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# Grooming a healthy forest

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## Fire district planning educational campaign for Third Creek fuels zone

The North Lake Tahoe Fire Protection District is launching an educational campaign to explain the work the district is doing in the Third Creek stream zone area.

Fire Chief Mike Brown said the campaign, which includes walk-throughs of the area, is partially in response to some negative comments the district has received from Incline Village community members concerned with the fuels reduction work in the area.

Work began the first week of June and is expected to end sometime next week.

At Wednesday's NLTFPD board of directors meeting, director Gene Murrieta said he has also received complaints about the work the district is doing in the area, which is significantly different looking now that fuels reduction work has been done.

Brown agreed.

"It's been recognized for years that stream zones are overloaded with fuels," Brown said. "We need to get in there to create a fire safe and healthy forest in that project area."

The district is employing its handcrews to thin brush and trees in the area, a job fire used to do before humans inhabited the basin, Brown said. But, with humans protecting against fire, the stream zone became overgrown and presents a serious fire threat.

"Reducing the fire threat to our community is the No. 1 priority," said Norb Szczurek, who heads up the project as NLTFPD fuels division chief. "By reducing the fire threat we reduce the amount of vegetation in the area, and that allows the leftover vegetation to have less competition for nutrients in the soil."

The hand crews are being assisted by machine equipment which is tailored for stream zones, using a specialized arm to remove trees before limbing and chipping them. The machine is able to stay far away from the stream, minimizing impact on the sensitive area and keeping the stream clean of dirt and vegetation. Work is expected to be completed Wednesday, Szczurek said, a little behind schedule because of a complication with the removal and chipping of willow trees.

Szczurek said willows are wetter than average trees and take the machine longer to chip because of excess moisture. The willows are being left to dry to make chipping them in the coming weeks an easier task.

Leftover vegetation piles in the stream zone should be cleaned up within weeks, Szczurek said.

Brown said that due to concern for the project he's led multiple tours of the area to educate residents on the health of the forest.

The district is planning to organize group tours of the area in the coming weeks, Brown said, and an announcement of the tour times and dates could be made as early as next week.



- Bonanza Photo - Jen Schmidt



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