

Opinion: Calif. water bond is good for Tahoe

By Julie Regan

As we count down the days until the Nov. 4 election, we are in full information overload. Mailboxes are exploding with proposition mailers. Measures seem to run from A to Z. It would be easy to say forget about it all. And that would be a big mistake. Here's why.

Despite this being a non-presidential election cycle, there are some important initiatives on the ballot for Californians. And making your voice heard at the local and state levels is possible by casting your vote.



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Proposition 1, referred to as the California Water Bond, may seem of remote interest to us in Tahoe who are removed from the north versus south state water wars. But the bond is actually important to the Lake Tahoe Basin. The proposition includes grant funding for environmental restoration projects and direct funding for the California Tahoe Conservancy.

The subject of water is notoriously controversial in the American West. Mark Twain has scads of quotes about it including this one: "High and fine literature is wine, and mine is only water; but everybody likes water."

We like it so much in fact that we are running out of it. State water supplies are in dire straits and Lake Tahoe just dipped below its natural rim. If the drought continues, Tahoe's winter economy will be severely harmed and our shores will be threatened by new and existing invasive species. Add to these factors a changing climate and we could have the perfect storm for water quality and water quantity.

If passed by voters, Proposition 1 would authorize \$7.5 billion in general obligation bonds for state water infrastructure and watershed restoration projects. While we won't see a new line item on our property or income taxes for Proposition 1, the bonds would become part of California's overall debt obligation. The bond is designed to invest heavily in the aging water infrastructure of the state and protect its many watersheds. A significant portion of the bond, \$1.5 billion, is designated for protecting rivers, lakes, coastal waters, and watersheds.

Lake Tahoe could see the return of funding which has run out for environmental projects in the Lake Tahoe environmental improvement program (EIP) if Proposition 1 passes. The Tahoe Regional Planning Agency leads the EIP in partnership with nearly 50 different implementing agencies including the Tahoe Conservancy and other California state agencies. The EIP, in combination with sound land use policies and other factors, has driven one of most significant improvements in the Tahoe environment in decades – the stabilization of lake clarity and an end of the precipitous decline that plagued us for decades. California water bond funds are essential to continue the state's commitment to protecting Lake Tahoe and to continuing this progress.

Overall, the passage of the California Water Bond would mean additional dollars for investment in many environmental restoration projects for the Lake Tahoe Region which also drives infrastructure, construction, and other jobs in our local economy.

With the future of funding for environmental restoration and EIP projects uncertain, the California Water Bond would provide a secure funding source. Money received through this bond could also be used to leverage funding from other sources, including federal, and private.

As a local homeowner, I feel the pain of taxes and consider every new measure and proposition carefully. Please do the same. And please think of the future. Warren Buffet said it best: "Someone's sitting in the shade today because someone planted a tree a long time ago."

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