

# Opinion: Working together for Tahoe's sake

By Casey Beyer

As the incoming chair of the 15-member Tahoe Regional Planning Agency Governing Board, this promises to be a hopeful and exciting year. 2015 will be full of opportunities, but also challenges, for the continued protection of Lake Tahoe.

The No. 1 priority among our challenges is funding shortfalls. Federal and state funding that has paid for environmental restoration and protection efforts at Lake Tahoe for years is drying up and new approaches need to be pursued.



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We must work together to find creative resources from our federal, state, local, and private sector partners to continue completing environmental improvement program (EIP) projects. Over the last two decades, the EIP has built bike paths, improved the health of our forests, reduced stormwater pollution, and halted a decadeslong decline in Lake Tahoe's mid-lake water clarity.

Our environmental efforts must include Tahoe's near shore. That area of the lake is the focus of a new monitoring and research program because it continues to experience water quality problems even as mid-lake clarity has stabilized. Addressing threats from pollution, algae growth, and the

spread of invasive species are top priorities for us.

We must find long-term funding sources to continue our mandatory boat inspection program to prevent the introduction of new aquatic invasive species into Lake Tahoe, and to control as best we can the impact of damaging invasive species that are already in the lake.

We are seeing many transportation improvements in the Tahoe basin, with major local projects such as the Kings Beach Commercial Core Improvement Project, Harrison Avenue Streetscape Improvement Project, and Incline Village to Sand Harbor Bike Path all taking shape. But we must do more to improve our transportation corridors.

Transportation projects offer some of the best return for our dollar in terms of community revitalization and improved mobility, access, and recreation. They also offer tremendous environmental benefit by creating safer and more convenient ways for people to get around on foot or bike and by reducing the amount of fine sediment and other pollution that washes into Lake Tahoe with rainfall and snow melt.

Part of our transportation challenge is educating policy makers in Washington, D.C. Federal funding formulas allocate money for roadwork based on our small rural population, and fail to account for the millions of visitors who travel to Tahoe each year from nearby cities. Upgrading our transportation infrastructure and transit systems in the basin, so critical to the health of Lake Tahoe's environment and communities, as well as the experience of visitors, requires changing those formulas.

As a native of Nevada and a California governor appointee, in my three decades of public service in California and Nevada, no assignment has been more important to me than when I was appointed to the TRPA Governing Board in September 2009. In the last five plus years I have worked to build a bi-partisan

bridge of trust between two states and gained the respect of California Gov. Jerry Brown and Nevada Gov. Brian Sandoval. There is no question that California and Nevada share the responsibility to protect this national treasure.

Growing up in Reno, Lake Tahoe was my playground and backyard and I spent every spare moment I could enjoying it. Skiing and swimming in the lake's crystal clear water and hiking the Rim Trail before it was recognized as a recreational wonder were all part of growing up. It's these activities that turned me into a young environmental steward in the 1960s at the same time the TRPA was being created.

For years, unproductive interactions between the stakeholders at Lake Tahoe stalled progress and did little to improve the lake's environment or our communities. Fortunately, times are different today.

In December 2012, we turned a page in Lake Tahoe's history by approving a widely supported Regional Plan. Implementation of the plan will improve Tahoe's natural environment and the health, sustainability, and economic vitality of our communities. A variety of groups with different opinions are setting aside their differences to focus on our challenges and seeking solutions for the mutual interest of the Lake Tahoe Basin.

Winston Churchill once said, "If we open a quarrel between the past and present, we shall find that we have lost the future." I want everyone to be a part of solving the challenges we have before us, because meeting them head on will benefit our lake and the opportunity will be our legacy to future generations. That does not mean we will agree on every issue, but when we stay engaged, bringing our different views and opinions to bear on problems, keeping the big picture in mind, we will find common solutions.

*Casey Beyer will serve as chair of the TRPA Governing Board*

*from January 2015 to December 2017.*