

Property owners finding trees marked without their consent

By Kathryn Reed

Blue numbers are mysteriously cropping up on trees along Powerline Trail. It's not just Forest Service land being marked. And it's not the feds with the spray paint.

It's NV Energy out of Reno numbering the trees.

But no one is letting homeowners know what is going on.



NV Energy marked the tree, middle, being a threat to the power pole on the right.

Photos/Kathryn Reed

For Janill Gilbert, whose house in South Lake Tahoe backs to the trail, it was a bit disconcerting to come back from a jog one day to find a tree in her yard with the number 798 on it.

If it falls one way, it goes into the power line, falls another it hits open dirt, falls the other two ways it could do some serious structural damage.

It's not just dead trees or ones in the forest Gilbert has seen marked. All have been in the 700s.

Up the trail a bit is No. 800 – on land the Forest Service owns.

“We do work with the utilities. We have agreements and easements with them,” Cheva Heck, USFS spokeswoman, said. This parcel is one of the urban lots the agency owns.

But the Forest Service didn't have any insider information over any other property owner. They found about the painted trees when *Lake Tahoe News* called.

An NV Energy official said the plan is to notify property owners their trees are going to be felled when all have been marked. The plan is for the work to be done this fall.



Not all rust colored pines have been tagged for removal.

“We have a 60,000-volt line from Stateline to Meyers. An arborist is out there now going through the entire line. He is not done,” Fay Anderson, spokeswoman with the utility, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Fay said it is the power company's responsibility to make sure limbs and trees don't threaten the lines. They have the authority to trim or remove trees in their right-of-way.

“Most properties have easements for utilities,” Fay said.

Dealing with NV Energy issues is not new to Gilbert.

The trail is a bit of an L-shape through the forest. Where it starts going uphill is where a pole caught fire in May. Gilbert said they heard a noise, saw flames and called the fire department. The decision was to let it burn out, which took about 24 hours, as embers fell onto the snow below. Soon after a new pole was erected.

Looking at the land behind Gilbert’s house and the others along the street, it’s hard to know what the arborist was thinking when he chose to tag certain trees. The one in her yard and up a short ways are dead. But other ones along the route that could conceivably fall onto the power line are dead, too.

Gilbert wonders if the power company will have to come back next year. Something is killing her trees. In the handful of years she’s lived in the house 15 of the 20 backyard trees have had to come down.

She speculates it is drought conditions. With being at the bottom of a hill, her vegetation is not well watered. Plus, she doesn’t have an irrigation system out back.

NV Energy might want to drive along her street. The seemingly healthy trees in front are swaying against the power lines.