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Fire agencies seek aid to thin forests, create a buffer

\$2.4 million would clear Carson Range foothills to protect homes, harvest and manage fuel

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

RENO -- State and local agencies are seeking a federal grant to build a long fire break along the eastern Sierra Nevada front from Reno to Douglas County.

The \$2.4 million requested by local fire agencies, the Nevada Safe Fire Council, Washoe County parks and others would be used to thin forests along foothills of the Carson Range and create a fire buffer to help protect homes, officials said.

It's the first time that forest-thinning projects outside the Tahoe Basin are being allowed to compete for money through the Southern Nevada Public Land Management Act, which makes money available through the sale of federal land in Clark County.

The Carson Range request would compete for part of the \$82 million available for sensitive land purchases and other projects under the act. While it could take years, the request includes almost \$1 million for Washoe County to start clearing nearly 100 years of accumulation of dead trees and other fuels on 2,000 acres of high priority areas.

"The grants will get you over the hump, but fuel management is going to be part of the county agenda for years to come," Elwood Miller, founding director of the Nevada Fire Safe Council and a retired University of Nevada, Reno, forestry professor, told Washoe County commissioners during a briefing Tuesday.


Ed Smith, a natural resource specialist with the university's cooperative extension, said 66 Nevada communities are designated as being in extreme fire danger.

Of 13,740 homes in Nevada at a high or extreme risk of a wildfire, 5,803 homes are in Washoe County, 4,387 in Douglas County and 23 in Carson City, according to a wildfire risk assessment prepared for the Nevada Fire Safe Council.

One of the biggest concerns is the Galena area along the Mount Rose Highway southwest of Reno. Officials said part of the forest hasn't burned since 1910 and has an overabundance of fuel.

"It has the greatest potential for a catastrophic fire," said Mike Greene, chief of the Sierra Fire Protection District.

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