



ROBERT GAUTHIER Los Angeles Times

TULARE LAKE reemerged in March for the first time in 25 years. The Tulare Lake Basin is one of 21 groundwater basins deemed to be “critically overdrafted,” where local agencies are required to meet sustainability goals by 2040.

WITH THE LAND SINKING, THEY PERSIST IN PUMPING

The farm barons of the Tulare Lake Basin want to continue drawing groundwater at volumes that are collapsing the San Joaquin Valley

By Susanne Rust, Jessica Garrison and Ian James | REPORTING FROM CORCORAN, CALIF.

Earlier this year, as floodwaters rushed toward the San Joaquin Valley city of Corcoran — home to roughly 20,000 people and a sprawling maximum-security state prison — emergency workers and desperate local officials begged the state for help raising their levee.

Corcoran had been sinking, steadily, for years because of persistent overpumping of groundwater by major landowners in the Tulare Lake Basin that has sent the valley floor into a slow-motion collapse. And the levee raises made in 2017 — a multimillion-dollar effort funded by local property tax hikes and the prison system — were no longer up to the job. Ultimately, the state agreed to pour \$17 million into another round of levee engineering in an effort to save the town.

Farmers, meanwhile, were frantic as the basin’s phantom lake reemerged for the first time in 25 years and floodwaters surged onto croplands that had not flooded in modern times. The same overpumping that was sinking Corcoran had caused geologic transformations across the basin. What was once high [See **Tulare Lake**, A8]



IRFAN KHAN Los Angeles Times

WATER from an underground well irrigates an orchard in Visalia, Calif. A confrontation is brewing between landowners and regulators.

12/31/23 adds up to a wedding bonanza

By ALEXANDRA E. PETRI

Cindy Adams knew two things about her wedding: She and her fiancé, Anthony Asta, wanted to get married in Las Vegas, and she wanted to tie the knot on a date Asta could easily remember for their future anniversaries.

They decided on a New Year’s Eve wedding at the Little White Chapel in Las Vegas. The ceremony is scheduled for 12:30 p.m. on 12/31/23 — a repeating 1-2-3 pattern.

“We didn’t realize it was 123-123,” Adams, 49, said. Asta likes order, so the date seemed fitting.

[See **Vegas**, A10]

Holiday waste clogging up landfills

Season brings a visible deluge of wrapping paper, food, aluminum and shipping boxes.

By HAYLEY SMITH AND SUSANNE RUST

’Twas the week after Christmas, and in a quiet corner of the San Fernando Valley, lines of waste collection trucks waited to offload their goods onto a growing mountain of garbage.

Here at the Athens Materials Recovery Facility in Sun Valley, cardboard boxes



LUIS SINCO Los Angeles Times

HOLIDAY wrapping paper, plastic bags and cardboard boxes fill waste facilities this time of year.

careened down conveyor belts, empty bottles and cans flew through crushers and sorters, and hand crews sifted through soggy recyclables.

Wrapping paper, aluminum trays and Amazon logos were a near-constant among the detritus.

“We get a lot more boxes during this time of year for sure,” said Fabiola Martinez, an operations lead with Athens Services, which handles much of the waste hauling and recycling in Los Angeles and other nearby areas.

According to waste [See **Waste**, A10]

Netanyahu sees ‘months’ of war

The Israeli leader thanks the U.S. for its support, including more weapons. **WORLD**, A3

RIP: Restaurants that died in 2023

Some of the Southland’s most cherished eateries had to close their doors this year. **CALIFORNIA**, B1

A year of tumult for entertainment

Photographers reflect on capturing the faces of their most compelling portraits. **CALENDAR**, E1

Weather: A little rain. L.A. Basin: 61/47. **B10**



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State laws aim to curtail AI risks

Without wanting to ‘squench innovation,’ California politicians are setting the stage for more regulation.

By QUEENIE WONG

Jodi Long was caught off guard by the cage filled with cameras meant to capture images of her face and body.

“I was a little freaked out because before I walked in there, I said, ‘I don’t remember this being in my contract,’” the actor said.

The filmmakers needed her digital scan, Long was told, because they wanted to make sure her arms were positioned correctly in a scene in which she holds a computer-generated character.

That moment in 2020 stuck with Long, president of SAG-AFTRA’s Los Angeles local, while she was negotiating for protections around the use of artificial intelligence when actors went on strike. In November, the actors guild reached a deal with Hollywood studios that — among other stipulations — required consent and compensation for the use of a worker’s digital replica.

Labor unions aren’t the [See **AI**, A16]

A rosier year for parade turnout?

Organizers hope to see a return to pre-pandemic crowd figures in Pasadena.

By GRACE TOOHEY AND ANTHONY DE LEON

When the Rose Parade returned in 2022 after a historic break amid the pandemic, things felt different.

Despite the marching bands, high-stepping horses and massive floral displays again rolling through Pasadena’s streets, ticket sales dropped dramatically and spectators were noticeably fewer. Last year, with the threat of COVID-19 further reduced, crowds along the 5½-mile parade route were still not what Tournament of Roses organizers hoped to see.

This third year could be pivotal: Will the 135-year-old event bounce back to the crowds it once boasted, upward of 700,000?

Officials hope that answer is yes, and are banking on a promising forecast, a competitive football matchup and an exciting musical lineup to draw people in.

“We are expecting we’ll have good crowds for the parade and the game itself,” [See **Rose Parade**, A7]



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