

Research Continues to Help Preserve Lake Tahoe

By John Cobourn, Water Resource Specialist, and
Heather Segale, Environmental Education Coordinator
University of Nevada Cooperative Extension

Date: October 14, 2003

Research has contributed to the preservation of Lake Tahoe for several decades. UC Davis scientists from the Tahoe Research Group first alerted the world to an impending threat to Lake Tahoe. Their warning: "Unless immediate changes are made in the way the Tahoe basin is managed, the lake's quality would continue to deteriorate and could be lost. The clear, cobalt blue waters, which have been enjoyed by generations of Californians and Nevadans as well as visitors from around the world, are in grave danger of irreparable damage."

Scientists, noting that Lake Tahoe was losing its famed transparency, began to investigate the sources of increased levels of algae-feeding nutrients entering Lake Tahoe from disturbed land in storm runoff, snowmelt and from airborne compounds. The decision to treat and export wastewater out of the basin was just one of the breakthroughs in Lake Tahoe protection that was based on scientific discovery. More recently, research on toxic pollutants from certain two-stroke engines in jet skis and boats contributed to the ban on these highly polluting engines.

Local decision-makers continue to ask scientists for information in order to formulate policies to protect Lake Tahoe. In fact, \$58.6 million dollars, or about 4 percent of the Lake Tahoe Environmental Improvement Program, is targeted for research and monitoring.

Hydrologists, geologists, biologists, chemists, soil scientists, and forestry experts play an essential role in forming local policy. Research is conducted by scientists from the University of California, Davis; University of Nevada, Reno; Desert Research Institute; U.S. Geological Survey; USDA Forest Service;

Army Corps of Engineers; and others from universities, governmental agencies and environmental consulting firms.

The Tahoe Research Group Field Station, located at the site of a historic fish hatchery in Tahoe City, was established in 1967, primarily for alpine lake aquatic research. The building was built in 1924 and converted into makeshift labs in the 1950s. At the same time that research has expanded to include many more aspects of the atmospheric, terrestrial and aquatic environments in the Lake Tahoe Basin and surrounding watersheds, this research lab is falling into disrepair. The many scientists using this facility have significantly outgrown its ability to support all the research needed.

UC Davis has raised \$13 million in private funds to build a modern research center, and efforts are currently underway to find an appropriate location for the new facility. Once built, this facility will allow existing research to continue, provide space for new research and provide a location for visiting researchers from around the world to convene. Lake Tahoe will provide a unique setting for collaborative research and education opportunities with other institutions and become a national model for watershed and ecosystem protection and research. UC Davis hopes to realize the long-held vision of an innovative research and education partnership in the Basin.

If we are to restore the basin's health, yet continue to live, work and play here, more advanced research is needed. Researchers and policy-makers are seeking ways to balance environmental protection with human activities, and to identify the most beneficial and efficient use of tax dollars.



Lake Tahoe Environmental Education Coalition

tahoe.com
UCDAVIS



Watch for "The Lake Tahoe Report" each week and tune in to KOLO-TV News Channel 8 Tuesdays at 5 p.m. "The Lake Tahoe Report" is a collaborative effort of the Lake Tahoe Environmental Education Coalition, University of Nevada Cooperative Extension, UC Davis and the USDA Forest Service. For more information, contact Heather Segale, University of Nevada Cooperative Extension, (775) 832-4138, or logon to www.lteec.org.