

County pauses on fire plan

Susan Voyles
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Washoe County commissioners agreed Tuesday to withhold approval for 60 days of a state-generated plan that tells the county how to guard against wildfires, giving local fire officials a chance to upgrade a “low risk” rating for wildfires in southwest Reno and make other corrections.

The delay is not expected to jeopardize federal grants to reduce fire hazards for the county available through the federal Healthy Forest Restoration Act of 2003.

Under the act, counties that adopt community wildfire protection plans can apply for grants to reduce fire hazards on private lands, such as building fire breaks and clearing brush. And in counties with adopted plans, the U.S. Bureau of Land Management and the U.S. Forest Service officials are to make reducing fire hazards on their lands a priority.

The state plan assesses fire risks for 33 Washoe communities that are on the edge of wildlands and are the most vulnerable. The nearly two-inch thick report was prepared by the Nevada Fire Safe Council in Reno and Resource Concepts Inc. in Carson City, which has studied wildland fire dangers for the 17 Nevada counties.

Acting Reno Fire Chief Marty Scheuerman, whose department oversees much of the suburban county, told commissioners he would not sign off on the plan as required until the department gives it a thorough review. While the department provided information early on, he said local fire officials had no part in preparing the risk analysis.

And he said errors need to be corrected. Southwest Reno, for instance, would be in a poor position to compete for grants if its low fire-risk rating remains. With its wild ravines and ridges in the southwest, “no way is it near ‘low.’ ”

Gary Schmidt’s house burned in the Andrew fire nearly a year ago and he complained the report gives no mention of the blaze. And with so much of the sagebrush now gone, he said the fire conditions have changed.

Elwood Miller, recently retired council director who oversaw the studies, said he had no objections to Washoe officials wanting to revise and update the plan. But he urged officials to adopt the plan and change it later. He also said no other state is even close to catching up with Nevada in preparing the community plans.

In the report, the Mt. Rose corridor, upper Galena, west Washoe Valley, Antelope Valley, Red Rock and Warm Springs are given a high or extreme risk for fire.

Incline Village and Crystal Bay at Lake Tahoe were given a high fire risk in an earlier report. And 20 other communities were rated as moderate for fire danger.

About \$270 million is expected to be available nationwide for grants to removing fire hazards from private lands, the first ever offered.

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