

## Standing Up to Save Lake Tahoe

By Joanne S. Marchetta

Following years of public process and serious discussions to improve one of the strictest environmental plans in the nation, the Sierra Club recently filed suit on the update of Lake Tahoe's Regional Plan, a blueprint for the region's long-term sustainability. As the litigation deadline loomed, the options were clear—further extend discussions that started a decade ago, or stand up for the positive progress that Lake Tahoe residents and visitors have made toward true environmental stewardship. We chose to stand up for the lake and the thousands of stakeholders who have brought us to this critical moment in time.

It's relatively easy to make regulations, and Lake Tahoe has no shortage of them, but ensuring they continue to work toward the underlying goal takes real commitment. Changing them to improve environmental benefits takes courage and insight. What the proponents of the litigation have failed to understand, despite best available science and repeated documentation, is that maintaining the status quo at Lake Tahoe will not only fail to restore the ecosystem but it also will not address the communities surrounding this national treasure that are in decline and crisis. Under 30-year-old rules, rows of outdated motels and strip development were locked in place, complicating efforts to update needed environmental protections. Environmentally beneficial change requires investment, either public or private. Without investment in change, Tahoe's struggling communities can only dream of ever achieving the scale of environmental restoration that Lake Tahoe needs.

But the plan gave something far more important than new tools to encourage environmental investment. A side effect of the process to update the Regional Plan is a new positive spirit in Lake Tahoe—something we haven't seen in the region for decades. The culture surrounding Lake Tahoe has tended to be cynical and focused on what isn't possible. An intangible benefit of the groundswell of support for the 2012 Regional Plan is newfound momentum toward renewal and possibility. More people have shown they are willing to step in, participate, engage, and even lead Lake Tahoe's communities forward. More than ever we are hearing about what is possible when people come together and work together—environmental improvement, economic sustainability, and positive social change.

Litigation by well-meaning but uninformed activists throws a wrench into the spirit of the possible. Pointless litigation, without solutions, by those who cling to an outdated environmental strategy works only to kill the renewed spirit of a community just when

we are taking responsibility and stepping up more collectively than ever before. Why would the Sierra Club want to kill a community's newfound vitality which is grounded in environmental restoration?

Besides missing the opportunity to play a role in Lake Tahoe's future, the litigants are not offering any new arguments or groundbreaking information. TRPA staff spent hundreds of hours in stakeholder meetings with representatives of these groups and never hesitated to consider and respond to concerns. Each of our reasoned responses was met with the same negativity: 'It can't be done.' Worse still, the lawsuit espouses a backward-looking philosophy for Tahoe that appears hostile to local residents and the millions of visitors who marvel at this spectacular natural wonder. This philosophy fails to acknowledge a key fact -- that we can live in harmony with our fragile environment. Let's be clear, the 2012 Regional Plan is not a development plan, it is an environmental restoration plan that focuses on the largest contributors of pollutants to Lake Tahoe. The plan keeps regional caps on growth and requirements to preserve open space, and prohibits land subdivisions. With a few modest amendments in defined high-use areas, the plan works to accelerate restoration of Lake Tahoe's famed water clarity and is projected to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in the Basin by 7 percent per capita by 2035. By that time, the Basin-wide population is projected to equal only what it was in the year 2000.

Looking at the details of the plan under litigation, you might join me in asking the question, why exactly are the litigants suing?

If you supported the plan, or even if you simply recognized the need for a renewed approach to save Lake Tahoe and support its communities, now is the time to stay the course. Let's keep moving forward.

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