

Needle miner turning section of Tahoe orange

By Kathryn Reed

An orange tinge appears to be hovering over parts of the Al Tahoe neighborhood. It's needle miner.

Needle miners are small insects that are in the moth and butterfly family. And they are native to Lake Tahoe. But this is the first time there has been noticeable activity of the insect in the basin.

Bob Harms, who lives in the South Lake Tahoe neighborhood, said he first started noticing the discoloration of trees last year, with it being even more evident this spring.



Trees in the Al Tahoe area of South Lake Tahoe are turning orange from the needle miner. Photo/Kathryn Reed

This led him to do some calling and learn that it's the Jeffery pine needle miner doing the damage.

The bulk of the brown-orange needles can be seen on Los Angeles Avenue, along Oakland Avenue and with spotty sections heading into the neighborhood toward the lake.

Beverly Bulaon, forest entomologist for the Southern Sierra region of the U.S. Forest Service, is tasked with dealing with such critters. She works out of the Stanislaus National Forest office in Sonora.

“It is a very small little insect that feeds in the needles,” Bulaon told *Lake Tahoe News*. “Why it is occurring in the Al Tahoe neighborhood we don’t know.”

She said there is the possibility it will spread to other areas in the basin, but with this being the first year her team has been aware of the outbreak on the South Shore, it’s too soon to know many details other than the insect is active in this one location.

The insect is killing the needles, but not the whole tree. And because much of the damage is at the crown, limbing the tree is not an option to rid it of the needle miner.

Bulaon said what could eventually kill a tree is a secondary insect coming in and injuring the pine. How healthy and strong the tree is before the needle miner comes will determine its resiliency because trees can survive after being attacked by the insect.

Drought is a possible reason for the recent infestation, Bulaon said.

On July 30, Bulaon and a group from the California Pest Council toured the Al Tahoe neighborhood looking at the needle miner damage. Some neighbors tagged along. Now the neighbors are forming a loose knit group to keep an eye on whether the needle miner damage spreads or goes away.

Bulaon suggests people call their local U.S. Forest Service office if they are concerned needle miners are infecting their neighborhood.