

# Opinion: TRPA Compact keeps protecting Tahoe

By Shelly Aldean

Forty-five years ago, in December 1969, President Richard Nixon signed a unique bi-state compact approving California and Nevada's plan to create the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency. It was the first such undertaking of its kind, uniting two states, six local jurisdictions, and the federal government in a shared mission to protect Lake Tahoe's sensitive environment from overdevelopment.



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That effort has shaped the Tahoe we know and love today, and will help shape the Tahoe that we bequeath to future generations.

As we mark this important milestone, it's important to note that some of our progress is measured by what's not seen at Tahoe. The creation of the TRPA halted the runaway growth of the 1960s, ending plans for the development of a 750,000-resident city and a four-lane highway around the lake with a bridge across Emerald Bay.

Collaboration and progress have been a constant part of our efforts. So, too, unfortunately, has conflict.

Humans have cherished our beautiful mountain lake for

thousands of years. Tahoe's splendor inspires our imaginations and powers our appreciation of nature. It also supports a \$5 billion per year economy and attracts millions of visitors annually. Residents, business owners, environmental groups, and tourists all have interests in Lake Tahoe's well-being, and often hold differing views about how it should be protected and enjoyed. Our greatest progress over the past 45 years has been achieved through collaboration – and from working through our conflicts in search of compromise.

Disagreements about regulation and control between the states and local jurisdictions in the 1970s and differing views on the amount of development to permit at Tahoe in the 1980s led to the adoption of our prohibition on new housing subdivisions and our growth control caps for new lodging, commercial floor area, and homes. In the 1980s, consensus emerged from a plethora of opinions, resulting in the creation of an ambitious set of environmental thresholds that TRPA has a mandate to attain for key indicators such as air and water quality, lake clarity, fish and wildlife habitat, vegetation, scenery, and recreation.

None of our progress over the last 45 years has come without controversy or conflict, and yet, our progress has been real and noteworthy.

TRPA's ban on highly polluting two-stroke watercraft engines at Tahoe was the nation's first. It was highly controversial at the time, but has significantly improved our lake's water quality. Our mandatory boat inspection program for aquatic invasive species prevention is considered a model for the nation.

Launched in the mid-1990s, the environmental improvement program has invested about \$1.7 billion in federal, state, local, and private sector funding in projects that have stabilized our lake's once-declining clarity, installed erosion control measures on 674 miles of roads, treated almost

56,000 acres of forest land with hazardous fuel reduction projects, restored 20,000 acres of wildlife habitat, improved public shoreline access, and built 137 miles of new bicycle and pedestrian routes.

Conflict has often tested the commitment to our unified effort, but it has been unable to break our common bond and purpose. Instead, it has strengthened our resolve and led to some of our greatest accomplishments.

In the years leading up to the adoption of the Regional Plan update in December 2012, differences emerged between California and Nevada that threatened to break apart our bi-state Compact. Once again, we found common ground with a science-based plan designed to improve lake clarity, make communities more walkable and bikeable, and streamline the permitting process for homeowners and businesses.

California and Nevada are as committed as ever to our shared mission, and to the continued implementation of that Regional Plan Update for the benefit of our environment and our communities. California Gov. Jerry Brown put it best at this year's Lake Tahoe Summit in August when he said, "A breakdown can pave the way for a breakthrough."

We have much to be proud of after 45 years, but much more to do. Conflict and differences of opinion over policy at Tahoe will remain a constant part of our effort. The most important issue is how we manage that conflict, look at the needs of the basin holistically in our search for common ground, and chart the best path forward for our beautiful lake and surrounding communities. History has shown us time and time again that this is how real progress is made and true success is achieved.

In the words of Henry Ford, "Coming together is a beginning; keeping together is progress; working together is success."

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