

Opinion: Wildfire knows no season

By Lisa Herron

What began as a very dry winter in the Lake Tahoe Basin ended with Sierra snowpack approximately 85 percent of normal, thanks to heavy precipitation received during the month of March. However, both the National Interagency Fire Center (NIFC) and the Reno National Weather Service (NWS) expect a warming trend to develop that will lead to drier than normal conditions by late spring.

As a result, the below average snowpack is expected to melt faster, grasses and other vegetation are expected to dry out earlier and wildland fire activity is likely to increase to above average by mid-summer.

“Although we received a great deal of precipitation during the month of March, we are on track for an above average potential for significant wildfire activity this summer,” said U.S. Forest Service fire management officer Steve Burns. “It’s important to keep in mind that in the U.S., year-round fire seasons have become the new normal, which means for people living in fire-prone areas like the Tahoe basin, wildfire preparedness is essential.”

Across the U.S., nearly nine out of 10 wildfires are human-caused with illegal and unattended campfires being the biggest source of human-caused wildfires. In 2007, an illegal, abandoned campfire was the cause of the Angora Fire, which burned more than 250 homes, 231 acres of private property and 3,072 acres of National Forest land near South Lake Tahoe. The public can help the Forest Service and other fire agencies prevent these human-caused ignitions by learning where and when campfires are allowed and making sure campfires are

completely extinguished using the Soak, Stir and Feel method before leaving. On National Forest land in the Tahoe Basin, campfires are only allowed in designated campgrounds and never on the beach, in Desolation Wilderness or in the general forest. For more information about campfire safety, go **online** and/or **go here**.

The Tahoe Fire and Fuels Team (TFFT), which consists of the Forest Service and other state and local partners, has thinned and removed excess vegetation on more than 70,000 acres of National Forest and other lands around communities in the Tahoe basin to reduce the threat of severe wildfire. Forest thinning projects, also known as fuels reduction projects, are a top priority for the Forest Service and the TFFT and will continue to be implemented each year in the Tahoe basin. In order to complement Forest Service and TFFT fuels reduction projects, there are important steps residents and communities must take to improve defensible space and community wildfire preparedness at Lake Tahoe.

Springtime in the Sierra is the perfect time to complete defensible space clean up around homes, review evacuation plans, sign-up for reverse 911 with cities and/or counties, contact local fire districts to schedule free defensible space evaluations, learn about free chipping services and talk to neighbors about the importance of wildfire preparedness.

The time to prepare for the next wildland fire is now. Permanent residents, second-home owners and vacation home owners/renters should familiarize themselves with and follow advice **found here** and **here** on how to prepare their homes and neighborhoods for the next wildfire. Remember it's not a matter of "if" the next wildfire will occur, it's a matter of "when."

Another step toward wildfire preparedness is to sign-up for the Tahoe Network of Fire Adapted Communities (TNFAC) newsletter. TNFAC provides community members with education,

communication and advice; facilitates collaboration between communities and stakeholders; helps communities organize events and neighborhood-level vegetation removal projects and tracks community accomplishments.

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