

Motorcyclist dies in collision with vehicle in SLT

A motorcyclist died early this morning in South Lake Tahoe.

Officers at 8:20am were still on scene gathering evidence.

The collision between the motorcyclist and vehicle occurred about 6:15am July 26 on Highway 50 near Safeway. Details about the accident and people involved have not been released.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Spiraling wildfire fighting costs largely beyond USFS control

By Cassandra Moseley, The Conversation

Just six months after the devastating Thomas Fire – the largest blaze in California’s history – was fully contained, the 2018 fire season is well under way. As of mid-July, large wildfires had already burned over 1 million acres in a dozen states. Through October, the National Interagency Fire Center predicts above-average wildfire activity in many regions, including the Northwest, Interior West and California.

Rising fire suppression costs over the past three decades have nearly destroyed the U.S. Forest Service’s budget. Overall funding for the agency, which does most federal firefighting, has been flat for decades, while fire suppression costs have

grown dramatically.

Earlier this year Congress passed a “fire funding fix” that changes the way in which the federal government will pay for large fires during expensive fire seasons. This is vital for helping to restore the Forest Service budget. But the funding fix doesn’t affect the factors that drive costs, such as climate trends and more people living in fire prone landscapes.

More burn days, more fuel

Why are costs increasing so dramatically? Many factors have come together to create a perfect storm. Climate change, past forest and fire management practices, housing development, increased focus on community protection and the professionalization of wildfire management are all driving up costs.

Fire seasons are growing longer in the United States and worldwide. According to the Forest Service, climate change has expanded the wildfire season by an average of 78 days per year since 1970. Agencies need to keep seasonal employees on their payrolls longer and have contractors standing by earlier and available to work later in the year. All of this adds to costs, even in low fire years.

In many parts of the wildfire-prone West, decades of fire suppression combined with historic logging patterns have created small, dense forest stands that are more vulnerable to large wildfires. In fact, many areas have fire deficits – significantly less fire than we would expect given current climatic and forest conditions. Fire suppression in these areas only delays the inevitable. When fires do get away from firefighters, they are more severe because of the accumulation of small trees and brush.

Protecting both communities and forests

In recent decades, development has pushed into areas with fire-prone ecosystems – the wildland-urban interface. In response, the Forest Service has shifted its priorities from protecting timber resources to trying to prevent fire from reaching houses and other physical infrastructure.

Fires near communities are fraught with political pressure and complex interactions with state and local fire and public safety agencies. They create enormous pressure on the Forest Service to do whatever is possible to suppress fires, which can drive up costs. There is considerable pressure to use air tankers and helicopters, although these resources are expensive and only effective in a limited number of circumstances.

As it started to prioritize protecting communities in the late 1980s, the Forest Service also ended its policy of fully suppressing all wildfires. Now fires are managed using a multiplicity of objectives and tactics, ranging from full suppression to allowing fires to grow larger so long as they stay within desired ranges.

This shift requires more and better-trained personnel and more interagency coordination. It also means letting some fires grow bigger, which requires personnel to monitor the blazes even when they stay within acceptable limits. Moving away from full suppression and increasing prescribed fire is controversial, but many scientists believe it will produce long-term ecological, public safety and financial benefits.

Professionalizing wildfire response

As fire seasons lengthened and staffing for the national forest system declined, the Forest Service was less and less able to use national forest as a militia whose regular jobs could be set aside for brief periods for firefighting. Instead, it started to hire staff dedicated exclusively to wildfire management and use private-sector contractors for

fire suppression.

There is little research on the costs of this transition, but hiring more dedicated professional fire staffers and a large contractor pool is probably more expensive than the Forest Service's earlier model. However, as the agency's workforce shrank by 20,000 between 1980 and the early 2010s and fire seasons expanded, it had little choice but to transform its fire organization.

Few opportunities for cost control

Many of these cost drivers are out of the Forest Service's hands. The agency may be able to have some impact on fire behavior in certain settings, with techniques such as hazardous fuels reduction and prescribed fire, but these strategies will further increase costs in the short and medium term.

Another option is rethinking the resources for wildfire response. While there are almost certainly savings to be had, capturing these savings will require changes in how society views wildfire, and political courage on the part of the Forest Service to not use expensive resources on high-profile wildfires when they may not be effective.

Even if these approaches work, they will likely only slow the rate of increase in costs. Climate change, the fire deficit on many western lands and development in the wildland-urban interface ensure that continued cost increases are baked into the system for decades to come.

Wildfire fighting costs now consume more than half of the agency's budget, reducing funds for national forest management, research and development, and support for state and private forestry. Even if it doesn't lower costs, the fire funding fix is vital because it will help create space in the Forest Service budget to fund the very activities that are needed to address the growing problem of wildfire.

Cassandra Moseley is an associate vice president for research and a research professor at University of Oregon.

Sex workers speaking out against effort targeting brothels

By Associated Press

An attention-grabbing pimp's campaign for the Nevada Legislature has sparked an anti-brothel effort that sex workers fear could spread to parts of the state that allow legal prostitution.

A November ballot referendum is seeking to shut down four brothels in Lyon County in eastern Nevada owned by Dennis Hof, the *Reno Gazette-Journal* reported.

Hof, the owner of half a dozen legal brothels in Nevada and star of the HBO adult reality series "Cathouse," won a Republican primary for the state Legislature last month. Many leading Republicans in the state are shunning his candidacy and he has previously said the anti-brothel efforts are political retribution.

Read the whole story

Construction worker severely hurt in S. Lake Tahoe

A construction worker at the Gondola Vista condo project in South Lake Tahoe was critically injured Tuesday when he was run over by a colleague, according to officials.

The name of the man in his mid-40s has not been released.

He was in a manhole when another worker backed over him on July 24. Eric Guevin with Tahoe Douglas Fire said no charges will be filed because it was an accident.

“OSHA will investigate and a fine may be levied at that time,” Guevin told *Lake Tahoe News*.

The construction project is along Lake Parkway next to Van Sickle Bi-State Park. They are 20 high-end condos designed to be second home or vacation rentals.

The worker was airlifted to Renown Medical Center in Reno.

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*

Nevada tightens election security

By Yvonne Gonzalez, Las Vegas Sun

Millions of dollars and enhanced protections have helped Nevada shore up systems protecting voter data and ballot-casting since the 2016 election marked by suspicions of foreign interference.

One of the latest suspected Russian ties to election interference includes an indictment last week over emails and data stolen from Democratic groups in 2016, which Nevada officials say are separate from and can be much less secure than the systems safeguarding voter data and ballot-casting.

The indictment also pointed to an information breach of about 500,000 voter records in Illinois in 2016. But elections officials emphasized that much of the data was publicly available.

Read the whole story

Fire to close Yosemite National Park

By William Ramirez and Cresencio Rodriguez-Delgado, Fresno Bee

Yosemite Valley will shut down Wednesday as fire crews try to stop the Ferguson Fire from spreading into the national park, according to fire crews.

A noon closure will be imposed on a portion of Highway 41 from Wawona to the tunnel entry into Yosemite Valley, according to Yosemite National Park Superintendent Michael Reynolds.

The closure is expected to last until Sunday.

Read the whole story

Nev. could elect first female-majority statehouse

By Associated Press

Nevada voters could soon make history by electing the country's first female-majority state legislature.

Women, after winning a record number of primary contests last month, could make up nearly two-thirds of the statehouse by Nov. 7, the Reno Gazette-Journal reported .

“In the past, we’ve had to ask women five, six, seven times to run for office,” said Danna Lovell, director of Emerge Nevada, a Democrat-linked candidate training nonprofit based in Las Vegas. “Whereas now, they’re worried. They’re scared about what’s going on in their communities. ... I think there’s an extremely great possibility for a female majority.”

[Read the whole story](#)

Calif. schools grappling with growing pension costs

By Jessica Calefat, CALmatters

California's public schools have enjoyed a remarkable restoration of funding since the bone-deep cuts they endured during the recession, but many now face a grave financial threat as they struggle to pay the escalating costs of teachers' pensions.

Over the next three years, schools may need to use well over half of all the new money they're projected to receive to cover their pension obligations, leaving little extra for classrooms, state Department of Finance and Legislative Analyst's Office estimates show.

Some districts are predicting deficits and many are already bracing for what's to come by cutting programs, reducing staff or drawing down their reserves even though per-pupil funding is at its highest level in three decades and voters recently extended a tax hike on the rich to help pay for schools.

Read the whole story

Report: States should be cautious as they look to sin taxes for revenue

By Yvonne Gonzalez, Las Vegas Sun

So-called sin taxes on alcohol, tobacco and gambling are not a reliable source of state revenue, authors of a new research report warn.

Sin taxes are volatile and likely to shrink as more states look to expand sports betting under a new Supreme Court ruling and legalize recreational marijuana as a solution to budget issues, according to a report released today by Pew Charitable Trusts.

The report, "Are Sin Taxes Healthy for State Budgets," is a joint project between Pew and the Rockefeller Institute of Government that found "taxes on vices are tempting, but

unreliable sources of revenue.”

Read the whole story

Did short-term rentals kill the mountain town?

By Tom Vanderbilt, Outside

Brian Barker was living in Portland with a well-paying union job as a spokesperson for the fire department. But despite having “a job you don’t leave”—he had an itch. “I wanted to go live in the mountains,” he says. “I didn’t want to sit in traffic all the time. I was tired of living in the city.”

So he began searching. Missoula, Boise, Truckee—“anywhere within 30 minutes of a ski area.” In 2014, he relocated to Crested Butte, a 1,500-person-strong former coal-mining town nestled in Colorado’s Upper Gunnison River Valley. It’s often referred to as the last great American ski town, a distinction that locals, despite acknowledging it with a hint of self-deprecating smirk, do not really go out of their way to dispute. Phenomenal skiing aside, it is the sort of place where doors go unlocked (except, occasionally, to keep bears out); where locals on the Crested Butte Bitch and Moan Facebook page gripe about tourists (typically Texans) exceeding the 15-mile-per-hour speed limit downtown; where powder days mean closed stores and canceled meetings; where even the gas pumps at the local Shell station seem to take things just a bit more slowly.

“This is a great place to raise kids,” Barker, a divorced father of two young children, tells me one evening, wearing a

baseball cap, a vest, and a hint of stubble. We're seated at the Brick Oven, a locals' hangout on Elk Avenue, the town's main spine, where tidy wood-frame buildings in a rainbow palette glow beneath the snow-capped mass of the eponymous mountain.

This postcard existence comes at a price, though. The cliché about remote adventure-town idylls is that people either have a second home or a second job. Barker has three jobs.

Not long ago, Barker stopped by the property-management company that oversees his rental to talk about a water heater on the fritz. "The manager said, 'I know you have kids, but the owners are thinking about turning your place into a VRBO. You should probably start looking.'"

Read the whole story