

Opinion: Partnerships will save Lake Tahoe

By Joanne Marchetta

The 16th annual Lake Tahoe Summit, held on the lakeshore at Edgewood Tahoe on Monday, opened with beautiful sunshine after a refreshing rain that, quite literally, cleared the air as federal, state, and local officials, and members of the science, business and conservation communities all came together with a singular focus on protecting and restoring Lake Tahoe.

This year's summit theme of public-private partnerships showcased the important role they will play in future restoration efforts at Lake Tahoe. With the sun-setting of funds from Southern Nevada federal land sales and diminished funding from all levels of government that have traditionally fueled much of the restoration work here in Tahoe, a new model of environmental restoration is needed. Supporting and encouraging the private sector to invest in environmental redevelopment and restoration projects is a promising path forward. It is one that has already shown positive results here in the Lake Tahoe Basin.



Joanne
Marchetta at
the 2012 Lake
Tahoe
Environmental

Summit.

Photo/LTN

For example, when the Heavenly Mountain Resort master plan was adopted, the phased restoration of upper Edgewood Creek near Stateline was funded by Vail Resorts. And on lower Edgewood Creek, where the stream passes through Edgewood Golf Course, restoration of the lower reaches are proposed as part of the hotel and golf course realignment project. In addition, stormwater from the highway crossing the creek will be filtered in ponds on the golf course significantly reducing stormwater treatment costs for Nevada taxpayers.

The Lakeside Trail recently completed in Tahoe City was financed with government and private funds including the California Tahoe Conservancy, North Lake Tahoe Resort Association, and the Tahoe Fund, while local contractors, engineers and planners did much of the work. In addition, private property owners donated easements for the public trail through their properties and one business substantially modified its operations to allow for safe public use. With collaboration, the Lakeside Trail, with its beautiful design and stormwater treatment components is an unqualified success to be enjoyed by local families and visitors alike.

South Lake Tahoe's new Lakeview Commons park is also a great public-private partnership success. Funded largely by public money, the project has environmentally restored a neglected area of shoreline, but has also been an economic boon to local businesses and concessionaires benefiting from the large number of people flocking to the park for great outdoor events or just to take in the view.

And who can forget Fred Jackson, owner of the Tahoe Lobster Company, and the latest entrepreneur to dip his toe (or crayfish traps) into the lake as he commercially harvests a troubling invasive species at Lake Tahoe in a successful new business venture that is also helping the environment.

TRPA is prioritizing partnerships like these through key policies in the Lake Tahoe Regional Plan update that could be approved by the TRPA Governing Board in December of this year. The draft policies create incentives for property owners in town centers to redevelop in a way that incorporates water quality improvements with pedestrian and transit improvements for greater community benefit. Other proposed updates would reward homeowners for completing stormwater BMPs by allowing additional land coverage. These innovative proposals will open opportunities for a vigorous redevelopment market that will lead private sector restoration efforts using 21st century public-private partnerships.

More good news out of this year's summit: key stakeholders are collaborating and compromising in unprecedented ways to protect Lake Tahoe. The bi-state consultation efforts led by California Natural Resources Secretary John Laird and Nevada Department of Conservation and Natural Resources Director Leo Drozdoff delivered a suite of policy recommendations designed to forge agreement on long-outstanding differences involving the Regional Plan update. New levels of cooperation among states, agencies, organizations and individuals may hold promise not just for the lake, but equally for ourselves.

Elsewhere, compromise has become elusive; holding strong on our differences preserves only the status quo. As we move toward a collective goal of completing the Regional Plan update by the end of this year, my hope is this: that the many people who love this region make it a habit to really listen to those whose vision for the future is slightly different than their own. For Lake Tahoe, cooperation, collaboration, compromise and partnerships are habits we should keep if we wish to secure a healthy and sustainable future now, and for generations to come.

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