

West Region Wildfire Council

Meeting Minutes

11/10/16

Last Name	First Name	Affiliation
Austin	Tom	Log Hill Fire
Barth	Chris	BLM
Bennett	John	Telluride Fire
Dinsmore	Jennifer	San Miguel County
Falk	Lilia	WRWC
Gomez	Jamie	WRWC
Hutt	Tanner	DFPC
Morrill	Scott	Gunnison County
Saunders	Lezah	Red Cross
Schmidt	Brad	DFPC
Shelby	Austin	CSFS
Staehele	Alan	Ouray FPD
Tarantino	Mike	WRWC
Tisdell	Ben	Ouray County
Watkins	Teri	Montrose County

Introductions

Lilia Falk facilitated the meeting and initiated a round of introductions. She then introduced presenter Forest Schafer of the North Lake Tahoe Fire Protection District who was calling in from California.

Presentation: “Lake Tahoe Basin Fire and Fuels Programs” presented by Forest Schafer, forester for the North Lake Tahoe Fire Protection District

[Click here to view the presentation.](#)

Forest Schafer is a forester and fuels manager for the North Lake Tahoe Fire Protection District and he presented to the West Region Wildfire Council meeting about the creation and operations of the Tahoe Fire and Fuels Team (TFFT). He started his presentation by talking about the foundational building blocks of TFFT. Forest talked about three programs in the Tahoe Basin intended to increase fire awareness that were created pre-2001. These programs included a 1995 document “Actions to Protect Lake Tahoe”, a “Tahoe Re-Green” Program, and an “Incline Village/ Crystal Bay Defensible Space Handbook”. These programs started the beginning of wildfire awareness in the Tahoe Basin but it was not until the early 2000’s that a new era of wildfire awareness arose. With several large catastrophic fires in the early 2000’s including the 2001 Martis Fire which burned > 14,000 acres and the 2002 Gondola Fire which burned 673 acres and destroyed several homes the mind set of living with fire was changing. With an increase of catastrophic wildfires in the west the Healthy Forests Restoration Act of 2003 was passed with the intent to reduce the threats of destructive wildfires. A requirement of this law was that communities within WUI areas create a community wildfire protection plan. This new era of wildfire awareness in the Tahoe Basin resulted in the drafting of several fuels reduction plans including the “Tahoe Basin Fuels Reduction 2004 Action Plan”, as well as basin-wide CWPPs by November 2004. Strategic planning continued into 2007 with the drafting of the “Fuel Reduction and Forest Restoration Plan for the Lake Tahoe

Basin Wildland Urban Interface” and the “Stewardship Fireshed Assessment” but it was not until the catastrophic 2007 Angora Fire that changed the mind set of awareness to planning to action. As a result of the Angora Fire the California-Nevada Tahoe Fire Commission was created and the “Lake Tahoe Basin Multi-Jurisdictional Fuel Reduction and Wildfire Prevention Strategy” was created. This commission and document was a necessary step for fire mitigation in the Tahoe area as it involved partners from fifteen jurisdictional agencies in two states working collaboratively to reduce fuels basin wide. To implement the plans identified in this multi-jurisdictional document the Tahoe Fire and Fuels Team was created with the mission to “protect lives, property and the environment within the Lake Tahoe Basin from wildfire by implementing prioritized fuel reduction projects and engaging the public in becoming a Fire Adapted Community”. The TFFT then drafted the “Lake Tahoe Basin CWPP” which planned the treatments in five divisions around Lake Tahoe working with 19 agencies.

After explaining the creation of the TFFT, Forest Schafer presented the goals and operations of the team. He explained that the goals of the TFFT were to create Fire Adapted communities, restore and maintain fire-resilient landscapes, and provide effective and efficient wildfire response. To reach these goals TFFT used the Tahoe Basin CWPP as well as Community Action Plans to implement projects. Forest then focused on landscape scale projects intended to maintain fire-resilient forests. He focused specifically on projects that have been completed in the Incline Village Community in North Lake Tahoe. Forest used maps to show how the Incline Village Community had broken and scattered land ownership with steep slopes, a dry aspect, and numerous chimneys. The community had limited evacuation routes and was a top priority for treatments. Because of the multi-jurisdictional planning TFFT was able to treat a majority of the fuels surrounding the Incline Village Community on both public and private lands. The treatments included many units of mechanical thinning as well as controlled burns. Because of the collaborative planning of the TFFT the public was incredibly supportive of the treatments in the Incline Village Community and controlled burn projects crossed from federal land directly up to private houses. As of now TFFT has treated a total of 46,996 acres on private, state and federal land.

Schafer then explained the action that the TFFT was taking to create Fire Adapted communities. He communicated that there are annual community work days scheduled in each of the eight communities surrounding the lake. These work days are generally between June and August and help homeowners in the community mitigate their properties. The Zephyr Fire Crew is present to help residents with chainsaw work and labor and chippers blanket the neighborhood. For these community work days a publically owned urban lot and several residential properties are mitigated in each community. Forest explained that the next action TFFT uses to create Fire Adapted communities is a curbside defensible space inspection. These inspections were established in 2010 and became operational in 2011. 2,500 properties in the district are inspected and inspections repeat every four years. The State of California, Cal Fire inspects hazards in California and the North Lake Tahoe FPD conducts the evaluations in Nevada communities. Both agencies inspect the conditions of the Home Ignition Zone and the various zones of defensible space. The agencies then make risk reduction recommendations to the homeowner. To enforce these recommendations the State of California may issue a citation or fine to any uncorrected violations.

Forest then talked about the outreach and education that TFFT was doing. He stated that TFFT has a Public Information Team that provides consistent public education and promotion to create wildfire awareness. He then showed slides with various campaigns promoting defensible spaces, healthy forests, and home ignition zone mitigation. He then explained that TFFT was providing support to expand community involvement to create a basin-wide network of Fire Adapted Communities.

To end his presentation Forest talked about the potential health issues of the Tahoe Basin forests. Mountain Pine Beetle epidemics have been hitting Sugar Pine stands hard in the Southern Sierra and Schafer expressed his worries of the beetles moving into the Tahoe Basin. Since Colorado has experienced major outbreaks of pine beetle mortality he asked the audience for opinions on how to best manage the forest in the event of a beetle infestation. Lilia Falk, Ben Tisdell, Chris Barth, Mike Tarantino and Austin Shelby shared experiences that they have seen in Colorado concerning bark beetles.

Round Robin

Lilia Falk facilitated a round robin discussion. She talked about a WRWC campaign to educate residents within the Norwood FPD about their wildfire risk. She talked about a letter that will be sent to residents within the FPD that will educate homeowners about their property's wildfire risk, their neighbor's wildfire risk and their community's wildfire risk. The letter will also have access to a personalized webpage that displays the homeowner's wildfire risk and explains specifically how eleven risk rating factors contribute to that homeowner's risk. To see an example of this educational letter [click here](#). Lilia then opened the floor to round robin speakers and Ben Tisdell, Chris Barth, Jamie Gomez, Mike Tarantino, Austin Shelby, Jen Dinsmore, Scott Morrill, Brad Schmidt, Tanner Hutt and John Bennet spoke about projects, plannings and operations that were underway in the West Region.