BLM plays important role at Lake Tahoe

By Chris Rose

The progress made on Lake Tahoe's restoration over the last 20 years required significant capital investment from the public and private sectors. While the federal Bureau of Land Management does not manage any lands in the Tahoe basin, the agency has played an instrumental role in funding and coordinating the federal share of the Lake Tahoe environmental improvement program.

As the largest federal manager of public lands in the United States, BLM's role in Tahoe has not been widely known. BLM became involved in the Lake Tahoe Basin in 1997 through an executive order former President Bill Clinton signed to create the Lake Tahoe Federal Interagency Partnership. The partnership includes agencies from the U.S. Departments of Agriculture, Defense, Interior, and Transportation, as well as the Environmental Protection Agency.

$400 million in projects

Agencies in the partnership work to implement high-priority projects in the Lake Tahoe EIP, and BLM has used funding from the Southern Nevada Public Land Management Act (SNPLMA) to help to restore Lake Tahoe through stewardship, service, and science. Since 2002, BLM has provided approximately $400 million in SNPLMA funding for more than 400 projects in the Tahoe basin to stop water clarity-harming soil erosion and reduce hazardous fuels in the wildland urban interface where Tahoe's forests and communities meet.

An amendment to SNPLMA in 2003 facilitated a predictable funding stream to fulfill the federal share of the EIP. This major investment has required close coordination to plan,

execute, and account for SNPLMA funding.

BLM has also used portions of that SNPLMA funding to acquire environmentally-sensitive lands identified by the Santini-Burton Act. To date, $115 million has been set-aside for Santini-Burton Act acquisitions at Tahoe. Of that amount, the U.S. Forest Service has spent $67 million to acquire 2,576 acres. Another 21 acres are in the process of being acquired for $2.9 million, leaving more than $44 million available for future land acquisitions. Protecting sensitive lands from development has a direct tie to improving the lake's famed water clarity.



Thinning the forests around Lake Tahoe has helped return the woodlands to natural conditions while reducing the threat of

catastrophic wildfire. Photo/Mike Vollmer

Providing the oversight

BLM provides the framework, rules, and program oversight for federal agencies in the Tahoe basin, and its focus on transparency, accountability, and demonstrated results is critical to ensure that Environmental Improvement Program projects comply with applicable laws and regulations.

A new project category for hazardous fuels reduction and wildfire prevention was created through the White Pine County Conservation, Recreation, and Development Act amendment to SNPLMA in 2008. This project category helps pay for the creation and implementation of multi-jurisdictional hazardous fuels reduction plans and wildfire prevention in the Tahoe basin, as well as in the Carson Range and the Spring Mountains in Nevada.

Thousands of acres treated

BLM organizes the nomination, implementation, and compliance of hazardous fuels reduction projects for all 18 entities in the Tahoe basin eligible for this hazardous fuels funding. Of the 76 hazardous fuels reduction projects SNPLMA has funded to date, 43 projects have been for the Tahoe Basin, removing hazardous fuels from thousands of acres of forests around Lake Tahoe communities.

“The stability and sustainability of funding from SNPLMA has allowed, and will continue to allow, federal, regional, local, and private entities to create and implement long-term hazardous fuels reduction and wildfire prevention plans within the basin,” BLM Nevada Director John Ruhs said.

BLM will continue to be a major partner in reducing wildfire risk and improving forest health at Tahoe, and will consider approving more hazardous fuels reduction projects in future

rounds of SNPLMA funding.

This summer, BLM issued a preliminary recommendation for funding another round of hazardous fuels reduction projects through SNPLMA. BLM recommends funding another 37 projects totaling almost $105 million, with five of those projects totaling almost $25.7 million in the Tahoe basin.

“Federal funds through BLM are critical to reducing the risk of catastrophic wildfire at Lake Tahoe,” said Forest Schafer, of the North Lake Tahoe Fire Protection District and incident commander for the Tahoe Fire and Fuels Team. “We are grateful for the longstanding partnership.”

Chris Rose is a public affairs specialist with the Bureau of Land Management. This article first appeared in ***Tahoe In Depth****.*