

Overcrowded forests creating fire danger

By Kathryn Reed

Even though millions of federal dollars are headed to California to remove dead trees in national forests, if they had arrived sooner it would not have made a difference for the Emerald Fire.

None of the \$11 million allocated last week by the U.S. Department of Agriculture is coming to Lake Tahoe. That isn't to say forest projects aren't happening, it's just this latest round of funding bypassed the basin.

On the first day of the Emerald Fire by Cascade Lake it was Lake Valley Fire Chief Tim Alameda who told *Lake Tahoe News* one of the issues the firefighters were dealing with was all the dead trees. They just add fuel to the fire.

The new money will help complete 10 dead tree removal projects on 12,000 acres of California's national forests. Eldorado, Sierra, Stanislaus and Sequoia national forests are the beneficiaries.

But clearly there is not enough money or manpower to take care of all the forests.



Flames from the Emerald Fire are visible on Oct. 14 as fire rips through 200 acres of dry forest. Photo/Taylor Flynn/Tahoe Mountain News

“More federal investment will be needed to remove the dead trees most likely to fuel destructive wildfires, but these funds are a down payment to begin to address this crisis and reduce the risk to public safety. Trees that pose a threat to people and property will be removed—there will not be clear cutting,” Sen. Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif., said in a statement.

She has been a strong advocate to get funding for these projects.

Fire season in the West is now a year-round phenomenon and not relegated to the dry months. This is obvious with the 200-plus acre fire on the South Shore that as of today is 90 percent contained, but also with the Little Valley Fire burning in

Washoe Valley. Both started while it was raining. As of Oct.16 the amount of land burned in the Nevada fire is holding at 3,400 acres, with 20 percent containment. But 22 residences and 17 out buildings were destroyed.

The cause of these fires is still under investigation. While no lightning was reported when they both started about 1:30am Oct. 14, winds were howling. Power lines don't need to drop to start a blaze; wires touching each other are enough to spark a fire.

As of the first week in September, in California there had been 5,354 fires this year that had burned 496,126 acres, resulting in seven fatalities and the destruction of more than 1,270 homes and other structures.

"Five years of punishing drought and resulting pest infestations have resulted in 66 million dead trees in California's forests. According to firefighting officials, about 5.5 million of these trees pose a particularly high risk to people and property," Feinstein said. "They are most likely to contribute to increasingly destructive and unpredictable fires near population centers and fall on roads, power lines and homes."