

# Opinion: It takes everyone to keep Tahoe waterways clean

By Kirsten Lindquist

On Sept. 17 from 9am to noon, dedicated volunteers around Lake Tahoe will roll up their sleeves for a clean and clear lake with the 2011 Great Sierra River Cleanup. This annual cleanup throughout the Sierra Nevada is sponsored by the Sierra Nevada Conservancy and runs in tandem with the California Coastal Commission's Coastal Cleanup Day, the largest volunteer event in California.

Last year, more than 200 volunteers basinwide turned out to pick-up trash on beaches and riverbanks, keeping 2,642 pounds of litter from funneling into Lake Tahoe. This year the planning committee is hoping for even more volunteers – including you.

The Great Sierra River Cleanup began as a regionwide effort three years ago to protect Sierra Nevadan watersheds from easily preventable pollution – trash – and to support the cleanup efforts on the coast. The rivers of the Sierra Nevada are the headwaters which provide almost 65 percent of the state's developed water needs before reaching their ultimate destination, the Pacific Ocean. The cleanliness of watersheds here in the mountains not only impacts drinking water quality, ecosystem health and recreation locally, it also has broader implications for the health of California's water supply and coastal ecosystems.



Cigarette  
butts are  
always  
something that  
fill trash  
bags on the  
cleanup day.  
Photo/LTN file

Last year, 4,500 volunteers collected about 151 tons of trash, appliances, car parts and other debris throughout the Sierra Nevada.

Residents of the Lake Tahoe Basin are known for their love of the outdoors; people choose to live here because of its natural beauty. Unfortunately, that doesn't mean the streams and beaches are always pristine. At one Great Sierra River Cleanup site in Tahoe last year, 19 bags of trash were collected in addition to five couches.

"There's a greater need here for vigilance against litter than people may realize," explains Ellen Nunes, programs director of Clean Tahoe. "Even when littering is unintentional, the plastic bags, cans, the bear messes left uncleaned, they all add up. And it really takes a whole village to keep itself litter-free, even if only a few are contributing to the mess."

Clean Tahoe, the local nonprofit responsible for numerous clean-up programs and advocacy around the lake, started the Tahoe chapter of the Great Sierra River Cleanup from the start of the campaign in 2009. This year the Sierra Nevada Alliance, Tahoe Resource Conservation District, California Tahoe

Conservancy, Tahoe-Baikal Institute and California Trout have rejoined Clean Tahoe to put together the event. South Tahoe Refuse is also sponsoring the event, allowing disposal of trash collected free of charge.

“It’s exciting to see the enthusiasm for cooperation among so many groups in town—from local and state agencies, businesses to nonprofits,” says Reyna Yagi, AmeriCorps member at the Sierra Nevada Alliance.

Seventeen cleanup sites have been designated for the Tahoe cleanup this year – including locations on the North Shore as well as the South Shore. Community groups, businesses, families and individuals are all encouraged to participate. The Boys and Girls Club of South Lake Tahoe, Harrah’s, Kiwanis, Sierra Nevada College and Great Basin Institute Conservation Corps are among those already signed-on. But the cleanup committee is always in need of more volunteers.

“We’ve had volunteers from 18 months to 80 years old; every person makes a difference,” Nunes says.

To sign-up, go online. Unregistered volunteers are also encouraged to participate at the drop-in site at Regan Beach in South Lake Tahoe, where the volunteer appreciation after-party and raffle will also be located. For more details, contact Ellen Nunes at [cleantahoe@sbcglobal.net](mailto:cleantahoe@sbcglobal.net).

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