

League brings awareness to Tahoe storm pipes

By Kathryn Reed

A whole lot of brown gunk is coming out of storm pipes that flow into Lake Tahoe. While that isn't news, greater awareness is being brought to the issue.

The League to Save Lake Tahoe has identified 50 pipes in the basin carrying runoff water, but believes there are more. One of the problems is there is not just one agency responsible for knowing where the pipes are, what is coming through them and where that water originated from.

Most of the identified pipes go into the lake, with a couple taking water to the Upper Truckee River.



The Venice Drive pipe on the edge of the Upper Truckee River is dry March 17, but that is likely to change when the storm rolls through the basin this week.

Photo/Kathryn Reed

It is hard to identify pipes in Nevada because of the different rules when it comes to public-private property at

the water's edge.

In October, the League implemented a pilot program where nine volunteers adopted a pipe. Their job is to get samples of water during storm events, take pictures and write notes of what they see. To date, 250 water samples have been collected.

"We wanted to create a program where the community could do something and get dirty. Something so they could take the issue into their own hands," explained Darcie Goodman Collins, executive director of the League. "The key message is get involved."

A couple dozen people attended a meeting last week at Lake Tahoe Community College to learn more about the Pipe Keepers and to hear what the results were of the initial data collection.

"We just want to know if the pipe is a problem and if it's being taken care of," explained Nicole Gergans of the League.

Turbidity, or the cloudiness of water, is measured in NTUs, which stands for nephelometric turbidity unit. For Lake Tahoe, the NTU in shallow water is supposed to be no more than 1 NTU or up to 3 NTU near a drain, according to the League.

Here are the average measurements as of mid-March since the program started for this rain-snow season:

- Kaspian Point Pipe – 181 NTU
- Lardin Avenue Pipe – 170 NTU (On Jan. 21, the water was too turbid to measure, which means it was more than 1,000 NTU, the League reported.)
- Meeks Bay Pipe – 21.6 NTU
- Venice Drive Pipe – 181 NTU
- Sunnyside Pipe – 59 NTU

- Upper Truckee River-Highway 50 Pipe – 500 NTU
- Fremont Avenue Pipe – 63.4 NTU.

Besides the League giving out info, Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board, Tahoe Regional Planning Agency, Tahoe Resource Conservation District and the Environmental Protection Agency had folks in the room as members of the audience.

Bob Larsen with Lahontan spoke a bit to the group; in large part about how fine sediment is clouding the lake.

“Go upstream of the pipe. That’s where a lot of solutions lie,” Larsen said.

Kristi Boosman with TRPA said collaboration is good and so is identifying all of the pipes.

The League is looking for more people to be part of the Pipe Keepers. For more information, call (530) 541.5388 or email Emily@keptahoeblue.org.