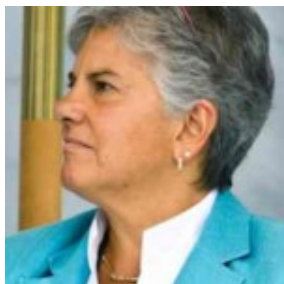


Opinion: TRPA's leadership goes beyond the basin

By Joanne Marchetta

The environment of Lake Tahoe does not often turn on a dime. Environmental progress is measured in decades, not the nanoseconds of the digital age.

When the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency and partner agencies started inspecting Lake Tahoe watercraft in 2008, all we knew was that we needed to protect our waters from the growing threats of aquatic invasive species. We took the necessary steps, but did not know then that the watercraft inspection program would one day help protect other water bodies as well. Five years later, Lake Tahoe aquatic invasive species experts are consulted across the Western states and are called to Washington, D.C., to help on the national level.



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Lake Tahoe's reputation as an environmental leader took an exciting turn last month. At a summit in Colorado, the water sports industry unveiled an aquatic invasive species boat filtration system developed in partnership with TRPA and other wildlife agencies. Spurred by the rise of watercraft inspection programs in the United States, a private company created a biologic filtration system, an innovation that can be installed in ballast bladders on many wake sport boats.

Leading aquatic invasive species researchers at UNR carried out extensive testing of the filter system in Lake Mead's heavily infested waters. The system proved effective at keeping aquatic invasive species and their larvae out of ballast tanks, live-wells, and bait-wells. Its use, if it catches on, could save boaters wait-time and help keep the cost of the program down by eliminating the need to decontaminate most ballast systems at Tahoe.

The recent environmental innovation is already spurring change. The company has orders coming in rapidly from major boat manufacturers and dealerships. The result of collaboration will improve the efficiency of watercraft inspection programs here in Tahoe and across the country and could reduce the spread of invasive species to unprotected waters.

This is not the first time Lake Tahoe's leading-edge policies catalyzed increased environmental protections beyond these shores. In 1999, when TRPA prohibited carbureted two-stroke watercraft engines in the Tahoe region, other water bodies, such as Donner Lake and San Pablo Reservoir, followed suit with similar regulation of the high-polluting engines. This was one instance where the environmental improvement to Tahoe was noticeable immediately. In the first year of the prohibition, a 70 percent drop in gas-related pollutants was measured lakewide. New federal EPA emissions standards for two-stroke engines came online in 2006 and most two-strokes are now cleaner burning, fuel injected engines.

The positive results of other Tahoe conservation programs that garner national and international attention are realized more slowly and doggedly. UC Davis last week released encouraging data from 2013 that shows the lake's clarity is holding steady. After more than two decades of environmental guidelines and restoration projects, the decline of Lake clarity has halted and science is showing that with innovative strategies we can return Lake Tahoe to its historic depth of

nearly 100 feet. Every year, planners from other countries visit Tahoe to take away lessons for harmonizing the natural with the man-made environment.

Tahoe is on a world stage environmentally for how we protect the urban and natural worlds for future generations. Few alpine lakes which claim such awe-inspiring beauty and pristine conditions also share the complexities of being a year-round vacation destination surrounded by diverse communities. Lake Tahoe is one of just three lakes on the West Coast designated an Outstanding National Resource Water and the only one outside the National Parks system with a mix of public and private property ringed by highways and a population in the tens of thousands.

These are among the reasons Tahoe's environmental initiatives are so often used as models and drivers of environmental innovation. Our efforts to establish equilibrium between the human and natural environments provide both inspiration and instruction for communities grappling with similar issues. When we work to protect our shores, sometimes we are serving more than our beloved lake. We are setting an example of environmental stewardship for others far and wide.

Lake Tahoe communities are changing for the better and progress is coming from all sectors. As we strive to save the lake and improve our communities, it is important to recognize that we also carry the responsibility to share our innovations with others, which in turn pays dividends for Lake Tahoe.

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