

Opinion: TRPA has outlived its usefulness, time to disband

By Kathryn Reed

What is wrong with Lake Tahoe? *Plenty.*

What is right with Lake Tahoe? *A few things.*

What can be done so the answers are reversed?

Every time I leave town I contemplate the above questions because the negatives of Tahoe become crystal clear when other locations seem to have their stuff together. I also contemplate those questions and their answers with friends, colleagues and others in the area.



TRPA, a federal agency, has allowed cities, counties and state transportation agencies to let gunk flow directly into

Lake Tahoe. Photo/LTN
file

I have relatively minor examples in my life that show the difficulties I have had with rules in the Lake Tahoe Basin.

We don't have our TRPA best management practices certificate because our driveway is out of compliance. It has a 1 to 2 percent grade. It's concrete. The most expensive part of replacing the driveway is getting rid of the concrete. Tahoe Regional Planning Agency and the Tahoe Resource Conservation District want us to put in a swale on the "lake" side of the driveway. The water flows the other way, in front of our neighbor, into a ditch and into a field by an elementary school where sediments are naturally filtered out.

We live on a high water table. Each spring the sump pump sends water from under the house, through a pipe to the back yard – where many times the yard is then flooded. The water goes underground, back under the house and the process is repeated. I have spoken to TRPA, Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board, South Lake Tahoe and South Lake Tahoe PUD officials about having a communitywide catch basin for all this water so it could be used for irrigation. I have even said tax us. Yep, I used that three-letter word.

They all said it's not possible, that there is no shortage of water here so there is no incentive and that people would not tax themselves.

Well, taxing for the sake of taxing we won't support. But taxing because there is a true, tangible benefit is different.

You see people, we are going to have to pay for the improvements in town. We are the government. I hear people say taxes are high in Tahoe. Prove it. Show me.

Yes, it's expensive in terms of housing, food and gas. But taxes? Not so much.

(Yes, the state of California is outrageous – but that's a different issue.)

Another personal issue was with business licensing. When I wanted to start a home-based business, I needed to go to the airport (aka city hall) for the regular business license. Then I had to go to South Lake Tahoe's Tata Lane office for the home business license. Then I got to pay more money for the privilege to work at home – where I am not adding more vehicle miles traveled to get to an office.

Imagine if I had wanted to do something grander?

Government and regulatory agencies are the problem.

Companies and individuals wanting to do large-scale (even medium-scale) projects are hindered by regulations and then sued by environmental groups that don't like the projects. The hoops people have to go through are astounding and counterproductive.

Improving infrastructure

Not all development or redevelopment is bad. But neither should it all be approved because there is environmental gain.

Do we really need a five-star resort at Homewood along a road that is so crowded? Do we really need a state highway in front of the only bi-state park in the country?

We can't blame our woes on second homeowners. Like South Lake Tahoe, in Vail and Park City about 70 percent of the houses are not occupied by primary residents. Those towns are functioning and look great.

But those cities taxed themselves. (They aren't perfect, no area is, and it's not that we have to be them – but we do need to stop saying what we don't want to be and figure what we do want because what we have is crap.)

We have to pay to have free transit if that's what we want. We have to pay for roads if that is what we want.

Yes, part of the problem cities and counties have is the amount of money doled out each year on pensions and health care for retirees. But don't begrudge the retiree for getting what their union bargained for. Look at the electeds who agreed to those *public* dollars to be spent on a few employees instead of the greater public. (It's only a handful of employees who abused the system by racking up OT and doing other things to inflate their pension. But we the public need to demand those practices are not allowed – to stop the loopholes that essentially amount to the theft of public money.)

We can start by voting. Nov. 6 is the next chance to make a difference. City and county reps sit on TRPA and other vital boards. If you don't vote, you are part of the problem.

Lakeview Commons in South Lake Tahoe was paid for by California Tahoe Conservancy dollars. That's state money. Part comes from Tahoe license plate sales. Wouldn't it be more logical to drive around with a Tahoe plate (California or Nevada), than a bumper sticker?

Improvements to the North Shore in Placer County come from taxing hotel guests in Lake Tahoe. Maybe next year when South Lake Tahoe asks voters to increase the hotel tax some of the dollars could be allocated for events or the arts or to improve athletic facilities and not just go to balance the general fund.

Monumental change needed

There are other ways to bring change beyond voting.

It is time to disband the TRPA.

A week from today is the annual Lake Tahoe Environmental

Summit. Sen. Dean Heller, R-Nev., is hosting it at Edgewood Tahoe. Two other U.S. senators, a congressman and possibly the governors of California and Nevada, along with a cadre of local muckety-mucks, who often act like star-struck adolescents around these Washington-types, will join him.

TRPA was enacted by Congress to protect Lake Tahoe. Congress can make TRPA go away. What if we showed up at the 10am event in Stateline and took back our lake? What if we the people told these members of Congress that enough is enough?

TRPA has nine thresholds. Lake clarity is just one of them. That is why they get to say if your deck can be expanded, waffle on how big of a tree you get to cut down in your yard, if windows on a house should be allowed to be seen by boaters on the lake, and to decide after a fire obliterates 254 houses that pine needles as an erosion control measure isn't so wise.

TRPA has done good. But even its executive director keeps admitting to how things must change, that past policies weren't based on science, and that it is a new day.

Well, the new day should be that they go away.

Local jurisdictions can figure out how to zone areas. Local jurisdictions can figure out what type of lighting is good, what paint colors work, what signs should look like and if a tree should be removed.

Local water agencies and fire departments have proved that they can form regional alliances. Because we do need a regional, aka lakewide, approach to some matters.

Lahontan and the Nevada Department of Environmental Protection, along with owners of lakeside property, U.S. Coast Guard, and departments of waterways for the states will figure out the lake clarity part.

TRPA stresses that is a *planning* agency and not a doing

agency. It looks like it planned the demise, ruin and destruction of Lake Tahoe based on the dilapidated infrastructure, lack of attention to water clarity along beaches (where we and the tourists are swimming), creating commodities out of commercial floor area and tourist accommodation units, and the empty buildings (because it's so dang impossible to convert old hotels into housing or to renovate structures because of the air mitigation fees).

TRPA has failed us. We must stop this. We can't rely on the updated Regional Plan that is supposed to be approved in December. Those close to the process say a lawsuit is likely if it does pass, and that it won't include any meat in terms of real change. All of that remains to be seen and is speculation at this point.

Still, TRPA is hurting the Lake Tahoe Basin, not helping it. It served a purpose once, but now it is so much about creating job security for the people inside those walls.

This is the agency that last month paid approximately \$12,000 for two people to come talk to the Governing Board and locals about what Tahoe needs to do fix itself. At the end of the three-hour public session I told two TRPA employees that the night was a complete waste of my time. Someone else told them the two speakers were preaching to the choir.

TRPA is a public agency – so that means those were our dollars that paid those people to essentially have a paid vacation in Lake Tahoe. Wow, I could talk for \$6,000. I could give you my opinion for much less – oh, wait, I just did – and it was free.