

# Beach-goers critical of USFS handling of fight

By Kathryn Reed

U.S. Forest Service officials are defending their approach to the July 4 melee at Ski Beach.

A fight broke out between two guys that ended with five law enforcement agencies being called to the South Shore beach, three people receiving citations for fighting, and one person going to the hospital.

“A subject attempted to assault a Forest Service officer and the K9 was used to apprehend him. The dog is fully trained and certified in patrol, narcotics detection and handler protection. Other Forest Service law enforcement officers helped restrain the subject. At this point, the officers were surrounded and the crowd was taunting them and yelling profanities,” Forest Service spokeswoman Cheva Heck told *Lake Tahoe News*.



U.S. Forest Service officers on July 4 hold down a man who was in a fight. Photo/Julie Gardner

But that is not what eyewitnesses said happened.

Julie Gardner of South Lake Tahoe was about a foot away on the sand from where a fight broke out between two guys. What started as an argument escalated into one guy shoving another guy who was wearing a full knee brace. The latter fell on his back onto a bike.

Gardner told *Lake Tahoe News* that two guys were assaulting the man with a brace when a friend of the solo guy jumped in to break up the fight.

“The U.S. Forest Service came over and released the dog. The dog immediately ran up and attacked him,” Gardner said of the friend of the man with the brace.

She did not hear the Forest Service give any warning that the dog was going to be deployed.

Many people who commented on *LTN*’s first story about this fight were critical of the USFS, saying many of the same things that Gardner said.

The guy went down, officers cuffed him, but the dog didn’t let go. According to Gardner, the dog kept the hold for at least a minute as officers tried to get him to release. And then the dog allegedly bit the handler.

He was taken to Barton Memorial Hospital that night with several non-life threatening puncture wounds, according to Gardner.

Heck did not answer these questions:

- What is the policy regarding deploying a K9?
- How does the dog know whom to go after?
- When the crowd told officers they had the wrong guys, why didn’t they go after the two who ran?
- Allegedly the officers could not get the dog off the guy.

What happened there?

- USFS officers are accused of shoving people to the ground. Any comment?

“This is a pending law enforcement matter, and no further details are available,” Heck said.

Gardner described the scene as chaotic, with people yelling at each other and law enforcement.

Forest Service officials say nearly 70 people were involved and estimate more than 1,000 people were on this beach that is just to the north of Baldwin Beach. Assisting the Forest Service were officers from South Lake Tahoe Police Department, El Dorado County Sheriff’s Office, California Highway Patrol, California State Park police and CalFire.

Gardner said she has never seen such ineptitude from law enforcement.

“It was a completely malicious, unwarranted attack by the dog and officers,” Gardner said.