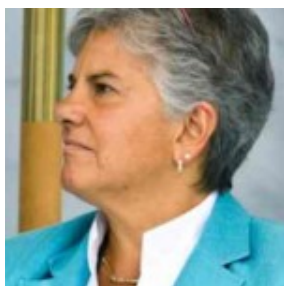


Opinion: Every day should be Earth Day at Tahoe

By Joanne Marchetta

As we celebrate Earth Day this April, let's remember how important environmental stewardship is to the health of Lake Tahoe, and how important our individual actions are.

Over the last two decades, public, private, and nonprofit partners have made significant progress conserving and restoring Lake Tahoe's environment through the Environmental Improvement Program.



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What started in 1997 as an idea for better collaboration among agencies working on restoration projects, in the year of the first presidential summit at Lake Tahoe, has grown into one of the nation's most ambitious and successful environmental restoration programs.

Over the last 20 years, Environmental Improvement Program partners have completed more than 500 projects. Those projects have built or improved 153 miles of bike and pedestrian paths and upgraded transit facilities to provide transportation options and improve air quality. They have upgraded 750 miles of roadway to reduce stormwater pollution and protect Lake Tahoe's water clarity, restored 17,278 acres of wildlife

habitat, opened 3,195 feet of shoreline for public access, and treated 69,554 acres of forest to reduce hazardous fuels and wildfire risk. They have treated 47 acres of the lake to remove invasive clams and plants, and keep invasive species from spreading and damaging Lake Tahoe's environment and the recreation opportunities it supports.

It's not only the public projects that make a difference for the lake and our communities. It's also what all of us can do as private citizens that can add up to change for the better.

Over the last few years, we have all seen pictures of discouraging amounts of trash on Lake Tahoe's sandy beaches after the July 4 holiday. Fortunately, our communities have no shortage of dedicated people willing to volunteer their time to clean up messes that others have left behind.

Every year, TRPA presents Lake Spirit Awards to people who show a tireless dedication to protecting the lake and its environment. Past award winners have cleaned up litter, built and maintained bike trails, created programs to educate students about Lake Tahoe's environment, and created composting programs for schools.

We can't lose sight of the incredible impact that individuals can have at Lake Tahoe. The Environmental Improvement Program encourages some easy ways that each of us can help protect the lake.

Don't litter, and pick up trash: Cigarette butts, paper, and plastic can all be picked up by wind or water and carried into the lake.

Bike, walk, or catch the bus: Less driving means less air pollution and less traffic congestion.

Pick up after your pet: Dog waste can be harmful to other dogs, wildlife, and water quality. Many trails at Tahoe have stations offering free biodegradable bags for pet waste.

Please pick up after your dog and dispose of its waste properly.

Choose native plants for your yard: Gardening with native plants means less water, fertilizers, and pesticides.

Install and maintain best management practices: Installing measures on your property to stop erosion and infiltrate stormwater helps improve Lake Tahoe's famous water clarity.

Get defensive: Create defensible space and properly maintain the vegetation around your home to significantly reduce wildfire risk.

Replace old woodstoves: Newer EPA-certified woodstoves use half the wood to generate the same amount of heat as an old stove, so you'll save money and reduce air pollution. The EPA estimates that removing one old woodstove is equivalent to taking five old diesel buses off the road. Plus, there are rebates available to help cover the cost of replacement.

Become a Tahoe Keeper: Learn how to inspect and clean your canoe, kayak, or paddleboard to help stop the spread of aquatic invasive species.

Volunteer: There are many ways to get involved. Help with beach cleanups, report aquatic invasive species infestations, and help monitor storm water pollution.

These are just a few of the things each of us can do to help protect Lake Tahoe. Other ideas, as well as catchy campaign signs and messages to help spread awareness about the importance of environmental stewardship at Lake Tahoe, are available through the **Take Care campaign**. You, too, can help us spread the word.

Millions of people travel to Lake Tahoe each year to enjoy its unparalleled outdoor recreation opportunities. Everyone's actions have an impact, and each of us plays an important part

in leaving this beautiful place that we all love in better shape than we found it for future generations to enjoy. No one individual or agency can protect Lake Tahoe on their own. That takes all of us working together.

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