

Obama affirms climate change impact at Tahoe



Thousands attend the Tahoe Summit to hear President Obama speak. Photo Copyright 2016 Carolyn E. Wright

By Kathryn Reed

STATELINE – President Obama bridged the environmental and economic divide in a speech at Lake Tahoe on Wednesday that left no doubt that without addressing climate change, the land, water and social welfare of this basin and all areas will be left to wither in the wind.

Obama was speaking to thousands of people Aug. 31 at the 20th annual Lake Tahoe Environmental Summit at Harveys.

“Healthy and diverse lands and waters help up us build resiliency to climate change,” he said. “Economies like this

one live or die by the health of our natural resources.”

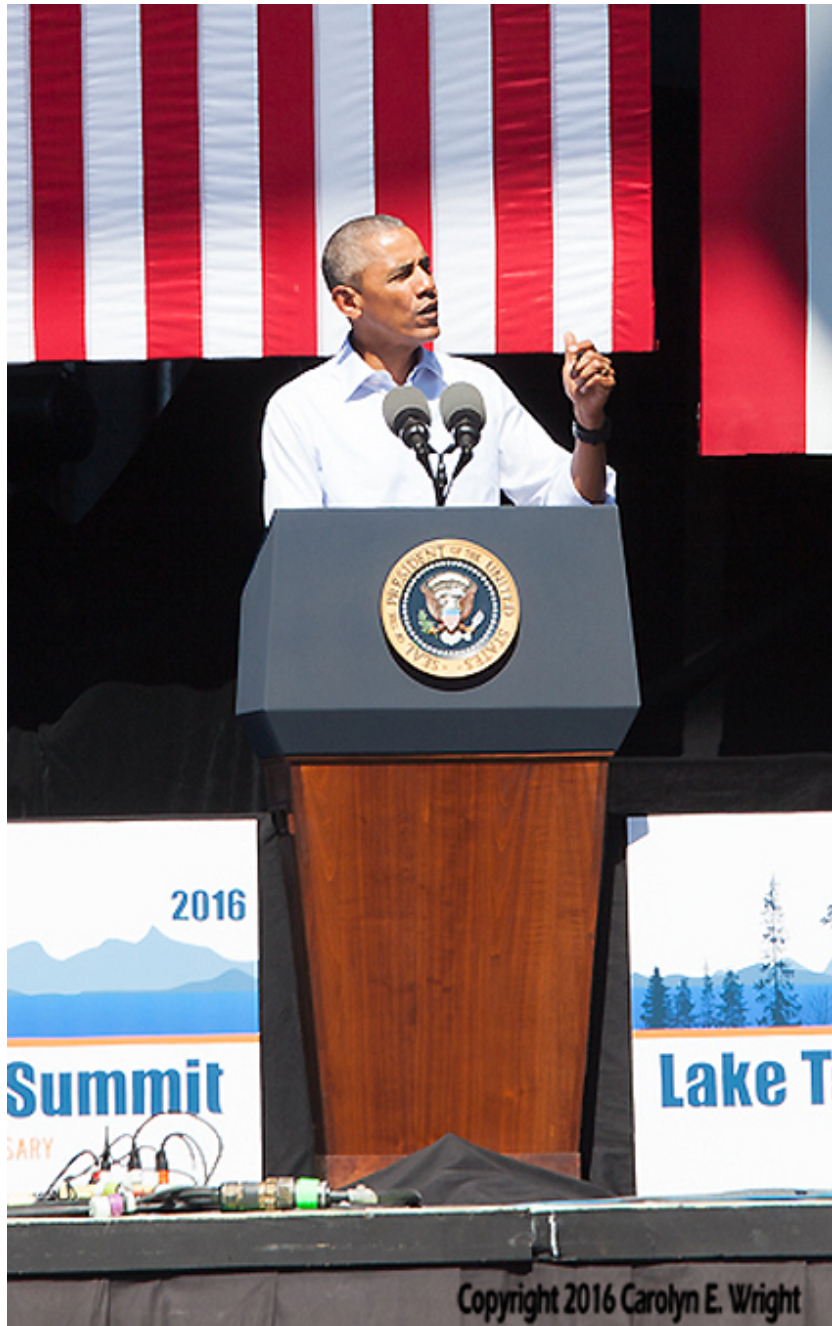


President Obama gets a good view of Jobs Sister on Marine One as he arrives at Lake Tahoe Airport. Photo/John Adamski

Obama was the keynote speaker at the summit hosted by Sen. Harry Reid, D-Nev. Joining them on stage were Gov. Jerry Brown, California Democratic Sens. Dianne Feinstein and Barbara Boxer, and Janice Schneider, assistant secretary for Land and Minerals Management of the U.S. Department of the Interior.

“The challenge of conservation and battling climate change are linked,” Obama said.

Taking a line from a Washoe elder, Obama said, “What happens to the land, happens to the people.”



President Obama in his first trip to Lake Tahoe tries to cement his environmental legacy. Photo Copyright 2016 Carolyn E. Wright

Obama praised work being done in California by Brown to reduce carbon emissions, tackle climate change and increase reusable energy consumption.

Brown said today 25 percent of the state's energy comes from renewables, while that is expected to double by 2030.

Boxer, who has been absent for most of the summits since the inaugural one, said, "Yes, we are here to celebrate the progress, but we have more work to do."

With the warmest average surface temperature at Lake Tahoe recorded in 2015, the 2007 Angora Fire that destroyed 254 houses a reminder of what a wildfire can do, and California and Nevada being in a fifth year of drought, the need to protect the environment is evident. To do so takes money.



Sens. Harry Reid and Barbara Boxer have championed Lake

Tahoe during their tenure; both are retiring. Photo
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Since the first summit in 1997 that was launched by President Bill Clinton and Vice President Al Gore, nearly \$2 billion has been spent in the basin on environmental projects. This has been a combination of federal, state, local and private money.

Even though the reauthorization of the Lake Tahoe Restoration Act is wending its way through Congress, there is no guarantee it will pass. It is now part of the larger Water Resources Development Act. The LTRA has gone a few cycles without seeing the light of day. It would allocate more than \$400 million to the basin.

Still, there is other money flowing here.



Sharpshooters and Secret Service were the norm inside and outside Harveys. Photo Copyright 2016 Carolyn E. Wright

Schneider spoke of how earlier Wednesday close to \$30 million was awarded to eight projects. Most of that – \$25 million – is headed to Tahoe and the surrounding area for restoration, including fuels management. The North Lake Tahoe Fire Protection District in Incline Village is getting money, so is the U.S. Forest Service, Tahoe Resource Conservation District and California Tahoe Conservancy.

Richard Solbrig, general manager of South Tahoe Public Utility District, told *Lake Tahoe News* that without the annual allocation of money in the federal budget to help with firefighting infrastructure, agencies like his and others in the basin would be in dire straights. While the funding requires the local districts to come up with a 50 percent match, it still lessens the local burden and gets projects done faster. Those federal dollars are paying for more than 100 fire hydrants to be put in the ground this year by South Tahoe PUD.



LTBMU Fire Chief Kit Bailey and Fallen Leaf Lake Fire Chief Gary Gerren at the summit. Photo/Kathryn Reed

While Kit Bailey, fire chief for Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit, is appreciative of any money that comes to help thin the forest, that's not the agency's only issue. The U.S. Forest Service, which owns about 80 percent of the land in the basin, also needs facilities.

“We need a new fire station on the West Shore partly because the engines keep getting bigger and the buildings are aging, and more and more are deteriorating,” Bailey told *Lake Tahoe News*.

The Meeks Bay station is a converted gas station from the 1940s that then became an ice cream shop before it was turned into a firehouse. And the hot shot crew housed in Meyers also needs a better facility.

But seldom at these summits is money allocated for what might be considered a basic necessity – like a suitable, modern building.



Sen. Dianne Feinstein and Gov. Jerry Brown follow President Obama off the stage at Harveys. Photo Copyright 2016 Carolyn E. Wright

On Aug. 31 the Obama administration allocated the following funding:

- \$29.5 million dedicated for hazardous fuels reduction projects to improve forest health and protect life and property from the threat of catastrophic wildfires. The funding will be used on public and private lands to remove

standing dead and dying hazard trees along roads, in campgrounds, at administrative and communication sites, and in the wildland urban interface.

- The National Forest Foundation with the Forest Service and local partners announced it has raised more than \$4 million for forest health, sustainable recreation and creek restoration projects throughout the Truckee River Watershed.

- The Environmental Protection Agency is allocating more than \$230,000 in grant funding for infrastructure to manage and reduce stormwater runoff in the region.

- The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is spending \$1 million for eight projects to prevent the spread of zebra and quagga mussels from nearby water bodies to Lake Tahoe.