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Rules relaxed on tree removal

Tahoe effort aimed at lowering fire risk

The Associated Press

Lake Tahoe land use regulators have eased regulations for tree cutting on private property as part of the effort to reduce risks of major wildfires.

The Tahoe Regional Planning Agency board of governors agreed that trees 14 inches or less in diameter can be removed without a permit if the activity is designed to decrease fire danger. Previously, removal of any trees greater than 6 inches in diameter required a permit.

The change was requested by chiefs of the Tahoe Basin's seven fire districts in the wake of the Angora fire that burned 3,100 acres and 254 homes in June.

"We're asking the TRPA board to help us make our communities safe," said Chief Lorenzo Gigliotti of the South Lake Tahoe Fire Department.

Easing the tree removal rules is among several actions Tahoe fire officials said should be taken quickly. More recommendations are expected next spring from a panel established by the governors of California and Nevada following the Angora fire.

"This is our opportunity to show the public we are really serious about this matter," said Bruce Kranz, Placer County's appointee on the board. "It had to take a catastrophe for us to get serious about it."

John Pickett, the California coordinator for the Nevada Fire Safe Council, supported the change as a way to thin Tahoe's ailing forests of smaller trees he said increasingly are threatened by bark beetle infestation.

"It is also the right thing to do for the ecology of our forest," Pickett said. "You are on solid environmental ground to pass this rule change. This certainly is the right thing for the lake."

The board did not approve a request from fire chiefs to change the rule for all trees, including those near the lake shore that obstruct views. Permits are required to remove such trees greater than 6 inches in diameter.


Fire chiefs said different treatment for lake-front trees sends a confusing signal to property owners and hinder needed activity to reduce fire danger around the lake.

"We want to keep this simple," said Mike Brown, chief of the North Lake Tahoe Fire Protection District that includes Incline Village. "I think if we come up with two standards, it's going to be confusing."

If the governors are willing to be more forgiving when some trees are cut to reduce fire danger, the agency made clear again Wednesday it has no tolerance for those who cut trees to improve their view.

They authorized their lawyer to file a lawsuit against a company accused of cutting down or removing limbs from seven trees on state-owned property in Kings Beach to enhance views of Lake Tahoe from its property.

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