

Opinion: Progress in Tahoe is measurable

By Joanne Marchetta

The recent South Shore economic forum gave a sense of what's possible when we come together around a vision to improve our Tahoe communities and the region's environment. Recognizing that "planning" means little without implementation, let's review some of the on-the-ground improvements accomplished under the Lake Tahoe Regional Plan just this last year.

Many of these achievements stem from the fact that the agency today is different than it was 20 years ago. We have made changes to be more effective, to partner with other organizations, and to institute a science-based vision for environmental restoration efforts at Lake Tahoe.



Joanne
Marchetta

The first notable accomplishment is the recent clarity data released jointly by TRPA and UC Davis scientists. The average clarity reading for the lake in 2012 was the best it's been in 10 years and the loss of clarity, which had been on a path of steady decline for several decades, has stopped. Clarity gains in 2011 and 2012 are especially significant because high levels of precipitation measured in both years were expected to diminish lake clarity. We are still working with scientists to discover new strategies to improve summer clarity and the

near shore, which remain a concern. The science is showing that restoration efforts, through the environmental improvement program (EIP), are on the right track.

The EIP is the capital investment strategy designed to achieve Lake Tahoe's environmental targets, which are called threshold standards. Private property owners, the federal government, both states and local governments all contribute to the restoration program and together, we have hit some major milestones in the past year:

Aquatic invasive species

- 5 acres of the lake bottom treated for Asian clam removal
- 7 acres for invasive weed removal
- 30,000 watercraft launches were overseen by inspectors to prevent other invasive species from being introduced
- 3,700 boats decontaminated

Recreation

- Lakeview Commons in South Lake Tahoe
- Lakeside Trail in Tahoe City
- Nevada Stateline-to-Stateline Bikeway, Kahle Drive to Elks Point Road in Round Hill
- Sawmill Bike Trail Section II near Meyers.

Forest health and fuels

- The 10,000-acre U.S. Forest Service South Shore Fuel Reduction Project started last season with the thinning operation along Highway 89 near Camp Richardson
- 19 homeowners in Logan Creek partnered with Tahoe Douglas Fire Protection District to complete fuel reduction and

defensible space work in their neighborhood by matching the district's costs with a \$20,000 private contribution.

Along with these high-profile projects, significant stormwater improvements were completed on roadways last year – many were years in the planning stages. These accomplishments are meaningful for Lake Tahoe. A recent evaluation of the thresholds found that 63 percent of measurable standards were in attainment or improving. The scientifically peer-reviewed report also showed the areas where we need to accelerate progress, and the recently adopted 2012 Regional Plan focuses on those areas.

TRPA is working at full steam to implement the updated plan, which includes streamlining permit processes for property owners through the new area plan framework. Local governments have already set to work developing their area plans and community members are participating in the process. TRPA is maintaining its regional role by collaborating to ensure the plans help attain Lake Tahoe's thresholds. This is a significant priority because it allows the community's vision to become an on-the-ground reality. If you aren't already, I encourage you to become involved in the area plans of your community by going online.

While we are facing litigation on the plan from the Sierra Club, we remain confident the court will uphold the plan. It not only meets our mandate to achieve and maintain regional standards, but is also a 21st Century model of sustainability. Far from being a growth strategy, the plan cuts the rate of residential allocation in half, eliminates 10,000 vehicle miles traveled in the basin annually, and anticipates an additional 1,200 parcels will be protected or restored. No other set of proposals analyzed comes close to this level of restoration. The challenge at Tahoe today is not stopping runaway growth, it's stopping the decline in our environment and communities.

The 40-year-old bi-state Compact that created TRPA is working to deliver meaningful results for Tahoe. This year's accomplishments alone show what can be achieved when public organizations and the private sector work together to increase environmental restoration and support our communities. We need more accomplishments like this next year and beyond to realize those images of a better future for Tahoe we collectively applauded at the South Shore forum. For more information, our website.

Joanne Marchetta is executive director of the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency.