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Fish kill to resume

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Spraying of Meiss Lake and the Upper Truckee River's headwaters will resume next week in a project to eradicate brook trout and make way for stocking of the threatened Lahontan cutthroat trout, which once thrived in the Lake Tahoe Basin.

Officials from California's Fish and Game Department said Thursday that spraying with the fish poison rotenone likely will be necessary both this year and next year to be sure all the brook trout are out of the waters. Once cleared of brooks, Meiss Lake and four to six miles of the river headwaters will be stocked with 200 to 300 Lahontan cutthroats in an effort to build a self-sustaining population.

Fish and Game biologists met Thursday with officials from the U.S. Forest Service and Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board to go over details of the project, which stirred up a great deal of local controversy and bureaucratic in-fighting last year.

The agencies are attempting to better coordinate the project this time around to avoid the name-calling and political turf battles that broke out as a result of last year's spraying.

In addition, sampling more detailed than tests done last year will be conducted to be sure that neither the rotenone nor the petroleum products used in the chemical mixture pollute water and wells outside the project

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area. Rotenone breaks down naturally a few days after spraying, but the breakdown will be enhanced with potassium permanganate, Fish and Game chemist Brian Finlayson said.

Christmas Valley residents last year expressed concern that their drinking water wells could be contaminated by the chemicals. Finlayson said the poison did not migrate beyond the treatment area. Christmas Valley wells will be sampled again this year following the spraying.

At the meeting, rancher Elliot Joses, who runs about 500 head of cows and calves on a Meiss grazing allotment, expressed fear that four of his cows found dead in the area last year and four others that have been miss-

ing may have been poisoned by rotenone.

Joses said his veterinarian told him a cow could be poisoned by the chemical if it drank a sufficient quantity of water treated with it. Fisheries manager Pat O'Brien said Fish and Game has not seen evidence that cattle are vulnerable to rotenone poisoning, but the rancher was urged to have his vet contact the department to determine whether more study is warranted.

Autopsies could not be done on the dead cattle because the corpses were too decomposed by the time they were found, Joses said.

Spraying will be done just south of the El Dorado-Alpine County line in what is known as the Meiss country, at the southern tip of the Lake Tahoe Basin.

Spraying will be done only by boat or by hand this year. The Fish and Game Department's

use of a helicopter in last year's spraying came as a shock to Forest Service biologists, one of the factors that led to the ill will among the government agencies.

About 50 gallons were sprayed last year, and a similar amount probably will be used again next week, Fish and Game biologist Jim Ryan said.

Unlike last year's live recovery and transplantation of about 2,200 brook trout into Showers and Dardanelles lakes, there will be no live recovery attempt this year, because few live fish are expected to be living in the waters.

Fish and Game biologists said the brook trout must be eradicated because Lahontan cutthroats do not compete well with them. Fish barriers on the river at the county line are designed to prevent brooks from migrating upstream and infiltrating the cutthroat stocking

area.

The planting is part of a federally required species recovery plan for the trout, which has been on the threatened list since 1975.

The Lahontan cutthroats used to be abundant in the Truckee, Carson and Walker river basins. Throughout their historical eastern California and Northern Nevada range, their habitat included 334,000 acres of lakes and more than 3,600 miles of streams.

Today, the trout are down to about 1,300 acres of lake habitat. Commercial harvesting, competition from non-native game species, and dams on spawning streams led to the population crash during this century.

The federal Endangered Species Act requires fisheries managers to carry out species recovery plans for plants and animals vulnerable to extinction.