

Nev. sets bar lower for 11th-graders taking ACT

By Meghin Delaney, Las Vegas Review-Journal

Nevada high school students taking the required ACT exam will be considered proficient starting this fall if they reach a threshold that's lower than the national standard set by the test creators.

The State Board of Education signed off on the "cut scores" that will be used to determine whether students have demonstrated sufficient mastery of math and English on the test at a meeting Thursday in Las Vegas. The board decided to divide student test scores into four different categories, with the highest two – Levels 3 and 4 – being considered proficient or passing grades.

ACT doesn't set cut scores the same way, instead using what its creators call benchmarks.

Read the whole story

Mega Indian casinos to be built on way to Tahoe

By Dale Kasler, Sacramento Bee

A Hard Rock casino-hotel is coming to the outskirts of greater Sacramento, upping the competitive ante in the region's increasingly crowded gambling market.

The Hard Rock Cafe International chain has announced it will partner with the Enterprise Rancheria Indian tribe to build a mega-resort in Yuba County, not far from the Toyota Amphitheatre in Wheatland.

While preliminary site work is under way, neither Hard Rock nor the Enterprise tribe would discuss details about the resort.

Meanwhile, two more tribal casinos are in development in the region. Caesars Entertainment Corp. and the Buena Vista Band of Me-Wuk Indians announced they broke ground in April on a \$168 million casino outside Ione, about 30 miles east of Sacramento. The Wilton Rancheria tribe plans to build a \$400 million casino, hotel and conference center in south Elk Grove, although it hasn't yet scheduled a groundbreaking.

Read the whole story

As wildfires get worse, these tools will help keep you safe

By Wes Siler, Outside

As the fire season lengthens and as wildfires become both more severe and more common, we need to start rolling information about them into our everyday lives—just like we do with the weather forecast. Luckily, visualizing the spread of a wildfire has gotten as easy as predicting afternoon showers thanks to three powerful new tools.

The first in an upgrade to the government's all-agency fire data clearing house InciWeb, which has gained a new map

feature for each of the fires it reports. So instead of a wall of bureaucracy-speak, you can instead actually see exactly where a fire is burning when you go read about it. This info is updated each morning. Straight from that page, you can follow links to the fire's hashtag on Twitter and Instagram for photos and crowdsourced information. A Facebook link directs you to the page of whichever agency is responsible for managing the fire, where that agency posts live updates and critical information.

Read the whole story

Alleged Truckee flag burner arrested

By KOLO-TV

A Truckee man was booked Saturday on an arson charge after allegedly burning a store's U.S. flag.

The Truckee Police Department said a U.S. Army veteran donated a flag which officers hung to replace the damaged flag.

Joshua Everett Lozon, 27, was booked Saturday morning on suspicion of committing arson.

Read the whole story

National park ozone pollution rivals large cities

By David Keiser, Gabriel E. Lade and Ivan Rudik

Most Americans associate U.S. national parks with pristine environments that represent the very best of nature. In the 1916 law that established the National Park Service, Congress directed the new agency to “conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wild life therein and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations.”

But over the past century it has become increasingly hard to protect the parks from impacts of human activities outside their boundaries. In 2015 the National Parks Conservation Association, a national advocacy group, released a blistering report giving many popular parks poor grades for unhealthy air, haze and impacts from climate change.

In a study just published in “Science Advances,” we analyzed levels of ozone, the most widely monitored pollutant in parks, and their impact on visits to 33 national parks from 1990 to 2014. The sites we studied included popular parks such as Acadia, the Grand Canyon, Great Smoky Mountains, Joshua Tree, Sequoia and Kings Canyon and Yosemite. We found that while cities once had more “bad air days” with unhealthy ozone levels than national parks, today parks and metro areas have virtually the same number of unhealthy ozone days per year on average. We also found that park visits fall on high ozone days – especially during summer and fall, when peak ozone levels typically occur.

The impact of bad air days

Regulatory efforts to protect the national parks have a long

history. The Clean Air Act Amendments of 1977 and 1990 designated parks as Federal Class I Areas, granting them special air quality and visibility protections.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's 1999 Regional Haze Rule increased these protections by requiring states to develop and implement plans to improve visibility and air quality in parks and wilderness areas.

However, these regulatory actions have spurred contentious debate and litigation. Environmental groups argue that these measures are not stringent enough, while some states and industries call them too costly.

Major sources of park air pollution include power plants, automobiles and industrial facilities. Unlike other pollutants emitted directly from these sources, like sulfur dioxide or lead, ozone is a secondary pollutant. It forms in the atmosphere through chemical reactions between nitrogen oxides, volatile organic compounds and sunlight. Nitrogen oxides originate from the usual urban pollution sources, but biogenic sources like trees are actually the largest source of volatile organic compounds, above industrial sources and cars.

Ozone pollution is a serious threat to human health and the environment. It has been linked to increased respiratory symptoms, hospitalization rates and mortality. It also is correlated with poor visibility in parks, and can damage sensitive plant species.

Ozone trends over time

To our surprise, for most of our study period we found that average annual ozone concentrations in national parks were nearly identical to those in metropolitan areas. However, summertime levels and the incidence of unhealthy days told a different story.

Since ozone forms in sunlight, levels typically are highest on

hot, sunny days. When ozone levels exceed the national standard, which is currently 70 parts per billion, local and regional governments may issue alerts or urge people to avoid outdoor activities.

In 1990 cities had far more days bad ozone days on average than national parks. But through the decade, summertime ozone and unhealthy ozone days worsened in national parks. By the year 2000, ozone levels in national parks were, on average, very similar to those in metropolitan areas. Explaining this increase was beyond the scope of our study. According to the National Park Service, pollution in national parks can come from many sources, including power plants, industrial sources, vehicle emissions and wildfires.

Since the early 2000s, ozone levels in both national parks and metropolitan areas have improved. But bad air days still occur. On average, among the locations we studied, metro areas currently have 18 unhealthy ozone days per year, while parks have 16.

Bad air days drive away park visitors

To see whether visitors responded to changing ozone levels in the parks, we matched monthly visitation data from the National Park Service with various measures of monthly average ozone levels. We found that a one percent increase in ozone concentrations was associated with approximately a one percent decrease in park visitation on average. This response was most pronounced during summer and fall, when both visitation and average ozone levels are highest.

Why do visits decrease when ozone is high? We see two possibilities. First, visitors may worry about adverse impacts on their health. Second, visibility is typically poor when ozone levels are high because ozone participates in chemical reactions in the air that can form haze.

We found stronger evidence that health concerns keep visitors

away. Park visitation has a robust negative correlation with the incidence of unhealthy ozone days, perhaps because of air quality warnings that accompany these high levels.

The value of further ozone reductions

Across the United States, ozone levels declined by 31 percent between 1980 and 2016. But city residents and tourists in national parks still experience unhealthy ozone levels for two to three weeks per year. Exposure to high ozone levels may be particularly harmful in national parks, since health effects from ozone are greater during exercise, such as hiking, backpacking or rock climbing.

Although we found that some people decrease their visits during unhealthy days, we still observed that since 1990, nearly 80 million visitor days have occurred during high ozone periods. This suggests that improving air quality in U.S. national parks could produce significant human health benefits. We hope that state and federal policy makers will weigh these benefits of improved air quality along with their costs as discussions move forward on air pollution regulations.

David Keiser is assistant professor of economics, Iowa State University; Gabriel E. Lade is assistant professor of economics, Iowa State University; and Ivan Rudik is assistant professor of applied economics, Cornell University.

Chamber execs weigh in on

SnowGlobe

By Kathryn Reed

SnowGlobe can be a divisive topic even in the heat of summer. For those who are bothered by the electronic music festival, their angst never really goes away.

Tami Wallace of the South Tahoe Chamber of Commerce and Steve Teshara with Lake Tahoe South Shore Chamber of Commerce flanked South Lake Tahoe Mayor Wendy David during her monthly “conversation” at the senior center on Wednesday. The purpose of the gatherings is for members of the community to ask questions about any topic, though usually there is a theme to start with.

The chamber presidents couldn't escape having to weigh in on SnowGlobe.

“We are in support of SnowGlobe to an extent,” Wallace told the group. “We think it is absolutely in the wrong venue.” She said she's tried to find a location other than the ball fields, but has been unable to.

Teshara said his chamber supports the event, but recognizes the impacts it has. He is hoping the changes made by the promoter for this year will bring significant improvements to those who are bothered by the noise.

One attendee at the July 18 conversation asked if the chambers could sponsor a gathering for business owners who have been bothered by SnowGlobe. So often all that is reported is how businesses support SnowGlobe and see it as a positive.

The woman who spoke talked about how she does everything she can to prohibit concert-goers from renting her vacation rentals, saying SnowGlobers are bad for business. She said there are enough families wanting to come to the South Shore

at New Year's that the music festival is not needed any more.

Others pointed out how the event has made Stateline less of a big deal; and that it's easier on public safety resources.

In responding to a question about why the casinos don't do something interesting on New Year's Eve for the crowds, Teshara said the reasoning is that so many who spill out into the highway at the bewitching hour are underage. The casinos don't have any desire to attract more young people.

Vacation home rentals and the beach at Beach Retreat/Timber Cove were other topics.

FAA: Pilot in fatal Truckee plane crash had expired medical certificate

By Jordan Cutler-Tietjen, Sacramento Bee

The pilot whose private plane crashed south of Truckee on Tuesday morning was flying with an expired medical certificate, according to multiple sources.

Flying without a medical certificate is an illegal violation of Federal Aviation Administration regulations, according to Ian Gregor, public affairs manager for the FAA's Pacific Division.

The accident killed the pilot, 67-year-old Kenneth Whitall-Scherfee of Carmichael, and one of his passengers, 55-year-old Peter Jackson of West Hollywood. The plane's only other passenger, whose identity has not been released, was being

treated for critical injuries in a Reno-area hospital as of Thursday afternoon.

Read the whole story

Harrah's-Harveys to have year-round paid parking

Harrah's and Harveys Lake Tahoe will implement a paid valet and self-parking program beginning July 30.

This new parking policy will operate continuously 24/7 throughout the year. Different parking rates will apply to high season (summer and ski season) and low demand season, and will be fixed at \$25 for self-park and \$30 for valet parking during special event days, including outdoor concerts, celebrity golf and designated holidays.

Platinum and above Total Rewards guests will continue to self-park for free. Complimentary valet will also be available for platinum and above Total Rewards guests. Discounts are available for Gold Total Rewards guests. Parking charges for non-Total Rewards hotel guests can be billed to their room.

The initiative is intended to improve the parking experience for guests, according to the casinos.

A sample of some of the new paid parking rates for "high season" includes the following features:

- First hour for self-parking at Harrah's and Harveys is free.
- Self-parking up to four hours is \$10 and four to 24

hours is \$13.

- Valet parking is \$15 up to four hours and \$20 from four to 24 hours.
 - Valet and self-parking is always free for Platinum, Diamond and Seven Star Total Rewards members.
 - Gold Total Rewards guests receive a \$3 self-park and a \$2 valet park discount year 'round.
 - Locals dining in any Caesars Entertainment-owned outlet or shopping in any outlet at either property will receive free, validated parking (with purchase) from that outlet.
 - "Locals" are defined as those residing anywhere within the Lake Tahoe Basin, Carson City/Carson Valley, Minden and Gardnerville.
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Calif. is prepping for extreme weather

By Henry Fountain, New York Times

For years, there has been a movement in California to restore floodplains, by moving levees back from rivers and planting trees, shrubs and grasses in the low-lying land between. The goal has been to go back in time, to bring back some of the habitat for birds, animals and fish that existed before the state was developed.

But in addition to recreating the past, floodplain restoration is increasingly seen as a way of coping with the future – one

of human-induced climate change. The reclaimed lands will flood more readily, and that will help protect cities and towns from the more frequent and larger inundations that scientists say are likely as California continues to warm.

Researchers say it is unclear whether climate change will make California drier or wetter on average. What is more certain is that the state will increasingly whipsaw between extremes, with drier dry years, wetter wet ones and a rising frequency of intense periods of precipitation.

Read the whole story

Driver admits guilt in fatal Cave Rock DUI

A woman involved in a fatal DUI accident at Cave Rock last summer pleaded guilty this week to causing death and causing substantial bodily harm while driving under the influence.

Kimberly Ann Davis, 40, of Carson City faces up to 40 years in prison.

Sranthon Bunnag, 52, of Thailand was a passenger in the vehicle. She was killed after their vehicle collided head-on with a minivan on June 26, 2017.

Court records show Davis' blood-alcohol content at nearly three times the legal limit.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report