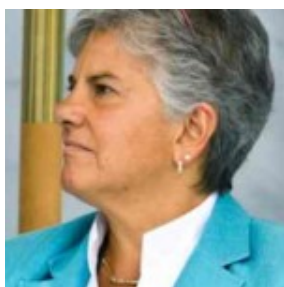


Opinion: Plenty to be proud of in Tahoe

By Joanne Marchetta

People at Lake Tahoe are working together like never before to restore our environment, revitalize our economy, and improve our communities. We saw significant progress all around the lake this year. And our progress is sustainable with continued partnership and collaboration, so critical to tackle the many challenges and important decisions on our horizon.

This summer, the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency and city of South Lake Tahoe adopted the Tahoe Valley Area Plan, a community vision to enhance the environment and revitalize the area around the Y intersection of highways 89 and 50. This vision for the gateway to the South Shore is the second area plan adopted in the city and is already attracting interest.



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Barton Memorial Hospital is making major facility upgrades with the planned construction of a health and sports performance center on its medical campus. An investor is working on plans to overhaul the factory outlet stores at the Y, turning the tired shopping plaza into a contemporary retail center with a stage for events, community patio, and bike and pedestrian trails linking to the Tahoe Valley green belt envisioned for the area.

South Lake Tahoe also opened Bijou Bike Park, an impressive community undertaking. The bike park shows the kind of recreational assets we can build working together and is proving to be tremendously popular with residents and visitors.

Working with California State Parks, California Tahoe Conservancy, and U.S. Forest Service, El Dorado County completed the second phase of its Sawmill Bike Path, finishing an important 3-mile link between South Lake Tahoe and Meyers for bicyclists and pedestrians.

Placer County and Caltrans are nearing completion of the Kings Beach Commercial Core Improvement Project. This large project is calming traffic, improving pedestrian and bicyclist mobility, and beautifying Highway 28 in that North Shore commercial hub. It is also significantly reducing the amount of stormwater pollution that washes off the highway into the lake.

Douglas County Board of Commissioners passed a 5-cent gasoline tax increase that will help pay for future transportation improvements, showing how local communities can take action. North Tahoe transit providers are consolidating and working on funding plans to create a free-to-rider transit system with more frequent service for Truckee, Tahoe City, Kings Beach, and Incline Village. Similar initiatives are underway on the South Shore. By staying focused, we can achieve a seamless, free-to-rider regional transit system.

California officials awarded nearly \$9 million in grant funding this year for several upcoming Tahoe projects. The funding will help California Tahoe Conservancy build another phase of the South Tahoe Greenway Shared Use Trail, help South Lake Tahoe improve bicycle and pedestrian access and safety around the South Tahoe Middle School, and help Tahoe Transportation District build the Highway 89/Fanny Bridge Community Revitalization Project in Tahoe City.

Budget enhancements California and Nevada approved this year provided TRPA and its partners with the funding needed to sustain Tahoe's watercraft inspections. This frontline program is critical for protecting our lake from invasive species and it is working: No new invasive species have been detected in Lake Tahoe.

With the inspection program funded, we are now turning our focus to controlling or eradicating the aquatic invasive species already in Tahoe before they can do any more harm to its environment and world-class recreational opportunities. A science-based roadmap for invasive species control projects that researchers at UNR released this year will guide that initiative.

The U.S. Senate and House of Representatives have moved forward on the Lake Tahoe Restoration Act of 2015. The bill would continue the federal government's important investment and leadership at Tahoe, helping pay for projects to clear hazardous fuels from our forested public lands and protect our lake from the harm of invasive species.

The Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act, a five-year, \$305 billion federal transportation bill Congress and President Obama enacted this month, includes language that will steer additional funding to Lake Tahoe for roadway improvements and enhanced transit service.

We are making significant progress at all levels and on all fronts and we have much to be proud of at Tahoe. But we have much more to do and continued partnership and "epic collaboration" will be critical to sustain our progress to restore our environment, revitalize our economy, and improve our communities. By working together we are making a real and meaningful difference.

Joanne Marchetta is executive director of the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency.