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NEWS RELEASE

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TRPA LOOKS BACK FIVE YEARS ON PROGRESS MADE SINCE ANGORA WILDFIRE

Stateline, NV – The Tahoe Regional Planning Agency is marking the fifth anniversary of the Angora Wildfire by reminding the public of the importance of creating defensible space around their homes and reflecting on the community’s progress since the fire.

The Angora Wildfire began with an illegal campfire on June 24, 2007 near North Upper Truckee Road in South Lake Tahoe. It spread four miles in three hours and burned more than 250 homes and structures on 3,100 acres. It was the largest, most damaging wildfire ever recorded in the Tahoe Basin. A Bi-State Fire Commission was formed by then-governors Schwarzenegger and Gibbons to investigate the tragedy and make recommendations to Lake Tahoe agencies on ways to improve fire safety.

“TRPA is proud to have implemented all feasible recommendations from the Fire Commission’s Report,” said TRPA Executive Director Joanne S. Marchetta. “As proof of the Basin’s collective efforts, nearly 5,000 acres of our forests have been treated to reduce wildfire risk at Lake Tahoe.”

Since the Angora Wildfire, the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency and the Lake Tahoe Basin Fire Chiefs have developed a strong partnership around the need to improve public safety and defensible space in the Basin. Shortly after Angora, the Fire Chiefs provided TRPA with a 9-point letter which listed updates to the TRPA Code of Ordinances needed to facilitate a more aggressive fuels reduction program. TRPA worked diligently with the Basin Fire Chiefs to update TRPA’s policies to help meet public safety and fuels reduction goals, completing the changes ahead of the release of the Fire Commission Report in May 2008.

“The aftermath of the Angora Wildfire solidified partnerships between the TRPA and the Basin Fire Chiefs while fast-tracking the changes to better protect communities and the environment from catastrophic wildfire,” said Mike Vollmer, TRPA’s Forest Program Manager and Fire District Liaison.

The Bi-State Fire Commission Report delivered 29 TRPA-specific recommendations including 45 action items of which TRPA has implemented all that were feasible including:

- Reducing permit requirements by increasing the tree removal diameter requiring a permit from 6 inches to 14 inches (diameter at breast height)
- Creating a “Defensible Space Assessor” definition and training program to allow fire districts to have more personnel involved in defensible space assessments.
- Working with Stormwater Best Management Practices (BMP) partners and fire professionals to integrate erosion control with Defensible Space requirements.
- Developing clear, concise public messages and revised “Living With Fire” guidelines with partners.
- Working with Fire Chiefs to solve land coverage issues for health and safety.
- Working with USFS on MOU to streamline forest fuels permitting
- Staffing and chairing the Fire Public Information Team (Fire PIT).
- Dedicating staff to work with the Tahoe Fire and Fuels Team (TFFT) for expeditious permitting and public information.
- From 2008 – 2011, the Tahoe Fire and Fuels Team treated 4,679 acres with an additional 7,318 acres in planning. TRPA is an integral member of this team.

In commemoration of the 5th anniversary of the Angora Wildfire this year, TRPA’s Governing Board passed its 2012 Resolution in Support of Lake Tahoe Wildfire Awareness Week and thanked the Tahoe Basin Fire Chiefs for their service during a ceremony at its May 26 meeting. Chief Mike Brown of the North Lake Tahoe Fire Protection District spoke during the ceremony about the strength of the partnership formed between TRPA and the fire districts since the Angora Wildfire.

“We would like to thank the Agency for its cooperation and partnership in the areas of fuels reduction, defensible space, public safety and the safety of Tahoe Basin” he said, speaking for the Lake Tahoe Basin Fire Chiefs.

TRPA’s Executive Director confirmed the importance of the Agency’s partnership with Basin Fire Chiefs. “We share a common goal of protecting people, property and the fragile environment of the Tahoe Basin,” Marchetta said. “We value the excellent relationship we have formed with the Lake Tahoe Basin fire agencies as we pursue these important goals together.”

The Tahoe Regional Planning Agency cooperatively leads the effort to preserve, restore, and enhance the unique natural and human environment of the Lake Tahoe Region now and in the future. For additional information, call Kristi Boosman at (775) 589-5230 or send an email to kboosman@trpa.org .

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