

# South Shore elects united in legislative, recreation endeavors

By Joann Eisenbrandt

What bothered everyone present was the substantial loss of local representation and control, and the negative impacts on future funding for transportation and other projects that dissolution of the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency Compact would create.

This was one of many topics at the April 29 joint meeting of the Douglas County Commission and South Lake Tahoe City Council at Lake Tahoe Resort Hotel (formerly Embassy Suites).

The final topic was the potential impacts of California and Nevada Senate bills on the future configuration of TRPA. Controversy over the role and effectiveness of the bi-state agency has been the background noise of Tahoe economic and environmental discussions since its inception. Everyone's ears perked up with the passage of Nevada Senate Bill 271 in March 2011, providing for the withdrawal of Nevada from the Tahoe Regional Planning Compact by 2015 unless the 1987 Regional Plan was updated. In that case, the Nevada Tahoe Regional Planning Agency would assume TRPA's duties for the Nevada side of the Lake Tahoe Basin.



Recreation on the South Shore is now the economic focus. Photo/LTN file

South Lake Tahoe Mayor Tom Davis said, “(I) never thought I’d be supporting TRPA, but SB271 got us to where we wanted to be with the Regional Plan. Now to see the California reaction. It will put the Tahoe economy back to the dark ages. This is how wars get started.”

The Regional Plan update was finalized and adopted in December 2012, but SB271 has not been repealed. That is the intention of Nevada Senate Bill 229, introduced in March. It was approved by the Senate on April 22 and now goes to the Assembly. Nevada Gov. Brian Sandoval has said he will veto the bill pending further information on the status of the Sierra Club’s lawsuit against the TRPA Regional Plan update.

Uncomfortable with the uncertainty, California decided to cover its own Tahoe backside, with the introduction of Senate Bill 630, authored by Sens. Fran Pavley, D-Agoura Hills and Senate President Pro Tem Darrel Steinberg, D-Sacramento. Should Nevada withdraw from TRPA, or fail to repeal SB271 in its 2013 legislative session, the California Tahoe Regional Planning Agency (CTRPA), a precursor to TRPA that was dissolved when the bi-state compact was enacted, would be reconstituted and put in charge of the California side of the lake on Jan. 1, 2014.

TRPA’s current 14-member board would be replaced with a nine-

member governing body, appointed by California's governor with the approval of the Senate, with one member coming from South Lake Tahoe and one from either El Dorado or Placer counties.

City Councilwoman JoAnn Conner expressed her indignation over the idea that those outside the basin have the right to control what happens here. "It's a governance issue. Who has the right to govern this city . . . those senators from Southern California who condone the taking of our rights? Leave us alone. We're the stewards of the lake, not Santa Barbara or Los Angeles."

Douglas County Commissioner Nancy McDermid felt that all the work of SB271 has not yet been done. The Regional Plan was updated, but issues remain regarding the voting structure and who should bear the burden of proof in lawsuits against the agency. Currently the burden is on TRPA to prove it has lived up to its mandates, rather than on those suing to prove it hasn't. "[SB] 229 is premature. It's not like it's now or never. We have time to work on the other parts of [SB] 271." (McDermid is on the TRPA Governing Board.)

Commissioner Lee Bonner put into words the general sentiment in the room, "Our hearts are together on this issue .... Nobody wants the Compact to go away. No matter what, those of us at this table will work together."

City Councilwoman Angela Swanson asked that sentiment be put into concrete action, requesting that a joint letter from the city, Douglas County, Placer County and El Dorado County to the California and Nevada legislatures be drafted, outlining just what's at stake for the lake, and urging them to honor the commitments they made at the last environmental summit. City Manager Nancy Kerry and Douglas County Manager Steve Mokrohisky were tasked with drafting the letter as quickly as possible. The next joint City Council/Douglas County Commissioners meeting was tentatively set for immediately before or during the environmental summit in August.

Recreation, like most everything else at Lake Tahoe, is much more than child's play. Whether it's adults playing slot machines, or children thundering across a soccer field, it's a high stakes game because it's all tied to the basin's economic survival.

At Monday's meeting, the elected officials discussed the joint South Lake Tahoe-El Dorado County Parks, Trails and Recreation Master Plan, and the opportunity for Douglas County to partner with this effort.

Cindy Mendoza of MIG, the master plan consultant, spoke on the plan's components, goals and timeline. The plan focuses on a change from a mainly gaming-based economy to a recreation-based one. The cost to the city and county for the master plan is \$132,000. MIG was chosen, according to City Manager Nancy Kerry, "because they got the idea we needed guidelines on how to implement the plan, not just a document with pretty pictures." The projected completion date is May 2014.

Along the same joint planning theme, Nevada and California Tahoe-based area plans were discussed. Brandy McMahon, senior planner for Douglas County, gave a presentation on the county's South Shore Area Plan and John Hitchcock, planning manager for South Lake Tahoe gave a presentations on the city's Tourist Core Area Plan. While these are separate area plans, being developed under the recently-approved TRPA Regional Plan update, they have compatible design guidelines and standards and both focus on a long term vision to make Tahoe a more viable resort destination.

Mark Rayback, project engineer with Wood Rogers, gave a presentation on Tahoe Transportation District's loop road project. This project envisions the reconfiguration of Highway 50 from Pioneer Trail to about Edgewood Tahoe Golf Course, with the goal of creating a community "Main Street."