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## Angora fire sparks closer look at Placer County regulations

By: Gus Thomson, Journal Staff Writer

Supervisors were given a look into a possible fire-ravaged future for Placer County's forested east end during a workshop Tuesday - and told the future could be as close as tomorrow or later this summer.

Reporting to the board a week after the catastrophic Angora Fire was extinguished, District Five Supervisor Bruce Kranz said the summer fire season is still very young.

"It could happen here," Kranz said. "We're only at the beginning of the fire season."

Backed by presentations from Nevada Firesafe Council and Cal Fire officials, Kranz was able to get support from the board for staff to look into current ordinances to possibly toughen standards on property-owner responsibilities for keeping their brush trimmed to help control wildfires.

Cal Fire Unit Chief Brad Harris said that moisture in forest-fire fuels was hovering at 13 to 14 percent - near historic lows so early in a fire season that lasts through October. Those low percentages usually don't occur until September, he said.

"In comparison, dry-kiln lumber is 12 percent," he said.

In answer to a question from the board, Harris said a program similar to Riverside County's hazardous weed abatement effort will cut down on fire but would add costs for government to enforce. Kranz had mentioned the possibility of a program that would evaluate the need for work on a property, fund the work if the property owner wouldn't do it, and put a lien on the property to pay for it.

Harris said that Riverside County's program helped save homes during fires. Firefighter safety is also of primary importance, he said.

"It's our No. 1 goal," Harris said. "We don't want to bury any more firefighters."

The Angora fire, located in the South Lake Tahoe area in El Dorado County, cost \$13.7 million to suppress - about the same as last year's Ralston fire, near Foresthill. The blaze burned 3,100 acres, while destroying 250 homes and outbuildings.

Kranz showed a Powerpoint presentation that included photos of the devastation. "Chimneys, appliances and vehicles" were about all that was left in the ashes, he pointed out.

John Pickett, Tahoe Basin coordinator for the non-profit Nevada Firesafe Council, said that he could expect to get up to 80 percent of property owners to cooperate in efforts to cut down on brush and smaller trees but "the other 20 percent aren't going along voluntarily."

Pickett said the problem is particularly acute because there are no regulations to maintain undeveloped lots - even those next to houses. As an example, he said one overgrown lot was located next to three others that had cleared their land in San Diego County. When fire came, "one homeowner burned down three neighbors," he said.

Supervisors were interested in looking further into possible tightening of regulations. Auburn-area Supervisor Jim Holmes called for educating homeowners and communication with other jurisdictions, while looking at current ordinances.

"If we don't take care of our forests, Mother Nature will take care of it for us," Roseville Supervisor Rocky Rockholm said.

In other board business:

Prosecutor Garen Horst was presented with the Placer County District Attorney's Office Prosecutor of the Year award. The award - which deputy district attorneys vote on to honor effort, enthusiasm, courage and excellence in prosecuting cases - is presented in memory of prosecutor Anne-Marie Bourgeois, who died as the result of a fire at her Roseville home 13 years ago.

While approving sewer-rate increases, supervisors voted to establish a committee from several municipal advisory committees to assist in reviewing capital needs, compliance strategies and costs for sewer and water infrastructure maintenance. Supervisors had proposed the committee and a closer look at proposed increases at a May meeting. Rates in the North Auburn area's sewer maintenance district are going up 14 percent, from \$59.51 to \$67.84 a month. The increase is retroactive to the start of the month.

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