

Opinion: An answer to the Keys' problem

By Steve Urie

Kathryn Reed's balanced **Aug. 12 article** on the plan to use herbicides to control invasive curlyleaf pondweed and Eurasian watermilfoil, and native coontail in the Tahoe Keys begins with the overriding message of a study presented by the Tahoe Keys Property Owners Association at this week's public meeting: "It's time to do something different."

Indeed it is, but it isn't what five Tahoe scientists proposed, which is to use "tailored and prescriptive use of selective approved herbicides" to attack the weeds choking the Keys' waterways. As much as the five agency managers and academics, who received the bulk of the study's \$250,000 cost, would like us to believe that there are chemicals that are strong enough to be effective after being diluted by the flow from the Upper Truckee River and selective enough to distinguish between the two non-native plants and the half dozen native plants in the Keys' canals – it isn't true.



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Reed reports that it was noted that using the herbicides "would be like applying a chemical to kill dandelions on a yard, but not killing the grass at the same time." Probably true. Here are **15 human health problems** linked to using Monsanto's Roundup.

One of the study's authors, Lars Anderson **says in an intro video** that the program's goals were to reduce the \$400,000 annual cost to mechanically harvest the plants and "to overall improve the growth of native plants and have a habitat suitable for native plants and fish that's also useful for humans to sail, and swim, and boat in." Really, Keys property owners? You want your kids and visitors swimming in a cesspool of chemicals strong enough to kill vegetation?

None of the current Keys property owners is responsible for the destruction of the Upper Truckee River Marsh. That happened a half-century ago before anyone recognized the potential damage of punching a hole in nature's filtering system and creating 11 miles of stagnant canals that have become a veritable Garden of Eden for non-native plants and animals. But the current Keys property owners can step up, take the lead, and do something to fix the basin's greatest environmental mistake – eliminate the canals.

Crazy! Impossible! Unaffordable! Where would all of the boats go?

The boats would be stored in **high-tech dry dock** at improved and expanded lagoon marinas. A partnership between the California Tahoe Conservancy, TRPA, and the TKPOA would reengineer the canals with parkways and wetlands to receive some of the river's flow, and the lagoons would be reengineered to act as **better settling basins**.

Terrific, but who pays for it? We all do. The total cost is less than \$100 million – equivalent to what TRPA receives in their environmental improvement program each year. Because they are losing their back-yard docks, Keys' homeowners pay nothing and save weed and canal maintenance costs and have attractive, eco-friendly backyards. California, Nevada, and TRPA shoulder the financial burden – and everyone gains a purer, clearer lake with less algae and far fewer aquatic invasive species issues.

It's time to stop putting destructive, multi-million dollar band aids on Tahoe's deepest wound and to step up and heal the lake.

Steve Urie is a Truckee resident and the author of "Tessie, Quagga Mussels, and Other Lake Tahoe Myths".