

Opinion: United approach benefits Lake Tahoe

By Casey Beyer

History shows time and time again our greatest accomplishments at Lake Tahoe are achieved when people work together. In the past, Tahoe was known as a place where unproductive interactions between stakeholders led to a stunning decay in our environment and our economic vitality, creating a region that seemed frozen in time.

We face major environmental challenges at Tahoe, including the uncertainties of climate change. And as Albert Einstein said, “We can’t solve problems by using the same kind of thinking we used when we created them.”



Casey Beyer

Fortunately, today, we have a strong and broad coalition of people who are working to meet those challenges head on. We must remember the lessons from our past and focus on working together and finding innovative solutions to achieve our next greatest accomplishments.

One recent example of people working together is the volunteer beach cleanups organized to pick up more than 2 tons of trash left behind by July 4 crowds.

The League to Save Lake Tahoe organized more than 300

volunteers who took time out of their own holiday weekends to pick up 1,800 pounds of trash carelessly left on our beaches. Similar efforts were undertaken by K&K Services, Clean Tahoe, and no doubt by many others. These volunteers deserve our thanks for stepping up to keep our environment and communities free of litter.

But keeping people from littering in the first place is another way to address this problem. Tahoe Fund, the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency, and dozens of other agencies, nonprofit groups, and businesses teamed up to create the innovative Take Care campaign. We have created an outreach campaign that aims to improve environmental awareness and stewardship among our visitors and residents and prevent such messes.

Take Care messages and graphics are available for free online. TRPA encourages people to use them every way possible. The colorful and creative messages are a subtle way to remind people that we all have a role to take better care of Tahoe by doing simple things such as properly disposing of our trash, preventing wildfires, stopping the spread of invasive species, and cleaning up after our pets.

At the state level, California and Nevada leaders are more committed than ever to finding solutions to vexing issues by working hand-in-hand. As Sen. Dean Heller, R-Nev., said, "If Nevadans and Californians can all agree upon one issue, it is the protection of Lake Tahoe."

In a renewed spirit of cooperation, both states approved significant budget enhancements this year to provide sustainable funding for Tahoe's boat inspection program. TRPA, in collaboration with 40 partner agencies and nonprofits, manages the inspection program. It has successfully prevented the introduction of any new aquatic invasive species and has become a national model for other parts of the country looking for ways to stop invasive species.

Leaders at the federal level also remain key partners at Tahoe. This month, our bi-state delegation in the Senate introduced the Lake Tahoe Restoration Act of 2015. Introduced by Sens. Dean Heller, Harry Reid, D-Nev., Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif., and Barbara Boxer, D-Calif., this bipartisan legislation is a comprehensive approach to continued environmental restoration at Tahoe, authorizing up to \$415 million over 10 years.

Colleagues in the House of Representatives also are working on a version of the bill. Rep. Tom McClintock, R-Granite Bay, this week had a committee hearing on draft legislation he is preparing.

The legislation introduced in the Senate would continue the federal government's investment in critical projects at Tahoe to improve forest health, reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire, combat aquatic invasive species, reduce storm water pollution, improve water quality, restore mid-lake clarity, and continue reintroduction of the native Lahontan cutthroat trout.

This federal funding would give a substantial boost to our Lake Tahoe environmental improvement program, providing funding to leverage with local government, state, and private sector funding to complete our region's highest-priority environmental restoration projects. More than 50 government, nonprofit, and private sector partners have made significant progress working together through the EIP, which is recognized as one of our country's most ambitious and successful environmental restoration programs.

Almost 445 projects completed through the EIP have halted Tahoe's long-running decline in water clarity, improved storm water collection and treatment on 674 miles of roads, cleared hazardous fuels from 55,690 acres of forest, restored nearly 16,000 acres of wildlife habitat, opened 2,579 feet of additional shoreline for public access, and built 137 miles of

new bike and pedestrian routes. That is progress we can all be proud of, and progress we need to continue.

We are fortunate to have such an amazing array of individuals and groups who care deeply about Tahoe's future and are committed to working together to preserve and restore our environment and revitalize our communities. Strengthening and building upon that culture of partnership and collaboration is a top priority for TRPA, and it is how we will best meet the challenges that lay ahead. Please join us in that effort by being active and engaged, and by sharing your energy and creativity to help us all work together toward common solutions.

Casey Beyer is chair of the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency Governing Board.