

A year later – Lahontan, El Dorado County still at odds

By Kathryn Reed

El Dorado County Board of Supervisors say there is no way the county has the money to pay for the unfunded mandate to reduce sediment from entering Lake Tahoe. It's the same message they delivered in 2010.

The supes met Oct. 11 in South Lake Tahoe for their once-a-year venture outside the West Slope. Just like last year Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board Executive Director Harold Singer addressed the five electeds.



Harold Singer

And just like 2010, it was a sparring match between he who makes the rules and those who must carry them out.

The big picture is the total maximum daily load – the EPA policy funneled to the state that regional water boards pass on to local jurisdictions. It's about reducing fine sediment from reaching any major body of water. It's not just a Lake Tahoe thing.

Singer, though, also brought up how the county's stormwater permit with Lahontan expired a year ago. They are usually good for five years. It's possible the water board will grant a new permit at its December meeting in South Lake Tahoe.

Supervisor Ray Nutting is perplexed Lahontan can have a policy when it does not know what the effects of the runoff from U.S. Forest Service owned land is. The Forest Service owns about 80 percent of the acreage in the Lake Tahoe Basin.

Nutting was visibly shocked and dismayed to learn Lahontan's baseline year for sediment is 2003 when the state agency has been in existence since the 1960s.

Supervisor Jack Sweeney said, "I find the TMDL rather subjective. I think we are wishing for something. I'm not sure it is scientifically achievable or economically achievable. I feel bullied into this."

Singer kept emphasizing it is the urban areas that are making Lake Tahoe less clear than years gone by, that is why the counties and city in the basin are being tasked with reducing what runs off from the land in their jurisdictions.

He said his agency would like to monitor the various types of best management practices being used in various locations to see what works so the ones with the most gains in terms of reducing sediment can be used elsewhere in the basin.

Singer also acknowledged that if significant changes made to the landscape to reduce fine sediment from reaching Lake Tahoe do not equate to substantial improvements in lake clarity, Lahontan will have to reassess what it is asking jurisdictions to do.