

# Opinion: Locals Taking Action – Connecting the drops

By Rebecca Bryson

I don't know if you've felt it lately, but there is a lot of positive energy in Tahoe lately. Locals are saying "we want this" and then taking the steps to make it happen. It's coming from the leadership, but even more important, it's coming from the people who live here.

We have achieved much, from the proposed Bijou bike park, greenhouses, domes, gardens, and nutrition programs in our elementary schools, and the largely volunteer built, world-class Corral mountain bike trail project. These projects are important to the people of Tahoe and to our future as a strong, vibrant community.



This column – Locals Taking Action – will highlight examples of locals taking positive action in our community and offer steps – large and small – that all of

us can also take to contribute to this transformation. Locals Taking Action allows us to tip our hats and learn from those in the basin who are actively making a difference in our community.

Our first set of articles will focus on water and energy saving initiatives. Why? Because water and energy work together. If you've been reading the news, you know that South Tahoe Public Utility District – which ultimately means us, as the community – will be required to cut its water use by the percentage identified in the state Water Resources Control Board conservation standard, currently listed at 28 percent.

Fortunately, STPUD already has some programs in place that we

can take advantage of in short order. STPUD is once again offering the Turf Buy Back Program to eligible applicants. Do you have to eliminate all of your beautiful grass? No. The rebate just requires that a minimum of 400 square feet of lawn be replaced. With our dry winter, some of your grass has probably already died. Now is the time to eliminate or downsize your lawn – to not only save water, but also make your life easier, as native plants or nonliving groundcover require much less maintenance and water. Funds are limited, so contact STPUD as soon as possible to get on the program waiting list.

STPUD also offers rebates to upgrade residential and commercial appliances, including toilets, clothes washers, and water efficient fixtures. You can receive a rebate of up to \$100 for the installation of a high efficiency toilet, and \$200 for the installation of a new high efficiency clothes washer, significantly reducing the replacement cost. Isn't it time you opted for a new toilet or washer that is easier on the environment? Contact Donielle Morse at [dmorse@stpud.dst.ca.us](mailto:dmorse@stpud.dst.ca.us) or 530.543.6268 to sign up for a rebate and/or a free Water Wise House Call assessment. There will be a Turf Buy Back workshop on May 6 at 6pm at STPUD's board room, 1275 Meadow Crest Drive in South Lake Tahoe.

In this time of drought, we need to be mindful of not only our water consumption, but our energy consumption as well. Using water also affects the amount of energy we burn. In Tahoe, we expend 15 million kilowatt-hours per year to transport our wastewater up over mountain passes and out of the basin. This costs almost \$1.5 million per year. Any water savings you can achieve also saves our community from excess energy costs.

Since water and energy are linked together, use of one affects the other. Massive amounts of water are used to cool the power plants that generate our electricity. So every time you turn on your computer, television or lights, water is being used. According to research, one light bulb left on 12 hours a day

for a year uses 3,000 to 6,000 gallons of water at the power plant. Based on these calculations, replacing one frequently used incandescent light bulb with a CFL bulb can save not only 60 to 70 percent in energy costs, but also between 2,000 to 4,000 gallons of water a year. LEDs can save even more.

Think about how many places in businesses, schools, and even in your own house where lights are being left on all day – even in these long days of sunlight. Turn off all lights and equipment when you are not using them. And sign up for one of Liberty Utilities free home energy audits. As part of the audit, they provide free LED and CFL lights as well as water conserving showerheads. Contact Liberty Utilities at 800.782.2506 Monday-Friday, 8am to 5pm.

*Rebecca Bryson wrote this in collaboration with members of the Energy Water and Waste Workgroup of the Lake Tahoe Sustainability Collaborative. The Collaborative is a group of more than 100 community members, business owners, agency representatives and nonprofit employees committed to supporting and accelerating the changes necessary to create a thriving, vibrant future for Lake Tahoe.*

**Next article:** Illuminating changes at Lake Tahoe Environmental Science Magnet School.