

Opinion: Noting Lake Tahoe's accomplishments

By Casey Beyer

Four years ago this month, TRPA approved the 2012 Regional Plan. The landmark plan charts a course to restore Lake Tahoe's environment and revitalize our communities and it was forged through Herculean work by California, Nevada, local governments, the public, and dozens of other partners.

Many Tahoe Basin stakeholders once questioned if we could work together, but the Regional Plan ushered in an era of collaboration. Today, the answer is how can we work together more efficiently. By building and strengthening partnerships we have made remarkable progress. This year was no different.



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Just this week, the icing on the 2016 cake of success came by Congress's reauthorization of the Lake Tahoe Restoration Act. The bipartisan legislation authorizes up to \$415 million in future federal funding appropriations for environmental restoration and conservation projects. Eight years of negotiation went into this legislation's passage, which was possible only because of the partnerships strengthened in 2012.

Working together, TRPA and Tahoe Fire and Fuels Team partners have also secured nearly \$30 million in federal funding this

year to remove hazardous fuels from Tahoe forests. These projects will improve forest health, reduce wildfire risk, and build upon the 65,000 acres of forest already treated. Next summer marks the tenth year since the Angora Fire. Work to reduce hazardous fuels and create fire-adapted communities is ongoing and it must remain a top priority as we confront the realities of a changing climate.

Local governments and highway departments are implementing transportation projects that benefit the environment, enhance our economy, and improve our quality of life. A new Class 1 bike path links South Lake Tahoe and Meyers and trails on the North and West shores continue to improve. Construction started this summer on a 3-mile trail from Incline Village to Sand Harbor. The showcase project will enhance recreation, improve safety, clean up stormwater pollution, and ease traffic and parking problems in one of Tahoe's most heavily-visited highway corridors.

TRPA's forthcoming regional transportation plan will further outline the projects and strategies needed to reduce traffic congestion and improve bike trails and transit for residents and a growing number of visitors to more easily travel around our communities and to popular recreation sites without having to get in their cars at all.

As I sat at the 20th annual presidential summit this August, I was inspired to hear President Obama give us his impression of Lake Tahoe. The president's comments brought joyous cheers from more than 7,500 people in attendance. It was Tahoe's first presidential visit in a decade and put a national spotlight on the lake and its environmental issues. While the president was joined on stage by Sen. Harry Reid, Dianne Feinstein, and Barbara Boxer, as well as California Gov. Jerry Brown, it was the sheer energy of the crowd and the beauty of Lake Tahoe that shined brightly that day.

The Environmental Improvement Program was launched at the

first presidential summit in 1997 and today it is one of the nation's most successful environmental programs. Much of its success has been fueled by the original Lake Tahoe Restoration Act of 2000. Through the program, local, state, federal, nonprofit, and private sector partners have completed hundreds of projects to remove hazardous fuels from forests; restore streams, wetlands, and marshes; protect the lake from invasive species; upgrade hundreds of miles of roads to reduce stormwater pollution; and build bike and pedestrian trails.

Partners around the basin are working together like never before to implement the Regional Plan and projects that benefit the environment and our communities. TRPA is committed to doing its part, and is working on strategic initiatives to accelerate environmental redevelopment, upgrade transportation infrastructure and transit services, improve the health and resilience of Tahoe's forests, and examine and improve how we measure the region's success.

Congress's vote to reauthorize the Lake Tahoe Restoration Act is the strongest sign yet that we are on the right track. It signals that our federal partners are committed to Lake Tahoe and that after two decades the lake's health remains a national priority. Collaboration is the cornerstone to our successes and it is the binding rule that we will see our progress grow in years to come.

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