NEVADA LEGISLATURE
LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE FOR THE REVIEW AND OVERSIGHT OF THE TAHOE REGIONAL PLANNING AGENCY AND MARLETTE LAKE WATER SYSTEM

(*Nevada Revised Statutes* [NRS] 218E.555)

DRAFT MINUTES

February 27, 2026

The second meeting of the Legislative Committee for the Review and Oversight of the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency and the Marlette Lake Water System for the 2025–2026 Interim was held on Friday, February 27, 2026, at 1 p.m. in the Tahoe Room, Tahoe Regional Planning Agency, 128 Market Street, Stateline, Nevada.

The agenda, minutes, meeting materials, and video recording of the meeting are available on the Committee's meeting page. The video recording may also be found at https://www.leg.state.nv.us/Video/. Copies of the video record can be obtained through the Publications Office of the Legislative Counsel Bureau (LCB) (publications@lcb.state.nv.us or 775/684-6835).

COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT IN STATELINE, NEVADA:

Assemblymember Heather Goulding, Chair
Senator Skip Daly, Vice Chair
Senator Robin L. Titus
Assemblymember Rich DeLong
Assemblymember Cinthia Zermeño Moore
Assemblymember Blayne Osborn
Assemblymember Howard Watts

COMMITTEE MEMBER ATTENDING REMOTELY:

Senator Melanie Scheible

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL BUREAU STAFF PRESENT:

Julianne King, Senior Policy Analyst, Research Division
Terese Martinez, Research Policy Assistant, Research Division
Lisa Creamer, Constituent Services Analyst, Research Division
Sarah Delap, Principal Deputy Legislative Counsel, Legal Division
Payton Alvarado, Deputy Legislative Counsel, Legal Division
Daniel Marlow, Program Analyst, Fiscal Analysis Division

Items taken out of sequence during the meeting have been placed in agenda order.
[Indicates clarification.]

AGENDA ITEM I—OPENING REMARKS

Chair Goulding:

Good afternoon. I would like to call this meeting to order. Welcome to the second meeting of the Legislative Committee for the Review and Oversight of the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency and the Marlette Lake Water System. Today the Committee will be hearing presentations primarily focused on forest health, wildfire prevention and response, and homeowners insurance in the Tahoe Basin. We are also honored to be receiving a presentation from Chairman Smokey regarding the Washoe Nation interests in the Tahoe Basin. Ms. Martinez, please call the roll.

[Roll call is reflected in Committee Members Present.]

Meeting materials can be accessed on the Committee's web page located on the Nevada Legislature's website. You can also sign up for electronic notifications related to the Committee's activities on the Legislature's website. Please sign in at the door and be sure to indicate on the sign-in sheet whether you would like to provide public comment. If speaking, please provide a business card to our secretary, if you have one. I will be calling those up who would like to provide public comment in the order that they have signed in. Once I call your name, please come have a seat at the table, and, when speaking, please press the mic button and please state and spell your name for the record. We will have a public comment period both at the beginning and the end of our meeting. Public comment is limited to two minutes per speaker—will be timed—and do we have a bell today? We have an alarm, so you will have an audible signal to wrap it up. Due to our full agenda and members' travel schedules, I will be limiting the first period of public comment to 30 minutes. Our second period of public comment will not be subject to a specific time limit, and that will be at the end of our agenda. Members of the public may provide testimony in several different ways, all of which are listed on the agenda. As I said, because we have a full agenda today, I would like to remind presenters to please do their best to keep within the time limits provided for their presentations. Finally, I would like to remind everyone to please turn off your electronic devices, especially cell phones and laptops, and put them on silent mode for the meeting. With that, we will move to public comment.

AGENDA ITEM II—PUBLIC COMMENT

Chair Goulding:

We have Danielle Hughes, Doug Flaherty, and Robert Larsen. Ms. Hughes, go ahead.

Danielle Hughes, Chief Executive Officer, Tahoe Spark:

Good morning, Chair and members of the Committee. Thank you. I am the CEO [Chief Executive Officer] of Tahoe Spark, and I have worked across energy systems, natural resources, land-use policy, transportation, and Basin governments in both California and Nevada for more than 25 years. Across that time, I have documented through hundreds of public records how the Tahoe Basin's energy system has been structurally extracted and how risk and costs have been shifted to year-round residents. What I am raising today is not a policy disagreement—it is a structural oversight failure that has accumulated over decades and now presents material risk to the Tahoe Basin. Liberty Utilities is a retail-only, limited-liability, California investor-owned utility serving the Tahoe Basin through a fragmented government structure that has never been reconciled with TRPA's [Tahoe Regional Planning Agency] land-use authorities, greenhouse-gas reporting, or the Basin's interstate energy reaction. Wholesale power serving the Basin is governed under federal interstate commerce, dispatched through Nevada balancing authority, and it is not regulated separately from NV Energy. Retail obligations, however, are imposed under California law. TRPA controls redevelopment patterns and visitation intensity using the growth model that does not reflect the Basin's actual conditions, including 15 percent year-over-year decline in populations in North Lake Tahoe and resulting in cost shifts onto low-income and working-class communities. Meanwhile, utility wildfire insurance costs have increased 300 percent, driven in part by Liberty-caused wildfire—killed one person and burned eight homes in Mono County—and the FAIR [Fair Access to Insurance Requirements] Plan is expected to go up over 60 percent in California in the Basin. The territory is subsidized the L.A. [Los Angeles] wildfires. No single entity evaluates how these systems interact, and that is why I request a formal audit now—it is necessary. We are in the eleventh hour of a wholesale contract with Verizon with a publicly integrated long-term plan, and NV Energy has the ability to cut our power with 180-day notice. I will finish this at the end. Thank you.

Chair Goulding:

Thank you. You can submit that in writing.

Doug Flaherty, Resident, Incline Village, Nevada:

[Inaudible] in emergency response and planning, retired fire combat Battalion Chief in the City of Orange, Orange County; lived and worked in the Santa Ana Canyon. The longer that I was with the Fire Service under those conditions, the more humble I became. I would never stand up here and lead this Committee to believe that ICS [Incident Command System] drills, home hardening, defensible space, forest thinning would buy us an inch of constrained roadway width during a major, fast-moving wildfire—of which I have seen many that have jumped 18-lane freeways in a matter of seconds. You are going to hear a lot about this type of thing—which is great. ICS drills, home hardening, defensible space, forest thinning to an extent are important, but it is a red herring to lead you to believe that you do not need a roadway-by-roadway, wildfire evacuation timing plan. We cannot continue to build out Tahoe in our town center density areas without loss of life. It is bad enough as it is. Washoe County, Incline Village [inaudible] six-hour [inaudible] time. That is the official evacuation time of Orange County. And lastly, I would have to say, for those behind me to continue to use the Caldor forest-thinning process during the Caldor Fire to suggest [inaudible] a fire. I [inaudible] debate that with anybody in this room. That is an obfuscation. Chief Lindgren from Tahoe Douglas Fire has said many times, "You caught a break in the weather." Please do not be persuaded. Thank you. (Agenda Item II A-1) (Agenda Item II A-2) (Agenda Item II A-3)

Chair Goulding:

Ellie Waller, you are next—and Ned Gaines. Go ahead, sir.

Robert Larsen, Program Officer, Tahoe Science Advisory Council, California Natural Resources Agency:

Good afternoon, Madam Chair and Committee members. I am here today to highlight the ongoing partnership between the Science Council and TRPA as it relates to forest health and the wildfire threat. As you will hear today, TRPA recently updated its forest health and wildfire threshold standards. TRPA asked the Science Council to coordinate an independent peer review of the initial proposal. And the Science Council organized what we refer to as an engaged review, which is essentially a structured conversation between scientists and managers during the policy development process. TRPA staff met with Doctors Hugh Safford and Patricia Manley over the course of several months to discuss ideas, hear specific concerns, and refine the final proposal that was just approved at a governing board meeting just yesterday—or this week—Wednesday, I guess it was. You may also hear today about a recent paper published in the science journal *Forest Ecology and Management*. That study was funded in part by the Council, and it examined the effectiveness of fuel treatments in mitigating fire severity and reducing tree mortality in the 2021 Caldor Fire. Overall, those results add to the growing list of forest treatment success stories in the western U.S. [United States]. The findings also highlight the urgency of continued, proactive forest and fuel management activities. These are just two examples that demonstrate the strong partnership between the Council and TRPA in developing science-based policies to support management at Lake Tahoe. I will close by saying that I am pleased to facilitate this ongoing partnership and look forward to further conversation. Thank you so much.

Chair Goulding:

Brett Tibbitts, you are up at the table next.

Ellie Waller, Resident, Douglas County, Nevada:

All the topics today are related to the human and environmental elements that TRPA should be addressing through the threshold analyses, Environmental Improvement Program, et cetera. The Bi-State Compact calls for the regional plan to establish a balance between the natural environment and the human-made environment. Overtourism, overdevelopment, unintentional consequences have abounded since the 2012 Regional Plan update by providing an unbalanced approach to recreational access, overcrowding in town centers, et cetera. Be reminded that the Tahoe Basin has a fixed infrastructure and has overbuilt existing conditions. TRPA states their caps on development rights have not been exceeded. They may not have been exceeded, but accounting for units versus people does not accurately account for unintended environmental-impact issues. There have been many challenges from the public either going unanswered or unproven. Over 370 amendments to the code have been approved since 2013. This is not a substitute for a deeper dive in amending the entire plan, especially keeping development in check with the local nexus issues created with extraordinary incentives being provided by the local jurisdictions and area plans at project levels. Examples—a developer is currently requesting a variance of 445-foot-length structure with 200 feet as an allowed zoning—not approved. Face value—less parking required allows developers to have larger footprints, more units, more people, more local impacts, as TRPA allows extra coverage and height in some instances. Increased density may give additional affordable housing units built, which are often crafted as market rate, but not address price-point affordability for others in need—lower than the average median income of 180. No traffic analysis for the sawmill logging trucks going through the Basin has been completed. The 2012 Regional Plan needs to be overhauled, and Basin-wide existing conditions and regional growth analyzed, as well as some of the unintended consequences I provided. (Agenda Item II B-1) (Agenda Item II B-2) (Agenda Item II B-3) (Agenda Item II B-4)

Chair Goulding:

On deck is Steve Teshara.

Ned Gaines, Commissioner, Division of Insurance, Department of Business and Industry:

Yes. Thank you, Chair. Actually, I think I marked myself down wrong on the sign-in sheet. I will be presenting on Agenda Number IX, so I will hold my comments until that time.

Chair Goulding:

Perfect. I was curious about that. We will look forward to hearing your longer than two minutes comments a little bit later. So, Mr. Tibbetts, Steve Teshara, on deck, and then Noa.

Brett Tibbitts, Tahoe East Shore Alliance:

Good afternoon. I continue to be very concerned about TRPA's ability or entrance to plan most of these Committee meetings—or to them—and the items and matters that get hid and are not dealt with and are of extreme importance. Case in point, the Tahoe Douglas Fire District is a GID [General Improvement District]. It is its own separate entity. It serves the entire Douglas County, East Shore Lake area from Stateline past Spooner Summit. Do you know what percentage of the calls to the TDFD [Tahoe Douglas Fire Protection District] come in from tourists? Can you guess? Eighty percent of the calls are from tourists. Do you know what percent of the funding comes from any tourist-related industry? Zero. The Department is largely funded by residential property taxes. There are not enough residents to properly support the Fire District. So, if you were really doing the job and improving the Lake, it should be on your agenda for new ways to provide funding for the Tahoe Douglas Fire District. They should get some of the TOT [Transient Occupancy Tax] tax; the majority of it goes to the Event Center. They get much more money than they need for their bond interest payments. Then it goes down to Douglas County for parks and recreation and the administration in the valley. It does not stay at the Lake. It was all done by mandate of Nevada legislation. I hope that as part of this, we can submit for legislation for next year for that to be amended. The Nevada Legislature passed this. TDFD is in major need of money. They have equipment that is not working. So, I would think if we could all do better by everyone if we can get TDFD more funding. Thank you.

Chair Goulding:

Thank you, sir. We have Steve Teshara next, and then—I think that I have this right—Noa. You are not making comments now? Great. Ann Nichols and Scott Tieche are on deck.

Steve Teshara, Owner/Principal, Sustainable Community Advocates:

Thank you, Madam Chair and Vice Chair and members of the Committee. My company is Sustainable Community Advocates. My comments this afternoon reference the letter that I submitted to you dated February 20 of this year, one week ago. (Agenda Item II C) My purpose in writing the letter was to provide you with additional background information on topics you have received other comments on. These topics include TRPA growth caps, people in the Basin, Lake Tahoe clarity, microplastics in the Lake, housing, short-term rentals and neighborhood compatibility, regional evacuation planning and TRPA's role in that, and work to update the Agency's environmental thresholds, along with the Tahoe Blue Events Center. We understand the time limits inherent in these meetings in terms of an ability to really more fully understand the presentations that you get, the comments that you receive. It is a tight meeting, and there is a lot of complex issues. So, if you have not done so already, I encourage you to review my letter and open up the link that is provided in the letter for each of the documents that I have referenced. I have two additional comments for you this afternoon. One, to reinforce that TRPA has no legal authority to limit the number of people who can live within the Basin—nor does it have the legal authority to limit visitation in the Basin. Second, the number of Lake Link microtransit rides provided—referred to in the last paragraph of my letter—should be a total of 725,000, from the launch date in 2022 through January of this year. There is a missing zero in that number—so the right number is 725,000 rides. Thank you for this opportunity to provide supplemental comments.

Ann Nichols, Resident, North Tahoe:

I would [inaudible] a governance issue earning TRPA's proposed restructuring of the water [inaudible] and environmental threshold carrying capacities. The proposal removes 26 existing threshold standards, including pollutant load reduction, [inaudible] discharge limits and reclassifies them as performance measures or code provisions. Load is the primary driver of Lake Tahoe clarity decline. [Inaudible.]—when we are off track. The restructure [inaudible] clarity [inaudible].

[The audio cut out for the rest of Ann Nichols' testimony due to technology issues.]

Chair Goulding:

Before you go ahead, Mr. Tieche. I have Elizabeth—I am having difficulty reading the last name—Elizabeth L. and then Claudia Andersen.

Assemblymember DeLong:

Chair, can I just bring something up? Could each speaker make sure that they are actually speaking into the microphone—to make sure that we are getting everything recorded.

Scott Tieche, Resident, Washoe County:

Hi—Scott Tieche, a multi-decade Washoe County constituent. On February 6th, I received the TRPA's "Profiles on Progress" E-newsletter—like most engaged residents, I read it. The second item referenced the Santini-Burton Act, but this time it used the word "modernization." That word caught my attention. The piece spoke about unlocking funds and advancing stewardship, forest management, including work with the Washoe Tribe—all important goals. No specifics. No clear explanation of what "modernization" would actually change. No governance detail. No guardrails. Read more like messaging than substance. I also read the Executive Director's recent opinion piece. Again—strong messaging, but light on specifics. I care about Tahoe deeply—many of us do—and when language gets polished while details stay thin, people get uneasy. In conversations with other engaged residents and based on what they have heard from current and former TRPA Board members, the concern I hear consistently is about direction and leadership—whether the Agency is becoming more focused on protecting itself than protecting the Basin. Maybe that perception is wrong, but perceptions matter—it deserves oversight. You are Nevada's oversight body. Tahoe is too important environmentally, economically, and generationally for legislative "modernization" to move forward without full transparency. So, I am asking you—require a detailed written explanation of what Santini-Burton "modernization" means—specifically what changes and what does not. Clarify exactly what would be unlocked—what funds would be unlocked—excuse me. We all want Tahoe protected. Oversight is a huge part of that protection. Thank you for the time. (Agenda Item II D)

Elizabeth Lernhardt, Resident, Zephyr Cove:

Five years after the Tamarack and Caldor Fires devastated our region and 19 years since the Angora Fire, I want to—what real progress have we made? Have our townships become safer? Are there official emergency evacuation plans in place to prevent another eight hour traffic nightmare—like the one we endured during the Caldor Fire? Are our forests being actively managed to remove excessive fuel buildup? Unfortunately, the answer to all of these questions is no. If we accept that climate change is real, which the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency has repeatedly affirmed, why is there so little effort to mitigate its consequences? Drier seasons and reduced precipitations are heightened wildfire risk, yet TRPA is not pushing resiliency. Consider the impacts—a single catastrophic fire releases more smoke, carbon, and ash than all combustion vehicles in the region combined. The ashes from the 2021 fires altered Lake Tahoe ecosystems by boosting nutrient levels, triggering algal blooms, and reducing water clarity. Wildfires burn far hotter than controlled burns. They sterilize the soil for decades. Just look up at the Gondola Fire right behind this building. The scar is from 2002. They wipe out wildlife and destroy habitats permanently. The Tahoe Basin Management Unit of the Forest Service owning 78 percent of the land has admitted it is 20 years behind of controlled burning. And yet they receive enormous federal funding through the Tahoe Restoration Act, $415 million over the next 10 years. On top of that, as the gentleman mentioned, there is a push to repurpose unknown funds from the Santini-Burton Act for vague unspecified projects. Where are the tangible results? Where is the accountability and transparency? We cannot afford complacency. Tahoe deserves better proactive management, real resiliency, and answers now. Thank you for your attention.

Chair Goulding:

Thank you. The middle microphone is acting up right now. So, yes, please use one of the outside two microphones—and next on deck is Robert Byren and Emily Kolessar. Go ahead, please.

Claudia Andersen, Chief Executive Officer, Tahoe Community Foundation:

Good afternoon. I am also a resident in my current year—25th year of a full-time Tahoe resident, right here in Douglas County. Given my long tenure, I remember the pre-Angora Fire days when the Tahoe Fire and Fuels Team (TFFT) did not exist, and I am here to speak about the importance of that Team. Back then, the fire safety and forest fuels reduction was not a topic of conversation or focus like it is today. Now, largely due to the hard work of the TFFT's—that is hard to say—cooperative efforts, our forests are being treated, and our communities are much safer as a result. And their work in community outreach and education has been effective in meeting what had been a critically-unmet need. Educating our community members is a really big issue in Tahoe and they are really helping. Collaborations and partnerships are not easy. It requires time and attention that is often in short supply, especially when members are busy leaders of their own fire districts and organizations. So, I am here today to express the Community Foundation's gratitude for the hard work accomplished by the TFFT members over the years, including the TRPA, who was a catalyst for its inception. Also in Nevada, I cannot say enough positive things about the leadership shown by our Fire Chiefs—Chief Scott Lindgren and Chief Ryan Sommers. They have been indispensable. We, at the Community Foundation, believe in the work of the TFFT and recently awarded them a grant to support their much-needed staff team. We believe this staff support of the TFFT will be able to help them accomplish their goals even more effectively. Our hope is that others recognize the expertise, the effectiveness, and the importance of the TFFT and join us in supporting them in protecting our Tahoe community. Thank you so much for your time.

Chair Goulding:

After Robert, Emily Kolessar, please come to the table. Thank you. Go ahead.

Robert Byren, Resident, Hidden Woods:

I have come to address Item VII on the agenda regarding wildfire evacuation planning. TRPA does share a primary role in wildfire evacuation transportation infrastructure, and it is committed to spend $1.8 million over the next five years toward—and I quote—"development of a resilience improvement plan that addresses the Basin's transportation system's vulnerabilities in the face of wildfires." And it goes on. We are not asking the Agency to spend millions on highway engineering and construction, but to work with NDOT [Nevada's Department of Transportation] and provide some practical guidance. Specifically, I submitted a white paper entitled *Keeping Spooner Junction Safe for Wildfire Evacuations.* (Agenda Item II E) The motivation for this was NDOT's U.S. 50 and S.R. [State Route] 28 intersection control evaluation published on August 7, 2024, which failed to even consider wildfire evacuation as a criterion for Spooner Junction. What they came up with was a grade-level roundabout design selected primarily for its traffic-calming effect. However, traffic calming and flow capacity reduction are the opposite of what is required in a major wildfire evacuation. We proposed a grade separation trumpet interchange, which—albeit more expensive—meets all the criteria for transportation safety and provides the necessary three unimpeded egress lanes with one ingress lane for effective evacuation and firefighting operations. The Tahoe East Shore Alliance has interacted with NDOT multiple times in an attempt to change their stance, or lack thereof, on wildfire evacuation transportation planning. We look to all of you for support in keeping the Tahoe Basin from becoming another wildfire statistic—like Paradise and Lahaina—and I thank you.

Emily Kolessar, Resident, Douglas County:

Good afternoon, Madam Chair and members of the Committee. I live in Douglas County at Lake Tahoe in a heavily-forested neighborhood where wildfire risk is not theoretical, it is part of our daily reality. I spend much of my time outdoors, like many in our region. The health of our forest directly impacts our safety, economy, and way of life. I am here to highlight the important work of the Tahoe Fire and Fuels Team, a collaborative partnership of state, local, and federal agencies working together to reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire and improve the long-term forest health. Through the Lake Tahoe Community Wildfire Protection Plan and the Forest Action Plan, this Team implements projects at both the landscape scale and within our local fire districts. In my community, the Tahoe Douglas Fire Protection District plays a critical role in carrying the work forward. Importantly, the Lake Tahoe Community Wildfire Protection Plan aligns with the Nevada Cohesive Strategy Implementation Plan, ensuring our regional efforts support broader state and federal wildfire resistance goals. I also want to thank the TRPA for coordinating regulations and helping secure funding for hazardous fuels reduction and ecological forest restoration. Through the Nevada Tahoe Resource Team, the Nevada Division of Forestry, and bond funding, your continued support makes this work possible. On behalf of those of us who live in these forests every day, thank you for prioritizing wildfire resilience and the long-term health of Lake Tahoe.

Chair Goulding:

Thank you. AVH [Audio Visual Hearings Unit] , do I understand correctly that we have three callers on the line?

AVH, Information Technology Services, Administrative Division, LCB:

Yes, Chair, that is correct. If you are joining us via phone today and would like to provide public comment, please press *9 now to take your place in the queue. Caller with a phone number ending in 999, please press *6 to unmute yourself and begin.

Jessica Grime, Tahoe Chamber and Resident, Douglas County:

Good afternoon, Madam Chair, Vice Chair, and Committee members. I am speaking today on behalf of the Tahoe Chamber and as a resident of Douglas County. The Tahoe Chamber is a bi-state organization representing a diverse network of businesses and community-based organizations throughout the South Shore. We promote a prosperous, sustainable economy that supports businesses as a foundation of positive, prosperous, sustainable economy that—I am sorry, I am getting a little caught up—supports businesses as a foundation for positive change, embraces environmental stewardship, and strengthens our community. We have a long history of engagement with TRPA. Chamber representatives participate in working groups, committees, workshops, and public hearings. Our role is to represent our members' interests, and while we may not always agree on every policy or decision, we are committed to constructive dialogue rooted in mutual respect. In our experience, that approach leads to more balanced, durable outcomes for the environment and our local economy. We also recognize that TRPA is a significant employer in our region. Its staff brings deep expertise and professionalism to complex environmental and planning challenges. Many TRPA employees are not only public servants, but also neighbors—raising families here, volunteering locally, serving on boards, participating in our schools, and contributing to the vibrancy of our communities. The Tahoe Chamber supports collaborative, multidisciplinary models, similar to the Nevada Tahoe Resource Team, that bring agencies, stakeholders, and community partners together to advance shared environmental, economic sustainability goals. Lake Tahoe's future depends on partnership, not polarization. As a bi-state Chamber, we are committed to productive partnership with TRPA—when grounded in healthy dialogue, thoughtful policy, and balanced solutions to protect Lake Tahoe while supporting the businesses and residents who call this region home. Thank you for the opportunity. (Agenda Item II F)

Chair Goulding:

Next caller.

Ronda Tycer, Resident, Incline Village:

My name is Ronda Tycer, a 35-year resident of Incline Village. TRPA is neglecting its mandate to keep Incline Village residents safe from wildfire or from any other major calamity requiring a no-notice evacuation. In the Dan Segan presentation threshold update report to the Governing Board, he cites the 1982 Resolution titled "Environmental Threshold Carrying Capacities for the Lake Tahoe Region." And I quote:

> To ensure that the natural beauty and economic productivity of the region would persist for generations to come, the Bi-State Compact directs TRPA to establish environmental threshold carrying capacities defined as an environmental standard necessary to maintain a significant scenic, recreational, educational, scientific, or natural value of the region or—

—and I emphasize—"to maintain public health and safety within the region." Unquote. The TRPA is mandated by the Compact to maintain public health and safety within the region. We citizens of Incline Village do not believe TRPA's latest approved area plans meet that requirement. Last December, TRPA forced all Tahoe jurisdictions to allow dense development in town centers. This urban concept has no relevance to our small, rural township of Incline Village. Our town center consists of both sides of two-lane Highway 28 running through the center of the Village. Increasing density in our town center means increasing gridlock along our only evacuation escape route. We citizens asked, "How will resident's health and safety be enhanced by increasing density in Incline's town center?" Show us the data. Thank you.

Dana Tibbitts:

Good afternoon. I am here to address the intersection of wildfire evacuation risk and the proposed federal modernization of the Santini-Burton Act, an issue directly relevant to this Committee's focus today. The original 1980 Santini-Burton law had a clear and narrow purpose, to permanently remove environmentally sensitive land from the development pipeline in the Tahoe Basin. Today's modernization proposal, introduced in January of this year, shifts that posture toward unlocking funds and management flexibility. In federal land policy, flexibility includes discretionary authorities such as land exchanges, leasing, and infrastructure citing. This effort, which upends the original protection framework established by Congress in 1980, is being actively and publicly advanced by our preservationists-in-chief, the TRPA. Notably absent from this discussion is any consideration of evacuation risk. The Tahoe Basin is one of the most evacuation-constrained wildfire environments in the United States. Limited highway corridors, geographic bottlenecks, and extreme visitation surges create well-documented life safety vulnerabilities. In practice, Santini-Burton parcels now contribute to reduce density and provide an unrecognized layer of safety buffering within high-risk areas. Yet evacuation capacity is not once mentioned in the modernization narrative. Will TRPA support formal recognition of evacuation capacity as a primary planning constraint in any modernization framework? Or will they create statutory safeguards to protect land in perpetuity? If this Committee is serious about oversight and evacuation safety, then statutory permanence matters. Once land use pressure is normalized, it cannot easily be reversed, and law created to stop development pressure should not be quietly repositioned to manage it. Thank you. (Agenda Item II G)

Chair Goulding:

Thank you. I just want to make one comment about the—we have had some technical challenges here. It sounds like—I think we have got most of it sorted out, but Ms. Nichols' microphone was cutting in and out. We were in no way trying to prevent Ms. Nichols' comments from being on the public record. I will ask Ms. Nichols—if you would submit your comments in writing, so that we do not lose any of that. We have a busy schedule, and I hate to have you come up and repeat your comments again, but we certainly value them and want to make sure they are on the record.

With that, I am closing public comment for this portion of the meeting.

[A member of the public asked if she could speak.] At the end of the meeting you will be able to. If you would like to speak at the end of the meeting in our second period of public comment, please sign up at the back of the room on the public comment sheet for the end of the meeting.

With that we will close public comment for this portion of the meeting, and we will move on to the next agenda item.

AGENDA ITEM III—PRESENTATION ON THE WASHOE TRIBE OF NEVADA AND CALIFORNIA'S PRIORITIES FOR THE LAKE TAHOE BASIN

We will be hearing a presentation from the Washoe Tribe of Nevada and California regarding priorities for the Tahoe Basin. Chairman Smokey and Mr. Enos, please proceed up to the table and begin when you are ready.

Serrell Smokey, Chairman, Washoe Tribe of Nevada and California:

Hunga mi' heshi [Washoe Tribe greeting]. We are with our Tribal Historic Preservation Officer, Mr. William "Billyhawk" Enos. Excuse me, my throat is a little messed up. We wanted to come here today—we had a whole big list of the things that we want to talk about—really understanding capacities regarding our meetings. First of all, I do not think I need to fully remind everybody on the Board here about the importance of Tahoe and Da ow—Da ow aga is to Wá·šiw [Washoe] people—as this is where we come from—this is where—in our view—we were created. And everything revolves around the Lake and the water; it has always given us life, and we have been building capacity [inaudible]. This microphone is cutting out—but building capacity to do so. I know some things came up even during the last legislative session that we were not even ready for just yet. And so, we have really been trying to build that capacity, so that we are actually doing a lot more. We have come a long way, not just from the last time, but just over the past five years or so.

I wanted to hit on some specific things that we are working on and [inaudible] for everybody's information, and a lot of work that is being talked about, even in the comments, of course, is wildfire, forestry products—all of those things. Those are things that we have a huge focus on as well, because being original stewards of these lands, our people have always took care of these lands, and that is what we have been trying to build the capacity to actually physically come back and do again. And we have been doing that.

So, just starting out—there was some mention of SBA, the Santini-Burton Act. And yes, we are supporting the Santini-Burton Act. As the original Santini-Burton Act, it did have specific goals, but those goals remove Wá·šiw people even further from our lands out here than we were originally already removed from. That is why we have been a huge part in working with all the partners up here in the Basin—Tahoe Basin—and around the Lake to include—that the Wá·šiw Tribe and Wá·šiw people are specifically included in this new bill.

We recently—the Wá·šiw Tribe—I signed a new master stewardship agreement with the Forestry, and we are going to be doing a lot more work. We put it on ourselves. Again, this is us building capacity to have more of a say regarding the timber-harvesting operations and fire fuels—really all the forestry projects in and around the Tahoe Basin, as well as other national forests throughout the Sierra Nevada mountains. The reason we are doing this—again, it is not just—it is getting our people and the Tribe back to what we do. This is what our people have always done. So, it gives us the opportunity to now [inaudible] in modern practices and in order to actually do that. That is what we are building up to. But at the same time, there is so much work that needs to be done out here. It is going to open up a lot of jobs and opportunities in and around, not just the Tahoe Basin, but all the surrounding areas. And we, as a Tribe, are already working on that and getting things done.

When we talk about wildfires and the prevention—couple of things. I think we just need to be honest with ourselves as far as timber-harvesting operations. There is multiple areas, and timber harvesting—for one—it is for fuels reduction. It is taking away the fuels that our overgrown forests will just burn without stopping at all—that we can, we are going to help with it. At the same time, provides jobs; at the same time—moving down the line—produces revenue for the sawmill that we partnered with that is right down the hill. But the harsh reality is that we know now through the science of—in and around the Tahoe Basin—is that, at full capacity, there is probably less than 10 percent of timber being harvested and removed from the Tahoe Basin as per the annual growth rate that is happening. So, when it comes to fuels reduction, we are probably less than 5 percent of actually helping. And that is not just—let us say, us—I mean everybody, everybody in this room, everybody on this Board—we are not doing enough. But there are ways to do it, and that is why we are electing ourselves to really have a lead in this—working with the Forestry—and so that we are not doing it improperly like we have in the past—such as clear cutting and just wiping everything out. We bounced back and forth with that. We know that did not work. We clear cut everything out, then everything was regrown, and now we are overgrown. It is a fine balance, and that is what we are trying to reintroduce—those original stewardship practices of Wá·šiw practices—in order to have a healthy forest.

Another key area that is one of the largest issues that we know of in the Tahoe Basin is the removal of biomass—and that is all those little pieces. That is all the small stuff that is really fueling the fires to move and jump from tree to tree. And what do you do with that? Where does it go? How do you get the funding for it? The funding that—it is very unfortunate that there is not a whole lot of funding for that, and it does not pay for itself to be removed either. But we have been doing a lot of heavy research. Even I, myself, personally, have been researching this and seeing how we, as a Wá·šiw Tribe, can come and give presentations to—solutions—as to how we can actually help and provide that—so that we see physical results of this actually happening, because right now it is not.

Wildfires, in general—the hard part about it is that they are going to happen. Where we are at currently is some fire is going to come through, and it is just going to wipe everything out. And, unfortunately, no fire line or anything like that is going to stop it. One of the comments that was just made in the public comment section was "Fire lines jump so far," and I use the example of—this was a year ago or two years ago in Washoe Valley—when that fire hit, it jumped over the six-lane interstate through there, as well as, I do not know how many yards of just—it is a rock—and the fire still jumped over all of that and then made it to the next forest area. So, it will move. But, putting in good, healthy practices and removing that—it is in the hopes that the work that we can provide will actually be able to jump in there somewhere along the lines and help firefighters to be able to stop that or slow it down to the point to where we can jump in there and stop it as well.

But, with that also comes an issue that we have had—and another one we are working on—is every time there is a wildfire—this comes to our tribal historic preservation—is our history gets lost. When I say that—it is because when you have bulldozers—and it does not matter which fire department—they are working to put out the fire, and they do not care what they run over or plow over. And when they do that, there is a lot of destruction that happens. Now, a lot of our history is not written in books, it is written in the stones. It is written in the earth, and we do our best to protect those. And that is why we also are ramping up our historic preservation efforts. Which is another part—funding. There is really no funding for that either—we have to come up with that on our own—so that we are not losing these pieces of our history as well. And working with the fires—our last fire we had on the other side, in the Pinenut Mountain Range, our Reid went out there and walked—I think 12 miles—in front of the bulldozer to make sure that there was no destruction to any of our cultural properties out there. And they did—they were going to run right into some of them, and we were able to stop that and go around. But those are things that are not really thought about, I know, outside of the Tribe. And that is why I wanted to share that with you, so you know that these are the things that we must look at as well when we are doing this kind of work.

Kind of outside of that—coming back to a couple of things that happened. I wanted to bring back and possibly for maybe the next legislation, as I mentioned to this Board during the last legislation, we were not fully ready to put ourselves and fill certain areas or certain seats. And there was a recommendation for Tahoe Transportation District—the last time—which was not really what we were looking at or gearing towards. But something that has been talked about over the last few years is—and I do not know if this would require legislation—it is making the Wá·šiw Tribe as part of—officially one of the board members of the EIP. Because that was something that was brought up. We are technically—we go to those meetings—but we are technically listed as "other stakeholders" under the EIP, and the Wá·šiw Tribe is looking at being an actual governing entity listed in EIP.

Protecting the waters is something that we have been working on for many years actually. Right now, we are actually coming to the point of—where we would help—and for the benefit of the Tribe—is declaring the—having federally listed as the water of Lake Tahoe would be a traditional cultural place. This is something the Tribe actually worked on—started probably 20 years ago or so. So, it is something that has been on our working list for a long time. Over the past few years, we have gotten the leverage to actually move that forward, and we are going to be having that listed for the Wá·šiw Tribe.

This all comes back to really making it—in the modern legal process—that the Wá·šiw Tribe is the designated tribe of the Tahoe Basin. A lot of people here—or all of our partners—know, I am sure all of you know, that the Wá·šiw Tribe is the only tribe that is here in the Tahoe Basin. But even more recently, I hear it in different areas that some people say, "Well, there is these other tribes that were here as well." There is actually not. For the Wá·šiw Tribe and Wá·šiw people, we actually have that legally solidified through a Docket 288. And that came from the Indian Claims Commission Act or that the Wá·šiw Tribe actually—in the early 1900s actually had to establish our legal territorial boundaries as a tribe because this was happening across the country. It was an Act that was done all throughout the United States for the tribes to solidify their actual territorial boundaries because of the displacement of other tribes during the different eras and colonization. So, we actually have that document. Not all tribes have that. And so that is why I just want to throw that out there, so everybody is aware that the territories that we work in for the Wá·šiw Tribe and Wá·šiw people are legal territorial boundaries recognized by government.

One of the other things I want to just kind of throw out there is one thing we have been doing, and working great with a lot of the partners, and there is also different areas as our language department has been working on place names, putting in Wá·šiw names—traditional Washoe names—for areas that are in and around the Lake. I know before I mentioned, we did the interpretive signs and the trail signs and have stories on them. The one that is—I believe—the one at Taylor Creek is the first in the—I think anywhere—that includes—it is trilingual. It has English, Spanish, and Wá·šiw language when you press the button on it. That was done a few years ago—a while back. So, we continue to do that.

Again, letting everybody know that Wá·šiw people—we are not just the history of here—the people that were here and used to do things. We still are here, and we are still trying to do things. But we also value the partnerships that we have made and the work that we can do now. Again, it is also using modern practices and doing our part to keep the entire area of the Lake safe. We are not going to fix everything. We throw ideas around regarding a little bit of everything. We have even talked about—what can we do as a tribe to help regulate the traffic in the Tahoe Basin. What kind of transportations can we provide that would be beneficial that is outside the scope of the work that the Tahoe Transportation District can do? But we are always available to any, really, any ideas in ways that we can partner and work together. Because understanding the value of the Lake in itself is more than—more to us than just tourism. We still express our issues with overtourism; something else that was said today. It is an unfortunate fact that there just becomes a point to where there is way too many people here, and it becomes extremely dangerous. Our take on it is a little bit different because more tourism does push out Wá·šiw tribal members access to the Lake as well. And it is—we . . . It is kind of funny to us because we hear it echoed in community members now about not having enough access because of tourists—but we have kind of felt that way for a lot longer than that. But we do what we can, and we appreciate everything that has been happening.

We also put a lot of work into it and want to remind everybody that we are here to work together. Everything that we are doing, we need partners to do it. We cannot just—I mean—really, no one person, group, or entity can just do everything on their own. TRPA, the Oversight Committee, all the other organizations—I mean we need each other, and we rely on each other, and I think we have been working together to truly figure that out over the years. But we also need to solidify things so that they continue to build and progress into the future as well—and I say that, I mean—our ideas, our partnerships, our abilities to work on projects and do the things that need to be done in and around this entire area. I do not want anybody to get confused when I say build, that it means we need to build more stuff because that is also another issue that comes up a lot. But this place is growing—but it is only as big as it is. It is not going to get any bigger. There is no—not magic . . . Land is not going to magically appear to make Tahoe bigger to allow more capacity. And those are hard talks, I know, especially for everybody here to talk about is what is the threshold. We brought this up before, as you know, what is the exact amount of boats that should be on the Lake before we over-pollute it—before we put ourselves at more risk. Again, we are not always in agreement with everything, but we can work together to figure these things out.

Those are the basics that I just wanted to share with everybody today. And also look forward to any and all of your ideas now and into the future. I think we are going to collaboratively be able to help each other and appreciate all the work and everything that we have done to get to where we are at now. Thank you.

Chair Goulding:

Thank you so much, Chairman. We appreciate your comments, and we look forward to working together too. We enjoyed the tour that we had this morning down at the mill, and we look forward to continuing collaboration. Committee members, are there any questions?

Assemblymember DeLong:

Thank you, Chair. Thank you very much for the presentation. As it relates to your comment about wanting to get the Lake established as a TCP [traditional cultural property]. Have you had discussions with the Forest Service or California SHPO [State Historic Preservation Office] or the Nevada SHPO with regards to that?

William "Billyhawk" Enos:

Hello. [Inaudible, possibly Washoe language.] I am the Washoe THPO [Tribal Historic Preservation Officer]. Yes.

Assemblymember DeLong:

All right, thank you. Thank you, Chair.

Chairman Smokey:

It was a long process, but we are getting all those conversations. Getting everybody to the table is the hardest part.

Chair Goulding:

Thank you. Any other questions? [There were none.] Thank you so much. Appreciate it.

That will close that agenda item. I think we are going to do a little bit of a rearrangement here. We are going to lose one of our—Senator Titus needs to leave a little bit early. So, we are going to move up a couple of agenda items to make sure that she is here for them. We are going to jump to the panel discussion on the evacuation—Agenda Item VII—the presentation regarding Lake Tahoe Basin fire response and evacuation planning activities. Thank you for all of you that are on that panel for being flexible and responsive to a changing situation. Did we lose them? Okay. So, the other issue is the insurance. Okay. Well, I see Commissioner Gaines here. So, let us move to the insurance—agenda item is agenda VIII [*sic*]. Are you ready, Commissioner? Thank you so much for your flexibility—and then we will move to the panel.

AGENDA ITEM IV—PRESENTATION REGARDING THE TAHOE REGIONAL PLANNING AGENCY'S ROLE IN FOREST HEALTH AND WILDFIRE

Chair Goulding:

You may have—now that we are jumping around a bit. So now we will hear a presentation regarding environmental threshold standards and Lake Tahoe EIP [Environmental Improvement Program] activities. Dr. McIntyre and Ms. Caringer, please proceed when you are ready. If there are topics that have been covered in those last two, feel free to sort of scooch on ahead if it is redundant—we appreciate your flexibility. Thank you.

Kimberly Caringer, Chief Partnerships Officer/Deputy Executive Director, TRPA:

Thank you, Madam Chair, members of the Committee. I am the Chief Partnerships Officer here at TRPA.

Kat McIntyre, Ph.D., Division Manager, EIP, TRPA:

Thank you. I am the Division Manager for the Environmental Improvement Program here at TRPA, which also includes all things wildfire, risk reduction, and forest health.

Ms. Caringer:

Thank you. It is our pleasure to be here today. It is a pleasure to have you here at the TRPA Office and the public to talk about this very critical issue of forest health and wildfire. We are really going to focus on TRPA's role in forest health, and we are going to cover thresholds and the EIP. To help guide today's discussion, Chair Goulding provided us with three questions she wanted to make sure that we covered in our presentation today, which was really helpful. So, thank you.

- First, what is TRPA's role when it comes to wildfire risk, prevention, and coordination, particularly in relation to other agencies and their on-the-ground responsibilities?
- Has TRPA ever denied or modified a development proposal due to fire risk considerations?

- And finally, number three, what types of EIP, Environmental Improvement Program, funding has been allocated to address wildfire-related issues?

We have structured our presentation today to answer each of those questions. Following our presentation, you are going to hear from the Tahoe Fire and Fuels Team and the private sector—a lot of our implementers out there. So, by the end of the day, you are going to have a pretty comprehensive overview of what is going on in the Basin on this topic. Next slide.

Let us kick it off with what is TRPA's role in forest health and wildfire. We play three distinct roles in this topic. First, the Bi-State Compact charges TRPA with establishing threshold standards that are the long-term desired conditions of the region. We have ten threshold categories—one of which is vegetation preservation, which pertains to forest health. We set those standards, and they guide our work—as well as our partners' work—in the Basin, and we regularly track and report progress on those. We complete a threshold evaluation every four years. We just completed and released our latest threshold of evaluation last year. We will hear more about that.

Second, the Compact requires TRPA to develop a regional plan, policies, and code to achieve those thresholds. So, TRPA plays a regulatory and permitting role for forest health. For example, in really simple terms, we set policies to protect trees and vegetation where it should be protected, and we also issue tree removal permits for defensible space or other projects. We conduct project reviews to make sure projects are in compliance with our standards. We have a registered professional forester on staff and a compliance team as well to enforce those.

Third and finally, we play a leadership and convening role in the Environmental Improvement Program. Nearly 30 years ago, we realized regulations alone would not achieve the thresholds that I talked about—and we needed a proactive coordinated strategy to put projects on the ground to make progress. That coordinated program today is called the EIP, and more than 80 public and private partners are working together to fund and implement those projects. You will hear about those from the Tahoe Fire and Fuels Team. So, three roles setting thresholds—two ways to achieve those, the regulatory track and the EIP track. I will cover both.

Let us talk about the Angora Fire. In the early days of TRPA back in the seventies, eighties, and nineties, the way we set out to achieve thresholds was squarely on the regulatory side. In those days, our code dictated that residents could not cut a tree larger than six inches on their property without a permit. Land managers were also required to get a permit from TRPA to do their forest restoration work on public lands. The Angora Fire of 2007 was a big turning point for the Basin. The fire itself burned over 3,000 acres in South Shore neighborhoods and over 250 homes were lost in a matter of hours. This Fire was caused by an illegal campfire, and it put a spotlight on some of our policies and different agencies policies in the Basin on how we might be more responsive to the needs of today on some of our policies. Next slide.

After Angora, the Governors of California and Nevada formed the Emergency Bi-State Fire Commission [Emergency California-Nevada Tahoe Basin Fire Commission] to study what happened and provide recommendations for how we could be better prepared for the future. If you read the report, it talks about how the meetings were intentionally collaborative. In the report it says, quote, "The Commissioners all agreed that a universal goal is to have the most open, participative, and collaborative process…" and "the Commission felt really strongly that any member of the public should have a chance to give input." And so initial meetings of the Commission were dedicated to just that: listening—in particular to Basin residents, fire professionals, land managers, regulators, and scientists to talk through challenges and find solutions. TRPA was a very willing and appreciative participant in that process. Out of it came 90 recommendations in 6 different categories and those recommendations have shaped 20 years of policy reform in the Basin, and it was a catalyst for a new level of bi-state cooperation. Key recommendations included changes to both TRPA's regulations as well as our role in the EIP. More than 90 percent of the recommendations are implemented today, and I am going to highlight some of the ones that were most impactful on the next two slides.

First, our regulatory role. We made it easier for people to complete their dispensable [*sic*] space on their property. We upped the tree diameter limit. You can now cut trees on your property up to 14 inches without a permit. And if that tree is bigger and you do need a permit, you can easily apply for a permit online, and they are turned around very quickly. We, like I said before—we have a registered professional forester on staff who last year turned around 1,100 tree removal permits.

Next, the report found that we should expedite the work that was underway to allow more treatment in stream-environment zones, steep slopes, and work during the winter season. We have worked with practitioners and scientists to modify our rules to allow mechanized equipment in all of these areas now while maintaining the environmental protections needed.

And lastly, we updated our operating MOUs [memorandums of understanding] with land managers, fire districts, and utilities to get—more seamlessly get—their defensible space and their forest management work done. So, next slide.

In speaking about our regulatory and project review role, that brings us to question number two. Have we ever denied or modified a project proposal due to wildfire risk? The answer is yes. In general, when project proposals come through the door, it more often than not is going to go through several modifications before it gets a final permit. I will briefly take you through that process and give you an example. First, when we review a project, it has to comply with our regional plan, our policies, our code, and it must undergo an environmental review depending on the scale of the project—and consideration for forest health and wildfire risk is part of that. For example, we limit development in the Basin not only to protect the lake but to limit sprawl into the Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI). We do not allow lot subdivisions, we have an urban boundary for development, and the environmental review is going to review for impacts for forest health, traffic—it cannot show negative impacts to any of our thresholds. So, right out the gate, if you are coming in with a proposal that does not meet those basics, TRPA would not allow that project.

Next, local jurisdiction compliance. One of the recommendations that came out of the Bi-State Fire Commission was to add more fire expertise into our project review process. As a result, we added a fire chief representative seat on our Advisory Planning Commission, which reviews many of the larger scale projects as the technical experts before it goes to our Governing Board for a decision. All development projects going to TRPA have to go through local jurisdiction review, and they must get signed off from the local fire district and that they can support that project in the event of an emergency and that it meets their fire code.

If you are looking for a real example for how this works, I think the Homewood Ski Resort Master Plan we approved last year is a good example. Homewood Resort is a privately-owned ski resort located on the West Shore on the California side—pretty much directly across from where we are sitting right now. They requested a revision of their master plan to redevelop and revitalize the resort with a new Gondola, village, and hotel at the resort base. They had an approved master plan, but they were requesting a revision. So, we had to do an analysis of what impacts there would be from that revision—to traffic, to scenic, to water quality, forest health—again, all of our thresholds. The original proposal they brought in was modified several times from input from our planning team, our Planning Commission, our Board, as well as Placer County, the public, and the local fire protection district. And as part of that process, they reduced the size of the project. They added public shuttles to reduce traffic, and they worked with the local fire protection district to develop an emergency evacuation plan. They also are currently working on an agreement to provide the fire district financial resources, so they have adequate staff and equipment to support the project. It is a condition in our permit that they cannot start construction on that project in the village until that agreement is in place with the local fire district. Lastly, I just want to say, as part of that project they are implementing a 250-acre forest restoration component—which is great, because it is one of the biggest private parcels on the West Shore. It is adjacent to public land and forest service land, and it is such a high priority for us on the West Shore for forest health and wildfire. And with that, that is a pretty good segue for me to hand it over to Dr. Kat McIntyre to talk about the Environmental Improvement Program.

Dr. McIntyre:

Thank you, Kim. As mentioned earlier. My name is Dr. Kat McIntyre. No, my name is not Doctor—sounds like it at this point. Just for clarification, my doctorate is in forest science and policy, so I am very familiar with this world and realm, and I lead the Environmental Improvement Program here at TRPA. As Kim mentioned, the EIP was established in 1997 to help accelerate threshold attainment and increase the pace and scale of restoration in the Tahoe Basin. Like a Capital Improvement Program, the Environmental Improvement Program is a collaborative partnership of 80-plus partners coordinating and implementing across jurisdictional lines to prioritize and implement projects and leverage funding across a variety of sectors and resource areas. As many know and was mentioned earlier in the evacuation panel, the Tahoe Basin is made up of five counties, one city, two states, and federal lands, which all necessitates collaboration and continuous coordination and communication. After the Angora Fire and with the recommendations from the Blue Ribbon Commission, TRPA doubled down on collaborative and partnership through the Environmental Improvement Program. As a founding member of the Tahoe Fire and Fuels Team, we continue to this day to act in a convening and collaborative role for TFFT, helping to recruit and secure dedicated positions for TFFT coordination and management. And you will meet one of those positions and one of those people in our next presentations.

Lastly, TRPA coordinates and leads the overarching EIP funding strategy that directly impacts how funding flows to forest health and wildfire projects. So, the Environmental Improvement Program uses a collective impact model of funding, where almost all projects, including our forest health projects, are kind of cobbled together through a variety of funding sources, including federal, state, local, and private. Each year, we ask our EIP, or Environmental Improvement Program working groups, such as the Tahoe Fire and Fuels Team, to develop a prioritized project list that outlines those funding needs. Then those project lists are used by Team Tahoe to communicate with our elected officials and our Tahoe delegation on our top priorities, which are then highlighted during our annual Lake Tahoe Summit.

One of the questions that we received, and Kim highlighted earlier, was what type of EIP funding sources go towards forest health in the Basin? As I mentioned, partners and projects really do not rely on just one funding source, but employ that collective impact model of funding. So, forest health projects receive funding from federal, state, local, and private funding sources. And since 2010, $271 million have been deployed across a variety of forest health and wildfire risk reduction projects, with the majority occurring in the Wildland-Urban Interface directly around neighborhoods, evacuation routes, and critical infrastructure. In terms of federal funding, the Program's backbone funding sources include the Southern Nevada Public Land Management Act, otherwise known as SNPLMA—and the Lake Tahoe Restoration Act funding. Through land sales in southern Nevada, SNPLMA helps fund forest health and fuels reduction projects right here in the Tahoe Basin. Similarly, Lake Tahoe Restoration Act funding acts as a stable funding source for long-term restoration and forest health work here. Basin partners would not have been able to complete the level of work accomplished and integral to protecting and maintaining our forests, as well as our communities, without those funding sources. It really allows us to then leverage all of the local and state funding and private funding to really accelerate that pace and scale of restoration. Partners leverage those federal dollars with state and local funding sources. For example, on the Nevada side, partners utilize EIP bonds from the State of Nevada, as well as local and state-based budgets, for fire protection districts and Nevada Division of Forestry to accomplish work across multiple jurisdictions and ownerships. A great example of this would be the shaded fuel breaks that are occurring around neighborhoods on federal lands but that are supported and implemented by our local fire protection districts.

Lastly, private dollars play a critical role in the Environmental Improvement Program—as well as our forest health programs—including funding from the Tahoe Fund, NV Energy, as well as neighborhoods, HOAs [homeowner associations], and individual property owners. These dollars often help to reduce the risk of bringing in and testing new innovative technologies such as the BurnBot, which you might have heard of, and the recent Incline Village Fire Smart Community Pilot project. Next slide, please.

Even with the immense amount of work implemented, many of us know for the Tahoe Basin and the Sierra Nevada's, it is not an if but it is a when the next wildfire will occur. In 2021, we endured the Caldor Fire entering the Basin, crossing over the Sierra Nevada Crest for one of the first times in recorded history. Ten thousand acres of the 220,000-acre fire burned within the Tahoe Basin, but luckily no primary residences or lives were lost. However, with the Caldor Fire, a new host of issues arose, including concerns around evacuation, as well as short-term and long-term impacts of smoke to public health as well as water quality. It is important to keep in mind—during that time, the Caldor, Dixie, and Tamarack Fires were all burning that summer for weeks in the region. So, the Tahoe Basin became increasingly socked in with smoke, and the smoke impacts were so great those registered on our recent threshold evaluation—signaling to the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency a potential trend and a focus for future research and science efforts. We just heard from the evacuation panel that there were many lessons learned from the Caldor Fire, but overall people felt that it was a successful evacuation, and we got everyone out safely. Next slide, please.

Because of the work and the lessons learned from the Angora Fire, the Tahoe Basin partners were ready for the Caldor Fire. Fuel treatments that had been completed around neighborhoods in Christmas Valley and Meyers helped slow the fires march through the Basin. Firefighters reported that flame lengths dropped from 150 feet, to 10, to 15 feet within those treatment areas, giving them the space and time to defend and protect those neighborhoods and homes. A recent study from UC Davis [University of California, Davis] from Dr. Hugh Safford focused on fuel treatment efficacy in the Caldor Fire and found that forest fuel reduction treatments were highly effective, with trees in those treated areas being three times more likely to survive than those in untreated areas. The most successful treatments they found included multiple thinning entries followed by mastication—so that is where you go in and you grind up kind of the biomass that is left behind—which significantly helped reduce that fire severity even under extreme drought conditions which we were in. However, the study also revealed unburned fuel piles—which are those piles that are left, again, after treatment—actually increased fire intensity and tree death in some areas, highlighting a critical need for more timely pile burning and treatment. As noted in the article overall—and I think this is something that we want to highlight and underline—the results add to the growing list of fuel treatment success stories in the western United States, highlighting the growing need for proactive forest and fuels management around the west. Next slide, please.

Pivoting back to TRPA and our work plan, at our Governing Board retreat in 2025, forest health and wildfire were added as a separate strategic initiative or priority—highlighting the importance and the thread that it has in everything that we do in the Basin. This strategic priority outlines five key areas of focus for TRPA including: accelerating forest restoration through the EIP; serving as a regional convener for evacuation discussions; reviewing best practices for planning in the Wildland-Urban Interface; elevating public communication, education, and outreach around forest health and wildfire; and lastly updating the forest health thresholds and improving tracking.

I am pleased to report—we followed through on the last bullet I just highlighted, and two days ago our Governing Board adopted new threshold standards related to forest health. These standards mark a turning point for the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency and its role in the region related to wildfire. Underpinned by the best available science, these thresholds recognize the importance of fire to our forested ecosystem while incentivizing community risk reduction and protection. They allow for flexibility and active management to build a mosaic of forest types that are resilient to future disturbances, such as climate change, insects and disease, drought, and wildfire. One particularly successful update that we are really proud of includes the adoption of our first standard for community wildfire protection. That standard acknowledges, again, what we all know, but we often do not say—fire is part of our forest and our community—and the question is not if a fire is going to burn, it is when and how it will burn in the Tahoe Basin. The standard redoubles TRPA's commitment to work with implementing partners in the region to prepare our community for the next wildfire.

Lastly, I want to mention and highlight Lake Tahoe Info, or LT Info, the Environmental Improvement Program's website for accountability and transparency on all things Tahoe. This website allows anyone to access more information on the status of our threshold standards, all of the monitoring data that goes into our threshold evaluations, as well as all of the information on our Environmental Improvement Program projects, including forest health and fuels reduction projects. EIP partners are committed to each other, the public, and stakeholders to use common performance measures, track our accomplishments and the benefits of the work, as well as all the funding needed and expended on each project. Each year partners go into the EIP tracker; they review, add, and update their projects. This website provides anyone with the ability to see how much any agency or organization has spent or needs for a forest health project or a fuels reduction project.

In closing, I just want to say, no one doubts that the fire risk today is greater than it has ever been for much of the western United States, including the Tahoe Basin. My friends, family, and I evacuated under the same smoke-filled skies and uncertain conditions as our neighbors during the Caldor Fire. I have dedicated my career to wildfire and forest health, and I carry that responsibility with me daily. This is not just professional for me; it is personal. I have chosen the Basin as my home, and as the place to start my family. My husband is a wildland firefighter and participated in the Caldor Fire.

We hear the public. Wildfire, forest health, evacuation—they are top concerns. They are top concerns for us too. We have built a remarkably strong foundation in the Tahoe Basin, including strong relationships with partners, that have been forged by fire and a continued desire to learn, do better, and do more after every incident. There is still significant progress to be made before the next wildfire. We will continue to invest in our partnerships, initiatives, and projects to protect communities, our Basin, and Lake Tahoe for future generations. Thank you.

Chair Goulding:

Thank you so much for the presentation. Members, any questions? Go ahead.

Assemblymember Osborn:

Thank you, Chair. I think my question is for Ms. Caringer. You mentioned the Emergency Bi-State Fire Commission came up with about 90 recommendations, and to date about 90 percent of those have been implemented. So, for the other 10 percent, are those ongoing, or are those not feasible anymore, or have they changed? Where are we at?

Ms. Caringer:

Thank you for the question. The 10 percent remaining—a lot of them are either small administrative changes, but a big chunk of it is biomass and biomass utilization. I know you all got to see that firsthand at the sawmill. It is still a challenge we are working on as far as getting more of the wood off the landscape.

Chair Goulding:

Okay. Thank you very much. With that, we will close that agenda item, and we will move on to Agenda Item V.

AGENDA ITEM V—PRESENTATION REGARDING LAKE TAHOE BASIN FOREST HEALTH AND WILDFIRE PREVENTION ACTIVITIES

We will hear a joint presentation from the Tahoe Fire and Fuels Team, the U.S. Forest Service—Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit, and Nevada's Division of Forestry regarding forest health and wildfire prevention activities in the Tahoe Basin. Please go ahead when you are ready.

Annabelle Monti, Program Manager, TFFT:

Good afternoon, everybody. I am the Program Manager for the Tahoe Fire and Fuels Team, which you have heard a lot about this afternoon already. I wanted to kick this off because you just heard from TRPA, and you heard about this very high-level, regulatory—and standards that they have been working so hard. I wanted to provide a little bit of context about how do we actually translate that to on-the-ground work? How do we really get dirt to move in the forest? I like to say that the Tahoe Fire and Fuels Team, or TFFT, is really that catalyst and collaborative group that brings all of these partners that you have heard so much about—we get in the same room, we talk about these things, and then we figure out the best path forward to actually execute a lot of the things that we have been talking about this afternoon.

The biggest question that always comes up is in such a complex environment like the Lake Tahoe Basin—you have heard the stat already today—with two states and five counties and how many personalities—how do we actually make progress on these standards and objectives that we all know are so important? You have also already heard the phrase today—a lot of people stole my thunder already. Sorry, I get to go late in the afternoon—but you have already heard the phrase that wildfire does not know any jurisdictional boundaries. And we, as a partnership, are really focusing on erasing those administrative and jurisdictional boundaries so that we can affect real change on the landscape.

You have also already heard about the Angora Fire—and you know the stats, you have heard the history, you have heard a lot of what has come out of that. One of the main things in our realm that came out of the Angora Fire was the formation of the Tahoe Fire and Fuels Team—because how do you get all of these people together to do exactly this?

Essentially, the Basin partners recognized and took a stand, post-Angora, that this informal conversation and this informal partnership really was not going to cut it anymore. The risk profile in the Tahoe Basin had changed, and now the Tahoe Basin was facing challenges that they had not faced previously. For a long time, it was commonly believed that wildfire was never going to impact Lake Tahoe—and the Angora Fire was really the first major incident that shed light on that assumption and showed how wrong that truly was. So, all of the Basin partners came together, everybody who operates in this space, and that is made up of fire professionals, land managers, our philanthropic partners, private entities—any gamut that you can think of that operates in the forest health and wildfire mitigation space is a part of TFFT.

Partners came together and they formalized what everybody had kind of already been doing. Everybody talks to each other. Everybody sort of has an idea of what is going on, but the point of TFFT was that we really memorialized this—the relationships as well as the priorities of how we worked together, how we identified common goals, and how we worked towards them as a partnership. This coordination really connects the federal land managers, the state agencies from both Nevada and California, our local governments, all of our tribal partners, the nongovernmental organizations, the utilities that you have heard a lot about already, as well as our community-based partners—and that is not even covering all of them. The collaborative role is really to align the priorities, the funding strategies, the project sequencing, public messaging, and long-term planning, so that implementation reflects this Basin-wide strategy as opposed to individual agencies' objectives or needs.

At the end of the day, wildfire resilience is a network—as much as that might sound like a tagline, you cannot get away from the fact that all of this is interconnected. There is no single organization that can address wildfire in a place like Tahoe alone. The Basin's resilience depends on this network to function appropriately and efficiently. Vegetation management treatments are essential, but resilience also depends on defensible space compliance, our public education and outreach, and how we are communicating about these projects, evacuation coordination, workforce development, science and monitoring, as well as cross-state funding alignment. Treating acres absolutely matters—and that is what moves the needle on changing our landscape to be more receptive to fires so that we can be resilient in the face of these wildfires that we know are going to happen. But if those acres are not strategically connected across boundaries, the effectiveness is limited. And that is the role that TFFT plays—is to make sure that these are strategically aligned.

There has been significant progress, as you have heard, but there is always more to do. Also, vegetation grows back, so there is always, always more to do. The work coordinated through TFFT directly supports the Environmental Improvement Program that you just heard about through their three main goals—protect communities from damaging wildfire, restore ecosystem health and resilience, and improve wildlife habitat. The way that we move progress on those goals is hazardous fuels reduction, defensible space on public and private lands, the restoration of native vegetation, and the expansion of prescribed fire. Over the last couple of decades, these partners in the Tahoe Basin have treated more than 80,000 acres in fuels reduction and vegetation management efforts.

Defensible space programs have expanded. More communities are fire aware and know what it means to live in a fire dependent ecosystem. The risk to communities continues to be reduced through various means, and innovation and mapping, biomass utilization, and compliance tracking continues to evolve and improve. This coordination has truly increased the efficiency in the Tahoe Basin to move to landscape resilience. All of the partners in the TFFT contribute their specialty and their expertise to reach these overarching goals. The fire adapted communities, the fire protection districts, our philanthropic partners, and land management agencies are all part of this equation. When partners align timelines and funding cycles, they reduce the duplication of efforts, they stretch our limited funding even further, and they ensure projects are sequenced strategically, especially across state boundaries. This alignment becomes even more and more important as our complexity changes.

Smoke—as you have heard already, again—is inevitable, and we have a choice to decide how we want to have smoke in the Tahoe Basin. Beneficial fire or prescribed fire is one of the most important tools to not only implement a lot of the fuels work that we are talking about, but as well as maintain the work that we have already invested in. We have a lot of partners that are very adamant about prescribed fire and beneficial fire in the Tahoe Basin. At the end of the day, prescribed fire is the choice for how we manage our risk. We have already talked about how Tahoe forests are fire dependent. Frequently, we would have low-intensity fire historically, but once we have had urbanization in the area that has changed that risk profile, as well as our fuels profile, which you have already all heard about. So, prescribed fire really focuses on reintroducing fire into a fire-dependent ecosystem through defined weather parameters, coordinating smoke impacts with our air quality districts, it is heavily monitored, and it produces shorter-duration smoke impacts than a wildfire, for example.

Wildfire smoke events, particularly from high-intensity fires—like what we saw with Caldor, and Tamarack, and Dixie Fires—produce significantly greater total particulate emissions over longer periods of time. Whereas prescribed fire is more targeted, it is lower particulate emissions, and it is focused specifically on fuels reduction. Our research continues to show that the tradeoffs there are valid and worthy of serious determination of how we decide to treat fuels in the forest. Prescribed fire is not the absence of smoke—it is more of the proactive management of risk to reduce the likelihood of catastrophic smoke impacts later.

Through the coordination with the TFFT, partners align timing around prescribed fire. We also monitor the duration of smoke impacts. We also share public information and notifications to help provide community outreach, so people are aware of what projects are happening when and what to expect. And then we mitigate the impacts as much as possible while still achieving fuels reduction objectives.

Looking ahead, there is three realities that really shape where we are at today.
Number one, first and foremost, is funding. It is hard to talk about doing this work without acknowledging funding alignment. When you are talking about a location like Tahoe that is split by two state boundaries, as well as other jurisdictional and administrative boundaries, funding is very difficult to align as well as execute in an efficient way to make sure that we are meeting the objectives on the ground.

Increasing project complexity—which I just referenced—that is another reality. To be completely blunt, our easy acres are treated. We have now moved on to where the more complex and more challenging acres are really what we need to do to continue our landscape treatments in our forests in Tahoe. These complex projects really require more coordination across these ownerships and jurisdictions that we keep talking about.

The third reality is administrative complexity. I do have to acknowledge that the streamlining of permitting and executing these projects has really come a very, very long way in the last several decades, but there is always more to do. The central point is this, as this work becomes more complex, the coordination layer—which is what the role that TFFT plays—becomes more and more critical to make sure we are all on the same page moving forward. So, you have heard a lot about the Tahoe Fire and Fuels Team. You have heard more about the mechanics of how this collaboration operates, how the partners are involved, how we really address some of these things at a larger, big picture perspective. I think it is most important that you hear from our Nevada implementers and our partners that are actually making this work happen on the ground and getting those acres treated and moving us towards landscape resilience. Thank you.

Rosalie Herrera, Deputy Forest Supervisor, Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit, U.S. Forest Service:

Good afternoon. It was a pleasure to meet with you all earlier. A lot of the topics we have discussed today we are readdressing now, so it will be briefer for us. I am glad we had an opportunity to talk earlier, and you guys had an opportunity to ask questions. These are our priorities right now for the Forest Service, and they are priorities for our Chief. The ones that I really want to focus on that—there is a list up in front of you guys—are safety. We have been talking about safety. You have been hearing about the evacuation quarters. We have been talking about forest health and mitigating wildfire threats to support values at risk here in the Basin. So, safety is a big priority for us. It is number one.

Wildfire readiness and response—that is another major priority for us in the Forest Service. Active forest management—that is the vegetation management all our partners are talking about—and some of what we saw—like where some of that ends up at, when we did the mill tour earlier. The other one is—that I thought you all might be interested in hearing about—that is around this—is the deregulation that we are working on as an organization to reduce some of our directives and the redundancy in them. But really importantly is the partnerships we have in our cooperative federalism, but our partnerships are big, and we are here right now. These partnerships are great. We have partners in the audience who help us implement some of our forest work, and we will speak to that a bit more later. I am going to turn to Vic who is going to talk about some of our forest health work.

Victor Lyon, Vegetation Management Staff Officer, Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit, U.S. Forest Service:

Good afternoon, everyone. Our priorities in the Lake Tahoe Basin for the Forest Service on federal ownership is working in the Wildland-Urban Interface—so, particularly within that WUI zone, the defense zone is our priority and then the threat zone. We work from the developed core outward. The defense zone is approximately a quarter of a mile wide around that developed core, and then the threat zone is about a mile and a half. The reason—well, the reason is obvious why we are focusing our efforts there—that is where our communities are. That is also, as you have heard today, where the previous treatments that we have done before were instrumental. They were key components in the fire suppression efforts for the Caldor Fire, particularly—partly why the Christmas Valley neighborhood is still there—and same thing goes for the Iroquois Circle and Pawnee neighborhood—still there, largely because of the vegetation treatments that were in place prior to that fire occurrence. And then also the great efforts of the fire suppression teams that were there. And then also maybe a little bit of good fortune with time of day and direction of wind, and some other elements like that—as some folks in the room are familiar with. I feel really good about the work that we are doing in the WUI.

We are also focusing on the utility corridors. Our energy providers on both sides of the Lake—Liberty Utilities is the provider on the California side; NV Energy is the provider on the Nevada side—we are working in those corridors to mitigate risk of a wildland fire coming from the energy corridors. Also, at the same time—I think it is important to mention—protecting those energy corridors from a wildland fire because wildland fire can come from many different sources, and we want to keep the power on in the event of a wildland fire. Also, doing vegetation treatments in those energy corridors may help provide additional opportunities for the incident command during a wildland fire suppression effort to catch a fire and keep it smaller.

All right; we will move to the next slide here. Just wanted to highlight—and I will not—I definitely will not read through all of the bullets that are on this slide, but I did want to give an impression of how many different projects are going on within the Lake Tahoe Basin and highlight that this year is a really good year. I believe that we are going to implement—we are going to offer and award about 3,000 acres of treatments, which is more than a typical year. A typical year is about 2,000 acres of treatments. That is not considering—we usually are accomplishing around 750 acres of prescribed burning; most of that is pile burning. So, it is a good year this year. About 700 of those acres are likely to be in Nevada and 2,300 in the State of California. Just highlighting the projects that are in Nevada. That is that NV Energy Resilience Corridor—working with our energy provider there. Then also there is a project I think worth mentioning here, it is the Urban Forest Defense Zone Project [Urban Forest Defense Zone Fuels Reduction Project]. That is where we are reducing fuels within 200 feet of neighborhoods—so right along through—right behind people's backyards and in the urban lots that are in between houses. That is really important—to be in that core of the neighborhood there.

All right, and, oh, I wanted to offer some information regarding—how far are we along on these utility corridors? On the NV Energy—we have got about 650 acres completed already and 300 to 500 acres left, because that corridor is about 350 feet wide in the work that has been completed so far—that adds up to about 13 miles of energy corridor that had fuels reduced. It is not just 13 contiguous miles—these are the miles that are happening on federal ownership. So, it is a quarter mile here, two miles there, maybe three miles here. I feel really good about some of the work that we have done along the NV Energy power lines. I am really grateful for all of the partners—NV Energy, the local fire protection districts, and others—that have helped us accomplish that work.

I will not spend the same amount of time on Liberty Utilities, but similar work is happening on the California side. It has really been an innovative process. We have been getting a lot of questions from other areas, "Hey, how are you guys doing that work?" Really happy to be sharing that information so that others can replicate what we are doing here.

Then also I would be remiss if I did not mention the next large landscape project that we have on the Lake Tahoe Basin, and that is the Lake Tahoe West Project. That decision was just signed this past fall, and we are looking to implement right away. We already have a project that has been prepared and is going to be offered this summer. With that I will pass it on to Rosalie.

Ms. Herrera:

I want to add that Nevada will be benefiting from that Lake Tahoe West Project. I do not mean just here on the Lake. Although, like we are saying, fire does not know any boundaries, right? But because the products from that work will most likely end up at the mill—that we just visited today. I just want to highlight that piece. That is the nexus there.

I am just going to briefly talk about fire preparedness. When I first got here, and I was hearing about our treatments, I am like, "We are what? We are doing six acres?" I came from an area that did hundreds and thousands of acres, but it was the Southwest. It was a different landscape. It was not in this environment—in this WUI with these valleys at risk. Our fire preparedness is about protecting life and property—and our values at risk. But part of that preparedness is—the setup we have here is—who responds to that when the fire bell rings. It is the closest resource. It does not have to be Forest Service if it is on Forest Service land. It does not have to be the Forest Service if it is on us—it is whoever is closest. So, it might be any of the six fire districts that we work within the Basin who is going to respond first, and they do show up. It can be the tiniest thing—everybody shows up because everyone knows the valley is at risk here. It is pretty cool—pretty cool setup.

On the Basin, I will not read all that stuff—because I do not really want to read through all that stuff. I wanted to share that we have a sub-geo [sub-geographical] group. It is based with the State of California and all governments, and then we have a separate one for Nevada. The Nevada is included in the sub-geo Nevada federal government, but the Humboldt-Toiyabe is the keeper of the Nevada Master for working with state entities and other entities that are Nevada-based when it comes to responding to the fire bell. Right now, our fuels program is pretty much at capacity, meaning our staff refuels. It is not a lot of people—we have one, two, three . . . five people in that program. And that includes two operators, two equipment operators, and our engines are staffed—I am told by our Acting Chief, too, back here, John Chester—that we are staffed right now. We have a Hotshot Crew in the Basin as well and three prevention patrols. That is the staffing we have for our fire preparedness—and we also work on being ready this time of year. Our folks are doing what they need to do to be prepared for the fire season, going through their fire readiness. It is a process; there is a whole program behind it. And yeah, I just wanted to show that piece.

We have been talking about prescribed fire. So, the stuff that Vic just talked about—ideally, in an ideal world, we are going to burn those piles that Amy brought up earlier today that—she called them something else. But those piles that we build up to get rid of that—I am going to call it *biomass*—I mean, that is just my general term for it—that we need to get off, so it is not a factor—and to help with forest health. But they do not always happen as quick as you want. For one, when it is green—you cannot burn them when it is green; you gotta let them sit for a while. Also, we have burn plans that we do annually, and we review. The conditions have to be right; we call it the prescription for burning. So, all these factors have to come into play before we can put fire on the ground. We have a very rigorous system that we follow. Along with that, we also have to seek air quality control board districts—whatever one we are in—a burn permit for the day that we are burning, or the days that we are burning, in advance. I wanted to share that little bit with you all so that you know about that.

The next thing that everybody has been talking about today is shared stewardship. This is what Tahoe is about—shared stewardship. We could not get hardly any work done if we did not have the outstanding partners we have, from the folks sitting here at this table to some of our folks here in the audience that have—North Lake Tahoe and Tahoe Douglas—we have agreements with a couple of them to help us do some of this work. They are burn bosses for us. They help us mitigate some of these piles that we are talking about. In fact, something is coming to us next week—Dionne and I. Dionne is in the audience here; she is our acting Forest Supervisor. We are actively managing our forest the best that we can—conditions allowing—and with the capacity that we have. With that, I just want to say we are very appreciative of all our partners. We had a huge list of them. I am not going to read them all to you—but six fire protection districts right in the Basin alone—you have heard from several of them today. Thank you.

Ryan Shane, Acting State Forester Firewarden, Division of Forestry, Department of Conservation and Natural Resources:

Good afternoon. Thanks for having us here today. I will try and be brief—so many repeating themes, but all good ones that are necessary and have contributed to our success. Mainly how Nevada Division of Forestry and Nevada Division of State Lands attacks fire prevention and forest health in the Tahoe Basin is through a Forester on our Nevada Tahoe Resource Team who manages—plans, manages, and implements with contractors, with our local fire protection districts, and other folks on state park lands. The state park lands in the Tahoe Basin constitute the largest state park lands in Nevada, so it is a pretty serious issue for us at the state. Then the urban lots that exist on the Nevada side are managed by a Forester within the NTRT team with State Lands. Some of what I will say today is immediately adjacent to the Basin as well because that is also a threat to the Basin. We take that seriously.

I just wanted to throw up our Division goals up here. They are baked into our NRS 472 statutes. But the primary reason of throwing them up here is so that you can see they are highly aligned with everything that everybody has presented today. All our TFFT partners rely on the same set of organizational goals and that helps co-locating projects, sharing resources, and other tasks like deconflicting regulation—much more efficient and effective when we go through that process.

It is almost like I predicted the time crunch, and for those that you like dessert before the main course—the takeaway—from a lot of what is going on here today, and I will get into a little bit more detail in slides subsequent—is average or in elevated wildfire potential increased this year. We have been in a pretty good wet cycle—not extremely wet—actually, just meeting the average for some time. But the difference here is we are a little bit warmer. We will see what the rest of the season brings, and I will show you some charts soon on that. We have seen, with that increased moisture, decreases in insect and disease in most of our forests—so that is looking better. Up to about 2022, we were having quite an outbreak of some insects and disease. We are all focused on increasing pace and scale. We know we are behind the curve on treating these lands and these forests, preventing both insects and disease as well as wildfire that is catastrophic. So, we are all trying to take strides. Annabelle mentioned the key—capacity, funding limitations, and organizational challenges behind those—behind the challenge to get to increased pace and scale, but we are making progress.

Improving partnerships is an ongoing endeavor. I will say Tahoe Basin is ahead of almost anywhere in Nevada. And we take advantage of that within the Basin for sure, but there is always room for improvement. We have heard a lot of that discussion today. So, I already talked about the winners. We can go to the next slide. Thank you.

This is a brief image of insects and disease survey results from this last year.
Four million acres were surveyed across Nevada. About 0.1 percent was impacted by these insects and diseases—that is going to kill the trees, typically—that is how they are flagged from the air. The number one agent impacting the Basin here is Mountain Pine Beetle, and it

accounts for about 83 percent of the negative impact on the forest. The extended drought, again, really gives a launch to that kind of thing—decreases the trees' ability to fight off those insects and disease. But there is a host of different insects and disease in the Basin—things that depending on the conditions thrive or do not thrive. We always have these ebb and flows. Something that will exist in the forest one year may not be fatal for that tree—or even a series of years—and then when a drought comes along or some other adverse condition, all of a sudden, maybe a few things gang up, or the conditions plus that agent end up causing a fatal situation. What I can say is thinning and the fuels treatments that we do are also good for just general forest health and giving the trees the adequate resources to fight off these diseases.

There is an anomaly I just put on there on the screen. Our Agency has gotten questions about a project over by Kahle Drive, and it was a meadow restoration project. It raised the water table, and subsequently the trees do not like to live with their feet in the water year-round and ended up seeing a lot of trees dying. Which, in this case, was actually—we do not want to kill trees, but restoring the meadow is the objective—and the encroachment is going to have a result of having to move back away from the meadow. Then on the mitigation side—I think you have heard a lot about mitigation treatments, so I will hold my comments on those.

Couple quick figures showing—look, no drought right now; which is great. And then on the right side, the water curve for the year—this is a few days old when we had to have the slides submitted, but the last storms did a vertical stair step, and we are following that blue curve up the line. So, not looking too bad on the moisture. The difference with this moisture year compared to other average years is that the temperature profile has been about ten degrees, on average, higher. That is increased evaporation—that is increased evapotranspiration out of these plants. You are drying the soil profile; you are not going to carry water as long into the season and fuels will likely dry out a little bit faster. Again, this depends on what happens for the rest of the months in the wetter cycle of this part of the year.

A lot of talk about partnerships and shared stewardship. This figure on the left shows the Nevada shared stewardship priority landscape map. The Tahoe Basin was always cut out separate because there was a lot of things ahead of their time and moving right. And we were actually copying a lot of the good things for the rest of the state. Luckily, we looked toward Tahoe Fire and Fuels Team recently to adopt the landscape. We require a interagency planning group to plan together so that treatments are done in a more cohesive fashion. Tahoe is already doing it. It was a pretty natural step to take to represent that purpose and function. I will say one benefit is going from annual to five-year plans of work moving forward—gives us a little bit more continuity with funding and sharing resources and those sorts of things. As a result, you can see the list of funding here that has come back into the Basin in the very recent past. This is within the last year or so. A lot of state and federal funding moving towards these priorities based on the good work. I just want to send the kudos to Annabelle's organization for sponsoring her position—and the rest of the TFFT. Science tells us that if you undergo a collaborative effort, if you do not have full-time coordination capability that the organization and the performance of that collaboration will suffer over the long term—so, that is a major step forward for us in the Basin.

The map here on the right—it is hard to see, a little bit—but the darker polygons are all the treatments for 2025 overlaid on the lighter-colored hash marks of the TRPA forestry zones. I will just summarize it for you in that most of the projects are ending up in the number one priorities for the community wildfire protection plan, which is evacuation routes and Wildland-Urban Interface areas. Then in the 2025 accomplishments, this just covers the State of Nevada accomplishments. I will say underrepresented at this table right now is probably the two fire protection districts on the Nevada side. They help big time in all of this work, including what State of Nevada does. We utilize their workforce to get our work done as well. The good thing here is State Lands has gotten the urban lots to maintenance phase. That means they have gone in and done the hard work, repeated thinning, et cetera, and now basically minor work consistently every year and just assessing and making sure there is no major hazards moving forward.

Another major milestone—Nevada Division of Forestry and our partners burned over 4,000 piles this year, again, catching up to our backlog, similar to what we did last year. But I want to emphasize—the public and others may see burn piles still out on the landscape on our lands—is because they need to cure for about a year before we can go in and burn them. They simply will not do the job—and we have seen complaints if we actually burn them too early—a lot of the fuel ends up remaining on the landscape because it will not combust.

This slide shows the anticipated movement toward 2026 accomplishments, similar in terms of quantity—but I will say that funding and capacity are big limitations. We are looking at trying to enhance the amount of foresters in the Basin from multiple organizations. These are the people that assess the land, they go back, they write up a prescription—a plan, they often contract out, and then they monitor the implementation of these treatments. They cannot—that position can be a bottleneck, if you have the pool of contractors that we do and the workforce available. So, we want to make sure that any bottleneck in the system is addressed.

I will say also that funding is important. Bond funds have basically funded almost everything that State of Nevada has implemented on the general forest areas and within the WUI. On the urban lot side, SNPLMA has been a big funder, but even bond funds have contributed to those treatments as well. So, continuity and funding is going to be a big deal. Nevada shared stewardship was approved for $6 million last session—one-shot appropriation. If we want to continue with this enhanced pace and scale, we need continuity of those kind of appropriations over the long term. That is all I have. Thank you.

Chair Goulding:

Thank you for the presentation. That was very thorough. Go ahead.

Assemblymember DeLong:

Thank you, Chair. I think this question is going to be directed to the Forest Service. I appreciate the discussion about trying to streamline permitting to get treatment areas authorized to implement on. With that in mind, what are you doing, or how are you trying to minimize the time it takes to do your NEPA [National Environmental Policy Act] compliance?

Ms. Herrera:

We are going through—we have gone through a revamp, and we are continuing with the NEPA piece nationally. We have new processes in place. It is a major priority for our Agency and for the Forest Service for us to get—manage our forests—healthy and to the level that our land management plan tells us to do it at. We are doing okay. We have shelf stock with NEPA, but just so you know that is not really holding us up. It is other things that are holding us up.

Assemblymember DeLong:

Quick follow-up. Just let me ask this—and are you still doing NEPA on a project-by-project basis or are you using programmatic NEPA and then applying it back to a project?

Ms. Herrera:

Both. We do both. We have two different ways we do NEPA. One is through an integrated EA [environmental assessment]. Then we also have things like the Lake Tahoe West EA that we just completed. So, it really depends. But I did want to share that one of the things that we have done here on the Basin that is unique was that CE [categorical exclusion] that—where we can do . . . What is it? What was it?

Mr. Lyon:

It is the WIIN—it is the 2016 WIIN [Water Infrastructure Improvements for the Nation] Act. A big advantage for the Lake Tahoe Basin has been the 2016 WIIN Act, which allowed us to utilize categorical exclusions for NEPA which shortens our timeline. It shortens the level of documentation that is needed. So, it shortens the time frame that it required to accomplish the planning effort. I also wanted to mention, we also have emergency authorities now that allow us to shorten things like comment periods, say from 60 days—90 days down to 60 days. And that shortening of those periods depends on the level of the NEPA, whether it is an Environmental Impact Statement, the EIS, or an EA.

Ms. Herrera:

Right, and now we are calling them FANEX—I do not know what the acronym means, I am sorry—in replacement of the CEs. I am not sure how it is going to translate to the WIIN Act CE, but that has been pretty successful—and we have had others who have visited, who would like to see it implemented nationally.

Assemblymember Watts:

Thank you. I know [inaudible] here today and looking at one of the areas where there has been some treatment work done, and it was also brought up a little bit in public comment. I was just wondering if you could speak a little bit more to the Santini-Burton Act and some of the acquisitions that have been made and about the modernization. My very rough understanding is that you have been able to acquire lands, but you have not been able to actually deploy resources to manage lands. So, could you just give us a little bit of information on that and how the legislation change might fit into some of the things that you have discussed in this presentation?

Ms. Herrera:

Sure. I will not give you the stats on but—I cannot give you the stats right now. We can provide those to you—the exact number of acres and lots that we have purchased with the Santini-Burton Act funds in order to have more public lands for public to access here in the Basin. But what I will say about the new thing that has been proposed by others—I mean, we do not go out to lobby for anything; we are federal people, right? But to the best of my understanding, the new legislation—the one piece that I have heard that—and again, we are not there pushing this, I just want to make that clear—is the ability to use the funds to do the management of the work on the lands due to recreation and that resource damage. It is being able—right now, we cannot fund—and we used to be able to, I am told, I do not know when—fund staff to do work on behalf of the Lake on public lands with Santini-Burton. This is one of the things that is being asked by partners in the new permit—I mean not the new permit, I apologize—the new bill. And then Vic has something to add.

Mr. Lyon:

I believe the Santini-Burton funding—I believe that is still in discussion how that might be used. I cannot comment what might happen there, but I definitely can say that the Forest Service has about 3,000 urban lots that were part of the Santini-Burton acquisition. Most of those parcels are really small—quarter acres is a very typical occurrence. We have been managing those properties. We have been using other funding sources to do that, say, for example, the SNPLMA funds. We have, in coordination with BLM [Bureau of Land Management], an urban lots project, and are managing that in coordination with our fire protection districts. We have an urban lots crew that goes out and manages those lands, and we rely upon the fire protection districts who also help us. That expands our capacity. I would say it would be highly beneficial if the Santini-Burton funds would become available for the long-term management, because one of the continual challenges is fluctuations in funding levels. The money that we have right now is six-year funding, and we are I think about two-thirds of the way through that cycle. So, we would have to request more funding. I will just leave it at that unless you have other elements of your questions you would like us to address.

Ms. Herrera:

Yeah, thanks Vic.

Mr. Lyon:

Yes.

Chair Goulding:

Any other questions? [There were none.] Okay. We will close that agenda item. Thank you very much. Appreciate the work that you do and appreciate your presentation.

AGENDA ITEM VI—PRESENTATION ON WILDFIRE RESILIENCE FRAMEWORKS IN CALIFORNIA AND THE ROLE OF HAZARD AND RISK ASSESSMENTS

Chair Goulding:

Next, I have invited Californians to come speak to Nevada. We appreciate you, and we want to make sure that we are learning from you as appropriate. We will now hear a presentation on wildfire resilience framework in California from Mr. Schafer. Please introduce yourself and begin when you are ready.

Forest Schafer, Deputy Director, California Wildfire & Forest Resilience Task Force:

Good afternoon. Thank you, Chair and members of the Committee for the invite today. I am here today to speak briefly to some of the frameworks that we are using in California regarding wildfire resilience, with a particular emphasis on hazard and risk assessment. I am going to be doing some on-the-fly restructuring of my talking points to really hit on what I think some of the key points are for today's discussion and some of the discussion that follows. I will start by saying that I am very excited to be here today. I have a long history with this Committee. I counted—I think this is my ninth time presenting to this Committee—starting with when I was a Forester working for North Lake Tahoe Fire Protection District. Later, when I was helping to lead the Tahoe Fire and Fuels Team and working with the Tahoe Conservancy and this whole assortment of partners. So, whenever I get a chance to come to an event like this, it feels like a little bit of a reunion. I also have to express my appreciation for the teams that have presented because it is just a privilege to be able to see some of the things that I have worked on now be able to evolve and confront some of the new challenges and these evolving challenges that we are faced with as the threat of wildfire, and smoke, and insurance affordability and so forth gets ever more pressing as we move forward.

I am the Deputy Director of California's Wildfire and Forest Resilience Task Force. Governor Newsom created the Task Force in 2021, with two primary goals. Number one, how can we take a cross-government approach and help align the programs and the policies of federal, state, local, private, tribal organizations to really help move towards a common mission and a common goal. Number two, how can we rely, and tailor our programs, priorities, and policies, to best meet the specific needs and priorities of local, regional partnerships because that is where the work actually gets done, and that is where the true priorities are defined. I am going to lay out a three-part framework that we are working on and then connect that to the hazard and risk assessment items that exist within that.

Number one is landscape resilience and landscape planning. I will say that in California—and I would argue in Nevada too—we use really similar systems for assessing hazards, looking across landscapes using amazing tools with remote sensing and new data sets that really can help tell us where are the risks in this landscape? Where are forests healthy versus where are they unhealthy? Where are they too dense? Where do they need to be thinned? Where do we see some of the greatest potential fire behavior? In California, we have resource kits that we make available to local partnerships to help plan and prioritize their work. In Nevada, that is—a lot of those same data sets are available in the Nevada Wildfire Risk Explorer. We also, in California, have a new interagency treatment tracker. It has only been going for four years. But for the first time, we know what is happening on the landscape. We can look at federal land. We can look at state land. We can look at tribal land. We can look at local government land or private land and know—where has the work been done? Where has forest thinning been accomplished? Where have shaded fuel breaks been installed? Where has that work been done? I have touted all these great things that we are doing on the landscape side, but I have to say we have so much further to go on the community side—and I would say westwide and nationally that remains the case.

On the community side, number one—where we have great assessments of hazard and risk at a landscape level because we know the conditions of trees, and we have all this remote sensing ability. What we do not know is where are the true risks. What are the risks? What are the hazards that are existing at the residential level based on how homes are constructed, based on the defensible space that surrounds them? We can do inspections and the like, but none of that—none of those inspections are collected, at least in California, into a statewide database that allows us to know—this is the conditions that exist here—this is the conditions that exist in other places. Also our models are not as advanced. So, we have great fire-spread models. We can predict how fire is going to spread across the landscape. But when it comes to structure-to-structure spread and some of the catastrophic fires that we have seen all over California that I hope we never see in Nevada, the science around how that actually works is really not known. It means that we have a really hard time understanding what mitigations matter the most.

Then finally, we do not have a central way to collect what mitigations are occurring. On the landscape side, we can say we have done this fuel break, we have done this forest thinning treatment. But we cannot say with certainty—where have people retrofitted their homes to increase the resilience to fire or ember ignition? Where have they done defensible space? Where does it go far enough? Some of that exists locally, but it does not exist in this coordinated statewide fashion. So, our next steps is to—number one, build out the data standards and the models that help us better understand that risk. Number two, use that information to better prioritize the mitigations that matter the most. That is where we work through the Insurance Institute for Business and Home Safety, not just in developing parcel standards with wildfire prepared home, but also neighborhood standards with a wildfire prepared neighborhood—will really enable us to understand what mitigations matter the most and where do we put them. Then we need to collect the data on what is happening and where, and then we need to be able to report on the risk that is actually being bought down.

Now, I buried the lead a little bit here. But because there are so many complicated market factors involved in insurance availability and affordability, our strategy as a state and as a partnership within the Task Force is to build out these models, report on the work that is being done, and really be able to visibly show and demonstrate that risk is being reduced with statewide models, data standards, and parameters. We really feel that is how we are going to provide the tools to the Insurance Commissioner and to industry and to private insurers to be able to see—this is the work that is being done, and this is why it matters.

I am nearing the end. The last piece that I just want to mention—permitting is another kind of consistent element that has come up today. On the front of permitting, Governor Newsom recently suspended nearly all state statutes and regulations related to fuel reduction projects, as long as [inaudible] short list, best management practices are being [inaudible]. We are looking to build a successor program for that because that was done on an emergency authority basis—and so that does not exist in perpetuity, it will actually only exist until April.

One of the things I am focused on with my experience in the Tahoe Basin is trying to build the same sorts of partnerships and relationship that I had with TRPA as a regulator to implementer partnership in getting this work done. That is now [inaudible] statewide is so rare throughout the area that I have worked. I will say it was normal to me because it is where I grew up—where I came up in my career. But the relationship between TRPA and fire districts as implementers and others really does not feel like a regulator to implementer partnership—or relationship. It feels like a partnership. When codes were being updated a few years ago, TRPA came to us to ask, "What do you need and how can we, together, responsibly steward this environment?" So, on that permitting front, that is another key aspect that we know we need to carry forward in California. Nevada already has some great streamlining mechanisms available to it. With that, I will close my remarks. Thank you.

Chair Goulding:

Thank you so much for being here, and thank you for your presentation. So, is this standardization—the data collection and modeling risk assessment—the way that you are describing that—has that been done anywhere? Or is the work that you are doing now really—are you piloting that—those efforts?

Mr. Schafer:

Yes, it is being done locally. This is why I am so excited to hear from the Tahoe Fund with Amy Berry in a little bit—is that one of the most advanced pilots for actually being able to make this happen and connect it to actual insurance providers is happening in Incline Village with the Incline Village pilot that you will hear about later on today.

Chair Goulding:

Thank you for that clarification. But there are no other state—there is no larger scale areas where this is already happening? It is just right here and in the Basin is the first place that that data collection and standardization is beginning.

Mr. Schafer:

There is other places in—that I am aware of—in the State of California. There are other places in the State of California where it is occurring. And there is also ongoing efforts with creating a California Wildfire Commons, which is a partnership between actuarial firms and fire districts to begin developing these standards. We are putting the steps in place to begin building this in California in ways that can hopefully be able to move westwide with support.

Chair Goulding:

Thank you for that. Any other—go ahead.

Assemblymember DeLong:

Thank you, Chair. Wanted to follow up on your comments about permitting and the Governor's emergency declaration to limit the amount of permitting that is necessary. Does that emergency declaration and any plans moving forward, as far as fuel treatments, include suspending compliance with CEQA [California Environmental Quality Act] and limiting lawsuits?

Mr. Schafer:

The suspension from last year suspends CEQA, California Endangered Species Act, California Clean Water Act, among multiple other codes. So yes, it does suspend CEQA. We have approved, I believe, over 250 projects to move forward—in processes that otherwise could have taken one, maybe even two or three years, depending on the complexity of the project. Our priority is to see how can we create a durable system that is not dependent on emergency authorities to carry that work forward.

Assemblymember DeLong:

That is great to hear. Thank you very much. Thank you, Chair.

Chair Goulding:

Thank you so much for being here. I really appreciate it.

Mr. Schafer:

Thank you.

Chair Goulding:

We have two more presentations next, so we will close out that agenda item.

AGENDA ITEM VII—PRESENTATION REGARDING LAKE TAHOE BASIN FIRE RESPONSE AND EVACUATION PLANNING ACTIVITIES

[This agenda item was taken out of order.]

Chair Goulding:

We will now move to the panel discussion on evacuation. I appreciate your flexibility in jumping around here. We wanted to make sure that Senator Titus had the opportunity to ask you all questions and hear your presentation. We are now on Agenda Item VII. I am going to ask you all to introduce yourselves in a moment. This agenda item focuses on wildfire response and evacuation planning in the Tahoe Basin. We have representatives from TRPA, the Douglas County Sheriff's Office, Washoe County, South Lake Tahoe Fire Rescue, and the Governor's Office on Emergency Management and Homeland Security. I will ask you each to introduce yourselves and give a quick overview of your role. Then I think that we have given you some questions in advance, so if you can lay some groundwork for that, and then we will follow up with questions as well. Ms. Regan, why do not you begin?

Julie Reagan, Executive Director, TRPA:

Thank you. Good afternoon, Chair Goulding, Vice Chair Daly, members of the Committee, staff, the public, the community. Welcome to TRPA's Offices. I am the Executive Director here at the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency. I want to take a moment to introduce this esteemed panel—make a couple of introductory remarks. I will move back since we are a little tightly spaced up here to allow room for the others, but I just want to thank you for your discussion around this important community topic of evacuation planning and emergency response. I have had the privilege to work with the fire service here in the Tahoe Basin for more than 30 years. First, in my capacity with the South Tahoe Public Utility District, water infrastructure, sewer infrastructure provider here and then the last 22 years at the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency. I have lived through two major events, the Angora Wildfire of 2007 in my community and most recently Caldor. So, this is a deeply personal issue as well as professional for me, because some of the people right here to my right and left and in the room were truly responsible for helping our community get through Angora—where I had friends who left with nothing but the clothes on their back and lost everything in '07. And then proud to say because of their hard work, and the hard work of our communities, and a little luck from the wind, we were able to get through Caldor of 2021, with no lives lost, no structures in the Basin—permanent residence loss. It is quite a topic that is of great concern, as you heard earlier.

I wanted to just clarify three areas where our organization, TRPA, is involved in the topic. Through our land use authority and our role as the region's Metropolitan Planning Organization in transportation: we limit growth; we concentrate development into town centers to reduce sprawl—which can be an issue in evacuations; we improve our transportation systems and infrastructure that are essential to emergencies.

The second area we intersect in this area is through our leadership of the Environmental Improvement Program—the broad partnership of 80 different organizations. We help secure funding to advance forest restoration, defensible space, water infrastructure—projects that reduce wildfire risk in our communities and strengthen our community resilience. We also play a leadership role in what was mentioned earlier as the Fire Public Information Team, the Fire PIT, which formed after Angora to strengthen communication, which continues to be a challenge in the multijurisdictional landscape that we operate in.

The third area that we intersect in this important topic is as a regional convener. We bring partners together to foster coordination, communication, and increase public education on evacuation planning. We have convened similar discussions—is what you will hear today—in front of our Governing Board and with the community. Thank you for your continued attention. I will invite my fellow panelists just to introduce themselves, and we will get to your questions. Thank you.

Dan Coverley, Sheriff, Douglas County Sheriff's Office:

Hi. Law enforcement's role in these types of instances is evacuations. The area that needs the evacuation is identified by the fire service. Then we are the ones that actually knock on the doors and ensure people are evacuated, determine the evacuation routes, and then make the area secure—or as safe as we can—to allow firefighting to continue. We have great relationships not only on the Nevada side with the Carson City Sheriff's Office, Washoe County Sheriff's Office, and Highway Patrol, but on the California side, with the City of South Lake, their police department, and the El Dorado County Sheriff's Office, and the California Highway Patrol (CHP). We help them; they help us. It is just a phone call, and everybody just knows what to do. This is not something that is brand new; we have done it a lot. There is a lot of lessons that I have learned from doing this. The Paradise Fire was a big one. I listened to a presentation by the Butte County Sheriff just after that in 2019, and I learned a lot from his experience in that. That is my role here. Thanks for having me.

Kelly Echeverria, Emergency Management Administrator, Office of the County Manager, Washoe County:

Hi. Washoe County E.M. [emergency management] falls under NRS 414 and County Code 65 as a public safety agency. We partner with our fire departments and law enforcement; not only in our jurisdiction, but around the region and across state lines to plan in areas of preparedness, prevention, response, recovery, mitigation. To close capability gaps and to act in a disaster as a coordinating agency, but also as a hub of the wheel for information resources to support our community and our first responders. Myself, I have worked through Caldor Fire, Davis Fire—recently, and we have put a lot of work into constantly improve our processes as we will talk about today. Thank you for your time.

Ryan Sommers, Fire Chief, North Lake Tahoe Fire Protection District:

Good afternoon. We cover the communities of Incline Village and Crystal Bay. I have been with North Lake Tahoe Fire for over 30 years—people do not believe that—and I have been the Fire Chief now—I am on my nineth year here in the Basin. Very involved with all of the committees and all of the meetings and talks when it comes to wildfire and evacuations. As we know, wildfire knows no boundaries and that has been our approach—the fire approach—that we all need to work together. You are hearing from all of us today, how we do work together and that is not just a line, that is the truth. We talk and we conduct these meetings and plans and so on—every single day I think we talk about this. You are going to hear a lot more information from all of us today. Thank you for allowing me to sit here.

Jim Drennan, Fire Chief, South Lake Tahoe Fire Rescue:

Good afternoon. I have been with the City of South Lake now for about 26 years; Fire Chief for about 4. I also sit as the Chair for the Lake Tahoe Regional Fire Chiefs' Association. I would just like to echo Chief Sommers comments, especially following the Angora Fire and the Blue Ribbon Committee and then certainly four years ago, five years ago now—well, four and a half—with the Caldor Fire—a lot of lessons learned—a lot of really great work that was done prior to and has happened since. Specifically on the South Shore, we built the South Shore Division, which is a multiagency group that focuses on fuels management, as well as education, defensible space, home hardening, etc. I would tell you that every agency—whether it is fire, law enforcement, land managers within the Basin—are all working cooperatively. We are getting an awful lot of work done—a lot of acres treated, and specifically dealing with the evacuation issue, working with Caltrans and other agencies to work on rights-of-way and clearing those evacuation routes, as well as putting together plans. This is not something that we take lightly, we have been working on this for a long time. Like Chief Sommers said, this is something that really hits our desk every day. Thank you very much for having us. I am sure we will get into a lot more detail here in a minute.

Chair Goulding:

Thank you for those introductions. Are one of you taking point on walking us through, I think what we as a Committee would like to know, and I know that the public would like to know, is not down in the weeds what the plan is, but an overview of what the plan is. We want to be sure that there is a plan, and how it is being communicated both to residents and to tourists that you do not have a long-standing relationship with. Can you give us an umbrella perspective of what the evacuation plan is, and how you are working together?

Ms. Echeverria:

Sure. Each individual jurisdiction has their own plan. Washoe County has an evacuation plan, as does Douglas County, Carson City, Placer, and El Dorado. There is also the plan that the Fire Chiefs have diligently worked on last year—I think it was last year—to put together—that has annexes from each of the jurisdictions together, to show how our plans coordinate together, and our teams work across those borders. Chief do you want to talk about that plan a little bit?

Chief Drennan:

Sure. For reference, this can be found on the El Dorado County Sheriff's website—

Chair Goulding:

I am sorry, I need to interrupt you right now. The building network is down and so we are not recording the meeting right now. We need to take a pause. Thank you again for your flexibility. We will recess until we are back up and running.

[Recess to Fix Technical/Microphone Issues.]

Chair Goulding:

We are back in session. Thank you all for your patience. Are you ready? What we are all eager to hear, an overall view of—perspective of—the combined plan. And there will be lots of follow-up questions, but an overview of the joint plan is what we are hoping to hear.

Ms. Echeverria:

Before I—let me build a little suspense. If we could introduce Sharon Luce—

Chair Goulding:

Thank you for that.

Ms. Echeverria:

—from Nevada OEM [Office of Emergency Management]. She is online.

Chair Goulding:

Go ahead.

Sharon Luce, Deputy Administrator, Nevada Office of Emergency Management/Homeland Security, Office of the Governor:

Good afternoon, Chair, Vice Chair, and Committee members. On behalf of Administrator and Chief Brett Compston, I am Sharon Luce, the Deputy Administrator for the Nevada Office of Emergency Management and Homeland Security within the Office of the Governor and a native Nevadan. I provide administrative oversight and coordination of statewide homeland security and emergency management programs and grant funding to help people before, during, and after emergencies—including wildfires.

Under *Nevada Revised Statute* 414, Nevada OEM is required to plan to respond to emergencies or disasters including describing the roles of state agencies, local governments, tribal nations, and private organizations—including volunteer organizations—during an emergency or disaster. Describing the primary mechanisms for providing assistance at the state level and describing the policies, processes, procedures, roles, and responsibilities that state agencies carry out before, during, and after an emergency.

Nevada and California have also come together multiple times, and we have a strong relationship—that includes Caldor in 2021, a bi-state meeting at Parasol in 2022, and a Tahoe Summit tabletop exercise in 2023. We are currently actively working on a bi-state coordination annex to our response and recovery plan, projected for late quarter 4, 2026, to clarify liaison officer exchange, intergovernmental communications and information sharing, state-to-state mutual aid agreements, and public information synchronization. Also, in 2025, we started a Nevada, Arizona, California, Utah four-states work group, which includes emergency management, transportation, law enforcement agencies, local fire departments and law enforcement, and private sector transportation entities. That is my introduction. Thank you.

Chair Goulding:

Thank you.

Ms. Echeverria:

I am happy to reiterate what was said before—I am not sure when we lost Internet, but each jurisdiction has their own evacuation plan. When we are planning, we do include neighboring jurisdictions and partners to ensure input on our [inaudible] and functionality between jurisdictions. But, however—oh, so sorry. That being said, the fire chiefs came together and created a joint plan that has annexes from each of our individual evacuation plans, and I will allow Chief to address them.

Chief Drennan:

Hi there. What Kelly was referring to is—about a year and a half ago—Lake Tahoe Basin Chiefs, in coordination with all of the Basin law enforcement agencies—specifically following the Caldor Fire—determined that there needed to be some form of centralized document that we could all reference, which outlined different emergency managers, contacts, different plans within different jurisdictions, and recognized that we are dealing with two different states, I think five counties—if my count is right—it is something on the order of ten law enforcement agencies. You have got CHP, NHP [Nevada Highway Patrol], seven different county sheriffs, Truckee Police, South Lake Tahoe Police Department. So, when I say that the evacuation plans are the responsibility of law enforcement, that all by itself creates some complexity. Literally, law enforcement takes their cues from fire. When it is a fire, we would be giving them good information about wind direction, origin, expected fire behavior, et cetera, but they are the ones that are doing a lot of that work. On rare occasions, fire agencies will stop firefighting efforts and begin working toward rescue and evacuations—that took place during the Paradise Fire. So, when I say that there is a plan, there is a working document—I would call it a living document. It is really based—or it is really developed for us to reference, so that we can quickly contact our neighboring agencies and jurisdictions. I will speak about this a little bit later when we discuss the Caldor Fire and evacuations in 2021, but it addresses what the downstream effect might be of an evacuation. As an example, if something were to happen in South Lake Tahoe and then we go to evacuate, it is going to have a ripple effect downstream in whichever direction we send it. It is nearly impossible to build a plan that says, "If there is a fire, go here." It is just not—it is not a tsunami; they do not operate that way. Wind speeds, wind directions change, conditions change—there are so many variables involved. That is why the community leans on the experts in the room, the incident command post, who are managing that incident and then also managing that evacuation.

In the Basin, obviously, we have a number of constricting factors; namely, there is not going to be any more four- and five-lane highways built out of the Basin. So, funneling large amounts of people out of the Basin is a challenge to say the least. We are developing things like what we call a TRA, a Temporary Refuge Area. We are trying to make those evacuation routes as safe as possible by doing aggressive fuels management around those spaces. A lot of that is education to the public, and that is an uphill battle every day—that we are engaged in every day. I do not want to go too much more into more detail. I am sure there are going to be a lot of questions, and we have three other speakers that can speak to this as well. But in terms of what was developed a year and a half ago, I just want to stress that that was not just the fire chiefs—that was fire chiefs in the Basin shoulder to shoulder with every law enforcement agency in the Basin—so that we are on the same page.

Ms. Echeverria:

We also came together and created something called Tahoealerts.com to push to the public. For example, Washoe County uses an alerting platform called Rave or Smart 911. There are varying companies that jurisdictions can use for emergency alerts, and so we wanted to give the public an opportunity to sign up and recognize that that might change based on where they are in the Basin. So, Tahoealerts.com—there is a QR code on that as well. By scanning it and seeing where you are, you can determine what your alerting platform is and sign up for that.

Chief Sommers:

In summary, we have two states, what—five counties that touch Lake Tahoe—six counties that touch Lake Tahoe, and then we have 1,400 personalities, I mean, 1,400 ideas on how to accomplish this, correct? And so, with that being said, we wanted to have a central location for these folks—both owners, renters, visitors—to know what that plan is and in turn [inaudible].

With that being said, what do we do for the next step? How do we notify tourists when they are in town? This is a big tourist visitor area, correct? So, in Washoe County, North Lake Tahoe Fire—we are making it [inaudible], and I know this Committee [inaudible], but we have short-term rental programs in Washoe County [inaudible].

We have a short-term rental program in Washoe County. Part of the permitting process is those owners of the short-term rentals post information such as this; where do you find a plan for certain things? Not only the building evacuation plan, where the fire extinguisher is located, but where do you find evacuation plans? But the real world is—I am sorry, you have to know where you are. When you come up here and you rent a place, you better know that you are in Incline; you better know that you are somewhere in Tahoe Douglas—because that website—you have to refer to the correct plan to find out where to go, shelters being opened up, and such. There is different avenues and floods of information coming in all the time, but how do we get that word out to those people? We were trying to centralize that one item with that one website. That is still—like the Chief said—it is a live working document, and we are still working on those notifications and to get that word out. But, we are trying to think outside the box on how to just do that.

Ms. Echeverria:

If I may expand on Chief's comments. When we send an alert, we are sending it out through every technological means available to us—which means it is going out through emergency alert system to the radio and TV. It is going out on wireless emergency alerts to your cell phone. If people are signed up that allows them then to also include things like email. We are pushing it out to social media. It is going out through landlines to whomever still has those. We are using every possible opportunity to push that information out. We also have set up emergencywashoe.com, where we push information. We recognize that people might not know where they are, or what jurisdiction they are in. I know when I travel, I do not always know what county I am in. But, that is why we have brought on partners like Perimeter Map in Nevada. I know some jurisdictions in California are using that as well. It shows where you are in relation to what is happening, and it takes very low connectivity. It saw 2.4 million visitors during the Davis Fire. It shows where you are in relation to the fire perimeter at the evacuation areas, if there is road closures, if there is routes that we want the public to take—that all goes on the map, and they can click on it and find out more information. So, we are trying to troubleshoot some of these hurdles that we have historically seen. Where an alert used to go out and we would have to describe to the person, you know, "Between these two streets or in this [inaudible], evacuate now," but now you can see where you are in relation to the danger and make a more informed decision related to your safety. That is always the goal—right?—is public safety?

Sheriff Coverley:

Law enforcement is consistent with each jurisdiction. We basically do evacuations almost the same, and it comes down to this the fire starts, the first units on scene—if it is in a neighborhood, the deputies are already knocking on doors and telling people to leave. If it is at the top of the mountain and the fire department gets there, and we are able to have some time and plan and get a feel of the direction, and how long it may get to a populated area or a neighborhood—then that gives us time to be a little more organized in our contact. But we are contacting each and every resident—we are having face-to-face contact with them and talking to them. There is two reasons for that. One, if they do not get on the app or the social media, or they miss it that way—they are guaranteed to be explained what is going on. The other thing is some people need help. They may be home bound or have a medical issue that they actually need—physically need help getting out of their residence or into their vehicle and whatnot. And so, we are there to do that also. It is a layered approach. And the incident dictates, like Chief Drennan said, the incident dictates how the evacuations occur, how rapid they occur, and how we notify people. The apps and the software and that kind of stuff is really critical when we have time, especially when we want to allow people to come back into a neighborhood. The fire has gone through, or it is not a threat anymore, we want to repopulate that area, then we allow them to come in and we explain to them the route we want them to take and when they can come in and who can come in and that type of thing. That is a huge benefit on the law enforcement side. We never leave. So, your home is evacuated—there is a deputy there that is making sure nobody is breaking into your house and stealing your stuff while we are gone.

The other difference between Nevada and California—and we are primarily talking Nevada here—is evacuations are not mandatory; it is just a recommendation. Only the Governor can make it mandatory, and in my career—29 years with Douglas County—that has only happened once. But I am not going to get in a fight and physically make you leave. If you do not want to leave, that is your decision, and we will respect that—but we are probably not going to be able to come back. Does that make sense? We really depend on teaching the public and giving them the information that they need to be prepared. If you live at Lake Tahoe, you have got to be prepared to possibly be evacuated at some point while you live here. And how would that look? What do you need? Those types of things—and so we try to help the public answer those questions and stuff.

I am very, very confident in our ability to evacuate in Douglas County. I am very confident in Eldorado County's ability to evacuate and Washoe County's ability to evacuate. The key thing—and I cannot stress this enough for this group—the key element to all of this is time. And how you create time is by cleaning up the forest. So if the fire cannot move at a phenomenal pace like it did in the Paradise Fire, then that allows us to have time to evacuate people and evacuate them safely. If it is a bunch of junk and fuel and the fire is cooking and it goes faster than we can actually move and get to there, then that is a huge problem. There has been huge, huge progress made in that respect, in my opinion, in the Tahoe Basin since the Angora Fire, and it is awesome. It needs to continue—because the forest does not stay the same, and so that needs to continue. This group, I think, is key at ensuring that all of those entities within the Basin—private, state, county, federal—are able to do that—take care of the forest and give us that time—heaven forbid—where we need to evacuate people.

Ms. Echeverria:

Sheriff, thank you for mentioning "alerting" and helping individuals who cannot necessarily get out. I stated earlier that we have switched our system to Rave, which is our alerting platform. I have to take the opportunity to brag on that for a minute because for over a decade we had been searching for a solution to reach out to our friends and neighbors who have access and functional needs to see if they need extra help or to let them know to evacuate early, if they have the capacity to do so. The alerting system that every jurisdiction on the Nevada side has—it is Rave—which allows us to do that. If someone is signed up in Smart 911, they can note that they have access and functional needs, and we can message them directly with instructions on what to do or in a two-way conversation where they can let us know that they need help getting out or they are having trouble in whatever way. So, being able to bring on that capability in the last two years has been phenomenal for us, and we have used it every instance since we have brought it on.

Ms. Luce:

If I may—from the state perspective, evacuation planning is a whole of community and whole of government responsibility—but as you hear from my partners down there—up there—all emergencies and disasters start and end at the local level. But there is an immense amount of resources that are requested to support our local partners and their execution of all the things—all the communications that they are speaking of. We are in active participation with our neighbor in California and the California Office of Emergency Services on establishing mutual-aid agreements, sharing our Agency information-sharing tools, our field communications and technology tools, and our center-to-center personnel coordination. We do provide liaison officers between both states, and we also offer a liaison officer to the Office of Emergency Management at the local level upon their request. We also acknowledge that we have operational decision-makers in the Basin that are part of the Nevada National Guard, the Nevada Department of Transportation, and the Nevada Department of Public Safety—mainly—who work together with our local emergency managers and public safety folks on identifying the resources that they need in order to provide for those timely notifications and alerts and help with the transportation corridors during the evacuation process. I just wanted to ensure that all are aware that we are all actively engaged and involved in supporting each other through the evacuation-planning process.

Chair Goulding:

Thank you. Senator Titus.

Senator Titus:

First, thank you for coming in a little bit early and out of order. I threw a little monkey wrench in the whole thing today; so, thank you for being accommodating. A couple of questions if I might, Madam Chair. First, I do not see NDOT or Caltrans at the table. And one of the things—you are using Nevada roads, California roads, county roads, state roads, interstate roads—I am just wondering what the coordination is with the—actually, road departments, or if there is any. Because the concern that I am hearing from my constituents is plans about lane reductions and some of the stuff that they are doing—sometimes roundabouts, et cetera—that may impact what you are attempting to do.

Chief Drennan:

I will jump in on this. With the South Shore Division, which is us and Lake Valley—City of South Lake Tahoe and Lake Valley Fire—we make up the majority of the California side of the Lake. Caltrans, historically, had not really engaged with us much. They have their own fuels plan that they work down the highways that they—they think of acres treated as like medians being mowed—down Highway 50 or down I-5 or I-80. And so, there is a lot of that discussion happening where we are trying to get acres treated near evacuation routes, specifically up here in the Sierra. For the first time, one of my division chiefs, Jay Manning, along with Lake Valley's Martin Goldberg, have been able to work in concert with Caltrans, and we are beginning some of the first fuels treatments on 89 North Corridor—which is really complicated because you are dealing with rights of entry on the lands that are local, state, federal, and privately owned. So, if you think about the highway on the West Shore, going up past private homes, federal land, forest, et cetera—trying to do work with an easement off of—with Caltrans crews—becomes problematic when you are trying to figure out those rights of entry. They are coming to the table now, and they are actually engaging in work—we have plans and projects planned out for this coming season.

In the meantime, we have already accomplished a lot of that work on the South Shore, near the airport, on the way out into the unincorporated area, county, Meyers—that space—and up and over the Summit. I would say that, historically, it has been a little rough working with Caltrans—at least I can speak for the California side—but now they seem to be much more engaged, thankfully, and are working alongside us.

Chief Sommers:

For NDOT, Nevada Division of Transportation, very much the same in the beginning—they were not partners at the table years ago. That has dramatically increased. We have biannual meetings with every public safety agency in the Basin twice a year, and we talk about what plans or what road they are going to destroy—they say improve, but sometimes when I drive them, it does not seem like that is what is happening. They give us all of that information. We are in touch with the flaggers during those incidents. We can—they listen to us. We can divert traffic. They hold traffic for us. They do that type of thing. NDOT also works very well with, at least, North Tahoe Fire when it comes to fuels reduction. We go out—we leverage some of the state funds for grants—and we go, and we start working on the rights-of-way and the fuels reduction.

Where we are still lacking—and I will be honest—are some of the projects that are proposed. I want to say it improved with Highway 50 when they were talking about making Highway 50 two lanes—from four to two lanes and putting in decorative stuff like that. We were able to give some input on that, and I think they are listening. I have not asked them in the last six to eight months where that project is at—but they do come to us, and they do say, "How is this going to impact evacuation?" So, that is improving. Maybe not at the pace we all would like, but the partnership is developing and becoming better and better—at least from my perspective on the north end of the Lake.

Ms. Echeverria:

Hi, I will add on to that. I have to agree with both Fire Chiefs that the relationship is only improving. We have had a lot of difficulty in the past in bringing NDOT to the table as a partner—just, I believe, based on limited capacity and staffing issues. They are out doing the things in the road to get the work done and do not necessarily have the time to come to a planning meeting or that sort of thing—but that is changing. So, now they are at the table. Washoe County right now is going through an evacuation study. They have been at those meetings as a participant providing input, and we could not do what we are doing without them. I know we are here for fire, but I would be remiss if I did not mention that they have worked with us to include emergency management in avalanche notification. Given that Gazex [avalanche control] system is on 431, and it closes the road from time to time, which cuts off a huge part of our population. And before, we never knew when that was happening, which is ridiculous to not know when our neighborhood would be cut off.

Senator Titus:

A couple of things I want to address. First, I know in this area and Tahoe it is either winter or road construction. That is what it is like here. And so, do they communicate at all with the sheriffs or any of those flaggers when they are going to tear up a road—so that then changes your evacuation plans? So that is on—at least on your radar that that road is not even going to be accessible?

Sheriff Coverley:

They do. In Douglas County, we have State Route 207, which is Kingsbury Grade, which is a vital artery and then also Highway 50. They communicate very well with us for road closures or especially if it is something where they are going to have to shut the road down for an amount of time. The other thing that is good to—is important to note—is that during an emergency, the emergency trumps everything. And they are very good at stopping what they are doing and opening the whole thing up. Or if we want it just to go one direction, they can do that. And so, they are very responsive in the emergency to help us with signage, road closures—whatever we are asking them to do, they are extremely responsive. Almost all of those requests go through the Highway Patrol, but they are very responsive to that. We can probably all be better at the planning phase of stuff and communication, but in the moment—in the emergency—they are there.

Senator Titus:

One quick question. I have a lot of questions, but I do not have the time to ask them all. But I would like to know—most of the folks at any one time in this Tahoe area are not folks who live here. And so, if the locals sign up for their emergency plan—I know if I use the GPS, it will warn me there is something in the road ahead of me that—you can ping that—and know that there is some disaster. But if I am not on my GPS—and I know sometimes where I am going—how will—do you use like a ping? Every phone that is—can you know every cell phone in this valley and ping it with an emergency? That is a—the capability is there. But yeah, because I know from a law enforcement basis, they can ping a phone and know exactly where you are; and they can ping wherever they want to go. It is there. Do you use anything like that? Because I mostly worry—the locals may sign up. They may know that they have to notify the power—that they have to have power—they notify you, Sheriff, that they need assistance to leave. What about the hundreds of thousands of visitors here—who do not have a clue? How do you notify them? At the same time when you notify them, do you say, "Hey, you are in District 2—you need to go towards this direction."

Sheriff Coverley:

A couple of reasons—I will let Kelly expand. So, we are going to make contact with everybody in person, whether you are in a vacation home rental, in a condo, in a casino—it does not matter—you are going to have that face-to-face contact. The working group composed of the fire chiefs and the law enforcement and emergency management have developed postings in these rentals that explain to people in the case of emergency, this is what we want you to do. Now whether they do that or not is anybody's guess. But, that is a challenge. The challenge is—I will use Fourth of July for an example. That is a nightmare scenario because you have got a lot of people that are here and probably a third of those are incapacitated to some degree. So, add that to not being able to work your phone. That is a challenge, and I think that we have got a good plan in place, but you are going to have to make it work—and that face-to-face contact; it will be a mess—it just will be. But I think the best start—and I will let Kelly elaborate—is that we are getting better with the resources we have and allowing people to be notified if they so choose—and hopefully that they do.

Ms. Echeverria:

You do not have to sign up for us to ping your cell phone. I just want to make that clear, that we are going to ping your cell phone no matter what. We do not track your cell phone—that should also be clear.

Chair Goulding:

Any other . . .?

Assemblymember Osborn:

Thank you, Madam Chair. I was going to ask or just mention, following on Senator Titus's questions, that the hospitals in the area—I think this was one of the successes during the Caldor Fire. You never want to evacuate a hospital, but Barton Memorial did have to evacuate. I think that was done very successfully, but there is a lot that goes into that—taking ambulances out of the area to dedicate them to moving patients, long-term care residents. We have hospitals in Incline Village and a hospital over in Truckee. Can any of you just speak to that a little bit? And then there is also things—hospitals have other risks within them, like MRI machines, things that cannot be powered off or that contain helium or oxygen that are also fire risks. Can you speak to that a little bit?

Chief Drennan:

Yes. One of the lessons learned in Caldor was do not evacuate a hospital—if at all possible. Our experience there was—thankfully, we had an awful lot of advanced notice. We were watching the slow-moving blob walk up Highway 50. So, we had a pretty good handle on what the timing would look like. With that said, it was an incident unto itself to do that. Which speaks to the value of having really solid, commercial level, defensible space, and building material for a hospital, especially here in the Sierras. My thought at the time was that at worst case scenario, we could have sheltered the hospital in place. It was not the best—it was not . . . I wanted to try to do, I did not want to try to park ten engines around the hospital and pray. However, it is a concrete building, it is commercial grade, triple-pane windows, HVAC systems that we can run, [inaudible] down, and we could have kept some of those patients safe.

Your question specifically about what [inaudible] is one of two options, either shelter in place [inaudible]. [The microphone cut out.]

Chair Goulding:

Thank you for your understanding.

Chief Drennan:

No problem. So, you have one of two options—you are either sheltering in place, or you are planning an evacuation. The plan for that evacuation is really an event unto itself within the command structure. The number of resources involved in that when we did an after-action review of the Caldor Fire, that was a—that was a hot topic, because most hospitals work under what is called the HICS System, Hospital ICS, and often that is separate of the ICS system and the command structure with the incident management team that is running that major event. We use that incident management team for single point ordering. We have a good handle on all the resources that are assigned to the incident. And then you have a hospital that is Practice ICS over here grabbing ambulances and resources from over here—and so that was a major concern at the time. It is fraught with complexity. My advice is: try not to.

Ms. Echeverria:

The hospitals are also planning and training together in coordination with public health in Washoe County that occurs through the Inner-Hospital Coordinating Council once a month. That includes partners from across state lines. We also, since Caldor Fire, have done a bi-state evacuation exercise in Incline Village—in Crystal Bay—and we included the hospital as a part of that.

Chair Goulding:

Committee members, any other questions? Go ahead, Senator.

Senator Daly:

Thank you. A couple of things have occurred to me with listening to what you guys were saying, especially maybe how it relates to California, but even just within Nevada. How do you guys handle the incident command? Who—you know, if a fire starts in Douglas County and heads towards California, who is taking charge? And is there a hierarchy command? I know each sheriff is king in their county, if you will, but, for lack of a better word—but I do not know if Highway Patrol can say they were taking over or if there is some type of chain of command that has already been worked out between the agencies. And say, it started here—because you cannot have 18 people in charge. I am just curious if you have got something in place for that.

Chief Sommers:

This is exactly how the Lake Tahoe Regional Chiefs got formed because of these types of scenarios, as well as the Sierra Front. Now those two organizations—it is an all-day class to explain their objectives and strategies. But the short answer is—well, first of all, I do not think I have seen a fire go from Douglas to California because even fire wants to get out of California—so, we see it coming this way. With that being said, the first NIC is going to take charge, and then from there we will go into a unified command. But the first NIC is going to be involved with every strategy, objective, task to put that fire out. As it grows to other landowners, we are going to bring those representatives in, and then collaboratively we are going to make those decisions. But not—the first-in incident commander is going to stay involved, until it goes beyond what we call initial attack—it is into extended attack. Then we are going to come in and we are going to delegate an NIC to come in, and they are going to oversee the entire thing. The Caldor Fire was a perfect example. They called in a national team—if you are a federal team or a state team—they then take the responsibility of that. Then we tear it down a little bit to have liaisons or agency reps that are in contact with that incident commander throughout that incident to make sure all the local objectives are taken care of. Hopefully, that answers your question.

Senator Daly:

Yeah, I think it does on that. I am just—so at some level if it gets bad enough. And for the record, we love our friends in California.

Chief Sommers:

We do. We do. Gotta have some humor once in a while.

Senator Daly:

It is all good. I keep saying there is one Basin—there might be two states, but one Basin. So, when they bring—if they have somebody else come in or whatever, would not you want to have someone that is here that has done it—the local guy—at least have some say? To say, "Sorry, thanks for your advice, but you do not know what you are doing because you have not been here." Any concerns on that? I mean, you always see on the movies, the FBI guys come in and take over everything, and they do not know what the hell they are doing. I think it was *Die Hard*. They said after they crashed the helicopter, "I think we need some new FBI guys."

Chief Drennan:

We definitely need some new FBI guys. The beauty of the ICS system is that it really—it expands and contracts. Incident command, ICS, is incident command structure—it is a nationally recognized system of running these large incidents. It started in California—anyway—and it is now worldwide—not to, you know, but anyway . . . The way that works is, specifically, it will start with the first-in engine company. I mean, honestly, it is the engine captain who arrives first to that fire—that may be small or medium size or really, really big—but that first-in engine captain has incident command. The battalion chief coming in behind him is going to take command as that incident expands, and so on and so forth. I am going to ask for Ryan to run my next fire just because he is better at it. But—and maybe it will leave California—but, when we bring those teams in, we do have what he was describing as agency reps, liaisons. So, those are local folks who have really good on-the-ground knowledge of how fires behave in our local districts, and they are 100 percent a part of that command structure. The short answer to your question is yes, we do have local—not control all of the time, once a big incident management team, Type 1 Team, comes in—but we certainly have influence, and we have a seat at the table, and we are part of that command structure.

Senator Daly:

And then going back to the evacuation—and I know no plan is going to be perfect. Things change on the ground quicker than you can adjust sometimes, especially based on the intensity. If we have done some of the mitigation and hardening, we can slow it down. Like our friend from Douglas County said—time is what we are trying to gain. But on the evacuation—if you say, "All right, we got to get people out of South Lake Tahoe, and we want to send them towards Nevada because the other way is blocked and you cannot get there," because there is nothing wrong with Nevada—I am just saying. Who can make the call—because now you are getting onto Nevada roads, if you need to—if it was bad enough and you are trying to get it done—take people down 50 or down Kingsbury, to block the road at the bottom, so you have all four lanes going one direction. Who makes that call? You got to get DOT to do it? Or can the sheriff take care of it? Obviously, you want to have Caltrans or DOT help, but who has the authority to make that call? Or do you have to wait for a DOT?

Chief Drennan:

I am going to end up passing this quickly to the Sheriff and also to Kelly—but that was actually one of the major lessons learned during the Caldor evacuation. Obviously, I think everybody is pretty aware of that. I like to describe the Caldor evacuation as being wildly successful because of the fact that we had no injuries—nobody was killed. We were able to evacuate the entire South Shore and then operate functionally in that space with a lot of emergency resources. There were a lot of failures with that too on the back end of how we communicated and who we notified and when we notified. That is something that is really built into this evacuation plan. That is really the crux of it—determining who to call and when to call and make sure that they know downstream. These two can speak more specifically to that, so I am going to pass it on.

Sheriff Coverley:

Initially, when it is—in the emergency—when it is the initial emergency and I do [inaudible] I have to do [inaudible] as it [inaudible] or is extended [inaudible] then I am going to need help. Okay? Because I am going to run out of [inaudible] the whole department [inaudible] stop. I got to take care of [inaudible] up in the county. So, that is when the state emergency office—it used to be DEM, Department of Emergency Management—now it is the Office of Emergency Management. That is where we coordinate with them. Then I tell them, "Hey, I need this," and they send it to me. And they [inaudible] from all over the state. For example, [inaudible]. . .

[The microphone cut out.]

Initially, it is me. So, we just do whatever it takes to happen, and that is just how it works—and that is every sheriff in the state.

Senator Daly:

So, you are going to do it—ask for forgiveness—

Sheriff Coverley:

There is no forgiveness—it is an emergency. So, we are making it work.

Senator Daly:

I know. But if somebody wants to—you just say . . .

Ms. Echeverria:

I think another good example would be in the Davis Fire when we needed more law enforcement support, and working with the Nevada Office of Emergency Management we were able to bring in the Guard to help us with that.

But if I could go back to the scenario where fire leaves California—or sending people towards Nevada—and Nevada is, hopefully, tied in with the incident command structure as a liaison. You know, we were in communication with Barton Health prior to their evacuation and we knew it was coming, and we were talking with our partners in California. That is still the plan is to be tied in strategically so that we know it is coming, and we can put our law enforcement partners in place to direct traffic and keep that flow going safely. But I also want to keep in mind that those people have to go somewhere. And so, on our end in Nevada, as a receiving jurisdiction, we will be working on sheltering and mass-care resources, which do not happen very quickly—I mean, quickly enough—but it takes a little bit of time to get those teams spooled up. That communication is crucial so that we have a place for those people to go. I would like to pass it to Sharon with Nevada OEM to add her perspective.

Ms. Luce:

As you heard from the local partners in the room, those decisions are made at the local level through the on-scene command, whether that is a single incident commander or a unified incident commander. To Sheriff Coverley's point, when he is out of the resources in his agency to manage the things that are on scene, those resource requests go to the county—or Office of Emergency Management as that first layer. On something like this in the Tahoe Basin, we have Washoe County, Douglas County, Carson City that are all receiving resource requests for things that they are out of capability/capacity within those local agencies. The State Office of Emergency Management—where we come into play for this—is under *Nevada Revised Statute* 414. We would be obtaining resource requests from those various county Offices of Emergency Management. We support in acquiring and deploying resources through a lot of different things. One, we have emergency support functions and recovery support functions that are made up of state agency representatives. That is where we will have a seat at the table for Nevada Department of Transportation, our Department of Public Safety, the Nevada National Guard that Kelly brought up. Those state agencies will look within their own ability and capability to find the resources that are being requested by the locals that are seeing the things on the ground. If we are not able to source something through state agencies, we have the Nevada Intrastate Mutual Aid System under *Nevada Revised Statute* 414A. We also have state-to-state mutual aid through what is called the Emergency Management Assistance Compact. That is where we are able to ask for resources across different states to get them down to the locals. We are a resource coordination and management agency. We kind of have to do some deconflicting amongst the different counties that are asking for resources and trying to consolidate that and get the appropriate resources down there. We also go under the Governor's ability to declare emergencies and disasters in order to access our disaster relief funds and our emergency assistance funds to order things that we cannot get through mutual aid—that is just making a purchase of some sort—and trying to get those resources, again, down to the local level where they are very much needed. It is a complex system, and that is why it requires all of our communication and coordination across all government levels. We also will assist with the coordination through the state Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster, or the VOAD, to also get resources down to the local level in a timely manner. But those are the avenues that we utilize, and that is where we keep things deconflicted—that expansion and contraction—and staying within our limitations at the state level. We do not become on-scene command in any way, shape, or form. We support the local requests for resources, and we use everything at our disposal to try to get them what they need. Eventually, if it is out of the state's capability and capacity—and depending on the results of a damage assessment—we would coordinate with the federal government through the Federal Emergency Management Agency and see if there is a possibility to get presidential disaster declarations and open up resources and support from the federal level as well—pending the approval of a presidential disaster declaration.

Assemblymember DeLong:

Thank you, Chair. Talk a little bit about the North Lake area. Can you talk about the degree of and the quality of the coordination between, let us say, Tahoe City and Incline Village?

Chief Sommers:

Thank you for the question. Yeah, North Lake Tahoe [inaudible] Fire, bordering on California, much like Douglas [inaudible] very good coordination up there. Matter of fact, one of the steps that I took after I became Fire Chief, I joined Dispatch Center. So, actually dispatched by CAL FIRE [California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection], we are the only out-of-state agency dispatched by CAL FIRE Emergency Command Center. And part [inaudible] was the overall day-to-day operations. With that being said, that Dispatch Center now covers, I believe, 65 to 70 percent of the Basin—for response-wise. Then just two days ago, I signed an agreement with all the other agencies that are in the—around the Basin on that side of the Lake, where we instituted what we call boundary drops. The closest resource is going to go to the incident, whether it is in the State of Nevada or the State of California—and only one resource. We are not going to need to roll two, you know, gigantic fire engines to a bloody nose. If we are close to the bloody nose and it is right on the other side of the California state line, they would also have to come; we have dropped all those requirements. There is no reason for that. That is a waste. We do not need to be doing that. We can go into their district, handle the incident, and vice versa. So that coordination is there—very much so—and it extends all the way down to the fuels. We talked to them with fuels—we helped them coordinate a new fuels program for North Tahoe. We actually contracted with them to go in and take care of their chipping program until they could get the resources in place to take it over—which they have done. We are talking and working together on every level of business—if you will—that you can think of. We are trying to address that.

Ms. Echeverria:

That is also happening in emergency management as well—so, we are planning and training together. We have started a group called the Tahoe Emergency Managers Group, of which California and Nevada [inaudible] all the way up to the state level and down to the local level. We are able to coordinate things like training for avalanche crews, who are educated and trained through our partners in Placer County, as well as Mount Rose. That is just one example of how that is happening, but we have also brought our mass care partners together through that group to make sure that we are coordinating efforts in that respect as well. Placer County has included Washoe County in their evacuation study that they have going on and vice versa. So, literally on every level.

Chair Goulding:

Thank you all very much. Thank you for your flexibility. Thank you for your service to our community and for your thoughtfulness. I hope that this discussion has helped provide information to the community so that they can be assured that you have a functioning plan that will work in the unfortunate instance that we are no doubt having to face at some point. Thank you so much. With that, we will conclude this agenda item, and we will move back now to the top of the agenda—to Agenda Item IV.

AGENDA ITEM VIII—OVERVIEW OF NATIONAL TRENDS IN HOMEOWNER'S INSURANCE AND WILDFIRE RISK

Chair Goulding:

Next, I would like to invite Joe Kolman, who is a Policy Consultant for the Council of State Governments. Is he in the room?

AVH:

He is on Zoom.

Chair Goulding:

Great. Can we get a—

Joe Kolman, Policy Consultant, Council of State Governments West:

Thank you, Madam. Madam Chair, can you see the screen okay?

Chair Goulding:

Okay, there we go. We can see you now. Thank you so much. Thank you for being here, and thank you for your patience. We are looking forward to hearing what is happening at a national perspective on wildfire activities and policies. Thank you.

Mr. Kolman:

Thank you, Madam Chair. I think most of you probably know that as an organization of state legislatures and other organizations across the West. I am also staff for the Wildfire Committee [Wildfires & Disaster Preparedness Committee]. You do have some other members on the Wildfire Committee. Most prominent, of course, is Assemblyman Howard Watts, who is one of our Co-Chairs. The Committee has been looking at wildfire over the last few months and will continue to do so over the next few months and possibly into the next couple of years. The idea being that wildfire is certainly something that no one is dealing with alone. As you probably know, wildfire is a year-round problem. I think there was a fire in Colorado just this week. So, CSG West formed this Committee to tackle some of these issues and help states not feel like they were going at this alone. I am just going to go over a few things in the vein of—all of these things are built together. I think you heard some of this today. There is no silver bullet. Some people might think that one is better than the other, but all things are needing to be considered. (Agenda Item VIII)

The first thing the Committee is looking at is the built environment. You have got home hardening, defensible space, critical infrastructure, and insurance. We are going to talk about insurance in a little bit, but of course, you also have land management. You have got funding for suppression versus prevention, federal and state cooperation—which you heard about a little bit today, workforce development, who is going to go out and do that mitigation, prescribed burning—which is one way to treat some of the land as well. We are also looking at knowledge and technology. How can we capitalize on some new technology to help out with fire detection and also other things–even when you are looking at insurance and mitigating risk.

The Committee is looking at a few different things—having a centralized knowledge repository, tracking of legislative bills, regional collaboration, and empowering leadership. Essentially, giving you, as state Legislators, some knowledge that you need and some context from other states to make decisions that are right for your states. You will have this link in your materials—but this dashboard is something that we update every day. The biggest thing of interest is the wildfire bills tracking. Every day, you can go in and see what new bills are being proposed. I have grouped them into different categories—and wildfire insurance is one of them, along with suppression, mitigation, building codes, technology, and utilities.

Madam Chair, we will get into insurance. Again, not a surprise to any of you that fire is a year-round problem. Probably not a surprise that Nevada has also had a large influx in growth in the Wildland-Urban Interface. You have also had a big increase in fires and acreage burn; so, all of that plays into your insurance. I am going to actually borrow a couple of presentations that have been given to the Wildfire Committee before. Marc Ragin presented to the Wildfire Committee at the annual meeting in Jackson, and he actually studies insurance. The guy knows more about insurance than really anyone ever probably should—but he is also a really good speaker—so I would encourage you as you delve into this—he is a good resource, as are the Institutes for the Griffith Foundation [The Institutes Griffith Foundation].

I think you all know a little bit about insurance. It is a good thing to have. Insurance is a hedge against risk. Fire, though, is unique. The way that Marc would explain it is—with a flood, you know exactly—not exactly, but in essence—you know what the flood is going to affect. The flood spreads out. It affects a certain number of homes. Fire is unique and the embers can travel far and wide, so it can skip over. Also, it is indiscriminate in that while you might do a lot of good work on your house—you might have a metal roof, and you might have moved everything out of the fire zone. You cleared all the trees around your house, but your neighbor did not. Your neighbor has a wood shingle roof—did not clean the gutters. If your neighbor's house burns, your house is probably going to burn too, even though you did all of that stuff. So, when you are coming down to insurance and how insurance companies are going to value that risk, it is not just what you do, it is what your neighbor does too. And when you get into some of these more dense areas, like some of the ones in Hawaii that burned, land management is certainly a big part of fire risk and insurance. But when the homes actually become the fuel, that affects how they are going to insure those homes too. We are seeing that across the West. These dark red areas are places where people did not get their insurance renewed.

Chair Goulding:

I am going to interrupt you for just a minute. We are seeing you, but we are not seeing your slides and those of us at the table have a paper copy.

Mr. Kolman:

Oh no!

Chair Goulding:

But could you share, so that—particularly now that you are getting into some more images, that would be helpful. Thank you.

Mr. Kolman:

That would be helpful, would not it? I do not know why it is not sharing the screen. But if you have it in front of you, I do not need to share the screen. I will just tell you where I am. So, non-renewals—there is a map of the United States—it is orange and dark red. You will see most of the dark red for the non-renewals for 2023. Are we on the right page, Madam Chair?

AVH:

Hi, Mr. Kolman, this is AVH. If you could go ahead and select the green arrow in the middle of the bottom of your screen where it says "share," and then you will go ahead and select your PowerPoint.

Chair Goulding:

Looks like we are making progress there.

Mr. Kolman:

Okay, I am sorry.

Chair Goulding:

Fantastic. There we go. Thank you very much, appreciate that.

Mr. Kolman:

Of course.

Chair Goulding:

Nice work, team.

Mr. Kolman:

So, the higher premiums—you are seeing higher premiums come around all over the country again. And then premium increases—these were in 2023, expected. You can see those up in northern Nevada are some of the highest in the country.

The other thing that I am going to borrow from is Headwaters Economics. They presented to the Wildfire Committee last summer. They did a very recent—this was in the last couple of months—wildfire and insurance. They have looked specifically at options for homeowner coverage. What they did was they went through and they kind of narrowed it down to a few different ways that legislatures basically can look at the different kinds of insurance solutions. Again, there are not really any silver bullets here, but I will go through each of these. But you can see where some of them check some of the boxes, some of them check other boxes when it comes into retaining coverage, reducing premiums, filling in gaps, and incentivizing mitigation of risk. The only thing that checks all the boxes is state regulatory reform—but as Legislators, you know that is not always the easiest thing to do.

Voluntary certification is where you are really just having individuals—usually—and sometimes it can be community, but it is voluntary. They are hardening their homes. They are reducing the fuels around their houses. And then the idea is that insurance companies will give them a break on that. Legislation in this arena often mandates the insurers provide premium discounts—they retain coverage or other benefits, as long as the homeowner did something. There is the Firewise program, like what you heard about before. Some bills establish grant programs, so there might be a source of funding to help out some of these homeowners—so they get to that level of certification. Some of the other legislation that you will see—insurers have to disclose how the fire risk models are used. That is really important—when you get around to someone who does not get their insurance renewed, they want to know why they did not get that, and how do they appeal the risk scores. There is a trend around the states aligning wildfire mitigation strategies with market reforms. That is—the intent is there to stabilize affordability and availability.

Colorado—that sheet of bills that I gave you—I will spare us all and not go through all of those. But Colorado has a risk model assessment that they are using, and it is mandating public disclosure of discounts and appeals processes.

The next one are community-based, catastrophic insurance, and these are super interesting in that—Marc Ragin talked a lot about these at the meeting—but these are sort of self-insurance in some ways. There is not a lot of this happening across the country specific to fire—but think of your homeowners associations or some sort of local government district—you might have a rural fire district. The idea of these is that you get everybody together within whatever district you have or whatever governing institution that you have, and they pay into this. They are basically paying in their premiums to cover the cost of any damage that might happen out of a fire. The idea being—that is how you get everybody to harden their homes and to do metal roofs and to do defensible space and all of those kinds of things. It is where everybody has to buy in, and everybody shares in the risk, and everybody shares in the reward. Again, there are not really ones across the country that are doing this with fire now, but there are some bills out there where they are doing it with emergency responders—just other kinds of things where you have that community-based risk. California has one that they are looking at trying something out to address climate risk—so that might be more severe weather—and could also include fires.

The next one—parametric models. Parametric models, essentially they estimate the probability of the damaging event, and then they offer an automatic payout. So, you are basically setting the payout before the event happens. That way the insurance companies can have a degree of stability and knowing what they are supposed to pay out when a fire happens. Again, the regulatory frameworks for these are looking at ensuring transparency, consumer protection, actuarial soundness—what triggers the payouts? Something to consider here—again, people are saying this is not a substitute for traditional property or other types of insurance. This is really something to add on or something that if you cannot get a typical kind of insurance for, say, something specific like fire—this might be a way to go. New York is trying something like this. This was an enacted bill that New York had that defines and regulates parametric insurance for weather-related events.

A FAIR state plan—the Insurance Commissioner talked a little bit about this. Nevada appears to be one of the few states that does not have a FAIR plan. The basic idea of these are the insurance of last resort. When people cannot get anything else, the FAIR State Plan comes into being when there is a fire and there are claims. They are usually not state agencies, but they are the nonprofits that are supported by member insurers. In some states, the insurance companies pay into a fund that goes and supports the FAIR Plan. They pay claims; they maintain liquidity during catastrophic events—but again these are the plans of last resort. New Mexico has one of these. They recently have a bill proposed that would set a cap of $750,000 for property insured that is damaged by a wildfire.

The last one is sort of a conglomeration of all of the things that Legislators can do. A lot of them run through your state insurance commissioner. So, as you know, state insurance commissioners play a pretty central role in wildlife insurance. They approve risk models, they oversee premiums, and they ensure consumer protection. The Insurance Commissioner talked about—a little bit about AB 376, your regulatory sandbox. It does appear that no one is playing in the sandbox yet, according to him, but there are clearly a lot of ways out there that you could get into it. There are bills out there that mandate insurance commissioners to develop or update regulations to ensure things like—mitigation efforts are reflected in insurance pricing and availability. Insurance commissioners are often empowered to enforce consumer rights, so they can require wildfire risk scores, appeal processes—wildfire things like mitigation standards, data sharing, and grant programs for resilience can also come out of insurance commissioners. There is a lot of room in there for the Legislature to play around and come up with ways. Of course, all of those things are in your wheelhouse and subject to all the things that legislatures go through. With that, Madam Chair, I went through pretty quick, but happy to answer any questions.

Chair Goulding:

Thank you. I appreciate that. That was—particularly at the end of a long meeting, and we still have one more presentation. So, it is not at the end—but thank you for giving us this framework for responding to some of the information that we have been hearing today. Members, are there any questions? Okay. Thank you so much for your presentation. That concludes that agenda item.

AGENDA ITEM IX—REVIEW OF ASSEMBLY BILL 376 AND ASSEMBLY BILL 437 OF THE 2025 SESSION AND ISSUES RELATED TO PROPERTY INSURANCE IN THE LAKE TAHOE BASIN

[This agenda item was taken out of order.]

Chair Goulding:

Go ahead when you are ready.

Commissioner Gaines, Previously Identified:

Thank you, Chair. Thank you, Committee members. Thank you for having me today. Today I am going to discuss Assembly Bill 376 and some other current developments that we are working on at the Division of Insurance as it relates to the wildfire conversation. During the 2025 Session, the Legislature passed AB 376, which did three major things as it relates to homeowners insurance. The first is it allows property and casualty insurers who write homeowners insurance policies to exclude the peril of wildfire from a standard homeowner's policy. Insurers must still submit a product filing to the Division of Insurance to receive approval before they can begin excluding wildfire from homeowners' policies. I am happy to report that, to date, no insurer has done so—no policy in Nevada has had the wildfire coverage excluded from the homeowners. If anybody is aware of that or has received notice from a carrier, I urge them to contact the Division of Insurance because we want to know—because, again, nobody has actually filed seeking to do that.

The second item that AB 376 did was it provided a path for insurance carriers to submit a base-rate increase under a certain percentage, which in the statute, it is—3 percent is the standard base. And what it lets them do is they can implement that without prior approval from the Division of Insurance. Typically, we are a prior approval state; before any rate can be implemented, it has to be filed and approved through the Division. The idea behind it was to allow carriers to more quickly adjust their rates based on the risk that they are seeing in the state. However, we are working on a regulation that is—we have a public hearing coming up on that soon—where it required the Division to set the threshold. After much deliberation—going back and forth and speaking with industry—we are looking at around a 5 percent base that we plan to implement through the regulation. Of course, that could change as we move forward. There will be more to come on that.

Finally, it created a regulatory sandbox that allows insurers to innovate, and how they will offer coverage for wildfire risk. The sandbox allows them to not meet certain requirements of Nevada statute as it relates to homeowners insurance for a period of four years. Now, I do want to stress that that does not mean that we will allow the insurers to do whatever they want. There are still guardrails. They must file their sandbox for approval through the Division first. If we see anything that we think is going to be harmful to consumers, we would not allow it. To date, unfortunately, no insurer has filed anything. I am very disappointed in the industry because—while I was not here as this bill was being presented, as I am pretty new to Nevada—my understanding is they lobbied very hard for the sandbox. So, to me, it seems that they should be coming to the table, but, so far, they have not.

One thing I did want to stress is, again, nobody has filed to remove it. My conversations with the industry—they have all indicated at this point in time there is no appetite for them to do so. The industry is fully aware that currently there is no alternative. So, if they start carving out and excluding the wildfire coverage, consumers have nowhere to go to get that—under the current regulatory scheme and in just the market.

I am happy to say that we have received our first filing, though, for an insurer seeking to introduce a wildfire deductible. That is a fairly easy way for insurers to have somewhat of relief as it relates to covering the wildfire risk. So, what they would do is—and this is pretty standard in the Midwest and then on the East Coast—there are wind and hail deductibles that apply to the homeowner's policy that are in excess of—the base deductible may be $500,000. It is usually not a percentage; it is a set dollar amount. But then the wind/hail deductible—because those are such common occurrences in the Midwest and on the southern coast—you have the hurricanes, things of that nature—it is a higher deductible. It is set as a percentage of the overall value of the home. I am originally from Texas. I had a 2½ percent wind and hail deductible when I had my house there. So, if we suffered a hail loss, then I had to pay 2 percent of the overall value of my home before the insurance kicked in. What we are seeing with this particular carrier—they are looking to do something similar with the wildfire. It is not mandatory though; in this case, consumers would still be able to choose what their deductible is. It is a good way for those consumers that have the ability to take on more of the risk for them to do so—and in return, they typically see lower premiums. I view this as something good. It is not a solution to all the problems, but it is one piece of the puzzle. This is going to have to be a multipronged solution to be able to really get to the wildfire risk. So, I am happy to see that. We do have some carriers that have expressed interest in possibly doing something in the sandbox, but they have not brought us anything solid—again, we are very disappointed to hear that. I continue outreach on a weekly basis—trying to get a hold of my contacts that I have dealt with over the years to somewhat give them a shaming as to why they have not brought anything to us and then to try to really urge them to think outside of the box. What I have heard is, "We do not want to be first."

The Department, in collaboration with the Department of Business . . . The Division—I am sorry—in collaboration with the Department of Business and Industry, we are working on something that we—a concept, because it is not fully baked yet. I do have to leave details out, but it is something that we are working on that could be implemented at the state level but not requiring any state obligations. It would not be funded by state money. It would still utilize an insurance company to do the administration, but it is a way of getting—kind of going around the reinsurers, which right now—that is one of the major drivers of homeowners insurance cost—because insurance companies—they have a finite amount of resources, so they buy their own insurance. If there is a catastrophic event, then—above a certain threshold—the reinsurance kicks in. Because the risk of wildfire has gone up so much over the last 10 to 15 years, the cost of reinsurance has increased significantly. What we are looking at is trying to find a way to get around that restriction. There will be more to come on it very soon. I hate being vague, but some of the things that we are talking about, if we put it out into the public, it could risk some of the people we are wanting to come to the table. Insurance companies do not like talking in front of each other. They are constantly scared that they are going to disclose some kind of trade secret. So, whenever something is a public conversation, they shy away from it. That is my motivation behind not revealing too much information. But we are bringing in the fire chiefs—we have been working with the Western Fire Chiefs Association. We are looking at a multipronged approach to this because we do have to bring all stakeholders in, and mitigation is going to be an important part of what we are looking at.

To make anything work there has to be some increased mitigation. Insurers when they are looking at a particular property, they are not only looking at that single property, especially in a region like Lake Tahoe, because even though that one person may have taken all the mitigation steps that they need to, if their neighbor is located relatively close to them and they have not taken any mitigation steps, the risk of the wildfire has not really been reduced. I know I have been asked several times—do insurers give discounts for mitigation? On a single residence, typically no. Because, again, if you are located in a neighborhood and none of your neighbors have done anything, your overall risk has not gone down. We do have a number of insurers, though, that have filed for discounts for any community that has been designated as Firewise-compliant. We have—I believe it is seven carriers that offer that discount. So that is where—and I know everybody in this room is fully aware of it—the importance of mitigation—because that is going to be one of the major drivers of maintaining availability of insurance within the Tahoe area.

I know it is difficult right now for some people to get insurance. We do have a number of carriers that are still writing in this area. Now I am not going to lie and say that it is going to be the most cost effective or it is going to be cheap, because you are going to pay for it—because you do pay based on your risk, and that is what the insurers are looking for. However, there are still options, it just may take a little bit longer to find it. I highly stress anybody that is having issues with finding a policy to contact an independent broker or agent. They will have the ability to run that risk through multiple insurance companies. Sometimes it may take quite a bit of work on the broker's end. I am experiencing it right now myself. I am in the process of buying a house and my agent ran the new property through 12 different insurance companies and all but 1 rejected it. And it just happened to be the company that I am using for my renter's insurance. I think that is really the only reason why they wrote it is because they already have my business, and they have my auto business as well. I do understand, you know, from a personal level, what a challenge it is at this point to try to get coverage.

One of the things we are looking at—because insurers are relying on a lot of data that we believe, at the Division, is inaccurate—the wildfire mapping. I was provided a copy of a map from a producer, and I do not know which company produced it—but it was showing the entirety of the Las Vegas Strip as having the highest wildfire risk that there is. I cannot figure that one out because there are no trees. There is not—there is no grass, there is nothing; it is concrete. So, that is something we are looking at, at the Division level as well. It is imperative that we get accurate mapping, because if insurers are relying on faulty data to make their decisions—that is just—that is consumer harm right there. And that is really the reason the Division exists—is to keep that from happening.

One thing I do like to put out there is, we at the Division have some authority to help people if they are finding themselves in a situation where they have been non-renewed, but the reason they are getting from the insurance company is a little vague. Insurers cannot just say, "We are non-renewing you due to wildfire risk." They must give you details as to what is that based on. And then, if you ask them, "Did you come and inspect my property in person?" and they tell you no—request one. What we are hearing is, again and again, insurers are relying on drones, especially in the Tahoe area. Drones do not produce the most accurate information. You cannot—there are certain things that you just cannot see on a drone. If they are taking pictures of it, and that is what they relied on, they need to get out there and do a physical inspection. We—I have a number of people that have filed complaints with my office that we have been able to push the insurer out there to do a physical inspection—and after that, they reverse the decision to non-renew. We can be a resource for that. I do urge that if you are talking to your constituents and they are telling you about these problems, remind them—contact the Division of Insurance. I may not be able to help 100 percent of the time, but we have a pretty good track record. That concludes my presentation. I am happy to take questions.

Chair Goulding:

Thank you, Commissioner. Members, any questions?

Senator Titus:

First, thank you for being here. I live over in Smith Valley and my insurance was canceled. And it was—they used a drone, and they saw my big old sycamore trees, and they did not like those at all. Apparently, I am in a forested area. But thank you for being there, so we have a pathway for our constituents. I represent this area, and it has been a nightmare for folks—and having that clarity and having you here—I appreciate that. Thank you.

Commissioner Gaines:

Thank you.

Chair Goulding:

Is there a question there? Well, our colleague has four, so he is making up for it. Why do not you hit us up with two?

Assemblymember DeLong:

That is fine—just tell me how I can do it. Thank you very much for the presentation—very helpful. I just happen to represent Incline Village and then over the hill into the Reno area in Washoe County. First question, what sort of percentage is that one insurer looking at with regard to—being applied to the various policies that they are trying to get passed by you?

Commissioner Gaines:

Are you talking about the—to be able to do the base rate increase?

Assemblymember DeLong:

Yes.

Commissioner Gaines:

Yes. So, within the statute, it states that they can currently—because we are still working on the regulation—it is currently capped at 3 percent. So, anything 3 percent or lower would just go through. Where we are looking at setting the cap is right at 5 percent. Because I have—I want to stress that it is base rate only—which are a pretty simple filing. Anything that includes modeling, additional rating factors—anything above base rate—they still have to file; they cannot use this.

Assemblymember DeLong:

Is 5 percent consistent with the number that they were looking at?

Commissioner Gaines:

That is what we are seeing in our filings. When we receive a straight base rate filing, they are averaging somewhere between 5 to—4 to 6 percent. That is where we came up with the 5 number—just meet in the middle.

Assemblymember DeLong:

All right. And then you expressed—my second question. You had expressed some dismay that none of the insurers had really been coming forward to look at the exemptions from providing fire coverage or the deductible. Have you had any discussions with their trade association about encouraging them to?

Commissioner Gaines:

Yes, I have. I have had multiple conversations with NAMIC [National Association of Mutual Insurance Companies], APCIA [American Property Casualty Insurance Association]. Actually, I know the NAMIC and APCIA representatives here, because they were the same representatives I dealt with in Washington State.

Assemblymember DeLong:

Great, thanks. Let me know when I can ask my others, Chair. Thank you very much.

Chair Goulding:

Assemblymember Watts.

Assemblymember Watts:

Thank you, Chair. Thanks for the presentation. I think one of the things that I had discussed with your office—obviously, not with you, but with your office—during the session was that this was the preferred solution or concept brought forward by the industry, and we worked to make sure that there were guardrails in place for you to vet that. It was the opportunity for the industry to put up or shut up—and so far, it does not seem like they put very much up. So, the question that I did have—you mentioned that obviously risk is at a community level. I will just say, I mean, I think there might be value in rewarding individuals for taking action because once you create that incentive, you might be able to get adoption at a larger community scale. But, you said that some insurers have filed to provide discounts for communities that have certification for hardening. I guess the question is—since they are bringing that forward, there is no requirement for them to make those filings. And so, where do things stand in terms of insurers accounting for either property owners or communities' mitigation efforts? Is it something that they have to do, or is it something that has more variability in it?

Commissioner Gaines:

It is variable based on the insurer. There is nothing currently in law that requires them to give discounts for the mitigation efforts, whether that is at a single parcel or for the community.

Assemblymember Watts:

Thank you. Follow up, Chair? Thank you. Yes, currently, so thank you. The other question I had was on the—you mentioned, again, just kind of the information flow as well, in terms of maps, things that you have to check to see—does this make sense? So, the high level question is, do you feel currently that you have enough information and expertise within your office to—first of all, are you getting enough information from insurers on how they are looking at this risk to see if it is being properly considered and then reflected in what they are offering and the prices? And then, do you also feel you have enough of an information pipeline about mitigation efforts that are happening to weigh those factors, as the regulator tasked with giving the thumbs up or thumbs down?

Commissioner Gaines:

That is a great question, and that is something we are working on. As I mentioned, we are working with the fire chiefs and trying to get some data directly from them. They are the boots on the ground; they know which communities have done all of the mitigation efforts. What I would like to do is gather that data from them and then compare it to what we are seeing in the wildfire models that the insurers are using, because I want to see where the discrepancies lie.

Chair Goulding:

Assemblymember Osborn.

Assemblymember Osborn:

Thank you, Chair. First, I want to apologize for missing the start of the meeting. I was in the Nevada Association of Counties meeting. So, apologies for that conflict.

Thank you very much for the presentation. And if you already covered this at the beginning, I will catch you offline. But, I wanted to do a deeper dive or just ask if the Division has done a deeper dive into FAIR Plans. I think 33 states have them already, and curious to know what the Division has examined or not yet in that regard.

Commissioner Gaines:

The Division has, from my understanding, at least since I have taken on and then the knowledge that I have from my staff who have been around for a while was the FAIR Plan was not something that has been seriously looked at at the Division level. I came from a state that had a FAIR Plan—we had one in Washington. There we were very lucky. There were very few people that were on the FAIR Plan. It was only about 400 homes that utilized the FAIR Plan, but it was starting to grow. What I have seen in my tenure, both in the industry and in the regulatory realm is with a FAIR Plan you always run the risk of that becoming essentially part of the admitted market—and insurers are very likely to not write something because there is that backstop. So, they just push it to the FAIR Plan. Given Nevada's unique population and where it is focused and concentrated, I do not know if the FAIR Plan is truly viable here—because if you have a very low number of people who go on it, then you run into your administrative costs are exceeding any benefit that you are getting off of it. But then also, what we do not want to happen, is we do not want this entire region then to have the admitted market leave and force those people onto the FAIR Plan because typically FAIR Plan policies do not cover—they are very bare bones. That is what we had in Washington—it only covered wildfire; but Washington was unique in that there was no carve out for wildfire on the homeowners policy. So, if you lost all of your coverage that—and then you were—when you went to the FAIR Plan, the only thing you could get covered for was wildfire—and your water loss, your liability, your contents coverage, you had none of that. So, there is a balance there. There are good aspects of the FAIR Plan, but then there are pitfalls that go along with it.

Assemblymember Osborn:

Follow up, Madam Chair. Along those lines, you mentioned in your presentation that there were still a number of companies that were writing policies in the area. Did you have a specific number or a list of vendors?

Commissioner Gaines:

I do not have that with me today. However, I can provide that.

Assemblymember Osborn:

That would be wonderful. Thank you.

Assemblymember DeLong:

Thank you, Chair. I want to follow up to some degree on one of my colleague's questions and has to do with the mapping and the modeling. Do you have the authority or ability to approve the maps or models used by the insurers in Nevada—so that we would have consistency on that evaluation of risk?

Commissioner Gaines:

Yes, we do receive those. We get more information than what is publicly available. We are able to dig into their modeling a little deeper. However, when it comes to approval, my authority to disapprove the model is somewhat limited. We can put parameters around it, which we have. One of the things we do not allow is if an insurer is using the model, they cannot use the model showing the high wildfire risk as the sole reason to not write the policy or to non-renew it. They must have other legitimate reasons to do that.

Assemblymember DeLong:

As a follow up on that. Would you see—if you were able to have that authority or that clear authority—would you see that having a direct effect on participation in the market by the insurers?

Commissioner Gaines:

If there is nothing—if we were to disapprove—because the thing is insurers use really only two companies. If both of those models—we did not allow them—then you would see insurers pulling back. They would need some other options.

Assemblymember DeLong:

All right, and then my final question. At what scale would the mitigation be applied? Is it—are you talking on a block, an HOA, five city blocks, the whole town?

Commissioner Gaines:

Good question. When it comes to the Firewise Program, it can be down to a block. It could be a larger neighborhood. There is variation there that they look at and allow for. So, if you have a couple of blocks that they do all the mitigation, everybody is on—actually, I think it is like 80 percent is what Firewise looks at—so as long as 80 percent of the residents have done the mitigation, they can get the certification, and then at that point could be eligible for the discount offered by the carriers. Again, like I said, there is like seven carriers that do that right now. I anticipate if more communities start reaching that, we would start seeing more carriers entering the market. The fact is insurance companies do want to write policies—it is their whole business model. I mean, that is how they make money, but it is based also on risk. They only want to write the risk that they feel is not going to end up costing them in the long run.

Assemblymember DeLong:

A quick follow up to that? Thank you. Do you find it better that the market drive the application of that discount? Or do you feel it would be appropriate for the state to have the authority to impose something on the carriers so that that discount gets recognized?

Commissioner Gaines:

Good question. I see possibly the need. Typically, I prefer the market to drive it, because it is that competition is what drives all insurance companies to do things. However, in certain cases—and this may be one of those unique cases—that you—my fear with having a regulation or a statute saying you must do this is if it sets what that percentage of discount needs to be, because some insurers might actually be willing to offer more.

Assemblymember DeLong:

The reason for the question is to follow up on my colleague about the insurance companies wanted this opportunity under the statute from last session—they have not come forward. Do they need a kick in the—? Thank you very much.

Chair Goulding:

I have a question of my own, and I want to build on that. You mentioned Firewise communities. My understanding is that there is not a standard mitigation activity requirement—a mitigation requirement to achieve a Firewise recognition. Would it be—in an effort to standardize risk assessment, Firewise does not seem to be a good standard for that because it is not a standard. Would it be helpful to have standardized—some definition or some methodology that standardized risk assessment, in the same way that an agreement on risk maps would be. Rather than having a black box where every insurance carrier—insurance company—can make up their own methodology. Would it be reasonable to work towards some sort of standardized risk assessment methodology?

Commissioner Gaines:

Great question. Yes, it would. Having something set in statute that these are the standards. Within the insurance industry, most carriers look to the Institute of Business Home Safety or IBHS. They are considered the gold standard for wildfire mitigation. They most recently completed in Mendocino, California—they built out an entire community that meets IBHS standards. This is the first community of its kind in the country. They go where—Firewise is kind of that first step; and there is a few standards within Firewise, but then they are a little squishy too—because they will look at things that may be—they are different than some of the other . . . IBHS has very defined standards, and through their research they have shown that IBHS Certified home standards slow the progression of fire. And in some cases, those communities can actually keep the fire from spreading, and they are much less likely to suffer any loss as well. So, it not only saves the community, but it saves the community downwind from them as well. I know mitigation cost is a concern. As they were building out this community in California, it was shown it increased the cost to implement all these mitigation standards only added about $3,000 per home on average. So, from a new construction perspective, that is the time to do the mitigation and have the standards in place. That is when it is going to be the cheapest. The cost is when you are retrofitting existing neighborhoods. That is when it becomes very expensive.

Chair Goulding:

Thank you. That was very helpful. Committee members, any other questions? [There were none.] Thank you so much. I appreciate your presentation and your answers to our questions. I think that will close this agenda item.

AGENDA ITEM X—PRESENTATION ON LOCAL STRATEGIES FOR MITIGATING WILDFIRE-DRIVEN INSURANCE COSTS

Chair Goulding:

Now I believe we are on to our last presentation, though certainly not the least. I am very excited about your presentation. Our last presentation for the day will be given to us by Amy Berry, the CEO of the Tahoe Fund. Please go ahead when you are ready.

Amy Berry, Chief Executive Officer, Tahoe Fund:

I am honored to be here. I have to say, I have been before this Committee before, but I have never done a 5:30 on a Friday presentation. We are setting new ground together here—which is great. I cannot imagine how you all are doing right now. The amount of information has literally been a fire hose for you since we met at nine o'clock this morning. I will try to fast forward through my slides pretty quickly. Does somebody have them? Oh, they are over here. I can do it.

I just want to say I am here on behalf of a whole group that coordinated something we call the Fire Smart Community Pilots. I would like to call out that Greg Erfani, our local champion in Tyrolian Village, is here, and our other champion in Glenbrook, Sydney Morrow, is here as well. And none of this work happens without homeowners in the community who really help make it happen.

The Tahoe Fund, very briefly, is a nonprofit. Our whole focus is to use the power of philanthropy to improve the Lake Tahoe environment for all to enjoy. What does that mean? It means helping get more environmental improvement projects done by raising private funds. We have raised about $35 million in private funding over the last 15 years to help secure over $200 million of public funds for a portfolio of over 220 projects. We focus on things that are going to reduce the threat of catastrophic wildfire, improve the health of the Lake, and make it easier for people to get around, enjoy, and take care of Tahoe. But, in 2019, our Board made a decision that our number one priority had to be reducing the threat of catastrophic wildfire because if we burn down this forest, nothing else really matters. We will not have a clear lake. We will not have a transportation problem because no one will be coming. Not to mention—there will not be recreation—and really the potential loss of life and property in the Basin. I do not have to go through the whole history—you heard it all this morning—but we did some very, very bad things to the forest back in the day to feed the Virginia City silver mines, and we are still seeing the repercussions of that now. You have heard about it all day.

As a private entity, we felt like we could play a slightly different role than all of our public agency partners to help support their work. And really, the focus is, how do we get more done more quickly? How do we increase the pace and scale of fixing our forests to prevent that catastrophic wildfire? We started something we call the Smartest Forest Fund. It is basically a philanthropic venture capital fund. We decided we did not want to fund big projects. What we wanted to do was provide initial seed funding to a lot of new technologies, innovations, and pilot projects that we thought could unlock a lot of what we term "logjams" in the system, to help our agency partners do more and to start to de-risk some of that—the new ideas.

We were at the sawmill earlier today together; we helped make that partnership come together. We heard about the need for workforce. We have been giving scholarships to every student in the LTCC Forestry Program [Lake Tahoe Community College's Forestry Education and Job Placement Program] since it started. We are helping stand up a new biomass-to-wood facility at the Northstar Community Services District. They are replacing oil with wood because they have all this excess wood—they would rather burn it. It is cheaper than oil.

Then I think you might have heard about Vibrant Planet. That is a technology company that we were able to do the entire community wildfire protection plan online. It usually takes years to do that. They can do it now in a couple of months, and now we have this beautiful map. You can go online, it is open to the public and you can see the high-risk areas, you can see the priority areas, and you can see the projects and what order they are selected in to help us reduce the threat.

Fire Aside—I think you heard about that as well today—we were so happy to partner with the Tahoe Community Foundation to provide that to every fire district in the Basin. Rather than getting a defensible space inspection where the inspector walks up, writes down on a piece of paper and says, "Here is what you need to do." Now, there is this really cool iPad technology. So, all the inspectors are out with the iPads, the system pulls up; it is all standardized. They answer all the questions. They are able to take photos with the iPads; it uploads, and then every homeowner gets a report of their home—and they can see what is in violation, what do they need to fix. And then when they fix it, they can take a photo, and reupload it.

We have been funding all of these things and then we had an auspicious coffee with Clyde's Coffee. Has anyone been to Clyde's? Yes, with Chris Anthony, who was, at the time, the Deputy Chief of CAL FIRE. He said, "I love absolutely everything that you are doing in the public lands—and I think the neighborhoods are going to burn down." And so, we started to talk to Chris about—how could we take all of this new technology that we have been working with and try to figure out how to help in the neighborhoods. One of the really big issues in the neighborhoods is that there is too much to do, and there is not enough resources to do at all. And so, we decided to start these pilots with the idea of bringing all this new technology to bear—where we can increase the pace and scale, where we can be smarter because we have the modeling and technology that tells us where to go to try to, as Forest said, identify the mitigations that matter the most. We cannot do everything. So, if there is a whole list of things to do, we are going to use technology to tell us—here is where you start, here is where you go next.

A huge part of that is this new technology called BurnBot. Have you guys heard of BurnBot? Hopefully, this video will play for you. No! Is it going to play? Oh, maybe not. Okay. Is it going to play? What you should be able to see is a masticating robot. Usually masticators have a person that sits on top, and they control it. One of the challenges with that is you cannot put them on steep slopes because it is top heavy. So this company called BurnBot took a traditional masticator, and they took the top off and instead you can see the gentleman standing next to it. He is controlling it with a remote control—side by side. What this allows us to do is all the mastication work in an incredibly efficient way. So, we partnered with North Lake Tahoe Fire a couple of years ago—with the TFFT, with TRPA, with some other financial partners—and we did a 22-acre test with North Lake Tahoe. We said, "All right. Let us see what these things look like in the forest." They were able to do 22 acres in three days. A hand crew would take two to three weeks, and we could not put the hand crew on the same steep slopes that we put the BurnBot. So, together with all this technology, we were like, "How do we bring this to the neighborhoods? How do we bring BurnBots to the neighborhoods? How do we bring Fire Aside? How do we bring Land Tender? How do we look at all of this?" We had coffee. The Caldor Fire came raging into the Basin, and we were like, "We got to figure out the neighborhood piece." We decided to start at Incline Village, because that is where we had done the first BurnBot pilot. And Chief Sommers and Chief Powning have just done an incredible job of community work around the whole Incline area. And so, we went to our friends at Land Tender, and we said, "All right, we want to do this pilot in Incline. Where should we start?" And Land Tender told us, "Here are the five highest priority neighborhoods. Here are the homes you should go knock on doors and see if you can bring BurnBot." Then when we sat down with the Fire Chiefs and with Land Tender and we mapped it all out to say, "Where should we go in Incline?" We all [inaudible] insurance at the table at the same time. We had RockRose Risk at the table, and they said, "Guys, it would be really great if you could pick an HOA, because that would be a lot easier for everybody." And we were like, "Great, that makes a ton of sense." It just so happens, one of the highest priority areas was Tyrolian Village—about 60 acres, 228 homes in an HOA. And Gregory Erfani, who is sitting here, had literally just typed into Google, "How do you get money to take down dead trees in your neighborhood?" because he was the HOA President, and he knew there was a big fire risk, and he was successful in getting that money—and thus the Fire Smart Community Pilots were born.

So, we brought a whole bunch of technologies together really to answer the question—how do we identify the mitigations that matter the most? How do we reduce the threat of catastrophic wildfire? And we looked at it from the public lands outside of the neighborhood—the work that North Lake Tahoe had done on public lands and state lands. We looked at the work that NV Energy had done on the utility corridors outside of the neighborhood. Then we brought the BurnBot in, and they did up to five feet of every home in that community. We also had hand-thinning crews from North Tahoe Fire and some dead tree folks. We literally mitigated fire from outside right to the front door of everyone's homes. And now we are in the home-hardening phase, which is—how do we get people to do the home hardening?

North Lake Tahoe did 228 defensible space inspections with Fire Aside software. We sent everybody their reports—like 25 percent of the people actually opened them. I think we are maybe up to 50 percent—Greg can shout if we are getting closer to that. But this is where we are really seeing like we got a little bit stuck in the neighborhoods, because home hardening is hard, just like it says. It is supposed to harden your home against a fire, but the psychological impact of getting this report and finding out that there is something you need to do to your home is really scary to people. They would actually rather not open their report, so they do not know that they do not know what they are supposed to do. They are really worried that insurance is going to see this report. Two things we keep telling them: one, insurance already knows—they have their own modeling; and two, if you are underinsured or you cannot get insurance right now, then it is more important than ever that you harden your home to fire. Because the last thing you want to do is lose your home in a wildfire when you do not have the insurance to cover rebuilding it. We built an entire model step one through ten—we have a little playbook here. I will skip through all the slides, given how late it is. But, basically we thought through—how can we build this model so it works not just to be scaled throughout Tahoe, but how can it be scaled throughout the entire western U.S.? There is a lot of different step-by-step guidelines of how you do it. Sort of model the neighborhood, see what the risk looks like, come and do the mitigation work, do the DSIs [defensible space inspections], remodel, see how you have reduced your risk over time.

What has been the most exciting, I think, through the whole thing is—there is an amazing scientist at Vanderbilt University called Dr. Mahmoud, and he is doing urban conflagration modeling. Does everyone know that term? So, when the L.A.—it got really popular last year during the L.A. Fire. When Southern California burned down, Altadena—they lost over 8,000 structures. It was not a wall of fire that hit the neighborhood—it was a wildfire on public lands in extreme wind that embers were cast from the wildlands into a home. One home lit on fire and guess what? It lit the neighbor's home on fire—it lit the neighbor's home—it lit the neighbor's home. So, Dr. Mahmoud has been looking at this conflagration modeling to understand which homes are going to light on fire and which ones are not. He really looks at it from a disease standpoint. You know how certain people are more at risk to get sick and certain people are super-spreaders; they are going to get everyone else sick. Remember, during COVID, this was like all the talk. He has basically taken that same model to urban conflagration and wildfire. His models show that there are certain homes in the neighborhood that are more vulnerable, and there are certain homes that are super-spreaders—they are going to light everybody else on fire. He uses a series of data metrics to do this. He looks at topography, geography, long-term weather trends, wind—he models it over the worst-case scenario. So, what is the worst wind conditions? What is the wind direction most likely going to be in the worst-case wind? He uploads all this data, but he had never done it before using Vibrant Planet data—using Fire Aside data. So, for the first time ever—because of this pilot—his model is now informed with a lot of other data points. What is really interesting with the DSI data is—not only does Fire Aside put it in the Cloud so neighbors can see it, now we can pull all of that aggregated data out, feed it into his model—so we can get super granular.

This is just to show you what his map looks like. Please do not try to figure out where the blue and reds are—it is not real—but eventually in the next week or so, he is going to give us a map of that neighborhood, and we are going to know who the super-spreaders are and who are the most vulnerable. Then we were very fortunate to get a $50,000 grant from NV Energy Foundation. So, we will be able to go to those homeowners that light up red and say, "Hey—" I am going to make Greg do this—"Hey, your house is probably going to burn everyone else's houses down. We really need you to fix your roof, or fix your deck, or move your firewood away, or put your vent screening up." And to incentivize them to do that work, we will provide a match for the funds that they put into it. It sort of turns everything we have done in the past upside down—like fire-adapted communities are great and fire safe communities—but it is sort of predicated on this concept that everyone has to do the work. What Dr. Mahmoud's model is telling us—not everyone has to do the work; the highest priority homes have to do the work. And so, we are thinking through how do we bring this modeling to bear—where we identify the highest priority and then we get the funding to take care of the highest priority. That, in essence, is the plan.

You can see, these are pictures from the Fire Aside software. These are what some of the violations look like—some are super easy to solve. Roofs are the most expensive. Luckily, Greg has been leaning on all his homeowners to get their roofs fixed—so I think we are good on roofs.

At the end of the day, we never built this pilot to get people their insurance back, because we just do not know—you have heard all day how you just do not know what is going to happen with insurance. But what we are hoping to do is better inform the models that insurers are using based on the pilot. What we are learning right now—what we have seen is that there is a disconnect between the mitigations that are happening at very local levels and what insurance is looking at.

It was interesting—I know Assemblymember Goulding was there at the Fire Adapted [Nevada Summit] network event on Tuesday, and there was an insurance panel, and they had a modeling company there that feeds the insurance models. And somebody said, "How do you calculate home hardening mitigations to risk?" And she said, "Well there is just no way to say what percentage your risk goes down if you install a vent." And like half the audience at the same time said, "Why not?" And then, they were sort of saying, "Well, are you counting local mitigations?" There was a lot of word soup and at the end she said, "Just do your mitigations." We do want people to do their mitigations, but we want the insurance company to ultimately see that. I know Forest brought it up, but there is a data commons effort that is underway right now that some folks are trying to put together. Which is basically—collect all the local mitigations and create a database that the insurance agencies—insurance companies can then—their models can pull from. But that is really where we are is this disconnect between the work people are doing that is really going to make their homes safer and what the insurance is picking up. We are really fortunate that RockRose Risk—which is an insurance mediary company—was with us for the whole ride, because in the middle of this they were able to help the largest HOA in Incline Village, McCloud, get their insurance premium down 33 percent—basically by using all the data from the Tyrolian pilot. We are not saying everyone is going to get their insurance down 33 percent, but it was a really encouraging—like, okay, we are headed in the right direction. Then, of course, there is maintenance.

Just to let you know, we now have five pilots. Each pilot has very serendipitously become like—there is a focus for each one. So, Tyrolian Village is very much about figuring this modeling out with Dr. Mahmoud. We did a smaller one in Incline Pines. We learned a lot about aesthetics. There is a broad spectrum between fire-safe community and an aesthetically-pleasing community. And if you are really into fire safe, you go out and you look at a community that has been cleared and you are like, "This is gorgeous—you are not going to burn down." And then neighbors who are like, "What happened to my favorite bush?" So, figuring that out.

Sydney has been leading the charge in Glenbrook. It is just amazing what she is done. She got 39 homeowners—within a larger HOA, but private owners—to all huddle funds together to do—I think over 500 dead trees they took down in their neighborhood. We did the same modeling around Glenbrook. They brought the BurnBot in—not into the actual homes, but to help build kind of a halo around—a fire break between Glenbrook and the public lands.

We are just embarking with our partners in South Lake Tahoe. There is no HOA there; there is no community leader. We have not found Greg or Sydney in South Lake yet, in Gardner Mountain. But the models all tell us Gardner Mountain is the highest priority community in South Lake. The fire department is like, "Let us start there." And now we have to figure out—how do you engage a community when there is not an HOA in place?

Then Carnelian Woods is a condominium complex on the California side and North Lake. They have done everything. They have done the public lands. They have done the defensible space. They have done the home hardening—and their poor HOA President has gotten a Ph.D. in insurance just to get them insured there. We are going to really dig in with Carnelian Woods to understand why is it so hard to get insurance? How can we really start to put the playbook in place that we can hand everybody else and say, "Here is how you do it."

I already went over all of this, but home hardening is hard. From a policy standpoint, we really need to figure out how to get the funding available to get people to do this work. It is really a social benefit like—you can hear some people say, "Well, it is not my house, they should do it." But if your neighbor does not do it, it is your house. We need to figure that out, and we have a real lack of local contractors in wildfire mitigation work. It is a huge economic development opportunity for the State of Nevada. If we can figure out how to fund home hardening, it is going to create an entire new sector of our really strong contractor industry.

Then we talked about insurance. I think the one thing that has not been said today is that we really need insurance at the table to be a partner. As you heard a lot, they need to insure homes. If they stop insuring everybody, they have no more revenue—they go out of business. So they have to figure out how to write risk. If we can get them at the table to help fund a lot of this mitigation work, we know reducing fuels in the public lands and then reducing fuels and home hardening in the neighborhoods will significantly change what happens when a fire comes in.

We have models. There is—Vibrant Planet actually ran the whole scenario for Altadena in a post-fire analysis for Congress. I think you have heard the numbers—like $40 billion worth of property loss. Their estimates show if they had invested $9 million in forest-thinning treatments around that community, they probably could have saved more than half of that $20 billion in loss. We were talking about this earlier today, but Ben Franklin said, "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure." It turns out he was actually talking about forest health work back in the day—but it could not be more true. If we can just figure out how to get the funding in place to prevent catastrophic wildfire, it will save us so much more on the back end in terms of the lives lost, property lost, ecological impacts . . . I will get off my soapbox now because it is really 5:45—which I cannot believe—so, I will take any questions. Thanks.

Chair Goulding:

Thank you so much. I know it is really late in the day, and I appreciate you being here and with us all day long, because I think that the information that you just shared with us really summed up everything that we have been hearing all day—really wrapped it all up with a bow.

Ms. Berry:

Oh good.

Chair Goulding:

Thank you very much.

Ms. Berry:

My pleasure.

Chair Goulding:

Questions? Go ahead.

Assemblymember DeLong:

Is it possible to get a copy of that document you referenced?

Ms. Berry:

Yeah, absolutely. I would love to share these with you. This is our very last one we have in print, so I am holding on to it. But—yes, we have it available on our website, and one of our missions is as soon as we are done—I should have said this—we are sort of building the airplane and flying it at the same time right now. We did not want to gatekeep the pilots until they were done because we are probably another year out until we will say we are done. But once we are done, then we are going to put a whole scaling strategy in place to make this available to as many communities as we can—not just in Tahoe and Reno, but really around the whole West.

Assemblymember DeLong:

Thank you.

Chair Goulding:

I guess that is the advantage of being really late.

Ms. Berry:

Thank you.

Chair Goulding:

Everybody is questioned out.

Ms. Berry:

Well, thank you all on behalf of everyone. Hopefully, what you took away today is that there is a large group of incredibly committed professionals all working on this. So thanks for hanging in there all day to hear so much about it.

Chair Goulding:

Thank you. That concludes our last presentation.

AGENDA ITEM XI—PUBLIC COMMENT

We have five people signed up now for public comment. I am going to just give this to you in order of the five of you—Sydney, Laura, Elizabeth, Greg, and Doug. There are so few of you in the room still that you probably do not need last names.

Sydney Morrow, Resident, Nevada:

Amy already introduced me—sort of, kind of—I am a Nevada resident. I have lived up here at the Lake for about 11 years, and I am going to use my two minutes very quickly. I waited until the end because I wanted to hear what was said to you.

Chair Goulding:

Will you also spell your name, please? Each of you please remember to state your name, spell it for the record. Thank you.

Ms. Morrow:

I want to reiterate certain acronyms to you today as you walk out of here. The first one is the Tahoe Fire and Fuels Team. Please keep this group funded. I do not know where their money comes from, but they are very important to this community. They hold Vibrant Planet right now, the software that I have gone painstakingly through my community to use, and that license is going to end in August. Could you guys find some money for them to keep it in there, because it is really important to me as a community mitigator to be able to use that software to look at my community. The other thing you have heard all day today is EIP. That is the database that TRPA uses to collect our work data on. You guys can use that with insurance companies and tell them—if the data is in there—every acre that I clear is put into that EIP program. Forest Service work is in there. The mitigation work is already being collected in that EIP file through TRPA. It is public information. So, you guys can have them use it. I am going to go back to AB 376—ouch guys, that one really hurt me as a resident up here at the Lake. But you get to go back into session in less than a year and you can amend some of the problems that are creating horrible anxiety in my community. I appreciate the sandbox—nobody wants to play in it. Okay? But you can make at least the insurance companies look at those of us that are killing ourselves to clear up our community and just please stop canceling my policies in my community. You ask about Firewise. I was the first community on the Nevada side to have Firewise. I have had it for five years. They do not care. I do not know who these seven insurance companies are, but they just keep canceling our policies even though we have been Firewise for five years. (Agenda Item XI A)

Chair Goulding:

Thank you so much. That is your two minutes. Please submit your comment—the rest of your comments in writing though. And Laura, please.

Laura Koscki:

Benjamin, from the State Farm Insurance Company, he insures in California, and I referred him to a lot of locals, and they were really appreciative of him. His number is 1 (818) 442-9200. Basically, I just want to say, the fire was intentional, on the Caldor Fire, and they left slash piles all the way up I-50 to widen the road. They took our land, and then they offered us land in a flood zone. The gentleman that was accused was exonerated, him and his son, for having target shooted in this campground. We do not want surveillance by the state—we want surveillance of the state. We need to know where every penny is going. Kevin Kylie allocated $400 million, and I would like to know from the top to the bottom, crewmen, where this money is going. The Rothschild zone, the utility companies, and so, they are in cahoots with PG&E [Pacific Gas and Electric Company]. And PG&E has seven felonies, and they were working with Newsom, and he signed everybody's rights off on the Paradise Fire, and he signed the MOU to burn us out. And so, I just want to emphasize this. It was all for the purpose of 15-minute cities. So, the military comes in, they bring in the 15-minute cities, which is the 5G towers, to substantiate this. It takes at least 60 minutes to have these 5G towers to extinguish themselves. No fireman can put them out. The same with the EVs. If the batteries get particles with water on them, then it takes 60 minutes for a Tesla to extinguish itself. So, you should not have any EV batteries on the Lake at all. Everybody across the country is upset with these data centers. And I want to say with the loggers, they should know better—they are dropping the big trees into the creeks, and it is poisoning our waterways. Thank you.

Ms. Lernhardt, previously identified:

Thank you for all that presentation. It was really mind-boggling. It was really an—even how after I stayed at two days at the Firewise, this is really comprehensive. And it is very clear after hearing the Insurance Commissioner in Nevada that AB 376 has far-reaching implications. It affects every Nevadan, not just those in high wildfire-risk zones. The notion that Clark County residents should not help shoulder the costs of fire-hardening measures like undergrounding Nevada Energy lines around Lake Tahoe is simply a moot point. Wildfire does not come with—respect county lines and neither do the insurance and utility challenges that come with it. We saw what happened in California, PG&E filed for bankruptcy in 2019, after they caused the Camp Fire and numerous previous fires. Prevention is not optional; it is essential to avoid catastrophic failures and financial burdens to everyone. As TRPA Chair, Michelle Williams, who also serves as a key role overseeing public utilities in Nevada, she has major influence in effect changes in the infrastructure as well as in the utilities. And we have heard several times today, you can do everything right on your property, but you are still vulnerable if your neighbor does not do it. At Tahoe, 90 percent of our land is publicly owned, meaning that our true neighbors include public entities like the Forest Service, BLM, and state agencies. Without their voluntary commitment and aggressive fuel reduction and vegetation management, residents will remain at an unacceptable high risk of losing their home. So let us go move beyond a division—let us mitigate wildfire risk, whether through utility upgrades or landscape-level fuel reduction. It is a shared responsibility across Nevada—protecting our communities, homes, and wildlife requires all stakeholders.
Thank you.

Chair Goulding:

Thank you for sharing your comments. Greg Erfani and then Doug Flaherty.

Greg Erfani, President, Tyrolian Village:

I am humbled because a lot of people today talked about our pilot program. Our pilot program was just like a small brainchild of Nick Bartone, Stephanie Lundstrom, and myself. And we just came up with this idea, and it just exploded. We are now invested $500,000 in 67 acres, making us a Firewise, fire safe community. But now I am going to come and ask you guys for a favor. I believe it is important to reemphasize what Commissioner Gaines stated—that when it comes to insurance, we need a multipronged approach. One critical distinction that must be addressed is that homeowners' associations are regulated to commercial insurance policies, which are deregulated in the State of Nevada. And then in 2011, an amendment was made to the law that single family attached homes would be looked at the same way that a stacked unit was—a stacked condo—so, somebody's ceiling is somebody's floor. This was great for 15 years. It functioned fine. However, today, the landscape has changed dramatically. A typical 1,000-square-foot house in our community now—attached—that once cost $1,800 per year to insure is now $6,000 to insure. Whereas my 1,200 square foot house is only $1,400 a year to insure. It shows you that there is a 75 percent increase simply because it is attached. Under the current structure, homeowners are required to maintain two separate policies—the HOA policy for the outside and the internal walls-in policy. As the Commissioner noted, insurance pricing is based on fiscal—financial exposure by forcing HOAs to carry a single master carrier, costs have increased while coverage has often decreased, and showed homeowners previously had better coverage and lower costs before the association mandated a master policy. I will submit my writing for you because it has been a long day. But thank you very much for the time.

Chair Goulding:

Thank you very much.

Mr. Flaherty, previously identified:

Speaking quickly—why would we ask all of our neighbors and everyone else in our neighborhood to harden our homes? It is going to take about 50 years. I think it is a great idea. In fact, I am on the McCloud Board of Directors, who got the 30 percent savings that we spoke of earlier. But why would I—we ask our neighbors to do this, and we do not ask TRPA to do their part and not make it harder for us to escape wildfires by increasing height, density, and coverage: 65 foot tall buildings, 100 percent coverage, up and down Tahoe Boulevard in Incline Village. Please read my lawsuit that is part of this—I submitted it as part of this process today. It is a really good read—really good education. Also, I promised last meeting that I would supply the Tahoe Blue Event Center VMT [vehicle miles traveled] information. We calculated the Tahoe Blue Event Center information—VMT calculation—at 3,241,564 VMT. How does TRPA justify zero VMT? It is in your packets. There is also a letter of complaint from four conservation groups, including the Sierra Club, in your packet. It is dated February 24 to 25. Please read it. Sixteen and a half months of not enforcing the permit conditions. They sat there—they let Tahoe Blue Event Center have 16½ months of passage without enforcing their conditions. Please read it.

Chair Goulding:

Thank you for your comments. I understand that we have one caller on the line. AVH, can you help us with the caller?

AVH:

Thank you, Chair. If you would like to provide public comment, please press *9 now to take your place in the queue. Chair, our public lines are open and working, however, we have no callers choosing to provide public comment.

Chair Goulding:

Thank you so much, and thank you for your support all day. Thank you to all the staff for your support today. It was a long day. We really appreciate it. That concludes our meeting. Our next meeting of the TRPA Oversight Committee will be on April 10th up here in this very room, and until then, thank you very much, everybody.

The following written comments were submitted for the record:

- Chris Anthony (Agenda Item XI B)
- North Tahoe Preservation Alliance (Agenda Item XI C)
- Pamela Tsigdinos (Agenda Item XI D)
- Roxanna Dunn (Agenda Item XI E)
- Kathie Julian (Agenda Item XI F)
- Debbie Nichols (Agenda Item XI G)
- Marianne Mika (Agenda Item XI H)
- Chris King (Agenda Item XI I)

AGENDA ITEM XII—ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business to come before the Committee, the meeting was adjourned at 5:59 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

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Terese Martinez
Research Policy Assistant

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Julianne King
Senior Policy Analyst

APPROVED BY:

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Assemblymember Heather Goulding, Chair

Date: ____________________________________

MEETING MATERIALS

AGENDA ITEM	PRESENTER/ENTITY	DESCRIPTION
Agenda Item II A-1	Doug Flaherty, Resident, Incline Village	Written Public Comment
Agenda Item II A-2	Doug Flaherty, Resident, Incline Village	Written Public Comment
Agenda Item II A-3	Doug Flaherty, Resident, Incline Village	Written Public Comment
Agenda Item II B-1	Ellie Waller, Resident, Douglas County	Written Public Comment
Agenda Item II B-2	Ellie Waller, Resident, Douglas County	Written Public Comment
Agenda Item II B-3	Ellie Waller, Resident, Douglas County	Written Public Comment
Agenda Item II B-4	Ellie Waller, Resident, Douglas County	Written Public Comment
Agenda Item II C	Steve Teshara, Owner/Principal, Sustainable Community Advocates	Written Public Comment
Agenda Item II D	Scott Tieche, Resident, Washoe County	Written Public Comment
Agenda Item II E	Robert Byren, Resident, Hidden Woods	Written Public Comment
Agenda Item II F	Jessica Grime, Tahoe Chamber and Resident, Douglas County	Written Public Comment
Agenda Item II G	Dana Tibbitts	Written Public Comment
Agenda Item IV	Kimberly Caringer, Chief Partnerships Officer/Deputy Executive Director, Tahoe Regional Planning Agency (TRPA) Kat McIntyre, Ph.D., Division Manager, Environmental Improvement Program, TRPA	Microsoft PowerPoint Presentation

AGENDA ITEM	PRESENTER/ENTITY	DESCRIPTION
Agenda Item V	Annabelle Monti, Program Manager, Tahoe Fire and Fuels Team (TFFT) Rosalie Herrera, Deputy Forest Supervisor, Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit, United States Forest Service (USFS) Victor Lyon, Vegetation Management Staff Officer, Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit, USFS Ryan Shane, Acting State Forester Firewarden , Division of Forestry, Department of Conservation and Natural Resources	Microsoft PowerPoint Presentation
Agenda Item VI	Forest Schafer, Deputy Director, California Wildfire & Forest Resilience Task Force	Microsoft PowerPoint Presentation
Agenda Item VIII	Joe Kolman, Policy Consultant, Council of State Governments West	Microsoft PowerPoint Presentation
Agenda Item X	Amy Berry, Chief Executive Officer, Tahoe Fund	Microsoft PowerPoint Presentation
Agenda Item XI A	Sydney Morrow	Written Public Comment
Agenda Item XI B	Chris Anthony	Written Public Comment
Agenda Item XI C	North Tahoe Preservation Alliance	Written Public Comment
Agenda Item XI D	Pamela Tsigdinos	Written Public Comment
Agenda Item XI E	Roxanna Dunn	Written Public Comment
Agenda Item XI F	Kathie Julian	Written Public Comment
Agenda Item XI G	Debbie Nichols	Written Public Comment
Agenda Item XI H	Marianne Mika	Written Public Comment
Agenda Item XI I	Chris King	Written Public Comment

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