

Electeds differ on what Tahoe needs



Sens. Dean Heller and Dianne Feinstein show bipartisan and bistate support for the Lake Tahoe Restoration Act. Photos/Kathryn Reed

By Kathryn Reed

ROUND HILL – Lake Tahoe’s congressional delegation wants the feds to spend more money in the basin. But they are divided on how much and where to spend it.

Money, forest health, lake clarity and transportation were the key subjects during the 19th annual Lake Tahoe Environmental Summit at Round Hill Pines on Aug. 24.

Sen. Dean Heller, R-Nev., is seeking \$450 million in his Lake Tahoe Restoration Act reauthorization bill, while Rep. Tom McClintock, R-Elk Grove, is asking for \$60 million in his bill.

Both include money for forest thinning and aquatic invasive species. The more expensive one will include transportation funds, cash for oversight and spending on other Tahoe environmental programs.

Since the inaugural summit in 1997, \$1.8 billion in public and private money has been spent on environmental improvement projects in the basin. The initial push was on lake clarity. In the intervening years what does and could affect the lake's clarity has changed and grown.



Rep. Tom McClintock, who represents the California side of the basin in the House, has introduced a scaled down bill to help Tahoe.

The other component that has been added is economic. With a healthy forest and a water body that allows people to see more than 70 feet down, it attracts tourists. Without these components, in some ways the basin becomes just another tree filled area with a potentially brown lake.

Gov. Jerry Brown pointed out that with California and Nevada's populations expected to grow substantially in the coming years

that it is impossible to stick with the status quo when it comes to solving problems.

“We are going to have to engineer at a higher level,” Brown told the more than 300 people in attendance. “We have to fight fires smarter and take care of the forests. We need to de-carbonize.”

McClintock warned, “The greatest environmental threat to Tahoe is a forest fire. The Rim Fire (two years ago near Yosemite) was 80 times larger than Angora.”

He believes since Congress has not approved the larger LT Restoration Act since 2009 that it is time to try a smaller formula and get the critical needs addressed. There are agencies in the basin that concur with this approach.