

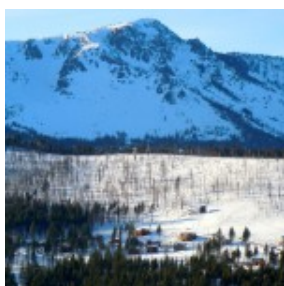
Funding withering away for Tahoe environmental projects

By Kathryn Reed

The money train known as SNPLMA (or Southern Nevada Public Lands Management Act) is making its final run to the Lake Tahoe Basin.

What this means is the millions of dollars that have floated to the region in the last decade will cease to exist after the round 12 dollars are allocated this summer and then distributed early next year.

More than \$300 million has been spent in Lake Tahoe from the sale of federal land in Southern Nevada. The Lake Tahoe Federal Advisory Committee is taking comments until May 9 on proposed projects for the last round of money.



Fuels
reduction
projects are
part of SNPLMA
money -- with
the idea of
not having
another Angora
burn area.
Photo/Kathryn
Reed

These millions of dollars have gone toward the environmental improvement program that was started in 1997 after then President Bill Clinton's visit to Lake Tahoe. That also launched the annual summer environmental summit.

Many of the 25 proposals received for round 12 funding are the same or similar in nature to previous requests. The themes are: forest health, watershed, water quality and habitat restoration, air quality and integrating science.

Here is some information about investments from 1997-2010.

The concern going forward is how the various agencies in the basin and local governments will come up with the necessary dollars to do the work required of them in the EIP.

"We'll get pretty creative as partners," said Jeff Marsolais, deputy forest supervisor for Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit.

Although Marsolais has been in the basin for less than a year, he is finding people willing to work together for the common good and not being territorial. Part of this change to be more collaborative and cooperative was the result of the devastating 2007 Angora Fire that leveled 254 houses.

Fuels reduction projects are a huge component of SNPLMA funding – especially in recent years. The preliminary recommendation is to spend \$3 million of the \$34.1 million total in round 12 on the Carnelian Hazardous Fuels Reduction & Healthy Forest Restoration project. These types of projects around the lake could be funded in round 12.

"I don't think we enjoyed that support or focus pre-Angora because of some of the political winds blowing at the time," Guy LeFever, fire chief of Tahoe-Douglas Fire Protection District, said of fuels reduction projects. "Things totally changed 180 since then."

Marsolais uses the example of the basin fire chiefs who were

unable to get SNPLMA money for a white pine project being able to work with the Forest Service to get money to demonstrate creativity.

He and others are saying partnerships like that is what will keep money coming to Tahoe.

With reauthorization of the Lake Tahoe Restoration Act languishing in Congress and odds the California water bond on the November ballot will fail, the money well is dry.

Marsolais said it's time to stop looking at one entity as the provider of money.

But specifics about where the millions of dollars are going to come from to keep up with state and federal mandates cannot be provided by anyone because the money isn't there.

Marsolais also pointed to everyone needing to tie projects together in order to leverage dollars.

However, that isn't exactly happening on the South Shore. The much talked about South Shore Hazardous Fuels Reduction & Healthy Forest Restoration project was stalled a bit under the previous LTBMU regime. Environmental documents on the project should be released by the end of this summer.

It calls for 10,000 acres to be treated in 10 years.

While the \$1 million requested for the South Shore project in SNPLMA round 12 was not recommended by the Federal Advisory Committee in April to be funded, the Forest Service has socked away \$16 million for the project for whenever it starts.

Had the wheels of government spun slightly faster, though, this project could have been done while South Lake Tahoe worked on its projects in the center of town – including the Lake Christopher project.