Senators keep trying to get money for Tahoe

By Kathryn Reed

For the fifth consecutive year, senators from California and Nevada are asking their colleagues to come up with $415 million to fund environmental projects at Lake Tahoe.

The last four years the answer was no – or it didn't even make out of committee for there to be a vote. When it was introduced in 2009 the cash was to be spread over eight years; this time it's for 10 years.

Since the inaugural Lake Tahoe Environmental Summit in 1997 that was convened at the request of then-President Bill Clinton, nearly $2 billion has come to the basin to primarily help with lake clarity. Money from California, Nevada, local jurisdictions and the private sector came up with the bulk of that dollar figure.



Congress is being asked to give Lake Tahoe $415 million over the next 10 years. Photo/Kathryn Reed

Clinton is the one who launched the environmental improvement program.

In 2000, the first Lake Tahoe Restoration Act was funded at $424 million across 10 years. Sen. Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif., reintroduced the act on Aug. 1, with the support of Sens. Barbara Boxer, D-Calif, Harry Reid, D-Nev., and Dean Heller, R-Nev.

Money has been used to improve the clarity and quality of Lake Tahoe, thin forests in an attempt to reduce the threat of wildfire, help fight aquatic invasive species, improve air and water quality, build bike trails, and improve wildlife habitat.

The new money would do much of the same.

“I strongly believe we have a duty to protect Lake Tahoe, one of the most beautiful and pristine spots in our country,” Feinstein said in a press release. “Even in times of fiscal austerity, we cannot ignore the natural wonders that define our country. Lake Tahoe continues to suffer from pollution and sedimentation that reduces the lake’s remarkable water clarity, the potential for devastating wildfires remains high and a variety of invasive species threaten to devastate the region’s economy.”

Her family has had a second home on the West Shore for decades.

With the annual enviro summit being Aug. 19, the LTRA will undoubtedly be a topic of conversation – especially with former Vice President Al Gore attending the Sand Harbor event.

“Having the authorizing legislation (LTRA) allows legislators to appropriate funding to protect our lake for future generations, with assurances the money is being used responsibly,” Cheva Heck with the USFS told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Also in the bill is $2 million that would be used to transfer all of the urban lots owned by the U.S. Forest Service on the California side to the California Tahoe Conservancy. The USFS

would get some CTC parcels outside the urban area so its ownership is more contiguous.

The current USFS parcels would be deed restricted so the CTC could not put them in their rather recently created “asset lands bank”; which allows the CTC to sell them for development purposes.

Nevada did not want to be part of the urban lot transfer.

The Forest Service manages more than 3,200 urban parcels throughout the basin.

This version of the LTRA would also allocate $20 million to bring back the Lahontan cutthroat trout.

The legislation requires an annual report to Congress detailing the status of all projects undertaken, including project scope, budget and justification and overall expenditures and accomplishments.

Here is a copy of Feinstein’s statement that she read into the record.

This is the LTRA summary of how the $415 million would be spent.