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Friday, June 27, 2008

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I've seen extensive criticism in these pages of the fuels reduction work the North Lake Tahoe Fire Protection District is doing in the Third Creek stream zone area. I presume these critics to be well-meaning if misinformed. Clearly they've never fought a forest fire as I had the privilege of doing as a much younger man one summer in a galaxy far away. The "trees" these people want to save aren't really trees. They're weeds. Just as we pull weeds from our gardens because they choke the life out of the desirable plants, so should we thin the weeds that creep along the forest floor, stealing water and nutrients from the trees.

Worse than weeds, however, they're also fuel. They will never grow to be big trees because the real trees shade them out. They exist, therefore, in the same way that smaller kindling is placed on a newly-started fire in order to ignite the larger logs. Without kindling, the larger logs never find sufficient heat to catch fire. It's the same in the forest. Remove the kindling and you remove the primary cause of uncontrolled fire.

Finally, there is the aesthetic. I spent seven years of my life in Europe, where they understand they must regularly prune the weeds in order to enjoy a healthy forest. When was the last time you read about a massive forest fire in Europe - a continent filled with massive forests? As in European forests, the sun can now penetrate to create new growth, grasses will create meadows between the trees, and the existing trees will absorb new nutrients to better fend off disease as well as fire. Now that's a forest. Thank you, NLTFPD.

Joseph L. Shaefer
Incline Village

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