

Counties, States and Feds Work Together to Solve Lake's Problems

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Date: March 14, 2003

The environmental problems of Lake Tahoe are being addressed by a unique partnership of City and County governments, the States of Nevada and California, Federal agencies, business organizations, and non-profit groups. Since the Presidential Summit on Lake Tahoe in 1997, these entities have increased their efforts to cooperate and to coordinate lake and watershed restoration projects.

The Tahoe Regional Planning Agency (TRPA) brought these coordinated efforts into sharp focus in 1997 by presenting an integrated, basin-wide plan to complete more than 800 capital improvement (restoration) projects within 20 years. This plan, known as the Lake Tahoe Environmental Improvement Program (EIP), represented the most comprehensive approach ever to improving lake health.

The EIP calls for an ambitious, \$ 1.4 billion program of scientific research, restoration projects and long-term maintenance programs to meet environmental goals or "thresholds" in these nine areas: water quality, soil conservation, air quality, vegetation, fisheries, wildlife, scenic resources and community design, recreation and noise abatement. Even with funding contributions by federal, state and local governments, the successful completion of this program will present many

challenges. In fact, the future of Lake Tahoe's environment depends in large part on public awareness and support of the EIP.

The EIP is a profound example of "integrated watershed management." Many EIP projects meet several goals at once. For instance, the restoration of a stream and meadow will reduce water pollution due to erosion and will also rehabilitate habitat for native plant and tree species. These, in turn, will provide healthy habitat for fish and wildlife.

The EIP works by "adaptive management," meaning that most projects are monitored after completion to determine if they are providing effective environmental protection. The results of this monitoring are combined with the products of new scientific research to continually improve the design of restoration projects at the lake, and to retrofit existing projects when necessary.

Restoration project construction activities can sometimes create inconveniences such as traffic delays and change some of the things we are used to in our neighborhoods. The scientists, engineers and planners who design EIP projects predict that the long-term benefits of these projects will far outweigh the short-term inconvenience of the construction period. By completing erosion control

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The Lake Tahoe Report

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projects in our watershed, the Counties, States and Federal agencies are repairing soil and plant disturbances that have been caused by urban development since the 1960s. Many business and community leaders believe that the economic health of our communities and the value of private properties will be preserved if we can correct the Lake's problems.

The success of the EIP actually depends not only on the agency projects, but also on citizen involvement. The greatest benefit to our lake will come from the decision of all residents to take personal responsibility for doing all they can to protect its water quality. As Dean Heller, TRPA Governing Board Chair, and Juan Palma, TRPA Executive Director, state in the booklet, *Leaving a Lake Tahoe Legacy*, "eventually people from all walks of life will accept the challenge to become a part of something greater than themselves—protecting and restoring the lake so future generations can enjoy it."

To learn more about The Lake Tahoe Environmental Improvement Program (EIP), ask for free copies of *Leaving a Lake Tahoe Legacy*, and *Leaving a Lake Tahoe Legacy II* by calling TRPA at 775 588-4547, or by calling the University of Nevada Cooperative Extension office in Incline Village at 775 832-4150.

