



News Release

South Tahoe Public Utility District
1275 Meadow Crest Drive,
South Lake Tahoe CA 96150

Contact: Shelly Thomsen
sthomsen@stpubd.us
530-543-6208

Fire and Flood Impact Recycled Water Facility

South Lake Tahoe, CA (August 3, 2021) – On Saturday, July 17 the Tamarack Fire experienced explosive growth and burned over the ridge toward Markleeville and the South Tahoe Public Utility District’s recycled water facilities just south of Woodfords. Buck McLelland, a Pump Station Operator for the District and a Woodfords resident, recognized the threat to District facilities and immediately responded by evaluating the location of the fire. McLelland contacted fire personnel to bring in a 20 man strike team. McLelland worked with the strike team to carve a line around the District’s shop facilities and wet down surrounding areas.

When the flames forced the strike team to evacuate, the results of their hard work remained. The next day District staff returned to find the forest decimated all around the shop facilities and Harvey Place Reservoir, where South Lake Tahoe’s recycled water is stored, but the shop was unharmed.

“We are incredibly grateful for Buck going above and beyond the call of duty to protect District facilities, while his own home was also threatened by the Tamarack fire,” said John Thiel, General Manager. “His quick response and the effective work by firefighting personnel protected District facilities and saved our community millions in potential damage. Sadly, over 600 acres of District property was burned out by the fire.”

Two weeks later, a natural disaster once again threatened the District’s recycled water facility, this time in the form of flash flooding. On Friday, July 30 torrential rain caused massive mud slides on the District’s property, damaging recycled water infrastructure. The Diamond Ditch which transports recycled water from Harvey Place Reservoir to surrounding ranchers was choked with rock, silt and burned vegetation.

“Our recycled water system relies on Diamond Ditch to convey water to ranchers,” said Thiel. “Over 1.25 miles of the Diamond Ditch clogged, forcing us to stop releasing recycled water from Harvey Place Reservoir.”

Wastewater districts in the Tahoe basin are required to export treated wastewater out of the basin pursuant to state and federal law. As such, the District exports South Tahoe’s recycled water 26 miles to Alpine County where it is stored in Harvey Place Reservoir before being released to surrounding ranchers for irrigation during the summer months.

The District is working with local contractors to excavate the debris and restore flows. Until then, Harvey Place Reservoir will continue to fill with recycled water.



Pump Operator Buck McLelland and Water Reuse Lead Jason Glaze assess Tamarack Fire damage surrounding Harvey Place Reservoir.



Fire break that protected District facilities during the Tamarack Fire



Mud slide into Diamond Ditch caused by flash floods after the Tamarack Fire.



Rock, silt and burned vegetation clog 1.25 miles of Diamond Ditch after flash flooding.

###