

4-day experiment to test Lake Tahoe's currents

Sixty-four containers each about the size of a 2-liter soda bottle are about to be thrown into Lake Tahoe.

Called drifters, these devices will track the water motion at 1-minute intervals by recording and transmitting their changing GPS location. They are submerged at the water level (to the approximate level of the orange tape visible in the photo) so that their motion is driven by lake currents.



UC Davis research engineer Alexander Forrest programs the drifters that will be used to track Lake Tahoe surface currents. Photo/Provided

Researchers at the UC Davis Tahoe Environmental Research Center in collaboration with UC Berkeley want to better understand the surface currents of Lake Tahoe. The experiment will run Nov. 12-15.

Scientists say understanding surface currents of Lake Tahoe is important because currents are responsible for the transport of contaminants, invasive species, urban stormwater and

floating debris.

The drifters will be released on north-south and east-west lines. On the first day, 32 drifters will be deployed. After two days they will be replaced by another 32 drifters. The positions of the drifters will be mapped over the entire four-day period.

If the units are not retrieved by the end of the day Nov. 15, they will lose battery power and will no longer be able to be tracked.

What the drifters might do to Tahoe if left to float around a while, is not being revealed. But the scientists would like them back if anyone finds one after Nov. 16. Just call (530) 902.2272 or email gschladow@ucdavis.edu.