

Economy woven into annual Tahoe environmental summit

By Kathryn Reed

INCLINE VILLAGE – No documents to sign. No grand announcement of buckets of money coming to Lake Tahoe. No new threat to the lake.

Tuesday's annual environmental summit was more of an update on what is going on than anything else. The economy was a last-minute add as a topic, which was embraced by some of the speakers.



Hundreds gather for the 14th annual environmental summit Aug. 17 at Sand Harbor.

Photos/Kathryn Reed

David Hayes, Department of Interior deputy secretary, talked about the importance recreation has on the U.S. economy. It accounts for 6.5 million jobs, generates \$49 billion annually in tax revenue, and \$289 billion in retail sales.

“It’s an important industry. It’s a way to bring economic

development to rural areas," Hayes said.

Recreation was evident on this bluebird day, as beach-goers frolicked along the shore and in the water at Sand Harbor. The historic Thunderbird woody sat offshore during the summit.

Sen. John Ensign, R-Nev., sported a bandage on his right arm – a mountain bike misadventure along the Tahoe Rim Trail during his multi-day visit to the area with his family.

What would also help the Lake Tahoe economy and the environment is for Congress to reauthorize the Lake Tahoe Restoration Act. With it being an election year, action on the plan that would bring \$415 million to the region in an eight-year period may not occur until after Nov. 2, if at all.

It was the inaugural summit in 1997 with then President Bill Clinton that spurred the federal funding for Lake Tahoe. The original act passed in 2000 brought \$424 million to Tahoe in 10 years.

All told, \$1.5 billion has been spent on environment improvement projects in Lake Tahoe since the first summit.

Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, D-Nev., spoke to the nearly 300 people on Aug. 17 about how the Travel Promotion Act passed by Congress earlier this year will help Tahoe. He said it will create 6,000 jobs for Nevada and a half million nationwide. The idea is people outside the country will be told about the virtues of Lake Tahoe and be enticed to re-create here.

As always, lake clarity was a substantive part of the summit. Invasive species and forest fuel reduction were also touched on. El Dorado County Supervisor Norma Santiago and consultant Trish Kelly rehashed the previous day's meeting about the Prosperity Plan.

Sen. Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif, spoke about a meeting she

hosted for 50 locals on Monday who provided her with a slew of reports – mostly about lake clarity, some about the thousands of acres treated for fuels management.

At the summit she said, “Twenty-five percent of these beautiful forests around us are dead and dying, therefore it’s primed for a catastrophic fire.”

She illustrated how the Asian clams invading Lake Tahoe could extend 3.5 miles if laid end-to-end.

In these trying economic times, Feinstein and others pointed to the need to tap into the private sector even more. She praised Steve Teshara with Sustainable Community Advocates and Andrew Strain at Heavenly Mountain Resort for their efforts. She also acknowledged Art Chapman who runs JMA Ventures.

The constant theme for the day was Tahoe is an international treasure that needs protecting.

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