

# Opinion: Tahoe not immune to climate change

By Joanne Marchetta

For 20 years, every August we've paused to reflect on our collective commitment to Lake Tahoe's restoration at the Lake Tahoe Summit. This year, with Sen. Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif., hosting the event, the issue of climate change will be front and center. Climate change poses incredible challenges for Tahoe, affecting not only the health of its famously cold, clear waters, but the health of its expansive forests and what is to become of our \$5 billion outdoor recreation-based economy.

The 2016 State of the Lake Report by UC Davis highlights how climate change is already impacting Tahoe. Drought and warmer temperatures are changing precipitation patterns that contribute to tree mortality in Tahoe's forests. Scientists are studying how these same warming trends are affecting the lake's ecological conditions and may be threatening the long-term health of Tahoe's environment.



Joanne  
Marchetta

TRPA and dozens of partners are working together to meet the challenges of climate change and ensure that Tahoe's environment and communities are resilient and sustainable.

Over the last two decades, an unparalleled partnership has been continuously investing in the Lake Tahoe Environment Improvement Program. We have halted the long-running declines in lake clarity; thinned overgrown forests to reduce wildfire risk; restored wetlands, streams, and wildlife habitat; and improved roads and communities to reduce stormwater pollution. But responding to climate change means we must continue.

Five years of severe drought have stressed Tahoe's forests. While tree mortality at Tahoe is far less severe than in other parts of the Sierra Nevada, we are taking every step now possible to improve long-term forest health and resiliency and prepare our communities for wildfire.

In the 10 years since the devastating Angora Fire in 2007, Tahoe Fire and Fuels Team partners have thinned 50,000 acres of forest to reduce hazardous fuels, helped thousands of homeowners create defensible space, and worked tirelessly to educate people about the importance of wildfire prevention and preparedness.

All 117,000 acres of wildland urban interface in the Tahoe basin—the most dangerous areas where forests and communities meet—will have been treated over the next decade. That work now needs to extend to the larger forest setting. Through the Lake Tahoe West Partnership, we are planning landscape-scale projects to thin overstocked forests, improve water quality, and enhance recreation access throughout 59,000 acres of Lake Tahoe's West Shore, an area extending from Emerald Bay to Squaw Valley—a model we can apply to other parts of the Tahoe basin.

TRPA and transportation partners are continuing to build a system of alternatives to the private automobile. We are building bike and pedestrian trails around the lake and doubling down on increased transit service, particularly to popular recreation sites, to reduce traffic congestion, make it easier for people to travel without driving, and reduce

greenhouse gas emissions. With a plug-in electric vehicle readiness plan, we are also working to enhance charging infrastructure and make the Tahoe-Truckee region a leader in the deployment of zero-emission electric vehicles.

TRPA and its research partners are working to understand the potential impacts of climate change at Tahoe and make certain the region's environmental conservation and restoration programs are as effective as possible. Sustainability and resiliency to climate change are top of mind in TRPA's planning initiatives, from shoreline planning to transportation, forest health, water quality, the fight against aquatic invasive species, and community revitalization.

Partners are taking major steps toward sustainability. The city of South Lake Tahoe has committed to getting all its electricity from renewable sources by 2032. Vail Resorts, which runs Heavenly, Northstar, and Kirkwood, has committed to securing all its electricity from renewable sources and eliminating landfill waste from its resorts by 2030.

Responsibility for this work must not be someone else's problem. Please play your part in working toward sustainability solutions. From walking or biking instead of driving a car to recycling, small actions taken on a large scale make a world of difference. If you'd like to learn more about how you can help fight climate change at Tahoe, TRPA's award-winning Sustainability Action Plan identifies many steps individuals and organizations can take.

Climate change poses unprecedented challenges. But we have a history of partnering together to meet challenges for the health of Tahoe's environment and communities. By continuing to work together as responsible environmental stewards, we can make certain that future generations will be able to enjoy the treasured lake, forests, and mountains we all are working hard to conserve and restore.

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