

Lahontan trying to cope with climate change

By Kathryn Reed

It's not a matter of whether climate change exists; the discussion now is what is going to be done about it – not to stop it, but in terms of how to live with it.

That is exactly what the Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board's directors are going to discuss at this week's meeting. The board and staff are working on climate change adaptation strategies.

Specifically, the outcome of a climate change survey is on the Jan. 11 agenda. Because the survey closed on Dec. 31, an in depth analysis of all the responses will not occur at this meeting. (The meeting is in Apple Valley.) However, staff has been able to consolidate the more than 400 ideas into about two dozen potential adaptation concepts or actions.

The survey was open to the public and agencies.

"The biggest take home message is there is strong support for the board to take action to protect our recharge areas, to help out with addressing stormwater and infrastructure," Scott Ferguson, supervising engineer with Lahontan, told *Lake Tahoe News*. "Where we saw differentiations was how to do it."

All nine regional water boards are looking at climate change and coming up with ideas for their particular area.

There has been much talk about pollution and climate change, but very little about water quality and climate change. The latter is the direction Lahontan wants the conversation to go. Stormwater, flood plains and infrastructure are the main topics.

People used to only look at stormwater as something to get rid of. Now people are trying to figure out how to better capture it and reuse it. This is particularly prudent thinking in areas prone to droughts.

“How do we retain it and how do we manage it so we are not altering existing surface water?” Ferguson said. The answers are still being sought.

With the snowpack expected to decrease in the Sierra it means more rain will be falling. Lahontan would like that water to get into the ground.

“We need to be restoring wetlands; they act as a sponge to hold water and release water later in the year,” Ferguson said.

Regarding infrastructure, some industrial facilities and wastewater treatment locations are vulnerable to extreme flooding. Lahontan plans to do a threat analysis to determine how to protect areas.

“We are looking for a lot of coordination with our partners out there as we move forward with how best to be better prepared. We recognize everyone has limited resources,” Ferguson said.

Lahontan’s jurisdiction covers a large swath of eastern California, stretching to Southern California. Lake Tahoe and Truckee are just a small part of the territory. Whether there are different rules for various locales remains to be seen.

After staff does a thorough analysis of the survey the results are expected to be released in the spring, with public workshops in June, and the draft climate change adaptation strategy presented to the board in September.

“We will probably look to identify some particular actions that have been rising to the top, and offer another

opportunity for input from partners, the water board and interested parties," Ferguson said.