

# Letter: In defense of Tahoe's trees

To the community,

The chain saw is coming yet again to my neighborhood. The first time it was cleanup following the Angora Fire. Then it was fuel reduction by the fire department of assorted parcels and residences. Then it was fuel reduction by the USFS of national forest land. Some trees that had survived the fire did not survive the USFS. More recently the California Tahoe Conservancy cut trees on scattered lots they own. Now Liberty Utilities is unmercifully removing out what they call hazardous trees out of front yards that are cherished aspens and conifers.



Fallen Leaf Lake after work by the U.S. Forest Service.

Photo/Liana Zambresky

It seems standards have changed. Trees that were tolerated in the past are not tolerated anymore. If a tree leans a little, it is cut. If it is damaged a little, that's the end of it. If it is beautiful and healthy, but a little too close to the power line, it's history. I know plenty of people who are damaged and lean a little, but they are tolerated. Do we have to be so unforgiving with trees?

I moved to Tahoe years ago because I was attracted to the ruggedness of the area, the deep forests, the diverse wildlife, the howling winters, the roaring mountain streams, the sparkling lakes and the magnificent, snowy mountains. I liked the bumpy, narrow roads and the closeness of the community.

It's not the same anymore. Big money has moved in. The Tahoe area is feeling the heavy hand of man like never before. A walk in unspoiled woods can hardly be found. I used to walk several times each week in the meadows and woods at Fallen Leaf Lake. I would delight in seeing a pileated woodpecker, a western tanager or a bear with cubs. However, it breaks my heart to go there now and see the forest decimated by USFS thinning. I don't want our forests ruined beyond recognition just because they might someday burn. Nor do I want the beauty of our neighborhoods diminished by excessive standards set by Liberty Utilities.

In the years that I have been here, there have been very few power outages. One was caused by a car driving into a power pole and breaking it. Another by a problem at a power station in Carson City. I can't even recall one that was caused by a falling tree.

We have become a society that looks over its shoulder for every little thing that could go wrong. We have homeowners insurance because something might happen to our house. We have auto insurance because we might get into an accident. We have life insurance because we might die suddenly. We have health insurance because we might get sick. We have an umbrella policy because these other insurances might not be enough. We might get an earthquake. We might get a flood. A meteor might fall out of the sky... We have become such a fearful society.

This fear, frenzied in my opinion, has led to uncompromising removal of trees at Tahoe. We need to get a grip on our attitudes, stand back and take a look at the big picture. Life

is hazardous. There's no question about it. We can't cover every contingency. I recently flew to Minnesota. What really struck me on the flight is that once away from the Sierra, there were no more trees for thousands of miles. This helped me to see that Lake Tahoe trees are special. They are to be cherished and protected. There should be a place for good judgement. Rules should allow for flexibility and tolerance of special situations without the threat of a lawsuit. Our forests and urban trees need to be managed wisely with care. Once cut, a tree is gone. It takes 100 years to replace a 100 year old tree. What will the world be like by then?

**Liana Zambresky, South Lake Tahoe**