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The Path Toward Restoration, Continued Collaboration

Joanne S. Marchetta

In this time of nature's awakening as winter once again turns to spring, another important milestone is upon us. This year marks the 45th anniversary of the formation of the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency as a unique bi-state agency in the United States focused on regional environmental goals. Perhaps it is this unique jurisdiction that has at times made the Agency a crucible for fiery debate and discourse over how to protect one of our nation's most treasured natural resources. Despite the heat of the crucible, significant environmental progress continues to emerge.

Last week, as if in cadence with the turning of the season, a federal judge ruled in the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency's favor in litigation on the 2012 Lake Tahoe Regional Plan Update. In his decision, the judge stated that we had done our homework and that enacting the new plan was based on sound science. Now, we can pivot to join forces with the community to advance the next environmental leap forward and to re-build bridges with stakeholders who questioned progressive policy direction.

The decision, although important, is not the only cause of renewal. A broad coalition of people willing to step in and lead the Tahoe Basin forward formed out of the process to update the Regional Plan. The spirit of cooperation from environmental groups, business leaders, and citizens that rose out of the Plan's formation is still going strong and much-needed improvements to Lake Tahoe's regulatory framework have not stopped since its passage. Homeowners are getting a break for installing stormwater infiltration around their properties and incentives are in place for increased restoration and more walkable, bikeable town centers. Updating the plan was an important milestone since it had not been thoroughly updated since its original adoption more than a quarter century ago.

Other signs of progress and renewal are inescapable around the Lake. TRPA shares its 45th anniversary this year with the first Earth Day. The awakening of our stewardship of the environment coincides with our desire to work across political lines to develop innovative environmental policies. Over the span of decades, we were able to stop runaway growth and curb sources of pollution. Today, two-thirds of Lake Tahoe's environmental targets have been achieved or are showing improvement. We know we have more to do and, like all of you, we are spurred onward by the principles of stewardship embodied in every Earth Day.

imagine. plan. achieve.

In the next environmental leap forward, TRPA, researchers, and other water quality agencies will hone in on policies to improve nearshore water quality as well as deep lake clarity. We will continue to control invasive species and maintain one of the most successful watercraft inspection programs in the nation. We will continue supporting efforts to reduce forest fuels and encouraging property owners to complete defensible space measures around their homes and raise the safety of our communities.

In each of these efforts, property owners, residents and visitors all have a part to play. The cooperation, personal action, and constructive compromise that will continue Lake Tahoe on a path to sustainability does not come from a rule book. It comes from all of you. It is my sincere hope that nature's awakening this spring enlivens and spurs you to find out what you can do to help restore Lake Tahoe and to take part.

Joanne S. Marchetta is Executive Director of the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency