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# Meeting the Environmental Goals of the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency

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LEGISLATIVE ANALYST'S OFFICE

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Senate Budget Subcommittee No. 2 on Resources,  
Environmental Protection, Energy and Transportation  
Hon. S. Joseph Simitian, Chair





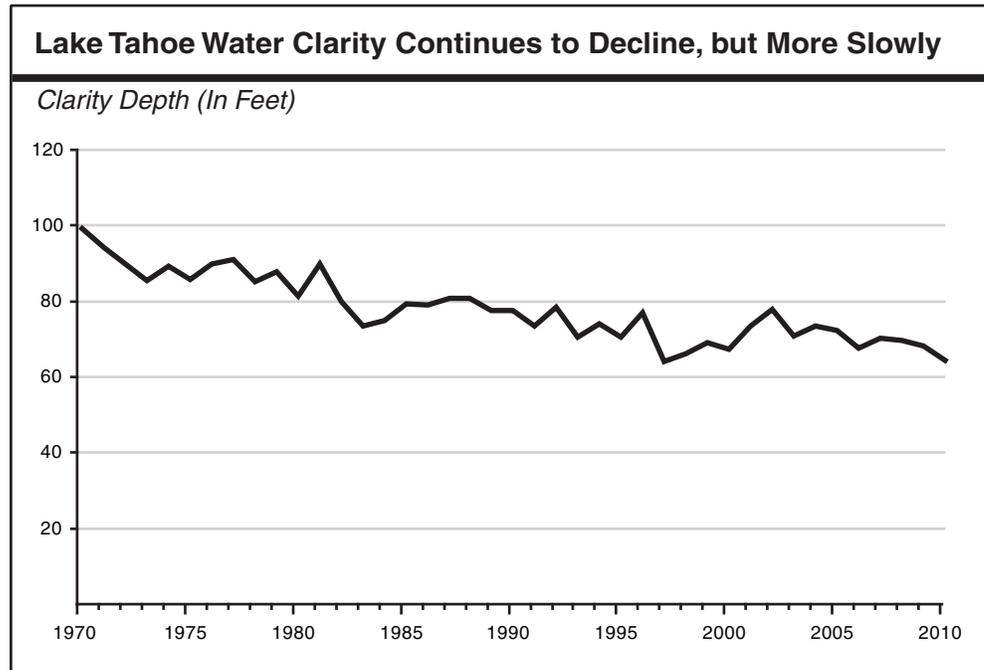
## Overview of the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency (TRPA)

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- Organization.** The TRPA was created by a 1969 compact between California and Nevada, which was ratified by Congress, to address environmental issues in the Lake Tahoe region. The operations of the agency are governed by a 15-member board comprised of locally elected officials and citizens from outside the Tahoe region—seven representatives from California, seven representatives from Nevada, and one non-voting member appointed by the President. A majority of members from each state must agree to implement changes.
  
- Responsibility.** Specifically, the TRPA is responsible for regional planning, development and redevelopment oversight, regulatory enforcement, and implementation of environmental protection and restoration of Lake Tahoe and the surrounding region.
  
- Environmental Thresholds.** Revisions to the compact in 1980 authorized the TRPA to (1) adopt environmental quality standards or thresholds and (2) enforce ordinances designed to achieve them. The thresholds involve measurable targets for the following nine categories: water quality, soil conservation, air quality, vegetation, wildlife, fisheries, scenic resources, noise, and recreation.



## Primary Goal of TRPA Is Water Clarity



- The TRPA was created mainly in response to water quality concerns, as measured by the clarity of the water in Lake Tahoe. As a result, in meeting the nine different environmental thresholds, the TRPA and participating agencies have focused on increasing water clarity. Although some of the thresholds (such as water quality) directly influence water clarity, nearly all of them relate to water clarity.
- The Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board, and the Nevada Department of Environmental Protection developed standards called Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) that identify pollutants and prescribe strategies to improve water clarity.
- As shown in the above figure, Lake Tahoe's water clarity has declined over the past several decades. However, the rate of decline has slowed in recent years.



## Many Agencies Involved in Lake Tahoe Clarity Efforts

### Key Participating Agencies

#### Federal Agencies

Army Corp of Engineers  
 Bureau of Land Management  
 Forest Service  
 Fish and Wildlife Service

#### California State Agencies

Department of Transportation  
 Department of Parks and Recreation  
 State Lands Commission  
 Tahoe Conservancy  
 Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board  
 Department of Forestry and Fire Protection

#### Nevada State Agencies

Department of Transportation  
 Department of Wildlife  
 Division of Environmental Protection  
 Division of Forestry  
 Division of State Lands  
 Nevada-Tahoe Resource Team  
 Public Service Commission

#### Regional Agencies

South Shore Transportation Management Association  
 Tahoe Regional Planning Agency  
 Tahoe Transportation District  
 Truckee North Tahoe Transportation Management Association

#### Local Governments

City of South Lake Tahoe  
 El Dorado County  
 Placer County  
 Washoe Tribe  
 Carson City  
 Douglas County  
 Washoe County

- Many state and local agencies are involved in efforts to improve the water clarity in Lake Tahoe.
- The TRPA seeks to improve water clarity through the Tahoe Environmental Improvement Program (EIP) and the Regional Plan.



## Tahoe EIP

<b>Environmental Improvement Program Estimated Expenditures</b>		
<i>(In Millions)</i>		
	2011-12	2012-13
<b>Capital Outlay, Local Assistance, Grants</b>		
<i>California Department of Transportation</i>	\$25.0	\$12.0
Special funds	(25.1)	(12.0)
<i>California Tahoe Conservancy</i>	\$15.7	\$9.3
Special funds	(1.0)	(0.5)
Bond funds	(1.3)	(0.4)
Other	(13.4)	(8.4)
<i>State Water Resources Board</i>	\$0.1	\$8.5
Bond funds	—	(7.7)
Other	(0.1)	(0.8)
<b>Planning and Strategic Development</b>		
Tahoe Regional Planning Agency	\$1.9	\$1.9
Special funds	(1.9)	(1.9)
<b>Total Proposed Expenditures</b>	<b>\$42.8</b>	<b>\$31.7</b>

- Tahoe EIP is a program of capital improvements and research projects designed to achieve the environmental thresholds by focusing on environmental preservation and restoration. The California Tahoe Conservancy is the lead implementing agency for the state of California.
  
- From 1997 through 2007 (program’s first ten years), about \$1.1 billion was spent on capital improvements. From 2008 through 2018, capital costs are estimated to be \$1.8 billion. The Governor’s budget proposes a total of \$32 million for various state departments to implement EIP projects in 2012-13, which is a decrease of about \$11 million (26 percent) from the current-year level of expenditures.
  
- The Nevada-Tahoe Resource Team, which coordinates the efforts of Nevada state agencies, is estimated to spend about \$3.3 million in both 2011-12 and 2012-13.



## Tahoe Regional Plan

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- ☑ **Major Components.** The Tahoe Regional Plan, as adopted in 1987, includes (1) standards for uses of land and other natural resources (including maximum population densities); (2) a development plan for regional transportation systems; and (3) plans for conservation, recreation, public services, and facilities for the region to achieve adopted thresholds.
  
- ☑ **Revised Plan Expected.** The current plan is outdated with respect to the TMDL, threshold attainment strategies, population growth estimates, and transportation needs. A revised plan is anticipated in December 2012, with draft documents being released in late April.
  - Will likely address goals identified in Chapter 728, Statutes of 2008 (SB 375, Steinberg), such as concentrating development away from environmentally sensitive lands, and making policies consistent between development and transit plans to reduce vehicle miles travelled and increase effectiveness of transportation modes.
  - Legally acts as the area's Sustainable Communities Strategy, as required by Chapter 728, for meeting the state's greenhouse gas emissions goals specified in Chapter 488, Statutes of 2006 (AB 32, Núñez/Pavley).



## Issues for Legislative Consideration

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### **Future Funding for Tahoe EIP**

- At this time, participating EIP agencies have only committed \$700 million towards the estimated \$1.8 billion in EIP costs.
- Although state bond funds have been the primary source of funding in recent years, most of these funds have been exhausted.



### **Improved Coordination and Increased Efficiency**

- The California Tahoe Conservancy has identified several strategies to improve coordination and increase efficiency, which in turn would improve the implementation of EIP projects.
- These strategies include (1) swapping land and sharing resources between land management agencies, (2) improving coordination between Caltrans and local agencies, (3) creating a team of California state agencies to better coordinate efforts in Lake Tahoe, (4) developing a collaborative plan to improve water quality, and (5) combining state funds with local resources for projects (such as wastewater projects).



### **Recent Nevada Legislation Could Impact Ability to Achieve Thresholds**

- Nevada recently enacted legislation that would dissolve its involvement in the compact unless several changes are made by 2015. These changes include (1) removing governing board's supermajority vote requirement, (2) updating the regional plan to address changing economic conditions, and (3) requiring individuals challenging the regional plan to demonstrate that it does not comply with the compact.
- If Nevada withdraws from the compact, the lack of coordination and agreement between the two states may substantially impact the ability to achieve certain environmental thresholds in the Lake Tahoe region.



## Issues for Legislative Consideration

*(Continued)*

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### **Legislative Oversight Has Been Difficult**

- As we have noted in the past, it has been difficult for the Legislature to oversee the Tahoe EIP. In part, this is because expenditures are not separately displayed in the Governor's budget. Instead, they are spread among several state agencies and are not always identified as such. Thus, it is difficult for the Legislature to identify program expenditures, staffing, and activities to hold the various participating agencies accountable.
- When Tahoe EIP funding proposals are reviewed on a department-by-department basis, it can be difficult for the Legislature to evaluate whether the policy and funding priorities inherent in the budget proposals are consistent with legislative priorities.