

**FRONT PAGE**

- [News](#)
- [Sports](#)
- [Your Town](#)
- [Obituaries](#)
- [Opinion](#)
- [Region](#)
- [A & E](#)
- [Special Sections](#)
- [Real Estate](#)
- [Classifieds](#)
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- [Events Calendar](#)
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## Fire commission explores emergency declaration for Tahoe basin

**Julie Brown**  
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A declaration of emergency for the Lake Tahoe Basin to speed up fire fuel reduction efforts and open doors to state and federal funding is being explored by the blue ribbon commission formed after June's Angora fire.

The California-Nevada Tahoe Basin Fire Commission approved motions Friday that acknowledged the commission's intent to declare an emergency and authorized co-chairs Kate Dargan and Sig Rogich to form a committee to discuss the matter further with legal counsel and staff.

Though the commission approved the intent to declare an emergency with a majority vote, many commissioners expressed the need to clarify several components to the declaration. They wanted to clarify the actual threat posed to the Tahoe basin, funding mechanisms that should be pursued and future projects that will bring solutions.

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"That motion is only for the purpose of moving forward," Rogich said at the meeting. "This simply tells the world we view this as an emergency, with more specifics to follow."

Commissioner Jim Pena, the sole vote against the motion, asked fellow commissioners to clarify what premises the emergency was based on.

The argument would be based off the threat wildfire poses to Tahoe's primary natural resource - water clarity, Da said, reflecting on previous conversations she had with legal counsel.

At the Tahoe Forum in August, Sen. Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif., said Lake Tahoe was one of two unique sources of lake clarity in the world. The other being Lake Baikal in Russia, Dargan said.

Other commissioners said they saw an impending threat against lives and communities in the basin.

"I think the emergency here is the extreme nature of fire here, and the values at risk," said Commissioner John Pic. "And the values at risk are people if that's not an emergency, I don't know what is."

In a presentation given to the commission, Dave Zocchetti, general counsel with the California Office of Emergency Services, said state and local emergency proclamations often reflect an imminent disaster. In such cases, the declaration would heighten the need for prevention measures.

"The declaration and proclamation process is really driven by threat, or potential threat," Zocchetti said.

Emergency proclamations at a federal level tend to be in response to an emergency, rather than to avoid the disaster.

Once approved, a declaration can waive rules and regulations that may hinder the ability to cope with the specific threat, Zocchetti said. It also has the potential to open doors to funding sources. But funding is not always a guarantee.

When San Bernardino county in California made an emergency declaration because of a fire threat created by thousands of dead trees killed by bark beetles, funding was received from congress in an act parallel to the state declaration.

Commissioner Julie Motamedi said she did not want to recommend a gubernatorial proclamation, which would develop expectations towards an outcome, without a better understanding of funding.

Rogich recommended the commission pursue dollars from the Southern Nevada Public Land Management Act, which funds environmental projects in Nevada from the sale of public lands in Clark County.

The fund is highly competitive between agencies in the lake and in Nevada.

Commissioner Allen Biaggi suggested a notion of an endowment that would provide funds more stable and long-term than the land management act.

Rogich said the emergency proclamation was the only way to receive additional funding sources, but the declaration would have to provide a precise budget to ensure the commission receives the appropriate amount of funds.

Commissioner Bob Davidson said federal interest, without exception, lies in cost-effective solutions to the problem at hand, which in this case would mean cost-effective fuel reduction methods.

"We have to justify our request," Davidson said. "And cost-effectiveness is very high on these people's minds over there."

Pena said he needed clarification on how they plan to address this emergency in relation to time.

"This is an issue that has to be dealt across the landscape, if we're going to truly protect the community," Pena said.

The commission will be held accountable to the declaration's subsequent progress in fuel reduction, Pena noted.

A recently-released interagency wildfire prevention strategy outlines fuel reduction strategies over the next 10 years.

Rogich said he doesn't view fuel reduction as a 10-year plan.

"I view this as a two- or three-year plan because I don't think we have 10 years," Rogich said.

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