

Douglas County looking beyond traditional TMDL solutions

By Kathryn Reed

STATELINE – Connectivity. That is the word being used on the Nevada side of the Lake Tahoe Basin when it comes to total maximum daily load.

“The big water year really helped educate us about what is connected,” Mahmood Azad, Douglas County TMDL representative, told county commissioners. “If it is not directly connected (to Lake Tahoe), it does not need a water quality project.”

Some water that never connected to another source did last winter, while others stayed to themselves.

This is significant because the theory behind the federally unfunded TMDL mandate is all bodies of water need to be part of the treatment program. It’s the Environmental Protection Agency pushing down the policy to reduce fine sediment. In the Silver State, it’s the Nevada Department of Environmental Protection that is the overseer.

What Azad and other are discovering is not every puddle of water ends up in Lake Tahoe and therefore it probably should not have an expensive filtration system associated with it.

“With the issue of connectivity, it is disconcerting we don’t know what makes it into the lake,” Commissioner Greg Lynn said at the Oct. 20 meeting. “The state of water quality at the lake after 40 years of TRPA is still very primitive.”

Azad said, “Neither TRPA nor NDEP are leaders in connectivity.”

A major concern of the five counties and city in the basin is how to pay for the projects and then where does the

maintenance money come from.

Grants secured by the Nevada Tahoe Conservation District will fund the public portion of the Nevada TMDL projects, but maintenance is an unknown.

"It's an open ended budget and that's scary," Azad said of the maintenance component.

Azad said he is looking at getting grants to study ways to reduce fine sediment from reaching Lake Tahoe. One idea is use rock chips on roads because they don't breakdown. The problem is they can't be used on roads where the speed limit is more than 35mph because of the damage that can be done to vehicles.

Another possible study is looking at how iron naturally occurs in some waterways and how those bodies of water don't deliver sediment to the lake.

With fine sediment from roads said to be a major contributor to diminished lake clarity, that is an area entities are focused on.

Warrior Way improvements are expected to happen next year. Bids should go out in November.

The remainder of Lake Village will also be bid next month, with work commencing in 2012.

Azad told commissioners the stormwater infrastructure mapping is continuing, with two people in the field every day.

"We will translate this into a maintenance management system," Azad said.