

Feds give Tahoe \$6.8 million to thin forests

By Kathryn Reed

Red dominates large segments of a map of Lake Tahoe. This signifies "wildfire ignition risk" zones.

These are areas most susceptible for a catastrophic wildfire because of the dense vegetation.

The California Tahoe Conservancy on Thursday accepted a \$6.8 million grant to treat between 1,200 and 1,800 acres in the wildland urban interface. This the acreage that abuts where people are living and poses the greatest threat to communities.

The money comes from the Bureau of Land Management via the Southern Nevada Public Land Management Act.

While the CTC will be the overseer of the money, the land to be thinned includes multiple property owners, with the CTC lots accounting for 30 percent of the total.

"The next step is to work with the grant partners to start prioritization," Milan Yeates with the CTC told the state board at its Dec. 8 meeting in South Lake Tahoe.

The work is expected to be done in the next six years. First, though, officials will decide for sure what gets treated. Preliminary mapping has already occurred.

"Prioritization of treatment areas will consider a range of topics including environmental review, terrain accessibility, slope and cost estimates," the staff report says.

A concrete plan is necessary because this funding doesn't cover the cost to treat all of the 3,000 acres that have been

identified as needing to be thinned.

The plan is to treat the areas with the highest threat first. On the South Shore acreage near Stateline is being looked at. Some of this is where an arsonist set multiple fires this summer. (That person has never been caught and the investigation is ongoing.)

Almost all of Sugar Pine Point State Park is covered in red on the map Yeates showed – signifying its vulnerability. The Kings Beach-Highway 267 corridor is another problem area.

Patrick Wright, executive director of the CTC, pointed out in his report how a healthy, thinned forest can withstand a fire better than an overgrown, crowded stand of trees. This fall's Emerald Fire along Highway 89 is an example of this because part of the burn had been treated.

Fire doesn't burn as hot in a healthy forest, is less likely to crown, and in its wake leave trees still standing.