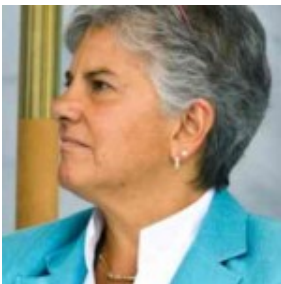


Opinion: Without collaboration, status quo prevails

By Joanne Marchetta

As the keynote speaker at last month's National Workshop on Large Landscape Conservation in Washington, D.C., U.S. Department of the Interior Secretary Sally Jewell emphasized the central role collaboration must play for America to protect its natural resources, balance economic needs, and address emerging environmental challenges such as climate change.

"We are moving into an era of epic collaboration," Jewell said, explaining that regional partnerships across jurisdictional boundaries are more important than ever for the federal department that manages 20 percent of our nation's land.



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The Department of the Interior has directed 70,000 employees at its array of agencies, bureaus, and offices not only to work better together, but to work better with other federal, state, tribal, and local governments, and the private sector, toward large-landscape solutions for challenges and conflicts. When insular agendas conflict, nothing gets done, and when

nothing gets done, the status quo is our only option.

The need for collaboration, partnership, and a landscape approach to planning and environmental protection has long been recognized at Lake Tahoe. It was the central factor when California and Nevada took a visionary step and created the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency 45 years ago this December.

The bi-state compact created TRPA to “harmonize the needs of the region as a whole so as to ensure an equilibrium between the region’s natural endowment and its man-made environment,” tasking it, two states, and six local governments to work together to protect and restore one of the world’s largest and clearest mountain lakes and its 500-square-mile watershed.

While it may have been implicit all along, TRPA made building partnerships and taking actions to back them up an explicit core value in its 2010 Strategic Plan. Today, as resources for continued restoration progress become scarce, we need to ensure partnership and collaboration remain at the heart of our approach to regional environmental and socioeconomic restoration work. TRPA is taking partnership to the next level and making “epic collaboration” its central strategic goal. Collaboration has not always been easy to achieve at Lake Tahoe, but history proves no progress is possible without it. Fortunately, it is alive and well at Tahoe.

The TRPA-led watercraft inspection program, recognized as a national model, brings together 40 public and private partners working to keep aquatic invasive species out of Lake Tahoe. At iconic Emerald Bay, divers are removing five acres of rubber mats that were laid down to control an infestation of harmful invasive Asian clams. The collaborative project not only reduces the population of non-native clams, but also studies the mats’ effectiveness as a way to control other invasive species populations in the lake.

For years, agencies at Lake Tahoe have been working together

to reduce hazardous fuel loads and the risk of catastrophic wildfire through a multijurisdictional plan. Nearly 37,000 acres were treated from 2008 to 2013, mostly close to homes and property for front-line protection.

Impressive water quality improvement projects are showing how public agencies and the private sector can partner to improve communities and transportation systems and reduce stormwater pollution. That includes the Kings Beach Commercial Core Improvement Project, which along with pollutant cleaning strategies, has added benefits of sidewalks, street lighting, roundabouts, traffic calming, and overall revitalized community character for that North Shore community. It also includes the Bijou Erosion Control Project and Harrison Avenue Streetscape Improvement Project in South Lake Tahoe, which added renewed vitality and streetscape improvements to businesses close to Lakeview Commons. Together, these three projects will reduce the amount of fine sediment and pollutants washing into Lake Tahoe each year with stormwater by almost 70,000 pounds – a critical achievement as we continue to restore water clarity our lake lost for decades.

Communities around Tahoe are working to reimagine their futures and craft their own visions of environmental restoration and economic revitalization under the new Regional Plan. It is a challenging process, but as these area plans are created and realized they will improve not only individual communities, but the natural splendors, economies, transportation systems, and recreational opportunities of the Tahoe Basin as a whole.

Public agencies and stakeholders at Tahoe had to set aside independent agendas to overcome huge challenges and controversies and come together to agree on their common interests and needs for the new Regional Plan approved in 2012. We are now working together to ensure those interests and needs are met and balanced with our beautiful lake's environmental needs. Let's show the rest of the country we can

lead. Epic collaboration is hard, relentless work. Without it, our political system elsewhere is in gridlock. Here at Tahoe, we have something going for us that we cannot risk losing. Collaboration and partnership are a continuing commitment needed for our collective success. Please join TRPA in making that commitment.

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