



Media Release

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Lahontan Regional Water Board Addresses Bi-State Angora Fire Commission Recommendations to Prevent Future Fire Risks

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SOUTH LAKE TAHOE -- In the five years since the June 2007 Angora Fire burned approximately 3,000 acres, destroying 254 homes in the South Lake Tahoe area, the Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board (Lahontan Water Board) has aggressively addressed major recommendations of a multi-state commission focused on identifying future fire risks.

Lahontan Water Board actions include adopting a region-wide timber waiver, amending the Water Quality Control Plan for the Lahontan Region (basin plan) to make it easier for property owners to reduce forest fire fuel in open areas, and issuing a permit to the U.S. Forest Service so that 10,000 acres of land surrounding South Lake Tahoe can be better managed so fires don't spread so quickly.

Following the devastating fire, the Governors of California and Nevada established the California-Nevada Tahoe Basin Fire Commission (Commission) to evaluate plans and policies in place in the Lake Tahoe Basin that influenced how forest fuels treatment activities were designed, permitted, and implemented. In May 2008, following many months of interviews with key agencies in the states on both sides of Lake Tahoe, the Commission released its final report that outlined 90 recommendations that would facilitate prompt treatment of the overstocked forests surrounding Lake Tahoe and make neighborhoods more fire safe.

The Lahontan Water Board has addressed all (22) of the Commission's recommendations that were applicable to the Board.

"The Water Board is pleased to be part of the effort to ensure our communities are as fire-safe as possible," said Lahontan Water Board Executive Officer Patty Kouyoumdjian. "Our goal is to protect water quality while assisting land managers to treat and manage our forests to reduce the detrimental effects of wildfire."

The Lahontan Water Board took prompt action to facilitate forestry management projects including the adoption of a region-wide timber waiver. The timber waiver identifies six categories with varied requirements depending on the relative risk of water quality impacts associated with the project.

Projects with low water quality risks in categories one through three do not require notification to the Water Board. These projects include anyone conducting defensible space projects within 150 feet of a home or structure, on public land within 300 feet of a private property boundary, and any hand crew operations.

Timber Waiver categories four through six address project activities that have greater potential to impact water quality and applicants are required to submit an application and conduct monitoring. User friendly application and monitoring forms have been created to allow the applicant to easily identify, monitor, and report activities that may affect water quality. All applicants are required to take steps to protect water quality while conducting their projects. The timber waiver allows all projects to proceed without any payment of fees.

The Water Board has amended the basin plan to emphasize the importance of fuel reduction activities and to make the rules more flexible to allow for reasonable fuel reduction measures to occur within stream environment zones, such as the burning of slash piles generated during fuel reduction activities. This has increased the ability of land management agencies and fire protection districts to decrease forest fuels and protect neighborhoods.

In January, the Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit of the U.S. Forest Service signed a decision notice for their South Shore Fuel Reduction and Healthy Forest Restoration Project. This project involves fuel reduction treatments on approximately 10,000 acres of Forest Service managed land surrounding South Lake Tahoe. Lahontan Water Board staff acted quickly to circulate a California environmental analysis and permit for the project and the Water Board adopted the permit on April 11, 2012. Project implementation is expected to begin this July.

The Lahontan Water Board continues to assist land managers and landowners in the Tahoe Basin to ensure fuel reduction and defensible projects are completed as quickly as possible while improving watershed functions and forest health.

To read about the Fire Commission: <http://resources.ca.gov/tahoefirecommission/>

To read a summary of the Fire Commission's recommendations:
http://resources.ca.gov/tahoefirecommission/downloads/Final%20Docs/TBFC_KeyRecommendations.pdf

The Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board (Lahontan Water Board) is a California agency established to protect and restore water quality, including restoration of Lake Tahoe's transparency. The Water Board regulates discharges of pollutants to water quality. Visit their homepage at: <http://www.waterboards.ca.gov/lahontan/>

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