

Tahoe Regional Planning Agency

Fire Safety & Defensible Space

The threat of a catastrophic wildfire at Lake Tahoe is a concern to the TRPA and the entire community. The TRPA has secured grants and is pursuing other funding sources to implement the (Lake Tahoe Basin Fire Plan). This plan is a blueprint to reduce fire danger in communities around the lake.

(click here) to go the Living With Fire website for the Tahoe Basin.

It's important for property owners to take "defensible space" measures to protect their homes in the unfortunate event of a wildfire. There are many simple things you can do to protect your home:

- Call your local fire district for a defensible space home inspection and/or tree removal permit for fire safety.
- Remove all vegetation that may be touching your home. Look for tree branches and bushes that have grown up next to your house.
- Break up dense vegetation around your home.
- Clear all dead vegetation including tree limbs on the ground, pine needles and cones, dried grass, flowers, etc. Many local fire departments have a free service to chip your dead tree limbs.
- For areas of bare soil with no vegetation, rake all pine needles once a year, in the Spring; then let them fall and collect the rest of the year. TRPA and all Lake Tahoe fire districts agree that this is both defensible and good to control erosion.
- Consider leaving the "duff" layer of pine needles in your yard wherever there is bare soil. The "duff" layer is the dark area at the ground level where pine needles are decomposing. The duff layer has low ignition properties and is a ready option to controlling soil erosion.
- Keep an area approximately 30 feet surrounding your home clean and free of debris or dead vegetation including pine needles. Everything in this area should be healthy and green.

To help streamline the permit process for carrying out hazardous fuel removal from your property, TRPA has entered into agreements with local fire protection districts (FPDs) to offer free inspections and assistance to speed up defensible space work in the Tahoe Basin. These agencies may also offer free chipping service and financial assistance programs to offset the costs to homeowners.

The following FPDs can issue tree removal permits for defensible space purposes only:

? North Lake Tahoe FPD (Washoe County)
(775) 831-0351 ext. 2

? Tahoe-Douglas FPD (Douglas County)
(775) 588-3591 ext. 227

? Lake Valley FPD (portions of El Dorado County south of Emerald Bay excluding the City of South Lake Tahoe)
(530) 577-2447

? Meeks Bay FPD (El Dorado County north of Emerald Bay)
(530) 525-7548 ext. 15

? North Tahoe FPD (Placer County)
(530) 546-4347

Within the City of South Lake Tahoe and Fallen Leaf Lake, contact the TRPA Forester at (775) 588-4547 ext.244.

Trees

For thousands of years, the forests in the Lake Tahoe Basin took care of themselves. Low intensity fires crept through the forests, clearing underbrush, thinning tree stands and cleansing and recycling the resources within.

In the 19th century, pioneers in the area clear-cut many of the basin's forests responding to a need for timber in the silver mines in the Comstock Lode. Loggers took many of the biggest and hardiest trees which had been in the area for more than a hundred years. This caused a loss of much of the diversity of trees as the forest grew back. Due in large part to the contrasting forest management styles over the past hundred years, we are now in a situation with too many trees, not enough diversity of trees, and an excessive number of dead and dying trees.

The TRPA realizes that management of public forest lands and private property have different needs. We have tried to make things simple for homeowners so that they can reduce the fire danger on their property, but also protect the forested areas around the lake in which we live. For example, if you want to remove a tree on your property for defensible space that is less than 14 inches diameter at breast height (14" dbh), you can do so without a permit as long as your property is not in a stream environment zone or the tree was not planted at the request of TRPA.

Additionally, we have tried to improve the ease of creating defensible space on private property by working with local fire departments to issue tree cutting permits on our behalf. Currently TRPA has agreements with every fire protection district in the Tahoe Basin and work closely with them to help you manage the forest on you property effectively.

We are also working with the USDA Forest Service, Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit and Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board to update their respective management plans, while we update our regional plan for the Lake Tahoe Basin. This process, called PATHWAY 2007 will include updates to management of the public forest areas among other things.

Tree Removal

Proposed Activity or Project	TRPA Requirements
Killing or materially damaging a tree	<p>Is not allowed. (See notes on live limbing below.)</p> <p>Material damage is defined as any of the following activities or alterations to a live tree 14" dbh or larger;</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) topping 2) the removal of live limbs within the upper two thirds of the total tree height 3) girdling 4) the application of chemicals harmful to the tree 5) purposefully exposing the cambium layer 6) other damage to the tree that will potentially result in its death or disfigurement, or in a significant way increase its susceptibility to insects or disease.
Removal of trees smaller than 14" dbh	<p>No permit required unless in an SEZ (Stream Environment Zone) or backshore, or if the tree planting or retention was required by TRPA.</p>
Removal of dead (no green whatsoever) trees	<p>Removal of dead trees does not require a permit, except for large dead trees (snags) protected by TRPA's old growth protection ordinances in Conservation and Recreation Land Use areas and in SEZ's. Snags larger than the following sizes are affected: In Nevada and east of Carnelian Bay – 24" dbh; in the rest of the California portion of the Region – 30" dbh. Contact TRPA for approval to remove these large</p>

	snags from these areas.
Removal of live trees 14" dbh and larger	Obtain a tree removal permit from TRPA. Use of heavy equipment and stump removal are NOT part of the permit.
Removal of 100 or more live trees 14" dbh or larger	Contact TRPA regarding additional permitting requirements.
Cutting, trimming or removal of live lakeshore or SEZ vegetation of ANY type or size or landscaping in SEZ or backshore	Obtain written approval and/or a tree removal permit from TRPA.
Tree removal from a project footprint pursuant to TRPA Code Section 65.2.E	Reviewed through applicable building/grading/ development permit application process. Trees to be removed must be shown on TRPA-stamped plans as approved for removal.
Live limb removal	Live limb removal not meeting the definition of Material Damage in Chapter 2 of the TRPA Code is exempt. However, some scenic area project permits contain provisions prohibiting any view enhancement limb removal. TRPA does not require a permit for limb pruning necessary to maintain the following safety clearances: Chimney outlet: 10 feet Buildings: 6 feet Driveways: 15 foot vertical clearance for normal use and fire truck access Walkways and paths: for pedestrian use Utility lines: Contact utility company about street line maintenance; Homeowners may prune limbs impinging on their service lines.
Dead limb removal	Exempt, no permit needed.