

Opinion: Building on Lake Tahoe's successes

By Joanne Marchetta

Nearly 25 years ago, the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency and dozens of partners embarked on an unprecedented mission to conserve and restore the Lake Tahoe Basin's treasured natural resources through the Lake Tahoe Environmental Improvement Program.

That partnership has continued to grow. Today, the EIP is one of America's most ambitious and successful landscape-scale restoration programs, with more than 50 local, state, federal, nonprofit, and private sector partners completing projects that improve Lake Tahoe's forests, streams, wildlife habitat, water quality, and public recreation opportunities.



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As the annual Lake Tahoe Summit approaches on Aug. 7, hosted this year by Sen. Dean Heller, R-Nev., now is the time to reflect on the challenges and successes of this "epic" collaboration and recommit to working together to face the most difficult issues like climate change.

This year's summit follows the news that Tahoe's famous water clarity in 2017 fell to the lowest levels ever recorded. The end of the most severe drought in a millennium followed by the

wettest winter on record and record summer temperatures all combined to reduce the lake's average annual water clarity to 59.7 feet. But one bad year does not make a trend. We continue to make major progress on restoring Tahoe's clarity to its historic level of nearly 100 feet by reducing storm water pollution from roads and urban areas and restoring streams, meadows, and wetlands that play a critical role in the watershed's health.

There are many challenges in front of us. But heading into this year's summit the Lake Tahoe region can take stock of what we have accomplished together.

This summer marks the 10th anniversary of Lake Tahoe's Aquatic Invasive Species Program. Over the last decade, watercraft inspections have successfully prevented the introduction of any new aquatic invasive species in the lake.

With the inspection program keeping new invasive species out of the lake, collaborating partners are completing more projects to control populations of aquatic invasive species that found their way into the lake decades ago. Last year, partners treated 14.5 acres of the lake for Asian clams and aquatic invasive plants – a new record for the number of treatments in one year at Lake Tahoe. And we are working with both the public and private sectors to expand Tahoe's aquatic invasive species control program, testing new treatment technologies like ultraviolet light and securing funding to make continued headway on this important issue.

Over the last two decades, basin fire agencies have treated more than 70,000 acres of forest to thin out brush and other hazardous fuels in the wildland urban interface areas that surround Lake Tahoe communities, with more than 50,000 acres of forest treated since the devastating Angora Fire in 2007. Fire management partners are working to complete the first round of fuel reduction in all 117,000 acres of wildland urban interface at Tahoe within the next 10 years and working with

communities to create defensible space and improve wildfire preparedness through the Tahoe Network of Fire Adapted Communities Program.

TRPA and partners on the Tahoe Fire and Fuels Team are also working to expand this forest health work into the broader landscape through the Lake Tahoe West Restoration Partnership. This groundbreaking project is focused on restoring forest resilience to drought, insect attacks, and climate change in 60,000 acres of Tahoe's West Shore, an area spanning from Emerald Bay to Squaw Valley. Last summer, project partners completed a resilience assessment of West Shore forests. We are now working on a restoration strategy to accelerate forest health and fuel reduction projects in this area and incorporate water quality and recreation improvements to restore one of Lake Tahoe's most iconic landscapes and create a model we can use for other parts of the basin.

Much more progress is on the horizon for the Lake Tahoe Region. TRPA and its transportation and recreation partners are working on a corridor management plan for Highway 89 to improve traffic congestion, parking, and public recreation access in the heavily visited Emerald Bay area and to develop a Tahoe Basin Sustainable Recreation Strategy. Partners have brought new bike share and micro-transit services to Lake Tahoe and started construction on several major transportation projects, including the Fanny Bridge Community Revitalization Project in Tahoe City, the Incline to Sand Harbor Bike Path, and new bike paths at Dollar Point and Meeks Bay. With the recent public acquisition of Johnson Meadow, we are looking forward to vastly expanded restoration of Lake Tahoe's largest tributary, the Upper Truckee River.

With continued collaboration, Lake Tahoe can meet its major challenges head on in the next quarter century, from a changing climate to continued population growth in neighboring metropolitan areas and increased visitation from those areas.

The upcoming Lake Tahoe Summit is a time to build upon and celebrate our successes and to recommit ourselves to working together on the many challenges we will face in years to come. By continuing to collaborate and work together, we can ensure we leave behind a healthy and resilient Lake Tahoe for future generations to cherish.

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