

Water quality fine will restore areas of Truckee



Erosion causes excessive flow in Middle Martis Creek. Restoration would eliminate these peak flows and restore the headcuts. Photo/Brian Hastings/Balance Hydrologics

By Kathryn Reed

More than \$700,000 from stormwater violation fines is going to be spent on three projects in the Truckee area.

Five years after a settlement agreement was reached with Lahontan Regional Water Quality Board and East West Partners, the parent company of Northstar Mountain Properties, the remaining money is going to be put to use.

At the time the \$2.75 million penalty was the largest rendered by Lahontan. The fines were for 11 projects that encompassed 325 acres, including work at the Village at Northstar,

employee housing and trailside townhomes. Work at the Ritz-Carlton was also part of the fine, though some documents call it Highlands Resort Hotel.

East West later filed bankruptcy, which then lessened the fine by about \$1 million.

The Lahontan board in April 2011 allocated the money in part to the Northstar Fire District. That money has been spent. Another portion was for restoration at the Waddle Ranch.

“It didn’t make sense to spend the rest of the money on that site when there are other areas in the watershed that are actively impacting water quality,” Eric Taxer, engineer with Lahontan, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

That is why the Lahontan board at its meeting last week revisited how best to spend the fine.

Also at the Feb. 12 meeting the board changed the supplemental environmental projects (SEP) protocols. This will give the board more of a say in what goes on instead of being left with a yes/no vote when negotiations are completed.

Spending the Northstar Mountain Properties fine will be the first test of the changes to SEP rules. Board members Amy Horne and Peter Pumphrey helped staff with the SEP revisions.

“The overall concept is transparency so the public has a say in the process,” Taxer said. “Projects were developed through a public input process that consisted of local stakeholders up there.”

The projects approved on Wednesday are restoration at Elizabethtown Meadow, Dry Creek and Middle Martis Creek Wetlands. Those three will use the remainder in the account, or \$704,000.

Truckee River Watershed Council will be the lead agency to get the work done.

At Elizabethtown, roads will be decommissioned and drainage will be reconnected, along with meadow restoration. The design should be finished in March, with CEQA documents done in June. Construction should be done by October. This project will cost \$79,500.

At Dry Creek there are logging issues that go back to the late 1800s. Taxer told the board that in places the meadow has turned into sagebrush. With stream and meadow restoration, the goal is to return it to its pre-logging conditions.

The \$224,500 project will be completed in October 2015.

At Middle Martis Creek the channel will be realigned, old fill will be removed and wetlands replaced. Issues arose in this area when the creek was realigned and confined to go under Highway 267.

This project costs \$400,000. It will be done by the end of this construction season. Revegetation will occur in 2015.