



# Friends of Lake Tahoe

P.O. Box 1464

Tahoe City, CA 96145

[www.friendsoflaketahoe.org](http://www.friendsoflaketahoe.org)

[info@friendsoflaketahoe.org](mailto:info@friendsoflaketahoe.org) FB: Friends of Lake Tahoe

June 13, 2011

## The Politics of Air Basins and County Lines: The Lake Tahoe Basin versus Cabin Creek

Placer County's Biomass Project Manager, Brett Storey, has presented as a major reason for locating a Biomass Power Plant in the Lake Tahoe Basin (LTB) the fact that the LTB is in attainment with federal air quality standards. The rest of Placer County (Mountain Counties Air Basin), particularly due to development around Roseville and Auburn, is in non-attainment. Cabin Creek, the local biomass collection, processing, and storage facility just south of Truckee, is located in the Mountain Counties Basin section of Placer County. The logic follows, therefore, that it would be easier to site a plant in the LTB than outside the LTB in Placer County.

This narrow logic assumes, however, that Cabin Creek (the alternative plant site under review) must be in the Mountain Counties Air Basin because it is in the Placer County Air Pollution Control District's jurisdiction. In reality, a further examination of precisely where Cabin Creek sits in relation to Truckee reveals a **closer** connection to the Eastern Nevada County Air Basin which is just across the line that separates Placer County from Nevada County.

### Current Status of Attainment of Air Quality Standards

There are three levels ambient air quality standards: Federal, under the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA); State, under the California Air Resources Board (CARB); and air quality thresholds in the LTB under the TRPA. The LTB is in attainment with the EPA, but is in non-attainment for Ozone with CARB. The pending redesignation for the LTB is "non-attainment-transitional," which means it is close to attainment. The rest of Placer County is in non-attainment with the EPA and the CARB. Truckee (The Eastern Nevada County Air Basin), however, **is** in attainment of **all** federal and state standards.

### Cabin Creek Belongs in Which Air Basin?

The actual site (once known as the dump / landfill) up Cabin Creek road off Highway 89 is located about one mile from the Placer County / Nevada County line. Nevada County is similar in shape to Placer County, elongated east/west from the Sacramento Valley to the Nevada State line. The air quality for both Placer and Nevada Counties west of the Sierra crest (Donner Summit) is quite different from the rural high country to the east of the Sierra crest.

CARB and the EPA recognize Nevada County as bifurcated into two distinct air basins with Truckee as the center of the Eastern Nevada County Air Basin. The Western Nevada County Air Basin is also part of Placer's Mountain Counties Air Basin, and is designated non-attainment by the EPA.

This partitioning of Nevada County's Air Basin into eastern and western air basins was based on the usual factors for evaluating air basins: geography and meteorology, location of emission sources, transportation corridors, metropolitan areas, existing nonattainment boundaries, and political jurisdictions.

Placer County is not divided into two sections east and west of the summit because two air basins already exist - the LTB and the rest of the Placer County. The only area of Placer County east of the Sierra summit not in the LTB is the Truckee River watershed to the Nevada County line and the Northstar/Martis Valley area to the Nevada County line.

Where is the Cabin Creek facility? It is next to the Nevada County line, in the Truckee River watershed, and within a mile of Truckee. Cabin Creek is, in reality, part of Eastern Nevada County Air Basin based on the standard factors used to determine boundaries. That Cabin Creek is located in Placer County on the border of the Nevada County line is simply the result of a political jurisdiction – not the fact that it is east of the Sierra Crest, along the Truckee River canyon, nearly adjacent to the town of Truckee, and a few minutes from Interstate 80.

To classify Cabin Creek as part of the Eastern Nevada County Air Basin for EPA air quality purposes is simply a matter of requesting this adjustment with all the evidence supporting such a request. Then Cabin Creek would be in the appropriate air basin that is at a higher level of attainment than the LTB Air Basin.

It is for this reason, we believe, that Tom Christofk, Placer County's Air Pollution Control Office, made it clear in an interview in September of 2010 with the *Sierra Sun* that obtaining permits for a Cabin Creek site could be arranged. (Mathew Renda, *Sierra Sun*, September 16, 2010)

For more information, please see: <http://www.arb.ca.gov/ei/maps/statemap/abmap.htm>