

Opinion: Adaptive strategies, money needed to keep studying Tahoe

By Geoff Schladow

Scientists at TERC have just submitted what will be the final set of research proposals under the Southern Nevada Public Lands Management Act, better known as SNPLMA. For the last 10 years these funds, approximately \$3.5 million per year, were available on a competitive basis to fund research that was deemed both scientifically rigorous and important to the efforts to restore Lake Tahoe.

Over the years, the UC Davis Tahoe Environmental Research Center and its collaborators have been able to write proposals that received substantial funding from these SNPLMA funds. The results of that funding has led to the development of a range of products including tools for modeling lake clarity and quantifying pollutant inputs from urban areas, a better understanding of nearshore water quality using remotely sensed data, and the impact of the Angora Fire on the lake. Many other projects are still under way, and will be completed in the next two years. Many of the actions that will be undertaken at Tahoe in the coming years will be based on the findings of this research.



Geoff Schladow

What happens in the coming years, as conditions change and new questions and new threats to Lake Tahoe arise? That is difficult to know. Traditional science funding, from sources such as the National Science Foundation, is usually targeted at generalized questions. If the research is addressing a Tahoe-specific question, NSF will expect local entities to fund it. Locally, however, funding for most everything is in short supply, and likely to remain so for some time to come. Private and philanthropic funding has always been an important part of TERC's budget, and our hope is that this will remain strong.

My concern, as we use the science conducted to date to guide the restoration of Lake Tahoe, is that we stay mindful of the fact that our knowledge is always incomplete. What seems in 2011 as the best strategy may in time be found wanting. We will only know this if monitoring and focused research is continued, and ways to conduct that in affordable ways are found. The other essential ingredient is the willingness of management agencies to continue to work with scientists to assess progress and, if necessary, to adapt the strategies.

In more robust economic times, this is how things happened and how progress was made. The challenge is to ensure that it continues to happen. As 2011 draws to a close, I want to thank all those who helped us with the many things we were able to accomplish this year. This ranges from our incredibly dedicated staff, our volunteer docents, the many students and interns that work through TERC, our partners in other research institutes and in the numerous Tahoe agencies, those who visit our education centers, and those of you who have helped fund our research and education programs. I wish you all a safe and peaceful holiday season, and look forward to seeing you in 2012.

Geoff Schladow is director of the UC Davis Tahoe Environmental Research Center.

