

Lahontan Water Board needs new leader; Singer retiring

By Kathryn Reed

After 40 years of employment with the state water board, Harold Singer is retiring.

He has been executive officer of the Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board since the late 1980s and was working for the state board before taking the job in South Lake Tahoe.

What he does next is unknown because Singer chose not to return multiple calls. Nor is it known when his last day will be.



Harold Singer

When *Lake Tahoe News* started inquiring about Singer's departure, most people didn't know he was leaving, though some knew he had been talking about retiring.

Neither the Lahontan office in South Lake Tahoe office nor the state office in Sacramento have a bio or resume for Singer on file. Neither of those offices nor the Victorville office for Lahontan would release contact information for Lahontan board members.

Even the state board's public affairs folks didn't know he was leaving until *Lake Tahoe News* called.

Board President Jack Clarke was asked by Sacramento officials to call *Lake Tahoe News*. He didn't. *Lake Tahoe News* sent board member Amy Horne an email, but she didn't answer it.

Singer's job has been posted several places. Here is the job description for the position that pays between \$112,068 and \$121,176 a year. The deadline to apply was Dec. 16.

It will be up to the regional board to hire his replacement. The state doesn't get involved. This could happen behind closed doors, at a special meeting, or a subcommittee could be put together to vet the applicants.

Lahontan has been a lightning rod of late. Pre-Angora Fire in 2007, it was the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency which received the bulk of public badmouthing. That changed as it came to light the rules the water board has that some say thwart progress in the Lake Tahoe Basin.

Lahontan is often said as though it is a four-letter word. Every agency and jurisdiction in the basin has had difficulty with the regional water board – from permits to thin trees, to the recent sediment load regulation, to working in stream zones, to redundancy, to being unwilling to compromise.

With Singer not returning calls, his second in command, Lauri Kemper, out until the end of the month, and the board being incommunicado, Lahontan chose to have no voice in this story.

While Lahontan's jurisdiction covers a much greater area than Tahoe, stretching to Southern California, the news from there is not all great, either. Think Erin Brokovitch and Hinkley – the issue brought to the world through the film starring Julia Roberts. Lahontan and PG&E are still dealing with contaminated drinking water.

Many thought Singer would soften after his family lost their home in the Angora Fire. As executive officer, not much changed, according to people who spoke to *Lake Tahoe News* off

the record.

But as a neighbor, Singer is seen as one of the good guys.

El Dorado County Supervisor Norma Santiago, whose jurisdiction encompasses the 254 houses that burned to the ground that June, has witnessed Singer be a friend to his neighbors, and as she put it – that neighbor everyone wants to have.

Singer has also given a lot to youth sports. He has been an umpire in softball leagues and referred youth soccer.

Santiago said, “He is a very dedicated individual to the mission of Lahontan. He has always been very open with me, straightforward and taken the time to teach me so I could gain an understanding of the information as it relates to Lahontan.”

Joanne Marchetta, TRPA executive director, said, “Harold has made significant contributions to the lake and his community of South Lake Tahoe. We wish him well in the next phase of his life.”

Claire Fortier, South Lake Tahoe mayor, said, “He has kept Lahontan focused for 20 years. He has run an effective organization for as long as he has been there.”

The next Lahontan board meeting is Jan. 11-12 in Apple Valley. The agenda is not posted so it’s not known if the board will discuss the executive officer position.

