

USFS trying to be innovative to fund healthy forest projects

By Kathryn Reed

“The biggest threat to forest health is a catastrophic fire,” Randy Moore, U.S. Forest Service Pacific Southwest regional forester, said with remnants of the 2007 Angora Fire as a backdrop.

Moore was on the South Shore last week to promote the Veterans Green Corps program. He spoke with *Lake Tahoe News* a bit about the scarcity of funding sources for fuels reduction projects as well as the perceived diminishing concern for wildfires in the Lake Tahoe Basin.



Randy Moore

In August he toured the Angora burn area with Sen. Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif., while both were in the basin for the annual Lake Tahoe Environmental Summit. While Feinstein at the summit mentioned the importance of continuing to keep forests healthy, it no longer resonates like when the 254 houses that were destroyed in June 2007 were still smoldering.

Moore said Feinstein is well aware of the need for money to keep forest projects going. But without reauthorization of the Lake Tahoe Restoration, it could be an uphill battle.

Even the fire chiefs in the Lake Tahoe Basin notice their cause is losing importance among those who control the purse strings.

Part of the problem is the purse is close to being empty and more interests – notably aquatic invasive species – are clamoring for the few dollars that are available.

Moore said he is asking Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit Forest Supervisor Nancy Gibson to define, “What is life like after SNPLMA?”

SNPLMA – Southern Nevada Public Lands Management Act – has been the funding source for much of the work to create a healthier forest. Those dollars are about to run out.

Without fire coming through to naturally thin the forest, it has left the basin (and other forested areas) overcrowded and susceptible to a catastrophic wildfire. Flames jumping from crown-to-crown are near impossible to fight, whereas if a fire can be kept to the ground, it is easier to suppress.

The Forest Service owns about 80 percent of the land in the Lake Tahoe Basin. But the feds are not coming through with money to maintain it, instead the mantra is private interests need to cough up more dollars.

Still, Moore said his office is working on leveraging dollars and looking at opportunities.

He said \$9.5 billion worth of water that is used in California communities comes off National Forest land, with another \$16 billion worth of wood harvested from those lands. That is money other entities are making off water and lumber. It takes about \$500 million to protect that property.

“When you look at large metropolitan areas, it’s in everyone’s interest to keep that landscape healthy,” Moore said.

What all that means and how the Forest Service may turn those

resources into dollars remains to be seen. He doesn't foresee his agency creating reservoirs to get into the water selling business.