

USFS drains Seneca Pond before restoring area



U.S. Forest Service crews are in the process of restoring the area where Seneca Pond was. Photos/Kathryn Reed

By Kathryn Reed

Seneca Pond is no more. The 51-year-old manmade lake has been drained, and excavators are moving dirt and vegetation with the goal of the site being restored this fall.

Today it is a mudflat. In a couple years U.S. Forest Service officials hope it will be hard to tell they had heavy equipment in there.

The pond was about a half acre, but by the time the work is done 2 acres of stream environmental zone will have been restored in the forest off North Upper Truckee Road in El Dorado County.

At the deepest point it was about 4 feet. For the last two

weeks the water was siphoned off into the forest. By the end of next week the excavation should be completed, with restoration work continuing through the fall.

Seneca Pond has long been a favorite spot for area residents. User created trails – many of which will be removed in this process – are intertwined, providing a mountain biking and hiking mecca mostly used by locals.

The pond is most famous for being the ignition point of the 2007 Angora Fire. It was an illegal campground that had not been fully extinguished that led to 254 houses being destroyed. No marker will commemorate that tragedy, but the boulder near where it started still exists.

It was after the fire that a set of protocols was developed for the area. The forest supervisor at the time signed off on the decision in 2010. Getting rid of the pond and working on Angora Creek are the last projects to be completed, and they will be finished this fall.

The pond was built in 1964 and enlarged a year later. This was when the land was privately owned. A hippie commune was out there, including teepees. It was in the early 1970s that the Forest Service became the landlord.

Stephanie Heller, project manager for the USFS, said the main reason to remove the pond is that as a manmade entity it isn't natural.

"It's typically not something we have in the forest to manage," Heller said as she walked along side what would have been the shore of the pond.

In the early 1990s the Forest Service took measures to keep the



"We are trying to make it an equally pleasing experience, just different." – Stephanie

pond full of water year-round. Clay was added as a liner and a conveyance system from the uphill spring was created.

Heller, USFS Seneca Pond project manager

Post-Angora the water table rose significantly because there were no longer the trees to absorb the moisture. This led to the conveyance system breaching, which caused issues.

The hillside above this area with the charred trees is a stark reminder of the 2007 fire. There is also lush undergrowth that proves the area is wet even during the fourth year of a drought.

This pond was also home to the American bullfrog, an invasive species that will eat nearly anything that comes into its path. This in turn has hurt the native Western toad and Pacific tree frog populations.

Heller said amphibians are in such a state of decline that her agency is doing what it can to protect their habitat. As crews continue to work through the fall to return the Seneca Pond area into a setting more like what it would have been like pre-human interference, the goal is the contours and undulations will create pockets of water in normal and wet years where amphibians could thrive.

The little island that was in the pond is staying, though it will be thinned. It will be a landmark of sorts.

Heller said neighbors have an emotional connection to the pond and have voiced their displeasure with the change.

“We are trying to make it an equally pleasing experience, just different,” Heller told *Lake Tahoe News*.