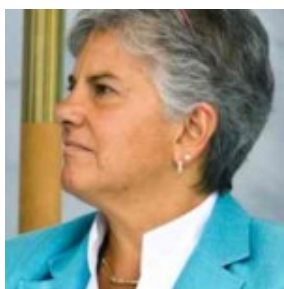


Opinion: Olympians prove Tahoe is recreation oasis

By Joanne Marchetta

The roster of U.S. Olympic athletes competing in Sochi this year is testament to the Tahoe region's reputation as an outdoor Mecca for mountain athletes. More than a dozen of our nation's competitors at the Games hail from the Tahoe area and our communities couldn't be more proud of these young athletes.

Lake Tahoe's natural attributes make it an incredible place to live, work and play and we are hearing more and more that communities want recreation and the outdoor lifestyle to play a larger role here.



Joanne
Marchetta

The Tahoe Regional Planning Agency and the Olympics are connected historically. Following the 1960 Winter Games at Squaw Valley an uncontrolled development boom ensued that spurred TRPA's creation in 1969. Over the last 45 years, TRPA has evolved and since the update of the Regional Plan in 2012, the agency is embracing its leadership role in sustaining Tahoe as an outdoor legend.

Our updated priorities include raising TRPA's focus back to the regional level that was originally envisioned when

California and Nevada created the bi-state agency. The area plan framework of the Regional Plan encourages local governments to take on more responsibility for planning, environmental improvement, and project permitting, which streamlines the permit process for property owners while enabling TRPA to focus on issues that affect the entire Basin and build the partnerships to address them.

As conditions change in the Tahoe basin such as prolonged drought or less snowfall over time, how we connect people to recreation opportunities has regional importance to our \$5 billion regional economy as well as our quality of life. Many of our Olympians could testify to both. They and their families had to support themselves while reaching for their Olympic dreams. The reality is that many families struggle to stay here and with a regional economy that is based on tourism, recreation improvements can bolster our economy while making Lake Tahoe an even better place to earn a living and raise a family.

Topping the regional list for needed recreation improvements is completion of a bikeway around the lake. Many key segments of this trail have been in use for years and TRPA has prioritized completing connections and seeing this project through. We share this goal with many partner agencies and the collaborative efforts are bringing forward new sections through Homewood, between Incline Village and Sand Harbor, and from Van Sickle Bi-State Park in Stateline to Roundhill Pines Beach in Nevada. Bike trails deliver air and water quality improvements while resulting in millions of dollars of economic activity to our local economy.

The southern anchor of the Stateline-to-Stateline Bikeway near Nevada Beach is already proving to be an amazing sample of the basin's transition from gaming to outdoor recreation. People now can bike through the forest to one of several marquee beaches, or hike to the Tahoe Rim Trail right from the largest hotel base on South Shore without once getting in a car.

Continuing to plan for and implement these types of improvements will help reduce driving and congestion, enhance our quality of life, and make Tahoe more competitive among mountain resorts.

Other than improving connections between people and recreation, in the coming year TRPA is focusing on basinwide sustainability initiatives, transportation improvements in key corridors, finding a stable source of funding for the Environmental Improvement Program, and supporting forest fuel reduction and defensible space efforts in one of the driest years on record. Also, regional partnerships are critically important this year for the lake. Already we are preparing for the possibility of drought conditions in the shorezone, making strides in aquatic invasive species protection, working with scientists on near shore-shoreline clarity and algae growth, and helping improve systems to monitor environmental quality as well as social and economic issues.

As a region and as individual communities mapping out their unique destinies, Lake Tahoe is on a path of positive progress. As we welcome home the many Tahoe Olympians who represented the U.S. in this Winter Games, let's remember that we owe it to future Olympians to continue protecting our mountain lifestyle, improving our fragile environment, and preparing for a changing landscape.

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