

**TAHOE IN 50 YEARS: Environmental Restoration and Protection
In the Face of Climate Change
(Mountain & Resort Town Planners Summit, October 16-18, 2019)**

Good Morning: I'm Joanne Marchetta, executive director of the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency. I'm delighted to **welcome** all of you to our beautiful place and privileged to be kicking off this year's Mountain Towns Planners Summit.

Introduction:

For many of us here, we are called to live in the mountains, seeking refuge in the high elevations, surrounded by captivating high peaks and pristine mountain waters,

- some of the **most beautiful and evocative places on the planet.**
- Just for a moment, I ask you to reflect: Those of **us here today** are **among the 15%** of the earth's **privileged population** that can **call these spiritually charged, special environments our home** and our **livelihood.**
- The **successes** we have **achieved** and **lifestyles we have known** in our mountain towns across the West are **now threatened by changing climate.**
 - The **time for platitudes** and **deferring to the next generation** are **over.**
 - We are **going to have to be far bolder** and more **personally courageous** in our mindsets, our leadership, and our actions.

Today, I'm here to talk about realities that we share –

- First that **many of the challenges** we face as planners in **mountain and resort towns are similar** and unique to our geography.
- But I'm **also here today to talk about more important matters**, the state of **human relations and the quality of our HUMAN CONNECTIONS.**
- **The two are linked** you know. And I'll **draw that connection as we go.**
 - I'll **do that by drawing on examples of this place I know best as a Region** here in the Central Sierra, **straddling** the borders of **two states, called Lake Tahoe.**
 - **Now more than ever**, we are **called on to be honest** about who and what we are as communities, how we engage with others, and **honest** with the truth of what lies ahead.

I want to **start with the importance of MINDSET.**

- **Because what we see on the ground** in a place **reveals the mindset of the place.**
 - In other words, our **mindset indicates our community culture**, and **community culture defines what is possible.**
- There is **nothing more important than mindset**; because **our mindset is our reality.** It's **what makes everything possible.**

Let me **reflect on an important mindset**:

Sacramento's National Public Radio station produced a **podcast** this year called **TahoeLand** – it **was recommended to you** with the **Summit information**. For those who couldn't or didn't listen:

- It **paints a pretty bleak narrative** for Lake Tahoe's changing climate **in the coming decades, sobering actually**.

What struck me though was an episode featuring a Native American researcher at the University of Nevada, Reno. **A remarkable young woman, Helen Fillmore**, a member of the Washoe Tribe, who will be speaking here on a panel tomorrow, **profoundly recounted her people's history with Lake Tahoe**.

- **She said: What you** as settlers or latecomers to Tahoe **imagine as the foreboding state of Lake Tahoe 50 years from now is the reality that my ancestors would, if they were here, experience today**.
 - Essentially, our **dire predictions for the future under climate change** are what the Washoe see as **present-day Tahoe**.
- **What this means: as planners, we don't share everyone's reality: we can start by feeling shared empathy for Helen's people: What we fear will happen has already happened for the Washoe elders whose ancestors were first in this place**.
- Helen described beautifully the Washoe **Tribe's connection with Tahoe. It is a MINDSET foreign to modern American culture and the predominant American way of life**.
 - **The Native American MINDSET sees beyond the fiercely separate individualism of "what's in it for me" that drives most of us in America**.
 - **Instead, the Washoe say, "We are not FROM here. We are OF here."** Think about that. We are **OF a place, not just part of it (living in it, visiting it) but ONE with it**.
- **What if we shifted OUR MINDSET to look at ourselves as OF a place... how might that change what we stand for or the values the community endorses?**

Now let's contrast that mindset with the predominant state of human relations, specifically about today's prevailing mindsets. Do you find what's going on in interpersonal relations today just a bit concerning, even frightening?

- **People who study the human brain and how we think, here's what they know**.
 - **We are filled with COGNITIVE BIAS, finding justifications that support our beliefs, often denying any evidence that refutes those beliefs**.
- **Since 2010, there has been an annual nationwide research study on how civility impacts Americans**.
 - **94% of Americans BELIEVE that we are usually or always polite and respectful**. That COGNITIVE BIAS makes most of us -- that means you and me

too -- **believe that we are making the world we live in a kinder, better place when in fact we may NOT be.**

- In **another study, most of us strongly believe we are VIRTUOUS and MORAL, yet we regard the average person – that is, everyone else -- as **distinctly less so.**
 - In other words, **the overwhelming majority of us BELIEVE that we are NOT CONTRIBUTING to the world's problems, the problems right here at home, right where we live and work, and that those problems are being created by OTHERS and should be solved by OTHERS.**
 - **And with that prevailing belief – that it's everyone else's fault -- we may sink into hopeless despair, and believe we can do little or nothing about the prevailing divides.****

From “Command and Control” to Collaboration:

In case you think I am only talking about you, no, here in Tahoe, we've not escaped that predominant American mindset.

- **A snapshot of the mindset and community culture of Tahoe over 50 years reveals that we have evoked polarized viewpoints and deep divides over and over again.**
- **The first was over Tahoe's status as a national park.**
 - Back at the turn of the **1900s**, America's **second deepest lake** and one of the **clearest large lakes in the world** was held **so special by John Muir** and others, they **wanted it to become a national park.** We would not be a National Park.
 - After many attempts, **by the 1930s**, that **debate was settled.** Lake Tahoe had **too much private land** and too much **human-caused disturbance.**

Then 50 years ago, in Tahoe, there was what seemed a breakthrough in mindset. We set a unique precedent that bridged an early divide.

- In the **mid-1960s**, state leaders in **California and Nevada** realized that the lake was in **trouble. Over-development** was threatening lake clarity and its environment.
- A **willingness to collaborate** by the states is what **led to the formation of the TRPA.**
 - In **1969**, Governors **Reagan and Laxalt** agreed to Tahoe's **bi-state compact**, then **passed by Congress** and **signed by President Richard M. Nixon.**
 - **TRPA** came into existence and was **charged with protecting Lake Tahoe as a regional authority** and **harmonizing the natural and human-made environments.**
 - A city as large as **San Francisco** was envisioned here in what now is a rural place.
 - **TRPA, during our first decades, successfully halted the unchecked development** that was threatening the lake by **enacting a groundbreaking growth management plan.**
 - The **outfall** was **highly polarized divides.**
- That **early** and visionary **partnership exacerbated** existing **divides.**

- in the **view of many**, TRPA's regulatory **command and control** approach grew from a **mindset of divisions** among us, pitting environment vs economy and public interest vs private property.
- **In those years, environmental protection was in its infancy.**
 - **Our mindset too was in its infancy.** TRPA tended to work in isolation, in a silo. We mandated from top down instead of seeking connection and common ground.
- It would take us a few more decades, but we would eventually learn that to continue making progress in protecting and preserving Lake Tahoe... we would have to work harder at a mindset of bridging divides.
 - In the mindset of the Washoe Tribe, we would have to learn better how to "go together."

Present Day: The collaborative pathway to success.

Then, in the **1990s**, three decades into the bi-state partnership, a sea change shifted our mindset. We opened up to the realization that our progress had stalled, we were not accomplishing enough.

- **TRPA launched what we call the Lake Tahoe Environmental Improvement Program.**
 - We brought new partners to the table, public and private. Private sector buy-in led the way and project support from the private sector was instrumental in unlocking public funds.
 - The EIP connected multiple sectors in the common mission to save Lake Tahoe.
 - Over 25 years, we've enlisted more and more partners in conserving and restoring Lake Tahoe and its watershed.
 - Nearly 700 projects have been completed to improve water and air quality, to make our forests healthier, to protect and restore fish and wildlife habitat, recreation and scenic improvements, and more.
 - We've invested more than \$2 billion from all sectors.
 - Lake Tahoe is now a model for large landscape-scale restoration partnerships.
 - **AND** the foundation of that successful model was a **NEW MINDSET**:
 - not mere collaboration, but it grew to **EPIC Collaboration** that would lead us forward.
 - Now we have nearly 80 coordinating partners -- federal, 2 states, local governments, NGO, private owners and business, and philanthropic partners, all rowing together to achieve common goals for Tahoe.
 - And TRPA is proud to coordinate this partnership.

The road less traveled:

So why am I dwelling on shifting mindsets?

With EPIC COLLABORATION, we believed we had found our north-star. Here we are bucking the tide of today's human relations, bringing everyone together and making our place a better place...?

- **Make no mistake, I believe** and have staked my career and reputation on it: **working collaboratively** to achieve shared goals is an imperative not an option. And **COLLABORATIVE LEADERSHIP** is an essential skill set to find common ground.

- But even the successes of EPIC COLLABORATION over 50 years in protecting the lake IS NOT ENOUGH because, **climate change is now a game changer.**
- **The genie is out of the bottle, climate change is happening, and as planners the reality is changing right under our feet**, pulling the foundations of what we know out from under us. It's **literally existential** now. **Not so subtle disrupters now mean** we are **needing to overhaul virtually every system** we work with.
 - The dynamics of **our environments** that support us **are changing.**
 - Our **visitation patterns are changing** as people escape the heat of nearby areas.
 - **Transportation and technology are changing** making the hidden places less remote.
 - **Our knowledge sources are changing**, disrupted by smart phones and sharing apps.
 - And as for the **economy**, after nearly a decade of **economic growth and expansion that may be true for some, others simply do not see themselves in it** and have been **left behind.**
- **Today's hard divisive issues – this whole new set of climate challenges (and the human relations challenges that go with it) -- need yet another tectonic shift in mindset** to meet the daunting challenges that lie ahead.
 - A **shift much closer to what** Helen Fillmore and the **Washoe indigenous people believe.**
 - We are **not separate**; we are **one with each other.**
 - Our **divides are only a creation of our mindset.**
 - And as **planners**, it's our job, indeed **our calling, to evaporate divides and make connections that bind all nature and all peoples together.**
- **With difficult changes ahead, we literally have no choice but to remake our mindsets to **ADAPT and bridge today's polarized divides.****

Let's look at just a few of the challenges we may share in our mountain communities **and ask how our mindsets may need to shift on these in order to adapt.**

For us here in Tahoe... **we start with climate's effects on our namesake asset, Lake Tahoe:**

- That Lake out there – 39 trillion gallons of fresh water, 72 mi long, 12 miles wide, one of the most CLEAR, CLEAN large lakes on the planet.
- Now, new **planetary temperature records** are set **each year**, and **air and water temperatures are on the rise**. This **changing climate** leads to **more extreme weather events**.
 - And now that Lake is warming. IT's HARD to raise the temperature of 39 trillion gallons. But it's warming.
 - We've **invested more than a billion** dollars to **reduce the amount of fine sediments** from stormwater runoff **flowing into the lake** from roadways and improper land use — **and this is only a start**.
 - **And now, as climate variability gets worse and lake temperatures continue to rise**, these are new conditions making the lake ripe for other **threats** -- harboring and supporting new aquatic invasive species.
 - **And changes in our nearshore with algal blooms and threats of toxic bacteria.**
- **That's not all** -- **warming** in the decades ahead **may mean that in some mountainous locations, the snowpack becomes extinct**.
 - **Snow towns** must now **adapt to become green season towns**.
 - **If a large majority of yearly precipitation falls as rain...** it means we **may have to plan not on snow storage but on flooding and handling excess water**.

Forest Health and Climate Change:

Then too, **what of our forests and climate adaptation?**

Prolonged periods of **drought** are **stressing forests and grasslands**. **Extreme weather** leads to **stronger winds ... creating the conditions where a single spark** from a visitor's cigarette (that was our 2002 Gondola Fire) or a vacation rental BBQ (that was the West Shore fire two years ago) **ignites catastrophic fires**, a threat that grows as climate changes.

- **Like** so many cities and **towns in the west** we have **learned firsthand** the devastation that fire brings. Here we **doubled down on forest health initiatives after losing 250 homes in the 2007 Angora Wildfire**. That was our wake-up call and it was in fact a "small" fire.
- Nearly **two dozen partners** helped create our **Tahoe Fire and Fuels Team**.
 - We have **already treated nearly 60,000 acres of wildland urban interface** – the area where homes meet the forest -- since 2007.

Still, it's not enough. In the **coming years forested and populated mountain regions will need to increase the pace and scale of forest health** initiatives.

- As an example, a landscape scale forest restoration initiative, **The Lake Tahoe West Restoration Partnership**, targets **accelerated forest thinning treatment on another**

60,000 acres, much of it **using modern mechanical methods** even **on steep slopes**, on Lake Tahoe's west shore. **Our Codes** currently **prohibit** this and **need to be changed**.

- **So, we've shifted our mindset again to treat the landscape as a whole instead of by property ownership** – across different federal forest boundaries, across federal and state boundaries, with good neighbor agreements – all while **increasing the natural use of fire as a tool for forest restoration**, the smoky effect of which you've now experienced first-hand.
 - And **we have agreement on this approach** from **both the environmental and fire service** communities.

There's a **whole other set of issues** regarding our **built environment and the people in it**.

As mountain town stewards, **we all are challenged to harmonize our natural and human-made environments**

- We talk often about the **triple bottom line** – the Environment, the Economy, and the Community – **all must improve** if we're **to be successful**.
- **Here too, we cannot separate the people from the land and the lake, telling some to stay away while only the privileged few enjoy the spoils of Tahoe's majesty.**

So, let's start with a **look at housing**, as you all did yesterday.

- **Most homes here, as may also be true in your town, are owned by 2nd homeowners, some **who** only occasionally visit but **now rent to other visitors, short term**, to help pay the mortgage.**
- **Because tourism fuels our economies, the economy falters when workers who support the visitor services can't find an affordable place to live** (because most homes are vacant second homes) that is close to employment **and employers then can't find workers to fill available jobs**.
- **Workers** are forced into **longer commutes, emitting more greenhouse gases** into the atmosphere and **increasing stress on our already overburdened roadways**.

Available, affordable, and achievable housing supply is a growing crisis here at Lake Tahoe and around the country.

- Regionally two coalitions, the **Mountain Housing Council** and the **Tahoe Prosperity Center**, are **working to create collaborative public and private solutions** that **increase the available inventory of affordable housing for our workforce**.
- At the **same time, county and city governments** are **grappling with how to enforce rules pertaining to vacation home rentals**.
- A **backlash is building**. **Locals are speaking out**. They want **more sensitivity to local culture**. "Keep our residential areas residential."
 - **TRPA** is committed to **do its part** – the Agency now provides **incentives for the construction of deed-restricted affordable housing units**.

- **But, it's not nearly enough and we cannot do it alone.**

And then there is **Visitation: Loving our destinations to Death.**

What beckoned us to mountain communities beckons the visitor just as loudly.

And **how should we feel about those visitors ...?** Do we **wish they would go away** so we can enjoy what we're lucky to "have" and they don't?

- **By some estimates, 15 to 20 million people a year are visiting the Lake Tahoe Basin. Only 55K live here regionally. During **peak summer and winter** seasons, **visitor numbers are reaching critical mass.**
 - There are **nightmare stories of massive traffic jams**, and three-hour drives that finally end nine hours later. Local trips that take hours to get to and from the grocery store.**

The question is, **how do we — as mountain planners — create sustainable recreation and tourism management?**

- **How can we continue to provide access to the most desired tourist destinations in the areas where we live, but at the same time protect them from what's now known as "overtourism?"**
 - **Destinations across the globe are in the same boat** – from Venice to Machu Pichu, travel is on the rise.
 - A recent **European Union report** identified **105 destinations around the world in some state of overtourism.**
 - **Solutions from transportation to technology are emerging** to prevent us from loving a place to death.
 - **As planners, we are being called to dramatically improve the way tourism is managed.**
 - **Wildly popular destinations need rigorous long-term planning** that is not just about reorganizing marketing, but **steps to manage** the type of tourist and their **behaviors.**
 - We need to **become social scientists** and really **good at understanding human drives and human relations.**
 - **TRPA along with myriad public and private partners are planning a menu of changes to the systems that handle recreation enthusiasts** – possible changes that assuredly may not be popular, like
 - reservations, shuttle-access only, paid parking, congestion pricing, and occasional closures to allow a rest period at some sites.
 - **The question** is still open as to **how willing locals and visitors will be to go at a different time, in a different way, or to a different place.**
 - These are **the kinds of adaptations needed to accommodate population increases, changing behavior patterns, and the impacts of overuse.**

Transportation Solutions:

Lastly as example, there is the challenge we have worked on without success for decades.

- Our transportation system exists like a slice of swiss cheese. It's there, but it's full of holes. While we have plans, we need bold implementation and skin in the game from everyone.
- Realizing our goals of getting people out of their personal vehicles and reducing greenhouse gas emissions means we must provide reliable and timely transportation alternatives.
 - We are seeking out new transportation opportunities like on-demand transport (Uber & Lyft), and micro-transit shuttles to help fill the gaps.
 - And we are convening across state lines to see if we can align on a transit system concept we can all commit to.

One innovative approach is afoot. The North Lake Tahoe Resort Association will soon ask voters to create a Tourism Business Improvement District... or TBID for short. There are currently 95 TBIDs operating in California.

- Under the proposal \$3 million would be raised annually.
- Funds would go directly to support transportation and affordable housing priorities.

Also, on the north shore, Squaw Valley ski area recently implemented a TBID to fund a micro-transit program. In the Squaw valley area, a 1% fee is levied on hotel rooms and on daily lift ticket purchases.

- These fees are funding the MOUNTAINEER micro-transit system, which provides free to the user rides throughout the valley.
 - Users can summon the door to door transit system by using a free mobile phone application.
 - The program will operate again with 4-wheel drive vans this winter from December through April.

Conclusion:

This is just a sampling of the systems we need to overhaul with climate effects.

So what will the landscape of YOUR mountain resort town look like in another 50 years? We can't be sure.

- Without a doubt, we need intentional, proactive planning informed by a mindset that finds connections and respects a widely shared sense of local culture.
- What we know is, it's becoming harder and harder to discuss difficult issues: like the economic divide, equity, and inclusiveness; like limits on outdoor recreation access; like

vacation home rentals and the backlash to preserve local culture; like affordable housing; limits on cars; and value capture from tourists; and much more.

Easy? **NO.**

- To make our **way through these hard (and harder) conversations**, it will **call us to make shifts in how we think, and how thinking differently makes us feel.**
 - And that **requires something of each of us.**
 - **No matter what the difficult issues** of your town or region may be, **START WITH YOURSELF.**
 - **You cannot lead others until you can do for yourself what you are asking of others.**

When I called out earlier the need to adapt, I meant no one **other than YOU and me and our mindsets.**

- **Here's just a few things we can do as planners to help heal divisions, divisions that are made only in our minds: We can**
 - **Make it easier to listen to others** – and listening is NOT preparing to respond.
 - **Plumb ideas in ways not possible on social media** – this means favoring, encouraging, arranging more actual **face to face interactions**. Work groups, focus groups, task forces, discussion circles, safe spaces – whatever it takes to engage.
 - **Build empathy**
 - Remember Helen Fillmore and the Washoe. Your big plan is someone else's worst nightmare. We must address more diverse interests in our plans.
 - **Gain insight and perspective**
 - Bring more diversity to the table. Intelligence is not the status quo or the interests only you and I can think of.
 - **Be willing to face people's strong feelings**
 - We so resist being in the face of real FEELINGS. Lead people into their feelings and acknowledge people's FEARS in our plans and our actions.
 - **Listen to opposing views**
 - Look for ways to be more inclusive.
 - **Create environments that foster a little better understanding.**
 - **Seek common ground and reconciliation.**
 - And wherever possible, **promote the understanding that we may not yet have all the necessary voices at the table because we are not separate.**
 - Know that divides are created only in our minds.

After all this ask yourself, what will you DO, what are you willing to DO to lead yourself so you can lead others?

- It takes **COURAGE to admit that our mindset** until now and **our actions have contributed to the problem.**
- It takes **courage to stand up**, reach out to those we've not spoken to before, to **admit that we too** could be contributing to the problem and **may need to change our ways and our mindset.**
 - And here's the **hardest Truth. Not one of us – not one -- believes that we are the raindrop responsible for the flood.**
 - **Our beliefs can lead us off course.** But remember ...
 - **You and I are not “better than” or “smarter than.” Once we accept that, we can lead others.**
- With what's ahead, we each will have to sacrifice something of ourselves, our lifestyles, our expectations of entitlement, and **we each will have to give up expecting others to adapt before adapting ourselves.**
 - **As the African proverb says: If you want to go fast go alone, but to go far, we must GO TOGETHER in collaboration, not opposition.**
- **Because** as the Washoe people say, **being OF a place,** and fully connected to all things and all others, **makes us accountable** to one another **in ways that our OLD mindsets never even imagined.**

Thank you. I hope you enjoy the rest of the Summit and your visit here to Lake Tahoe!