

# Future of pesticide use in Lake Tahoe debated

By Kathryn Reed

“Can we trust Lahontan to protect our interests? I don’t know.”

Those were South Lake Tahoe City Councilman Bruce Grego’s words at Tuesday’s City Council meeting. Lahontan was in the building to give a presentation about the likelihood of the water board soon allowing pesticides to be used to eradicate aquatic invasive species.



Milfoil is a problem in the Tahoe Keys and elsewhere in Lake Tahoe.

Photo/TRCD

While the regional water board intends to have a lengthy process for anyone wanting to go this route, Grego isn’t sure they are trustworthy.

On the other hand, Mayor Hal Cole said he couldn’t imagine the agency permitting the use of a substance that would threaten the drinking water supply. He added that having grown up here he knows the lake doesn’t look like it did decades ago.

While South Lake Tahoe does not get its water from Lake Tahoe, other purveyors in the basin do, plus the outflow in Tahoe City via the Truckee River is the drinking water source for Reno and other areas.

At issue are the various nonnative species in Tahoe that are posing various problems for the lake, while aesthetically creating an eyesore at the shoreline for beach-goers.

The presentation at the Oct. 4 council meeting was for information purposes only. Lahontan is taking comments on the proposal before its December board meeting in South Lake Tahoe. (Location and time not yet set.) The Environmental Protection Agency must sign off on the proposal, which would not happen until at least spring 2012.

Mary Fiore-Wagner with Lahontan told the council the current policy is too restrictive and that entities like county vector control violate the policy when spraying to wipe out mosquitoes. Instead of turning a blind eye to this reality, the policy would legally allow for such chemical uses around waterways.

This is not just a Tahoe issue. The pesticide use would affect Lahontan's entire jurisdiction, which is a large swath of the state.

Dan Sussman of Lahontan tried to reassure the council that the robust permit and monitoring process is designed to have public safety as the top priority.

Lahontan's philosophy is the use of pesticides provides another tool to deal with aquatic invasive species that when used judiciously will be an overall benefit to the environment.