



TRPA members speak out on what's right, wrong and what needs are immediate

Adam Jensen, ajensen@tahoedailytribune.com

July 5, 2007

With Tahoe Regional Planning Agency's executive director, John Singlaub, under a microscope for policies perceived by many as contributing to the disastrous consequences of the Angora fire, the agency's Governing Board will face tough decisions this month about how to proceed.

The Angora fire was photographed by Kamin Leonard, shot from Zephyr Heights at 2:30 a.m. last Monday.



[Click to Enlarge](#)

Ground coverage, defensible space and fuels management will be particularly divisive topics for the board, with a proposal from the U.S. Forest Service and Nevada State Lands over the management of Slaughterhouse Canyon first on the list.

The issue was slated to be decided during the board's June 27 meeting, but was pushed to July when the June meeting was cancelled after the start of the fire.

Proposed thinning efforts in the notoriously fuel-rich canyon near Glenbrook have forced the Forest Service and Nevada State Lands to seek access to the site via the reconstruction of an old railroad grade.

Environmental groups have previously opposed the project because of the 0.21 acres of new coverage in a Stream Environment Zone (SEZ) that would occur as part of the project.

Slaughterhouse Canyon is just one of many issues requiring the attention of the TRPA, whose executive director has promised a thorough review of the agency's policies.

Several TRPA board members have been available for comment on the direction of the agency in light of the Angora fire. Here is what they had to say:

Bruce Kranz - Placer County Board of Supervisors

"(Catastrophic wildfire prevention) is my number one issue," said Kranz, at the U.S. Forest Supervisors Office in South Lake Tahoe on Tuesday. "This could have just as easily happened in my district."

Kranz said now is not the time to be criticizing agencies, noting the fire season has only begun and immediate action is required while the public's attention is focused on the threat of wildfires.

The Placer County supervisor added that more mechanized removal of trees is necessary and TRPA's decisions need to look at more than just environmental health.

"I think everything should be open for discussion. Not all trees should be saved. If we're going to have healthy forests, you can't have ladder fuels," Kranz said of small trees that have the ability to bring fire into the crowns of trees that wouldn't otherwise burn. "We have to have priority that's placed on public safety."

Julie Motamedi - California at-large appointee

"I feel as though the Governing Board in the last 21½ years has made incredible efforts to encourage forest fuels reduction," Motamedi said during a phone interview on Monday.

Motamedi said she was not interested in the "blame game" but said clearing up public confusion about the agency's policies, as well as obtaining funding to encourage homeowners' implementation of defensible space practices around their homes, are key.

"I'm not saying the system is perfect, but I do believe the system is there," Motamedi said. "I think the focus really needs to be on education of the process."

Shelly Aldean - Carson City Board of Supervisors

"Forest fuel reduction has been a top priority of the Governing Board for a number of years," said Aldean on Monday, noting a large accumulation of fuel remains in the basin.

Aldean noted recent efforts by the agency to begin allowing mechanized thinning equipment into stream environment zones as signs of an agency moving in the right direction.

"We're playing catch up," she said. "It's going to take a cooperative effort, not only agencies, but individual property owners. Thinning is not a panacea. You're not going to prevent forest fire just by thinning the forest. Everyone needs to pick up a telephone and make those calls."

The Carson City supervisor said many people may have been turned off by the agency's past policies that some considered "absurd," but the agency has changed.

"TRPA is a convenient target. I have seen, since my tenure on the board, a pretty dramatic philosophical shift. It is not the obstructionist people think it is," Aldean said. "The agency is a lot more moderate than it used to be."

Mike Weber - City of South Lake Tahoe appointee

South Lake Tahoe City councilman Mike Weber hoped the reality of the fire would foster policies inspired by more "common sense and balance."

"We're not going to protect every pine tree," Weber said during a phone interview on Wednesday. "Let the Forest Service go in and do what they need to do."

Weber called some of the TRPA-proposed alternatives for the Slaughterhouse Canyon project "ludicrous" and saw bringing down the price of thinning efforts as essential to preventing another Angora fire.

"We have plenty of trees. We need to have a common-sense approach to get to the ones that need to be removed and quit arguing over every tree. That's just irrational."

Blame for the fire cannot be placed solely with the TRPA, Weber said. The influence that environmental groups like the League to Save Lake Tahoe and the Sierra Club exert over the agency's policies also require some critical attention, Weber said.

Coe Swobe - Nevada at-large appointee

Coe Swobe, an outspoken proponent of fuels reduction, was critical of the agency he helped create during a phone interview on Tuesday.

"I think we're going to have to have a basin-wide meeting - a summit meeting - mainly with the Forest Service and the various agencies around the two states and to some extent the TRPA. Leadership will have to be outside the TRPA because they abdicated their leadership role by not giving fuel management top priority."

Swobe also included the Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board among the agencies that may need to take leadership in light of the Angora fire.

"The TRPA and Lahontan control how the forest fuels are removed, and they've got to review their regulations so more mechanical thinning can be used to remove forest fuels," Swobe said. "It's too expensive to do it by hand."

Like many of the other board members commenting throughout the week, Swobe conveyed a renewed sense of urgency regarding fuels management in the basin. He also acknowledged the board has experienced its share of bureaucratic wrangling in the past.

"I was in the legislature for the creation of TRPA. It was my piece of legislation. We never envisioned the bureaucracy. We're now getting entangled in our own regulations," Swobe said. "I hope we can take advantage of this and get something done."

[BACK](#) 