

Fire commission wants federal and state emergencies declared

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Members of the California-Nevada Tahoe Basin Fire Commission scrutinizes documents Friday during a meeting at Lake Tahoe Community College.
Dan Thrift / Tahoe Daily Tribune



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The commission established to look into last June's Angora fire unanimously agreed on dozens of recommendations Friday and will ask the Bush administration to declare a state of emergency for the Lake Tahoe Basin.

The emergency move would allow for federal funding to prevent future catastrophic wildfire. The cost of a five-year emergency plan has been estimated at \$7.8 million.

The commission approved dozens of recommendations to the governors of California and Nevada after monthly and twice-monthly meetings since August.

The call for federal and state intervention was unanimously agreed upon before the group voted on at least 70 other recommendations. The group's unanimous agreement sets in motion a number of measures aimed at protecting life, property and the environment.

Members of the California-Nevada Tahoe Basin Fire Commission had expressed both agreement and disagreement on a number of items in the 192-page document but were unified in the final recommendations to California Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger and Nevada Gov. Jim Gibbons.

The plan now will move to a 30-day public review before reaching the governors' desks.

Among the recommendations in the plan, the document addresses a reprioritization of forestry practices in the Lake Tahoe Basin and the means to pay for them.

The recommendations include changes in several policies on the books when it comes to the management of dead and dying timber, the removal of trees, otherwise known as thinning, and how to attack a forest fire once it starts.

Streamlining policies

As witnessed by the Angora fire, which burned 3,072 acres, destroyed 254 homes and caused \$140 million in property damage, the commission states that there is a clear and imminent threat of wildfire in the Lake Tahoe Basin, and with that is an urgent need to streamline policies that often conflict with one another.

"It's been hard-thought and hard-fought," Commissioner Patrick Wright told the panel as it wrestled with how and where to place policies and recommendations on the document.

Among Friday's accomplishments, the commission:

- Directs agencies and property owners to implement fuel-reduction projects to minimize fire risk.
- Wants a single information clearinghouse on fuel reductions.
- Recommends state and federal emergency declarations.
- Directs agencies to simplify permitting systems.
- Wants an update of memoranda of understanding and agreements.
- Directs agencies to agree on consistent defensible-space regulations.
- Recommends uniform building standards throughout the basin.
- Embraces the 10-year fuels treatment plan.
- Supports biomass infrastructure development in the basin.
- Recommends policy that prioritizes life, property and the environment - in this order.