

Lake Valley makes pitch to hike fire tax



Lack of property tax revenue from the Angora burn area is impacting Lake Valley Fire. Photos/Kathryn Reed

By Kathryn Reed

MEYERS – Lake Valley Fire Protection District does not have enough money to do all of the things it wants to do. That is why a parcel tax is on the Nov. 4 ballot.

Members of the district, which for the most part includes the incorporated area of El Dorado County in the basin, have been paying \$20 a year since 1986. The problem is Measure M never increased based on inflation. It brings in \$150,000 a year.

Measure H, which will be before voters, would replace Measure M with a \$120 fee that would be tied to the consumer price index. This means it could go up each year, though not by more than 3 percent any given year. It is projected to bring in \$1 million.

“Things will change,” Fire Chief Gareth Harris told *Lake Tahoe News* when asked what happens if the measure fails. “We’d have to eliminate the fuels program.”

About 25 people turned out for a meeting Oct. 8 regarding the

measure, though most were firefighters or on Lake Valley's board.

Firefighter Martin Goldberg went over where the money would go. He explained how state and federal funds have dried up so another resource needs to be found. Measure H is the district's answer.



Firefighter Martin Goldberg, left, with some of the members of the Angora Peak Fire Crew.

The money would not go to raises, even though firefighters have not received a raise in eight years. The salaries it would fund are those of the members of the Angora Peak Fire Crew. Many of them just spent two weeks on the King Fire. They were paraded before the audience and introduced.

This group is responsible for the free chipping service the district provides, thinning on district parcels and pile burning.

Parcel tax money would also go toward aging facilities and equipment.

It would go on indefinitely. Goldberg said if other funding sources come forward, then property owners would be given a reprieve with Measure H. Possible sources are if Lake Tahoe Restoration Act is reauthorized and if State Responsibility Area funds are released.

"I feel like we are asking what we need to maintain the program," Goldberg told the group.

Lake Valley is not receiving any of the \$152.33 the state is collecting from residents for being in a State Responsibility Area. It does, however, intend to apply for a chunk of the \$10 million that will soon be made available statewide.

Another hit to Lake Valley's income is the diminished property tax collected from the Angora burn area. This is because about 100 of the 254 houses that were reduced to ash in June 2007 have never been rebuilt.

"They are off the tax roll except for the land value," Harris said. "That is a significant issue."

To pass, Measure H requires two-thirds of the voters on Nov. 4 to approve it.

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Notes:

- More info is available online.