

Opinion: A blue Tahoe means a clear shore

By Rochelle Nason

We received disturbing news last week that deepwater clarity at Lake Tahoe has dropped nearly 4 feet. Scientists also confirmed that clarity near the shore is worse than it is a mile off shore.

One of Lake Tahoe's greatest assets is its beautiful shoreline. When we wade into its crisp water, we can often see clear down to our toes. When we swim, we may spot white sand and boulders 20 or 30 feet down. A vast majority of people enjoy the lake's clarity from shallow areas.

Tahoe's shoreline beauty is deteriorating rapidly. More and more, we see algae blooms, water weeds and silt along the shoreline. These are signs that the shoreline ecosystem is rapidly changing. Public concern is rising.



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State leaders who gathered this week for the Tahoe Summit should be on alert that Tahoe's shoreline environment is threatened. Protecting shoreline clarity is essential for a healthy ecosystem and economy. The League to Save Lake Tahoe, also known as "Keep Tahoe Blue," is committed to working with policy makers to find and implement solutions.

What are the culprits?

Scientists are still getting a handle on what is causing shoreline deterioration. We know invasive species like Asian clams thrive on nutrients, then produce waste that causes algae blooms. Scientists are examining how boat pollution may remain more concentrated near the shore and cause nutrient spikes. Invasive plants, animal waste, fertilizer runoff and sediment are also concerns. And sadly, old drainage pipes still spew urban runoff directly onto Tahoe's beaches.

An obvious culprit could be the thousands of tons of road sand applied during the winter season. Cars grind up sand into fine particles and, as the snow melts, this silt hitches a ride to the lake.

What is being done?

To keep that sand out of Tahoe, a simple solution is better street sweeping. Some of Tahoe's old street sweepers stir up more dust than they collect. The League has been urging jurisdictions to use low-nutrient sand, reduce sand application, use better street sweepers, and sweep more often.

In addition, Tahoe's boat inspection program must remain strong. Inspections are critical to preventing aquatic invasive species that could permanently disrupt Tahoe's shoreline ecosystem. The threat is now closer than ever, as reservoirs near Reno have tested positive for destructive quagga mussels.

The League is also urging policymakers to create comprehensive shoreline protection programs. These programs should include clear standards, practicable solutions and a measured strategy for success. Finally, restoring Tahoe's watershed is the key to protecting its water quality. Policy makers should retain strong limits on building footprints, and ensure property owners install runoff control measures. Tahoe also needs continued federal and state funding to upgrade old drainage

infrastructure and restore disturbed wetlands.

Thousands of people a year are drawn to Tahoe to enjoy its shoreline beauty. Restoring deepwater clarity and protecting Tahoe's shore must go hand in hand. A blue Tahoe means a clear shore.

Rochelle Nason is executive director of the League to Save Lake Tahoe.