

Tahoe Mountain growth returns post-Angora



A stand of live trees defines the Angora Fire boundary.
Photos/Kathryn Reed

By Kathryn Reed

The dictionary definition of a forest is “a large area covered chiefly with trees and undergrowth.” It’s hard to know what to call a former forest that is covered with undergrowth and what looks like poles.

This is Tahoe Mountain eight years after the Angora Fire.

The trees – such as they are – create a salt and pepper affect. It burned so hot through here in June 2007 that what was once brown and green trees are no more. “Stumps” are taller than people. The life of these trees was taken too soon all because people were negligent when it came to putting out an illegal campfire at Seneca Pond.

When it comes to forest devastation, Angora’s 3,000-plus acres is a blip on the map – especially when compared to the fires

burning throughout California right now. It was the loss of the 254 houses that was the most impactful.



Bull thistle, while pretty and attractive to bees, is not a native species to the basin.

Among the standing dead trees is an understory of life. However, much of it is invasive and flammable like white thorn and bull thistle. Grass is a couple feet tall.

This is U.S. Forest Service land. They say it's normal for this type of flora to grow after a fire because these species like disturbed soils. The agency is treating some areas to kill the invasives.

Late spring and early summer rains have helped the vegetation grow taller than would be normal for this time of year.



Tall grass is thriving on Tahoe Mountain.

Dave Fournier, vegetation specialist with the Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit, said this flashy fuel would burn quickly, but at a low intensity if a fire were to come through this area again. Even in windy conditions this type of fuel is easy to suppress, he said.

Some of this vegetation is along the trails off Tahoe Mountain Road and some is near houses. The Forest Service offers a homeowner stewardship program that allows residents who have property that abuts the federal land to treat it. For more info on the program, call 530.543.2600, then wait for the "urban lots" prompt.



South Lake Tahoe looking toward Stateline is visible from the ridge.

A map at the third gate on the right on Tahoe Mountain Road shows a variety of trails that are mostly used by mountain bikers. They are also good for dog walks, and evidence showed equestrians use them as well.

The views are fabulous – the South Shore peaks (Tallac, Jobs, Freel), Lake Tahoe from the ridge, and even the developed area is interesting from this perspective.

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Notes:

From South Lake Tahoe continue on Lake Tahoe Boulevard at the Y. Turn right on Tahoe Mountain Road. Park at the third green gate.

Not all the trails are marked. We took the first two distinct left turns and then the first right. Then we guessed and just kept going up.