

**Testimony of Michael D. Brown, Fire Chief, North Lake Tahoe Fire Protection
Discussion Draft of H.R. _____, the "Lake Tahoe Restoration Act of 2015"
Tuesday, July 14, 2015, 10:30am**

My name is Mike Brown. I am the Fire Chief for the North Lake Tahoe Fire Protection District. I am one of seven local fire agency chiefs in the Lake Tahoe Basin, but there are many more agencies, organizations, groups and individuals that play a role in protecting the community from catastrophic wildfire.

When thinking of Lake Tahoe, pristine blue waters, beautiful vistas, and recreational opportunities come to mind. Millions of visitors from all over the United States as well as the entire world visit Lake Tahoe every year to enjoy its unique surroundings. They swim, fish, and boat in the clear lake; they play on beaches with perfect summer weather. They stay in campgrounds, and hotels and rental homes. In the mountains they hike, and bike, and ski. And no matter where you are in the Basin, a glimpse of Lake Tahoe is not far away. It seems like it's all about the big blue lake, but surrounding that big lake are streams, meadows, and forests ecosystems.

These ecosystems are what keep Lake Tahoe blue, because a healthy lake needs a healthy forest. In these Forests, wildfires are essential to the health of the forest. However, the forest around Lake Tahoe is not in a condition where fire can play a natural role.

The Forests around Lake Tahoe are similar to many forested areas throughout the country. Our many years of fire suppression efforts have hindered Mother Nature's ability to rid the forest fuel loading that we are currently attempting, with success, to remove and manage. Over stocked tree stands, brush, and pine needles create a vulnerable mixture for fire fuel beds that, when an ignition source is found, can create fire conditions that impact not only the safety of our residents and visitors, but create watershed problems that impact lake clarity, contaminate drinking water adversely affect our communities.

Any fire in this forest condition will most likely result in a catastrophic wildfire with significant consequences for the Lake environment. What we need to do is invest in the forest to create a mosaic of more park-like conditions.

To that end we have developed a multijurisdictional strategy with state and local partners to help us restore fire resilient landscapes, create fire adapted communities and provide an effective and efficient wildfire response. The strategy provides a roadmap for the Tahoe Fire and Fuels Team to implement landscape scale fuel reduction and healthy forest projects across all lands, regardless of ownership or jurisdiction.

We appreciate Congress's attention to the problem. The discussion draft provided by Congressman McClintock would significantly help our efforts to implement our multi-jurisdictional strategy. Specifically, the additional forest fuels funding would go a long way in helping us achieve our mutual goals.

We would like re-emphasize that fire knows no jurisdictional boundaries. This was proven when the Angora Fire burned 254 homes in Lake Tahoe in 2007. We would welcome an opportunity to discuss with the Committee how the supplemental fuels funding could aid in our multi-jurisdictional efforts.

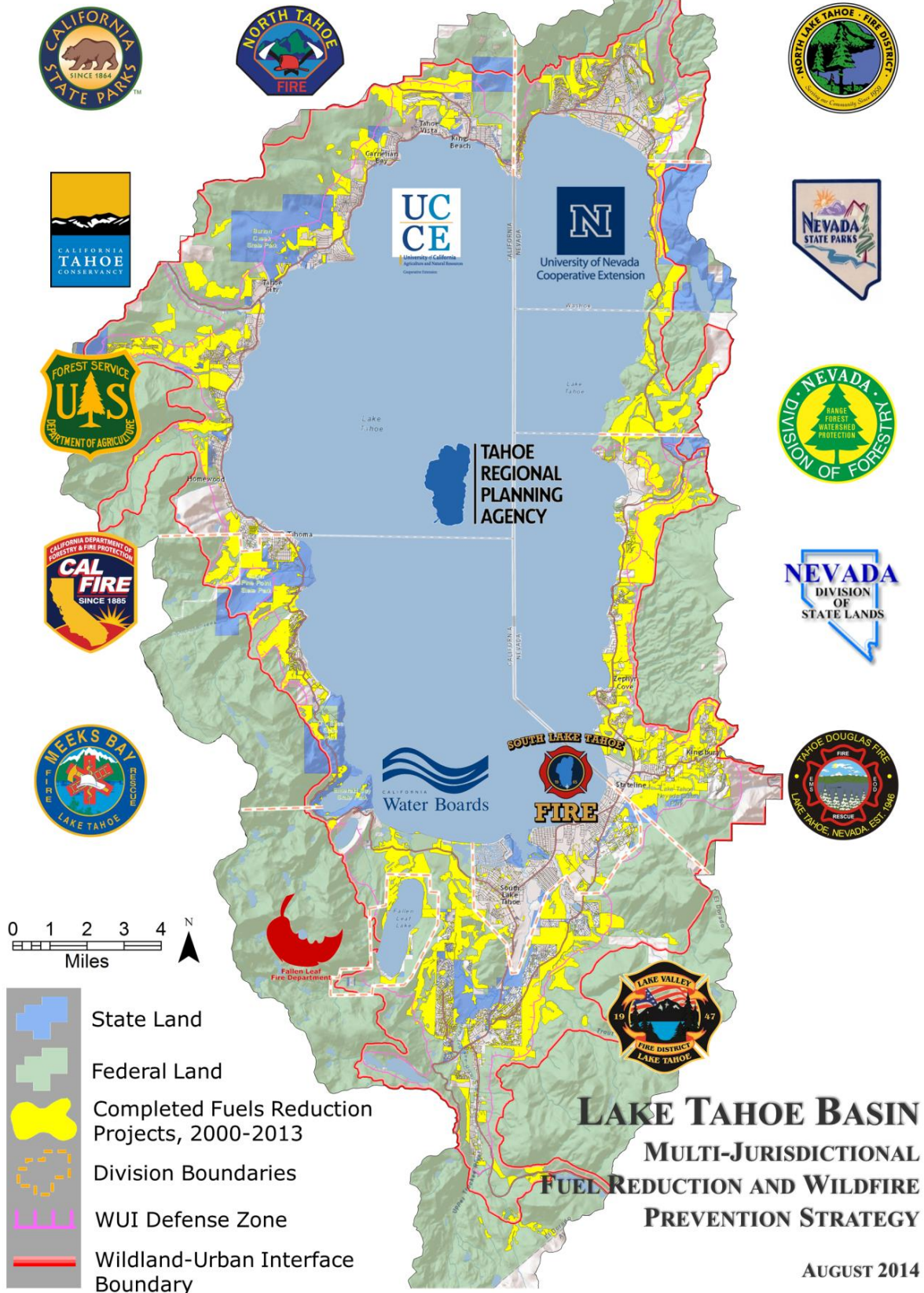
The Multi-jurisdictional Strategy confirms our capacity to deliver and our needs over the next 10 years to complete priority work in the wildland-urban interface. We also need to annually implement phased treatments in previous project areas, because vegetation grows back.

Obviously for those of us who live and work there, we appreciate the emphasis in the proposed legislation on enhancing recreation opportunities and protecting the Lake from invasive species. We also appreciate the proposed bill's involvement of local government in vegetation management and land acquisition.

Again, we very much appreciate Congress's attention to Lake Tahoe and the forest and communities which surround it and particularly Congressman McClintock's support with this proposed legislation

TFFT

TAHOE FIRE & FUELS TEAM



LAKE TAHOE BASIN MULTI-JURISDICTIONAL FUEL REDUCTION AND WILDFIRE PREVENTION STRATEGY

AUGUST 2014



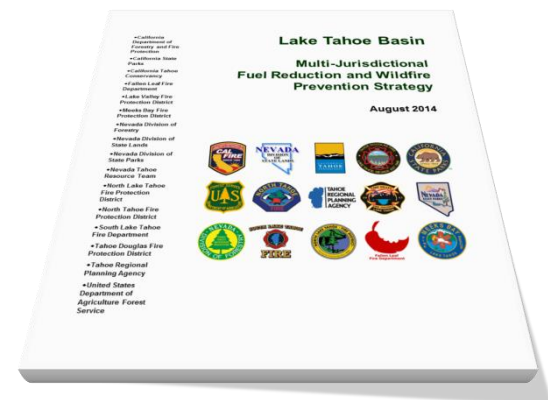
The Multi-Jurisdictional Strategy: August 2014 Update

The updated Multi-Jurisdictional Fuels Reduction and Wildfire Prevention Strategy facilitates the strategic decisions that must be made by land management, fire, and regulatory agencies to reduce the probability of a catastrophic wildfire in the Lake Tahoe Basin. It establishes a process for identifying and prioritizing projects that will have the greatest benefit for Lake Tahoe communities.

This Strategy was developed collaboratively by fifteen Lake Tahoe Basin agencies, including the USDA Forest Service, the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency, and the land managers and fire services of California, Nevada, and local jurisdictions. The full commitment by partner agencies to support and implement the Strategy will provide social and ecological benefits to all jurisdictions by protecting Lake Tahoe communities and forest resources.

Since the development of the original Strategy, the National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy was developed by the Wildland Fire Leadership Council as required by the Federal Land Assistance, Management, and Enhancement Act of 2009 (FLAME Act). The three goals of the National Cohesive Strategy have been embraced by the partner agencies, and are integrated into this strategy. The goals are to:

1. Restore and maintain fire-resilient landscapes.
2. Create fire-adapted communities.
3. Provide effective and efficient wildfire response.



The treatment of hazardous fuels in the wildland-urban interface is projected to cost between \$144 million and \$156 million, with an additional \$25 million to \$35 million anticipated to implement phased treatments on previously treated areas. The Strategy identifies the need to develop and maintain a stable staff and contractor resource pool to implement the proposed projects. The benefits of implementing this strategy include:

- Reduced wildfire risk.
- Reduced fire behavior.
- Increased defensible space.
- Increased forest resiliency.
- Wildlife habitat protection.
- Reduced risk of scenic quality impacts.
- Reduced potential for significant air quality impacts.
- Carbon sequestration and emission reductions.

Federal, state, and local land managers and fire agencies will continue in partnership with each other and the communities they serve to implement the Strategy and monitor its effectiveness. The continued commitment to coordinate, communicate, and collaborate will result in responsive and cost-effective wildfire prevention and fuels reduction that will protect the people and values of the Lake Tahoe Basin.

For more information on the Strategy, visit
<http://www.fs.usda.gov/projects/ltbmu/landmangement/projects>

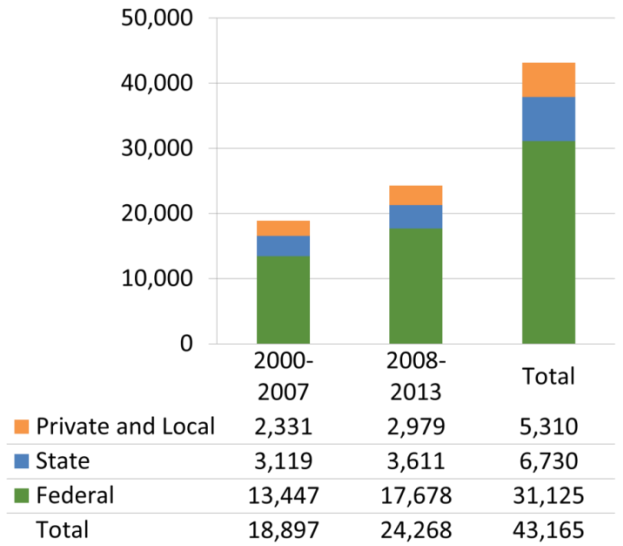


Fuel Reduction

Fuel reduction projects protect communities by reducing fire behavior, giving firefighters a chance to control wildfires before they become catastrophic. The projects also help to restore and maintain fire resilient landscapes by emulating the disturbance of frequent, low-intensity fires that shaped the landscape and ecology of the Lake Tahoe Basin.



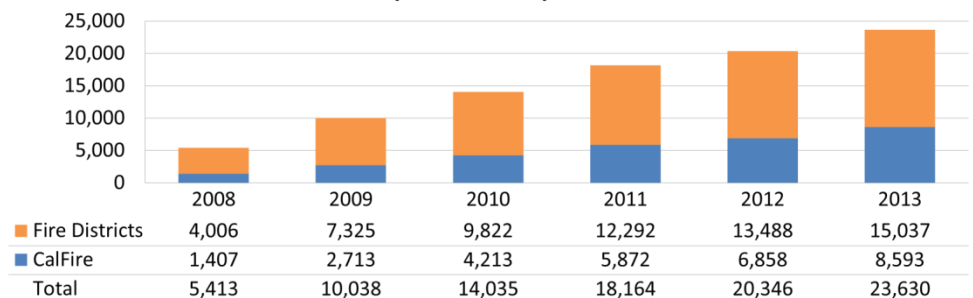
Fuels Reduction Treated Acres



Defensible Space

In neighborhoods where homeowners have created defensible space around individual homes, the treated areas overlap and create larger areas where firefighters would be able to directly attack a fire or engage in structure defense operations. State

Inspections Completed



and local fire agencies are actively educating, inspecting, and enforcing defensible space standards. All local fire agencies in the Tahoe Basin have memorandums of understanding with the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency whereby the local fire department can inspect properties and issue tree removal permits if tree removal is deemed necessary to create adequate defensible space. Along with issuing permits, local fire agencies consult with homeowners about defensible space and provide an inspection report based on state laws requiring defensible space. As the number of homes owned by out-of-area owners increases, the challenges of implementing defensible space standards and public education regarding wildland fire hazard becomes increasingly complex.

Local fire agencies provide implementation assistance to homeowners, such as chipping programs where residents can have yard waste chipped and hauled from the property. In addition, the LTBMU provides homeowner and stewardship agreements to allow homeowners to extend their defensible space onto national forest lands



Tahoe Fire and Fuels Team

The Tahoe Fire and Fuels Team was formed during the fall of 2007, and organized in the spring of 2008. After the Angora Fire of 2007, the governors of Nevada and California created the California-Nevada Tahoe Basin Fire Commission to examine regulatory and social environments that influence fuels reduction in the Lake Tahoe Basin. In their final report, the Commission recognized the value of multi-jurisdictional collaboration to coordinate fuels reduction projects, obtain and manage funding, and to plan and implement projects identified in the community wildfire protection plans.

The team utilizes the incident command system (ICS) familiar to fire professionals and emergency management personnel. Staffing is provided by member organizations on an as-needed basis.

Each fire district/department in the Tahoe Basin forms a geographic division within the Tahoe Fire and Fuels Team. The member agencies coordinate the work that is being completed within the divisions, and provide services to homeowners such as defensible space inspections, tree removal permitting, and residential chipping. In addition, the divisions, the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency, University of Nevada Cooperative Extension, University of California Cooperative Extension, and the USDA Forest Service manage public information through the Fire PIT or Fire Public Information Team. The Fire PIT has created several well received public information campaigns such as the popular “Get Defensive” campaign.

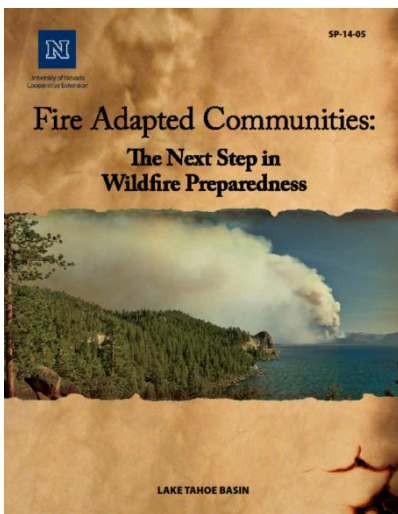
Oversight of the Tahoe Fire and Fuels Team is provided by the Multi-Agency Coordinating Group composed of the chief executives of the signatory agencies to the Strategy. The Group provides general direction and political leadership for the Tahoe Fire and Fuels Team, approves yearly operations plans, and assists with identifying funding opportunities.

The Fire PIT

The **Fire Public Information Team** (Fire PIT) is the outreach and education arm of the TFFT. The team is comprised of public education and communications professionals who conduct coordinated outreach to raise awareness of wildfire issues in the Lake Tahoe Basin, and to increase defensible space practices on private property.



The Fire PIT “Get Defensive” campaign



Fire Adapted Communities

A **Fire Adapted Community** takes responsibility for its wildfire risk. Actions address resident safety, homes, neighborhoods, businesses and infrastructure, forests, parks, open spaces, and other community assets. The more actions a community takes, the more fire adapted it becomes. Taking actions to become a Fire Adapted Community is the next step in wildfire preparedness. A Fire Adapted Community can survive a wildfire with little or no assistance from firefighters.

For more information on Lake Tahoe community programs, visit
<http://www.livingwithfire.info/tahoe>