

Lake Tahoe  
Federal  
Interagency  
Partnership



# *Lake Tahoe Basin Executive Committee*

*A Lake Tahoe Federal Interagency Partnership*

*Mid-Year Update  
April 2001*



## **LAKE TAHOE BASIN EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE 2001 UPDATE**

This report summarizes current activities for 2001 and future focus of the Lake Tahoe Basin Executive Committee, which is the local committee of the Lake Tahoe Federal Interagency Partnership (Partnership). The Partnership was formed in 1997 to coordinate actions to address economic and environmental concerns at Lake Tahoe. The Partnership includes:

- U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service and Natural Resources Conservation Service
- U.S. Department of Defense, Army Corps of Engineers
- U.S. Department of Interior, Bureau of Land Management and Geological Survey
- U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Highway and Federal Transit Administrations
- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

The Bureau of Reclamation, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and Housing and Urban Development have joined the Partnership at the local and regional levels since the original Partnership Agreement was signed in 1997.

The Partnership has produced three Progress Reports since 1997 to document actions taken to improve Lake Tahoe's clarity, as well as to address other key issues such as forest health, air quality and transportation. These reports provide background on the Partnership and document federal spending in the basin since 1997.

### **FUTURE FOCUS**

The Partnership continues to make substantial progress in restoring and preserving the Lake Tahoe environment while avoiding adverse impacts to the local economy. Over the next year the Partnership will focus on:

- 1) Implementing the Lake Tahoe Environmental Improvement Program (EIP),
- 2) Coordinating scientific research and tools to support management efforts, and
- 3) Integrating projects between agencies.

### **BACKGROUND**

The significance of Lake Tahoe and its surroundings as a national environmental resource is widely recognized. Although government, business and environmental entities are working together to address environmental concerns in the Basin, the clarity that makes Lake Tahoe world famous continues to decline at an alarming rate. Scientists warn that unless this trend is halted over the next decade, the Lake's clarity will be irreversibly lost. Dead and dying trees continue to be a concern of land managers and to local fire agencies. Traffic congestion during peak tourist season continues to cause delays and air quality problems, adversely affecting the local economy and environment.

### **ENVIRONMENTAL IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM**

To address many of these environmental and economic problems facing the basin, the Partnership has embraced the Lake Tahoe Environmental Improvement Program (EIP).

The EIP was developed by the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency (TRPA) in 1997 as a way to accelerate the pace at which environment threshold attainment is achieved. The nine environmental thresholds for the Lake Tahoe Region are water quality, soil conservation, air quality, vegetation preservation, wildlife, fisheries, noise, recreation, and scenic resources.

The EIP identifies actions necessary to achieve the threshold indicators and lists over 700 projects to be implemented over a twenty-year timeframe. It is estimated that \$908 million is needed to implement EIP projects over a ten-year period which began in 1997 (Almost \$1.5 billion over a 20-year period from 1997 to 2016). One third of the total funding is to come from the federal government (the States of California and Nevada, local government and private sector make up the other two thirds share).

The Lake Tahoe Restoration Act, passed and signed into law last fall, authorizes up to \$300 million for federal funding of EIP projects. If appropriated, the funding will come through the USDA Forest Service (USFS) and could include up to \$10 million per year for local governments to implement EIP projects.

The EIP includes restoration projects, scientific research and monitoring and governmental and community programs needed to implement the EIP. TRPA updated the EIP this year to improve project descriptions and costs, increase public input and to make the EIP more “user friendly” by incorporating information into an electronic database linked with a Geographic Information System.

### **CURRENT ACTIVITIES**

While most of the Partnership’s activities fall within the scope of the EIP, some projects are not encompassed in the EIP but contribute to basin economic or environmental goals. For example, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) has been working with the TRPA to develop a Transportation Plan, which is one of the requirements of the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) designation. Tahoe was designated an MPO in 1998 to address the transportation and transit issues associated with a ten-fold increase in population during peak tourist season. Implementation of MPO activities has been slower than anticipated due to staffing and other issues, including problems associated with the air quality conformity requirement of the Transportation Plan. FHWA is continuing to work with the TRPA to address these issues and seek additional funding for planning efforts. In addition, the USFS recently created an engineering position to work on MPO implementation.

Another example of federal activities outside of the EIP includes the Housing and Urban Development’s (HUD) technical assistance in forming a basin-wide community housing development organization (CHDO). Working with basin partners, this non-profit entity will be charged with multiple tasks including providing housing inventory studies and developing new affordable housing and rehabilitation of current housing stock. As 20 percent of the current stock is owner-occupied (most single family homes are second homes or tourist rentals), the severe demand for basin employee housing adversely affects the sustainability of the current basin economy. HUD continues to work with

local governments and housing advocacy groups to remove the formidable barriers to housing approaches in the basin.

The Partnership EIP activities continue to address the three most pressing issues in the basin, water clarity, forest health and air quality/transportation, as well as supporting other environmental threshold goals. Many of these activities not only support implementation of the EIP but will help set the stage for updating the TRPA Regional Plan, USFS Basin Management Plan and the California Regional Water Quality Control Board Basin Plan, all scheduled to be updated in the next five years.

The following is a brief overview of current federal EIP activities, which fit into three EIP components:

- 1) EIP Projects,
- 2) Science and Monitoring, and
- 3) Programmatic Support.

### **1. EIP PROJECTS**

The USFS will be implementing watershed restoration projects on 65 acres in 2001 and will be developing planning documents for watershed restoration projects on 1000 acres in 2002 and 2003. In 2001 they will also be retrofitting 20 miles of forest roads with Best Management Practices and decommissioning 10 miles of roads. The USFS is also acquiring 134 acres of lands and is currently in negotiations to acquire 1,800 acres at High Meadow. All of these activities will continue to help reduce the amount of sediment and nutrients entering the Lake.

The USFS and its partners continue to make headway in improving forest health and reducing fire risk in the Basin by removal of dead and dying trees and by implementing prescribed burning. They will be conducting mechanical treatment on 1,700 acres and prescribed fire on 600 acres. Many of the areas where these projects are implemented are adjacent to homes where, without this work, a fire could have a catastrophic impact on personal property and lives.

The U.S. Bureau of Reclamation is currently working with state and local agencies to restore portions of the Upper Truckee River, which is the highest contributing tributary of sediment and nutrients to the Lake.

### **2. SCIENCE AND MONITORING**

The USFS's comprehensive Lake Tahoe Watershed Assessment provides a greater understanding of the amounts and sources of nutrients and sediment entering Lake Tahoe, as well as areas where more information is needed, such as in the area of air/water interactions. The Assessment estimates that over 50% of the nitrogen and almost 30% of phosphorous entering the Lake comes from air sources, though it remains unclear what percentage of these sources is from inside or outside of the Lake Tahoe Basin. The Partnership will continue to work with the California Air Resources Board to better define the sources of air pollutants entering the Lake as well as to address the increasing ozone levels entering the basin.



The USFS and U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) are collaborating with TRPA, and the four research institutions operating in the Tahoe Basin (UC Davis, University of Nevada at Reno, the Desert Research Institute, and the Forest Service's Pacific Research Station), to design and implement an adaptive management plan. The plan will include research, monitoring, and modeling essential for the effective restoration of the Lake Tahoe ecosystem.

The EPA has continued its support for the development of a Lake Clarity Model by UC Davis, which is expected to be complete within the next two years. Once complete, the model will establish the pollutant loading levels needed to achieve the loss of Lake Tahoe's water clarity, a tremendous step forward in scientific understanding of the Lake. From this understanding, better decisions can be made about what types of projects will make the greatest contribution to improving water quality and halting clarity loss.

The USGS cooperative analysis of historical tributary monitoring data will be finalized this year. This project has compiled into a digital database 364 station-years of stream flow, stream nutrient, and sediment transport data covering the period 1973-1999. The analyses of these data will include evaluation of historical time trends in nutrient loading to the Lake. Coupled with the Lake Clarity Model, this information will better inform where the key sources of sediment and nutrients are located and where projects should be implemented.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) is initiating a comprehensive, Basin-wide hydrology study, which will benefit new flood plain analysis delineations, as well as provide hydrological data for future scientific endeavors in the basin.

### **3. PROGRAMMATIC SUPPORT**

Many of the Partnership agencies are reorienting their organizations to improve EIP implementation. The USFS has created an EIP coordinator and finance positions, which will help their organization focus resources and activities to support EIP goals. The EPA continues to staff a person in the TRPA offices to help coordinate EPA's as well as Partnership activities with the EIP. The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has added 2 new staff positions to provide technical assistance to landowners implementing EIP projects.

The USACE is assisting TRPA in defining program and project management tools that can be used in implementing the EIP. This USACE effort will assimilate existing Basin review, coordination, and regulatory requirements into organizational frameworks to improve achievement of EIP projects and programs.

The NRCS serves as a key partner in the Lake Tahoe Environmental Education Coalition Backyard Conservation and Best Management Practice (BMP) Working Group. The partnership includes the TRPA, Tahoe Resource Conservation District, Nevada Tahoe Conservation District, Nevada Cooperative Extension, and Americorps. In FY 2000 the partnership inventoried and evaluated over 600 properties at Lake Tahoe prescribing

erosion control and runoff reduction practices that enable private homeowners to meet TRPA water quality ordinances and a major component of the private sector contribution to the EIP. The Conservation Districts provided labor and incentive programs to help 250 homeowners install conservation practices resulting in BMP Certificates of Completion. The program is expected to double in 2001 with addition of staff and increasing momentum.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with basin stakeholders to craft a conservation plan for the Tahoe Yellow Cress, a proposed endangered shoreline plant endemic to Lake Tahoe.

### **PARTNERSHIPS**

To restore and protect the Lake Tahoe Basin, local stakeholders have formed innovative partnerships of government, business, and environmental interests. The federal government continues to work in partnerships with the Washoe Tribe and with local and state governments, and to coordinate all federal activities in the Basin more fully in pursuit of greater environmental results.

Initially chartered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) in the summer of 1998, the Lake Tahoe Basin Federal Advisory Committee (FAC) provides the Partnership with valuable recommendations and advice. After having met regularly since December 1999, the FAC's Charter was renewed by the USDA last year, sending a positive message of support and affirmation for the importance that the Partnership places on the work of this FAC. The FAC serves as a ready-made forum for consultation on various ideas and programs undertaken by the Partnership and their federal budget recommendations are a useful reference for agency budget formulation.

Through participation in groups such as Tahoe Regreen, the Forest Health Consensus Group, the Upper Truckee River Focused Watershed Group, and many others, the Partnership is directing staff and funding to support many actions related to EIP implementation.

### **CONCLUSION**

The Partnership looks forward to continuing to support EIP goals and activities through implementation of the Lake Tahoe Restoration Act and other federal programs. Other key areas of focus include coordinating scientific research and tools to support management efforts, and integrating projects between agencies.

Contact information for the Lake Tahoe Basin Executive Committee is provided below.

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