



<https://www.kalw.org/post/bay-area-headlines-wednesday-72920-am#stream/0>

Bay Area Headlines: Wednesday, 7/29/20, AM

By KEVIN VANCE & AP & CAPITAL PUBLIC RADIO NEWS • 8 HOURS AGO

[Share](#)[Tweet](#)[Email](#)



Massive Fire Engulfs Several Buildings In SF / Great American Outdoors Act Could Help CA National Parks, Create New Green Spaces / CA Indian Tribe Gets Back Big Sur Ancestral Lands / School Districts Scramble To Get Laptop, Hotspots For Distance Learning / CA To Collect Race And Sexual Orientation Info From Covid-19 Test Takers / CA Withholds Virus Money From Two Defiant Cities

Massive Fire Engulfs Several Buildings In San Francisco

About 150 firefighters battled a massive blaze raging through at least six commercial buildings in San Francisco. The fire sent a thick, black plume of smoke up to the sky and embers to a nearby freeway. The California Highway Patrol says one southbound lane of Highway 101 was closed because of the blaze in the South

of Market neighborhood. One firefighter was treated for minor injuries. People in neighboring buildings had to evacuate and power was knocked down because of the blaze, trapping several people in elevators in nearby buildings.

Great American Outdoors Act Could Help California National Parks, Create New Green Spaces

Congress passed perhaps one of the largest conservation bills since World War II last week.

The Great American Outdoors Act does two major things. It funds a program that could expand natural areas, preserve habitat and help cities buy land for parks. Secondly, it would provide billions of dollars to help address maintenance needed for parks like Yosemite, says Marcia Argust with the Pew Charitable trust.

“Park facilities and resources are aging and deteriorating. Yosemite alone has repair needs of over \$600 million.”

Places like Lake Tahoe could also get upgrades for more public access to the lake and trails, said South Lake Tahoe City Councilman Devin Middlebrook.

“We want to make sure that no matter who you are, you can come to Tahoe and experience the same thing that everyone else does.”

If the bill is signed by the president, groups will have 90 days to give their proposals to Congress, and the funds could start moving in October. Middlebrook says leaders in Tahoe are putting together their asks now.

California Indian Tribe Gets Back Big Sur Ancestral Lands

A Native American tribe has reclaimed a small part of ancestral lands on California’s Big Sur coast that were lost to Spanish colonial settlement nearly 250 years ago. The Mercury News reports the Esselen Tribe of Monterey County closed escrow on 1,199 acres about 5 miles inland from the ocean that was part of a \$4.5 million deal involving the state and the Western Rivers Conservancy. It marks the first restoration of any lands to the tribe, which lost 90% of

its approximately 1,000 members to disease and other causes by the early 1800s. The land encompasses old-growth redwoods, oak woodlands, meadows and endangered steelhead trout.

School Districts Scramble To Get Laptop, Hotspots For Distance Learning

Distance learning in California has exacerbated the so-called 'digital divide' — leaving kids without access to reliable internet and devices at a severe disadvantage.

The latest state budget allocated over 5 billion dollars to schools for spending on pandemic-related needs.

Tracy Unified School District in San Joaquin County received about 10 million dollars. Brian Stephens is the district superintendent. He says Tracy Unified bought 14 thousand internet hotspots and laptops for students in need.

"We spent it all — 100 percent — on devices. All of it."

Some parts of the district have minimal broadband availability — a problem up and down the state, from Modoc County to the inland Mexican Border.

Governor Gavin Newsom is mandating that all students have access to devices and adequate internet connection. As some spend all of their pandemic-related funds on technology, others are turning to Silicon Valley companies for donations.

CA To Collect Race And Sexual Orientation Info From Covid-19 Test Takers

Californians can expect some personal questions when getting a coronavirus test. Health and Human Services Secretary Doctor Mark Ghaly says testing facilities and doctors will be required to report the sexual orientation, gender identity, race and ethnicity of patients. In fact, the requirement now applies to all transmittable diseases.

"Improving our data is like getting a new pair of glasses that helps us see more clearly or using binoculars that help us see a little further out."

San Francisco Democratic state Senator Scott Weiner (Wee-ner) has been pushing for the state to get this information. He says when it comes to the health care system, the LGBTQ community has suffered a long history of government neglect. Dr. Ghaly adds that certain ethnic groups, including Latinos, face a disproportionate risk from COVID-19.

CA Withholds Virus Money From Two Defiant Cities

Governor Newsom for the first time is using his new powers to withhold money from two cities in California's Central Valley that are defying state health orders by allowing all businesses to open. The state is withholding nearly \$65,000 from Atwater and more than \$35,000 from Coalinga. It's just the first part of \$2.5 billion that cities and counties risk losing if they don't toe the line on coronavirus safeguards. Atwater's mayor says the governor is abandoning the small city even as he devotes more resources and federal money to combat a virus surge in the Central Valley.