

Opinion: Remembering Bill Morgan's contributions

By Clem Shute

We at the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency are mourning the passing of Bill Morgan. In the pantheon of people who have contributed mightily to the agency's success, Bill is in the top tier. He was executive director from April 1, 1985, to Sept. 30, 1989, one of the most tumultuous times for TRPA. There is a high likelihood that there would be no TRPA if Bill had not been at the helm and found ways to bring disparate parties together.



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In the spring of 1984, the Governing Board adopted the 1984 Regional Plan. Many are not aware that there was a plan adopted then because of the events that followed its passage and eventually led to the more well-known 1987 Regional Plan. It is the period between the adoption of the two plans when Bill played a decisive role.

The hearings leading to the adoption of the 1984 plan revealed deep disagreements between California and Nevada and between development and environmental interests. The controversy can be described fundamentally as different visions of the amount of development that should be allowed in the Tahoe basin. The day after the 1984 plan was approved by the TRPA Governing Board, the state of California and the League to Save Lake

Tahoe filed a lawsuit in federal court seeking to void the plan and stop all development in the basin until, in their view, a proper plan could be adopted. A federal judge agreed and ordered a development moratorium at the Lake.

At this point, "all hell broke loose." Nevada believed California had overstepped its bounds by, in effect, transferring TRPA's powers to the federal court. This was so serious to Nevada that it threatened to withdraw from the bi-state Compact. Developers were beside themselves as they were prevented from having permits issued. Local governments were concerned about lost tax revenue from new development. California and the environmental groups believed this was justified because the 1984 plan allowed too much development. Into this boiling cauldron stepped Bill Morgan.

As executive director, Bill convened a consensus building workshop which included all the interests in the basin ranging from representatives of both states to representatives of major developers and environmental interests and Realtor associations and the League of Woman Voters, both groups that had not been involved on a day-to-day basis. His stated goal was to come up with a regional plan by consensus. Everyone was willing to give it a try, in large part because of the respect Bill commanded in every quarter. The story goes that at the first meeting, during the lunch break, a Realtor offered a League to Save Lake Tahoe representative an apple, which was only taken after he was assured it did not contain poison.

Convening such a group is one thing. Keeping it together and working through all the issues is another. As it turned out, the group met for several days each month for about two years. It was during this difficult time that Bill's skills shined brightest. First, he led in identifying issues and proposing solutions. He was courteous at all times. On more than one occasion, someone would walk out in disgust. Bill would follow them to the parking lot and in his quiet, persuasive way bring them back. Everyone trusted him to be an honest broker. He

also had to keep Governing Board members informed of the progress of the consensus group so that they would be willing to accept the plan when it emerged.

In 1987, consensus was reached. The results were presented publicly through hearings and the Governing Board ultimately adopted the Regional Plan. The lawsuit was settled. The two states and all the other interested parties had learned to talk to each other. The bitter controversy ended as did the risk that the Compact would be voided.

Without Bill's intellect, integrity, honesty and diligence, it would not have happened. This is accomplishment enough, but there is an even longer lasting legacy that is at the core of how TRPA operates today. That is collaboration. As our Governing Board's recent strategic planning retreat demonstrates, all TRPA initiatives today are underpinned by partnering with the interested parties to work toward the common goal of achieving the environmental thresholds. Bill set the path forward. He will be missed.

Clem Shute was appointed to the TRPA Governing Board in 2011 by California Gov. Jerry Brown.