Wildland fire near Incline quickly snuffed

By AP

INCLINE VILLAGE — Firefighters hiked an hour through nearly a mile of thick brush early Friday to snuff out a small wildland blaze near Lake Tahoe, where authorities are bracing for an early start to a potentially dangerous fire season in the Sierra.

No structures were threatened by the fire that broke out at about 2:30am on a mountainside near Incline Village, North Lake Tahoe Fires Protection District spokeswoman Tia Rancort said.

Crews hiked through the heavy brush and downed timber before they reached the flames on U.S. Forest Service land at an elevation of about 7,800 feet.

The flames put up so much smoke at one point that officials issued an alert for smoke-sensitive populations, urging them to stay indoors and keep windows closed.

Rancort said there was no early indication of the cause of the fire, which remained under investigation. Fire district officials reminded residents that the entire area covering the north shore of Lake Tahoe remains under a "no public burning" order.

"Our fire conditions are still very dry," Rancort said.

Northern Nevada is entering its third year of drought. Snowpack in the Lake Tahoe Basin closed out 2013 at about 33 percent of average, and the Truckee River Basin was at 23 percent.

North Lake Tahoe District Fire Chief Mike Brown said it's as

dry as he has seen it.

“Normally in the area where we have this fire we have 5 to 10 feet of snow,” he told KRNV-TV. “We have no snow in the area.”

Fire officials just over the mountain in Reno also worry about the potential for a challenging season like the one two winters ago, when a pair of fires burning with the intensity usually seen only in the heat of summer destroyed more than 50 homes.

Similar conditions this winter have fire crews on edge.

“We’re already going to go into summer with a fuel type that will be taxing us early on with our resources,” said David French, battalion chief for the Truckee Meadows Fire Protection District.

“As far as fire fuel, right now I’d say it’s about the way it is in June,” he told KTVN-TV. “I’d say we’re looking at very high to very extreme possibilities this summer.”