

# Millions of dollars at stake to improve Lake Tahoe

By Kathryn Reed

“This was really an important day for Lake Tahoe,” Joanne Marchetta said after Wednesday’s Senate committee hearing regarding the reauthorization of the Lake Tahoe Restoration Act.

As executive director of the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency, Marchetta was one of three people from Lake Tahoe at the hearing in Washington. The others were Julie Regan with TRPA and Patrick Wright, executive director of the California Tahoe Conservancy.

Wright, with input from the TRPA folks, addressed the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works, which is chaired by Sen. Barbara Boxer, D-Calif.



Joanne  
Marchetta

[Click here to read his testimony.](#)

“What we are trying to do is raise the profile of Tahoe to stand up there among all other watershed restoration projects,” Marchetta told *Lake Tahoe News* in a phone interview from Washington. “It’s all based on building state, federal, local and private partnerships. We made that point. We have

strong partnerships in Tahoe and we are going to build on that. We can show results.”

The lake’s other senators – Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif., Harry Reid, D-Nev., and John Ensign, R-Nev. – all spoke in favor of the bill that would bring \$415 million to the lake over eight years for invasive species, lake clarity, fuels reduction and erosion control projects.

“Another way to think about this is it is in fact a jobs bill,” Marchetta said. “Our community in Tahoe is suffering from the recession like the rest of the nation. This money means we can infuse dollars back into the local economy, to put people back to work. These are jobs for the construction and restoration folks, people who want to work on road projects, engineers and designers.”

Lake Tahoe was one of five watersheds in the country asking the committee for its blessing during the nearly three-hour hearing.

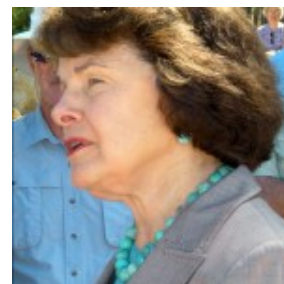
None of the other regions had the show of force that Lake Tahoe did on Wednesday.

“All of the questions were about accountability. We are already out ahead of the pack on accountability and we will only strengthen those programs,” Marchetta said. “We hope to leverage more monitoring money out of this authorization.”

Having 10 years worth of science to show the senators seemed to go a long way. The first Lake Tahoe Restoration Act was passed in 2000 after then-President Bill Clinton in 1997 launched what is now the annual Lake Tahoe Environmental Summit.

Feinstein told her colleagues how in 1997 the clarity of Lake Tahoe was to a depth of 64 feet, and it’s at nearly 70 feet now. In 1968, it was 102 feet.

She rattled off numbers like the 300 projects that were completed in the last decade with the \$1.4 billion public-private partnership at the lake, the 739 acres of wetlands that have been restored, the acres of fuel reduction and habitat restoration, and the efforts to reduce fine sediment from reaching the lake.



Dianne  
Feinstein

“Much work has been done, but much work lies ahead,” Feinstein told the panel.

Just like when she spoke at last summer’s summit, Feinstein reiterated the need to continue thinning the forest to avoid another catastrophic fire like the 2007 Angora Fire, and putting money toward the potentially devastating quagga mussels and other invasive species.

“We have 10 years of science that tells us exactly where our highest priority projects are. That bodes well for convincing people Tahoe is the right place to spend money,” Marchetta said.

Ensign expressed satisfaction that projects have not been based on personal wish lists, but instead on the science.

“Lake Tahoe is a national treasure and it needs national attention,” he said.

Other people testifying on Wednesday were Peter Silva, assistant administrator for water with the EPA; Harris

Sherman, undersecretary for Natural Resource and Environment; David Dicks, with Puget Sound Partnership; Pete Grannis with New York Department of Environmental Conservation; Debrah Marriott with Lower Columbia River Estuary Partnership; David Naftzger with the Council of Great Lakes Governors; John Tauzel with New York Farm Bureau; and David Ullrich of Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiatives.

Invasive species is a threat to all of the bodies of water. The threat of wildfire, especially in relation to water quality, set Lake Tahoe apart. The other entities also don't have the extensive private-public partnership like Tahoe does.

The committee will vote on the bill. Assuming it passes, it goes to the full House. The House authorizes expenditures, so it may mean more lobbying in Washington by Lake Tahoe officials to convince lawmakers to spend the money. Funds aren't likely to be allocated until fiscal year 2012.

"We think we have a really good shot to get this bill passed," Regan said. "We have strong bipartisan support. Our clarity is showing a more stabilizing trend. That is a really good story to tell."