

# Recreation opportunities on USFS land in Tahoe a concern

By Kathryn Reed

Playing in the outdoors is clearly what is important to people who live on the South Shore.

During two public meetings Tuesday at the U.S. Forest Service office in South Lake Tahoe the nearly 70 people at each session wanted to talk about and ask questions regarding recreation.

(There are two more meetings today in Kings Beach.)

The Forest Service is taking public comments until Aug. 30 on the draft Forest Plan that is expected to be a working document for up to 15 years. (The current plan is from 1988.) A final plan with a preferred alternative could be released in early 2013, with a record of decision expected in fall 2013.

Four alternatives are in the plan, with B being what the Forest Service is favoring. Plan A keeps the status quo, while plans C and D create new wilderness areas. It's possible the final environmental document could meld various alternatives as well as include new items based on public input.



Deputy Forest Supervisor

Jeff Marsolais talks July 17  
about the draft Forest Plan.  
Photo/Kathryn Reed

Jeff Marsolais, deputy forest supervisor for Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit, told *Lake Tahoe News*, "Alternative B really reflects a balanced approach to all aspects of managing public lands in the basin."

He said this alternative is consistent with how the Forest Service currently manages its thousands of acres, but provides more flexibility and new thinking.

Between the two sessions the Sierra Club, Sierra Forest Legacy, Sierra Nevada Alliance, California Wilderness Coalition, Defenders of Wildlife, Friends of the River-California Wilderness Project, and Snowlands Network issued a joint press release. Collectively they would like stronger protections for the forest and watersheds. The groups support additional wilderness designations.

Alternatives C and D would do just that. The former includes the Dardanelles-Meiss Meadows area and the latter would also have Freel Peak as wilderness.

When land is designated wilderness it means mechanical recreation is forbidden – this includes bicycles.

Several people at the evening session wore T-shirts that said "Say No to Alternative D". These people are concerned snowmobiling opportunities are going to be eliminated. And they would be with alternatives C and D. Even if the Forest Service wants a wilderness area, Congress must make that designation.

Then there were the people with stickers that read, "Protect our forests".

Water enthusiasts were represented by guys who just arrived on

dry land based on being dressed in wetsuits.

In addition to the recreation group, the breakout sessions included watersheds, biological resources and forest vegetation-fuels management.

Alternative B allows for more terrain to use managed fire – meaning letting a fire that was started naturally (lightning) be allowed to burn. This technique would only be used if there would be environmental benefits and no safety issues.

For instance, when the Showers Fire occurred 10 years ago, it was suppressed based on policy that is still in effect today. If plan B were the law, that fire would have been allowed to burn naturally – the way Mother Nature intended.

However, Randy Striplin with the Forest Service stressed that a fire would be monitored daily, so if conditions change, suppression may be the ultimate answer.

Alternative D would eliminate the wildland urban interface as an area to be treated for fuels reduction after 10 years.

Any project currently on the books will proceed no matter what alternative is chosen. This includes the South Shore fuels reduction project that just started and will take about eight years to complete, as well as restoration to the Upper Truckee River.

Assumptions were made in creating the alternatives – like money from Washington isn't going to increase, visitors to the Lake Tahoe Basin would increase 1.4 percent a year, and climate change will impact the ecosystem in the forest.

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**Notes:**

- Today's sessions are at the North Tahoe Conference Center, 8318 North Lake Blvd., Kings Beach, from 2-4pm and 6-8pm.

- An online session will be July 19 from 1-3pm. More information on how to participate in the webinar is available at the USFS website.
- The draft EIS is online. It includes an executive summary. It is near the bottom, middle of the page.