

# Opinion: Cooperation key to saving Lake Tahoe

By Clem Shute

The unanimous passage of SB630 by the California Legislature marks the end of an era of controversy and the beginning of an era of renewed cooperation between California and Nevada. The passage of this bill means a renewed commitment by the two states to cooperate in achieving the environmental thresholds established by the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency.

It also ends the possibility that the 45-year-old agreement between the states to work together on Tahoe issues would cease. And, it gives the states' support to TRPA in going forward with the recently adopted Regional Plan update.

How did we get here? Frustration over the inability of TRPA to update its Regional Plan manifested itself in the form of legislation passed in Nevada to withdraw from the Compact due in large part to the perceived gridlock in getting anything done. This frustration further showed when in August 2011 three United States senators and the two governors gave TRPA a deadline of December 2012 in which to update a plan which had remained largely unchanged since 1987.



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In fairness to TRPA, efforts to update the plan had been ongoing for many years but a lack of consensus prevented

action. In response to the deadline established by our elected leaders, TRPA began an intense effort to update the plan. A committee of the Governing Board held more than 15 hearings on possible provisions of an updated plan. Consensus was reached on some 90 percent of the issues but serious disagreements continued on major environmental policies. The two states stepped in and created a bi-state consultation process which was able to close the gaps and bring consensus for the updated plan.

It is important, particularly to me, that this consultation process resulted in increased environmental protections for Lake Tahoe without increasing the amount of development allowed. The Regional Plan update was adopted by the TRPA Governing Board on Dec. 12, 2012.

Both states have recognized the significance of the updated plan. They worked to remove obstacles to implementation of the new plan and set a course for renewed cooperation. Nevada repealed its law which threatened withdrawal from the Compact and California's SB630 carries forth the agreement between the states to support TRPA's efforts to improve the environment at Lake Tahoe.

However, we cannot break out the Champagne yet. A fly in the ointment in the form of a legal challenge by the Sierra Club must be overcome. That organization has done much to protect the environment over the decades. But, due to apparent misunderstandings on its part of what is in the plan, coupled with an attitude of full opposition unless it gets all of what it wants, the lawsuit is an obstacle to complete implementation of the Tahoe plan. I have urged the Sierra Club and anyone interested to look at the facts.

The strict growth controls that have been in effect since 1987 remain. Science has shown us that small particles released from pavement, old buildings and highways are a large cause for loss of lake clarity. The new plan emphasizes replacement

of that infrastructure thereby improving lake clarity. Some 1,200 parcels are expected to be protected or restored. The number of new homes that can be built is reduced from 300 per year to 130. The plan will reduce reliance on the automobile and reduce greenhouse gas emissions as required by California's SB375. There is an emphasis on removing development from environmentally sensitive areas. The new plan is not perfect but will achieve the environmental thresholds established by TRPA. It deserves the unfettered chance to be implemented without the cloud of litigation.

Now that Nevada and California have made an unqualified commitment to help TRPA, we at TRPA are poised to work together toward the common goal of a Lake Tahoe that remains as Mark Twain observed, "the fairest picture the whole Earth affords."

*Clem Shute is an appointee of California Gov. Jerry Brown to the TRPA Governing Board, was chair of the Regional Plan Update Committee, and is current chair of the Regional Plan Implementation Committee.*