

# STRATEGIC DIRECTION

## 2020 AND BEYOND



*Lake Tahoe*

November 2020



TAHOE  
REGIONAL  
PLANNING  
AGENCY

# TRPA AT-A-GLANCE

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## LEGAL CHARTER AND GOVERNANCE

### Charter

TRPA was created in 1969 as the first bi-state regional land use planning agency in the country with unique land use authority to manage development. It is governed under the Compact enacted by the states of California and Nevada, affirmed by the United States Congress, and then signed by the states' governors and the President of the United States. In 1980, the Compact was amended to bring broader, statewide representation to the Governing Board. Recent bi-state legislation addressed the need to update the Compact with an explicit recognition of economic conditions in environmental planning at Lake Tahoe.

### Governing Board

TRPA is directed by a 15-member Governing Board, seven members from California, seven from Nevada, and one non-voting Presidential Appointee. Four of the members of the governing body from each state constitute a quorum.

### Advisory Planning Commission

In addition to a Governing Board, TRPA is advised by a technical body called the Advisory Planning Commission (APC). This 21-member body, also created by the Compact, reviews technical analysis and proposals for adequacy and recommends plans and approaches to the governing body for adoption by ordinance. This commission includes chief planning officers from all the counties in the Region as well as designees of key water quality and natural resource agencies.

## TRPA ENVIRONMENTAL THRESHOLD CATEGORIES

- Water Quality
- Air Quality
- Soil Conservation
- Vegetation
- Fisheries
- Wildlife
- Scenic Quality
- Recreation
- Noise



# TRPA AT 50:

## HONORING THE PAST. ELEVATING THE FUTURE.

**H**igh in the Sierra Nevada and split by the California and Nevada border, Lake Tahoe is one of the world's largest, deepest, clearest, and most spectacular mountain lakes. Fifty years ago, Lake Tahoe faced a critical crossroads as rapid development threatened its future. Regulatory authority for the 500-square-mile watershed was fractured, split among the two states, four counties, and a city. Protecting and restoring Lake Tahoe would require partnership and collaboration.

In response to the crisis, and growing concerns Lake Tahoe would be irreparably harmed, California and Nevada formed the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency (TRPA) to manage growth and development in the watershed and lead a shared, cooperative mission to conserve and restore the lake and its unique environment. The states' action was unprecedented for its time. With approval from Congress in 1969, they created America's first bi-state compact agency formed to address environmental problems at a landscape scale, at one of the nation's most treasured and troubled natural resources.

At the time, rampant development was damaging and displacing the streams, marshes, and meadows vital to Lake Tahoe's health and famed water clarity. Development pressures grew stronger each year as Tahoe was showcased as a place to vacation, gamble, ski, live, work, play, and invest. Some envisioned a city the size of modern-day San Francisco, with four-lane freeways ringing the lake and a bridge over its iconic Emerald Bay, even as its clear waters grew more clouded from stormwater runoff and sediment.

Lake Tahoe's expansive forests were faring no better. Logging a century earlier clearcut most of the basin. Forests regrew thick with brush and trees, more susceptible to drought, insect attacks, and wildfire. Lahontan cutthroat trout had been fished until gone from the lake entirely, replaced with non-native trout and crayfish and Mysis

### TRPA VISION & MISSION

Our **vision** is for a Lake environment that is sustainable, healthy, and safe for the community and future generations.

Our **mission** is to cooperatively lead the effort to preserve, restore, and enhance the unique natural and human environment of the Lake Tahoe Region, while improving local communities, and people's interactions with our irreplaceable environment.

shrimp to help feed them. These species and others made their way into Lake Tahoe and changed its aquatic ecology before modern-day programs to prevent and control invasive species.

Fifty years ago, the majestic mountain lake's future was uncertain. So was TRPA's. Its early years were riddled with strife and conflict. TRPA, the two states, local governments, and factions throughout the region all had differing visions for the future of Lake Tahoe and its management. They struggled to find any agreement on a balance between Lake Tahoe's environment and the livelihood and economy of its communities. The new shared, cooperative mission for Tahoe threatened to tear the region apart.

### TEAM TAHOE

Partnerships began to gradually emerge, grow, and strengthen. Forming TRPA, California and Nevada each recognized that neither state working by itself could protect their shared natural resource. TRPA learned that it, too, must reach outward for success, work to bring people to the table to find common causes despite their differences, build partnerships, and collaborate and communicate to make needed changes a reality. Today, the Agency is collaborating with more partners than ever before to

conserve and restore Lake Tahoe's environment, revitalize its communities, and strengthen the resilience and sustainability of each in the face of a changing climate.

The Lake Tahoe Environmental Improvement Program (EIP) highlights the impact of collaboration. The EIP has grown from a fledgling idea into one of the world's most ambitious, collaborative, and successful landscape restoration programs. Twenty-five years ago, TRPA and partners increasingly recognized that regulations alone would never be enough to remedy the widespread harms done to Lake Tahoe's environment. The region needed a program to coordinate the work of local, state, federal, and private sector partners to truly achieve landscape-scale conservation and restoration, recognizing partners could achieve more by working together than by working alone.

TRPA and partners created a framework for the EIP. The Clinton administration and Tahoe's congressional delegation were instrumental in helping formalize it at the first Lake Tahoe Summit in 1997. Their actions united Lake Tahoe's governmental agencies and programs in the EIP and provided greater federal funding to jumpstart the program. Speaking at the first summit, former President Bill Clinton said, "We have a shared responsibility to build on our commitment at all levels to be sure the lake and its environs are protected."



**PLANS IN THE 1950S FOR A ROAD ACROSS THE MOUTH OF EMERALD BAY THREATENED THE SCENIC BEAUTY OF LAKE TAHOE AND LAUNCHED A NEW ERA OF PROTECTION AND RESTORATION.**

**"LAKE TAHOE IS A WORLD-CLASS MARVEL, AND, FOR 50 YEARS, TRPA HAS BEEN INSTRUMENTAL IN MANAGING THIS UNIQUE RESOURCE. THE COLLABORATIVE WORK OF TEAM TAHOE WILL BE ESSENTIAL IN THE FUTURE AS WE ADDRESS NEW CHALLENGES FROM CLIMATE CHANGE AND ONGOING STRUGGLES WITH TRANSPORTATION AND CONGESTION."**

**– NEVADA GOV. STEVE SISOLAK**

That shared responsibility has continued to grow. Today, TRPA and more than 80 local, state, federal, tribal, non-profit, and private sector partners are working together through the landmark program to make the greatest possible collective impact. With shared purpose, goals, and commitment of partners, we are planning, coordinating, funding, and implementing Tahoe's highest-priority conservation and restoration projects. More than 700 have been completed. They are helping restore Lake Tahoe's water clarity and the health of its forests, meadows, marshes, and streams, keeping polluted stormwater and harmful invasive species out of the lake, building paths and trails, and creating new public recreation opportunities.

Because of partnership and collaboration, TRPA has a broadly-supported Regional Plan accelerating private redevelopment and public sector investments that are helping local communities thrive and revitalize while also helping the region meet its environment goals. Projects are creating walkable, bikable, mixed-use town centers, improving pedestrian and bicyclist mobility and transit services to reduce reliance on the automobile, and helping protect and restore Lake Tahoe's most environmentally-sensitive areas.

A growing array of diverse partners today make up what U.S. Senator Dianne Feinstein of California calls "Team Tahoe." These partners all recognize the inextricable



link between the health of Lake Tahoe's communities and the health of its natural environment, which is the largest driver of the region's \$5 billion recreation-based economy. More than ever before at Lake Tahoe, there is a broadly-shared vision for a healthy and sustainable future for the environment and local communities. Teamwork has been the catalyst for success at Lake Tahoe and TRPA has helped lead the region from a time of early and fragile partnerships into an era of epic collaboration.

## COLLABORATION AND COLLECTIVE IMPACT

Tahoe's collective impact approach to landscape conservation and restoration is being mirrored around the U.S. TRPA's collaborative leadership is recognized as critical to conservation in the 21st century in the face of unprecedented challenges such as climate change. The Network for Landscape Conservation advances collaborative conservation as an essential approach to connect and protect nature, culture, and community throughout North America. In 2018, the Network published the Pathways Forward Report following a national conference which highlighted collaboration across jurisdictions as a key strategy to achieve ecosystem-scale conservation and promote climate resilience.

Drawing from research first published a decade ago in the Stanford Social Innovation Review, the collective impact model focuses on the commitment of groups to a common agenda for problem-solving. Collective impact takes epic collaboration to a radical level and calls for five essential ingredients:

- A backbone organization with dedicated staff
- Common agenda
- Shared measurement
- Continuous communications
- Mutually reinforcing activities among all participants

Staying true to the call for collaboration in the Bi-State Compact that founded TRPA, the Agency's role has continued to evolve as a convener of the diverse stakeholders in the Tahoe Basin. Building upon the growing spirit of shared purpose and strengthening its role as the region's backbone organization, TRPA identifies key regional challenges, collaborates to foster common understanding of the problems, and creates broadly-shared visions for solutions. Through constant communication using its many platforms from Tahoe In Depth to online and one-

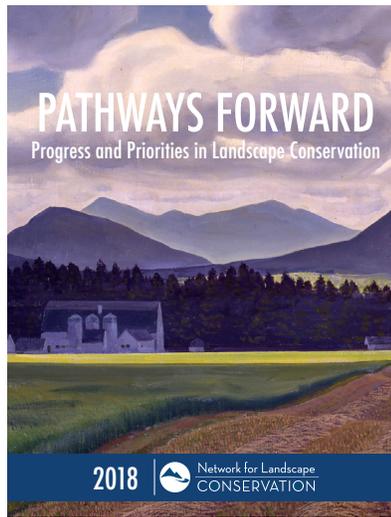
on-one channels, the Agency plays a crucial leadership role in bringing disparate voices together.

Partnership and collaboration have grown from small steps to great strides at Lake Tahoe, and have been the hallmark of every success. They have achieved much to help turn the tide for Lake Tahoe's environment and communities, helping to ensure the lake remains a world-class natural resource for today's and future generations to enjoy, cherish, and protect. And yet Lake Tahoe remains at a critical crossroads, confronting large and complex challenges. With the stakes as high as they are in the wake of health pandemics, climate change impacts on Tahoe's forests and watershed, new threats from invasive species, and continuing pressures on the fragile ecosystem, working within the collective impact model is a priority for TRPA in our strategic direction.

## CLIMATE CHANGE IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Climate change is widely expected to be the largest challenge of the 21st century, bringing with it more frequent and intense wildfires, more severe droughts, heat waves, and storms, and changing weather patterns. Some effects of the changing climate are already appearing with alarming acuity. Following years of catastrophic wildfires that have continued to grow in size and intensity, California in 2020 experienced its most devastating wildfire season. By mid-October, fires burned more than 4.1 million acres as the state battled five of the 20 largest fires in its recorded history.

Lake Tahoe will not be immune to these challenges. Its climate is already changing. Less of the region's total precipitation is falling as snow. Water temperatures are rising. So are average daily low air temperatures; for the first time on record they are above freezing. Warming temperatures with the likelihood of more frequent and severe droughts and changing precipitation patterns threaten to disrupt every natural system at Lake Tahoe, exacerbating longstanding environmental challenges and testing the health, resilience, and sustainability of the region's environment, communities, and economy.



**"CONSERVATION AT A LANDSCAPE SCALE WILL ONLY HAPPEN THROUGH COLLABORATION, THROUGH PARTNERSHIP—WE ALL KNOW THAT TO BE TRUE."**

**— JESSIE LEVINE,  
STAYING CONNECTED INITIATIVE,  
NETWORK FOR LANDSCAPE  
CONSERVATION COORDINATING  
COMMITTEE MEMBER**

Within Lake Tahoe's communities, residents and employees are struggling to find and afford housing. This worsens financial hardships for families, makes challenges for businesses trying to hire or keep help, and creates car commutes that worsen traffic congestion and harm air quality.

Cities around Lake Tahoe, from Reno and Carson City in Nevada to Sacramento and the San Francisco Bay Area in California, are continuing to grow. Drive-up visitors are putting metropolitan-level traffic demands on Tahoe's limited roadways. This clogs roads during peak times, degrades the environment, and strains public recreation areas. Without transformative changes to Lake Tahoe's transportation system and new strategies to improve the sustainability of recreation access and foster greater environmental stewardship, these pressures will continue to increase as major metro areas surrounding Tahoe grow.

To address these large, complex challenges, TRPA must continue to work with partners and the science community in order to succeed in its role as Lake Tahoe's backbone organization. From climate change to transportation and sustainable recreation, affordable housing, community revitalization, and continued environmental improvements, no one entity can solve the complex challenges Tahoe faces. Solutions will take all of Tahoe working together and with new partners located outside the Tahoe Basin. To ensure Lake Tahoe remains a world-class natural resource and one of Earth's most iconic and inspiring natural landscapes, TRPA and the region's partners must build on the successes of their past and take the next major steps in strategic directions, growing from an era of partnership into a new era of radical collaboration.

# STRATEGIC INITIATIVES AND PATH FORWARD

## BUILDING RESILIENCY

An alpine ecosystem as fragile as Tahoe's can suffer even from small changes. The impacts of warming air and water temperatures could be devastating: More severe droughts and storms. Changing weather with more rain and less snowfall. Tree mortality, longer wildfire seasons, and more intense fires. Warming lake waters increasingly susceptible to algae growth, invasive species, and reduced water clarity.

Every TRPA initiative includes strategies to strengthen the resilience of Tahoe's environment, communities, and economy to the emerging stresses of climate change and to improve the region's sustainability. California and Nevada have aggressive targets to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and TRPA and the region's partners must work to help meet those targets. Working together to implement the national award-winning 2014 Lake Tahoe Sustainability Plan will reduce greenhouse gas emissions and strengthen the region's communities and economy. As a major drive-up destination for millions of Northern California and Northern Nevada residents, TRPA and dozens of partners, including inter-regional partners in

neighboring metropolitan areas, must implement major improvements for the transportation system, which is the largest contributor of greenhouse gases in both states. TRPA's Climate Initiative is harmonizing the goals of both states and local governments in the Tahoe Basin while maintaining the Region's reputation as a global leader in sustainability.

## KEEPING TAHOE MOVING

Tahoe's transportation system needs transformative changes. Reliable, frequent, and free transit with expanded routes, miles of new paths and trails, complete streets, convenient mobility hubs, real-time travel and parking information, electric-vehicle charging, adaptive roadway management, and travel demand strategies can all help Tahoe achieve broadly-shared goals. These include a healthy, world-class environment, reduced traffic and greenhouse gas emissions, revitalized and pedestrian-friendly town centers, and improved safety. These changes will provide more sustainable travel options for residents and millions of yearly visitors. TRPA's 2020 Regional Transportation Plan and the 10-year Action Plan created by the Bi-State Consultation on



**"JUST BECAUSE TAHOE IS RESILIENT DOESN'T MEAN ITS STRENGTH IS LIMITLESS. WE NEED TO STRENGTHEN THE LAKE — AND THE COMMUNITIES THAT DEPEND ON IT — SO THAT IT CAN ENDURE THE CHALLENGES OF THE FUTURE."**

**— U.S. SEN. CATHERINE CORTEZ MASTO (D-NV)**



Transportation lay out this vision and strategies for TRPA and partners in and out of the basin to achieve comprehensive, long-overdue improvements that transform how people travel around, to, and from Lake Tahoe.

## TAHOE LIVING

Tahoe faces a housing crisis. TRPA and partners must find ways to create more achievable workforce housing. To meet many community and environmental goals, Tahoe employees must be able to find and afford housing close to transit and trails that provide connections to work, school, stores, and recreation areas.

## RESTORATION BLUEPRINT

The Environmental Improvement Program has guided Tahoe's restoration for almost 25 years. TRPA and 80-plus EIP partners must find new funding sources to accelerate progress toward a healthy, sustainable, and resilient region. Top priorities include major transportation and community revitalization projects, reducing

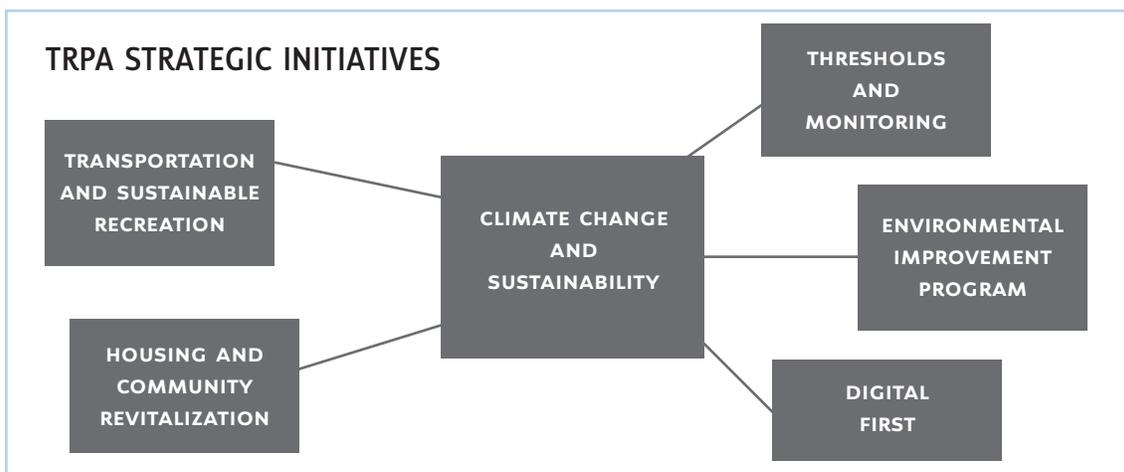
wildfire risk and improving forest health at a faster pace on a landscape scale, implementing plans to control or eradicate aquatic invasive species, and working with partners to reduce stormwater pollution through area-wide management projects and watershed restoration projects that provide multiple benefits for communities, the environment, and Tahoe's clarity.

## MEASURING WHAT MATTERS

Conserving and restoring a 500-square-mile watershed's environmental health requires good data, achievable goals, and monitoring programs that provide needed information to measure progress and adaptively manage for better results. TRPA and science partners continue to update monitoring programs and the threshold standards that set environmental goals for the region. The Tahoe Science Advisory Council continues to be an invaluable partner in guiding this work. Updates must ensure programs are effectively tracking important changes to Tahoe's environment and providing TRPA and the region's land managers with the best possible information to identify challenges and measure progress. Near-term updates will focus on measures for water quality, transportation, recreation, and stream environment zones.

## DIGITAL FIRST

TRPA will continue its transition to digital technologies for information storage, access, and sharing, permit applications, and customer transactions. This shift will help TRPA store and more easily share valuable data with many partners, improve transparency and public access to information, and provide greater ease and convenience for property owners and businesses and their information and permitting needs.



## BUDGET

TRPA's budget is organized to reflect its three core functions—planning, implementation, and research and analysis—within a continuous 'Plan, Do, Check' framework. Funding for these functions comes from a variety of sources including the states of California and Nevada, fees for services, and competitive grants.

Moving forward, TRPA and its local, state, federal, and private sector partners must work together to secure new funding sources for priorities and efficiently plan and implement projects. Finding ways to accelerate the

implementation of high-priority transportation improvements and other EIP projects is imperative to the region's continued success.

Tahoe's funding challenges could be seriously compounded by the global Covid-19 pandemic, which has caused significant impacts in California and Nevada. The Agency will continue to improve operational efficiencies and work closely with both states, and collaboratively with our partner agencies and organizations within the Tahoe Basin to ensure core programs and initiatives are not compromised.

