

Opinion: New governance vital to balance Tahoe's future

By Ross Miller

Conflicts between California and Nevada over how to manage Lake Tahoe are severely hindering effective management of a unique resource shared by the two states.

It has been widely suggested that the issue is simply a battle between Nevada's desire for more growth and California's desire to protect the environment. The reality is that the different perspectives of the two states are considerably more nuanced, and deserve greater explanation and examination. As Nevada's secretary of state, one of my duties is to serve as a member of the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency board. In that capacity, I feel a responsibility to work toward developing a renewed commitment on the board to develop a comprehensive plan that will make Lake Tahoe a sustainable resource for all its users.

It is important to consider the history of the TRPA and its formation as a response to the unrestrained growth of earlier decades. Its formation effectively put the brakes on that growth, and ostensibly provided the two states an opportunity to work together to repair the environmental damage caused by that growth with an eye toward more well-planned, responsible projects. As governor of Nevada during the 1990s, my father, Bob Miller, worked closely with California Gov. Pete Wilson, our congressional delegation and President Bill Clinton to obtain significant federal funding aimed at repairing the effects of unrestrained growth before TRPA was formed. Through the creation of the Lake Tahoe Summit and the Environmental Improvement Plan, we cooperated and made significant progress.

Today, irrefutable science tells us that Lake Tahoe's clarity

and environmental sustainability are threatened by the same fine sediment runoff from urban areas that were developed in the 1950s and 1960s, as well as significant near-shore nitrogen and phosphorus contaminants.

The current board structure and the inability to update a comprehensive plan have resulted in a failure to address this threshold issue. Instead, we are left with an endless and seemingly intractable process that prevents even the most environmentally responsible private restoration efforts. A policy of responsible redevelopment, using technology that has evolved during the subsequent decades, could provide a sustainable economic climate and effectively protect the Lake Tahoe environment.

We can no longer rely on big federal earmarks to restore any damage to Lake Tahoe. The only way that we are going to realize the environmental goals we seek is by tearing down the urban development of earlier decades, and rebuilding in an eco-friendly manner. Doing so will require broad-based cooperation between the public and private sectors, and a recognition that sustaining Lake Tahoe environmentally will require sustaining it economically as well.

Ross Miller is Nevada's secretary of state and a member of the board of the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency.

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