

Tahoe Basin Fire Chiefs

February 10, 2012

Honorable Members of the El Dorado County Board of Supervisors

John R. Knight, Chair

Ron Briggs, Vice-Chair

Norma Santiago, District 5

Ray Nutting, District 2

Jack Sweeney District 3

Dear Chairman Knight and Supervisors:

We the undersigned California Tahoe Basin Fire Chiefs are writing to enlist your Board's support in our campaign to persuade Governor Jerry Brown to reinstate funding for the two CalFire engines and crews that have been stationed in the Tahoe Basin since the devastating Angora Fire in 2007.

Specifically, in his 2012-2013 budget, Governor Brown proposes to eliminate \$2.3 million in General Fund support for state-funded fire protection at Lake Tahoe, leaving only a skeleton staff to provide fire prevention services, such as defensible space inspections and enforcement.

The Governor's proposal comes at the same time the State Board of Forestry and Fire Protection is moving forward with approved plans to implement a new fee on the owners of homes and other structures located with "State Responsibility Areas" (SRA). The significant number of residents, second home, and other property owners within SRAs on the California side of the Tahoe Basin will soon be paying new fees to the State for what would be a reduced level of service if the Governor's budget is adopted.

Our local districts - Lake Valley Fire Protection District, Fallen Leaf Lake Fire Department, Meeks Bay Fire Protection District, and the North Tahoe Fire Protection District - will continue to provide fire protection services to residents and property owners, but resources will be stretched more thinly than ever. The U.S. Forest Service will continue to have a presence, but unlike CalFire and local districts, the Forest Service is not a 24/7 all risk provider.

Since learning of this proposal, we have been working every channel in an effort to convince the Governor not to push forward with this catastrophic budget proposal. It threatens a number of key agreements and strategies embodied in the historic ***Emergency California-Nevada Tahoe Basin Fire Commission Report***, published in May 2008. As you are keenly aware, this bi-state commission was established by then governors Schwarzenegger of California and Gibbons of Nevada in the wake of the wind-whipping Angora Fire which destroyed or damaged more than 250 homes and more than 3100 acres of land within El Dorado County at the Lake.

Among its findings and recommendations, Finding 37 of the Report is as follows: *“The level of wildland fire protection on the California side of the Basin in “State Responsibility Areas” is below the basic 24/7 all-risk standard experienced elsewhere in California.”* The finding goes on to say: *“As a result of the “balance of areas” arrangement between state and federal fire protection agencies in California, property owners on the California side of the Tahoe Basin receive services at a level which is lower than the standard elsewhere in California. In other areas of California, property owners in “State Responsibility Areas” receive 24/7 all-risk protection by the state’s fire department, CAL FIRE. In many cases where there is an organized local fire protection district, the local and state agencies cooperate in delivering programs, including fire prevention and multi-hazard fire and rescue services. The lead on multi-hazard structure fire and rescue services comes from local government, while wildland fire protection comes from CAL FIRE. In many cases, the local government’s ability to provide statutory mandated services is constrained by the shift of property tax dollars to the State of California. This leaves a reduced ability for local government to participate in 24/7 wildland fire protection.”*

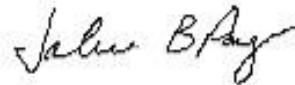
We believe it is reasonable for the State of California to provide Basin property owners with the same 24/7 all risk fire services provided elsewhere in the State. The Governor’s budget proposal is in conflict with the fairness, particularly in light of the new SRA fees that will soon be charged. The State should address this inequity by taking on Direct Protection Responsibilities (DPA) within the Tahoe Basin. Maintaining budget support for the two CalFire engines that have been stationed at Lake Tahoe since the Angora Fire will go a long way to meet the State’s responsibility.

Thank you in advance for your consideration and support. To expedite your communication with the Governor, we have provided your staff with a draft letter. Thank you for the opportunity to act together to ensure fairness and protect the lives and property of those we are dedicated to serve.

Sincerely,

Gareth S. Harris

Chief Gareth S. Harris
Lake Valley Fire Protection District



Chief John Pang
Meeks Bay Fire Protection District



Chief Duane Whitelaw
North Tahoe Fire Protection District



Chief Gary Gerren
Fallen Leaf Lake Fire Department