

Letter: Tahoe not on cutting edge of environmental planning

To the community,

Although TRPA has spent a lot of time since 2012 touting messages about how *“Lake Tahoe is often looked to as an area on the cutting edge of environmental planning”* (e.g. 1, 2, 3), we beg to differ. This may have been the case decades ago, but other areas now surpass Lake Tahoe in terms of environmental protection, stormwater technology, and natural resource protection. Here are some examples of how our local planning isn't quite 'ahead of the game:'

- California's Water Board **promotes natural infiltration** instead of large stormwater facilities to help reduce polluted stormwater runoff, yet TRPA's 2012 Regional Plan promotes more pavement in **areas closest to Lake Tahoe** and encourages large “areawide” stormwater facilities;
- The Environmental Protection Agency encourages the **elimination of curb and gutter systems**, however extensive systems are being installed and/or planned around the Basin;
- Caltrans reports and numerous traffic studies note **increasing highway capacity leads to more traffic and driving**, but the TRPA and transportation agencies are **approving more**;
- **Other local government** regulations protect natural ridgelines, while Tahoe agencies are **contemplating new ridgeline development**; and
- Tahoe plans include **more parking spaces** as groups undertake efforts to **remove them**.

Making matters worse, the proposed **2015 Lake Tahoe Restoration Act** would amend the TRPA Compact to weaken TRPA's role in environmental protection by **requiring TRPA** to consider the

(presumed) economic impacts of plan regulations. *Keep in mind this is often what the corporations and large developers claim to be 'economic.'* Their ideas of 'economic' (increasing their immediate [short-term] profits) are not based on truly helping our locally-owned/small businesses and communities, or long-term protection of Lake Tahoe. TRPA is currently the only agency with land use authority in the Lake Tahoe Basin charged with protecting Tahoe's environment; the economics of the basin are already being monitored and prioritized by local entities (e.g. counties), along with numerous groups (e.g. **Resort Associations**). Notably, the original TRPA Compact was strengthened in 1980 because local governments eyeing tax dollars were approving projects that harmed Tahoe's environment (although TRPA has, unfortunately, returned most project approval authority back to the counties, oversight is still required). The proposed Compact amendment will leave us with no land use authority that truly prioritizes Lake Tahoe's environment. As depicted in our "**Tahoe Regional Overgrowth**" map, the North Tahoe region is already facing substantial development proposals that will bring more people, more cars, and more crowding. We are not opposed to new development, but believe it should complement and respect Lake Tahoe's fragile environment and our unique communities – not *overwhelm* them. We will continue to keep you informed as these plans and projects proceed.

Sincerely,

Susan Gearhart, Friends of the West Shore president