



Lava shaped Lake Tahoe

by Mary Caperton Morton
Tuesday, May 1, 2018

With its preternaturally clear blue waters, Lake Tahoe is tranquil today, but the deep lake straddling the border of California and Nevada was once the site of repeated lava flows. In a new [study](#), researchers used radiometric argon dating to describe how episodes of volcanism created the landscape around the largest alpine lake in North America.

A small, volcanic field lies along the northwest shore of Lake Tahoe, where the lake flows into the Truckee River. In the new study, published in *Geosphere*, the researchers mapped, sampled and analyzed the succession of lavas that formed the field. Their work revealed that the lavas and pyroclastic materials erupted from seven vents in at least three episodes of volcanism starting roughly 2.3 million years ago.



The headwaters of the Truckee River begin at the Lake Tahoe dam. Credit: Dinuraj K, CC BY 2.0.

Using radiometric dating, the team constrained the timeline of changing shorelines through these periods of volcanism, which raised lake levels above today's elevation of 1,897 meters above sea level. The lake's outlet to the Truckee River was dammed when the first episode began about 2.3 million years ago; this raised the lake level by about 150 meters, from about 1,896 meters above sea level to 2,048 meters. Another flow 2.1 million years ago dammed it again, raising the lake level from about 1,914 meters to 2,073 meters. Then, about 940,000 years ago, another flow raised the lake level to 2,085 meters. These three raised shorelines indicate that the present outlet of Lake Tahoe through the Truckee River Canyon has existed for at least 2.3 million years.

The findings may be relevant to assessing future volcanic hazards around the now-heavily populated lakeshore. "The timing of this repetitive volcanic activity raises implications for future volcanic eruptions and their hazards," said co-author [James Moore](#) of the U.S. Geological Survey in Menlo Park, Calif., in a [statement](#). "The lake could be dammed by lava again, causing extensive shoreline flooding as its level rose, or rapid dam failure could cause extensive downstream flooding along the Truckee River on its path to Reno."



Climate strike in downtown Reno on Sept. 20 2019. (Andrea Laue/The Nevada Independent)

Indy Environment: Reporting on heat and climate change. Send us your stories.

Good morning, and welcome to the Indy Environment newsletter.

As always, we want to hear from readers. Let us know what you're seeing on the ground and how policies are affecting you. Email me with any tips at daniel@thenvindy.com.

If you received this from a friend, [sign-up here](#) to receive it in your inbox.

The summer is coming, and temperatures are rising.

They have been for some time. The average temperature in Nevada has already increased by about 2 degrees since the start of the 20th century, with most of the hottest 10 years recorded after 2000, according to the Nevada Climate Initiative, which has aggregated climate data and science specific to the state ([a very helpful resource](#)). This trend is only projected to intensify.

Climate change, by mid-century, is projected to increase average temperatures by 4-6 degrees in Nevada, and significantly increase days with extreme heat. The effects of this are cascading and often amplify existing issues around human health, infrastructure and ecosystem health.

Across the U.S, heat-related deaths [have often outpaced](#) other weather-related fatalities (floods, tornados, etc.) in recent years. Yet the struggles that people face dealing with heat are often hidden, and it seems they are rarely discussed and rarely factored into policy.

Heat still leaves its mark, though, and this is only becoming more true as the climate changes. There has been some incredible regional and national reporting on heat over the last few years (stories in [The Arizona Republic](#) and [High Country News](#) last year stand out). **But on the whole, I've found that the topic is underreported, including on our website at *The Nevada Independent*.**

There are countless stories to tell about the impact of increasing temperatures and for months now, I have been thinking about how important (and under-discussed) it is. Like so many big environmental problems, heat is not just a story about weather or even solely about climate change. It is a story, too, about inequality, access, haphazard urban planning and public health.

Over the next few months, I plan to work on a number of stories centered on the effects of heat. I will pull from **a lot of data, but what I'm really curious to hear are the stories behind the data.** When it comes to increasing temperatures, our experiences can be quite personal — they vary depending on everything from age, occupation, health and even where we live.

Please send us your stories. How has heat affected you? What personal experiences have you had grappling with the effects of heat? How are you coping with the effects of hotter days and hotter nights? What do you remember about temperatures growing up when compared to temperatures today? And what concerns do you have as the climate changes? Do you think we are doing enough to address the impact of heat from climate change in our public policies?

Email me at daniel@thenvindy.com. We'd love to hear from you.

Here's what else I'm watching this week:



Native vegetation a north of Sloan Canyon National Conservation Area in May 2018. (Jeff Scheid/The Nevada Independent)

CARSON CITY AND CONGRESS

A mining tax deal? There are fewer than **30 days left in the legislative session**, and it's a whole lot of politics. In public, lawmakers have said little about three proposals to amend **the Nevada Constitution and change how mining is taxed. But there's a lot going on behind the scenes.** My colleagues Michelle Rindels and Riley Snyder [wrote about the political calculus this weekend.](#)

Blockchains changed to study status. Last week, Gov. Steve Sisolak [told the Reno Gazette Journal](#) that he was scrapping a legislative push (for now) that would have enabled Blockchains Inc., a startup with large landholdings outside of Reno, to eventually build out a **“smart city” overseen by a new county**-like government. The proposal, which raised hackles in progressive circles, in rural counties and among environmentalists, will become a... study (if the Legislature approves that).

Blockchains underscored the way in which water and economic development proposals are [tied at the hip](#), in many cases. Water should be the first thing policymakers ask about.

Here's the Sisolak quote that really stood out from the *Gazette Journal* story: “The further we got into this, the more I realized how many stakeholders there were. You're talking about water, governance, housing, infrastructure, taxes. There's a lot of issues there.” Note what came first on that list.

Sierra Club raises concerns about the Clark County Lands Bill, [a congressional proposal](#) to expand development boundaries in Las Vegas while conserving land throughout the county.

In a letter [sent to the delegation last week](#), the Sierra Club Toiyabe Chapter wrote that “**we** have several concerns with the legislation that are addressed in this letter in detail: sprawl, climate change, water use, environmental justice and air pollution, affordable housing, off-highway vehicle impacts, and the lack of a public process surrounding the formulation of **this bill.**”

Two more land bills: Democratic Sens. Jacky Rosen and Catherine Cortez Masto [re-introduced two bills last week](#) that would change how public land is managed in Lander County and Carson City.

Decorative turf ban moves forward. The Assembly passed a proposal to ban decorative turf in and around Las Vegas, our legislative reporter [Tabitha Mueller reported](#). The push, proposed by the Southern Nevada Water Authority, would require the removal of grass that is for decorative purposes, an action that could save billions of gallons of Colorado River water.

Coming up: Sen. Chris Brooks (D-Las Vegas) is [expected to introduce](#) an energy bill this week requiring a big utility investment in electric vehicle charging and aimed at boosting transmission infrastructure. The bill is also expected to move the state to a larger wholesale energy market.

WATER AND LAND

“But there’s a wrong here that needs to be righted.” *InsideClimateNews* reporter Judy Fahys [looks at a new report](#) highlighting water insecurity challenges faced by **Indigenous communities in the Colorado River Basin.** “As hard as people across the country found it to practice rigorous hand-washing and social distancing, it was even tougher for many members of the **30 tribes in the Colorado River Basin,**” Fahys writes. **“Many lacked the clean water essential for sanitizing their homes and bodies to stop the spread of the coronavirus.”**

Arizona prepares for Colorado River cutbacks: *The Arizona Republic’s Ian James* looks at [how Arizona agencies are preparing](#) for “painful” cuts as Lake Mead approaches the first-ever shortage threshold. Utah is looking at [ways to save water](#), too, KUER’s Kate Groetzing reports.

A land transfer for shorebird habitat: The U.S. Bureau of Reclamation [transferred more than 23,000 acres of wetlands and pasture](#) to the Nevada Division of State Lands and the Nevada Department of Wildlife last week. The land transfer provides important shorebird habitat within the Lahontan Valley Wetlands, part of a larger fabric of important water bodies throughout the Great Basin. Sens. Mitt Romney (R-Utah) and Jeff Merkley (D-Oregon) re-introduced a bill [to fund data collection](#) on saline Great Basin lakes. Rosen and Cortez Masto are co-sponsors.

NASA’s public lands proposal: Here’s a [press release that caught my attention](#): The Bureau of Land Management is seeking comment on National Aeronautics and Space **Administration’s application for withdrawal of 22,995 acres for use on satellite calibration** activities, which would segregate the lands for up to two years while the withdrawal **package is being processed.**”

The Real Water story: David Ferrara at the *Review Journal* has done a great job covering the ins and outs of the litigation involving Real Water, a water-bottling company owned by **former Assemblyman Brent Jones that’s at the center of a federal investigation** into liver illnesses. [This update from Ferrara really stunned me:](#) “Las Vegas-based Real Water, the focus of an ongoing U.S. Food and Drug Administration investigation into liver illnesses, hired a man with almost no experience in the business to oversee testing at one of its Southern Nevada bottling **plants.**”



Power lines from Hoover Dam stretch through Eldorado Valley on June 16, 2016. (Jeff Scheid/The Nevada Independent)

MINING

Legislative campaign donations: My colleague Jacob Solis looked at where the [more than \\$330,000 in mining industry campaign contributions](#) went during the 2020 election cycle.

Nevada Gold Mines helps police purchase use-of-force simulator. ([Elko Daily Free Press](#))

The Tiehm's buckwheat fight: “The Biden administration says a U.S. judge exceeded his authority when he gave federal wildlife officials a May 21 deadline to decide whether to formally propose endangered species protections for a rare desert wildflower at the center of a fight over a proposed lithium mine in Nevada,” [the Associated Press’ Scott Sonner reported](#) this week.

For months, conservationists have been seeking state and federal rare species protections **for the Tiehm’s buckwheat**. Something else to watch: At the same time that the litigation is going on, the company behind the proposed lithium mine is going through the mine permitting process with the Nevada Division of Environmental Protection.

Whistleblowers allege conflict in permitting Colorado mine: “The director of the state’s Air Pollution Control Division repeatedly signed off on exemptions to pollution limits for the world’s largest gold miner, Newmont Corp. — a company that he previously represented as an attorney in private practice, according to state records,” the [Colorado Sun’s Michael Booth reports](#).

In case you missed it, [my story](#) on cleaning tainted water at the Anaconda Copper Mine. The story, based on public records, documents how state environmental regulators came to approve a revised report that reduced how much contamination the mine was responsible for.

ENERGY AND CLIMATE

California renewables and a regional grid: For a very brief period last month, **California hit 94.5 percent renewable energy. Yes, it only lasted four seconds. But it's a big deal.** *Los Angeles Times* reporter Sammy Roth [looks at what it means in the context of the rest of the West.](#)

A massive solar plant in California desert: The Biden administration approved a large-scale solar plant that will go on about 2,000 acres of land near Blythe, California, [Reuters reported.](#)

When a climate solution leads to more emissions: [Important journalism](#) from *ProPublica's Lisa Song* and *MIT Technology Review's James Temple* on how a California program to create carbon offsets mischaracterizes the benefits and in doing so, allows for more emissions.

Federal funding for transmission lines: “The federal government said [last week that] it is making more than \$8 billion available to build and improve the nation’s transmission lines as part of its efforts to improve America’s aging electric grid and meet President Joe Biden’s ambitious clean-energy goals,” [the Associated Press’ Cathy Bussewitz reports.](#)

And lastly, the U.S. Geological Survey [has now joined climate Twitter.](#)

Our mailing address is:

7455 Arroyo Crossing Parkway Suite 220
Las Vegas, NV 89113

Want to change how you receive these emails?

You can [update your preferences](#) or [unsubscribe from this list](#)



Copyright © 2019 The Nevada Independent
All rights reserved

NEWS

Reno River Festival to return in 2021 with tickets, but no kayaking

Jenny Kane Reno Gazette Journal

Published 1:59 p.m. PT Apr. 12, 2021 | Updated 4:52 p.m. PT Apr. 12, 2021

As with many returning events this summer, the Reno River Festival will have a few changes this year, including no river kayaking competitions.

The river festival will continue as a celebration around downtown Reno's stretch of the Truckee River, but it will not include the wet and wild river kayaking races as a crowd control measure.

"Typically, people gather in large crowds on the rocks along the river to watch the competitions, and in order to comply with COVID-19 regulations, we need to keep crowd sizes down," said Katie Heuberger, a spokeswoman for the festival.

The competitions are additionally not taking place because the festival usually takes place on Mother's Day weekend, when the river is at peak flow. This year, the festival will occur about a month after the peak has passed, Heuberger said, noting that the drought forced the cancellation of competitions in 2015 as well.

Still, the festival will feature local craft beer, food, vendors and music at Wingfield Park from June 12-13.

For the first time in the festival's 17-year history, entry will require purchase of tickets. General admission tickets are \$15 per day, with extra activities such as the craft beer tours and hard seltzer tour costing extra, between \$30 and \$50 additionally per day. Tickets are to help ensure that the event does not become overcrowded, organizers said.

Participants can also purchase \$249 tickets for a private table at the MusicFest, two days of live music on-site. Details on the acts have not been released.

"Craft vendors, food trucks, performers, and all of those who rely on events to make a living have been hit especially hard by the pandemic," says Jess Horning, co-owner and co-founder of Liquid Blue Events, which hosts the festival. "This festival is a chance for the community to get outside and support local."

COVID-19 restrictions will be in place at the festival including mask and social distancing requirements. Those restrictions are subject to change per Washoe County's latest pandemic measures. For updated information, go to RenoRiverFestival.com.

IF YOU GO

What: Reno River Festival

Where: Wingfield Park

When: June 12 - 13

Tickets: \$15 per person, per day for general admission; beer and seltzer tours and private tables at MusicFest cost extra.

Jenny Kane covers arts and culture in Northern Nevada, as well as the dynamic relationship between the state and the growing Burning Man community. She also covers the state's burgeoning cannabis industry (Check out her podcast, the Potcast, on iTunes.) Support her work in Reno by subscribing to RGJ.com right here.

Singapore

300,000 households, businesses to get new smart water meters from early 2022



A couple testing out the new smart water meters that aim to drive water efficiency within households. (Photo: Facebook/PUB, Singapore's National Water Agency)

By [Vanessa Paige Chelvan](#) (/author/7542030)

15 Apr 2021 12:19PM

(Updated: 15 Apr 2021 12:26PM)

<https://v1.addthis.com/live/redirect/?url=mailto%3A%3Fbody%3Dhttps%253A%252F%252Fwww.channelnewsasia.com%252Fnews%252Fsingapore%252F300-000-households-businesses-new-smart-water-meters-pub-14625622%2523.Ylmo5dJgLYM.mailto%26subject%3D300%252C000%2520households%252C%2520businesses%2520to%5e0028e53cd1fd98&rev=v8.28.8-wp&per=undefined&pco=tbx-300>



Bookmark



SINGAPORE: About 300,000 households and businesses in Singapore will have [new smart water meters](#) (/news/singapore/pub-install-300-000-smart-water-meters-singapore-2023-track-app-11438088) from early next year, allowing them to monitor their daily water usage and receive alerts about suspected leaks.

This comes as national water agency PUB launches the first phase of its Smart Water Meter Programme.

The programme will be rolled out at Bukit Batok, Hougang, Jurong West, Tampines, Tampines North, Tengah and Tuas, PUB said on Thursday (Apr 15). Meter installation is expected to start in early 2022 and be completed in 2023.

“In selecting these locations, PUB had considered a range of factors including property mix, efficiency of deployment and the need to replace older conventional water meters,” the agency said.

The meters will be installed at no cost to customers. Customers will receive notification letters from PUB prior to the installation.

SP Group’s subsidiary, SP Services Limited, has been appointed for the S\$123.7 million smart water metering project.

Advertisement

► **Commentary: Think outside of the box to tackle water scarcity** (/news/singapore/singapore-water-management-strategy-financing-smart-devices-10596216?cid=h3_referral_inarticlelinks_24082018_cna)

Currently, conventional water meters are read manually once every two months, and customers are billed every month with their water consumption estimated every alternate month.

Smart water meters will eliminate the need for manual readings, as the devices can read and remotely transmit data back to PUB daily.

Customers will also be able to access near real-time data to track their daily water usage, and will can also receive alerts about high consumption and suspected leaks.

Advertisement

Such leaks often go unnoticed until customers receive a higher than usual water bill at the end of the month, PUB said. Tracking their daily consumption will also help customers become smarter users of water, saving water and money in the process, the agency added.

“The Smart Water Meter Programme is an important pillar in PUB’s Smart Roadmap, which outlines our vision to digitalise Singapore’s entire water system. With access to near real-time monitoring and data across the water network, this allows us to transform our operations and planning to meet Singapore’s water needs,” said Ridzuan Ismail, Director of Water Supply (Network).

“With increasing water demand and challenges posed by climate change on our water resources, we are also constantly challenged to find more efficient ways to supply water and conserve water, in order to safeguard Singapore’s water security,” he added.

► **Commentary: Reducing household water consumption starts with the toilet bowl** (/news/singapore/commentary-reducing-household-water-consumption-starts-with-the-14445242?cid=h3_referral_inarticlelinks_24082018_cna)

Mr Ridzuan also said that smart water meters that can provide near real-time water use information will help to change consumer behavior and give a major push to water conservation efforts.

Following the roll-out of this first phase, PUB will look to install smart water meters nationwide, the agency said.

The meters will be installed as part of PUB’s meter replacement programme at no cost to customers.

Source: CNA/vc

Tagged Topics

Water – the next frontier for smart network technologies

Apr 16, 2021



Image credit: Stock



Leak detection is a key use case for the smart water network with acoustic leak detectors a supplement to district metered areas.

The electricity smart grid has attracted much publicity as smart meters and subsequently other smart technologies have brought intelligence and automation to the distribution and transmission systems.

Though not so high profile, the water networks are no less significant in need of being ‘smartened’.

Smart water metering is one key technology. While water meter reading requirements are not so stringent as electricity and demand management is not generally a requirement, smart water metering is no less important in securing regular and accurate readings for billing and eliminating the need for physical meter reading.

Have you read?

[Smart meter data crucial for Texas utilities in post-storm repairs](#)

[City of Atlanta extends analytics deal to improve management of water meters](#)

[Louisville Water Company goes digital with Oracle Utilities](#)

Prepayment is an option for customers and changes of property ownership can be handled remotely with remote switching.

Smart water metering also could leapfrog the basic metering in the many locations still without, where billing is not based on usage but another factor such as the property value or size.

Then there are the ‘smart grid’ technologies for monitoring and management of the water networks.

This site uses cookies which are essential to make the site function effectively. By using our site you accept the terms of our cookie policy.

ACCEPT

[Cookie Policy](#)

But arguably one of the most fundamental is leak monitoring, with water lost to leaks, and hence to revenue collection, averaging around 30% globally.

“Such technologies have the goal of enabling operational visibility into the health of the distribution system as well as helping utilities improve their operational efficiencies through effective and targeted water loss reduction,” says Sheila Kee, Senior Product Manager Water Operations Management at Itron.

District metering areas

Traditionally leak detection for water and also gas has been based on district metering areas. A service territory is divided into ‘districts’ and in essence, the metered flow into and out of the districts is compared with the metered volume to the properties within the district, with a difference indicative of a leak.

This district metering approach has been implemented at the southern Kentucky Warren County Water District since as far back as the 1980s, long before it became widely implemented.

However, when the company, which also manages the neighbouring Simpson County Water and Butler County Water districts, came to audit the losses, it felt an additional approach was needed.

“Although our infrastructure leakage indexes suggested we are in good shape, a different story is painted when the cost of the water is applied to the losses,” said BJ Malone, Manager of IT/GIS at Warren Water and project lead of the AMR/AMI implementation in a presentation at Itron [Utility Week EMEA in March](#).

“Together the cost to the three systems is approaching \$900,000 and for example for Simpson the losses amount to almost 20% by volume and 10% of the operating budget.”

Together, the three counties have about 3,300km of transmission and distribution lines, 380km of service lines and 280km of collection lines serving over 39,000 water and 7,500 sewer customers over a 3,100km² area. Across the three areas, approximately 600 leaks have been detected each year.

While district metering has obvious efficacy, a challenge is that if a leak is suspected technicians often have to work through the area to locate it, which can take time and resources. A further specific challenge with the Warren County area is that with its Karst topography, drainage from leaks can be downwards rather than to the surface.

This site uses cookies which are essential to make the site function effectively. By using our site you accept the terms of our cookie policy.

[ACCEPT](#) [Cookie Policy](#)

After a six-month pilot, full-scale deployment was initiated, with over 18,000 Itron AMR and AMI endpoints and almost 11,000 Itron Riva leak sensors now in the field.

“At this point we’re off to the races,” says Malone, noting that the locations of the leak sensors have been optimised with GIS.

Data analysis is via an online platform, with data from all sensors uploaded daily and mapped with colour coding according to leak probability for easy visualisation.

“In addition to the main and service line leaks and being able to zero in more quickly on the location of the leak which we expected, we also have had some unexpected results,” Malone says.

“One of these is detection of customer side leaks, which we wouldn’t normally pick up on the meter due to the low flow. The other is busted meter bottoms and this is particularly important now with AMR/AMI that meter readers aren’t opening the boxes and looking inside regularly.”

With the system over the past year on average 11 service line leaks per month were found, with volumes ranging from just over 2l per minute up to 140l per minute with an average almost 50l per minute.

Sign up to our newsletter

“For us acoustic leak detection is an enhancement to our established district metering areas in enabling us to find and repair more leaks in less time,” Malone concludes.

“We feel we have done well and expect the water loss improvements to increase as we complete the rollout over the next couple of years.”

Itron will host its flagship event, **Itron Utility Week** (IUW), virtually for smart city and utility leaders in the Asia-Pacific (APAC) region on April 21 and 22, 2021.

Register for this free event.

This site uses cookies which are essential to make the site function effectively. By using our site you accept the terms of our cookie policy.

ACCEPT Cookie Policy

Jonathan Spencer Jones

Jonathan Spencer Jones is a writer and analyst with more than 20 years covering the energy transition and the evolution of digitalisation in metering and the grid. He is a former editor of Smart Energy International and ESI Africa and was involved with the digital offerings of these publications from their conception. He is a physicist by training and began his career as a research astronomer before transitioning to STM publishing.



This site uses cookies which are essential to make the site function effectively. By using our site you accept the terms of our cookie policy.

[ACCEPT](#) [Cookie Policy](#)

Search Site

Man-made lakes supplying water to millions in the West expected to shrink to historic lows

by SAM METZ, The Associated Press
Saturday, April 17th 2021

AA



In this July 28, 2014, file photo, lightning strikes over Lake Mead near Hoover Dam that impounds Colorado River water at the Lake Mead National Recreation Area in Arizona. The Bureau of Reclamation is forecasting first-ever water shortages because of falling levels at Lake Mead and says the reservoir could drop so low that it might not be able to generate electricity at Hoover Dam. (AP Photo/John Locher, File)

coming months, dropping to levels that could trigger the federal government's first ever official

Search Site

The U.S. Bureau of Reclamation released 24-month projections this week forecasting that less Colorado River water will cascade down from the Rocky Mountains through Lake Powell and Lake Mead and into the arid deserts of the U.S. Southwest and the Gulf of California. Water levels in the two lakes are expected to plummet low enough for the agency to declare an official shortage for the first time, threatening the supply of Colorado River water that growing cities and farms rely on.

It comes as climate change means less snowpack flows into the river and its tributaries, and hotter temperatures parch soil and cause more river water to evaporate as it streams through the drought-plagued American West.

The agency's models project Lake Mead will fall below 1,075 feet (328 meters) for the first time in June 2021. That's the level that prompts a shortage declaration under agreements negotiated by seven states that rely on Colorado River water: Arizona, California, Colorado, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah and Wyoming.

will not have binding im
 ose released each Augt

58°

85°

Press Clips
 86° to

allocate river water. If projections don't improve by then, the Bureau of Reclamation will

Search Site

Arizona, Nevada and Mexico have voluntarily given up water under a drought contingency plan for the river signed in 2019. A shortage declaration would subject the two U.S. states to their first mandatory reductions. Both rely on the Colorado River more than any other water source, and Arizona stands to lose roughly one-third of its supply.

Water agency officials say they're confident their preparation measures, including conservation and seeking out alternative sources, would allow them to withstand cuts if the drought lingers as expected.

"The study, while significant, is not a surprise. It reflects the impacts of the dry and warm conditions across the Colorado River Basin this year, as well as the effects of a prolonged drought that has impacted the Colorado River water supply," officials from the Arizona Department of Water Resources and Central Arizona Project said in a joint statement.

In Nevada, the agency that supplies water to most of the state has constructed "straws" to draw water from further down in Lake Mead as its levels fall. It also has created a credit system where it can bank recycled water back into the reservoir without having it count toward its allocation.

Colby Pellegrino, director of water resources for the Southern Nevada Water Authority, reassured customers that those preparation measures would insulate them from the effects of cuts. But she warned that more action was needed.

"It is incumbent upon all users of the Colorado River to find ways to conserve," Pellegrino said in a statement.

The Bureau of Reclamation also projected that Lake Mead will drop to the point they worried in the past could threaten electricity generation at Hoover Dam. The hydropower serves millions of customers in Arizona, California and Nevada.

To prepare for a future with less water, the bureau has spent 10 years replacing parts of five of the dam's 17 turbines that rotate to generate power. Len Schilling, a dam manager with the

-head turbines allow the
turbines will be able to generate

58°

85°

Pressy Clips
86°
called

"deadpool" when there won't be enough water for the dam to function

Search Site

But Schilling noted that less water moving through Hoover Dam means less hydropower to go around.

"As the elevation declines at the lake, then our ability to produce power declines as well because we have less water pushing on the turbines," he said.

The hydropower costs substantially less than the energy sold on the wholesale electricity market because the government charges customers only for the cost of producing it and maintaining the dam.

Lincoln County Power District General Manager Dave Luttrell said infrastructure updates, less hydropower from Hoover Dam and supplemental power from other sources like natural gas raised costs and alarmed customers in his rural Nevada district.

"Rural economies in Arizona and Nevada live and die by the hydropower that is produced at Hoover Dam. It might not be a big deal to NV Energy," he said of Nevada's largest utility. "It might be a decimal point to Los Angeles Department of Water and Power. But for Lincoln County, it adds huge impact."

MORE TO EXPLORE

Woman, 4-year-old son found shot during welfare check at home

Reno woman sentenced to prison for opioid conspiracy case

Cellmate suspected of killing Washoe County inmate in Nevada prison

Crews battle rockfall rather than snow as drought conditions prevail on Sierra mountain passes

Amy Alonzo

Reno Gazette Journal



Each year, dozens of California Department of Transportation employees gear up for one of their most daunting tasks – plowing the mountain passes that separate California’s Central Valley from the eastern Sierra Nevada, an outdoor-lover’s playground.

Skiers, snowmobilers, backpackers and rock climbers anxiously await as crews clear the piles of snow, wondering when Caltrans will open gates that block access to the passes.

This year, outdoor enthusiasts won’t have to wait long. Nearly 80 percent of California and a whopping 92 percent of Nevada is in a severe drought, and the snowpack that is there is melting rapidly.

Caltrans District 9 crew members plowed Tioga Pass Road on the eastern side of Yosemite National Park, from Lee Vining to the park gate, in less than three days, punching through to the park entrance on Friday.

It usually takes the better part of a month to clear the road.

“This is probably the lowest I’ve ever seen it,” said Caltrans Maintenance Area Superintendent Clint Weier of the region’s snow levels. Weier has been with the agency for two decades.

In a year where road crews didn’t even have to drop a plow until they reached an elevation of 9,000 feet, Weier and other Caltrans veterans agree on one thing: The snowpack is low.

'Not much of a challenge'

Each spring, Caltrans personnel gather to assess plowing strategies for the passes. Some of the first people to see what the snowpack looks like in the Sierra Nevada each year, they analyze snow levels, rockfall, upcoming storms and weather patterns to determine when to start clearing the roads.

More: Wildfires, bears, dust: All of Nevada is in a drought. What does that mean for residents?

More: 'Mediocre' water year wraps up for Tahoe, Truckee basins

"It's weather conditions and forecast. And really the amount we got over the winter. If we had had a really big snow year, we might have tried to get up there a little sooner," Weier said.

Two years ago, in a freak May blizzard, operations were shut down and crews had to re-plow the road to reach the vehicles they had stashed at their high point on the highway.

"That happens all the time up here," Weier said.

In the winter of 2016-17, nearly 30 feet of snow covered the road, and plow drivers couldn't see poles that help mark the road's boundary, said Maintenance Supervisor Randy Walker. The snow was so low it was nearly in town.

"That's the lowest I've ever seen the snow level where we had to start running the plows," Weier said. "It was at the lower gate."

When crews started plowing this year, about five feet of snow covered the road above 9,000 feet.

"My guys are disappointed this year. It's not much of a challenge opening the pass," Walker said.

In 2017, crews ran into an early season avalanche on Tioga Pass.

"We were making good progress, [then] we hit a debris flow and it took us another day and a half to go another 100 feet and get through it," he said. This year, the crew flew through the area in what seemed like a matter of minutes.

They cleared 1.5 miles of road the first day, a mile the second day, and then made it to the park gate, roughly 12 miles up, on the third day.

On one portion of the road between the park entrance and a vibrant green bridge that spans Lee Vining Canyon, wind and snow slides can pile up extra snow, topping 100 feet some years. This year, crews found eight feet of snow.



According to Yosemite Rangers Rob and Laura Pilewski who winter in Tuolumne Meadows, spring touched the region at the end of March with near-record high temperatures in the 50s.

"It was warm and dry in the Yosemite high country this week," they reported to the National Park Service. "The sound of wind has been replaced by the sound of running water."

It's not as dire as the droughts of the 1970s, said District 9 Maintenance Manager II Greg Miller, who has 39 winters with Caltrans. Or the drought of '91, when the plow crews got laid off in February because there was so little snow.

But still, it doesn't look good.

According to the U.S. Drought monitor, nearly 37 million Californians and Nevadans are living in drought-stricken areas.



Battling constant rockfall

At 9,945 feet, Tioga Pass is California's highest automobile pass, with a precipitous drop on its south side into Lee Vining Canyon.

Originally built as a dirt wagon road in 1883 and 1910, the road provided access to a silver mine in the area. Through access between the eastern and western Sierra opened in 1915.

On Tuesday, with most of the snow cleared, crews were battling gusting winds that were topping 100 mph on mountain crests while clearing the road of fallen rock.

"We have a problem with freeze thaw," Weier said. "Water gets into the cracks and expands and fractures the rocks and makes it come down. There's no way to inspect that. You can't go up and monitor every rock and every crack."

Rockfall rains down on the road all summer long, said Miller, a licensed blaster and hazmat specialist who oversees avalanche and rock blasting for the district. Crews clear the road of rocks twice a day, seven days a week.

Weier remembers his dad taking him up on the pass when he was a kid.

"When I was about that tall," he said, holding his hand out about waist-high, "he was a supervisor and he took me with him on a rock run. There was a rock he couldn't move with a little plow, so he parked in a spot where we shouldn't have rocks come down, and moved it by hand, when a rock the size of a truck came down. It sounded just like thunder and lightning when it hit the ground."

The pair quickly hopped in their truck and drove back down the highway.

Now, crews build rock and gravel berms along the highway, serving as barriers for falling rocks, as well as guardrails on the steep road that drops off hundreds of feet on its south side.

Pressure to open the gates

Without a lot of snow, Caltrans gets a lot of pressure to open gates to the mountain passes early, Miller said.

“But we don’t do it until it’s safe,” he said.

Miller estimates Tioga Pass will open to the park entrance on April 23. Yosemite National Park has just started plowing the western side of the pass, and there is no estimated date when the road will fully open.

On Sonora Pass, just north of Yosemite, Caltrans crews have already plowed the eastern side of the road to a gate that separates the east side from the west side. Crews on the west side are nearing the summit.

“We may open some of the lower gates,” Weier said.

Monitor Pass, which connects Ebbetts Pass with Hwy. 395 near Topaz, is already open.

Historical opening dates for Sierra Nevada mountain passes, with snowpack levels as of April 1, are:

	Year	Tioga Pass	Monitor Pass	Sonora Pass	Ebbetts
		Pass			
		Snowpack			
•	2021:	N/A	April		
	9	N/A	N/A	N/A	
•	2020:	June 15	May 8	May 15	May
	15	46%			
•	2019:	July 1	April 21	May 30	May
	15	176%			

Amy Alonzo covers the outdoors, recreation and environment for Nevada and Lake Tahoe. Reach her at aalonzo@gannett.com or (775) 741-8588. [Here's how you can support ongoing coverage and local journalism.](#)

\

Washoe County Commissioners to vote on amended COVID-19 reopening plan

by Madison Macay

Monday, April 19th 2021

RENO, Nev. (News 4 & Fox 11) — Washoe County Commissioners will be voting on the [reopening plan](#) for the county Tuesday, April 20.

The following are some of the upcoming changes being proposed on the agenda:

- Allow 10 people to a group in restaurants and event settings
- Eliminate social distance minimums for outdoor events
- Private gatherings are un-enforceable, so they should not be addressed in the plan
- Masks will not be required during exercise, such as working out at a gym or athletic activities
- Vaccination rate of 50 percent to lessen current restrictions (for example, to move from 6 feet of distancing to 3 feet indoors)

On April 13, [Governor Sisolak announced](#) his confidence in every county being able to fully reopen at 100% capacity by June 1. He also recognized that counties may want to fully open even earlier, when the power is transferred to individual counties on May 1.

Local businesses like Recycled Records Reno are looking forward to getting closer to pre-pandemic capacity limits.

Recycled Records Reno is a Northern Nevada institution and they have been selling secondhand records since 1978.

Current statewide COVID-19 capacity limits for indoor businesses are capped at 50% of pre-code capacity. That means only 21 vintage lovers can browse music at a time at Recycled Records.

Current statewide standards also state retail stores must have "counters" at all public entrances to manage capacity and they must have health screening signage at public entrances. They are also encouraged to conduct temperature screenings before entry.

A document put together by Washoe County on mitigation measures, ready to take effect when we turn to local authority on May 1 states, "If possible, maintain social distancing between customers. If not possible or causes a hardship to monitor, limit to 50% capacity" for retail establishments.

There will be no requirement for health screenings, temperature checks or counters at the front of the business, according to the May 1 local authority plan.

Recycled Records store manager, Kevin Howell, says one of the tasks of running a record store is not only about the music, but staying up to date with new county guidelines. As those loosen, Howell is hoping for the best.

“ *I think it's just going to continue to get better. We're just going to keep following the guidelines and get as many people in here as we can, and just keep going forward instead of backwards.*

For more information on the current Washoe County COVID-19 mitigation measures, [click here](#).
For more information on the local authority plan, [click here](#).

To view the April 10 meeting agenda, [click here](#).

To watch the meeting live at 10 a.m., [click here](#).

California governor declares drought emergency in 2 counties

Gov. Gavin Newsom has declared a drought emergency in two Northern California counties as the state grapples with depleted water supplies after a dry winter

By KATHLEEN RONAYNE and JOHN ANTCHAK Associated Press

April 21, 2021, 4:33 PM • 5 min read



The Associated Press

FILE - In this July 8, 2014, file photo, is a sign alerting visitors to water conservation efforts at the...[Read More](#)

SACRAMENTO, Calif. -- Standing in the dry, cracked bottom of what should have been a more watery Lake Mendocino, Gov. Gavin Newsom declared a drought emergency Wednesday in two Northern California counties in response to arid conditions affecting much of the state and the West Coast.

The declaration is targeted to Mendocino and Sonoma counties, where drought conditions are especially bad, rather than statewide, as some Central Valley farmers and officials had hoped. But Newsom said a broader drought declaration could come as conditions change.

Recent Stories from ABC News



California, which is now in its second year of drought, is bracing for another devastating wildfire season after a winter with little precipitation.

"Oftentimes we overstate the word historic, but this is indeed an historic moment, certainly historic for this particular lake, Mendocino," Newsom said, standing where 40 feet (12 meters) of lake water was supposed to be. The lake is at about 40% of normal capacity.

About three-quarters of the western United States is in what is called a megadrought

Last week, hundreds of farmers who rely on a massive irrigation project spanning the Oregon-California border were told they'll get a fraction of the water they need as federal regulators attempt to balance agriculture with federally threatened and endangered fish species central to the heritage of several tribes.

The two California counties spotlighted by Newsom are part of the Russian River watershed, which is about 110 miles (177 km) long and stretches from the Redwood Valley and Ukiah down to Santa Rosa. Lakes Mendocino and Sonoma are the primary sources of water for residents and commercial users like wineries, and together they provide water for about 600,000 people, said Grant Davis, general manager for Sonoma Water.

Beyond the drought declaration in the two counties, Newsom's executive order allows the state to prepare for expected effects of the water shortage statewide more quickly. Though he did not declare a statewide drought emergency, the State Water Resources Control Board in March sent early warnings to 40,000 water rights holders urging them to start conserving. The board suggested that agricultural users reduce irrigation and seek other water sources, and that urban users put in drought-resistant landscaping and replace household appliances with water-saving ones.

"If you're in a different part of the state, you probably need to know that this will one day happen to you," Karla Nemeth, director of the California Department of Water Resources, said of the drought declaration.

The department says this is the fourth driest year on record statewide, especially in the northern two-thirds of the state. But Newsom said urban Californians are also using 16% less water than they were at the start of the last major drought, which lasted from 2012 to 2016. That drought prompted Gov. Jerry Brown to impose broad restrictions on water use that affected nearly all Californians.

"We've barely been out of those drought conditions and here we are entering back into these drought conditions," he said.

Farmers and leaders in the Central Valley are still hoping for a statewide declaration.

"The Central Valley can't afford to be overlooked. California is in a drought. We need a statewide emergency declaration immediately in order to deliver more water to farmers and growers in the valley," Sen. Andreas Borgeas, a Republican who represents Fresno County, said in a statement.

Nemeth, of the Department of Water Resources, said an emergency declaration isn't yet necessary in the valley because unlike in the Russian River watershed, water users there have access to multiple sources and streams of water. The state's executive order will not increase the allocation for valley farmers, but it will make it easier to transfer water, she said.

"We're managing the system just very, very tightly but there aren't emergency powers that we need to do the things that would help the valley," she said.

Under Wednesday's order, the state Water Resources Control Board power can curtail water rights in those counties if major water users do not voluntarily begin to conserve. Some of the largest commercial water users in the region are grape growers and wineries. Local governments could place restrictions on residential water users as part of the conservation effort.

The Russian River watershed is unique in that it relies much more on falling precipitation as it is “geographically isolated” from larger water systems in the state, said Wade Crowfoot, the state’s natural resources secretary.

Without aggressive conservation, the lake is likely to be extremely low by October.

“We could be out of water,” Davis said.

Elsewhere, local water districts are already taking action to address dry conditions. In Marin County, which abuts Sonoma, water officials voted Tuesday night to require residents to reduce water use through measures such as washing vehicles at home and filling backyard pools. People could face fines for violations.

Newsom said he's not anticipating issuing mandates but said he's planning for everything.

Antczak reported from Los Angeles. AP writer Janie Har contributed from San Francisco.

Drought, demands on groundwater making water law even more contentious

State commission starts rethinking adjudication procedures

By **Jeniffer Solis** - April 20, 2021



It's dry out there. (Getty Images, Creative)

Water law adjudication, already a complicated field, will only become more so because of the climate crisis, extended droughts, and increasing demand for groundwater in Nevada, the Supreme Court was told last week. The court Friday held its first meeting for the newly created commission to study the adjudication of water law cases.

Members of the commission range from ranchers to conservationists to mining industry representatives and scientists. Several judges for rural counties were appointed to the commission, including from Lyon and White Pine County, who oversee a significant number of water law cases in their courts.

The commission comes after Chief Justice James Hardesty [filed a petition](#) to start the commission with an eye toward possibly creating a water law specialty court. However, the core mission of the commission is to improve the education, training, specialization, timeliness, and efficiency of the court's approach to water law. Water law cases frequently involve the assessment of lengthy records, specific scientific concepts, conflicting expert testimony, and years of relevant Nevada history, Hardesty noted in his petition.

"This is not a commission that's designed to rewrite Nevada's water law or its statutes. We might in the progression of the commission's work identify areas where recommendations might be made...but the principle objective of this commission is to focus on the process by which we adjudicate water rights," said Justice Hardesty during the meeting.

Adam Sullivan, the acting state engineer, said primary resource challenges facing the state include prolonged drought cycles, a lack of available water throughout the year, and greater demand for groundwater.

"We are experiencing increasing temperatures across the state. Climate models consistently forecast that we will continue to see greater extremes in drought periods and flood intensity," Sullivan said.

"What this means is a longer growing season and higher water demands for crops."

In Nevada, the average annual surface water usage is about 4-5 million acre-feet annually. A majority of that water – about 65 percent – is used for irrigation. Another 16 percent is used for municipal purposes and the remaining largest share – 19 percent – is used for wildlife and recreation.

About 1.5 million acre-feet of Nevada groundwater is used every year, about two-thirds of it for irrigation. The second and third biggest uses are mining at 10 percent and municipal uses at about 9 percent, respectfully.

"The greatest short-term impact is to our agricultural regions where reliable water supply on an annual basis is important for crops and local economies," Sullivan said.

Water for environmental needs like springs and other aquatic habitats is also a concern because those resources don't have the explicit protections afforded to water rights holders, Sullivan said.

"Increased development and competing demands put pressure on our water security across the state. As we grow and diversify water demands evolve and generally increase, but the supply is limited. This inherently creates conflict and our water laws have limited tools for how to manage it," Sullivan said.

Sullivan said the Nevada Division of Water Resources is understaffed and overburdened by managing increasingly complex water conflicts.

Courts are reluctant to uphold cancellation or forfeitures of water rights, said Sullivan, contending that courts commonly find that water authorities followed the law, yet compassion for the circumstances overwrites statutory requirements.

Nevada's water laws are founded on prior appropriation, meaning priority is given to the first person who used the water for beneficial use, but inconsistent application of state statutes makes resolving conflicts difficult, said Sullivan.

In establishing a water law specialty court, Nevada would be following the example of other states in the region.

According to a survey by the Nevada Division of Water Resources, four western states — Colorado, Idaho, Montana, and New Mexico — have created some kind of specialty court to handle water cases.

All states with water courts have also provided specialized education and training for judges who serve on water cases.

"From my perspective, I think Nevada water law has served this state very well. There is a great deal of flexibility in it," said practicing water law attorney Gordon DePaoli, who represents the Truckee Meadows Water Authority.

Attorneys on the commission generally agreed that one of their top priorities should be shortening the length of time it takes to adjudicate water law decisions. Cases can take years to adjudicate, adversely delaying final water law decisions in the state. State water regulators [say there's been an increase](#) in frivolous claims and unnecessary litigation over the past 10 years.

Members of the commission also requested more data on specific cases that show inconsistent decisions made by courts and how those decisions challenged statewide administration of water rights.

Judicial education on the complexities of water law, as other states have implemented, was supported by several commission members.

Oscar Wichman, who represents rural counties, suggested creating a specialized court system divided up to seven districts with lifetime appointments for judges assigned by the Supreme Court. Mining attorney Ross de Lipkau similarly suggested the Supreme Court appoint a few district court judges to hear all water-related cases.

"We have a system, that while not perfect, guarantees local representation, and I think that's inherent in the current judicial review process that we have in law right now and I think that's extremely important to maintain," said Kyle Roerink, executive director of the Great Basin Water Network and commission member.

Jeniffer Solis

Reporter | Jeniffer was born and raised in Las Vegas, Nevada where she attended the University of Nevada, Las Vegas before graduating in 2017 with a B.A in Journalism and Media Studies. While at UNLV she was a senior staff writer for the student newspaper, the UNLV Scarlet and Gray Free Press, and a news reporter for KUNV 91.5 FM, covering everything from the Route 91 shooting to UNLV housing. She has also contributed to the UNLV News Center and worked as a production engineer for several KUNV broadcasts before joining the Nevada Current. She's an Aries.

BUSINESS & DEVELOPMENT

River Forest OKs contract for water meter infrastructure upgrade

New system will take readings remotely via radio signal



by **Robert J. Lifka**

April 20, 2021 Updated April 21, 2021



The River Forest officials took a major step in a major infrastructure project at the April 12 virtual village board meeting, approving a contract with Siemens Industry Inc. for services related to the planned \$1.32 million automatic metering infrastructure (AMI) system.

Under the contract, Siemens will provide consulting services, project management assistance and installation and verification of water meters and multiplexer units (MXU) for the fixed-base AMI system for a fixed cost of \$1,028,343.

The AMI project will entail upgrading water meters throughout the village with state-of-art equipment that will allow the village to obtain meter readings without requiring public works staff members to perform a “drive-by” read, which is the current practice.

According to John Anderson, public works director, the project will deliver better customer service by providing accurate bills based on actual consumption that can be seen in real time by providing meter reads on a daily basis.

It can also help identify any irregularities in water usage such as leaks being experienced by residents, he added. The project will require upgrading 1,964 of the village’s 3,180 existing water meters to new meters that will have the ability to provide digital readings and new MXUs, which are small battery-powered devices installed close to the meters.

Since the remote reads will be collected by radio signal, the village will need to install one or two central antennae. Anderson previously identified the water tower, the pumping station and village hall as potential locations. River Forest officials will use the village’s existing meter manufacturer, Sensus, for the project, he added.

The contract also calls for Siemens to provide a public relations campaign that will inform residents about the program, providing informational fliers and a toll-free number for them residents to call for any questions they have about the project.

Short videos will be produced providing information and details of the program that will be displayed on the village website. A list of frequently asked questions also will be created and posted on village web sources to inform residents and answer their questions.

Anderson said preliminary work will begin “within the next several weeks” and the entire process will take approximately one year which brings completion to spring/summer of 2022.

Preliminary work includes data collection of the village’s current meter and MXU inventory, identifying the location of the antenna or antennas and reviewing information technology needs.

Officials also will determine current processes and how they can be improved in the future and determine of the scope and selection process of the AMI wireless network and potential leak-detection providers.

© 2021 Growing Community Media, NFP.

Proudly powered by Newspack by Automattic

NEWS

Frustrated Washoe County commissioners approve new proposed COVID-19 mitigation measures

Terrell Wilkins Reno Gazette Journal

Published 5:39 p.m. PT Apr. 20, 2021

Businesses in Washoe County will no longer be subject to capacity limits and will be asked to follow social distancing guidelines starting May 1 under a proposed COVID-19 mitigation plan approved Tuesday by the Washoe County Commission.

The plan must be approved by a state task force before it would take effect on May 1, the same day that Nevada counties are set to take over most COVID-19 mitigation measures from the state.

Gov. Steve Sisolak's statewide mask mandate will remain in place indefinitely.

Under the plan, most businesses such as restaurants, bars, gyms, arcades and museums will no longer have to operate at 50 percent capacity, while the county "recommends" they follow social distancing guidelines. Starting on June 1, state-mandated social distancing requirements will be dropped under Sisolak's most recent reopening plan.

Groups of 10 would be allowed to be seated together in restaurants, private gatherings would not be policed and events of more than 500 people could submit a plan for approval by the county.

Strip clubs and nightclubs would be allowed to open on June 1.

Restrictions could be reinstated if the Truckee Meadows COVID-19 Risk Meter hits red or new case counts reach 625 cases per 100,000.

Plan vs. no plan

The initial conversation between commissioners centered around the importance of adopting a local authority plan at all give Sisolak's new reopening directive.

Commissioner Vaughn Hartung expressed frustration with the changing nature of reopening plans, sharing that he didn't feel the board had much say in the final guidelines.

"They're asking us for a plan but then when we give a plan we can't get all the people on board but we're not the ones who are in charge," Hartung said. "I'm frustrated beyond imagination that we're even sitting here having this conversation."

Hartung said that he felt the distinction between local authority plans and the default directives set forth by the governor were unnecessary.

"If all of this stuff is going to change on May 1 and if the governor is going to release us, let's let people make the decision," Hartung said.

He added that he supported letting people decide what they're uncomfortable with and let the state government take responsibility for enforcing their own default mandates.

"We just say that 'as of May 1 this is what we do' and basically fall back to the governor's directives which is let the businesses open, let people decide if they're uncomfortable with this," Hartung said. "If the governor has other mandates on top of that, then that'll be the state's responsibility. That's my opinion."

Due to the structure and timing of Sisolak's Emergency Directive 044 — his most recent reopening plan — coming through just before the discussion, Deputy District Attorney Nate Edwards cleared up what happens if the county elects not to adopt a local authority mitigation plan.

Edwards shared that if the county doesn't come up with its own plan, it automatically adopts the state's default COVID provisions instead.

"You have the authority to make your own decisions about something like social distancing, business caps and capacity caps if you adopt a plan," he said. "So there's a benefit to the county in adopting a local plan rather than just saying 'we're not gonna adopt one, we're gonna allow the state provisions to remain in effect'."

Commissioner Kitty Jung shared a similar sentiment, stating that making a plan would be better than letting the governor's current directives stay in place for businesses over the next month.

"I think the concern from staff, though it doesn't sound 100% logical to me, is that if we don't bring a plan like this we'll be stuck at 50% for the month of May," she said.

Another benefit of adopting a local plan, according to Edwards, is the freedom to make changes after June 1 without oversight from the state level.

"If you adopt the local plan, after June 1 you can amend it without going through the process of seeking endorsements and all that type of stuff," he said. "That leaves it to you and your discretion to make changes to your local plan."

"So I read those as incentives to the local governments to adopt the plan because it gives you more latitude moving forward."

Commissioners approved the version of the plan that has already received the required endorsements and it will be presented to the Nevada State COVID Task Force on Thursday for approval.

"We have to present something on Thursday. If we don't, we will find ourselves in a more difficult situation," Chair Bob Lucey said. "I feel that this is something we need to move forward with. I recommend that we vote on some sort of form of the endorsed plan. Then we can dissect this and put some definitions in our plan before we go before the state."

Follow reporter Terell Wilkins on Twitter, @terelljwilkins, call him at 252-367-8463 or email him at twilkins@rgj.com.



This stunning timelapse shows the megadrought's toll on the West's largest reservoir

Lake Mead's levels have dropped significantly since 1985, a bad omen for the regions that depend on it.

By Lili Pike | lili.pike@voxmedia.com | Apr 21, 2021, 8:00am EDT



Lake Mead marina, south of Las Vegas, Nevada, on August 23, 2020. | Daniel Slim/AFP via Getty Images

Just how bad is the **drought** in the Western US? The shrinking of Lake Mead, the country's largest reservoir, is a troubling indicator.

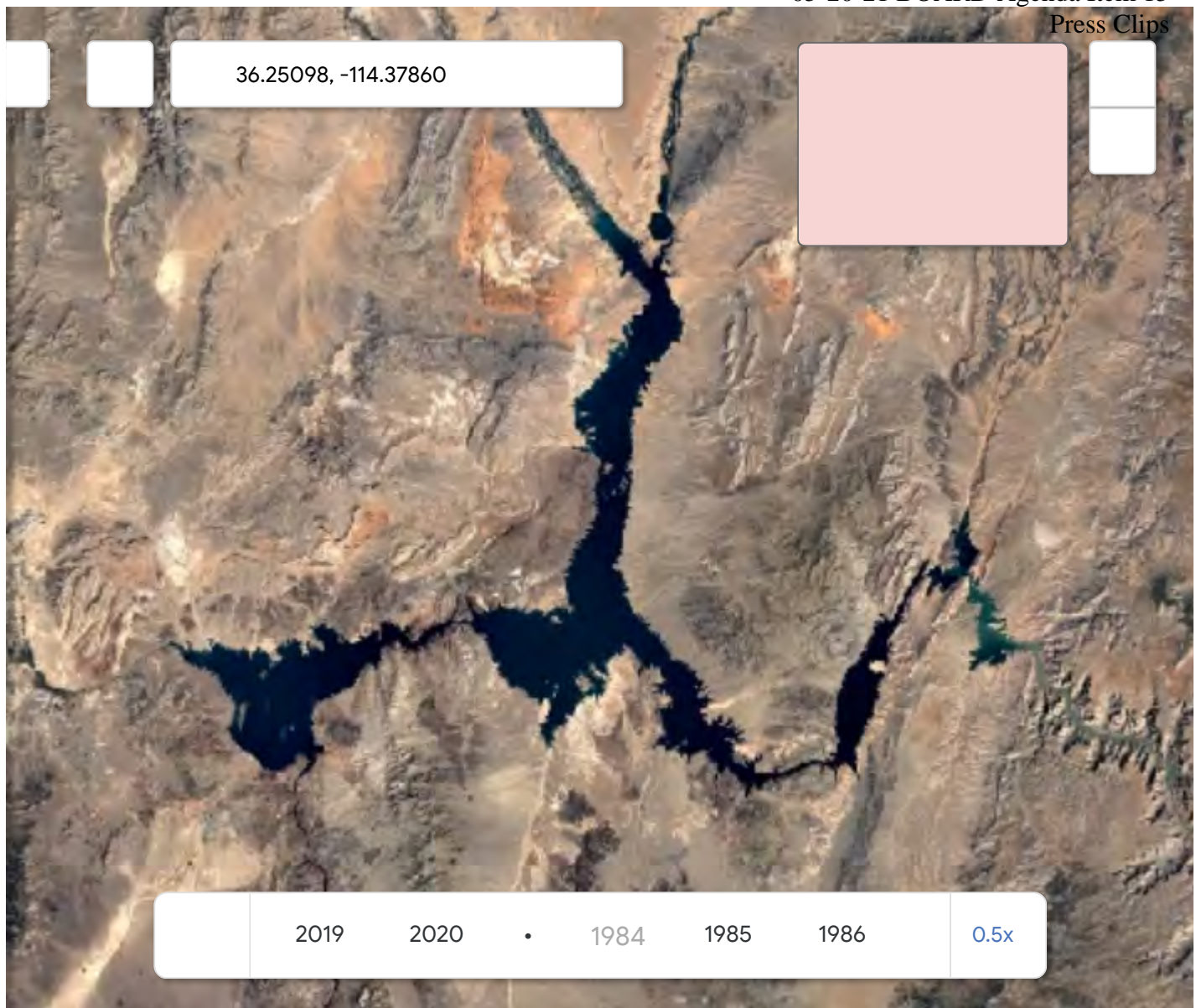
The massive man-made lake, which straddles the border of Arizona and Nevada, is now only at **39 percent** of its full capacity, down from **44 percent** in April 2020. That's

equivalent to a 10-foot drop in the water level, according to the latest data from the **Bureau of Reclamation**. Which means mandatory restrictions on the amount of water surrounding states draw from Lake Mead could be triggered in the next few months.

"This year will be really telling because it will provide a stress test of the newest policies that we thought were stricter but likely will need to be even more strict in the future," said Elizabeth Koebele, a political scientist at the University of Nevada who focuses on water policy.

The impending restrictions have been a long time coming — the reservoir started contracting well before 2020, as Vox writer Brad Plumer **explained** in 2016. The latest drought in the West is but one episode in a two-decade **megadrought**, and it has taken a toll on the Colorado River, which feeds Lake Mead.

The animated map below, from Google Earth's new **Timelapse feature**, shows just how much the reservoir's boundaries have shriveled since 1984.



Lake Mead's dropping water levels will affect Arizona's water supply as soon as next year

Lake Mead's recent contractions are concerning because the body supplies water to **25 million** people across Arizona, Nevada, California, and Mexico. Built in **1936**, the Hoover Dam and the attached reservoir have shaped the geography of the West, making life in Las Vegas and Los Angeles possible.

As the lake level has dropped, states have so far managed to avoid reaching the point where mandatory water restrictions kick in, but it looks like they are coming soon.

Sign up for The Weeds newsletter

Vox's German Lopez is here to guide you through the Biden administration's unprecedented burst of policymaking.

Sign up to receive our newsletter each Friday.

The Bureau of Reclamation keeps tabs on the lake by measuring its height at Hoover Dam. There, the water level is currently at 1,081 feet, and the Bureau **projects** it will drop below 1,075 feet as soon as June. After it crosses that threshold, the federal government will **declare** an official water shortage. Under a Drought Contingency Plan agreed upon by the affected states in 2019, some states will start to see big cuts in how much water they receive from Lake Mead starting in **2022**.

Based on the pecking order from **past negotiations**, Arizona will have the biggest reductions in allocation from Lake Mead while California won't face restrictions until the reservoir drops below **1,045 feet**. The agreement dictates that Arizona will have one-third of its water supply from the reservoir cut, Ian James **reported** for AZ Central. Farmers will be among the **most impacted**, according to the state's drought plan, but they will be allowed to use groundwater resources to compensate to some extent.

As a result of the preemptive drought planning, states have already prepared for the inevitable point when they will have to endure such cuts, said Koebele. "The basin has become increasingly collaborative over time, and people are thinking about it as, 'It's not if this happens, it's when it happens and how do we best handle it.'"

Generally speaking, she said, cities will be relatively unaffected by any cuts for now, whereas farms, which consume the vast majority of the basin's water, will have to start investing in technologies like drip irrigation to become more efficient.

Climate change poses a serious long-term threat to the millions who depend on the Colorado River

The imminent resource crunch is just the beginning of the problems for the millions of people in Arizona, Nevada, California, and Mexico who depend on Lake Mead and the Colorado River for their water.

Rising global temperatures are expected to bring more frequent and more intense droughts to the Southwest, according to the latest **National Climate Assessment**, which was authored by 13 US federal agencies in 2018. Climate change is also increasing the likelihood of long-term megadroughts like the one we are seeing now.

In a **2020 study** published in *Science*, US Geological Survey researchers found that warming will reduce the flow of the upper Colorado River by 14 to 26 percent by mid-century under a moderate climate action scenario.

"Climate change is really severely impacting the basin," said Koebele. Rising heat increases evaporation, she explained, "Even when we get a good snowpack, if the soil is super dry we can see really big reductions in run-off." That means less precipitation from the mountains ultimately makes it to the river.

To adjust to an increasingly water-scarce future, basin states and stakeholders are starting to negotiate a post-2026 deal, which will set the framework for the coming decades. In the meantime, cities and farms will need to continue to find ways to make their water use more efficient. Arizona is even considering building a **desalination plant** with Mexico to import water from the sea.

"We are going to hit a peak with efficiency and conservation, or hit a limit eventually, but there is still more to do there," Koebele said.

As for the coming year after Lake Mead drops below 1,075 feet, it will be the first stress test for states as they collaborate to conserve Lake Mead's water for the future.

Will you support Vox's explanatory journalism?

Millions turn to Vox to understand what's happening in the news. Our mission has never been more vital than it is in this moment: to empower through understanding. Financial contributions from our readers are a critical part of supporting our resource-intensive work and help us keep our journalism free for all. **Please consider making a contribution to Vox today from as little as \$3.**

New report finds significant decline in Great Basin sage-grouse population, offers framework to focus recovery efforts

[View this email in your browser](#)



Sage grouse about 30 miles north of Austin, Nev. (Jeff Scheid/The Nevada Independent)

Good morning, and welcome to the Indy Environment newsletter.

Programming note: I'm taking some time off next week, so the Indy Environment newsletter is going to take a short one-week break. I'll be back in May with lots of news to cover.

As always, we want to hear from readers. Let us know what you're seeing on the ground and how policies are affecting you. Email me with any tips at daniel@thenvindy.com

If you received this email from a friend or colleague, you can [subscribe here](#).

For decades, wildlife biologists have documented population declines in Greater sage-grouse, one of the West's most iconic species. Across its range, lingering drought, industrial development, large-scale wildfires and the rapid proliferation of invasive species have fragmented or damaged its habitat.

Now, a recent report from the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) highlights how significant those declines have been. [According to the report](#), sage-grouse, which rely on habitat in 11 Western states, have experienced a rangewide population decline of about 80 percent since 1965 and an even greater decline in the Great Basin, especially in the last few decades.

Sage-grouse are known for a unique mating ritual in which male birds strut around areas known as “leks,” making a popping sound with two yellow inflatable air-sacs in their chests — all in the early morning hours of the day. For biologists, sage-grouse often serve as an indicator species for the general health of the sagebrush ecosystem, a predominant landscape in Nevada.

“The Great Basin faces multiple threats, and some that are much different than the rest of the range,” said Peter Coates, a USGS researcher and a lead author on the report.

Over the past few decades, annual grasses have taken root in many areas where sagebrush once was. That includes cheatgrass, an invasive species that contributes to a vicious cycle of extreme wildfire, which poses a direct threat to sage-grouse and restoring its natural habitat.

The Great Basin already sits on the southern, more arid periphery of the sage-grouse’s range, Coates said. That means extended drought can have especially extreme effects on populations. When precipitation does return, it’s difficult for birds to recover where its habitat has been lost.

“When there is pressure such as drought exerted on these populations, this is largely going to cause these populations to decline,” Coates noted. “But if that drought is prolonged, it appears that we can have a lot of these peripheral populations reach ‘points of no return.’”

At the same time, sage-grouse face other stressors. Shawn Espinosa, an upland game staff specialist with the Nevada Department of Wildlife (NDOW) who works on recovery efforts, said the species can face additional pressures brought on by mining activity, inappropriate livestock grazing, the ecological footprint from horses, energy development and transmission lines.

“When you get to the Great Basin, because of climate change and all of the other stressors that we’re placing on this landscape, it doesn’t take a rocket scientist to figure out why sage grouse populations are doing as poorly as they are,” Espinosa said in an interview last week.

In the past, conservation groups have sought to list the bird under the Endangered Species Act. But in 2015, the Obama administration dropped a finding that the species should be listed and instead [directed states and federal land managers](#) to implement extensive conservation plans.

The population declines in the report caught the major headlines. But the report is also important for land managers because it provides a framework for potential ways to move forward. The report helps standardize sage-grouse data to **determine population trends, define population boundaries within the species’ range and a “Targeted Annual Warning System” that aims to help biologists pinpoint local areas of concern and better tailor their conservation efforts.**

Right now, Coates said biologists don’t always know **“which actions are the best, which are always the most effective. And we’re not always going to the right place at the right time.** The Targeted Annual Warning System gives us a tool to go to the right place at the right time.”

Many threats to sage-grouse, including fire and climate, are difficult to **directly control, Espinosa said, and it's all the more reason to better manage** the things we can control.

“We can do a better job of managing mining,” he said. “We can do a better job of managing wild horses. We can do a better job of managing livestock on the landscape. And we can do a better job of restoration. We can probably do a better job with invasive species as well.”

“And in some respects, we are getting there,” Espinosa added. “But not fast enough.”

A lot of that depends on whether land managers, who permit development projects on public land, prioritize the protection of sage-grouse. Espinosa said that, especially over the last four to five years, “there’s been some dereliction of duty out there regarding land use management.”

Researchers plan to further study the effectiveness of conservation efforts. But Coates said, so far, results suggest that certain conservation actions can help to mitigate some disturbances.

“I would argue that we don't know what the trends would be like without the conservation actions, but they would likely be a lot worse than what we're seeing with what we have now, considering the amount of loss of habitat we've experienced in the last two decades,” he said.

Here's what else I'm watching this week:



Las Vegas Bay boat ramp is closed because of low water level at Lake Mead. (Jeff Scheid/The Nevada Independent)

WATER AND LAND:

Federal officials project Colorado River shortage: “The man-made lakes that store water supplying millions of people in the U.S. West and [Mexico](#) are projected to shrink to historic lows in the coming months, dropping to levels that could trigger the federal government's first-ever official shortage declaration and prompt cuts in Arizona and Nevada,” *The Associated Press*’ Sam Metz [reports from Carson City.](#)

Things could get worse for Lake Mead: John Fleck, director of the University of New Mexico's Water Resources Program, looks at [what's "likely" for Lake Mead through 2023](#).

The Supreme Court's commission to study water adjudication held its first meeting last week ([here's a link to the recording](#)). Jeniffer Solis with the *Nevada Current* [breaks down how the meeting went](#): "Water law adjudication, already a complicated field, will only become more so because of the climate crisis, extended droughts, and increasing demand for groundwater **in Nevada, the Supreme Court was told last week.**"

Montana conservationist picked to lead the BLM: The Biden administration plans to nominate Tracy Stone-Manning, an associate vice president for public lands at the National Wildlife Federation, to lead the U.S. Bureau of Land Management, an agency that manages more than 65 percent of the land in Nevada. [More from the Missoula Current](#).

Clark County unanimously passes [resolution to protect](#) 30 percent of Nevada's land and water by 2030.

ENERGY AND CLIMATE CHANGE

What happened to natural gas legislation? Over the weekend, my colleague Riley Snyder and I [wrote about the politics and utility lobbying](#) that went into defeating proposed **legislation, outlined in the state's climate strategy, that would have started the state's** transition away from natural gas and toward electrification.

Energy \$\$\$ in the Legislature: My colleague Jacob Solis tracks campaign contributions from the energy industry in his [weekly "Follow the Money" feature](#).

The opportunities and limits of green hydrogen: [Excellent story](#) by *The Seattle Times'* Hal Bernton and *InsideClimateNews* James Bruggers on the potential for green hydrogen as an alternative fuel source. The story also gives a good overview of how hydrogen is currently used and its carbon footprint.

MINING

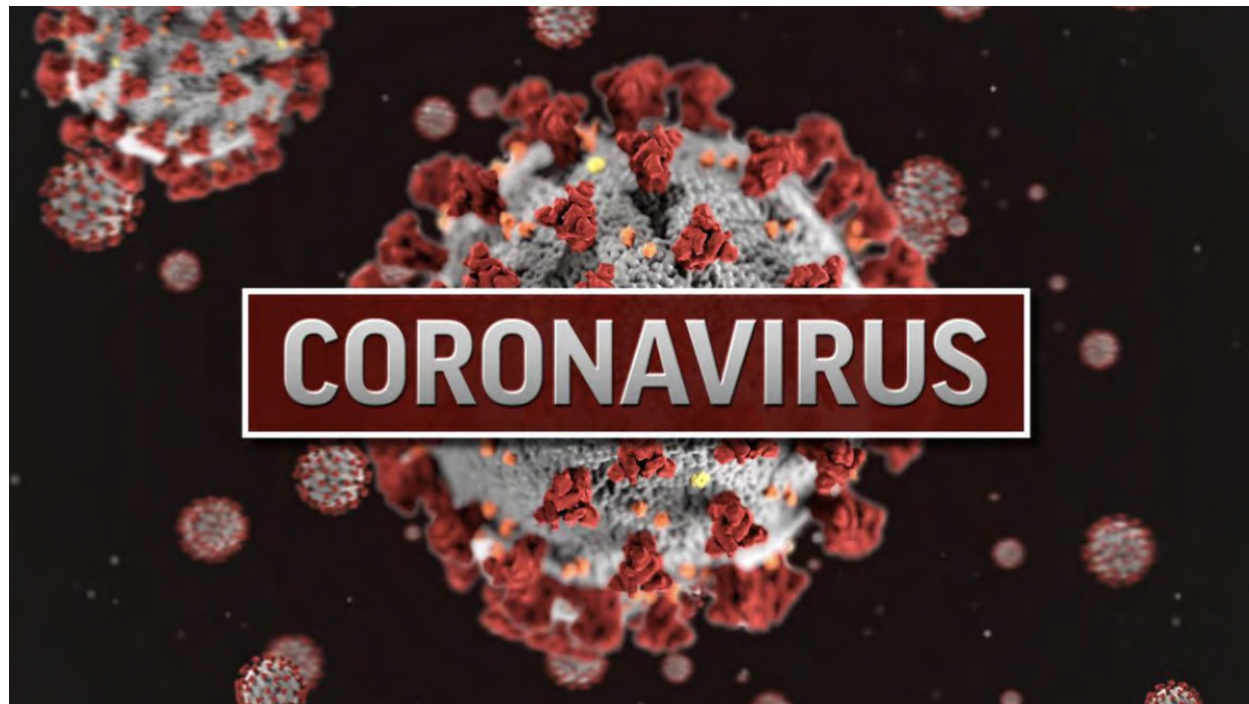
A demand for more lithium: **"The supply of electric vehicle batteries** worldwide is not on track to meet rising demand for electric cars, trucks and buses, a trend that could cause **EV production delays in the next six or seven years, according to a new report,"** [E&E News' Miranda Wilson writes](#).

A proposal to reopen a giant California gold mine: *The San Francisco Chronicle's* [Kurtis Alexander writes about a proposal](#) to reopen a giant gold mine in Grass Valley.

"Mining may have given rise to this community, and more notably, lifted the entire state from frontier to financial powerhouse, but the scars it left on the landscape remain visible, **and unwanted."**

Investors pushing gold mines to improve climate goals: **"Canadian miner Barrick Gold Corp** [earlier this month] raised its greenhouse gas emissions target to 30% from 10% and pledged to achieve net-zero carbon emissions by 2050, amid an investor-driven push **for climate change initiatives,"** [Reuters reported earlier this month](#).

Washoe Co. Commission to revise COVID reopening plan



COVID-19 update (AP Images)

By [Steve Timko](#), [Matt Vaughan](#) and [Audrey Owsley](#)

Published: Apr. 21, 2021 at 9:26 PM PDT | Updated: Apr. 22, 2021 at 1:06 PM PDT

RENO, Nev. (KOLO) - **UPDATE:** Washoe County Commissioners will submit a new COVID-19 reopening plan after failing to get support from the Washoe County Health District, the City of Reno, and the Washoe County School District.

The Nevada COVID Task Force reviewed the plan Thursday as counties across the state prepare for the transition of mitigation control to the counties on May 1.

Commission Chair Bob Lucey acknowledged it's 'aggressive' to open 100 percent with no social distancing on May 1. Task Force Director Caleb Cage said he didn't see an issue with the plan itself, but mentioned 'administrative challenges.' Lucey said Commissioners will present a revised version of the reopening plan ahead of the May 1 deadline.

ORIGINAL STORY: Washoe County Commission Chair Bob Lucey issued a statement Thursday after Washoe County's district health officer said he does not endorse the plan Commissioners approved Tuesday as a roadmap to opening the community from COVID-19 restrictions.

Despite recommendations from health authorities, the plan approved by the county does not wait until June 1 to drop social distancing recommendations recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The county recommends ending social distancing rules on May 1.

Health Officer Kevin Dick said Wednesday in a letter to the COVID-19 Mitigation and Management Task Force that Washoe County has seen a trend towards more cases in recent days.

"The vaccination rate of 23.14% of the population that we have on April 20, 2021 and the rate of about 30% we expect to have on May 1, 2021 is not approaching a portion of the population with vaccination immunity, that will be essential for a reduction in the transmission of the disease," Dick said in a letter to the state task force. "Therefore, it is essential that social distancing continue to be required in the County until a larger proportion of the population is vaccinated."

By June 1, 50 percent or more of the Washoe County population could be vaccinated, Dick said.

"During the discussion, Commissioners expressed that people could make their own decisions about social distancing and the risks they would take," Dick wrote. "Unfortunately, this is not an option for many in our population that must work to feed and house their families. Our schools do not operate in isolation from the rest of our community and will also be impacted if social distancing is dropped too quickly and disease transmission increases."

Lucey is standing by their proposal, despite concerns from Dick.

In a response, Lucey said in part:

"We stand behind the plan because we know there is COVID fatigue in our community. People are going to return to life and the things they've missed in the last year whether we dictate mandates or not.

The County Commission has worked to balance the demands of parents, educators, and business owners to return to some semblance of normalcy with the imperative to protect the community from increasing rates of COVID-19 infections. We have advocated for the personal rights of citizens to act as they feel best for their families during this pandemic. The community has the opportunity to become vaccinated and tested if they choose. The community also has a choice on when and where they do their business."

Copyright 2021 KOLO. All rights reserved.

BAY AREA DROUGHT

Marin Water Officials Approve Mandatory Use Restrictions for 195,000

By **Bay City News** • Published April 22, 2021 • Updated on April 22, 2021 at 6:52 am



The 195,000 people in southern and central Marin County served by the district are prohibited from non-essential uses such as washing vehicles at home, power-washing homes and businesses,

pushing and street cleaning.

Download our mobile app for [iOS](#) or [Android](#) to get the latest breaking news and local stories.

According to the district, mandatory restrictions are triggered when reservoir levels drop to 40,000 acre-feet by April 1. Levels are currently at slightly more than 41,000 acre-feet with the driest months still ahead.

Local



10 MINS AGO

Daly City Releases Names of Officers in April 7 Fatal Shooting of SF Man



44 MINS AGO

Vacaville Man Arrested for Allegedly Starting Deadly 2020 Wildfire

The district will discuss more irrigation restrictions in two weeks, officials said.

Last year was the second-driest on record, with only 20 inches of rainfall, and followed a dry year in 2019.

The district declared a drought in mid-February and launched a campaign asking customers to conserve water voluntarily.

"Persistent warm, dry weather has led to the lowest level in nearly 40 years, the district said.



2 percent -- the lowest level in nearly 40 years, the district said.

"Our goal is to reduce our consumption of water by 20 percent by 2025, said Koehler, president of the district board. "Our consumption has always risen to

Koehler, president of the district board. "Our consumption has always risen to

the challenge. Our most affordable reservoir of opportunity to address drought and grow our climate resilience is outdoor water use, which doubles during the summer months. Marin is a community that



reduction goal.

The district said it would delay enforcement of restrictions until May 1 to allow customers time to prepare.

The district said it plans to focus on education to encourage customers to follow the rules. A first violation would result in a written warning, with subsequent violations subject to a \$250 fine.

The district offers water conservation programs and incentives that include rebates for replacing lawns with drought-resistant landscaping, discounts on graywater kits that reuse water for irrigation, and free water-efficient nozzles, showerheads, and faucet aerators.

"Our priority is to partner with the community around building greater water use efficiency now and in the future," Koehler said. "Water is a limited resource and Marin Water will be providing a range of programs and incentives to support our residential, business and institutional customers with opportunities to conserve."

Copyright BAYCN - Bay City News

This article tagged under:

BAY AREA DROUGHT • MARIN COUNTY • MARIN MUNICIPAL WATER DISTRICT • WATER RESTRICTIONS

SPONSORED • WORLDSLIFESTYLE

Ever Wondered What Ki





WaterNews

Study Surveys Global Risk of Dry Wells

April 22, 2021 / in Water News, WEF / by Brett Walton

Millions of wells are only a few meters above the water table, study finds.



Wells, including this one, are going dry in Doula, a village 55 kilometers (34 miles) northeast of New Delhi. Doula and many regions in India are facing a groundwater emergency triggered in part by thirsty industries, intensely irrigated agriculture, and hydrological mismanagement. © J. Carl Ganter / Circle of Blue

By Brett Walton, Circle of Blue

Wells serving many of the world's rural households, farms, and factories are at risk of running dry if groundwater levels in their areas continue to decline.

According to a new analysis of 39 million wells, between 6 percent and 20 percent are no more than five meters below the top of the water table. The math in these scenarios is unforgiving.

"This implies that millions of wells are at risk of running dry if water tables decline just a few meters," Scott Jasechko of the University of California, Santa Barbara, told Circle of Blue. Jasechko and co-author Debra Perrone, also of UCSB, published their peer-reviewed [study](https://science.sciencemag.org/content/372/6540/418) [https://science.sciencemag.org/content/372/6540/418] online on Thursday in the journal Science.

These wells at the brink of the water table could be vulnerable to long-term groundwater declines, in addition to seasonal fluctuations, reckoned in this study at about 1 meter on average globally, though Jasechko cautioned that it was a conservative estimate.

Drilling a deeper well is often an inadequate solution, Perrone said. It might spur a race to the bottom and worsen local groundwater drawdowns. Because more electricity is needed for pumping, deeper wells increase operating costs. However, the analysis found that deeper wells are not being drilled in all areas. In some places, new wells are just as vulnerable to declining water tables.

Lifting water from greater depths also raises questions of equity, Perrone said. Not every household can afford to spend \$10,000 or more on a new well. Tapping other water sources might not be feasible. When a family has no other option, they might sell the land or move.

Constructing a global groundwater well appraisal was no simple task. Jasechko and Perrone combed through 134 databases, often requiring multiple inquiries per country. Canada, for instance, keeps its groundwater records at the provincial and territorial level.

Gathered from 40 countries that are home to 3 billion people and represent half of global groundwater pumping, the data included records on well location, depth, purpose, and date of construction. Though the results describe global patterns, Jasechko said the analysis is supported by locally relevant details.

Jasechko and Perrone included as many countries as possible in the analysis, but they were constrained by the quality of the record keeping. India, Mexico, South Africa, Thailand, Brazil, most of Europe, and the United States were among the countries that made the cut.

"Data sets choose researchers, not the other way around," Jasechko quipped.

All told, they spent six years on the project.

Perrone believes it was time well spent. Groundwater research that she began in the western United States extends globally. If wells are the hardware, Perrone is now assessing the software — the legal and regulatory systems — that match water supply and demand, to see what solutions are working.

"We're most interested in how to use this information to inform change," Perrone said. "To elevate groundwater to the importance it should have."



 [<https://twitter.com/waltonwater>]

[<https://www.circleofblue.org/author/brett/>]

Brett Walton

[<https://www.circleofblue.org/author/brett/>]

Brett writes about agriculture, energy, infrastructure, and the politics and economics of water in the United States. He also writes the Federal Water Tap

[<https://www.circleofblue.org/water-tap/>], Circle of Blue's weekly digest of U.S. government water news.

He is the winner of two Society of Environmental Journalists reporting awards, one of the top honors in American environmental journalism: first place for explanatory reporting for a series on septic system pollution in the United States

[<https://www.circleofblue.org/2016/world/brettwalton/>](2016) and third place for beat reporting in a small market (2014). He received the Sierra Club's Distinguished Service Award in 2018. Brett lives in Seattle, where he hikes the mountains and bakes pies. Contact Brett Walton

[<https://www.circleofblue.org/contactbrettwalton/>]

VOICES | Opinion *This piece expresses the views of its author(s), separate from those of this publication.*

Everyone who lives in Washoe County and the region deserves access to Lake Tahoe | Hill

Alexis Hill

Published 8:00 p.m. PT Apr. 22, 2021 | Updated 10:38 a.m. PT Apr. 23, 2021

This opinion column was submitted by Alexis Hill, commissioner for District 1 on the Washoe County Commission.

Those of us who are fortunate enough to live in the proximity of Lake Tahoe, as we residents of Washoe County do, should count ourselves lucky indeed to have such beautiful beaches and mountains in our backyard. Unfortunately, in recent years, the parking lots and the roadways that serve the lake have become crowded from dawn to dusk.

Because of the overcrowding, some residents of Lake Tahoe communities are fighting solutions that will allow for better public access to the lake. This is not the way to fix this problem. Our public lands are for everyone regardless of ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic situation, class, religion, ability and age. One solution to overcrowded parking lots and roadways is to increase access to affordable and reliable public transportation which can deliver people sustainably, safely, and efficiently to Lake Tahoe.

Improvements to public transit would allow residents to move more easily throughout the basin and solve major public safety issues. Getting cars off the road would also help with lake clarity, an ongoing environmental issue that must be dealt with head-on. On March 12, 2021, I voted with the majority of the Tahoe Transportation District (TTD) board on which I serve to move forward with a federal grant that will support a planning process and purchase of the old elementary school in Incline Village for a mobility hub. This is the first step in a lengthy process that is underway to improve mobility in and around the lake. For example, RTC Washoe is running a pilot program this summer that will allow residents to take transit from south Reno to Lake Tahoe. This park and ride will only be successful in substantially reducing vehicle miles traveled if there is a connected transit system around the whole lake — of which an Incline Village mobility hub is an essential component.

I understand that community members have also come forward with concerns about this purchase because they are not sure if the former elementary school in Incline Village is the right location for a mobility hub due to traffic worries. The rare opportunity provided by this federal grant also includes planning dollars to help investigate other site options for this use. Washoe County is taking a lead on the project to ensure that the community can come forward with suggestions and be a part of the transportation solution at Lake Tahoe. And, if the elementary school is chosen as the site after this public process, TTD will receive additional remediation dollars for removal of the school and site cleanup.

While these major transportation projects work their way through the process, Washoe County is also working with our partners (Tahoe Regional Planning Agency, State Parks, NDOT and other cities, counties and NGOs around the Lake) to find creative solutions to solve many of the recreational tourism issues that show no signs of easing.

TTD is currently working with the communities of Incline Village, South Lake Tahoe and Zephyr Cove to improve access to public transportation in order to mitigate traffic and parking issues. As the county commissioner who represents residents in both Reno and Incline Village, part of my job is to make sure everyone has equal access to our beautiful Lake Tahoe and its surrounding mountains. One way to ensure equal access is to improve public transit options.

We must remember that we are on the lands of the Washoe (Washiw) people who have stewarded these lands for generations. The future of Lake Tahoe relies on the meaningful involvement of all of us. Lake Tahoe should be pered but that doesn't have to include reserving access to only a few. I urge all residents of Washoe County to support the Tahoe Transportation District and Washoe County's efforts so we all can access Lake Tahoe today, and ensure conservation of this shared natural wonder for future generations.

Please submit your comments about this project by April 27 to Washoe County at washoe311@washoecounty.us.

Alexis Hill serves as commissioner for District 1 on the Washoe County Commission.

In-person events back on track

ARTOWN, RENO RODEO, SUMMER CAMPS SCHEDULED; BUT BURNING MAN WON'T IGNITE



Northern Nevada special event organizers are betting that by summer, vaccinations and fewer safety mandates will put most folks' COVID-19 fears in the rear-view mirror.

Many in-person events that were cancelled or forced to switch to virtual presentations last year – including **Artown**, the **Reno Rodeo**, summer camps and other activities – are back on schedule for 2021.

The area's largest summer event, Burning Man, a festival held in the Black Rock Desert that attracts more than 60,000 participants, is cancelled for this year. Updates about the 2022 event can be found by subscribing to the **Burning Man Journal** and signing up for the **Jackrabbit Speaks** e-newsletter.

Hot August Nights, an annual celebration of rock music and car culture, pulled to the curb last year, but will roll out again during the first weekend in August at multiple locations throughout Reno and Sparks.

Some gatherings will rely heavily on outdoor events; others will be hybrids of in-person and virtual presentations.



“Right now the registered presenters ratio for live events versus virtual is about 10-to-1 on the live side,” said Oliver X. Artown’s executive director. “We see many senior groups and historical tours with older demographics preferring to remain cautious and opt for virtual events.”

Summer events have to be planned now, he said, even though no one can foresee the trajectory of the pandemic.

Artown’s 2021 main stage festival footprint **at Rancho San Rafael Park** in Reno will host 28 of 31 days of live programming with three dark days, Oliver said. “We are expecting to be able to host a suitable capacity – Covid-19-related protocols notwithstanding – within the socially distanced ‘pods’ at Rancho for all of our live series programming.

“There are some unknowns that we hope will be ‘knowns’ once May comes around and pandemic precautions are set by local governments... Not planning the event now would leave us flat-footed.”

Oliver said that safety will be a major consideration at all venues.

100 years of Reno Rodeo

Organizers said they are committed to holding the Reno Rodeo, set for June 17-26, at full capacity.

Their statement follows Nevada Gov. Steve Sisolak’s recently announced goal of having businesses and venues in every county reopen to 100% capacity by the start of June.

“We remain fully committed to holding a safe rodeo, first and foremost,” said George Combs, general manager of the Reno Rodeo, in a news release. “We have all been hard at work planning for the 2021 rodeo with some uncertainty around social distancing requirements. With these recent developments, we are confident that we can put on a safe event at full capacity while providing fans the exhilarating experience the Reno Rodeo is known for.”

The rodeo arena capacity is a little over 8,600 spectators; 8,100 is considered a sell-out because of limited sight-lines in some seats.



PHOTO/RENO RODEO: A cowboy competes in the saddle bronc competition at the Reno Rodeo in 2019.

In the coming weeks, Reno Rodeo officials will be formalizing health and safety guidelines for staff, volunteers, competitors and attendees, including any mask mandates that may be in effect. More details about onsite policies and updates **will be announced**.

The 100-year-old Reno Rodeo is the longest-running, biggest annual professional sports event in the area. It’s nationally televised event and is one of the top five regular-season rodeos in terms of prize money sanctioned by the Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association. The rodeo has an estimated annual economic impact of more than \$50 million in Northern Nevada. Tickets may be purchased online at

mynevadatickets.com.



PHOTO/THE GREAT RENO BALLOON RACE: Balloons rise from Rancho San Rafael Park during the balloon races in 2019.

The river, balloons and BBQs

The **Reno River Festival** returns on June 12 and 13 with a celebration of all things local. The Truckee River in the heart of downtown Reno is scheduled to host musical performances by Nevada bands and local vendors hawking craft beer, food and handmade crafts. **Tickets are available** online.

The **Street Vibrations Spring Rally** is revving up for action June 4 through June 6. The 11th annual event includes live entertainment, Good Vibrations® Slow Bike Races, ride-in shows, poker runs, scavenger hunts, VIP parties and more than 80 vendors.

The 25th annual **Great Eldorado, BBQ, Brews and Blues Festival** is set for June 11 and 12. The concerts are free at the festival billed as equal parts barbeque block party and microbrew tasting event. More than 50 microbreweries from around the world are scheduled to take part in the event that features two music stages.

The **Great Reno Balloon Race** is scheduled to take to the skies Sept. 10 through Sept. 12. The event, which features about 100 hot air balloons at Rancho San Rafael Park, is free.

Lavender, trees and plein air

Wilbur D. May Arboretum and Botanical Garden at Rancho San Rafael Park will host the **May Arboretum Society's** annual Artist Stroll and Wet Paint Sale on Sunday, June 13, from 10 a.m. to noon at the arboretum 1595 North Sierra Street in Reno.

The society invites residents to stroll through the gardens and groves of the arboretum and botanical garden while many of the region's artists set up their easels and paint *en plein air*, capturing the essence of the flora and fauna that call the arboretum home.

The event is free. The artists' morning work will be displayed beneath the canopy of the arboretum's Kleiner Oak Grove at 12:30 p.m. and will be available for sale. Proceeds support the artists and the work of the society. Masks or face coverings are required.

The **May Arboretum Society's** 7th Annual Lavender Day is slated for July 10 at the Labyrinth Garden. The event includes lavender plants for sale, demonstrations on harvesting, infusing, and cooking with lavender and other mini-presentations under the Red Tent throughout the morning.

Local vendors include artists offering jewelry, mosaics and garden art, fairy garden accessories, and more. Lavender Day is free and scheduled from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Girls rock at camp

Last year, the popular **Girls Rock Reno** summer camp was a virtual event limited to 10 digital campers making music online. This year, the rockers will be collaborating in person again from July 19 to July 23, with performances scheduled on July 24.

Campers, ages 9 to 16, will learn an instrument, form a band, write a song, and play it at the showcase at the end of the week. In addition to jamming with their fellow campers, the kid rockers will see lunchtime performances by local and touring musicians and have the opportunity to explore different workshops that include screen-printing, music history and more.

The camp, a part of the Holland Project, welcomes all self-identified girls, trans and non-binary youth to participate. No music experience is required.

Participation is limited to 16 campers. Applications are open at girlsrockreno.org, with financial aid and scholarships available. Residents are invited to donate to the scholarship fund, sponsor a camper, or otherwise get involved in the summer program.

Food trucks return

Food Truck Friday is returning to Idlewild Park beginning in June. Organizers said they expect about 4,000 people each day, starting on Friday, June 4.

Food Truck Friday organizers put out **a call on Facebook** for food and dessert vendors, with applications available until April 30. Those who want to apply may send an email with contact information to RenoStreetFood@gmail.com.

Other festivals, events, summer camps and performances are being planned for the (hoped-for) post-pandemic season. We'll be keeping up with those as they are announced.

EDITOR'S NOTE: This story was updated April 27 to include the announcement of Burning Man's cancellation.

Welcome to the Reuters.com BETA. Read our Editor's note on how we're helping professionals make smart decisions.

[Read more](#)



[Sign In](#)

April 21, 2021 4:29 PM PDT

Environment

White House moves to assist Western U.S. communities hit by drought

Reuters



U.S. President Joe Biden removes his face mask to speak about the status of coronavirus disease (COVID-19) vaccinations and his administration's ongoing COVID-19 pandemic response in the Eisenhower Executive Office Building at the White House in Washington, U.S., April 21, 2021. REUTERS/Tom Brenner

The White House on Wednesday announced an effort to provide immediate support to farmers, tribes and communities suffering from worsening drought conditions in the Western United States.

After a meeting of the National Climate Task Force, President Joe Biden's administration said Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack and Interior Secretary Deb Haaland would lead an interagency effort to coordinate the federal response to the water shortages.

The administration has sought to ramp up the federal response to climate change that produces more extreme weather, including droughts. The Interior Department said in a separate statement that the group will identify both immediate financial needs and develop longer-term measures to help communities and the environment.

Parched conditions throughout the West follow quickly on the heels of a multi-year drought in the region last decade. Farmers and ranchers in some areas are grappling with historically low water allocations, according to the White House. Many creeks and stock ponds remain dry, according to the U.S. Drought Monitor.

"We are committed to using every resource available to our bureaus to ensure that Tribes, irrigators and the adjoining communities receive adequate assistance and support," Haaland said in a statement.

Earlier on Wednesday, a group of tribes, commercial fishing and conservation groups from the Klamath Basin on the Oregon-California border sent a letter to Biden requesting

urgent support for fishing-dependent communities, farmers and ranchers.

"The scope and scale of impact the drought will have on the already-strained people, economies, infrastructure, and wildlife of the Klamath Basin cannot be overstated," the letter said.

Earlier this month, California said a key measure of snowfall in the state was about 40% below average. The state relies on snow melt in the spring to replenish streams and reservoirs for drinking water and irrigation.

Our Standards: **The Thomson Reuters Trust Principles.**

APPARENTLY, NO ONE ACTUALLY WANTS PUBLIC WORKERS TO UNDERSTAND PERS



MICHAEL SCHAUS

APRIL 25TH, 2021 - 2:00AM

It's not merely that people disagree about how best to solve the challenges facing us in the modern political era—it's that, often, we don't even agree on what challenges merit discussion.

Certainly, social media and cable network propaganda disguised as “news” contribute to this unfortunate reality—but it was a problem long before Jack Dorsey introduced the world to a new kind of public squabbling, or Fox News branded shouting matches as some form of informative programming. Personal and institutional biases, after all, have been a staple of human nature for as long as we've been capable of debating important ideas. Often, people don't merely have a difference of opinion on how to address a public challenge, they have a fundamentally different perception of what challenges exist in the first place.

The fundamental lack of nuanced discussion regarding Nevada's Public Employee Retirement System (PERS) is a good—albeit somewhat niche—example.

A recent poll conducted for Nevada Policy Research Institute by [OH Predictive Insights](#) of Nevada government workers shows that the individuals most directly impacted by PERS—public employees themselves—don't, initially, seem to think there's much to dislike when it comes to their retirement system.

However, as it turns out, the survey also demonstrated that most of these workers misjudged some pretty basic facts about how PERS operates in the first place.

More than two-thirds of workers not only underestimated the amount they pay into the state's retirement system, but nearly an equal number were [unaware that those rates were about to increase](#) this July. Over half of respondents also were unaware that recent rate hikes have gone toward [paying down the system's debt](#) (rather than funding the future benefits of current workers) or that government employees hired after July 1, 2015 will see [reduced benefits](#) while still being forced to pay the same all-time-high rates as their veteran colleagues.

In light of these results, it's easy to see why members of Nevada public sector unions—as opposed to unions in some other states, [such as Arizona](#)—have been traditionally hostile to even the slightest suggestion of reform. After all, members don't even know rate increases are coming down the pike, let alone any of the ancillary concerns regarding the ability of PERS to keep its promises to workers.

Taxpayers, members of the media and lawmakers often share in this incomplete understanding of the issue. In 2019, for example, Gov. Steve Sisolak mistakenly described PERS as [the nation's best-funded pension plan](#). Even under the most favorable assumptions, however, [Pew Trusts ranked PERS 23rd](#) out of 50 states; the [Federal Reserve System](#) ranked Nevada's pension debt as the ninth worst in the nation as a percentage of state GDP; and the cost of Nevada's pension system has been rated as the [highest in the country](#) by the National Association of State Retirement Administrators.

Given the way PERS [selectively shares information](#) regarding its performance, the confusion experienced by Gov. Sisolak and others is quite understandable.

Nonetheless, some public servants have noticed a growing unfairness in how the system operates. [Teachers](#), for example, are hit particularly hard by the current PERS contribution scheme — and yet, the [PERS board quickly dismissed concerns](#) raised by new teachers after rate increases (and benefit reductions) were enacted in 2015. In truth, there are plenty of reasons why government workers should be inquisitive if not outright critical about the status quo. As the rate increases in Nevada and elsewhere indicate, there are substantive issues with the [way public pensions report their nances](#), which lead to inevitably unfavorable consequences for public sector workers. In fact, outside of the government class, criticism is a pretty bipartisan affair. [Bellwether Education Partners](#), the [Brookings Institution](#) and the left-leaning [Urban Institute](#) have all leveled sharp criticism at modern government-pension practices.

Nonetheless, the official line from PERS and its defenders in the political realm has long been a sciolous claim that “all is well, there’s nothing to see here.” Predictably, the result has been a serious lack of objective information given to the individuals most directly impacted by the system’s performance: government workers themselves.

When it comes to the health of Nevada’s Public Employee Retirement System, there’s plenty to debate. Regardless of how one might feel about the overall concept of defined-benefit pension plans, however, there are also plenty of legitimate reasons for public sector workers to raise an eyebrow at the reason for recent rate increases and reduced benefits.

If public sector unions, politicians and government officials are at all interested in discussing ways to provide a sustainable and quality retirement option for public servants, full disclosure of how the system currently operates would be an essential first step.

Ensuring workers are aware of an imminent rate increase, for example, would seem like a good place to start... even if it *does* stir up some uncomfortable conversations that challenge the current bias among Nevada’s public-sector leadership.

Michael Schaus began his professional career in the financial sector, where he became deeply interested in economic theory and the concept of free markets. Over a decade ago, that interest led him to a career in policy and public commentary—working as a columnist, a political humorist and a radio talk show host. Today, Michael is director of communications for the Nevada Policy Research Institute and lives with his wife and daughter in Las Vegas.

[Privacy Policy](#) [RSS](#) [Contact](#) [Support Our Work](#)

7455 Arroyo Crossing Pkwy Suite 220
Las Vegas, NV 89113

The Nevada Independent is a project of: Nevada News Bureau, Inc.
| Federal Tax ID 27-3192716

© 2021 THE NEVADA INDEPENDENT

EBMUD considers drought declaration; residents could be asked to conserve water

By Azenith Smith | Published 3 days ago | Updated 2 days ago | News | KTVU FOX 2

East Bay MUD considering drought declaration

The East Bay's largest water district, East Bay Municipal Utility District or East Bay Mud, may declare a stage one drought this week. It means residents may be asked to voluntarily reduce water by 10 percent. Azenith Smith reports

OAKLAND, Calif. - The rain on Sunday helped but water agencies said it's not nearly enough to change the drought picture in the Bay Area.

The East Bay's largest water district, East Bay Municipal Utility District or EBMUD, may declare a stage one drought this week. It means residents may be asked to voluntarily reduce water by 10 percent.

Sponsored Links

F

Lo

Learn More

For many people in the Bay Area, it was nice to see the rain on Sunday while it lasted.

"We definitely need rain here, it's been very dry," said Haley Miller of Oakland.

For most of the Bay Area, the rain was sporadic, at times a drizzle, light to moderate on and off.

"It's nice we are having rain especially in the Bay Area," said Kevin Marroquin of Albany. "We had a drought a couple of years ago."

"East Bay MUD, in our watershed we can typically look at getting 48 inches of precipitation a year and as of Friday, we were at 23 inches and a half or so," said Andrea Pook with East Bay Municipal Utility District.

Your Next Greatest Adventure—The American Southwest

Be ready to go off-grid in the Southwest with this pro advice to camp by.

Camping World—Travel Different

The district is now considering a Stage 1 drought, which means voluntary water conservation and purchasing supplemental water from the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation. Most of East Bay Mud's water comes from the Sierra snowmelt.

"Drought is always costly, it's costly," said Pook.

EBMUD would draw money from its reserves so, for now, no drought surcharge for the district's 1.4 million customers in Alameda and Contra Costa counties. The last time the district used supplemental supplies was the drought in 2015.

Last week, the governor declared a drought emergency in Mendocino and Sonoma counties. Marin County is imposing mandatory water use restrictions.

"If COVID wasn't enough, we had the fires, we will have even more fires this time around," said Phyllis Potter of Oakland.

Potter can't think of how she can conserve any more.

"I shut the tap off when I'm brushing my teeth, I take quick showers," said Potter.

She's hoping others will do their part.

"I would like there to be enough water for everyone who needs it," said Potter.

EBMUD board of directors is expected to make a decision at a board meeting on Tuesday. If a stage one drought is declared, customers may be asked to conserve starting May 1.

Azenith Smith is a reporter for KTVU. Email Azenith at azenith.smith@fox.com and follow her on Twitter and Instagram @AzenithKTVU or Facebook or ktvu.com.

Ad Content by Taboola |

35 Photos Of Historic Figures We Didn't Know Lived Long Enough To Be Photographed

Sponsored | Definition

Test Your Knowledge of Dog Food Ingredients. Take the Test

Sponsored | Blue Buffalo

This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten, or redistributed. ©2021 FOX Television Stations

LOCAL NEWS

Local water watchers plan drought education



Low lake level

By **KAREN RIFKIN** |

PUBLISHED: April 25, 2021 at 4:58 a.m. | UPDATED: April 26, 2021 at 4:54 p.m.



Elizabeth Salomone is General Manager for the Russian River Flood Control and Press Clips Water Conservation Improvement District; its mission is to proactively manage the water resources of the upper Russian River for the benefit of the people and environment of Mendocino County.

Joe Scriven is Assistant Executive Director/Fisheries Biologist/Board Secretary for the Mendocino County Resource Conservation District and Deborah Edelman is Water Program Manager/Senior Project Manager for Mendocino County Resource Conservation District; its mission is to conserve, protect and restore wild and working landscapes for the health of Mendocino County's water, soil and forests.

Having received approximately 13 inches of rain for the second year in a row (the average being 37 inches per year)—less than half of what is normal—the Russian River watershed has been placed in the category of severe drought by the U.S. Drought Monitor.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association (NOAA) projects that the drought will persist throughout the season, cumulatively putting the watershed in a dire situation with a very limited water supply.

There is no save-the-day rain coming; the chances of getting a drought-busting storm is zero and Lake Mendocino, at its lowest level ever (except when it was initially filled), will continue to reach historically low levels as the months progress," says Edelman.

The Russian River Flood Control and Water Conservation Improvement District and the Mendocino County Resource Conservation District have initiated the 2021 Drought Preparedness Campaign providing weekly educational postings on their Facebook pages and sending out bi-weekly up-to-date emails about water supply conditions and identifying easy-to-put-into-practice water conservation methods that people can employ at home and at work and share with family, friends and customers.

The campaign has been reaching out to individuals and commercial, industrial and institutional operations, being proactive in promoting water conservation measures, sharing information in a positive way to embrace the necessary changes.

"We all need to incorporate these activities into our daily lives, make it habitual," says Scriven. "This is an entire, all-hands-on deck-situation; everyone needs to participate to make this drought the least damaging possible."

Customers in the Redwood Valley and Calpella areas will be mandated to reduce to 50-gallons per person per day within a month and



Willow County Water District and likely Millview, Hopland and River Estates will be asked to reduce their use by 40 per cent.

Practical steps to reduce water usage are simple and, when implemented, work.

“We’re promoting the attitude that this is all very possible,” says Edelman.

Showering less frequently and keeping it to 5 minutes or less; catching warm-up water in a bucket (Dollar Tree has buckets), toilet waste management (yellow, let it mellow, brown, flush it down), turning off water when brushing teeth or washing hands, shaving in a wash basin, doing full loads of laundry and dishes; re wearing clothing that is not dirty and waiting a week to wash bath towels.

“For ornamental landscape, trees and shrubs, where people have invested a lot of money, allowing them to die is not a great option so we need to look at having them survive, not necessarily thrive, but just enough to keep them alive; that’s where bucketing shower water and kitchen sink rinse water can be used effectively,” says Scriven. “Trees and shrubs have real value that need to be recognized.”

As to turf lawns, he says to let them go dry this summer, unless it is a sport field and not watering could lead to injury for athlete.

“Zero water to lawns.”

Do not throw leaves into the waste bin but use them and other forms of mulch around trees and shrubs to help the soil retain moisture.

Water deeply and less frequently rather than often and lightly.

“People and animals need water every day to survive; plants don’t need water 7 days a week,” says Scriven.

Consider your outside water usage and attempt to offset it with indoor usage, if necessary.

Look for toilet leaks or leaks in general, determine if faucet aerators are working (of if there is one), put shut off nozzles on outside hoses; consider low flow shower heads.

Look at your City bill to determine water usage in average gallons per month. Learn how to read your meter to determine daily usage; there are instructions on the back side of your bill—if you can understand them.

“Presently, 50 gallons per day per person is a reasonable target to shoot for; in the future it might go to 30,” says Scriven.



Salomone explains that farmers are diligent about reading their meters and know Press Clips exactly how much water they are using.

“It’s in their best interest to use as little water as possible,” she says.

The Russian River Flood Control and Water Conservation Improvement District is working closely with the Mendocino County Farm Bureau to determine how the agricultural community is going to fare through the drought.

“Most farmers in the valley from Potter Valley and south are looking to keep their assets alive and are pretty much relinquishing the idea of crop production this year. It’s going to be a huge economic hit; many are likely to lose their livelihoods and, with it, the livelihoods of their employees.

“The next couple of weeks will determine how much water is truly available from the reservoir and the system; water for public health and safety comes first and then figuring out how much is left to keep the agricultural community in survival mode.”

Email: joe.scriven@mcrcd.org to be put on the Monday email list containing information on specific steps to conserve water at home and work, both inside and outside.

Email: districtmanager@rrfc.net to be placed on the Friday email list that contains more detailed information about water supply conditions throughout the watershed.

Tags: [Newsletter](#)



Karen Rifkin

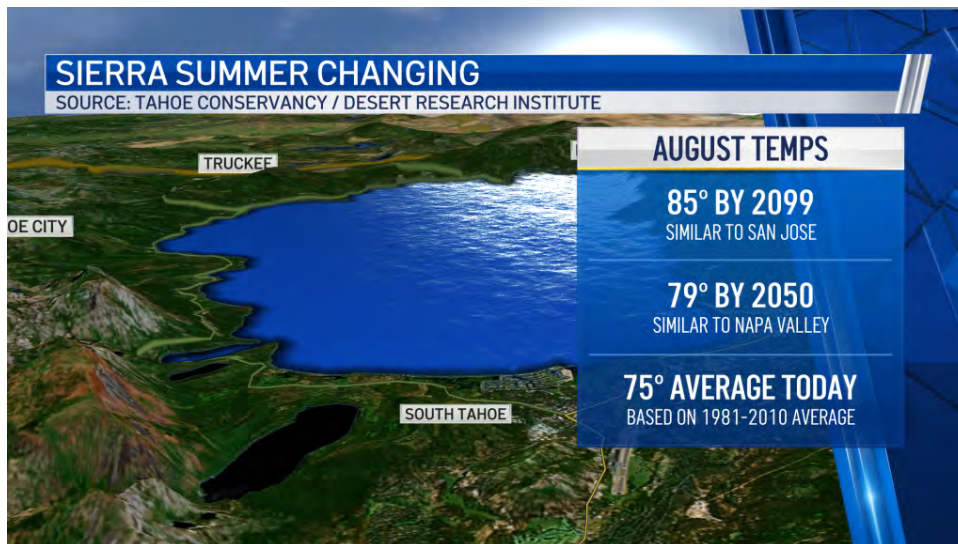


CLIMATE IN CRISIS

Climate Focus: Lake Tahoe's Future Much Different Under Warming

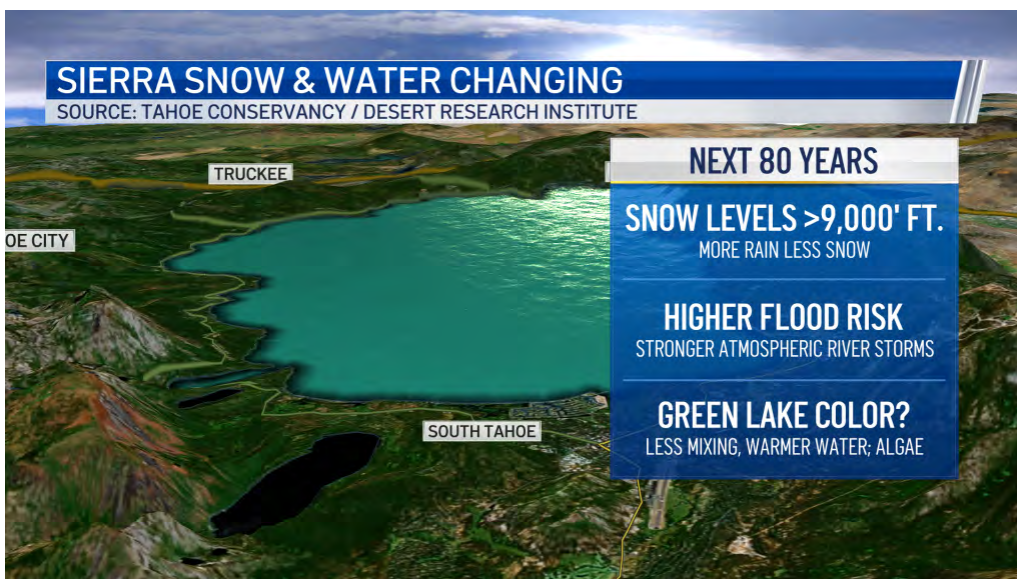
By **Jeff Ranieri** • Published April 27, 2021 • Updated on April 27, 2021 at 7:18 pm

When you think of Lake Tahoe, snow or even the blue water might be top of mind. But we might have much different conditions in the future if Earth keeps warming. Look at the data below and you can see the average August temperature is 75 degrees today, 79 degrees by 2050 and 85 degrees in 2099.



With continued warming, new data shows (see below) snow levels could move much higher over the next 80 years. This would bring a higher flooding risk as we would be getting more rain instead of snow.

What about the lake itself? As temperatures rise, this will create less mixing of the water, which would help to encourage algae growth and could bring Lake Tahoe more of a green color instead of blue.



You can find out more about how the Bay Area climate is changing in a [series of stories the Microclimate Weather Team](#).

NEWS

Boat Ramps Opening At Lake Tahoe

Boat ramps are opening for the summer at Lake Tahoe on May 1.

Wednesday, April 28th 2021, 3:27 PM PDT



Courtesy: TRPA

Boat ramps are opening for the summer at Lake Tahoe on May 1.

From May 1 to May 27, the Sand Harbor boat ramp will be open from 7 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. and the Cave Rock boat ramp will be open from 6 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Beginning on May 28, both boat ramp hours will be extended to 6 a.m. to 8 p.m. and will remain at these hours until they close for the season or close due to low water levels.

Boaters are reminded to complete all watercraft inspections with the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency prior to arriving at boat ramps. For more information on the Invasive Species Program and inspection locations, visit tahoeboatinspections.com.

Nevada State Parks officials urge visitors to observe safe water practices. Some of those include:

- Wearing a life jacket
- Don't drink and boat
- Check the forecast before you boat
- File a float plan
- Cold water safety, including slowly entering the water to allow your body time to acclimate to cold temperatures

For more information, visit parks.nv.gov.



Home > Featured > **City Council gives initial approval for StoneGate speci**

FEATURED

City Council gives initial approval for StoneGate sp

By Bob Conrad | April 29, 2021

The Reno City Council Wednesday voted to give StoneGate developers the initial approval to [fo](#) [special assessment district](#) (SAD) to fund the massive North Valleys development over the ne years.

It was the first of four approvals required by the city for the SAD to finance the industrial and residential development in Cold Springs.

Upcoming meetings will solidify the developers' agreement with the city. On May 26, the city will vo on the bond resolution for nearly \$37 million in bonds.

“That’s what really sets the bond in motion,” City Finance Director Deborah Lauchner s:

issue the bond. We hold on to all those bond funds until ... you do an official claim against the funds they meet the requirements [of the project].”

Then the city would reimburse the developers. Yesterday's vote, however, was just to create the dist

Council members Naomi Duerr and Jenny Brekhus both voted against the approval. Duerr said the was not enough information about what the city would get out of the deal, and she said a commitme for 200 affordable housing units would only be built 20 years from now.

"It's not there for me," Duerr said. "I found out it's not until phase five, the last phase, which has jus been mentioned is 20 years out. That's concerning to me. While I was surprised at the first SAD ... I found out [the developers] are planning five, six or seven SADs for a total price of \$200 million. Th their expectation."

Duerr and Brekhus voted against the initial reading of the SAD ordinance.

The council will revisit the SAD ordinance May 12 and again on May 26. The first reading of the bon resolution is also May 26, when more specific details about the agreement will be finalized. Final approval is scheduled for June 9.

Special Assessment Districts (SADs) in Nevada





RENO CITY COUNCIL

STONEGATE

BOB CONRAD

Bob Conrad is publisher, editor, and co-founder of This Is Reno. He has served in communications positions for various state agencies and earned a doctorate from the University of Nevada, Reno in 2011, where he completed a dissertation on social media journalism and crisis communications. In addition to managing This Is Reno, he holds a part-time research appointment for the Mineral County University of Nevada Extension office.



OVERTOURISM TAKES A TOLL ON LAKE TAHOE'S RECREATIONAL RESOURCES

Effortsffunderwayfftoffbetterffeducateffvisitorsffonffreducingfftravel impacts

By **Tim Hauserman** - April 29, 2021



Trash on a Lake Tahoe beach - photo: Tahoeinbalance.com

Lake Tahoe's recreational resources have been popular for generations, but last year when the pandemic descended upon us the number of people heading for the beaches, the hiking trails, and sledding hills reached new heights.

Unfortunately, many of those enjoying Tahoe's natural splendor left piles of litter and dog poop bags, defaced natural landmarks with graffiti, left unattended camps in the woods, and consistently parked illegally and dangerously on narrow Tahoe basin roads. Equally disturbing for many local residents, all those visitors clogged the forests, the places of refuge from the world, at the time when everyone was trying to stay six feet apart.

The Tahoe Rim Trail is the premier hiking and mountain biking trail in the region. For several years the Tahoe Rim Trail Association has been actively tracking trail user numbers. The TRTA Trail Data Report for 2020 concludes, "In general, the counters have confirmed anecdotal and observational evidence and suggest that there was a large increase of users in the early part of 2020 compared to 2019. This was due to the popularity of trail-based recreation in the face of the pandemic."

Interestingly, the report goes on to say, "use dropped off precipitously in September due to the heavy smoke in the area from wildfires and widespread and long-lasting forest closures."

The TRTA estimates that over 500,000 people per year use the 170 mile trail and its connector routes. This is perhaps ten times as many users as ten years ago. The increase comes from a wide range of user types from beginning hikers and bike riders, to expert bikers and long distance backpackers thru-hiking the entire trail.

The increased use of backcountry trails is inevitable considering the growing population within a half day's drive of Tahoe: There are an estimated 14 million people living between Reno and the Bay Area in Northern California and Northwestern Nevada. Depending upon the source there are an estimated 8 to 14 million annual visitors to the lake each year, and 50 million annual vehicle trips in and out of the basin (this includes commuters, which there are more and more of each year since the high cost and low availability of long term housing has forced many Tahoe workers to commute from Reno and Carson City).

All those visitors heading onto hiking trails and beaches unfortunately has led to more litter on the trail, toilet paper left behind by those who don't understand that if you pack it in, you have to pack it out, and increased fire danger caused by those who don't understand the danger of fires in the bone-dry Sierra forest.

"Tahoe was one of the only places you could go during the pandemic," said Heidi Hill Drum, chief executive officer of the Tahoe Prosperity Center. But this led folks who are "not naturally stewards of the environment to visit. Leaving trash on the side of the road, like baby diapers and plastic sleds? Who does that? Someone who cares about our community would not do that. A level of visitation this past summer involved a lot of people who didn't have a love of the region," said Drum.

Crowds and Locals Take Action on Litter

The pandemic also increased the frustration level for locals dealing with the crowds. Tourists crammed the most popular and beautiful spots such as the East Shore and Emerald Bay to the extent that Tahoe locals felt forced to live according to an old Yogi Berra classic line:

"Nobody goes there anymore, it's too crowded." Which unfortunately fosters an us versus them mentality with locals wishing the visitors would just stay away.

While Truckee resident Court Leve has been frustrated with litter and the lack of respect for the Sierra's natural surroundings for years, "when my dog jumped out of the Truckee River with a plastic bottle in his mouth, I decided that something had to change," he said. Leve started the Truckee Tahoe Litter Group on Facebook in an effort to publicize the problem and try to get local government agencies to take action. The site quickly became a rallying cry for those opposed to overtourism in the region and has over 2000 members.

"Truckee Tahoe has a California problem," Leve said. "I went on a two month road trip last year. I was in Colorado and Utah, at the tail end of the trip I came back to California. There was more trash in Death Valley and Lone Pine than I saw in the 50 days prior in Colorado and Utah. There was balled up toilet paper all over the place. They can't keep up with it, and that sucks. We are going to see it happening more and more."

Leve believes that a lot of people coming to the lake are not outdoors people, and that in the city littering is not such a big deal. While he says that the number of people coming to the Tahoe Sierra and the lack of education is the driver of the problem, he is equally frustrated with the lack of action by local public agencies.

"They have no one to pick up trash. They have no budget for them. We pay a lot of taxes to California and a ton of revenue comes in. We cannot handle the volume of visitors that are coming here," said Leve.

In that vein, many locals have been calling for a halt to money spent on marketing the area. Instead, they feel dollars should be allocated to deal with the negative impacts of too many people coming to the area.

What can be done about it?

The Truckee Tahoe Litter Group has been working hard with the Town of Truckee and Placer County to get the public agencies to up their game when it comes to trash pick up and litter enforcement. Volunteer trash pick up efforts are ongoing around the lake, which you could join if you would like to help, but the Litter Group is emphasizing that government needs to take a more active role in keeping our communities clean as well.

The Tahoe Rim Trail Association several years ago changed their mission statement so that they will no longer be marketing the trail, but instead the focus will be on maintenance and protection of this valuable resource. The TRTA also has taken on an important role of educating users to practice appropriate behavior in the backcountry.

This summer, the TRTA will "have staff and volunteers hang out at trailheads and provide stewardship information to people," said Morgan Steele, TRTA Executive Director. "If you are not in this outdoor recreational scene you might not understand. It seems there is a need to educate people on basic outdoor ethics." If you are interested in volunteering for the Task Force Trailhead Project this summer, contact the [Tahoe Rim Trail Association](#).

The Take Care Tahoe campaign, is an ongoing effort of 50 organizations to educate Tahoe visitors on proper use of the environment. They have produced fun and clever signage that can be seen throughout the region reminding people to treat the environment with respect. For litter there is a sign that says, "Your butt's stinking up the beach," And "If it's your dog, then it's your doody." For proper disposal of garbage to keep bears away: "Trash day is a bear's but," and one with a bear in the background that says, "This guy has reservations with your trash."

On Earth Day, the North Lake Tahoe Resort Association unveiled a Traveler Responsibility Pledge in an effort to educate visitors on the importance of taking care of Lake Tahoe.

It consists of six tenets that according to the resort association “outline [actions we can do to immediately reduce our travel related impacts.](#)”

The Trail Ahead

Hill Drum feels that with the pandemic still a factor and people still not confident about flying, we will see another big migration to Tahoe this summer, but “land management agencies hopefully will have better sta ng and better trash pick up. Hopefully we will be more proactive this year, reducing the impacts. On the other hand our trails and lake can only take so much,” said Hill Drum.

Hill Drum says that the long run solution is to educate our visitors about how to take care of Tahoe and to nd ways to diversify Tahoe’s economy away from a tourism only model. She also believes it is time to get out of this us versus them mentality which is prevalent in the area.

“We are not welcoming to our new neighbors,” Hill Drum said. “We are not the welcoming place that we should be. Eighty percent were not born here. The divide of us versus them is something that we work on.”

Tim Hauserman is a nearly life-long resident of North Lake Tahoe. He wrote the official guide to the Tahoe Rim Trail, the 4th edition of which was published last July. He also wrote Monsters in the Woods: Backpacking with Children and writes frequently on a variety of topics. In the winter, he runs the Strider Glider after school program at Tahoe Cross Country Ski Area. [Support his work in the Ally.](#)

RESOLUTION URGES COMPLETION OF TAHOE EAST SHORE TRAIL

Nevada legislation also calls for increased transit options to alleviate traffic congestion in Lake Tahoe Basin

By **Scott King** - April 30, 2021



The popular Tahoe East Shore Trail currently runs between Incline Village and Sand Harbor State Park, pictured here. SJR 12 encourages completion of the trail beyond Sand Harbor to Spooner Summit - photo: Brian Bahouth/the Ally

In mid-April, [Senate Joint Resolution 12](#) and [Senate Concurrent Resolution 8](#) both passed the Nevada Senate by unanimous votes and are now being considered in the Assembly.

SJR 12 would establish completion the Tahoe East Shore Trail from Incline Village to Spooner Summit as a priority and urges Congress to provide federal funding to facilitate that process, while SCR 8 seeks to support the identification of transportation priorities for the Lake Tahoe Basin.

If passed, these resolutions would be seen as a motion of support for the thirteen agencies collaboratively advocating for and implementing the [2013 State Highway 28 National Scenic Byway Corridor Management Plan](#). The Corridor Management Plan (CMP) seeks to address the safety, transportation, environmental, recreation, scenic and economic needs along State Route 28 from Incline Village to the Spooner Summit Intersection at US 50.

"The solutions [in the CMP] include a trail so that people are not having to walk on the highway, relocating parking to safer off-highway locations and introducing seasonal public transit," Carl Hasty, district manager for the Tahoe Transportation District (TTD), said. "This gives a full, multimodal suite of solutions in that corridor to help manage the number of folks who come and use that area."

The need for the solutions presented in the CMP has grown significantly in recent years, particularly as recreational day-use has increased due to the growing population centers around Lake Tahoe.

"While the resident population of Tahoe has been rather stable for a number of years now, we have a lot more outside day-use coming from Northwestern Nevada or the Sacramento area," Hasty said. "State Route 28 between Incline Village and US 50 is our longest stretch of undeveloped shoreline on the lake, so it's a very attractive, desirable place to be. We can end up with more than a thousand cars parking on the shoulder and that's become a safety issue for pedestrians, bicyclists and motorists and it's also an environmental issue when we get that much more erosion from this uncontrolled access."

A major priority of the CMP is constructing a shared-use path, called the Tahoe East Shore Trail, spanning the 11-mile stretch along State Route 28. To date, the first three miles have already been completed. However, the CMP agencies are looking for passage of SJR 12 to streamline the process of its completion.

"The most visible part [of CMP] is the first three miles of the shared-use path, which is a Class One Trail going from the old Ponderosa Parking Lot to Sand Harbor State Park," said Hasty by phone. "We are now in the process of addressing the next eight miles from Sand Harbor to Spooner. By addressing the next eight miles in increments, we can put together dollars to get these things on the ground."

According to Hasty, once the remaining eight miles of the Tahoe East Shore Trail are designed, allocating funds for its construction will continue to be a viable challenge.

"For Lake Tahoe, we often have to put together a variety of different funding sources in order to make a project happen. We go after what are called 'discretionary grants.' In this case, the federal government has a number of transportation grant sources and you don't know whether you're going to be selected or not. So it's always important to have support when you are submitting applications and [SJR 12] helps us with that," said Hasty.

Lake Tahoe, due to its location, presents a particularly unique set of challenges when implementing large-scale projects like the ones presented in the CMP.

"I'm not aware of any place as beautiful or as popular as Tahoe, but still has two states, five counties, one incorporated city and a federal agency as the biggest land manager," Jim Lawrence, deputy director for the Nevada Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, said during a committee hearing on SJR 12 earlier this month. "But since most of the parking lots and trail-work that's remaining is on Forest Service lands and there's possible federal spending packages coming, supporting [SJR 12] would be very helpful for securing additional federal funds needed to get this project completed."

While the TTD and its twelve partnering agencies have been implementing its CMP in segments, they recently announced another major step for the Tahoe East Shore Trail.

"We contracted with the Forest Service and just completed the Environmental Analysis for the next eight miles [of the Tahoe East Shore Trail] and that's an important milestone for the pursuit of any other dollars," Hasty explained. "Now we're taking the segment of expanding the two Forest Service [parking] lots for the trail connection. We have some dollars to design that with and we'll seek construction dollars once this design is done."

Beyond the completion of the Tahoe East Shore Trail, the TTD and its partner agencies will be exploring other means like shuttle services and cross-lake ferries to alleviate congestion on Lake Tahoe's roads. It's for this purpose that passage of SCR 8 would support determining public transit and other transportation options for Lake Tahoe's future.

"Part of our long-range transit plan is a cross-lake passenger ferry that would be a high-speed, low-wake vessel that would provide a year-round connection between the north and south end of Lake Tahoe," Hasty said.

In the meantime, different public transit systems have been or will be implemented. The Tahoe Truckee Area Regional Transit System (TART) operates out of Placer County to connect Truckee with the West Shore and North Lake Tahoe. After a brief pause due to COVID-19, the TTD will be re-starting its East Shore Express service from Incline Village to Sand Harbor, while the Visitors Bureau will be sponsoring a micro-transit shuttle service within Incline Village and Crystal Bay.

Additionally, this summer Washoe RTC will be piloting a shuttle service from the bottom of the Mt. Rose Highway to the Summit Park and Ride location, Sand Harbor and Incline Village.

"We're really looking to connect more inter-regionally, so people would have an option to be able to get up here without being in their cars," Hasty said of an interconnected regional transport system. "These are little trials to illustrate this connectivity that the future can bring us. It doesn't mean everybody's got to come up in that way, but we need to alleviate and address congestion with these multimodal options internal to the Basin."

This inter-regional, multi-agency partnership established by the CMP demonstrates the complex challenges in protecting Lake Tahoe's pristine ecosystems, while preserving its status as a safe and enjoyable destination for both tourists and its residential community.

"This corridor plan exemplifies that everyone who has a stake in that corridor, particularly from a management perspective, are working together and not just in their respective domains," Hasty said. "Better solutions come when we leverage each other and are able to muster all of our resources to improve safety and access to the lake. So it's an investment for now, it's an investment for the long-term and that's what this whole multimodal approach is about."

Scott King writes about science and the environment for the Ally. [Support his work in the Ally.](#)

Is enough being done to help Reno's growing homeless population?

by Kim Burrows

Monday, May 3rd 2021



11

[VIEW ALL PHOTOS](#)

Police working with Reno's Clean and Safe team on E. Commercial Row (KRNV)

LIVE

RENO, Nev. (News 4 & Fox 11) — Sta began moving into the [new \\$11 million Cares Campus](#), the new homeless shelter that could house up to 900 people near the Spaghetti Bowl. But the city of Reno will still try and reach out to those people who won't go to the shelter and would rather live on the streets.

James Lynch has been living on the banks of the Truckee River east of downtown Reno. Employees from the city's Clean and Safe team recently paid him a visit to give him good and bad news. First, he had to leave the riverbank.

"The water is rising right now and we're concerned about their safety we want to make sure nobody's floating down the river," Antonio Gilmore said, from the Clean and Safe team.

The good news: [The Clean and Safe program](#) is offering a \$400 city voucher to pay the deposit for Lynch to move into permanent housing at Village on Sage Street.

"It's a roof over my head and give me some stability," Lynch said.

He was one of dozens of people who camp along East Commercial Row behind the Aces' ballpark all the way to Sutro Street. The elaborate tents, shelters and camps extend about a half-mile long.

"We've had a pause on the cleanups and the sweeps, they've been called. We've taken a pause on that. because of both the pandemic and the shelter (not open,) he said. "It doesn't seem correct as a community to say "you've got to go, we're throwing your things away, you've got to get out of here but we don't have a place that's good enough," said Jon Humbert, city of Reno spokesman.

The Clean and Safe program offers services and information to people living on the streets. But does Reno have enough outreach services to help those people who won't use the new shelter?

"I don't think we have all the resources but what we're doing right now is working one person at a time," Gilmore said.

More people on the streets means more police response and resources used.

In 2020 Reno Police responded to 4,107 homeless related calls, including at shelters

- Reno firefighters say indigent fires rose 125% in 2020

Sear

- The Clean and Safe team made 3,983 contacts with homeless in 2020
- Through March 2021, the Clean and Safe team had 513 homeless contacts. 222 of those people accepted services

The city is banking on the Cares Campus taking a big bite out of the growing homeless population and the calls for service. Staff hope it will be a new incentive for folks to get off the streets.

"The goal there is to change our approach to all of this. But now we're going to have enough space, We're going to have more quality amenities, we're going to have the opportunity for families, for couples, for pets. Have a place that's better than anything we've had before," Humbert said.

There will always be a population who will not get services from a shelter. Antonio Gilmore is not deterred. He used to work in the shelter run by the Volunteers of America on Record Street near downtown Reno. He knows the homeless population, many by name. Gilmore knows he can make a difference.

"It's very advantageous for the simple fact that I know them, a lot of them and they know me well. So they know that I can help," he said.

POLITICS

UPDATE: Washoe takes over COVID response after state OK's county's fourth reopening plan

State officials have repeatedly rejected past county efforts to drop mask-wearing, distancing mandates

James DeHaven Reno Gazette Journal

Published 1:12 p.m. PT May 3, 2021 | Updated 4:40 p.m. PT May 3, 2021

Editor's note: This story was updated with new information from the state of Nevada.

The fourth time was the charm when it came to Washoe County winning state approval for a plan to reopen the region's COVID-clobbered economy.

County commissioners, who have had at least three local COVID management blueprints rejected by state officials, on Monday OK'd a recovery rollout that retains mask-wearing and social distancing requirements recommended by local, state and federal health authorities. The state's COVID-19 Task Force approved the plan hours later, allowing the county to officially take control of pandemic restrictions.

In other words, commissioners were rewarded for doing what they were told to do more than a month ago, when Gov. Steve Sisolak said counties would only be allowed to take over virus-containment efforts with a state-approved plan endorsed by local government and health agencies.

COVID-19: Lucey unsuccessfully pushes to drop mask mandate in Washoe as counties take over COVID mitigation measures

Related: State task force says Washoe County needs city, health district support for reopening plan

County Commission Chair Bob Lucey last month launched a pair of ill-fated attempts to unilaterally drop the social distancing rule, and at least partially part ways with the mask mandate.

But on Monday, despite loud, sustained pushback from constituents, Lucey said it was time to put forward a plan that would pass muster with the state.

“The best we can do for you today is move forward with an endorsed plan that brings local authority back to Washoe County,” he said. “We can move forward as a community or we can sit here and continue to be divisive, and I don’t think anyone in this community wants to continue to be divisive.”

Vice Chair Vaughn Hartung agreed that “sadly, there’s no other way to move forward.” He and Lucey joined two other county leaders in voting to approve the plan. Only Commissioner Jeanne Herman opposed the move.

Unlike previous proposals, Washoe’s latest plan embraces mask-wearing and social distancing guidelines from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, as well as a 10-person cap on tables at bars and restaurants.

The nine-page plan permits get-togethers of more than 500 people with a county-approved large gathering plan, and goes on to allow for the resumption of all sports activities. Body art and piercing services will also be allowed to resume expanded operations. Adult entertainment establishments and self-serve buffets will not, at least until June 1.

County leaders heard well over 90 minutes of angry public comment on the proposal from constituents frustrated by the ongoing mask mandate.

More than one maskless Washoe resident — apparently fed up with asking commissioners for help — prayed to a higher power from the dais, seeking divine intervention in a matter that’s long been out of their and the county’s hands.

Late last month, for example, Nevada’s COVID-19 task force rebuffed the county’s bid to drop social distancing requirements that won’t expire statewide until June 1.

The governor-appointed panel of public and private sector health experts said Washoe was technically allowed to end the distancing mandate once local leaders take over COVID containment efforts on May 1.

But task force members also flexed their power to effectively veto such reopening proposals, at least until Washoe returned with a plan that addressed other regional leaders’ concerns about losing the six-foot rule.

Gov. Steve Sisolak, too, has repeatedly reserved the right to overrule local officials who run

Sisolak in February announced plans to turn over the bulk of ongoing virus-containment efforts to local officials by the end of April, though he said the state would continue to play a role in supporting city and county health officials.

The first-term Democrat has also said that statewide protocols would remain in place to mitigate the virus' spread, including but not limited to mask-wearing and social distancing requirements.

Washoe's initial reopening plan abided by that guidance, but was amended amid fierce pushback from residents who wanted commissioners to take a more defiant stance against the governor.

County leaders pointed to COVID fatigue in defending their failed effort to drop the six-foot distancing rule, telling state task force members that "people are going to return to life and the things they missed last year whether we dictate mandates or not."

Local health officials were not impressed.

They wanted a plan that required, not just recommended, that residents continue social distancing through the end of May.

The state's COVID-19 task force agreed.

Chair Caleb Cage pointed out the governor would not hand over COVID rule-making authority to jurisdictions that did not have a plan endorsed by city officials and regional health authorities.

He said that left county officials with two options: Play by the state's virus-prevention rulebook until at least June 1, or come back with a more popular reopening plan by May 1.

Lucey — who acknowledged April's plan was "a little more aggressive" than previous versions — picked the second option, prompting the reopening blueprint finally approved by state officials on Monday.

James DeHaven is the politics reporter for the Reno Gazette Journal. He covers campaigns, the Nevada Legislature and everything in between. Support his work by subscribing to RGJ.com right here.



Home > Featured > **VIDEO: Unsheltered camp sweeps to resume with Nevada Ca**

[FEATURED](#)

VIDEO: Unsheltered camp sweeps to resume with Nevada Ca 10

By Jeri Chadwell | May 5, 2021

By Jeri Chadwell | Video by Bob Conrad

The Nevada Cares Campus off Fourth Street by the Governor's Bowl in Reno is expected to open with room for 900 unsheltered people living in the region beginning May 10. City officials have stressed that the new space will be open to anyone seeking it.

In the meantime, [the City of Reno is preparing to resume homeless camp sweeps.](#)

Unsheltered people—about 250 of whom are living along the Truckee River corridor—will [once again](#) be forced to move from the sprawling camps they've set up, largely on narrow tracts of land banded by river to the south and train tracks to the north.

“On May 10 and leading up to it, we're going to have notifications to let people know that some of our cleanup operations will be coming,” said city spokesperson Jon Humbert. “Our goal for that is to have the Cares Campus open and available to take folks. That transition is going to be starting on the 10th that people who are currently in the shelter system can come over, find a new home, find a larger home at the Cares Campus. And then we'll be beginning our operations.”

A 10-week plan to conduct sweeps of camps across 11 designated “zones” along the Truckee River corridor was announced last Friday.

“We have broken up the area along the river into a zone format ... and so those operations are going to begin in the middle of the month,” Humbert said. “And we're going to, essentially, work our way west—primarily along the river and areas here like Commercial Row.”

To prepare for this, the City of Reno and its Safe and Clean Team are providing people with notice of their intention to possibly bring in heavy equipment and crews to clean up camps.

They, along with community partners like the nonprofit Karma Box Project, are also offering resources to the people living within them.



Outreach done ahead of sweeps

City officials and members of the Clean and Safe Team joined representatives of the Karma Box Project on Tuesday afternoon at the camp that extends beneath the Wells Avenue Bridge off of Commercial Row to provide members of the media with an example of the type of outreach that is being done with unhoused people ahead of the Cares Campus opening and sweeps.

It may be several weeks before that particular camp is disassembled and its residents are referred to Cares Campus and other resources like Northern Nevada HOPES' new transitional living facility, Hope Springs. Humbert said the “goal is the end of the month” for the city, given its current timetable.



He was joined Tuesday by Antonio Gilmore to show reporters around the area.

Gilmore is program assistant to the Reno city manager's office and a member of the Clean and Safe

"What we do is we try to keep the parks and the river clear ... so the community can enjoy the resou are there," Gilmore said.

Gilmore has been doing this work for three years. He started with the Volunteers of America nonpro which runs local shelters and will oversee the Cares Campus. He then transitioned to his role with t Gilmore said the goal of the Clean and Safe team is to connect unsheltered people with local resourc addiction treatment and shelter.

"We have a lot of applications for places around town that work with people with no income, and sc going to be trying to apply for them, to basically help them get into these places," Gilmore said "There's also a place called Hope Springs that has intakes on Wednesdays at 8 o'clock, so we're goin try to gather a couple of people we can take so they can do the intake process."

[Hope Springs is a transitional living facility](#) spearheaded by local non-profit community health cent Northern Nevada HOPES. Gilmore said many people currently living on the streets are unfamiliar w it and other resources.

"A lot of them don't know about it," he said. "A lot of the people out here need to have their hands h to be honest with you. I'm here to do that. That's what we're doing. We're here to help them through the entire process—whether it be getting your ID, your social security card. That's what we're doing

Richard Joyce was among the people at the camp on Tuesday afternoon and said he'd received supp from Gilmore and the Karma Box team.

They helped Joyce, who said he's an out-of-work electrical engineer, get his ID.

"I have tears in my eyes because I just got my ID," Joyce said. "I've been trying to get it since December — and now I can go to work."

Joyce said he's "lost everything to COVID" and has been trying to get a job but been thwarted in his attempts by potential employers' requirement of an official ID.

"I couldn't even go to Burger King. I'm an electrical engineer. Nobody could hire me without ID—an when you have nothing, nothing, to come up from, zero, it's so difficult," he said. "It's so difficult. I f for all of these people out here. I know there's a lot of mental health issues, and drug issues. But if somebody wants to really get out of here, they'll be able to, you know? There's people willing to give hand up."

Joyce said he's pledged 10% from the first paycheck he pulls down to the Karma Box Project.

Safe camp still to come

Some like Joyce have said the help already provided by the Clean and Safe Team and others has bee sufficient. For others, it's not clear. While the Nevada Cares Campus will be opening in the next few weeks, people will not have a choice for a safe camping spot there, at least not initially.

“So, what we have for the Cares Campus is a phased approach,” Humbert said. “This is phase one, where we have people who are existing in the current shelter system can come and have a guaranteed spot. People who show up will have an open spot ready to go. Couples can be together essentially for the first time. Pets can be involved. The evolution of things to what’s called a ‘safe camp’ is going to be down the road for phase two and phase three.”

The Washoe County Board of Commissioners at its April meeting was set to vote on a contract for Karma Box Proj to manage the campus’ safe camp area, but the item was [removed from the agenda without discussion](#).

While the space for couples and people with pets is expected to bring more unsheltered individuals the lack of safe camping space may pose a barrier to some would-be residents of the shelter. However, officials have said adding a safe camping spot for those who don’t want to live within the shelter is a plan in the months to come.

“The topic has been controversial over the past—and regionally, whether it’s the county, Sparks, or others—we’ve made the combined decision that we want to look at the safe camp option,” Humbert said. “It hasn’t always been popular, but we feel that we want to give every single person who’s living on the street right now an opportunity to find a way out of that life. And if that is something they’re more comfortable with than a shelter situation with a loved one, or they need to have their Doberman pup with them, we want to have that opportunity for them.”

JERI CHADWELL

Jeri Chadwell came to Reno from rural Nevada in 2004 to study anthropology at the University of Nevada, Reno. In 2012, she returned to the university for a master’s degree in journalism. She is the former associate and news editor of the Reno News Review and is a recipient of first-place Nevada Press Association awards for investigative and business reporting. Jeri is passionate about Nevada’s history, politics, and communities.



ENVIRONMENT

Deepening Drought Holds 'Ominous' Signs For Wildfire Threat In The West

5-Minute Listen

May 6, 2021 · 5:00 AM ET

Heard on Morning Edition

[PLAYLIST](#) [Download](#)[Transcript](#)

ERIC WESTERVELT



Owner and founder Jeff Smith in front of what remains of Hourglass' winery and processing facility in California's Napa Valley. He's rebuilding, but wildfires have him rethinking everything about his land and business.

Eric Westervelt/NPR

After one of the most destructive and extreme wildfire seasons in modern history last year, a widening drought across California and much of the West has many residents bracing for the possibility this season could be worse.

Anemic winter rain and snowfall has left reservoirs and river flows down significantly, even as the state experiences its driest water year in more than four decades. Today, wildfire fuels in some parts of California are at or near record levels of dryness.

Fuel moisture — the amount of water inside a living plant — "is the lowest that we've recorded at these sites since 2013," says Craig Clements, director of the Wildfire Interdisciplinary Research Center at San Jose State University. "It's indicative of very dangerous conditions coming into this summer."

Those hazardous conditions are the result of drier, hotter weather and accelerated vegetation drying due to a warming climate, combined with more than a century of fire suppression, that has left many forests with treacherous amounts of built-up fuel. Those two factors are now amplifying each other, says Daniel Swain, a leading climate scientist at UCLA and the Nature Conservancy.

"I think, unfortunately, as bad as things have been recently, this year looks like another year that has some really ugly potential," Swain says.

Climate scientists point out that a menacing wildfire potential this year doesn't necessarily mean that anything will happen. "Really, that's just going to be a matter of luck," Swain says. But "of all the aspects that are predictable, they all look pretty ominous."

As dire drought conditions spread, all could get exacerbated again by warmer than normal temperatures.

"Summer temperatures are forecasted by the National Weather Service to be above normal again all across the West, including California," says Amanda Sheffield, a regional drought information coordinator with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's National Integrated Drought Information System.

California has already had a pretty rapid snowmelt for this time of year, she notes, so upper elevations "could be particularly vulnerable earlier than usual as we move into midsummer."

But it's a forecast some in wildfire and pandemic-battered California may not want to hear.



Wildfire-scarred hills are visible behind the famous sign welcoming visitors to Napa Valley.

Eric Westervelt/NPR

On a recent day in Napa County's picturesque Calistoga, tourists are returning in droves more than ready for a post-lockdown generous pour, and to take in the beautiful, if fire-scarred, landscape.

But Calistoga — like a handful of other cities — has already imposed emergency water restrictions because of the drought. So the city's energetic mayor, Chris Canning, has to balance boosterism with realism.

Canning notes that since the city's founding in 1862, residents have only been evacuated twice, both times in the last four years because of wildfire. "Not a good resume for a mayor," he says with a smile. "But absolutely necessary for the safety and protection of our residents. And we'll do it again if we have to."

To get a jump on any fires this season, Canning is pleased that the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, or Cal Fire, has dedicated a new firefighting helicopter and a 24/7 firefighting crew of nearly 50 men and women for Napa County. Cal Fire has beefed up its wildfire fighting capacity statewide, adding several specially modified S-70i Firehawk helicopters to its fleet. These are more agile and versatile than its old UH-1H, or Huey, helicopters.

And the mayor says most of the region's residents get it: Climate-fueled wildfires are an ongoing threat. So people are building bigger fire breaks, making an evacuation plan and clearing brush — creating what firefighters call defensible space on their properties.

But Canning admits that's not everyone.

"The other school of thought is let's pretend, you know, what happened in the past is the past, it'll never happen again," the mayor says. "The amnesia response is problematic, especially if you're not taking the precautions you need to as a business or a resident to be prepared. That's where it's dangerous."

The entrance to Hourglass winery, with an evacuation tag from the Napa County Sheriff's Office from last year's Glass Fire blowing in the wind. Residents place these tags on their properties before evacuating, easing the job of first responders.

Eric Westervelt/NPR

In late September, the fast-moving Glass Fire badly damaged nearly 30 Napa wineries, including family-owned Hourglass wines. It swept through as the region was still recovering from 2017's record-setting fires.

"That was all remnants of the old farmhouse," says Jeff Smith, Hourglass' founder and president, as he walks near a pile of charred stones — all that remain of the winery's guesthouse, built in 1852.

But Smith says the hardest loss was the grove of old growth redwood, Douglas fir, oak and olive trees, even older than the house, most which now lie burnt and stacked for salvage.

"To me that was the soul of the property, those trees," he says. "The buildings can be rebuilt, but the couple hundred-year-old trees, you know, you can't just magically bring those right back."

Hourglass' winemaking building is a total loss. Steel fermentation and storage tanks sit like sad, damaged sculptures: Most of the 2020 vintage is still inside, cooked and useless.

The devastating Glass Fire was just one of nearly 10,000 California wildfires last year that burned more than 4 million acres — a modern record. Across the West, more than 14,000 structures were destroyed, causing billions in damages. At least 46 people were killed as California, Oregon and Colorado — all saw record-breaking "megafires."

Smith, who was born and raised in Napa, is rebuilding. But he says the more frequent, more destructive wildfires have him rethinking everything about how he manages his land, business and life.

"You know, I grew up here. All of my roots are here, and it's my intention to stay and rebuild," he says. "But I think that there's a lot of game-changing thought processes that we need to be going through."

Past vintages, stored in wooden barrels in stone and cement caves built into the hillside, survived the fire. Smith is looking to rebuild stronger and smarter.

"We're taking a much harder look at materials, defensible space, at fire suppression systems, access. You know, all of these kinds of things to try to mitigate this into the future."

And Smith is hopeful. He aims to rebuild enough this summer to crush and process this year's grape harvest in a new facility here, along Napa's famed Silverado Trail in September.

At least, that's the plan.

"I tell my winemaking team: Have a backup plan!" Smith says with a laugh. In a world-class wine region turned wine and wildfire zone, he concedes, "It's always good to have a Plan B."



Trees burned by the recent Bear Fire line the steep banks of Lake Oroville, California, where water levels are at only 42 percent. A dry winter, after a record-breaking hot, dry 2020, has left much of the western U.S. parched.

PHOTOGRAPH BY JUSTIN SULLIVAN, GETTY IMAGES

ENVIRONMENT NEWS

‘Megadrought’ persists in western U.S., as another extremely dry year develops

The long-running dry stretch rivals anything in the last 1200 years, a sign of climate-change induced "aridification."

BY ALEJANDRA BORUNDA



PUBLISHED MAY 7, 2021 • 12 MIN READ

Water levels usually peak in May at Folsom Lake in California, rising as Sierra Nevada snowpack melts away and courses down to the reservoir, near Sacramento.

But this year, the drought that has gripped much of the U.S. West is already so strong that the lake is only half as full as normal. Instead of water, fields of purple lupines line vast swaths of dry lakebed.

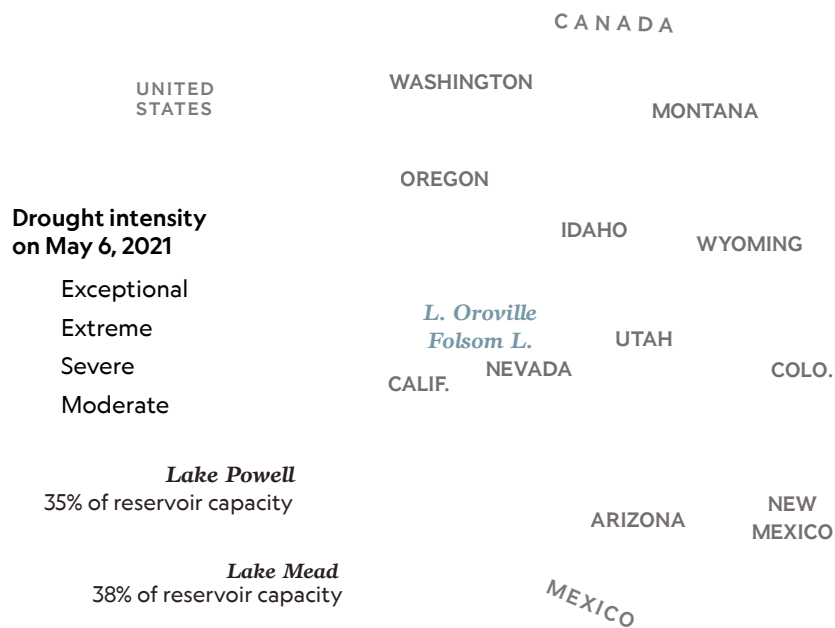
Folsom Lake’s situation is emblematic of the deepening drought across the western United States. As of May 6, 67 percent of the region was in a state of “severe” drought or worse; a stunning 21 percent is already in “exceptional” drought, the worst category in the U.S. Drought Monitor’s framework. At Lake Mead, one of the two major reservoirs of the Colorado River, which some 40 million Americans depend on, water levels are creeping toward a threshold that would trigger the first official shortage declaration for the basin.

The situation is unlikely to improve in the near future, scientists say, as 2021 shapes up to extend the “megadrought” that researchers have found to be gripping the region mostly unabated since 2000.

The region would have been in a state of drought regardless, “but it’s really climate change that pushed this event to be one of the worst in 500 years,” says Ben Cook, a climate scientist at Columbia’s Lamont Doherty Earth Observatory.

An extraordinary drought is expanding in the western U.S.

Below average precipitation last winter and dwindling snowpack in the mountains, both exacerbated by human-caused climate change, are making for a dire drought in the western United States. The U.S. Drought Monitor estimates that 57 million people are living in drought areas in western states right now.



Percent of western U.S. area in moderate or worse drought conditions



Riley D. Champine, NG Staff
Sources: National Drought Mitigation Center; USDA; NOAA

Dry, dry, dry

Drought can take many forms. There's "meteorological drought," which compares how much rain or snow has fallen compared to a long-term average. There's "hydrological drought," which considers how much water flows through streams and rivers and is stored in mountain snowpack and underground aquifers. There's the drought the soil, plants, and animals feel, called agricultural or ecological drought.

This year, by just about every measure, the West is extremely low on water. Most of California and the Four Corners states are somewhere between 25 and 50 percent of their long-term averages on most of the drought indicators. Snowpack in California on April 1, its usual peak time, hit only 59 percent of its long-term average and has already largely melted away, leaving it at a paltry 15 percent of its average at this date. Soils are parched. The Colorado and Rio Grande rivers are trickling compared to their long-term histories.

The U.S. Drought Monitor ties all of these many pieces together into a weekly, U.S.-wide snapshot, binning the on-the-ground drought situation into six categories from "none" to "exceptional." On April 22 they reported that 21 percent of the West was in "extreme" or "exceptional" drought, the two worst levels—nearly three times the area ever listed in that category this early in the year in the Monitor's 20-year history.

"It's incredible, how much of the West is in extreme or exceptional drought right now," says Sandra Postel, the director of the Global Water Policy Project, "including much of the Colorado and Rio Grande basins, the two lifelines of the Southwest."

The conditions are influenced by many factors, including a La Niña event that began last fall, which scientists know can contribute to dry conditions in the Southwest. In a La Niña event, ocean surface waters in the Eastern tropical Pacific are relatively cool (in an El Niño, this part of the ocean is usually extra warm). That cooling shifts the position of towering high-energy clouds, which tend to form over warm water, further to the west, which in turn affects the shape of planet-spanning weather systems. The effect "is like dropping a pebble into a pond," says Samantha Stevenson, a climate scientist at the University of California, Santa Barbara; where the pebble is dropped affects where the waves of weather move.

The shape and pattern of the big weather ripples moving away from the Eastern Pacific toward the western U.S. make it more likely that precipitation-rich storm systems curve northward toward the Pacific Northwest and Canada rather than toward the Southwest.

A healthy dose of random chance also feeds into the weather patterns that keep the West dry. But underneath the weather vagaries, human-driven climate change is making those conditions more likely.

Megadrought deepens

Dry conditions are nothing new in the U.S. West, which has cycled through water booms and busts for millennia.

But the region has been in a state of drought nearly every year since 2000, when the Drought Monitor was established. That 20-year-long stretch rivals any drought in the last 1,200 years, a team of scientists reported last year.

They knit together hundreds of tree-ring records from across northern Mexico and the U.S. West, creating a record that stretches back to about 800 AD. Trees record damp and dry years, growing more vigorously when their roots feel wetter soil and leaving behind slightly thicker rings. The team combined the tree rings with climate models to build a history of soil moisture, which indicates the intensity of drought.

ADVERTISEMENT

In that 1,200-year-long record, the region cycled through 35 major droughts, including four "megadroughts" of particularly notable strength and duration: one in the 800s; another in the 1100s; a third in the 1200s that has been linked to the collapse of Ancestral Pueblo culture in the Southwest; and one deep, intense stretch in the late 1500s that may have added insurmountable strain on Native communities in Mexico already stressed by colonization and disease.

The previous megadroughts lasted decades—“20, 30, even 40 years, really eclipsing anything we’ve had to manage for in the last 100 years,” says Cook. In the past century, droughts like the 1920s Dust Bowl generally lasted only five to 10 years—devastating for those living through it, but significantly less disruptive than a multi-decade-long drought.

This current dry stretch is already long and intense by comparison. It comes in second in their record only to the 1500s drought, which occurred in a world unchanged by human-forced climate change. That should give us pause, says Cook, because it shows the West can swing into such drastic drought states naturally, without the extra nudge of climate change. An extra push from humans could make the effects far worse.

And, according to their analysis, that’s exactly what has occurred: This “megadrought” has been pushed into extreme territory by climate change. It would have been bad no matter what—their estimates suggest it would have been roughly the eleventh most intense in their record—but the added heat from climate change supercharged the drying, pushing it up to the second most intense drought in the last 1200 years.

Climate futures

Human-caused climate change, in tandem with human reshaping of the natural hydrological systems—by damming rivers, growing vast fields of crops, and more—have shifted the baseline conditions so thoroughly that there is no way to return to what used to be considered normal. The physics are simply too different.

ADVERTISEMENT

Hotter air is thirstier than dry, capable of holding 7 percent more moisture for each degree Celsius (1.8 degrees Fahrenheit) warmer it gets. Climate change has bumped average air temperatures up 1.6 degrees Fahrenheit in the region since the early 1900s. The increase means the atmosphere more readily pulls water from streams and rivers, lakes and reservoirs, and plants and soils.

The effects can feed back on themselves, exacerbating drought under some conditions. Evaporation takes a lot of energy, which is used to transform water from liquid to gas, using up energy that would otherwise be absorbed into soil as heat. As soils dry out, there’s less water to evaporate—so solar radiation just heats the ground further.

“When we sweat, water evaporates from our skin, and that evaporation acts as a cooling mechanism for our body,” says Amir AghaKouchak, a climate scientist at the University of California, Irvine. “Earth’s surface works the same way.”

Crucially, hotter air also means the precipitation that arrives is more likely to fall as rain than snow. Snow in the high mountains acts like a water tower, storing winter precipitation until it melts in spring and summer, smoothing the boom-bust seasonal precipitation cycle. With hotter air, whatever snow does fall often melts earlier in the year. Both contribute to a “snow drought” effect. Agha Kouchak and a colleague Laurie Huning recently found that in the western U.S., snow droughts lasted 28 percent longer after 2000, compared with the previous 20 years.

And the effects cascade. Less snow can lead to drier soils, which can increase the chance of heat waves, which dry soils further.

In the face of continued climate change, some scientists and others have suggested that using the word “drought” for what’s happening now might no longer be appropriate, because it implies that the water shortages may end. Instead, we might be seeing a fundamental, long-term shift in water availability all over the West.

ADVERTISEMENT

“Climate change is leading to a steady aridification of the western U.S.,” says Cook. “We’ve shifted the baseline drier and drier, making it easier for natural variability to send us into a drought and harder for natural variability to drag us out of an event.”

Impacts on the ground

The effects of the ongoing drought are already playing out across many western states.

Along the California-Oregon border in the Klamath River basin, water reserves are so low that farmers in the region will receive only 8 percent of the water they usually get. The Yurok and Karuk tribes, which steward salmon and other fish populations along the river, are concerned that it won't have enough water to keep the fish healthy.

The Colorado River, the source of water for almost 40 million people, is struggling as well. Even hefty March snows that pushed the overall snowpack in the headwater region up to about 85 percent of its long-term average peak couldn't make up for the water deficit that had built up, and the snow has disappeared much more quickly than normal, says Brad Udall, a climate scientist at Colorado State University.

Lake Mead, the giant reservoir atop the Hoover Dam fed by the Colorado, is only 39 percent full, down over 130 feet since 2000. If the water level drops to below 1,075 feet (it was at 1079 at the end of April), a major water conservation plan will be triggered for the first time ever. The Bureau of Reclamation expects this to happen this June. If that threshold is passed, water allotments to the states that rely on the Colorado's water will adjust in 2022; states on the lower reaches of the river, like Arizona and Nevada, will be hit with major cuts.

Tribes in the river basin, who have long lacked consistent access to the clean and plentiful water to which they have legal rights, are also feeling the effects of the drought.

"Navajo Nation has been the epicenter of drought for years," says Bidtah Becker, a Navajo attorney and co-author of a new report outlining the water access challenges, highlighted by COVID-19, for tribes across the region. "This is a climate change matter, and it's really important for the federal government to invest appropriately now so that we're building water systems that are resilient for the future."

ADVERTISEMENT

The fear of another year of intense wildfire is growing across the region, as well; recent years have seen some of the largest and most disruptive fire seasons in recorded history, driven in part by extremely dry conditions. In April in California, measurements of the "fuel moisture content" in chamise, a common and flammable shrub, were at dryness levels not usually seen before June.

A good run of rain or late-season snow could offset some of the worst impacts, says Udall, but the likelihood of that showing up wanes as the season marches on. "We could maybe get lucky," he says, but luck now would simply assuage the meteorological, short-term drought—not the bigger problem.

"As warm and hot and record-setting as it has been the last few years," he says, "what you need to keep in mind is, these are some of the coolest temperatures you're going to experience in the next 100 years. Because it's just going to get hotter. You ain't seen nothing yet."



Hosing down the driveway? Why California has no statewide water wasting rules as it heads into a new drought

Emergency conservation rules expired in 2017, and Newsom administration hasn't renewed them



ALAMEDA, CA – MAY 4: A person cleans the sidewalk and waters the lawn in the front yard of a house in Alameda California on Tuesday, May 4, 2021.(Ray Chavez/Bay Area News Group)

By [PAUL ROGERS](#) | progers@bayareanewsgroup.com | Bay Area News Group

PUBLISHED: May 10, 2021 at 5:30 a.m. | UPDATED: May 10, 2021 at 11:45 a.m.

Anyone who lived through California's last big drought from 2012 to 2016 remembers the rules.

You couldn't water your yard so much that the water ran off into the street or sidewalk. Or hose down a driveway. Hotels had to put up signs telling customers they could choose not to have sheets and towels washed every day. Ornamental fountains were prohibited unless they recycled water. Watering landscaping within 48 hours of rain was forbidden. Cities couldn't water grass on street medians. And if you washed a car with a hose, it had to have a nozzle.



Now California is entering a new drought with dwindling reservoir levels. But so far, there are no statewide prohibitions against wasting water.

The previous rules — which were widely considered common-sense ways to conserve water — expired in November 2017, after former Gov. Jerry Brown lifted the state's emergency drought declaration when soaking winter rains filled reservoirs and caused flooding.

State officials tried to make the rules permanent, with fines of up to \$500 for violators. But they quietly dropped the issue in 2018, after lawyers for several water agencies called the rules overly broad and said they infringed on their water rights, hinting at lawsuits.

Some conservation experts say the Newsom administration should put the rules back in place.

"You want to get them out the door now," said Newsha Ajami, a civil engineer and director of Stanford University's Urban Water Policy Program. "These are easy things. Every drop of water we save now will be available for us later."

Some say the state doesn't need to revisit the rules. They say the decision is best left up to local cities and water agencies, many of which already have some form of water-wasting rules on the books.

"To adopt a statewide mandate by the governor to do something that's already been done doesn't seem to be necessarily the most effective use of time and resources," said Dave Eggerton, executive director of the Association of California Water Agencies, an influential organization that represents 460 water agencies in California, including most of the largest.

But others say even if the rules don't save large amounts of water by themselves, they remind the public that California is a dry state and water is a precious resource, a mindset that encourages responsible water use across society.

"As we head into another drought, prohibiting water waste seems like a no-brainer," said Tracy Quinn, director of California urban water policy for the Natural Resources Defense Council, an environmental group. "This was a missed opportunity."

Among the urban areas that still have local water-wasting rules in place are the city of San Jose, the East Bay Municipal Utility District, San Francisco, Sacramento and Los Angeles.

But the rules vary by area. Most places haven't been issuing fines for violators. And state officials say they don't know how many of California's 40 million residents are subject to local water-wasting prohibitions and how many aren't.

The most recent [study](#), done in 2015 by the State Water Resources Control Board, found that 95% of water agencies had local rules banning overwatering landscaping that allowed water to run into the street, sidewalks or other properties. But only 65% required hotels to notify guests they don't have to have sheets and towels washed daily, and just 40% prohibited watering lawns within 48 hours of rain, while 18% banned watering grass on street medians.

Why the statewide rules were never renewed remains murky.

"The urgency was less intense, because it was raining, and folks had done a real good job reducing their water use," said Felicia Marcus, former chairwoman of the state water board. "We got caught up in all the other things we were trying to get done before the end of the Brown administration, and it just didn't get across the finish line."



Lake Oroville in Butte County, California's second-largest reservoir, shown here on April 27, 2021, is just 42% full — half of its historical average for this time of year after two dry winters in a row. (Photo by Justin Sullivan/Getty Images)



Other sources familiar with the issue said that after the drought ended, Brown was focusing intently on trying to build two giant tunnels under the Delta to deliver water more easily to Southern California, and the threat of lawsuits over the water-wasting rules caused some state officials to back off.

A key moment three years ago revealed how passionate and intense California water debates can become, even over seemingly non-controversial issues.

On Feb. 20, 2018, the state water board, whose members are appointed by the governor, [held a hearing](#) to make the rules permanent. Some city water officials quibbled with the particulars.

But attorneys for several powerful water agencies said the rules were tantamount to the state curbing their water rights. They were upset that the water board was citing a provision in the state constitution that prohibits “waste or unreasonable use” of water as the legal basis for the rules, and they worried that if it invoked that authority with the urban water wasting rules, the board would use it in other areas.

Commenting back then, Robert Donlan, an attorney for the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission, said the rules would set “a dangerous and unnecessary precedent.” Phil Williams, general counsel of Westlands Water District in Fresno, quoted Martin Luther King Jr.’s “Letter from Birmingham Jail,” at the public meeting, recounted societal collapse in Iraq and cited Shakespeare, saying “the erosion of our laws results in the erosion of us as a people.”

Jackson Minasian, a lawyer for the Stanford Vina Ranch Irrigation Company, said at the meeting that if the board passed the rules, it might next tell farmers what crops to grow, or cities that they can’t provide water to undocumented immigrants.

Marcus said this week those arguments were overblown and the state water board has won most lawsuits over water rights.

“I think it would be a good idea to revisit the rules,” Marcus said. “You have push-back from water agencies that don’t like being told what to do, but they are pretty common-sense rules.”

Her successor, state water board chairman Joaquin Esquivel, said in an interview that California’s urban residents are still using 16% less water now than they were in 2013. He said state lawmakers have passed laws that will require further conservation in the years ahead, but if the drought worsens, all options are possible.

“It’s not off the table,” Esquivel said. “We need to be conserving. Even though this summer some agencies might not be in an emergency mode, we need to make conservation a way of life. We’re going to need to be doing more.”



ALAMEDA, CA – MAY 4: Sprinklers water the lawn of a house — and the sidewalk — in Alameda, Calif., on Tuesday, May 4, 2021. (Ray Chavez/Bay Area News Group)

Paul Rogers | Natural resources and environment reporter

Paul Rogers has covered a wide range of issues for The Mercury News since 1989, including water, oceans, energy, logging, parks, endangered species, toxics and climate change. He also has worked as managing editor of the Science team at KQED, the PBS and NPR station in San Francisco, and has taught science writing at UC Berkeley and UC Santa Cruz.



VOICES | Opinion *This piece expresses the views of its author(s), separate from those of this publication.*

Public outcry saved historic Steamboat Ditch | Jerry Wager

Jerry Wager

Published 6:00 a.m. PT May 11, 2021

This opinion column was submitted by Jerry Wager, a property owner adjacent to Steamboat Ditch and a member of the TMWA Steering Advisory Committee.

Once again, water is rushing through Steamboat Ditch — always a welcome return. But this year it was even more poignant, having almost lost this wonderful resource through the actions of a variety of agencies and individuals. Fortunately, the plan to put it in a pipe was thwarted by the outcry from hundreds of residents in January.

The mallards have returned, raising a new brood of baby ducks, and the frogs are croaking again behind our house. I am struck by all the ironies the ditch now seems to represent. For example, just over a month ago, the city announced plans to resurrect the Moana pool. Almost \$19 million to put a rectangular hole in the ground at one location, an aquatic amenity for area residents that they will have to pay to enjoy, while agencies were poised to spend at least \$25 million to wipe out 14 miles of Steamboat Ditch which people in the same area currently enjoy for free.

From January: Historic Steamboat Ditch could get piped under proposed project; residents left 'unaware'

Another ironic facet of this story is that the ditch probably has more importance today as part of the city and county's stormwater system than for agriculture — the reason it was constructed 140 years ago. City and county contracts with the Steamboat Canal Company for stormwater conveyance may provide more income than irrigation fees from valley farmers. I suppose it's not surprising that the city and county have usurped area ditches for this purpose, as development overtook their watersheds and these channels provided a way of moving increased runoff. Unfortunately, the ditches were never designed to carry the amount of water that is sometimes diverted into them, damaging private properties when sections of the ditch

inevitably fail. And, like other areas in the region where stormwater has been “managed,” damage suits ensue.

When the plan to pipe Steamboat Ditch came to light back in January, there was an enormous effort to elicit public opposition. At the time, I naively thought that a large international environmental organization operating in our part of the state, of which I am a legacy member, would be interested in expressing its concern about the loss of such an important environmental asset. I was so wrong. They were too busy, and couldn't be bothered. Even impassioned emails about the importance of the ditch to the area's environment and wildlife didn't budge them. I now put this down to “eco-snobbery.” When “natural” waterways are threatened, environmentalists often react with horror. However, Steamboat, like our other agricultural ditches are manmade — and, I guess, therefore, not worthy of protection. I wonder if the mallards, birds and the frogs, dependent on the ditch, make this distinction. Most of our small, secondary streams are ephemeral; that is, they dry up during the summer; agricultural ditches run during this same time period, providing an aquatic lifeline. Because of COVID-19, this same organization now provides its members with “virtual tours” of its nature preserves; perhaps, in the future, that is how we will have to take a walk along a ditch put in a pipe.

Opinion: Public water decisions need more transparency, scrutiny | Jerry Wager

When we moved to Reno nine years ago, I was impressed with emphasis placed on the area's history. The East and Midwest, where I grew up and worked, seem to take their history more for granted. It's odd then, that the story of ditches, such a critical piece of the area's infrastructure, seems to have been ignored. The history of the West is dominated by the exploits of white men, while what was built by Chinese laborers has been erased by time and racism.

So, as I sit on the patio behind the house and watch the runners, dog walkers and a host of other people, just enjoying themselves on the trail adjacent to Steamboat Ditch, I remind myself to appreciate this resource and not take it for granted.

Jerry Wager is a property owner adjacent to Steamboat Ditch and a member of the TMWA Steering Advisory Committee.

Have your say: How to submit an opinion column or letter to the editor

TRENDING: Top headlines from the Board of County Commissioners Me...



HOME WASHOE COUNTY HEALTH DISTRICT LIBRARY SYSTEM SIGN UP

TOP HEADLINES FROM THE BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS MEETING

May 11, 2021 | Board of County Commissioners



The following are highlights from today's Washoe
County Board of County Commissioners meeting:

1. Commissioners reviewed proposed FY22 budget: Assistant County Manager Christine Vuletich and Budget Manager Lori Cooke presented the [Washoe County FY22 County Manager's Recommended Budget](#) for feedback and direction. When the COVID-19 pandemic hit in early 2020, Washoe County prepared for severe financial impacts. With some careful cost-containment strategies and better-than-expected revenues, the impact was not as great as anticipated, and Washoe County is positioned to start the 2022 fiscal year in a stable financial position. This will enable the county to expand library hours and regional homelessness services. A newly established Homelessness Fund will support a variety of programs from the Sheriff's Homelessness Initiative to the shelter and safe camp program at the Nevada Cares Campus, as well as the continuation of Crossroads, Our Place, and other programs.

The total recommended Fiscal Year 2022 budget appropriations are \$829 million, and of that, the General Fund appropriations total \$435 million, or 53 percent.

The Fiscal Year 2022 recommended budget reflects strategic priorities for the county, including:

- Continuum of care for unsheltered and vulnerable populations
- Funding for property tax settlement payments
- Funding for expansion of Regional Homelessness Services
- Funding for expansion of library hours
- Restoration of General Fund support for capital projects
- Replenishment of Stabilization and Risk Management Reserves

Sta will incorporate feedback from the commissioners and return with the Final Budget for adoption at a public hearing on May 18. Sta is also monitoring the 2021 Nevada Legislative Session and budget, which is scheduled to end on May 31 and could have impacts on local budgets.

"I'd like to see the parks' budgets. I've heard it for seven years now how parks have been decimated, and it's true. It's a tired rhetoric," Commission Chair Bob Lucey said. "Our parks have zero revenue and provide such a valuable service to our community. These parks are huge assets to the county and we're not doing justice to these parks. Let's change the narrative and give back to the community. Let's find a way to identify funding for parks. To keep these parks at a status quo, we're doing an injustice not only to ourselves but also to the community."

2. Commissioners approved amendment to local authority of COVID measures: Washoe County assumed local authority over COVID-19 mitigation measures from the State of Nevada earlier this month. The authority allows them to amend the [plan](#) as needed before Gov. Sisolak lifts all emergency directives on June 1, with the exception of the statewide mask mandate. Nightclubs, day clubs, and adult entertainment venues were previously slated to reopen June 1, but Commissioners today approved an amendment to the mitigation plan to allow them to open. This will bring these businesses in line with other business types in the county, effective at 11:59 p.m. today.

3. Commissioners advanced Washoe County's Safe Camp Pilot Project at the Nevada Cares Campus:

In two actions today, Commissioners approved an [operator contract](#) for the county's new Safe Camp Pilot Project and approved the [submission of a grant](#) to pay to launch the program.

Washoe County will work with the Karma Box Project to start and operate a Safe Camp program at the Nevada Cares Campus until a formal procurement for services can take place. The agreement for just over \$102,000 will cover an initial three-month term and \$34,000 per month for subsequent months. The Nevada Cares Campus is slated to open next week, and will assist the public health and safety concerns for unsheltered people living in encampments along the Truckee River, and will enable the county to provide a safe camping location alongside services, which will be offered at the Nevada Cares Campus.

"The reason we're doing this pilot is to verify that the safe camp concept is a viable alternative to a shelter, which is the other option we will be making available in the next few weeks," County Manager Eric Brown said. "We want to know, can we achieve the same outcomes in terms of successfully transitioning them to stable housing."

Additionally, Commissioners approved a grant submission to the Nevada Non-Entitlement Community Development Block Grant Program to fund the Safe Camp Pilot Program. The funds are to be used specifically for the prevention of, preparation for, and response to the Coronavirus.

The safe camp model will ensure that people experiencing homelessness have a safe, low barrier option to begin the process of transitioning into housing. The safe camp staff will be trained to continually focus participant outreach on finding permanent housing. As more people are supported to successfully exit the camp into their own permanent housing solutions, we hope to further reduce the spread of the virus throughout the community.

Nevada received approximately \$9.9 million from this block grant program, \$244,000 of which is allocated to Washoe County for COVID-19 mitigation measures for unsheltered residents.

4. Reno-Tahoe International Airport CEO presented update on current business operations: The Reno-Tahoe Airport Authority operates two airports in the region. The Reno-Tahoe International Airport (RTO) moved more than 4.5 million passengers on 10 airlines in 2019, according to an [update](#) provided to the Commission by RTIA CEO Daren Griffin, who took the helm of the airport authority in August 2020. He reported on the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic as travel came to a standstill for much of the year. However, the airport is positioned to rebound with more nonstop destinations now than in 2019, and by July of this year it will have the highest ever nonstop destinations at 25.

The airport authority's second airport, Reno Stead Airport, will undergo improvements in the coming year and will be seeking proposals to develop 30 acres of available land for hangar/aeronautical development. "It looks like there are some amazing things going on at the airport," Chair Bob Lucey said. "Thank you for presenting to the Board today, and welcome to Reno. We really appreciate you and all that you are doing at the airport."

5. Commissioners received update on traffic signal timing from RTC: The Regional Transportation Commission conducts an evaluation and timing review of all 410 trac signals in Washoe County every three years. RTC's [signal timing program](#) began in 2005.

Traffic signal timing is an important tool to reduce pollution and fuel waste from vehicles slowing down and idling unnecessarily. Well-timed intersections also promote safety as they keep traffic flowing and help get drivers where they need to go faster. The signals have also been timed for proper pedestrian crossing time as well as vehicular crossing time. RTC has a traffic-signal hotline to report poor signal timing or other traffic-related issues: 775-335-ROAD (7623).

6. Commissioners approved board appointments:

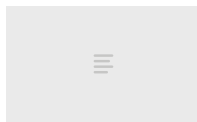
- [Clay Thomas](#), Washoe County Board of Adjustment, District 3
- [Ken Krater](#), Planning Commission
[Adam Kramer](#), Reno-Tahoe Airport Authority

RELATED POSTS



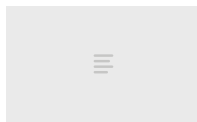
Board of
County
Commissioners approves
plan for local
authority
over COVID
restrictions

May 3, 2021



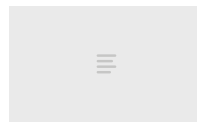
Top 5 things
you need to
know about
the Washoe
County
Board of
Commissioners meeting

August 25, 2015



Highlights
from Washoe
County
Board of
Commissioners meeting

February 24,
2015



Top 5 things
from the
Washoe
County
Board of
Commissioners meeting

October 27, 2015