

# 'Saving Lake Tahoe' not the easiest read

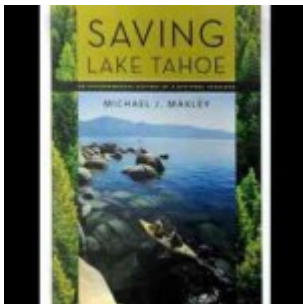
By Kathryn Reed

Sometimes I read a book and I'm left wondering who the author thought was going to read it.

Such was the case with "Saving Lake Tahoe: An Environmental History of a National Treasure" by Michael J. Makley.

Usually history and environmental books can captivate me. This, in some ways, felt like reading a regurgitation of facts, at times like a textbook.

For people who have lived the story, I can't see them wanting to read this because that's how I felt about the last half the book. I want to read something I don't already know so I can learn.



And for those who don't know this aspect of Tahoe's past, I think they would likely become overwhelmed with all the facts.

I know the book was not completely factual because I found errors. When this happens in a book I am then left questioning what else is not accurate.

For instance, Makley said the day the Angora Fire started in June 2007 there was a controlled burn. This is completely wrong. There were no controlled burns that day on the South Shore because it was a "red flag" day.

He also said the area was reseeded via hydromulch. Hydromulching did occur to stabilize the soil. Seeds and

fertilizer were not part of the mix.

Then Makley references *Lake Tahoe News* for a May 2009 article. *LTN* didn't launch until September of that year.

Where were the editors and fact checkers at the University of Nevada Press? Yes, authors get things wrong. But they should not be the last line of defense.

Makley would have been better served to have taken on a narrower topic and developed it in more detail.

It was a bit alarming to read how much development was proposed and how what is here got approved. It's easy to see why environmental groups don't trust local governments to protect the environment, which includes the lake.

Part of the book was like reading a history of the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency. With that in mind, you know Makley could write many sequels. And the agency's history is interesting. It's certainly tied to the philosophy of the two states.

The book showed how the dispute between California and Nevada has been going on for what seems like forever – at least to the early 1900s as documented by Makley. It has been an unstable relationship for most of that time.

One can only wonder what the Lake Tahoe Basin would be like today had the scientists had a louder voice.

"The scientists' recommendations conflicted with pressure to continue economic growth, stemming from gambling, real estate, and recreation. This emphasized the fact that the State of California, as represented by the restructured CTRPA, tended to back the scientists, while local governments and the State of Nevada generally supported the economic interests," Makley wrote.

Plus, it was in the 1980s that scientists said fine sediment

is a problem for lake clarity. More than 30 years later and we still haven't fixed that issue.

The sad part is that history just seems to keep repeating itself. And this includes the fact that those with money can save or destroy Lake Tahoe – with an acknowledgement that “save” and “destroy” are defined differently by people. I do have new respect for William Hewlett – of Hewlett-Packard fame – after reading the book.