

Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

July 1, 2005

LRWB 05-001

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Lahontan Water Board and California Board of Forestry Streamline Permitting Process for Fire-Safe Tree Thinning in Lake Tahoe Basin

SOUTH LAKE TAHOE – The Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board, the state agency responsible for regulating water quality on the California side of the Lake Tahoe Basin, and the California State Board of Forestry and Fire Protection, the State’s regulatory and policy Board responsible wildland fire protection and forest management, have joined together to simplify the process to obtain permits for cutting trees to address fire hazard concerns.

In response to concerns raised by local fire districts, the staff of the Regional Board asked the Board of Forestry to amend its recently adopted landmark fuel hazard regulations to further reduce the paperwork required of landowners in the Lake Tahoe Basin who want to cut trees to address fire hazards. The new rules take effect on June 24, 2005. Landowners may now thin trees in streamside areas to address fire hazards with less paperwork, by filing a brief “exemption form” instead of an extensive Timber Harvesting Plan (THP).

Previously, landowners wishing to thin trees in streamside areas had to complete an extensive Timber Harvesting Plan (THP). The new rules allow limited tree cutting in streamside areas without the preparation of a THP. Landowners on the California side of the Tahoe Basin who want to cut trees in streamside areas to address fire hazards will still need to obtain a waiver from the Regional Board, and in some cases, approval from the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency and/or the California Department of Forestry. But both the Board of Forestry’s and the Regional Board’s paperwork has been greatly simplified. Assistance in completing the forms can be obtained from Regional Board staff, the California Department of Forestry, or local fire districts. The two Boards, and the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency, are now planning on further streamlining as they consider adoption of this regulation on a permanent basis later this year.

“We all need to work together to minimize the potential for a catastrophic wildfire,” said Harold Singer, Regional Board Executive Officer. “The Regional Board is committed to making the regulatory process as simple as possible for landowners who wish to complete this essential work.” Board of Forestry and Fire Protection Executive Officer George Gentry stated “ The Board of Forestry and Fire Protection, along with our partners, has created landmark regulatory relief this year, and we look forward to furthering streamlined fuel hazard reduction efforts to protect water quality.”

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While protecting lives and property from wildfire is the highest priority, Singer said the Regional Board is also concerned about degradation of Lake Tahoe that could occur from soil erosion, whether from improper forestry activities or after a catastrophic fire. Singer and Gentry encourage all landowners in the Tahoe Basin to consult with their local fire district to determine if their home and property is “fire safe,” and comply with laws requiring removal of vegetation to create “defensible space.”

For further information about the new rules, please contact Lauri Kemper at (530) 542-5436 or California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection Unit Forester Mary Huggins at (530) 541-1989. To obtain a waiver from the Regional Board for tree cutting on the California side of the Tahoe Basin, please call Erika Lovejoy at (530) 542-5409.

The Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board is one of nine regional boards within the State Water Resources Control Board. The California Water Boards are a part of the California Environmental Protection Agency.

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