

Arsonist being sought in spate of SLT fires



A wildland fire burns Sept. 1 in South Lake Tahoe.
Photo/Provided

By Kathryn Reed

Someone – or multiple people – are lighting wildland fires in South Lake Tahoe, with crews having put out seven in the last week and a half.

The latest occurred Sunday afternoon in Van Sickle Bi-State Park on the California side.

It was called in at 4:02pm Sept. 4. More than an hour later smoke could still be seen from Saddle Road filtering up between the trees. In all, a swath about 25 feet by 40 feet burned.

“I don’t know,” was CalFire Division Chief Chris Anthony’s response to *Lake Tahoe News* when asked if there is an arsonist

on the loose.

Lisa Herron with the U.S. Forest Service when asked about an arsonist told *LTN*, "The only thing I can share is the cause of these fires remains under investigation."

And, yet, the definition of arson is "the criminal act of deliberately setting fire to property." And no one is saying that is not what is happening.

Lightning has been non-existent and no power lines have fallen; this leaves humans being responsible for starting them. This spate of fires is also not being blamed on homeless camps.

The fires have been on state and federal property. Together the agencies are working to determine if one or more people are responsible.

All of the fires have been in the same general wooded area, but never in the exact same location.

They are about the same size – this has to do with crews getting a jump on the blazes and a cooling trend. The Forest Service's Super Scooper was deployed Sunday to drop water on the fire, and on Thursday, too.

The fires have started at all times of day and night, with one being at 2 in the morning. And it's not like the suspect had the aid of a full moon to assist him or her with a walk in the woods at that hour.

One day there were three fires.

Even if an incendiary device is found, it can be difficult to isolate who may have been lighting the fires. Still, the state and federal investigators have myriad tools to employ to ferret out the culprit.

The Forest Service expects to increase staffing in light of

the rash of fires.

South Lake Tahoe firefighters have responded to all of the fires, with pictures often posted to the department's Facebook page. Those are now gone.

"Due to the joint investigation between CalFire and the U.S. Forest Service, South Lake Tahoe Fire and Rescue was asked not to post any of the fire activity that could get in the way of the joint investigation," Fire Chief Jeff Meston told *Lake Tahoe News*.

He would not comment any further about the fires.