

# Letter: Ridgeline development a disaster in the making

To the community,

During a recent District 5 constituent gathering in Supervisor Jennifer Montgomery's office in Tahoe City, Fire Chief Michael Schwartz stated: "On average, we put out a fire a day around here."

One day – likely a windy day – one of these fires is sure get out of hand, or some monster will blow in from elsewhere .I've been in the midst of a wind-blown, out-of-control, 100,000-acre wildfire.

Harrowing and life threatening only begin to express the terror. The ground was so hot I could feel the heat through the soles of my shoes. The wind was blowing embers more than a mile ahead of where we were trying to find safety. Simply breathing was an exercise in pain management, and it didn't matter how many showers I took, I stunk of smoke for days afterward. Those who live on the North Shore know that we're already at or near capacity with summer traffic that routinely gridlocks for a mile or more on highways 28 and 89. Weekday construction traffic entering and leaving Martis Camp backs up Highway 267 for miles, morning and evening. Kings Beach has experienced ever-growing congestion for years, but it has recently worsened with the narrow, single lane roads in each direction, no pedestrian control, and roundabout "improvements."

Now, imagine the additional impact of the proposed ridgeline projects comprised of the 550-site Brockway Campground, 760-home Martis Valley West Project, and acres of commercial amenities. These new developments, with 25-year building permits would be accessed from Highway 267. On a daily basis,

there would be hundreds of additional cars and RVs – some towing boats and other toys – logging trucks, and construction vehicles up and down Highway 267, congesting traffic for miles in either direction. Can anyone reasonably argue or defend the likelihood of something other than a gridlocked death trap within the basin and along Highway 267 during an emergency evacuation?

Recently, on Southern California's I-15 freeway between Los Angeles and Las Vegas, dozens of vehicles were overtaken and trapped by a fast-moving wildfire. Drivers and passengers were forced to abandon their vehicles and run for their lives. If this occurred on a four-lane freeway during routine traffic conditions, imagine what Highway 267 would look like with thousands of residents and visitors attempting to flee to safety.

There are many issues that I find disconcerting about these two developments in addition to the assured traffic congestion/public safety issues they will create. What about the added exhaust pollution trapped in the basin, and the resulting impact on the health of our residents, the lake, and forests? Where will the water come from to support these developments, and how will it affect the quality of water provided by local utilities in the basin? Which agency will provide first responder services to a new "Kings Beach-sized" community far from existing infrastructure? Will this be only the first ridgetop development to push its way into the Tahoe basin, forever destroying our unspoiled ridgelines and our uncompromised nighttime celestial views?

The list is endless.

Landowners have a limited right to find the highest and best use of their land. Conversely, as a check and balance, citizens' elected or appointed representatives need to exercise their moral and ethical responsibility to protect and safeguard their communities and constituents in order to

maintain a balance for the common good. As citizens, we must be observant and informed in order to effectively participate and protect our rights, our environment, our community, and our treasured Lake Tahoe. I can attest firsthand that in a wildfire few things go according to plan, especially evacuations. Many lives are at risk if North Shore residents and visitors simply can't get to safety. I've yet to hear any sound arguments to convince me that the two ridgeline developments, and the hundreds of additional vehicles they will assuredly bring, will do anything but jeopardize public safety.

**Robert Heinz, retired Realtor/investor and 18-year North Shore resident**