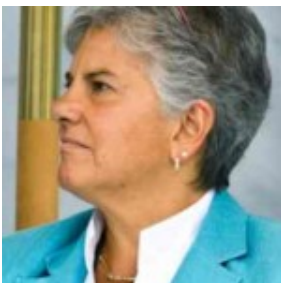


Opinion: Snowfall a good sign for Tahoe

By Joanne Marchetta

The New Year is getting off to a phenomenal start with snow falling at Lake Tahoe. It seems long ago since we've had snow around the lake, but as California and Nevada continue to grapple with four years of drought and water shortages, the snow couldn't be falling at a better time.

A snow survey this January by California Department of Water Resources found 54 inches of snow at Echo Summit. That's 16 inches above average for this time of year. And it's significantly more snow than we saw last April when the snowpack is usually at its greatest but surveyors found no accumulated snow on the ground.



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The first snowy winter in years is boosting Lake Tahoe's economy, bringing tourists to our ski resorts and hotels. That's welcome news for many people in our communities who depend on winter recreation for their livelihood.

But the snow is benefitting more than our businesses and skiers. A strong storm that hit the Sierra several weeks ago dropped more than 4 billion gallons of water into Lake Tahoe, quickly raising the lake's level by 2 inches. The lake is

still more than a foot below its natural rim, but the storm showed how our lake and parched forests stand to benefit from this return of winter weather.

An El Nino system in the Pacific Ocean promises to bring more heavy precipitation to California in the months to come—perhaps even too much precipitation for some communities bracing for mudslides and flooding. But as much-needed snow and rain fall on our region for the first time in years, we must not grow complacent about our need to adapt to a changing climate.

Just a few days after this month's heartening snow survey at Echo Summit, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration reported that 2015 was the second hottest year on record for the United States. NOAA recorded warmer than average temperatures throughout the American West, and noted that last year was also the 19 straight year that annual average temperatures have exceeded the 20th century average.

A study published in December found lakes around world—more than half of the world's freshwater supplies—are warming faster than the oceans and the atmosphere. Here at Lake Tahoe, our annual average air and water temperatures have also been increasing.

Climate change was a major topic at Operation Sierra Storm, a conference hosted at Lake Tahoe this January. The annual event brought together meteorologists and weather and climate experts from around the country to talk about climate change. The experts' message was loud and clear: Climate change is occurring and we need to take steps now to prepare and adjust.

Fortunately, we're seeing progress on that front. Nearly 200 nations at the United Nations climate summit in Paris last month agreed to take voluntary steps to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions to fight climate change. Countries are coming together as never before and realizing the need to

work together on climate change.

But we cannot rely on national governments or even state governments to fight the effects of climate change we will see and feel right here at Tahoe. We must work to make our local communities and environment as healthy and resilient as possible. We need to think globally and act locally, and that's exactly what we're doing at Lake Tahoe.

With more frequent and longer dry conditions, fire risk rises. Government agencies around Lake Tahoe are removing hazardous fuels from our forested public lands to improve forest health and reduce wildfire risk around our communities. That work is seeing a strong financial boost with \$3 million in grant funding for Tahoe that the U.S. Bureau of Land Management announced this January.

Communities around Lake Tahoe are building trails and bike lanes so people can get to work, school, and shopping and recreation areas without getting in cars. Our work to improve Lake Tahoe's electric vehicle charging infrastructure and create a seamless regional transit system will also pay dividends in reducing greenhouse gas emissions from vehicles.

Local, state, and federal governments around Lake Tahoe are working on many fronts to address the changing climate and prepare our region for its impacts. But there are many things residents and businesses can do to help. Our award winning Lake Tahoe Sustainability Action Plan identifies many simple steps that individuals can take to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The plan is available **online**.

While we enjoy the return of snowfall this winter, let's not lose sight of the bigger challenges we face. Please join our work to make Lake Tahoe's environment and communities more sustainable and prepared for the impacts of a changing climate. Together we can make a difference.

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Planning Agency.