

Sandoval not ready to commit to TRPA

By Sandra Chereb, AP

Nevada Gov. Brian Sandoval favors keeping alive the threat to leave the bi-state Tahoe Regional Planning Agency Compact, a decades-old agreement that has governed environmental controls and development in the basin , a legislative committee was told Tuesday.

But conservation groups said given more cooperation with California, environmental groups and business interests, repealing Nevada's threat would show the state's commitment to collaboration and tackling the lake's environmental challenges.



Gov. Brian Sandoval wants to keep Nevada's options open regarding inclusion in TRPA.
Photo/LTN file

No action was taken April 2 by the Senate Committee on Natural Resources on SB229, which would repeal the 2011 withdrawal legislation.

Steve Robinson, Sandoval's designee to the TRPA, said SB271 passed by the 2011 Legislature authorizing possible withdrawal

from TRPA was “essential” to jumpstarting negotiations and updating a regional plan for the first time since the late 1980s.

But he cautioned that a lawsuit filed in federal court in Sacramento by two environmental groups over the Regional Plan adopted in December “could be stopped in its tracks,” depending on how the court rules.

Additionally, the regional plan has yet to be fully implemented, and local governments now must come up with their own guidelines for overseeing some development activities.

“Looming over all of these ... are the threat of litigation,” Robinson said.

SB229 would repeal a law passed in 2011 that paved the way for Nevada to leave TRPA and instead regulate environmental protections and development within its boundaries.

Nevada lawmakers blamed their California counterparts for favoring tough environmental standards that they said were hindering development and the economy.

TRPA in December approved an updated Regional Plan that gives local governments more control over some decisions.

Sen. David Parks, D-Las Vegas and sponsor of the latest measure, said last year’s law was successful in bringing all parties to the table and an updated plan. But leaving it in effect would be a mistake.

“For this collaboration to continue ... it’s essential that Nevada recommit to the compact” by passing legislation this session repealing it, he said.

Kyle Davis with the Nevada Conservation League agreed, saying repeal of the withdrawal bill is “the top priority” of the state’s conservation community.

“I think lack of action by Nevada during this session will have a negative effect,” Davis said.

He said a perception that Nevada still wants to hold back would send “a pretty bad message” about its willingness to continue talks and work collaboratively.

Leo Drozdoff, director of the Nevada Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, reiterated Sandoval’s opposition to repeal – a sign committee chairman, Sen. Aaron Ford, D-Las Vegas, acknowledged was a hurdle for bill sponsors.

“We believe this bill is premature,” Drozdoff said, adding existing law sets a 2015 timeline for withdrawal and gives the governor the option to extend that deadline for another two years.

Business groups, including Tahoe resorts, also opposed the bill and urged the committee to allow more time, keeping the hammer of withdrawal in place.

But Parks disagreed.

“I think the important thing to bear in mind is time is of the essence,” he said. Given that Nevada lawmakers meet every two years, they won’t be able to consider repeal again until 2015.

“We’ll be at the eleventh hour,” he said.