

# Opinion: It's time Tahoe moved beyond 'arrested decay'

By Steven Frisch

On Dec. 12 the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency will vote on adoption of a new 2012 Regional Plan. The outcome will send a powerful signal to community, local, state and federal partners and private capital about whether stewards of Lake Tahoe will take control of their future and the resource that draws us together, or whether we will accept another decade of divided vision and environmental conflict.

The choice is between "arrested decay" – stalemate in the state of the lake – or advancing real restoration.

Sierra Business Council believes the best strategy to ensure the future of Lake Tahoe is to adopt the 2012 Regional Plan and leverage the power of private investment to partner on restoration of the lake.

Through the fog of debate about policies and thresholds is the light of an underlying truth: what we're doing now isn't enough, isn't working, and needs to change. With the effort of thousands of residents, numerous agencies, and more than \$1.6 billion of public investment in environmental improvement, Lake Tahoe is in a state of arrested decay. We have stabilized but not truly restored the resource.

Restoring Lake Tahoe and protecting it for posterity will require replacement of old infrastructure, fundamental redesign of urban centers, new transportation solutions, housing for working families, jobs to build the constituency for restoration, and treating almost every drop of water reaching the lake.

The reason we haven't restored the lake is that environmental

resources don't exist in isolation – people are involved – resources exist in a social and economic context. Restoring the environment without connecting the dots between nature, people and dollars is magical thinking – a resource doesn't get restored unless people support it and capital gets directed to it. Permanently restoring the lake must harness the power of all three to succeed.

To achieve real restoration will also require real money. To implement the environmental improvement program – and go beyond it to meet new challenges like invasive species, changing climate, and increasing uses – will cost hundreds of millions of dollars. Traditional funders, local, state and federal government, are unlikely to have the financial resources to fully support restoration over the next decade.

This is where harnessing the power of the private sector comes in.

Twentieth century environmentalism focuses its attention on slowing the encroaching impact of the industrial revolution – stopping bad things from happening – in the belief that environmental exploitation is an inherent part of capitalism. Traditional planning approaches, like the previous Regional Plan, rest on this premise and adopt a strategy of regulate, block and mitigate.

A whole new generation of environmentalists think capitalism is here to stay; that we have already begun to adjust our systems, providing prosperity in ecologically sustainable ways through use of new technologies and improved design. The adoption of new community planning techniques, smart transportation, green building, applied erosion control, renewable energy, and by engaging a larger population in the solution, we can restore resources and promote prosperity at the same time. The proposed 2012 TRPA Regional Plan adopts this more modern and pragmatic approach.

We're not saying that a regulatory structure is not necessary; without the good work of the Sierra Club and the League to Save Lake Tahoe to watchdog regulation we could not have arrested decay. The future requires a layered approach, with appropriate regulation, while harnessing the power of the private sector to assist in the restoration of the lake. We can't afford to have private capital sit on the sidelines. We must adopt a strategy of "stop bad things from happening" while actively encouraging good things to happen. We need the private sector to be a powerful force for good and invite in the capital that shares this ethic.

The risk of adopting this strategy is substantially less than the risk of signaling stalemate. The TRPA has designed a process to monitor and adaptively manage implementation of the 2012 Region Plan on a regular four-year cycle; we can measure performance and make changes when necessary.

We're all environmentalists when it comes to Lake Tahoe. The question is do we adopt a new environmentalism harnessing all of our resources to reach for real restoration or do we settled for old environmentalism and risk arrested decay.

Sierra Business Council believes that new environmentalism, harnessing all of our resources, and adaptively managing outcomes, is the more rational course.

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