

# Letter: Gore needs to know another side of Tahoe

**Publisher's note:** *This letter was sent to Al Gore today and reprinted with permission.*

**Dear Vice President Gore,**

It is with a great sense of urgency and concern that we collectively write this letter to you. It is relatively well understood in the Basin that the primary environmental and citizen-action nonprofit organizations are the Sierra Club, Friends of the West Shore, North Tahoe Preservation Alliance, Friends of Lake Tahoe, and the North Tahoe Citizen Action Alliance. The Sierra Club and the Friends of the West Shore are currently plaintiffs in a lawsuit, which we support, against the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency (TRPA). The League to Save Lake Tahoe, formerly a member of our group, is absent from the list because most of us no longer consider them an ally in terms of keeping Tahoe blue.

Our primary effort here to convince you that your selection as the keynote speaker at the Tahoe Summit is designed by its sponsors as additional "greenwashing" of their plans for the Tahoe basin. Contrary to their promises, the urbanization through densification of several centers in the Tahoe basin will exacerbate environmental degradation, especially with inadequate measures to reverse the current decline in water quality.

Your presence, essentially, is, we are very sad to report, environmental "window dressing" by the chamber of commerce type of organizations that support the TRPA's Regional Plan update (RPU) that is currently being challenged in court. The association of your prestige would lend credence to their planned resort boom and further their relentless campaign. We

know you are familiar with this type of politics and have witnessed it throughout your career. The best description of how the ski resort development industry operates is chronicled in the Hal Clifford's critically acclaimed book "Downhill Slide".

We hope that this cautionary note will prompt you to look more deeply at the whole truth regarding the environmental status of Lake Tahoe, the incorrect underlying assumptions of the RPU, and how their economic promises are replete with miscalculations. We believe it is important that your remarks may be properly tempered and include that those of us who value Lake Tahoe as one of the few "Outstanding National Resource Water" under the Clean Water Act, oppose the RPU since it will environmentally and economically degrade the region.

A very sustained public relations campaign by the TRPA, ski resort industry developers, chambers of commerce, gaming interests, local governments, and select federal and state agencies have focused on half-truths, significant omissions of "inconvenient truths," and other ploys of deception to manipulate public opinion. Each stands to earn terrific revenues in the short term resulting from over-expansion cloaked with the pleasing environmental rhetoric of "smart growth." Indeed, we, too, support "smart growth principles" but also understand that they don't, can't, and won't work at Tahoe because the region lacks the requisite conditions for their success. Tourists and visitors do not enroll their children in local schools or behave as year-round residents in their shopping habits or work schedules. Since roadway and utility infrastructure is currently at capacity, increased densities carry excessive costs and environmental impacts.

The desire of your sponsors is, essentially, to have your speech writer(s) lace your comments with their talking points, slogans, myths, and stereotypes thereby endorsing their validity. Such terms have emotional appeal and have evolved

due to the lure of federal dollars for metropolitan areas.

If your speech uses terms such as “environmental redevelopment,” “building sustainable communities,” “improved clarity,” “compact, hi-density development,” “culture of cooperation,” “livable, walkable villages,” and so on, then you will have endorsed false claims such as the notion that people will ride a bike in the middle of winter at Tahoe to buy groceries. These terms divert attention from the real causes and parties responsible for environmental damage to Lake Tahoe.

Few people are aware, for example, that throughout the basin heavily contaminated unfiltered stormwater runoff from roadways and parking lots is dumped directly into the lake.

Sadly, here as elsewhere, while the scientific and environmental community knows the truth, the agencies and their consultants are locked into funding mechanisms based upon theories that require the perpetuation of an illusion replete with false claims that ultimately become perceived as reality. Again, we know that you are all too familiar with such phenomena.

Sophisticated propagandists in support of resort planning that delivers high profits to distant owners and destroys local businesses have already done a relatively good job at selling inapplicable planning principles to many of your colleagues. They are already on the wrong side of history politically, environmentally, and economically. Not unlike Gov. [Jerry] Brown’s comment at the summit two years ago about the problem at Tahoe being one of “squaring the circle,” while few readers will understand this analogy, need we mention Samantha Power’s analysis of an avoidable debacle that you are personally well aware of? You do not want to join those who have been duped with false claims and who will sadly acknowledge years from now that “they simply didn’t get it” at the time.

We would be delighted to meet with you or your staff to provide substantive evidence, which can also be found in the legal complaint, in support of our position.

Sincerely,

**Roger Patching, president Friends of Lake Tahoe**

**David McClure, president North Tahoe Citizen Action Alliance**

**Ann Nichols, president North Tahoe Preservation Alliance**