

Lake Tahoe's future clarity may come down to money

By Kathryn Reed

Money – that was an overriding theme of the eight people who spoke before the Lahontan Regional Water Control Board about the proposed amendment to the plan to reduce sediment into Lake Tahoe. How the plan will be implemented was another concern.

No one argued at the Sept. 8 meeting at Lake Tahoe Community College that reducing sediment into one of the world's most pristine lakes isn't a worthy endeavor. Even how to go about it wasn't met with much argument. But the jurisdictions responsible for the work wonder where the billions of dollars needed to do the work will come from.



Bob Larsen speaks to the Lahontan water board on Sept. 8.

Photo/Kathryn Reed

Bob Larsen, environmental scientist with the water board, said it's estimated to take \$100 million a year for 15 years to accomplish his agency's clarity goal. But he was quick to say the estimates are "very rough."

The goal is to reduce fine sediment flowing into Lake Tahoe by one-third in the next 15 years so people could see into the water 77 to 80 feet.

Of the more than \$1 billion that has been spent in the last 10 years on the environmental improvement program, about half has gone to water quality projects.

Although Lahontan represents only the California side of the lake, the plan before the board has been a cooperative effort with the Nevada Environmental Protection Agency. This means the entire lake would be operating under this plan if it were approved.

Wednesday's meeting was a chance for the board to hear the proposed amendment to the Tahoe Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) plan and for the public to address the board. Comments on the proposal will be taken through Sept. 13.

Representatives from Placer and El Dorado counties, and South Lake Tahoe said in these economic times the dollars to do what is being asked of them aren't available. And with California mired in a \$19 billion budget quagmire, local jurisdictions don't know how Sacramento might further cripple them when a budget is eventually passed. Even Lahontan employees know how legislators dink with others and not their own pay. It's a state furlough day – meaning no work, no pay for Lahontan and other state employees even though lawmakers keep getting paid for not doing their job. (The fiscal year began July 1.)

Steve Teshara, with Sustainable Community Advocates, spoke of the need to tap into private investments. He, along with others, wanted more detail about how the plan will be implemented.

Before the lunch break, Russ Nygaard with El Dorado County, said it's imperative flexibility be built into the plan when it comes to time lines.

“Without state and federal funding, this will be difficult,” Nygaard said of being able to meet the TMDL requirements.

Leslie Case with Caltrans expressed concerns with the various TMDL regulations being adopted throughout the state and how her agency will be able to comply with them all.

Jennifer Quashnick with the Tahoe Area Sierra Club spoke to the need for better monitoring of the projects to ensure they are working.

The Lahontan board is scheduled to vote on the amendment to the Tahoe TMDL at the Nov. 9-10 meeting. It is possible that meeting will be delayed a week so it does not fall in a holiday and furlough week.