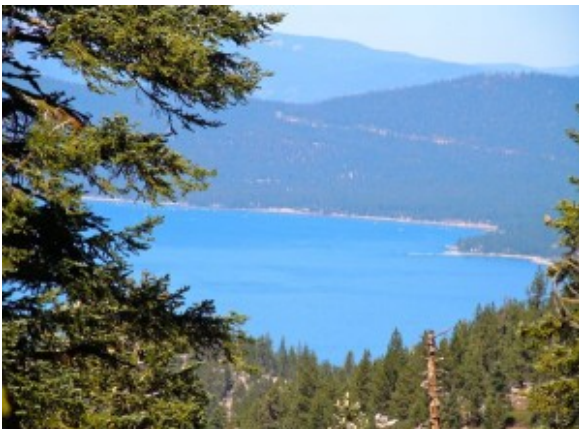


Change in Nevada lawmakers could alter future of state's involvement in TRPA

By Anne Knowles

Nevada's future in the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency is still up in the air despite the recent defeat of the man who sponsored the bill that was approved last year that threatens to remove the state from the Compact.

Sen. John Lee, D-North Las Vegas, the main proponent of Senate Bill 271 passed by the 2011 Nevada Legislature, lost to Patricia Spearman in the state's primary earlier this month. Spearman was backed by a broad coalition of groups, including the Sierra Club and the Nevada Conservation League, that were unhappy with Lee's record on a number of issues, including the effort to withdraw Nevada from the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency Compact unless certain reforms are made.



Lake Tahoe will always be part of Nevada, but whether Nevada will always be part of TRPA remains an unknown.

Photo/LTN file

“When we made the decision to try to defeat Lee in this election we were hopeful it would improve our chances to repeal this legislation,” says Kyle Davis, political and policy director, Nevada Conservation League. “Our goal is to see repeal of that legislation next session.”

Nevada Assemblyman Kelly Kite, R-Minden, a co-sponsor of SB271, whose district includes the Douglas County portion of Lake Tahoe, also was defeated in the primary. Retired Gardnerville rancher Jim Wheeler, who bested Kite and a third Republican candidate, Gary Schmidt, will face Independent American David Schumann in the general election in November.

Lee and Kite still sit on the Legislature’s interim committee that oversees the TRPA and Kite is one of the members of a three-person delegation tasked with meeting with its legislative counterparts in California to negotiate changes to the agency. The Nevada delegation, which also includes Assemblywoman Marilyn Kirkpatrick, D-North Las Vegas, and Sen. James Settelmeyer, R-Minden, is expected to have the first meeting with its California colleagues during the annual Lake Tahoe Environmental Summit being hosted by Sen. Dean Heller, R-Nev, at Edgewood Tahoe in Stateline on Aug. 13.

Then the Nevada group is required by the law to deliver a report on the state of the TRPA to the interim committee by Oct. 15, when the interim committee wraps up. That’s also the deadline for the committee – called the Legislative Committee for the Review and Oversight of the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency and the Marlette Lake Water System – to request up to 10 bill drafts for the 2013 legislative session.

In the meantime, Leo Drozdoff, executive director of Nevada Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, and John Laird, California’s secretary of Natural Resources, have been meeting to discuss the TRPA. They plan to meet again in July, according to Kay Scherer, deputy director of the Nevada department.

Laird, who attended his first California Tahoe Conservancy meeting this month (usually a delegate sits in for him on the board), said he and Drozdoff hope to have something to be able to present at the environmental summit.

One of Nevada's main complaints about the bi-state agency has been its inability to deliver a Regional Plan update. The TRPA recently produced a draft RPU and the accompanying environmental impact documents and has had four public meetings to discuss it, with another today in Kings Beach and one Thursday in Stateline. The agency is taking public comment until June 28, with the goal of delivering a final update by year end.

"I'm optimistic the new RPU will be adopted before the new (legislative) session or soon after," Nevada Conservation League's Davis told *Lake Tahoe News*. "We're hopeful that Nevada won't pull out if they develop a new RPU."

The bill draft or drafts requested by the interim committee could end up in any number of committees during the 2013 legislative session. SB271, for example, emanated from Senate Government Affairs, then chaired by Lee. The make-up of the committees for 2013 is unknown as is the number and content of bill drafts the interim committee on the TRPA will request.

The new members of the next interim committee overseeing the TRPA, which by statute meets every interim, will be determined by the Legislative Commission after the 2013 session.

Wheeler, the winner of the Republican primary for Assembly District 39, is the heavy favorite to win the seat. For his part, he says he would like to be assigned to Natural Resources, Agriculture and Mining, although there is no guarantee he will be appointed to the committee of his choice.

Wheeler opposed the incumbent largely on Kite's vote to pass Assembly Bill 561 during the 2011 session. The bill, negotiated by the leadership of both parties with Gov. Brian

Sandoval, extended a number of taxes to raise \$620 million for the state. Wheeler has signed a pledge, available at his website, to not to raise any taxes if he were elected to office.

“I am a very, very conservative person, and I feel the constituents are very conservative,” Wheeler says.

Wheeler says instead he would look to cuts in state government employment through attrition and the education budget to balance the budget.

“You have to look at everything,” Wheeler says. “The education budget is 51 percent of the budget. We’ve been throwing money at it and it hasn’t worked for 50 years.”

He says he supports Sandoval’s plan to provide vouchers for education.

“We need more charter schools. We need to bring private enterprise into the school system.”

Wheeler also supports SB 271.

“We need to get the TRPA straightened out,” he says. “It was a good bill passed in the last Legislature.”