

# Source of Taylor Creek spill unknown; samples taken

By Kathryn Reed

What exactly was dumped into Taylor Creek should be known late Tuesday afternoon when results from water samples taken Monday are delivered to South Shore officials.

While the substance appears to be petroleum, that still needs to be confirmed.

The U.S. Forest Service is recanting its earlier statement when officials said it was definitively astro turf soaked in petroleum that was the root of the problem.



A sheen of what appears to be oil floats on Taylor Creek Sept. 18. Photo/Kathryn Reed

“They have not identified the cause,” Cheva Heck, USFS spokeswoman, told *Lake Tahoe News* on Monday.

She said the estimate is 1 to 2 gallons was put into the creek that goes directly to Lake Tahoe. However, if petroleum is

only one component of what was dumped, that amount could grow.

The spill was first discovered Sept. 17 by a Forest Service employee when he arrived at work at the Taylor Creek Visitors Center.

But Heck emphasized as of now everyone is calling this a tiny spill.

At this time biologists have not seen any evidence of harm to the waterway or animals. With the first school of about 20 kokanee salmon arriving Sept. 19, the health of the creek is critical. This is one of their prime spawning areas each fall in the Lake Tahoe Basin.

“We were checking to see if this material is just staying on the surface of the water, which appears to be the case,” said Scott Ferguson, senior water resources control engineer with Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board. “We moved some sediment and some rocks under the water to see if anything had gone down to the creek bed.”

With the substance staying on the surface, this will be better for the ecosystem.

“It looks like what I call a dump and run,” Ferguson told *Lake Tahoe News*. “It looks like we are down to an isolated area where we have some material trapped on the vegetation. That’s why when you disturb it you see the sheen.”

All indications are someone dumped the unknown substance into the creek. Where the contaminate is coming from is a vegetated area, that when rustled oozes more of the material so it flows downstream. If not disturbed, nothing more flows into the creek.

Because of how dense the vegetation is and not knowing what the product is, it won’t be removed until more is known. Authorities don’t want to drag out vegetation without knowing

what is on it.

Booms and absorbent sheets will also remain in the creek until officials know what they are dealing with.

Forest Service officials say this will not impede the salmon's quest to swim upstream even though the booms cross the creek in multiple locations.

Jim Harris, Forest Service spill coordinator, reported late Monday the substance was found 30 feet upstream from the foot bridge along the Rainbow Trail, that it was not expanding and nothing new was appearing.

Lahontan ordered the water samples; it's El Dorado County Department of Environmental Services that is overseeing the cleanup; and the Forest Service that is investigating the spill.

A cleanup plan beyond the booms will be determined once officials know what they are dealing with.