

# Opinion: Diminishing Sierra snowpack impacts all of California

By Forrest Shearer

As a professional snowboarder lucky enough to ride mountains around the world, I have seen the impacts of climate change first-hand. I've seen once-famous slopes now with zero snow, ski resorts that have shut down, and glaciers that are disappearing.

In my native state of California, boarders and skiers are bracing for the effects of a warmer world. Scientists are predicting the Sierra snowpack will decline by 25 percent by 2050. We caught a preview this past ski season, when Lake Tahoe and Squaw Valley had to make their own snow well into February. It's no wonder the California Ski Industry Association is a big supporter of AB32, the state's landmark clean energy and climate law.

But whether or not you've ever strapped on a board or some skis, all Californians should get behind the state's groundbreaking efforts to save energy and tackle climate change. Because sooner or later, our changing climate will affect all Californians.

Consider that declining mountain snowpack I mentioned. It's not just important for skiers and boarders and the businesses that rely on them. It also provides about one-third of California's drinking water.

Or look at the record heat that's been roasting parts of California, along with much of the rest of the country. It's been epic; in fact, July was the hottest month on record for the continental United States, with drought covering almost

two-thirds of the lower 48 and wildfires burning up two million acres.

Scientists tell us that extreme heat will become more and more common as the world warms. And we can expect more severe droughts, heavy rainfall events, and other extreme weather, as well as more wildfires.

Communities in vulnerable areas across the country are already feeling the burn of global warming. Through a program with the environmental nonprofit, Protect Our Winters, called "Hot Planet/Cool Athletes," I go to schools in mountain communities throughout the U.S. to talk about climate change.

Through these visits, I've seen that young people get it. Their future depends on a healthy environment, and they are committed to doing their part. At one school, a teacher talked about the school's recycling efforts, and said anyone who wanted to get involved should see a student who was in charge of the whole program. I was very impressed with that kid and it's my hope that today's young students become tomorrow's environmental leaders.

But we shouldn't put the burden on kids to protect the environment.

Adults have to take responsibility for the mess we've made and not leave it for future generations to clean up.

So far, California is doing pretty well. The first step in tackling climate change is burning less fossil fuel, and California leads the nation in energy efficiency. Then you develop alternative energy sources that are cleaner or that don't pollute at all. California leads the country in solar power, wind power, and electric vehicle deployment. And now with AB32, we will show the nation how to create a successful market-based system for reducing emissions.

What Californians do is especially important, because what

happens here will be imitated elsewhere. Californians are trendsetters, especially when it comes to influencing younger people. Surfing, skateboarding, and snowboarding started here, movies and television shows are made here, and environmental trends get started here – the rest of the country, and much of the world, ends up following our lead. Through AB32 and other smart energy policies, California is blazing a trail to a sustainable clean energy future.

For some people, it's too much. They want us to slow down. But we can't stop now.

When you're tackling gnarly terrain on a snowboard, you can't hesitate. You have to know that you've trained, trust your instincts, and commit yourself fully. California has made a great start on a rad run. Let's stay committed.

*Forrest Shearer grew up as a Southern California surfer and is now a professional snowboarder. He works with Protect our Winters, the Alliance for Climate Education, and the Action Sports Environmental Coalition.*