

## The Forest Service Accomplishes Much with Help from the Lake Tahoe Restoration Act

By John Cobourn, Water Resource Specialist, and Heather Segale, Environmental Education Coordinator  
University of Nevada Cooperative Extension  
and Rex Norman, USDA Forest Service

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The need to restore and maintain the famed water clarity of Lake Tahoe is well understood and overwhelmingly supported by residents and visitors alike. Yet, when it comes to the projects and programs to accomplish this, the public may be confused by the various activities that don't always seem to be connected. Yet, like the individual stones of a mosaic, each contributes to a picture when put into perspective.

The Environmental Improvement Program or EIP provides a blueprint that ties together the many projects and programs into a basin-wide and ecosystem-wide strategy. Many diverse agencies of local, state and federal governments are each contributing to the pieces of the EIP. The Forest Service at Lake Tahoe receives annual funding for environmental improvement projects through special legislation known as the Lake Tahoe Restoration Act (LTRA). Signed into law in 2000, the LTRA authorizes Congress to allocate as much as \$30 million annually to federal projects to restore aspects of the Lake Tahoe ecosystem. So far, more than \$200 million has been directed through the LTRA to Tahoe projects conducted by the Forest Service – Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit.

As the USDA Forest Service is the largest land manager of the Tahoe Basin, managing 78 percent of the area's land, it initiates and completes projects in a number of the EIP project areas each year with funds from the LTRA. These include vegetation management, road decommissioning, recreation and scenic enhancements, BMP retrofits, wildlife and

fishery maintenance, as well as a number of science and research projects.

Both the Lake Tahoe Restoration Act and the EIP call for an ecosystem approach to Tahoe restoration. While the lake and its water quality is the most obvious barometer of overall basin environmental health, the lake's health is dependent on all that is around it. Many significant watershed and ecosystem restoration projects have been completed, and there are indications that these accomplishments may be paying off in improved lake clarity. Yet, there is still much more to do if we are to be certain of a positive trend in Tahoe's clarity. In order to effectively reverse the clarity-loss trend we have seen in recent decades, we must continue to restore creek systems and to identify and eliminate erosion sources in communities and on forest roads. We must restore and enhance habitat, protect and encourage old-growth generation, and more. Of critical importance is the need for vegetation management to reduce hazard fuels in the basin. A large wildfire in the basin would have a negative water quality impact that would take years, if not decades, to reverse.

The LTRA has made it possible for the Forest Service to accomplish a mosaic of inter-related projects with a common purpose – the restoration of the critical ecosystem processes and thresholds of Tahoe. The Forest Service LTRA funding, along with the funding and efforts of state and local agencies, contribute their individual stones to the mosaic. One by one, they are bringing more than a picture into clarity. They are also bringing a renewed clarity to a lake and the ecosystem upon which it depends.



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