

Letter: Forest thinning brings tears

To the community,

I wanted to thank Liana Zambresky for her eloquent article in the August *Tahoe Mountain News* about healthy forests (thank you Carla Ennis, too, for your letter-to-the editor). I lack the scientific expertise to back Ms. Zambresky up, but I share her sentiments.

I have just come back from walking through the latest destruction zone that I used to call the sacred land of Fallen Leaf. I shed many tears, got sick to my stomach, shed some more tears and came home. I am cried out for the moment, but my heart is heavy and hurting. I sorrow for the friends that I will never see again and exchange the joy of being alive with, the once stately grove of trees. I sorrow for all the countless birds and animals that were nourished and sheltered by those trees. I feel sorry for my own loss, the shade, the peace, the sense of secret paths though you were close to a road. I sorrow deeply for the earth that misses her children and has had Her land savagely destroyed.

I have heard this called fuel reduction with the idea that it will save it from a future fire and improve its health. I walked through the Angora area after the fire, I live across from Seneca Pond on the other side of North Upper Truckee and my parents lost their home on Mule Deer. I understand the deep pain that fire cost our Tahoe residents and I mourned the forest then, too. But I sure don't understand getting rid of a whole forest because you want to prevent it from burning in the future or think you are making it healthier by doing that.

I have heard there are good reasons for this practice, but I can't seem to wrap my mind around them in the face of the

visual evidence of what is left behind.

I am a minister at Unity at the Lake and it is very important to me to be a bridge builder and see/hear someone else's point of view. When I can't see the other side, then I know I have work to do ... to remember that there are people behind the point-of-view and that those people have dreams, fears and people they care about ... just like me. So I'm trying here. And yet my heart still cries and asks who will speak for the trees, the birds, the animals when they can't.

I know that when people are on opposite sides of an issue it often is hard to find common ground; everybody just feels they are so "right". And I certainly feel that way now but that doesn't help the situation or our community.

Ms. Zambresky wrote that we are two years into an eight-year cycle of these kinds of projects. What I would love to do is take a walk with everyone in the Forest Service who believes in this plan (and still says it was carried out properly) and walk though the few remaining of my favorite walks and then walk through the newly created "healthy" forest. I believe we could get beyond words, agendas, computer models and plans and perhaps the sacred heart of the forest, although It beats in fewer places now, would talk to us ... be the bridge between us. Perhaps you would light up from the inside in a way you'd never experienced before. We could share something special, and then I could listen to your concerns. And together we might be able to work at a solution, probably not totally to my satisfaction, probably not totally to yours. But maybe, just maybe we could come away knowing we worked on something together, perhaps a way that is less extreme and that doesn't leave a divided community and a dead (OK my opinion, so, at the very least uninviting) forest.

Hillary Bittman, South Lake Tahoe