

# Opinion: Partnerships can help bridge divides

By Joanne Marchetta

Nearly 200 conservation professionals from around the country gathered back east this November to have a strategic dialogue about the state of landscape-scale conservation. Lake Tahoe was featured at the forum for the region's cooperative restoration initiatives, and it was an honor to share the stage with such high-caliber conservation thought leaders.

The national forum showcased how people of all backgrounds are collaborating and working to conserve some of America's most iconic natural areas.



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Through the High Divide Collaborative, partners are working to conserve forests, wilderness areas, and open spaces that extend from Northern Montana and Idaho to Yellowstone National Park in Wyoming. The focus is on protecting working family ranches, headwaters for world-class fisheries and water supply, and nationally-important recreation areas, while also ensuring continent-scale wildlife corridors for species such as elk, wolves, grizzly bear, and sage grouse.

Along the East Coast, dozens of partners are working to conserve and restore natural areas and protect cultural

experiences along the storied Appalachian Trail that runs from Georgia to Maine. And through the Two Countries, One Forest initiative, the U.S., Canada, and 50 partner organizations are working to protect 80 million acres of forest habitat in the Northern Appalachia and Acadia ecoregion.

Speakers at the conference clearly showed that the conservation movement is coming of age in North America. From the Gulf Coast to New England and the American West, collaborative, landscape-scale conservation is being understood not just to feed the human spirit, but for our very survival, to connect people responsibly to the ecosystems that sustain us.

The understanding of this deep need to protect natural areas was echoed in elections this month. According to the Trust for Public Land, voters across the country passed 36 out of 41 local and state conservation measures on the ballot, approving more than \$1.5 billion for parks and conservation in coming years.

Lake Tahoe's conservation story is helping inspire and guide many of these initiatives. Lake Tahoe was one of America's visionary and first landscape-scale conservation initiatives. Rightfully fearing that Tahoe could be lost to runaway development half a century ago, California, Nevada, and the federal government partnered to stop overdevelopment in the Tahoe basin under the organizing cry that polluted water doesn't respect state lines.

Over the last half century, the Tahoe region has taken major steps to conserve and restore the lake and its environment and we are continuously working to increase the pace and scale of our conservation and restoration accomplishments and to make our communities more sustainable.

In the last two decades, the Lake Tahoe environmental improvement program has grown into one of the nation's most

ambitious and successful conservation and restoration initiatives. More than 50 public and private sector partners at Tahoe have implemented more than 500 projects to restore streams and wetlands, reduce storm water pollution, and restore forest health. TRPA and dozens of partners are working to sustainably redevelop our communities to lessen their environmental impact, improve the health, vitality, and safety of our neighborhoods, and reduce greenhouse gas emissions that cause climate change.

With climate change now threatening the environment we all depend upon, landscape-scale conservation takes on a new importance. It not only protects wildlife and the natural areas we all enjoy for recreation and inspiration, the integrity of landscapes can alleviate the aftermath of extreme storm events as well as protect air and water quality, human health, and confront major threats like increased wildfire.

Our partnerships and successes at Tahoe have created a national model for landscape-scale conservation in America, and it is heartening and inspiring to see other models taking shape nationally and globally. The leaders who gathered at the national landscape conservation forum acknowledged today's polarized politics and national divisions. But they all agreed on one thing: That there is the opportunity to use landscape conservation to show how models like Tahoe's collaborative partnership can bridge divides, promote understanding, and heal division. Now more than ever, we need that.

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