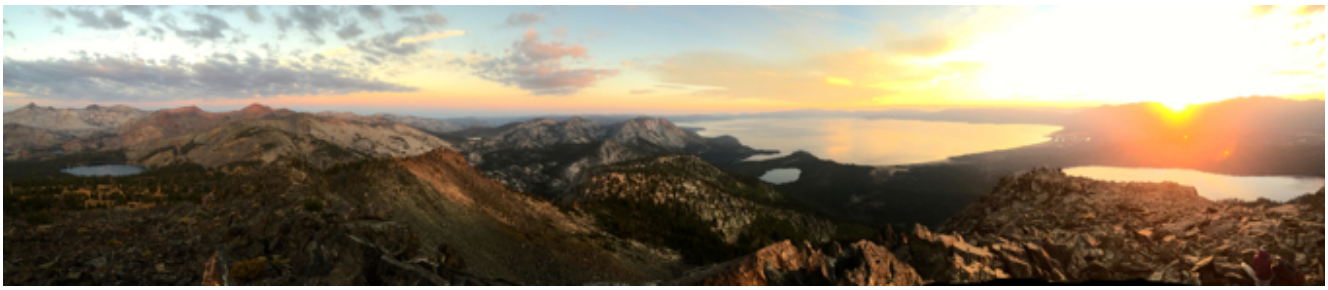
LTBMU sets course for next 15 years

By Kathryn Reed

While most people won't notice any changes to the forest in the Lake Tahoe Basin, those who are responsible for the care of its resources have a keener eye on the impacts of climate change and are considering stronger oversight of its waterways.

It had been 28 years since the Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit last updated its Land Management Plan. Litigation at the federal level that was not related to Tahoe stalled the plan that was started 12 years ago and was just approved in late June.



Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit contains 155,000 acres. Photo/Kathryn Reed

The bulk of the current plan has been in the process since 2012, with multiple meetings surrounding it, and the public's ability to give input and direct the outcome throughout the last four years. This document is intended to be valid for 15 years.

"The average visitor or resident won't see much difference. Partially that is because the 1988 plan set the LTBMU on a good course of restoration, forest health and balanced and diverse recreation offerings," Mike LeFevre,

planning staff officer with LTBMU, told *Lake Tahoe News*. “However, the new plan incorporates a lot of new science around things that really did not exist in 1988 such as climate change and invasive species. For example with climate change, drought and the severity of wildfires we now know we have to increase the pace and scale of our forest management. The new plan describes desired conditions that lead to forests that are resilient to drought, insects and fire.”

Most people in the basin are now accustomed to summer thinning and winter pile burning. That process started in earnest after the destructive 2007 Angora Fire that leveled 254 houses and charred more than 3,000 acres, most of which was U.S. Forest Service land.

Fuels reduction on the 155,000 acres in LTBUM is a big part of the new forest plan.

Glen Alpine waterfall on the South Shore is part of the LTBMU’s responsibility. Photo/LTN file

The plan divides the region into four management areas – general conservation, backcountry (50,084 acres), wilderness (Desolation, Granite Chief and Mt. Rose) and Santini-Burton/urban forest parcels. The 1988 plan had 21 management areas.

“This plan includes a 3,600-acre area surrounding Stanford Rock on the West Shore in the backcountry management plan,” LeFevre explained. “All of the backcountry management plan will emphasize natural ecological processes, dispersed recreation and limited management. Overall these areas are already managed for a less developed character, but importantly this plan affirms that approach for the life of the plan.”

This plan allows for less developed recreation than the 1988 rules. However, it still calls for an increase. Campgrounds and day-use parking can increase by about 10 percent.

This will help give the already 5.7 million annual visitors more options.

Road and trail systems, and uses remain similar to their current existence.

While the Upper Truckee River does not have the federal Wild and Scenic River System designation, since 1999 seven miles of it has been managed as though it is. This is so if Congress were to consider the designation, the river would have a good chance of making the cut.

The process for the USFS to recommend rivers-streams be included in the Wild and Scenic River System has two steps.

“First step is to determine if the stream is eligible. After reviewing the outstanding attributes of all streams in the LTBMU, the plan identifies three tributaries of the Upper Truckee River and three creeks – Taylor, Glen Alpine, Eagle – as eligible,” LeFevre said. “The second step is to determine

if an eligible stream is suitable. The plan does not include an analysis of suitability for the streams found eligible. A suitability study includes a substantial amount of public input and analysis. The LTBMU has no plans at the present to initiate the suitability analysis. However, the plan does direct that the streams found eligible be managed to ensure they remain eligible.”