

# Opinion: Fire prevention critical in Tahoe basin

By Richard Solbrig

The National Interagency Fire Center described the 2015 wildfire season as one of the most severe in decades, with more than 10 million acres burned. The Valley (76,000 acres), Butte (70,000 acres), and Rough (150,000 acres) wildfires highlighted the impact of the severe drought upon our critical watersheds.

According to a study by the Carnegie Institution for Science, they found that up to 58 million large trees in California have been heavily impacted by the drought and another 888 million trees, or approximately 41,000 square miles of forest, are drought-stressed.

As evidenced by the Angora, Martis and Gondola fires, the Lake Tahoe Basin is no stranger to the threat of wildfire to the health of our environment and our communities. Recognizing this threat, Tahoe's public water agencies, together with the U.S. Forest Service, embarked on an aggressive program to accelerate installation of critical water infrastructure to enhance our regional response to the threat of catastrophic wildfires. This bi-state effort is being accomplished through the Lake Tahoe Community Fire Protection Partnership.

Over eight limited construction seasons (May-October) the partnership has installed more than 16 miles of improved water line with 180 new fire hydrants every 500 lineal feet, 10 new water storage tanks with a 4.7-million-gallon storage capacity, five new booster pump stations to increase water flow, and strategically placed emergency generators to provide continued water supply during catastrophic events.

This regional collaboration is fortunate to have the support

of the region's congressional delegation, which recognizes the importance of a comprehensive approach to reduce the potential for catastrophic wildfire that includes enhancing the fire response capability of municipal water systems.

The Lake Tahoe Restoration Act, co-sponsored by Sens. Dean Heller, Dianne Feinstein, Harry Reid and Barbara Boxer, includes important provisions to reduce the threat of wildfire, improve water clarity, fight invasive species and support vital water infrastructure improvements, a comprehensive strategy to restore and protect the environment in the Lake Tahoe Basin. This measured approach calls for active management of our federal lands together with actions to protect the environment and our communities from wildfire. The water partnership joins Tahoe's environmental and business leaders in ardently calling for the passage of Senate Bill 1724, Lake Tahoe Restoration Act.

In the House, Rep. Tom McClintock has introduced a scaled down version (H.R. 3382) of the Lake Tahoe Restoration Act, which focuses on fire risk and invasive species management. We agree that the provisions are of vital importance to the economic and environmental health of the region and look forward to both Senate and House approaches moving forward to conference.

As we enter the 2016 wildfire season, the local partnership will embark on an aggressive effort to install critical water infrastructure for fire response and work with firefighting community to protect the Tahoe basin.

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