

# Opinion: Time to overhaul TRPA commodities

By Joanne Marchetta

When people visit Tahoe for the first time, they marvel at the extraordinary natural landscape and fresh, clean air. At the same time, some are shocked at the dilapidated condition of the built environment: rundown buildings, crumbling infrastructure, and tired-looking development. The paradox is compelling. Despite TRPA's mandate to harmonize the natural and human-made landscapes so that they blend together, outdated development that preceded environmental standards now serves as blight in our community.



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How we got here and what we plan to do about it is the focus of TRPA's Governing Board and the community at large. Because of cutting-edge science we know that not only is this outdated legacy development a visual scar on Tahoe, it contributes to the loss of the lake's world-famous clarity. Polluted stormwater runoff from areas developed before environmental measures were in place is clouding the lake's transparency. And policies from the 1980s that were designed to slow and manage growth and development had the unintended consequence of locking in the status quo and freezing in time 1970s-era buildings.

We need to improve the system of development rights for housing units, hotel rooms, and commercial space to accelerate the kind of environmentally-beneficial redevelopment projects our environment and our communities so desperately need. Overhauling the development commodities system is one of TRPA's top priorities. At a strategic planning retreat this March, our 15 Governing Board members confirmed they are committed to innovating and working together to make needed change happen.

But we at TRPA need your help to envision and implement the growth management system of tomorrow. We need the ideas, perspective, and help of all Tahoe stakeholders—residents, business owners, investors, environmental advocates, local government leaders—to create a growth management system that will work for Tahoe in the 21st century.

The 1987 Regional Plan limited the total number of homes, hotel rooms, and commercial floor area allowed in the Tahoe basin, turning them into a fixed amount of development rights. It also created mechanisms for these commodities to be transferred from one property to another and banked and sold as development rights that are needed for any project to happen.

With the new Regional Plan adopted in 2012, “bonus” development rights are available from publicly-held pools for projects that remove development from environmentally-sensitive areas, restore those areas, and transfer development into existing town centers. The goal is redevelopment that benefits our environment and revitalizes our communities.

This complicated commodities system is unique to Tahoe and has profoundly impacted our environment and economy in ways that are both good and bad. The system has successfully halted the runaway growth that once threatened our basin and limited the size of Tahoe's urban footprint. That's a good outcome for our natural environment and our recreation-based economy that

depends on its health. But the commodities system has also made it exceedingly difficult to realize the kind of multiple-benefit redevelopment projects that will restore our environment and revitalize our communities.

Without those redevelopment projects, Lake Tahoe will continue to see harmful environmental impacts from legacy development built before TRPA's creation in marshes, meadows, and stream zones where it would not be allowed today. The restoration of those areas is critical for the health of our watershed and wildlife. Meanwhile, communities will continue to struggle to secure the development rights and private investment needed to revitalize their town centers.

Interviews with dozens of stakeholders this year confirmed some of our suspicions about the commodities system: It is complicated, difficult to navigate, costly, not well understood, and a major obstacle to private investment and environmental redevelopment at Tahoe. The question confronting us now is how we will work together to make the commodities system better, and make it work for our environment and communities.

We at TRPA are committed to bringing our best ideas to the table and working toward a solution for this important issue. We want you to share with us your ideas to improve the commodities system and bring about this needed change and innovation. By working together, I am confident that we can reach a bold solution that protects and restores our invaluable natural resources and helps our communities thrive as places to live, work, play, and raise families.

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