

USFS wins court battle to remove Angora's dead trees

By Kathryn Reed

The U.S. Forest Service is about to remove the trees that are a constant reminder of the June 2007 inferno that reduced 254 houses to ash.

This is because a federal judge on July 13 sided with the federal agency.

Earlier this year Earth Island Institute and the Center for Biological Diversity filed a lawsuit in U.S. District Court in Sacramento contending habitat for the rare black-backed woodpecker would be destroyed if the 1,398 acres were logged.

The Forest Service said that is not the case and maintains not clearing the trees will increase the threat of another catastrophic fire.

Judge Garland Burrell granted a summary judgment on all counts in the Forest Service's favor.



Remains of the
Angora Fire in
April 2011.
Photo/LTN

Restoration work could begin as early as July 26.

“Work to control harmful invasive plant species, improvements to the road and trail system, and mechanical and hand-thinning of dead and some live trees to reduce the future risk of wildfire and improve forest health will begin this summer,” the Forest Service said in a press release. “Planning and design for stream channel, wetland and meadow restoration projects continues, and some field work will begin next summer.”

More than 3,000 acres, mostly USFS land, burned during the multi-day fire that started June 24, 2007, when a campfire that wasn't completely extinguished became a raging wildland fire on the outskirts of South Lake Tahoe.

A substantial number of trees had been removed in the last four years prior to the lawsuit being filed. Health and safety reasons were the reasons given for felling them.

A number of seedlings have also been planted.

With the lack of alive trees in the area and the abundance of moisture this winter and spring, water is everywhere in the burn area. Fresh vegetation and an array of wild flowers are sprouting in some areas. This will begin to stabilize the soil and absorb the water, but can't take the place of the thousands of trees that were lost in the inferno.