TAHOE REGIONAL PLANNING AGENCY

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NEWS RELEASE

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TRPA TO CONSIDER CHANGE TO TREE-CUTTING RULE FOR DEFENSIBLE SPACE, FIRE PREVENTION

Lake Tahoe, Stateline, NV – As part of its ongoing effort to help reduce the threat of catastrophic wildfire in the Lake Tahoe Basin, the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency Governing Board will consider a proposal November 28 to increase from six to 14 inches diameter the size of trees that property owners may remove without a permit while creating defensible space around homes and structures.

The proposal, recommended for adoption by both TRPA's Advisory Planning Commission and Catastrophic Wildfire Prevention Committee earlier this month, is part of a broader package of initiatives the agency has moved forward in concert with Basin fire professionals in light of June's Angora Wildfire in El Dorado County.

The proposed TRPA code amendment is to increase from the current six inches to 14 inches diameter the size of trees which may be removed for defensible space purposes without a permit. To protect scenic resources, the change would not apply to lakefront property on land between structures and the lake shore. In those instances, the six-inch-diameter rule would remain in effect, as would existing permit restrictions for lakefront properties which have them. Lakefront property owners, who represent less than four percent of Tahoe property owners, would continue to contact their local fire department to have trees larger than six inches between their home and the lake marked for fire safety.

The proposed rule change arose from discussions between TRPA staff and Basin fire chiefs who in September outlined nine areas of policy and practice to address to streamline defensible space efforts around the lake. TRPA and the fire professionals

quickly reached agreement on eight of the nine points, including the tree removal permit issue. The proposed code change was necessary to move forward.

"It's important to keep in mind that tree removal is only one small part of completing defensible space on properties," said Mike Vollmer, TRPA Vegetation Program Manager. "The Angora Wildfire demonstrated that more basic practices such as brush removal, proper wood pile storage, and clearance around and under decking play a more critical role in protecting homes from wildfire," Vollmer said.

Other areas of agreement previously reached between the fire agencies and TRPA include those surrounding review of emergency vehicle access plans for properties, maintenance of 5-foot non-combustible "moats" around structures during implementation of best management practices on properties, and allowing 100 feet of defensible space around homes and 300 feet on steep slopes to slow the spread of fire. Those agreements required no TRPA ordinance changes.

Discussions are ongoing between TRPA, fire agencies and erosion control experts surrounding the use of pine needles for erosion control in the five-to-30-foot zone around homes when creating defensible space. TRPA remains committed to finding solutions that benefit erosion control and wildfire protection. "The two are not mutually exclusive," Vollmer said, who is past Director of the Nevada Fire Safe Council. "With so many factors to consider to protect homes from the threat of wildfire, the first step a homeowner should take is to contact their local fire department to have a defensible space inspection," Vollmer said.

Also November 28, the Governing Board will receive a status report on TRPA's Community Enhancement Program and conduct the annual performance reviews for the agency's Executive Director, John Singlaub, and Legal General Counsel, Joanne Marchetta. The meeting begins at 9:30 a.m. at the North Tahoe Conference Center in Kings Beach. For additional information and a complete agenda, consult TRPA's main web site at www.trpa.org.

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 Dennis Oliver at 775-589-5235.

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