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Lassen County Times News

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Study Session Scheduled on Eagle Lake Water Crisis

Oct. 19, 2010 — Lassen County, California, District 1 Supervisor Bob Pyle wants to separate fact from opinion regarding the low water levels at Eagle Lake and see what solutions may be available.

The Lassen County Board of Supervisors scheduled a study session at 1:30 p.m. Tuesday, Nov. 9 at Jensen Hall to discuss the matter.

Pyle said he recently attended a meeting held in Portola discussing the water issues in the Feather River drainage, and some of that information may apply to Lassen County as well.

For example, Pyle said the experts reported 400,000 acre-feet of water — 15 percent — was lost to Lake Oroville during an average year due to dense vegetation in the Feather River watershed.

He said over the years the number of trees and shrubs in that watershed have increased from 11 or 12 per acre to about 140 today.

“With all the vegetation using this water, the thick canopy holding the snow — it doesn’t even get to the ground (because) a lot of it evaporates on the limbs,” Pyle said. “A lot of the water isn’t even making it to the river or getting down the river and making it to Oroville. It’s the same with the Pitt River, the Sacramento River, Lake Shasta, Eagle Lake, the Pine Creek watershed ... The vegetation is becoming so thick it’s taking up a large percentage of the water ... ”

According to Pyle, excessive vegetation is affecting water systems all across the state on both sides of the Sierra.

Pyle said a number of experts are expected to discuss vegetation, timber and brush, water use, evaporation, intake of water into the plants and released into the atmosphere and cloud seeding.

“One of my speakers has data he’s going to try to put together to prove — not just making statements — that cloud seeding of the Lake Almanor Basin is taking the water that should be coming over the hill to the Eagle Lake Basin,” Pyle said.

Proposed speakers include Michael Jackson from the Quincy Library Group, a representative from the U.S. Forest Service, an expert working to get a grant to study Pine Creek and David Lyle, who will talk about the Integrated Water Management Plan for Lassen County.

District 5 Supervisor Jack Hanson said the discussion should include the other watershed basins in Lassen County.

“We’ve been talking about this for years,” said District 4 Supervisor Brian Dahle, “and the public’s just starting to catch on.”

Dahle said he was pleased the city of Susanville also has been discussing the issue.

“As far as cloud seeding, you can’t just say it’s going on,” Pyle said. “You have to have facts and proof. We assume the storms coming over the Almanor Basin send storms over the Eagle Lake Basin. We can assume that. We can have a perception of that, but we don’t know it for a fact. We don’t need accusations — we need facts. We need data. I’m trying to go from more perception to more facts.”

Pyle said Lassen County is in the fourth year of a drought, and that’s part of it, but he suspects there may be more to the issue. He noted the Silver Lake area had more than average snowfall this year, but the water did not make it down Pine Creek to Eagle Lake.

Dahle said the Pitt River in his district feeds Shasta Lake, which is within a few feet of being full, “so something’s going on the way we’re in a drought and everyone around us is getting moisture.”

(Note: No one mentioned PG&E and other Weather Modification Programs in California.)