

Letter: Get the facts straight about oxygen

To the community,

I just couldn't help writing re: **Liana's article** on O₂ depletion.

You should know she is beyond redemption. Saying O₂ below 19.5 percent concentration is dangerous is ridiculous as the O₂ equivalent at 6,000 feet – Tahoe's elevation – is only 16 percent. I guess we are all zombies. Also, only one molecule of O₂ is used to create CO₂. Do you realize that if O₂ was 30 percent forest fires would burn like no tomorrow.

People are entitled to their own opinions, but not their own facts.

Ken Weitzman, South Lake Tahoe

Opinion: California's water should be captured

By **Dan Walters, Sacramento Bee**



Dan Walters

The Sacramento River, by far the state's most important waterway, has been running high, fast and dirty in recent days.

Upstream reservoirs on the Sacramento and its two major tributaries, the American and Feather rivers, have been increasing releases to make room for water from melting snow later in the spring.

California's drought may not be officially over, but what's been happening during the winter, thanks to the El Niño ocean phenomena, is a far cry from years of severe water shortages that Californians have been enduring.

Read the whole story

Letter: Oxygen depletion needs to be addressed

To the community,

As I walk through Tahoe neighborhoods and open spaces, I can't refrain from glumly noting stumps where once trees stood. Before the Angora Fire of 2007, trees were cherished and protected from cutting. Since then they have been deemed hazardous and under assault by many.

Trees in my neighborhood alone have been removed by the USFS, the fire department, California Tahoe Conservancy, Liberty Utilities and developers. Elsewhere, DOT has removed trees along roads. The city of South Lake Tahoe took out many to

develop Lakeview Commons at El Dorado Beach. California and the western states have lost thousands of acres of forests from fires. Otherwise, many trees are stressed or dying from drought and pests. Global deforestation is widespread.

We should be alarmed by the loss of trees both here where we live and around the globe. Trees and phytoplankton are the two most important sources of the oxygen we breathe; 10,000 years ago, forests covered twice the land area of today. The trees back then produced twice the oxygen of contemporary forests. Researchers have determined that during the dinosaur era, the atmosphere was far richer in oxygen. It comprised 30 to 35 percent of the atmosphere, whereas now it is slightly less than 21 percent.

Climate change resulting from increasing levels of CO₂ is much in the news these days. I have never once come across a discussion of oxygen depletion. However, there are people who are concerned. The Scripps Institution of Oceanography at La Jolla has been measuring steadily declining oxygen levels since 1985 (see <http://scrippsco2.ucsd.edu/>). Other European researchers are also seeing a decline. Oxygen is falling two to four times faster than CO₂ rises. NASA has noted in the north Pacific that oxygen producing phytoplankton concentrations have alarmingly dropped 30 percent compared to the 1980s. Nearly 150 dead zones in the world's oceans have been identified. These are likely caused by discharged sewage, industrial waste and fertilizer runoff. Also causing oxygen depletion is wide-spread deforestation, increasing fires and tree mortality.

We lose three oxygen molecules for each CO₂ molecule that is produced by burning fossil fuels. A 30 percent increase in CO₂ has occurred since the beginning of the Industrial Age. Depletion of oxygen will continue until we stop burning hydrocarbons faster than the environment can absorb the byproducts and replenish oxygen. Forests are extremely important in this process and need to be intelligently

managed.

Sufficient oxygen is needed for body health to keep cells, organs and the immune system functioning efficiently. Oxygen deficiency for humans is set at 19.5 percent. Below that, loss of consciousness and death can occur. Air is less pure in polluted cities than in the Sierra. Current reduced levels in cities may be contributing to the development of cancers and other degenerative diseases. It is clearly in everyone's best interest to be stewards of trees, to protect and encourage their growth, not get rid of them.

Monitoring CO2 in relation to climate change is not enough. It may become critically important for life on earth to ensure a sufficient supply of oxygen. It can't go on like this if we expect to live here.

Liana Zambresky, South Lake Tahoe

Opinion: Calif. needs to rethink county government

By Joe Mathews

Wherever you live in California, your county probably doesn't fit you.

Many counties are too small; 24 of the 58 California counties have populations less than 140,000, the population of my hometown of Pasadena. Some counties are too sprawling; it can take more than three hours to get across Riverside and San Bernardino counties.



Joe Mathews

And in the big metropolitan regions where most of us live, counties—which are supposed to be the state’s form of regional government—divide our communities, instead of uniting them. The Bay Area is sliced up between nine counties. The capital region around Sacramento includes four counties. Greater Los Angeles is a mash-up of five counties, with no clear geographic divides between them. I dare you to drive through four neighboring cities in four different counties—Yorba Linda in Orange, Chino in San Bernardino, Corona in Riverside, and Diamond Bar in Los Angeles—and tell me when you cross from one county to another.

It has become commonplace in California to complain that our state is simply too big to work effectively as one entity, and to suggest, via ballot initiative (as in venture capitalist Tim Draper’s “Six Californias” scheme) or petition to the Legislature (as the North State counties are doing) that we be split up into a number of different states. But creating new states would require congressional approval, making these ideas non-starters.

Instead, we could redesign our counties all by ourselves, without Washington’s help.

The heart of the problem is that California’s antiquated design, with its 58 counties drawn haphazardly more than a century ago, doesn’t make sense today, if it ever did. Indeed, the way that our counties divide us up is part of a larger fragmentation in California, where the problem is not big government but so many small and stupid governments—more than

6,000 in total, with 480 cities and thousands of special districts that few Californians know anything about.

This fragmentation of regions is not merely a problem of having untidy maps that make little sense to the people who live on them. Research shows that regions that are split up among many governments—as California's are—have less affordable housing and more sprawl, congestion, and segregation than those with more consolidated regional governance.

“The excessive competition triggered by political fragmentation encourages local jurisdictions to pursue socially and economically undesirable policies,” wrote the University of Minnesota's Myron Orfield and Baris Dawes in a paper delivered last month at Chapman University in Orange. “Cities steal malls and office parks from each other, fight tax incentive wars for auto malls, and zone out the poor for fiscal advantage in a process rife with haphazard planning and NIMBY biases. ... With jobs scattered like buckshot, transit, a cleaner environment, and basic opportunity for lower-income Americans become harder, not easier, to accomplish.”

The good news is that, in recent years, there has been more thinking in California about how to remake local governments, including counties. Some of the best of this thinking is summarized in retired Silicon Valley executive Thom Bryant's book, “California 2.0”.

“California 2.0” shows that our biggest challenges are regional: environmental systems, infrastructure, economic development, transit, and housing. And the book points out that the state already divides us into regions for certain ways of collecting data or governing us; California has 10 biodiversity regions, nine water regions, 15 air basins. But our counties don't match up with these regions.

So “California 2.0” argues for consolidating counties so that

each region of the state would be one county. There would be 19 in the author's ideal structure, though "California 2.0" suggests that even the old Spanish military's 10 territorial districts would fit California better than today's 58 counties.

If California were to embrace regionally consolidated government, it would be following a trend. France has been consolidating and empowering its regions, and some metropolitan regions, notably Toronto, have consolidated urban and suburban governments.

Such regional counties would need more power to devise regional solutions to the state's most pressing problems: schools, traffic, and housing. And, as "California 2.0" argues, they'd need expanded boards of supervisors and elected county executives to improve democratic accountability.

And if California politicians are to be taken seriously as they lead a one-state war on climate change, they'll need to embrace truly regional counties to make any progress. Today's state regulations on climate are unlikely to show much in results, in part because they require coordination between our fragmented local governments. But if we had counties that actually fit our regions, California might have a fighting chance of saving the world.

Joe Mathews writes the Connecting California column for Zócalo Public Square.

Opinion: Crusade for Calif.

auto insurance reform

By Joe Rodriguez, Mercury News

Dan Karr's new year began with sorrow, but the veteran Silicon Valley hand's new mission in life as an auto-insurance reformer is moving along nicely – for a 21st-century Don Quixote.

“Tilting at windmills, hah!” he said over breakfast in downtown San Jose recently to talk about his new company, ValChoice.com. “It’s probably a good analogy for what I’m trying to do.”

Put simply: Karr wants consumers to know how well or badly the auto insurance company they sign up with will treat them, especially after accidents, and he’s trying to make a buck at it. After all, Karr is a software engineer and former high-tech executive in Silicon Valley, one of the few places where socially minded businesses don’t get laughed out of the board room.

Read the whole story

Letter: Kirkwood workers dish up at B&B

To the community,

Bread & Broth would like to thank Kirkwood Mountain Resort for the ongoing support of our Monday evening meal program at St.

Theresa Church Grace Hall. Kirkwood's Adopt a Day sponsorship provided the funds for the filling and nutritious meal prepared by B&B's talented volunteer cooks at B&B's March 14 dinner. That evening the dinner guests enjoyed spaghetti with meatballs dinner that was served with sautéed asparagus, green salad, fruit salad, garlic bread and assorted desserts.

Helping at the dinner were Kirkwood Mountain Resort team members Carolyn Reuter, retail area manager; Craig Schroeder, rentals coordinator; produce, sales and serves manager Jarrett Morgan; and supervisor Christian Neville.

B&B volunteers would like to extend our thanks to these four sponsor volunteers. They were a very energetic group, and put a lot of effort and caring into helping the B&B volunteers and interacting with the dinner guests.

"This experience was personally humbling in many ways; realizing how much we take for granted, how seldom we recognize the hunger in our towns and communities, and how much more we can do to help," commented Reuter. "The quantity and quality of the food we served tonight and distributed was impressive. It was awesome to see and hear so many thankful folks with full stomachs and smiles on their faces."

B&B would also like to acknowledge and thank Ashlee Schouten for bringing a wide assortment of gently used clothes for our dinner guests. Schouten, a South High School student, has been having clothing drives for the past several years as a community project to benefit the needy of our community.

Carol Gerard, Bread & Broth

Opinion: Body Mass Index not a good health measure

By A. Janet Tomiyama and Jeffrey M. Hunger

You've just returned from your morning run and you're rustling through your snail mail when you receive some shocking news—an official memo from your employer informing you that your health insurance premium is increasing by 30 percent. You've been deemed a health risk, and you are being charged accordingly.

Yet you're the picture of health: A run is part of your daily routine, you passed your last physical with flying colors, and kale is your favorite food. This must be some sort of mistake. But you read the fine print to discover that your employer has decided that the most accurate measure of your health is your Body Mass Index, or BMI, which is derived by a formula that compares your weight to your height.

Even though you're a paragon of health, at 5 foot 2 inches and 164 pounds, your BMI places you within a range considered "obese." So your insurance company and your employer have determined that you are no longer among the "healthy."

This may sound Orwellian, but the federal government is working to make it common. Recently proposed rules by the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) would set clear guidelines for employers to use metrics like BMI to charge higher-BMI employees more for their health insurance. The apparent goal of these rules is to get higher-BMI employees to reduce their weight; a standpoint based on the assumption that such individuals must uniformly face poor health. Our research, however, suggests that this assumption is flawed and these rules will not accomplish this goal. In fact, the proposed rules could yield the opposite results.

The problem is that BMI is a problematic metric. It was invented more than 200 years ago by a Belgian mathematician named Quetelet, who based it on what he called the “average” human: a white male in Europe in the early 1800s. BMI also gets human biology wrong—it fails to distinguish between bone, muscle, or fat. You’ve probably heard about athletes, including the starting lineup of the Super bowl champion Denver Broncos, being “obese” by BMI standards, even though they’re very obviously in great shape. National Public Radio called the BMI formula “mathematical snake oil”.

As psychological scientists who study health, we were well versed in the pitfalls of BMI. We knew we had to push back and illustrate the fallacy of this thinking in such a way that policymakers would understand just how many healthy people would be adversely affected.

In a stroke of good fortune rarely seen outside the movies, we found the perfect dataset. The National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES) is a nationally representative sample of Americans surveyed every two years about their health and BMI. NHANES allowed us to look at established health markers to see who was healthy, and then see how many of those healthy folks actually fell in the higher-BMI categories employers deem “unhealthy.”

Our next challenge was to come up with an ironclad definition of “healthy.” For our analysis to have credibility, we had to have a definition that would be difficult to attack on scientific grounds. We dove into the research literature to look for different definitions and found quite a few, so we chose the definition that set the highest bar for health and used six different metrics including blood pressure, blood sugar, and cholesterol. These index the health of a person’s heart and blood vessels, risk for diabetes, and inflammation.

After crunching the numbers, the results were stunning. BMI did not map onto the real markers of health. Some 34.4 million

of the 70 million-plus Americans categorized as “overweight” by BMI were perfectly healthy. That’s 47 percent. The chances of BMI being a good predictor were not much better than flipping a coin. And 29 percent of Americans rated “obese” under BMI were healthy as well. Add those numbers together—and it means that more than 54 million healthy Americans would be unfairly penalized under the EEOC rules.

Our analysis uncovered another pitfall of BMI: 21 million individuals in the “normal” BMI range—those who would be considered perfectly healthy by employers and insurance companies—were actually unhealthy according to the criteria. These are people who would likely have higher health costs but who would skate by without added penalties under the new EEOC rules. More alarming, the fallacious assumption that “normal” BMI individuals are healthy could mean they wouldn’t get preventive care or that important diagnoses could be delayed or missed altogether.

Clearly, BMI needs to go. We hope our analysis is the final nail in the coffin for this flawed measure.

But the obsession with BMI is really a symptom of a larger issue: a national infatuation with weight that not only affects how people in power define health, but also perpetuates an entrenched stigma against heavier people. We’ve run many studies in our labs showing that this weight stigma gives rise to situations that make it hard for people to be healthy. We’ve shown, for example, that experiencing weight stigma makes individuals eat more high-calorie snack foods and feel less confident in their ability to maintain a healthy diet. These are things that are bad for you no matter what you weigh.

We’ve also found that people who experience weight stigma have higher levels of the stress hormone cortisol. That’s a problem because cortisol increases a person’s drive to eat unhealthy foods, and sends a signal to the body to start storing

visceral fat. That's a type of fat that sticks to your organs and won't necessarily make your body bigger, meaning it flies under the radar of BMI. It's also the type of fat that increases your risk for diabetes and cardiovascular disease.

Our cultural obsession with weight has led us to misguidedly prioritize numbers on the scale over important modifiable health behaviors—eating, exercise, and sleep. Beyond leading us astray from health, this obsession perpetuates the stigma attached to heavier bodies, which is itself an impediment to health.

The evidence is clear: It's well past time to forget about weight, both as a marker of person's health and as a marker of a person's standing in society.

A. Janet Tomiyama is assistant professor of psychology at UCLA. Jeffrey M. Hunger is a doctoral candidate of psychology at the UC Santa Barbara.

Opinion: Diversity in state, national parks important

By Richard Rojas Sr.

During my more than 30-year career as a California state park ranger, I was known as the diversity guy because I was one of the few Latinos to wear the park ranger uniform.

Similar diversity deficits exist across most park systems. The National Park Service workforce is only 5 percent Latino, a paltry representation. And that lack of diversity among rangers is, unfortunately, matched by a lack of diversity

among the people who visit the park.

While we often think about parks as places for preservation—and they are—I am convinced that the parks' ability to change and to reflect the country's diversity is the defining issue for the future of the nation's public lands. In this as in so much else, California is our best hope for the future.

California parks are rich in natural splendor and cultural heritage. The state's 279 parks preserve nearly 1.6 million acres of winding coastlines and pristine wilderness, and offer more than 15,000 campsites and 4,500 miles of trails for the public to visit and explore.

Anyone who has stood amongst California's towering redwoods, hiked the desert landscape, or experienced stunning mountain vistas knows that nature is transformational. As a park ranger, I heard stories from people who found inner peace, and walked away with a sense of responsibility for our natural treasures.

Yet, among these stories, what always stood out to me were the voices that were missing.

A survey commissioned by the National Park Service in 2009 found that only 28 percent of African-Americans and 32 percent of Latinos reported visiting a national park in the last two years, compared to 53 percent for whites. Similarly, a visitor survey found that Latinos represent only 11 percent of Yosemite visitors, even though they represent 38 percent of the population in California.

Unfortunately, the California State Parks system doesn't track visitor information, but during my time as a ranger it was obvious that many are being left out of this quintessential experience. The diverse California we see in our communities is not the California you see in campgrounds and on hiking trails.

Diversity matters for several reasons. We need every Californian—and every American—to be a champion for our parks systems. When budget cuts loom, resources for parks are typically first on the chopping block—and in California, cuts have led to the closing of parks and reductions in hours and maintenance. We've also seen Californians of all kinds support parks. Over the last decade, voters approved almost \$10 billion in statewide, park-related bonds, with polls showing overwhelming support from Latino and black voters.

Last year, a commission created by Gov. Jerry Brown published the Parks Forward recommendations aimed at increasing access to the outdoors. The report aims to have the demographics of park visitors reflect those of state residents by 2025.

To reach the report's ambitious goals, several immediate steps are necessary.

We need to make park staff more diverse so that visitors from all walks of life see themselves as part of the parks experience. The California Department of Parks and Recreation assembled a transformation team that has made it a priority to hire staff that reflects the demographics of the state.

The department also needs to scrub outdated rules that can discourage people from visiting. For example, state campgrounds only allow for eight people and two cars per campsite. That's a huge deterrent for people seeking space for multi-generational family events or group activities.

We can no longer expect people to find their own way to the outdoors. One promising demonstration project will build partnership with local organizations to get residents who don't traditionally visit state parks into our parks, both urban and wilderness. In Los Angeles, the department has partnered with organizations such as Latino Outdoors to invite first-time campers to new popular overnight events at Rio de Los Angeles State Park. In his proposed budget, Governor Brown

committed almost \$700,000 to pilot this idea in Los Angeles and the Bay Area.

The parks of the future need to become social gathering places. Surveys indicate that people want to picnic, play, congregate, and explore in the outdoors. Providing these opportunities can be as easy as installing more benches and reconfiguring campsites to accommodate bigger groups. But understanding that our parks are not currently serving the needs of all Californians is the first step in making them welcoming spaces for all.

Richard Rojas Sr. is board chairman of Latino Outdoors, a Latino-led organization that focuses on conservation and the environment. He was a California state park ranger for more than 30 years.

Opinion: Fiscal ineptness continues in EDC

By Larry Weitzman

El Dorado County's roads are literally falling apart, especially with the significant precipitation the county has had in the past four months. For the last eight years the county has allocated between \$1 million and \$2 million annually to attempt to keep up with EDC's road maintenance.

But that ended as the Board of Supervisors, led by then Chairman Brian Veerkamp, adopted a budget policy that no General Fund money will be used for road maintenance at the budget meeting on Sept. 14, 2015. According to EDC residents and taxpayers, road maintenance is the No. 2 priority of the

county after public safety. That No. 2 position was confirmed by the recent survey of EDC residents.



Larry Weitzman

The lack of general fund money is becoming a significant problem as at the latest BOS meeting (March 8) the BOS approved the purchase of 30 acres of land near the Missouri Flat industrial park for about \$2.65 million to build a new sheriff's headquarters. The money for the land was planned and allocated, but the much bigger issue is that the money to build a \$40 million to \$50 million sheriff's HQ has not. There is nothing in the budget for that. There is no question a new HQ is needed as the current HQ on Fairlane near the government center is on the cusp of becoming a superfund site. While that might be a slight exaggeration, we have needed a new HQ for years.

With the exception of Supervisor Shiva Frentzen and to some extent Supervisor Ron Mikulaco, the EDC board hasn't a fiscal clue as demonstrated by what was said at the BOS meeting of Feb. 23, item 33, the mid-year budget report.

Receiving significant discussion was the lack of road maintenance as Supervisor Mikulaco said "that the most important asset that this county has that everyone uses every single day is our roadway network." He went on to say "if this board was going to adopt putting \$3 million into the road fund (from the General Fund) ... that's something I would support."

Supervisor Mike Ranalli went on to kick the can down the road (but with all the potholes that might be hard) when he said,

“Um, I would prefer at this juncture, though, to kind of see all of the needs and totality before any specific recommendations.” Ranalli doesn't have a clue, especially about the budget. That's because at that final budget meeting last September he voted to end General Fund road maintenance and to successfully end five-year budget forecasts along with the rest of the board. Didn't Ranalli read the citizens survey? It's the No. 2 priority behind public safety. Maybe when his car's wheels, tires, suspension, alignment and/or engine (rock through the oil pan) get destroyed, he will look at his political mumbo jumbo differently.

Supervisor Sue Novasel chimed in with respect to Supervisor Frentzen's motion for a five-year budget projection and a \$2 million transfer of General Fund money to road maintenance: “I agree with Supervisor Frentzen that we have to keep our infrastructure going. That should be No. 1 goal ... those two are huge and I realize and I do agree with you Michael (Ranalli) that we really need to take a look at the whole budget.” (Novasel also likes to play kick the can.) “But that being said I would also really like to see an increase, (at) least \$2 million, maybe \$3 million in our roads when we get there. Again I will again thank Supervisor Frentzen for bringing up the five-year projection.” Novasel voted against Frentzen's motion later just as she didn't support it at the budget meeting last September.

At the Sept. 14, 2015, budget meeting it was Veerkamp leading the charge as BOS chairman to delete road maintenance from the General Fund budget along with the practice of preparing budget projections even against the pleas of Supervisor Frentzen. Without those projections the BOS has no idea of the future. This is just one of the consequences of the outrageous 15 percent raise to EDC employees and unnecessary employee hiring (budget projections reveal that outrageous cost) about two years prior which Veerkamp supported and voted for. But it gets worse.

Frentzen at this Feb. 23 BOS meeting made a motion for five-year budget projections to start again and for a transfer of \$2 million to the road fund. Mr. Kick the Can (Ranalli) says, "I'm supportive of the items but I am not gonna support the motion at this time. I think when it comes to forecasting, certainly there are some items that need to be looked at in five years." On the contrary, the record shows that it was Ranalli who didn't support Frentzen's motion of continuing the requirement of five-year budget projections last September. First Ranalli votes against the idea of five-year budget projections and then uses not having the budget projections as an excuse for not using General Fund money for road maintenance. Circular logic. Because of his fiscal malpractice, Ranalli is not qualified for his job.

Frentzen's motion to provide the BOS with a five-year budget projection and to provide the road fund with \$2 million in General Fund money is seconded by Mikulaco. With two yes votes from Frentzen and Mik and three no votes from Veerkamp, Novasel, and Ranalli the motion is given the kiss of death.

But this quote from interim CAO Larry Combs highlights this meeting: "Since, I have not had a chance to look at the budget and the projections for revenue, I can't forecast what effect taking \$2 million out of the General Fund (for road maintenance) would mean. But, that's approximately the amount that's going to be needed for debt service on the Public Safety facility. So, I would not recommend your board giving me that direction."

Combs has been here eight months and says he doesn't know the budget or its future. He even presided over the September budget meeting where he told the BOS budget projections are worthless. And on March 8 he recommended to the BOS to spend \$2.65 million for a sheriff's HQ property and he doesn't know if we have the resources to pay for the \$40 million to \$50 million HQ structure or even for the debt service of \$2 million or more annually if our county were to go into debt to

build it. Why do we pay this guy almost \$100,000 annually for this level of incompetence – especially when he only works part time?

More circular logic.

At the end of this fiscal year (June 30) EDC will have spent an additional \$77 million on salary and benefits since June 30, 2013, due to additional hiring and a 15 percent compounded raises. For four years' prior, the county salary and benefits budget remained level at about \$118 million. Nearly 70 percent of our general fund revenues now goes to salary and benefits. And they are going up. Without that expense, we could be driving on glass smooth roads and have the best sheriff's HQ in California without going \$40 million into debt.

Larry Weitzman is a resident of Rescue.

Opinion: Tahoe ahead of the game at landscape level

By Joanne Marchetta

Restoring and conserving our environment at Lake Tahoe means setting our aspirations at the right scale. That's what TRPA and many partners are working to do through strategic initiatives to ensure the health of our basin's forests, streams, and lake, and to improve our communities and transportation infrastructure.

Regions around the world are now working to conserve natural resources and ecosystems at the landscape level, not the political boundary level. That includes Chesapeake Bay, Puget

Sound, and the Great Lakes; large, complicated watersheds whose conservation requires multiple jurisdictions working together.



Joann
Marchetta

We are fortunate that trailblazers in California and Nevada had the vision decades ago to recognize the need to protect Tahoe as a watershed. They realized their initiative would fall short unless both states and all of our local governments were on board.

As a leader in environmental conservation and restoration at the landscape level, TRPA has a seat on the executive committee of the Large Landscape Conservation Practitioners' Network. Natural resource managers nationwide are starting to address issues at the ecosystem scale, the same scale our regional collaborative uses to make real progress at Tahoe. And we are committed to sharing our knowledge and learning from others how we can do better.

Lake Tahoe faces major challenges. Population growth in nearby metropolitan areas will drive increased visitation to our communities and our public lands, stressing our infrastructure and natural resources. A changing climate and its potential for prolonged drought will impact the health of our forests, lake, and recreation-based economy. Our strategic initiatives at TRPA focus on facing these challenges and making our region as resilient as possible.

One of our strategic initiatives focuses on improving the

system of development commodities in the Tahoe Basin, which has brought private investment in property upgrades to a virtual crawl. The movement, conversion, use, and supply of residential units, commercial floor area, and tourist accommodation units are all limited at Tahoe. While maintaining limits on total development, we must improve the commodities system to make sure it allows and encourages the kind of environmental redevelopment projects we need to protect our lake, restore environmentally sensitive areas like marshes and streams, and revitalize our town centers.

On another part of the landscape, TRPA and other members of the Tahoe Fire and Fuels Team have worked together to reduce hazardous fuels on tens of thousands of acres of forest in the Tahoe Basin. We have treated about half of the 117,000 acres of wildland urban interface where communities and forests meet and we have plans to treat the rest over the next 10 years.

But we are also working on a strategic initiative to scale those projects up to remove fuels from the extensive forested lands beyond the wildland urban interface. In light of the drought and warming climate, this work is critical to maintain the health of our forests and protect our water resources and communities from the risk of both catastrophic wildfire and emerging insect threats causing vast tree mortality associated with the drought that could, with a foothold here, change the face of the Sierra forest as we know it.

As TRPA and partner agencies complete the 2015 Threshold Evaluation Report, the latest five-year snapshot of Lake Tahoe's environmental health, we are also working to overhaul our outdated system of threshold indicators.

More than 150 indicators are used to gauge our progress in conserving and restoring Tahoe's water and air quality, soil, vegetation, fish and wildlife habitat, scenic qualities, and recreation opportunities. We need to comprehensively update this 30-year-old monitoring system to ensure it is as

efficient and scientifically sound as possible, so Tahoe agencies have the information they need to assess the health of our environment and the effectiveness of our policies.

We'll complete another major priority this year, an update to our Regional Transportation Plan. The plan's main focus is to better handle the heavy visitation our region sees and improve transportation options in our communities so people don't need cars to get to work, school, shopping centers, or recreation areas. This will involve better regional transit service, better bike and pedestrian trails, and the adoption of new technologies. Transportation is transformation at Lake Tahoe, and by upgrading our transportation system we can improve our air and water quality and our communities.

We set our aspirations high on the large challenges on our horizon at Lake Tahoe, and we can reach them working together.

We are fortunate to be one of the country's first regions to realize the need to work together at the landscape level to ensure the Jewel of the Sierra remains healthy for future generations to enjoy. Tahoe has been a leader in collaboration for decades, but now is the time to redouble our will and energy to collaborate and work together to confront the challenges that face our environment and our communities.

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