

DONNER GROUP TAGGED WITH WATER VIOLATION

Association cited for shoring up embankment

By Greyson Howard

Sierra Sun

The Donner Lake Property Owners' Association received a water quality violation for a project trying to prevent erosion on Donner Lake.

The association placed rocks along the shore of their beach, near the southwest corner of Donner Lake, in an attempt to reduce shoreline erosion, but didn't follow regulations meant to prevent sediment and pollution discharge into the lake.

"Last fall they placed along the Donner Lake shoreline rocks of varying sizes over about 400 feet," said Scott Ferguson, senior water resource control engineer with the Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board. "We'd been up to inspect the site and sent a notice of violation on August 4."

Gardner Combs, president of the Donner Lake Property Owners' Association, said the work was meant to reduce erosion along their beach.

"We want to be good citizens and this was done as a preventative measure," Combs said.

And Ferguson said such projects are a good thing, provided that they are done right.

"It's not that we don't permit such projects but it's important that it's done properly so it doesn't cause discharge," Ferguson said.

"They run the risk of discharging into the lake and also if not properly constructed it will not stabilize the embankment." He said the association should have submitted for a permit from the water quality agency, allowing them to study the project design and construction plans.

"We believe it was an appropriate measure but procedurally we may have failed in not including [The Lahontan Regional Quality Control Board] initially," Combs said.

Erosion forces have increased recently as lake levels have risen and wakeboarding boats create larger waves, Combs said.

The property owner's association has responded to questions raised in the notice of violation issued by the agency, Combs said.

"We won't do any work until such a time as we reach an understanding with [the water quality control board]," Combs said.

Because the water board is coordinating with multiple agencies on the infraction — the California Department of Fish and Game, California State Lands Commission, the Army Corps of Engineers, and the Town of Truckee — no enforcement actions have been decided on yet, Ferguson said.

Ferguson said he hopes to make some decisions within the next two to four weeks on enforcement, which could involve a fine and corrective actions or both.

ABOUT THE ASSOCIATION

The Donner Lake Property Owners' Association is a not-for-profit association with 700 members and the beach, said Gardner Combs, president of the association.

"The foremost responsibility of our association is our membership and stewardship of Donner Lake. We've been proactive for decades on Donner Lake," Combs said.

The association banned in-the-water fueling for boats at the beach, sponsored studies on fuel additive's effects on the lake, opposed Caltrans sand storage above Donner Lake, and lobbied for the bike path and drainage work on Donner Pass Road, Combs said.

"We'd like to be as proactive about protecting Donner Lake as on Lake Tahoe," Combs said.