shop



Cody Bass, owner of Tahoe Wellness Cooperative, listens June 5 to the South Lake Tahoe council talk marijuana. Photo/Kathryn Reed

By Kathryn Reed

It's been a slow, strange trip for South Lake Tahoe officials as they navigate a path toward allowing recreational marijuana to be grown, sold and delivered here.

Enough progress has been made that the recreational marijuana ordinance should be presented to the Planning Commission on June 14. However, time is ticking to get all the paperwork together by July 4 to qualify a tax measure for the November ballot.

Marijuana took up the bulk of the June 5 afternoon session of the South Lake Tahoe City Council meeting. A couple closed session items were related to the topic, with one item labeled as existing litigation with Tahoe Wellness Cooperative and another titled anticipated litigation, which was also TWC related.

There was no reportable action from either. Councilmember Jason Collin, who was absent for the entire open session part of the meeting, showed up for the midday closed session item

that dealt with anticipated litigation.

While it wasn't specifically agendaized, the council finally took up the topic of what to do with TWC. The medicinal marijuana dispensary has been in business for more than nine years and is the last survivor of the three that opened about the same time.

The four electeds voted to allow Cody Bass, owner and founder of TWC, to keep operating a medicinal facility, however he will have to comply with any changes to the new ordinance that would affect his business.

This includes meeting zoning regulations. Where TWC is at in the front of the Bijou Center would be OK for selling the medicine going forward. However, cultivation and extraction would no longer be allowed based on how the ordinance looks today. These are two integral components to TWC's business.

Bass did not want to talk with *Lake Tahoe News* about the decisions made on Tuesday.

"You're putting a bullet through my business," he told the council. He equated the actions of the council to being in a Communist country where vested rights are not recognized.

The council as a whole also expressed frustration with unknown variables that exist surrounding Bass and the city. One is the ongoing litigation involving whether Bass has a valid permit to even be open. Another court hearing is slated for later this month, but that doesn't mean a decision will be forthcoming.

The other issue complicating matters is the ballot initiative Bass and his attorneys have brought forward for the November election that would essentially grandfather his business in and tie the city's hands in many ways. A lawsuit to its legality would be likely if it were to pass.

Bass told the council he would withdraw the initiative and drop the lawsuit if the city would sit down with him to come to a resolution that would allow TWC to stay open where it is and allow recreational marijuana sales.

Interim City Attorney Nira Doherty said the most conservative interpretation of election code is that the measure cannot be withdrawn, and therefore advised the council to not go down that path.

“Cody, we are not just thinking about you and Tahoe Wellness Cooperative. We are thinking about what is best for the community,” Councilmember Brooke Laine said.

Bass would have the same opportunity to apply for one of the various recreational marijuana permits as anyone else.

The council had previously agreed to allow two adult-use retail businesses, two cultivators up to 5,000-square-feet of grow area, two microbusinesses, and unlimited testing facility/lab licenses.

A point system based on a variety of criteria will be used to determine who gets the permits. It will be a blind assessment, with identifying information redacted so the five-member judging panel doesn't know who the applicant is.

Locals will be given bonus points. However, the council had a hard time deciding what “local” means. They roughly decided on the boundary of Lake Tahoe Unified School District. However, this excludes those living on the South Shore of Douglas County. It was not explained why Nevadans shouldn't be allowed to own this type of business in South Lake Tahoe when they can operate any other type of business.

When it comes to taxing marijuana – recreational and medicinal – the city didn't make any headway.

“There are a multitude of things that need to be discussed

before we determine how much tax to come up with," Debbie McIntyre, finance director, told the council.

It's possible a special meeting could be called to deal with the tax issue.

S. Tahoe parking garage passes to cost more

By Kathryn Reed

While the daily rate is going to stay the same at the city owned parking garage at Heavenly Village, monthly rates and other long-term passes will be going up this summer.

The City Council on June 5 agreed to raise some of the rates for the 420-space facility. The changes are expected to take place in one month.

"Since the parking has become impacted at Stateline there is more interest in passes," Debbie McIntyre, finance director, said.

Three more holidays have been added to the list – Thanksgiving, Memorial Day and Labor Day. The significance is that rates on holidays for the whole day are \$50 instead of the usual \$25.

The current summer pass is \$50/month. It will be going up to \$125/month. Two hundred passes had been available, now there will be 100.

The winter rate of \$125 month is increasing by \$50 to \$175.

The city also offers a ski season pass that depending on when it is purchased costs \$300, \$350 or \$400. Those rates will be \$400, \$500 and \$600.

The annual pass is being discontinued. In its place will be a six-month pass. That will be \$500.

Last year the garage grossed \$1.2 million. Through April it has made \$900,000. Annual expenses to operate the structure are about \$350,000.

The city pays almost \$600,000 a year in bond debt. The soonest that bill can be paid off is December 2023.

After that time the council will have to decide where the revenue might go.

McIntyre reminded the council the original plan was to build a fifth floor on the garage. It wasn't done at the get-go because there wasn't the money to do so.

Democrat faces huge climb to unseat McClintock

By Emily Cadei, Sacramento Bee

Democrat Jessica Morse has advanced to a general election clash with Republican Rep. Tom McClintock this fall, edging fellow Democrat Regina Bateson for second place in California's top two primary.

McClintock finished first with 52 percent of the primary vote, Morse at nearly 20 percent and Bateson just under 13 percent. A final result could take weeks to determine as thousands of

late-arriving ballots are tallied.

The contest between Morse, an energetic 36-year-old first time candidate, and the 61-year-old McClintock, who's held elected office off-and-on since 1982, will offer voters in the 4th congressional district a sharp contrast in both experience and style. The district runs along the Sierra Nevada mountains from Lake Tahoe south to Yosemite, with the majority of its population concentrated in Placer County.

Read the whole story

SLT spending thousands on salary study

By Kathryn Reed

On a reluctant vote, the South Lake Tahoe City Council unanimously agreed to pay \$22,420 to conduct a citywide total compensation study.

This is to determine how the city's salaries compare to other jurisdictions.

The electeds last year had agreed to do a study for the fire department, with the contract with Bryce Consulting signed in January. An agreement with the general and public works labor groups called for an assessment be done for them as well.

However, at the June 5 meeting not all the councilmembers remembered a closed session discussion where it was decided to do a study for all employees. Interim City Attorney Nira Doherty said that decision did not have to be reported out because it was just direction given to staff.

It has been 11 years since the last study was done.

“I don’t think you can have meaningful negotiations without all cards on the table. A big part of that is what everyone else is paying,” interim City Manager Dirk Brazil said. (This was his first meeting, with his contract having been agreed to earlier at the meeting.) He said from there the city is honest with what it can afford.

It was pointed out that no matter what the study comes back with the city is not obligated to increase anyone’s wages.

Councilmembers Brooke Laine and Tom Davis were most concerned that the study will show South Lake workers are being paid less than their counterparts, but that there won’t be money in the coffers to equalize things. In particular, the looming obligation to pay CalPERS even more for retirees was brought up. In four years that bill is expected to go from \$4.5 million to \$9 million. They were also the ones who didn’t recall agreeing to the study. (City Councilman Jason Collin was absent.)

EDC sees new, old names win election

Updated June 6, 9:46am:

By Kathryn Reed

El Dorado County is going to have a new surveyor, treasurer-tax collector, and recorder-clerk – all because the current officeholders opted to retire.

Philip Mosbacher had no competition for surveyor in the June 5

primary election. K.E. Coleman (15,686 votes, 56.12 percent) topped Anne Billingsley (12,156 votes, 43.49 percent) for treasurer-tax collector. Janelle Horne (12,137 votes, 41.02 percent) and Todd White (10,436 votes, 35.27 percent) were the top two finishers for recorder-clerk.

Anyone who received 50 percent of the vote plus one is the outright winner in non-partisan races. In races without a clear winner the top two vote-getters will battle it out in November – no matter their party affiliation.

Auditor Joe Harn and District Attorney Vern Pierson each faced challengers, and both secured enough votes to retain their jobs for another four years.

Harn beat Mike Owen, accumulating 16,284 votes, or 53.2 percent. Pierson faced opposition from Deputy DA Trish Kelliher. He beat her with 17,349 votes, or 56.55 percent. Neither Harn nor Pierson were available for comment.

Others returning to office are:

- Sheriff John D'Agostini who was not challenged.
- Assessor Karl Weiland was not challenged.
- Assemblyman Frank Bigelow, the Republican representing the 5th District. He had 60.14 percent, with 12,762 votes.

Measure A, the initiative in Fallen Leaf Lake that extends the \$660 annual parcel tax for another four years, passed with 79.17 percent.

All of the above numbers are based on 100 percent of the precincts reporting.

All results are preliminary until they are certified, which can take up to one month.

El Dorado County related individuals who were running for

statewide offices include:

- Former El Dorado County Superior Court Judge **Steve Bailey** is one of the two top vote-getters for attorney general. Bailey stepped down from the bench last August and has since been battling **ethics violations**. With 99.4 percent of the votes counted, Bailey has 25.3 percent; with Xavier Becerra on top with 45.3 percent.

- State Sen. Ted Gaines, who represents Lake Tahoe in the state Legislature, is looking to move to the Board of Equalization. He will face Tom Hallinan in November. Gaines had 32.8 percent, while Hallinan pulled in 38.4 percent based on 100 percent of the votes counted.

- Rep. Tom McClintock far outpaced his competition in the 4th Congressional race with 52.1 percent and Democrat Jessica Morse garnering 19.9 percent. They will meet in November.

Voter turnout better than expected in EDC

By Susan Wood

About one-third of the registered voters in El Dorado County cast a ballot in Tuesday's primary – and that's considered good.

That's the general assessment leading into the final results for El Dorado County elections from a man who has spent much of his government career watching and analyzing them.

In the topsy-turvy world of elections, longtime county Registrar Bill Schultz has seen it all. He anticipated last

week that the June 5 primary might see only a 17 percent voter turnout, however he said people showed up in droves on election day. Preliminary estimates are the turnout will be closer to 33 percent. There are 115,431 registered voters in El Dorado County.

El Dorado traditionally brings out more registered voters to the ballot box in comparison to other counties.

“If you would’ve asked me a week ago, I’d say we’d probably have a low turnout – not as low as other counties – but low. But let me tell ya, it’s been jam-packed all afternoon. A lot of younger people. That’s good to see,” Schultz told *Lake Tahoe News*. “It’s going to be interesting.”

Termed the “jungle primary,” the two top vote-getters in a race advance no matter what party they fall in. That is assuming no one garnered 50 percent plus one. The change is intended to make the system more equitable.

“Every time there’s a gubernatorial race, everyone wants to get their name on the ballot. It’s bragging rights I guess,” Schultz said.

As a county, more than 78 percent of registered voters in El Dorado County opted for a mail-in ballot. An elections worker at Lake Tahoe Airport late Tuesday afternoon indicated there was less voter traffic than usual.

Mail-in ballots have become increasingly popular over the last decade. They’ve also posed as an early indicator to final results.

New this year in California’s system is the opportunity to register right up to election day. However, those are considered conditional ballots.

During a primary or general election, the day of civic duty brings out its share of gaffes and unusual events. This

primary witnessed El Dorado's neighboring Amador County run out of ballots because turnout ended up much greater than expected. According to the *Ledger Dispatch* newspaper, at least five polling places had none by 3pm, and voters had to be turned away.

Problems existed in large counties as well. Los Angeles County experienced widespread confusion when printing errors left many voters off the rosters.