

LTCC, Bijou Park fuel project to be done without chain saws

By Kathryn Reed

Thousands of trees will be removed from nearly 200 acres in the heart of South Lake Tahoe this month.

The fuels reduction project is concentrated on the campus of Lake Tahoe Community College and across Al Tahoe Boulevard at Bijou Community Park. Work will not interfere with graduation or the upcoming disc golf tournament.

Nor should it disturb neighbors. This is because the loud hum of chain saws won't be audible.



The equipment used in 2009 at Cold Creek is being used this year. Photo/Danielle Banchio

“There are two standard pieces of equipment. One is a harvester. That does the job of what a gentleman and a chain saw did. It is mechanized equipment. An automated saw cuts the tree at the base and lays it on the ground,” explained Danielle Banchio of North Valley Resource Management. “The forwarder is the second piece of equipment. It follows the

harvester through the stand and picks up the logs. It looks like a mini logging truck.”

The ground disturbance is kept to a minimum because a skidder is not used.

College officials were told the equipment often attracts spectators because it is still unique.

The only disruption to the college should be some of the trails behind it near Trout Creek will be off-limits while crews are working. Equipment will be brought in on South Tahoe Public Utility District roads when possible to reduce the need to be in the college parking lot.

“We will get some of the logs and use them at the Ledbetter Terrace,” Sue Niehoff, vice president of Business Services said.

Work could start this week, next week at the latest. Completion is expected to take at least three weeks.



Trees at Lake Tahoe Community College will come down this month.
Photo/Kathryn Reed

Cross Check Services, a logging company in Olympic Valley,

will be cutting the trees. No more than 500,000 board feet is expected to be culled from the 190 acres. Some of the smaller trees will be used for firewood.

Banchio, who is a registered forester, was hired by the South Lake Tahoe Fire Department as the consultant. Her firm based out of Taylorsville is responsible for designing the project, deciding what treatment to use, and writing the environmental documents for the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency and CalFire.

“We are conducting thinning from below. We will start with the smallest, most suppressed trees with a live green crown,” Banchio said. “There aren’t many ladder fuels. We are not seeing 6-foot Manzanita. In that area we need to thin the tree crown.”

The idea is in a wind-driven fire, like Angora in 2007, the flames jump from treetop to treetop because the crowns are so close together. Projects like this one are designed to reduce that threat. If a fire occurs, ideally it stays on the ground where it is easier to fight and spreads less quickly.

Money for the project is coming from federal stimulus, Southern Nevada Public Land Management Act, and a U.S. Forest Service grant.

Banchio, who is in her third year of working with South Lake Tahoe, expects the city’s fuel reduction projects to be completed in 2011.