

Opinion: Longing for the softer side of hurricanes

By Dulce Vasquez

After school, whenever I walked into my family's home in Davie, Fla., I was always reminded of 1992's Hurricane Andrew, which decimated nearly 64,000 homes about 60 miles away in the city of Homestead. Andrew—all Floridians are on a first name basis with their hurricanes—still lived on via the duct tape my uncle had applied to our jalousie windows. Even after the tape was removed, a large X of residue remained that my mother never bothered to scrub off.

Two things are funny about this: First, I didn't actually experience Andrew, because I didn't move to Florida until 1993. Second, that was the extent of hurricane preparations back then—duct tape to be sure that if the windows shattered, the glass would stick together, instead of splintering into tiny and dangerous little pieces. When you've grown up with hurricanes, their memories—like the tape residue—never quite go away.

My first real hurricane was Erin in 1995. Then 9 years old, I had no idea what to expect, but figured that all hurricanes were the same and this one would tear my house apart. So I took matters into my own hands. I got that green plastic mover's wrap you can find at U-Haul, fully wrapped the 13-inch CRT television I'd negotiated having in my bedroom, and put all of my books, Barbies, and beanie babies in plastic storage bins.

During Erin, every window in our home was covered with plywood, so inside the house it felt like it was 2am even during the day. I plopped down to watch the living room TV, but all broadcasts had the same information on loop until the

next National Hurricane Center forecast was released (every six hours). After several hours of this, I decided that my house was not going to flood and that I could unwrap my bedroom television and go back to watching "The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air. "

I don't mean to be flip—I know that hurricanes can kill people and destroy entire regions, and, when response and relief are slow to arrive, the aftermath of these storms can be even deadlier, as Puerto Rico is tragically experiencing right now.

But for those who have lived in hurricane-prone places, these epic disasters can come to feel routine. For me ever since Erin, hurricanes have been business as usual to me. Floridians rarely flinch at anything weaker than a Category 3. You go through the motions: put plywood on the windows, get enough water and non-perishable goods, fill every car you own with gas to the brim, and hope for the best.

As a kid, I always hoped the hurricanes would come during the week so school would get canceled. If we were really lucky (which I was a few times), the storm would hit on a test day and I'd have a few extra days to study.

The familiarity of the pre-hurricane procedure was, in its way, comforting. My family would sit on the couch and flip between the Weather Channel and Spanish news. My mom would go up to the TV and point to all possible trajectories, always deciding that we'd be a direct hit. My dad would then reason with her. But we were all experiencing it together.

The feeling that this was a holiday continued during the lull after the storm passed through; It almost feels like Christmas morning, where everything is quiet, and no one is in the streets yet and riding their bicycles.

The storms, like birthdays or holidays, eventually become part of the way you remember life.

In 2004, there was Ivan, which made me late for my first day of college in Chicago. The airport didn't reopen until an hour after my flight was supposed to take off. Similarly, Ernesto in 2006 made me one week late to my study-abroad program in Paris.

I remember Katrina. My mother's prediction of our home being a direct hit finally came true in August 2005 when the eye of Katrina made its first landfall just north of Miami as "only" a Category 1. It was nothing compared to what happened in Louisiana, but it still managed to leave a million Floridians without power and cause \$630 million worth of damage.

In the lull after that storm, sitting in my bedroom, I managed to write to one of my dorm mates from college, who lived in New Orleans. I warned that as a Category 1 storm, it'd been very powerful, and hoped he'd be careful. He wrote back to confirm he and his family had evacuated to north Florida. When we got back to school a few weeks later he let us know that his home was under 6 feet of water and was a total loss.

That same season was when I experienced my first hurricane from afar. Wilma ripped through Florida later in 2005. It was one of the latest-forming storms I can remember, hitting in late October. Comfortably welcoming fall in Chicago, I talked with my parents every day. They called to say they were safe and had a generator to power the fridge. Within a few days, my dad had run hundreds of feet of extension cords to power our three neighbors' refrigerators. It took three weeks for their power to get restored.

I still visit often, but I haven't lived in Florida since 2005. As it happens, no major hurricane since Wilma in 2005 had made direct landfall in Florida, until this year. Over the last 12 years, my family had dealt with warnings and evacuations, and my parents, instead of scurrying to Home Depot for plywood, replaced those outdated jalousie windows with some double paned windows with beautiful colonial

grilles. To protect them, they invested their tax refunds on accordion shutters that take no more than 5 minutes per window to close.

But Irma brought the hurricanes back home. From Los Angeles, where I live, I started tracking Irma as soon as it became a Category 5 storm. On Monday, my mom texted "Looks like pinche Irma is coming." Harvey had just destroyed Houston, and this was poised to be an even stronger hurricane, so there I was again, every six hours looking for the next National Hurricane Center forecast update.

On Tuesday, I asked my mom if they wanted to evacuate, and volunteered to book their flights. She said they'd wait and make a call on Thursday. On Wednesday, I sent my mom a graphic of the latest trajectory, which showed Irma blowing directly through their house. I asked again if they wanted to evacuate.

On Thursday my Mom said she wanted to evacuate but dad didn't want to. My anxiety and frustration grew. That night I had a dream that the roof of our home tore off. On Friday, I took action and told mom that the safest place in the house was in the bathroom (most inner, central place in the house, without windows). I wasn't sure if that's true or not, but it made me feel better.

On Saturday, my aunt, uncle, and cousin came to my parents' house— they live in a mobile home and those are always unsafe. Curfew started at 4pm.

On Sunday, as soon as I woke up and still in bed, I texted my mom to check in, but my iMessages were not going through. That meant they lost power and/or cell service. I started to panic. I texted everyone else in the house: mom, dad, brother, cousin, aunt. Nothing. Finally, after what seemed like the longest 20 minutes of my life, a message finally came through. All were safe. Relief.

Through the whole process, every ounce of me wanted to be

there, in the storm with my family.

Dulce Vasquez is director of strategic partnerships at Arizona State University and the former managing director at Zócalo Public Square, for which she wrote this.

Opinion: Precarious world for press freedom

By John Diaz, San Francisco Chronicle

The practice of journalism has rarely been more critical – or at greater risk – in the United States. Never before has a president of this nation so aggressively attempted to delegitimize and even threaten established news organizations that produce stories that undermine the narrative he is trying to create.

Public distrust of the media did not begin with the election of Donald Trump, but his constant drumbeat of “fake news” and claims of fabrication have only galvanized it.

Yet through the fog of Trump’s rhetorical war, several national news organizations – most notably the Washington Post and New York Times – have been doing a great public service with their investigative reporting of the allegations of Russian interference in the 2016 election and the many false statements from the Trump White House. If left to the dispatches issued from Trump and his surrogates, Americans would be under the mistaken impression that his son Donald Jr.’s summer 2016 meeting with the Russians was all about adoptions, millions of people voted illegally in 2016, the U.S. murder rate was the highest it’s been in nearly a half

century, and his inauguration crowd was the largest in history.

Read the whole story

Opinion: Taking action against sanctuary state

To the community,

The State of Jefferson joins the California Sheriff's Association and National Sheriff's Association, in their call for Congress to "take action and pass sensible legislation that doesn't hamstring law enforcement."

The citizens of the 21 counties that encompass the State of Jefferson have long supported their county sheriff's who have declared they will comply with federal immigration law, should the Governor sign SB54. The Jefferson leadership has been outspoken about Brown and his administration, putting the needs of illegal aliens (criminals) before that of the health and safety of American citizens.

They stated that SB54 not only bars sheriff's and police from asking people about their immigration status or participation in most federal immigration enforcement activities, but also would largely prohibit school and security officers, from using money or staff to investigate, question, hold or arrest people for immigration violations.

State of Jefferson also supports efforts by Republican Congressman Tom McClintock and others who are looking at ways to intervene, to include; that cities and counties who are

within a sanctuary state would be able to file and be awarded federal grant monies. The counties of Tehama, Siskiyou and cities of Anderson and Lincoln, have already adopted resolutions, declaring they will comply with federal immigration laws.

Efforts continue by residents in many of the northern rural counties, requesting that their county supervisors also take a stand, adopting similar resolutions, and also officially support their county sheriffs who have taken a vow to uphold the laws of our U.S. Constitution.

Those of Jefferson are not alone in their opposition of sanctuary counties and cities. In a recent poll by the University of California, Berkeley, 74 percent of Californian's opposed sanctuary jurisdiction.

The passage of SB54, is just another example of Brown and his cohorts ignoring the voice of the people, just as with the passage of the recent gas tax increase, along with the lack of representation that exists for rural residents in the California Legislature. It is time that Brown and his administration, start respecting California citizens and our law enforcement officers, who everyday risk their lives, diligently doing their jobs to protect their communities.

Terry Gherardi, State of Jefferson

Letter: Adventurous time at Bread & Broth

To the community,

The Mueller family really enjoys making people happy. As owners of Adventure Mountain Lake Tahoe, the sledding, tubing and snow play resort located at the top of Echo Summit, they provide winter activities that can be enjoyed by people of all ages.

Continuing their generous spirit of wanting to make people's lives better, Linda and Jim Mueller host several Bread & Broth Adopt A Day of Nourishment sponsorships annually. After hosting an AAD earlier in the year on May 5th, the couple along with their son, Max, were the hosts and volunteers for the Monday meal at St. Theresa Grace Hall on Oct. 16.

"Bread & Broth provides a great service to the South Lake Tahoe Community and Adventure Mountain Lake Tahoe is happy to help and play a part in giving back to our community," commented Linda Mueller.

Unfortunately, many of our Tahoe South Shore neighbors are food insecure and live in constant survival mode. Thanks to the Muellers' generous donation, their Monday meal fed 95 folks who are vulnerable and were very much in need of a hot, nutritious meal.

The Adopt A Day of Nourishment program is a funding source for B&B's Monday meal. In addition to the \$250 donation, the AAD program offers sponsors the opportunity to participate at their dinner event giving them the ability to personally serve others, lend a hand at the meal and have a humbling and uplifting experience. B&B would like to thank the Mueller's and Adventure Mountain for their on-going support of B&B's efforts to feed the hungry through the AAD program.

Carol Gerard, Bread & Broth

Letter: Reasons Measure C makes sense

To the community,

Ever since we moved to South Lake Tahoe 38 years ago, we have been proud to call this city our home. Between our community spirit of caring and sharing, excellent schools, and the inspiring nature of the lake and mountains, we are truly fortunate to live in such a special place. We recently hosted our foreign exchange student from 20 years ago and we were proud to show him all of the community upgrades such as Heavenly Village, Lakeview Commons, Harrison Avenue, South Tahoe High School, and the new Whole Foods project.

Although these community upgrades are visible improvements, not everything is perfect in South Lake Tahoe. A persisting problem that plagues our city is the deteriorating state of our aging streets and roads. These failing streets increase vehicle maintenance costs and reduce our quality of life. Dangerous potholes and cracks must be repaired promptly to improve safety for all residents and visitors to our city. This is why we must support Measure C on the November ballot.

Measure C will fix potholes and pave, maintain and repair local streets and roads. It will improve roadway safety for drivers, pedestrians and bicyclists, and will provide safe routes to school for children. Not to mention, repairing our roads through Measure C will reduce fine sediment pollution from roads, improving lake clarity and water quality.

We all agree that our roads must be repaired, but there is some disagreement as to why Measure C is the best option. But some things seem clear.

First, we need improvements now. The longer we wait, the more expensive road repairs will become, placing an even bigger burden on our city. Measure C is a solution that will begin repairs immediately, reduce costs through coordination with Southwest Gas and qualify our city for matching funds from the State.

Second, if we want reliable, dedicated road funding, we need to look beyond the city's existing General Fund budget. For over 50 years, our city has struggled to pay for the road maintenance, repairs and improvements we've needed. This is because, upon South Lake Tahoe's founding, the city's budget was formatted to prioritize other services like public safety over road repairs. This means that funding is inconsistent at best and often by default. Measure C provides a dedicated source of consistent funding that is not vulnerable to fluctuations in the city's budget.

Third, Measure C has the highest fiscal accountability standards of any road repair solution. Three-tiered accountability provisions include a legal mandate that funds only be spent on roads in South Lake Tahoe, a roads management authority separate from the City Council that manages funding and an unpaid Citizens' Oversight Committee that supervises road spending. Essential items and services, like groceries and medicine, are exempt from any costs, and Measure C is the only solution that ensures tourists help pay for their impact on our roads. If you are of the same belief as we are, that the city should be held accountable for all spending, then you will agree that there is no better option for fiscal responsibility than Measure C.

Opposition to Measure C has offered no solution to fixing our roads, other than demanding the City Council re-examine the budget. This is the same group that calls the City Council irresponsible with spending. Their solution is to leave our roads' future in the hands of the very individuals they say they don't trust to manage funding. This is not a solution at

all. We need Measure C – a fiscally-responsible, reliable solution to fix our roads starting now.

Our community has come together to support this important measure, with a coalition including the El Dorado County Taxpayers Association, both the local Democratic and Republican parties, both local chambers of commerce, the League to Save Lake Tahoe and many more all recommending a yes vote on Measure C. We urge you to join us in making the smart choice for the future of our city. Vote yes on Measure C.

Greg and Jean Bergner, South Lake Tahoe

Opinion: Calif. forests need better care

By Van Butsic, Henry McCann and Jeffrey Mount, San Francisco Chronicle

California's forests are on fire, with tragic consequences for communities around the state. While the firestorm in the Wine Country has made international headlines, many small mountain communities also were aflame or on high alert.

The focus now is on saving lives and protecting property, but when the fires are out, the state will have to face up to a major problem: Our forests are too dense and dry, and, in some areas, dying. We need a new way to manage this vital natural resource.

Nowhere is our challenge greater than in our headwater forests, the watershed for roughly two-thirds of California's surface water supply and 15 percent of its electricity from

hydropower plants. Failure to better manage our forests will result in higher future costs to fight wildfires, impaired air and water quality, and increased greenhouse gases due to loss of carbon stored in trees and soils.

Read the whole story

Letter: Measure C should be rewritten

To the community,

Once the money goes into the General Fund it can end up anywhere, that's why this Measure C is a good tax (if there is a good tax) because it is a specific fund that cannot be used for anything but what it's voted on.



Kenny
Curtzwiler

Specifically this started as a way to keep CalPERS from robbing the General Fund for unfunded pensions and liabilities. The problem is it not enough and everyone knows it even the authors. There is a scare tactic right now that if we don't pass it we will be driving on dirt and nothing is further from the truth. If we defeat the measure now, it can

be rewritten in time for the next election and that will give us time to get more funding.

The council is afraid to go after other funding sources. We are the only town that Vail is in that does not have a lift ticket tax. Vail gets \$4.5 million per year, Breckenridge gets \$3.5 million per year. That is why they look like they do. The council is afraid to go after other funding sources. Tax the TOT on VHRs only. You can also divert a portion of the TOT on VHRs to Measure C II. Tourists visiting VHRs and Vail use our infrastructure so why not have them help to pay for it. Raise the Measure C tax to 1 percent and lower the time involved.

Measure C as written will work but it can't due to inadequate funding. We are kicking another can down the road for our kids as 15 years is too long to fix the roads. By the time we get to the really bad ones the bad ones will have reached a level of really bad.

Thank you,
Kenny Curtzwiler, Meyers

Opinion: Wine Country triumph

By Joe Mathews

The deaths and damage of this year's Wine County wildfires are a historic disaster. They are also the product of an epic California success.

That triumph is the wine industry, which has come to dominate our state's land, culture and image. Indeed, it's now outdated to refer to the burning stretches of Napa and Sonoma counties as California's Wine Country. The truth is that the whole

state is wine country. These awful fires—and the hotter ones to come via climate change—will only make it more so.



Joe Mathews

Californians fight over water, but we connect through wine. It's a passion and pursuit that binds together rural and urban, business and labor, and rich and poor (we produce both \$3,499.97 Screaming Eagle varietals and the \$2.99 Charles Shaw wines they sell at Trader Joe's). Wine defines us to the world (only three nations on earth—France, Italy and Spain—produce more wine than we do), and is our leading home remedy, the best available balm for a state that inspires the sweetest of dreams and the most bitter of disappointments.

California is a state of disaster, and where there is disaster, you will find wine close by. Over the past 40 years, wine has boomed not only in Northern California—from 25 Napa Valley wineries in 1975 to more than 400 in Napa and Sonoma counties—but also in the Central Coast, the Central Valley, the Sierra Foothills and even Southern California's Inland Empire. Much of this growth has come at the edges of cities and towns, in the space between human development and our wilder lands.

These are the places where California's wildfires rage, and so the success of wine has lured many more people to live in riskier places. This era's giant blazes have hit all our wine countries. In addition to the awful scale and human carnage of the Napa and Sonoma fires, multiple wildfires this summer did damage to the Central Coast, including its

vineyards and wineries.

The history of wine in California is a century older than the state itself. California's saint, Junipero Serra, had vineyards planted in his 18th-century missions. Los Angeles was originally a wine country ("The City of Vines" was an L.A. nickname of the 19th century), and the Napa Valley's origins as a wine producer coincide with the Gold Rush.

By the late 19th century, wine was a major California export. While wine is often seen as an artisanal exception to California's newer industries, it actually established the template for the culture and economy that produced aerospace, movies, and software: Bring people and ideas from around the world to California, and then spin them together into new products that are exported back to the world.

California has privileged wine to a degree that might embarrass your local aristocrat. Our state is famous for its high taxes, but makes an exception for wine. Our taxes on alcohol, a legacy of a powerful 20th-century liquor lobby, are so much lower here that Californians have gotten used to getting great wine at low prices—a bit of the Golden State's largesse in every bottle.

In the aftermath of the fires, wine's exalted status may come under pressure. Before the blazes, there had been conflict between wineries and their local governments and neighbors. Wineries often see housing development as encroaching on their land. Homeowners and local governments have complained about the traffic and noise that comes with the thousands of winery events and the 24 million tourists who visit the Northern California Wine Country each year.

Perhaps the tragedy of the fires will inspire new collaborations and smart, resilient planning to buffer wineries and houses. But if the fires create more limits on where structures—be they wineries or houses—can be built, more

conflict is inevitable. The wine industry could also see internal turmoil and ultimately consolidation, as newer or smaller players, facing the high costs of rebuilding and insurance, sell out to bigger players. But look for wine to emerge stronger and win most of the battles—Californians like their wine more than they like other people's houses.

The Wine Country fires reflect the unpredictability and cruelty of nature—amplified by any number of human failings in managing our environment. The fires will rightfully force a reassessment of those failings, at least for a while.

But human beings can handle only so much misery, at least by themselves. Eventually, we gather with others and reach for the bottle. And then, as has been practice since an ancient supper described in the Gospel of Matthew, the wine “is poured out to forgive the sins of many.”

Opinion: Questioning EDC attorney's logic

By Larry Weitzman

Governments waste money and lots of it. The government employees who spend it many times don't care, it's not their money (it's other people's money, or OPM). And making matters worse most government employees are almost totally insulated and immune from any outside action for what the government employee does. And they are non-elected. The Board of Supervisors are supposed to be our oversight. Good luck with that.



Larry Weitzman

What I am about to describe is perhaps a microcosm of a wasteful government action, the kind that goes completely unnoticed, but in this case, it did get noticed. The amount wasted was just \$23,000, not even a drop in the bucket when compared to El Dorado County's over quarter of a billion-dollar General Fund budget. Not even pocket change, but it could have fixed a lot of potholes, a whole neighborhood's worth.

Here's what happened. We have heard a lot about Senior Legal who sees on average 2,000 over 60-year-old clients a year. To qualify for Senior Legal, a person has to be 60 years of age. Senior Legal attorneys make that crystal clear to anyone seeking their services, if you are not 60 years old you cannot be a client. Pretty simple rules and this column is not about that particular rule, but that's the rule.

A family dispute arose for a gentleman who was about 80 years of age and he sought the help of Senior Legal attorneys. The Senior Legal attorney represented only the gentleman and not his daughter who was under the age of 60 who attended the meeting with her father. Senior Legal helped negotiate a settlement for this gentleman that involved the younger under 60-year-old daughter, papers were signed and the matter resolved. A third-party attorney eventually finished the deal and prepared the papers which were signed.

After the resolution, the daughter evidently had second thoughts and complained that the Senior Legal attorney had a conflict of interest with her (claiming to represent both her

and her father) even though it was made clear that no such relationship between her and the Senior Legal attorney did exist as she by Senior Legal rules could not be represented by senior legal. In fact, the resolution wasn't performed by the Senior Legal attorney but a third-party attorney who also negotiated for the elderly gentleman.

Even though Senior Legal ended up having nothing to do with the final resolution, neither representing the ineligible daughter or the elderly gentleman, the daughter filed a conflict of interest complaint against the Senior Legal attorney. Because the Senior Legal attorney didn't and couldn't represent her, there could be no conflict of interest. Perhaps a letter should have been sent to the woman/daughter stating why and how there could be no conflict of interest. But that didn't stop someone in the County Counsel's office from hiring expensive, high priced San Francisco lawyers. There were two of them who came to the county who had a meeting with the particular Senior Legal attorney, a meeting that lasted about an hour. Travel time to and from EDC must have been six additional hours and what was done beyond the meeting related to this non-issue is unknown, but this is a pretty simple matter that should have been handled in-house. Was there something else going on by hiring these attorneys? Maybe someone in the county was trying to feather their nest for future employment. By the way, nothing came of the "investigation."

The bill for this "non-issue" totaled \$23,000. And word has it that county counsel wants to bill it to Senior Legal, which will further hurt seniors. This is an excellent example of how government works. Should this have happened? Absolutely not. But there is something else.

Who is ultimately responsible for authorizing this \$23,000 boondoggle? That's right, county counsel, who by the way was running Human Resources at the time via a deputy county counsel. We have a single person who heads county counsel and

that is where the buck stops, all \$23,000 of them. At least that's what Harry S Truman would have said.

Earlier in the week when I wrote this piece, EDC had a "good governance" meeting involving most every high-priced county official putting on a feel-good, dog and pony show on how EDC is going to reform (yeah, sure) and have good governance. But this kind of thing will continue to go on. What we need is an investigation of county counsel. The only way to stop this is a new county counsel. Additionally, our own CAO, Don Ashton, had nothing to do with this but perhaps expenditures like this should be within his purview. Here is an example of a check and balance that would lead to better governance. What is else is needed for good governance is absolute honesty, complete transparency and pristine ethics.

Larry Weitzman is a resident of Rescue.

Opinion: Wine Country fires wake-up for Tahoe

By Joanne Marchetta

The heartbreaking fires in Northern California's Wine Country this month have upended hundreds of thousands of people's lives. In just over one week, the fires across Northern California burned more than 220,000 acres, destroyed 6,000 buildings, and killed more than 40 people. Our hearts go out to our neighbors in Napa, Sonoma, and Mendocino counties.

The Angora Fire left the Tahoe region with special empathy for the distress so many people are going through with these wildfires, although their situation is far more devastating.

And these fires, like the Angora Fire, are yet another grim reminder that our lives and our livelihoods depend on the continued steps we take to reduce wildfire risk and prepare for even more catastrophic wildfires.



Joanne
Marchetta

Forest health remains a serious issue for Lake Tahoe. Like so many other areas, Tahoe's forests face threats from climate change, drought, bark beetle outbreaks, and tree mortality that increase the risk of wildfire. Residents, fire districts, and other local, state, and federal partners are working collaboratively to address these threats. Still more is needed.

Because of climate change, the fire season in the Western U.S. is over two months longer than it was just four decades ago. Wildfires are larger, more frequent, and burning more intensely. Drought has left forests with millions of dead trees to fuel more dangerous fires.

Improving forest health and preparing for wildfire takes action on many levels. Twenty partner agencies on the Tahoe Fire and Fuels Team, including TRPA, are working together and with basin residents to address each of them. But we must continue to act now, before Tahoe's next fire is burning.

People who manage the vegetation on their property to create defensible space around homes and businesses are taking an important first step. Properties without defensible space are much more at risk, allowing wildfire to spread among brush to

structures and burn into the tree canopy through ladder fuels. More than 27,500 properties at Tahoe have been inspected for defensible space over the last 10 years. People who have not created defensible space or requested an inspection to learn what they need to do to prepare for wildfire should do so now. It is something each of us can do today, and fire agencies are ready to help.

But one property's defensible space is only as good as the neighbor's. That's why Tahoe Fire and Fuels Team partners launched the Tahoe Network of Fire Adapted Communities. Led by the Tahoe Resource Conservation District, this program is helping residents work with their neighbors and local fire districts to improve wildfire preparedness on a broader scale in our communities.

Most Tahoe neighborhoods are in the wildland urban interface: The dangerous areas where our homes and the forest meet. These areas are the top priority for removing overgrown brush and trees that could fuel a catastrophic fire. Over the last 20 years, the Tahoe Fire and Fuels Team has thinned 70,000 acres of forest in the wildland urban interface. Partners are working to treat the remaining 50,000 acres over the next 10 years. Along with more people creating defensible space, brush removal, tree thinning, and prescribed fire in wildland urban interface areas must continue for us to improve forest health and reduce wildfire risk.

Just as important is expanding forest health initiatives into the larger forest. Tree mortality from drought and bark beetles is a growing danger. California now has more than 102 million dead trees. While the most severe mortality is in the southern Sierra and foothills, the number of dead trees at Tahoe has grown steadily and now stands at more than 136,000.

A collaborative tree mortality task force is working to address these issues in the Tahoe basin. And in August, TRPA issued an emergency permit for Caltrans to remove dead and

dying trees along highways at Tahoe. Work started this September along Highway 89 and will continue next spring along other highways.

The Lake Tahoe West Restoration Partnership is working on a comprehensive plan to improve forest health, water quality, and recreation opportunities throughout 60,000 acres of the West Shore, in an area extending from Emerald Bay to Dollar Point near Tahoe City. This innovative landscape-scale initiative is being led by the U.S. Forest Service, California Tahoe Conservancy, California State Parks, National Forest Foundation, and TRPA. It will help us achieve multiple project benefits in a more streamlined, cost-effective manner and develop a model for healthy forests in other parts of the Tahoe basin.

We are making progress, but have much more to do. By continuing to collaborate and work together, we can reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire at Tahoe. Each of us has a role to play, from wildfire preparedness to helping prevent wildfires—more than 90 percent of which are human caused through carelessness. Please reach out to aid those in Napa, Sonoma, and Mendocino who need help now more than ever. And join us by taking action to protect the health of Tahoe's treasured forests and the safety of our communities.

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