

Opinion: States must work together to preserve Tahoe

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The upcoming annual Lake Tahoe Summit, to be hosted this year by Sen. Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif., on Aug. 16, promises to be a doozy. The challenges to the lake's legendary clarity and to cooperation between California and Nevada are greater than ever.

– Water quality. Lake Tahoe remains one of the clearest large lakes in the world. But its famed clarity has been declining since the post-World War II building boom. Homes, casinos and golf courses brought sedimentation, pollution and algae growth. University of California at Davis scientists measured the lake's clarity at 102 feet in 1968, reaching a low of 64 feet in 1997. In 2009, it was 68 feet. Aggressive measures to attack pollution and sedimentation remain necessary.

– Governance. In a major threat to two-state cooperation, Nevada has threatened to withdraw from the compact governing Lake Tahoe by 2015 – unless California and the U.S. Congress adopt amendments to change the voting system. The two states have equal representation, with seven members each on the governing board.

To approve changes to the regional plan, a majority of members (four) from each state must vote "aye," a fair process. Nevada wants to change that – to nine of 14 votes without regard to state. It also wants to change the voting requirements for particular projects. Two-thirds of the lake is in California. Nevada funds one-third and California two-thirds of the cost for the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency. Why would California agree to Nevada's proposed changes?

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