

# Tahoe fire officials working on ways to make their needs heard

By Kathryn Reed

MEYERS – Fire officials are feeling like people have forgotten that every day there is threat of a catastrophic fire in the Lake Tahoe Basin.

They feel a bit dissed to not be more involved with the Aug. 16 annual environmental summit, when in recent years they have been an integral part of discussions surrounding the event.



Lake Tahoe  
Basin fire  
officials meet  
Aug. 4 in  
Meyers.

Photo/Kathryn  
Reed

The real work is not what is said at the 90-minute public session (which this year is at Homewood Mountain Resort from 9:30-11am), but instead during more intimate get-togethers with the politicians.

Some speculation is that with Govs. Jerry Brown and Brian Sandoval coming – the first time since 1997 the California and

Nevada governors have shown up – that more attention will be directed to Nevada's SB271.

In the past, the fire officials had direct access to Sen. Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif. That, so far, is not a possibility this year. And she is the hostess this year.

"We need to make sure fire is a priority. When there is limited money to spend there are other folks who are trying to create a higher priority than fire," John Pang, Meeks Bay fire chief, told his peers Aug. 4 at a meeting at Lake Valley Fire Department.

Money is needed to continue fuels treatment work. Because fire is no longer allowed to naturally burn in a forest, removing trees is the way to reduce the threat of fire. This season in the basin more than 2,000 acres are expected to be treated.

Elwood Miller, who works for the Tahoe Fire & Fuels Team, said he is hearing from congressional staff that because treatments are ahead of the 10-year plan, that perhaps funding should be cut. But with 85 percent of the basin being owned by a state or the feds, many believe they are the ones who need to take more responsibility than the local jurisdictions.

"A wildfire is not going to wait for SNPLMA money," Miller said of a key source of funding for the Nevada Fire Safe Council.

Also, the money being supplied by federal and state agencies to make the forest healthy is for the initial entry, not the upkeep of it.

It used to be thought that crews would need to revisit a site every eight to 10 years, but that has been reassessed to every five to seven. Part of the issue is when trees are thinned the undergrowth sprouts more rapidly. While a ground fire is easier to fight than a crown fire, Manzanita and white thorn burn hot and fast and are not desirable to keep growing in

large swaths.

While the fire gang, and state and federal landowners want more attention, they are going to keep working as a group to get what they want and need. Their collaborative approach is something that has been praised at previous summits by the Washington politicians.

**Other items from the meeting:**

- They collectively said the need for a biomass facility in or near the basin needs to be built. This came up because the Kings Beach location has been scrapped. Now the Cabin Creek area near Truckee is being considered because this is where refuse from the North Shore is hauled.
- Talk of Arizona's Wallow Fire centered on how it could have been worse without the amount of defensible space work that had been done prior to the blaze.