

TAHOE IN 50 YEARS: Environmental Restoration and Protection in the Face of Climate Change.

Good Morning: I'm Joanne Marchetta, executive director of the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency.

Thank you for inviting me to speak with you today.

Introduction:

– it's **such an interesting time for the lake as TRPA is about to turn 50** years old at the end of the year.

I'm here to **talk about the future of Lake Tahoe,**

- as an iconic lake, and as a place, the place I know best as a Region here in the Central Sierra, **straddling** the borders of **two states**, **arbitrary lines drawn** in the midst of a **century long past**.
- I'm **also here to talk about** what is going on in **human relations**.
- **The two are linked** you know. And **I'll draw that connection as we go**.

I'd like to take you on a journey of **where the Lake Tahoe Region has been, where we are today, and where I see us going in the future.**

- And I will focus largely on what lies ahead.
- The **successes** we have **achieved** in protecting Lake Tahoe **are now threatened by a changing climate**.
- The **time for platitudes** and **talking points** and **deferring to the next generation** the mess we have created **is over**.
- We are **going to have to be far bolder** and **more personally courageous** in our work to **protect** the Lake Tahoe **Basin in the years ahead**.

I don't know if any of you have **listened** to the **TahoeLand podcast** produced by Capitol Public Radio this summer.

- It **paints a pretty bleak narrative** for Lake Tahoe **in the coming decades**. It's actually **quite sobering**.
- **One of the episodes features Helen Fillmore, a young Native American researcher** at the University of Nevada, Reno and a **member of the Washoe Tribe**.
 - Her **remarks**, and her **recounting of her people's history with Lake Tahoe** were both simple and profound.
 - **She said: What you** as settlers or latecomers to Tahoe **imagine as the dire state of Lake Tahoe 50 years from now is the reality that her ancestors would, if they**

were **here, experience today**. Essentially, our **dire projections for the future** are what the Washoe see as the **present-day Tahoe**.

- **So we can start by feeling shared empathy: What we fear will happen has already happened for the Washoe elders. And we can share that pain – for us in anticipation, for another already now.**
- Helen Fillmore described beautifully the Washoe **Tribe's connection with Tahoe. It is a mindset foreign to modern American culture and the predominant American way of life.**
 - **It sees beyond the fiercely separate individualism of “what’s in it for me” that drives most of us in America.**
 - **Instead, the Washoe say, “We are not FROM here. We are OF here.”** Think about that. We are **OF a place, not just part of it but ONE with it.**
 - **What if we shifted our mindset to look at ourselves as OF a place... how might that change how we see our accountability to the challenges of protecting and restoring a place like Lake Tahoe.**

Let’s talk for a minute about the state of human relations, specifically about today’s prevailing mindsets. Do you find what's going on in interpersonal relations today frightening?

- **People who study the human brain and how we think, here's what they know.**
 - **We are filled with COGNITIVE BIAS, finding justifications that support our beliefs, often denying any evidence that refutes those beliefs.**
- **Since 2010, there has been an annual nationwide research study on how civility impacts Americans.**
 - **94% of Americans BELIEVE that we are usually or always polite and respectful.** That COGNITIVE BIAS makes most of us -- yes that means you and me too -- **believe that we are making the world we live in a kinder, better place when in fact we may NOT be.**
 - **In another study, most of us strongly believe we are VIRTUOUS and MORAL, yet we regard the average person – that is, everyone else -- as distinctly less so.**
 - **In other words, the overwhelming majority of us BELIEVE that we are NOT CONTRIBUTING to the world's problems, or to the problems right here at home, right where we live and work, and that those problems are being created by OTHERS and should be solved by OTHERS.**
 - **And we may sink into hopeless despair, and believe we can do little or nothing in response.**

Collaboration Will Pave the Path to Success:

Collaboration means bucking the tide of today’s human relations.

- **Believe me, I don’t mean to suggest it’s easy.**
- **It will require simply that we “go together.”**

Working collaboratively to achieve shared goals is **an imperative not an option**. And its **hard work** to find common ground.

The PAST

50 years ago, in Tahoe, we **set a unique precedent** that **bridged an early divide**.

- In the **mid-1960s**, state leaders in **California and Nevada** realized that the lake was in **danger**. A **willingness to collaborate** by the states is what **led to the formation of the TRPA**.
 - In 1969 – 50 YEARS AGO -- Tahoe's bi-state compact came into existence, passed by Congress and signed by President Richard M. Nixon.
 - **TRPA was charged with protecting Lake Tahoe as a regional authority**.
 - If we **know one thing with certainty**, we know that **Lake Tahoe would be an entirely different place if it were not for the creation of TRPA 50 years ago**.
 - A city as large as **San Francisco** was envisioned here. **TRPA successfully halted the unchecked building and growth** that was threatening the lake.
 - **However**, in the **view of many**, TRPA's regulatory **command and control** approach **exacerbated the mindset of divisions** among us: environment vs economy. Public interest vs private property.

The Science Documenting Degradation:

The agency grew out of fears that rampant development was going to destroy what made Lake Tahoe special.

- **Science proved** that **Lake Tahoe was losing its famed clarity...** and clarity loss was being **driven by the human footprint on the environment**.
 - **Back in the 1950s and 60s**, **wetlands were being bulldozed** to make way for **development** – environmentally unfriendly development **damaging the Lake**.
- **20 years ago**, we were **losing a foot of lake clarity every year**. **Fine sediment** matter from roadways was **running into the lake's waters** and **slowly hurting clarity**.
- **And** despite the best of intentions, **wildfire suppression** was in fact **creating hundreds of thousands of acres of unhealthy forests**. And in the decades to come, **the intersection of those over dense forests and the urban landscape would merge dangerously closer together**.
- In those years, **environmental protection was in its infancy**.
 - **Our mindset too was in its infancy**. In TRPA's early years, we **tended to work in isolation**, in a silo. **We mandated from top down instead of seeking connection and common ground**.

Present: Collaboration and Partnerships Lead the Way.

In the late 1990s we set about changing the agency's mindset.

- A **new collaborative model**, implemented through the Lake Tahoe Environmental Improvement Program, **changed the game**.

- We **brought new partners to the table**. **Private sector buy-in led the way** and project support from the private sector was **instrumental in unlocking public funds**.
- The **EIP connected every sector** of interest: federal, 2 states, local governments, and private property owners and businesses.
- **Over the past 25 years, we've enlisted partners, both public and private, in conserving and restoring Lake Tahoe and its watershed.**
- **Nearly 700 projects have been completed** to improve water and air quality, to make our forests healthier, and to protect and restore fish and wildlife habitat with **more than \$2 billion invested** from every sector.
- **Today Lake Tahoe is a model for large landscape-scale restoration partnerships.**
- **AND the foundation of that successful model is a NEW MINDSET:**
 - **not mere collaboration, but EPIC Collaboration** would lead us forward.

Today, we need another **tectonic shift** in mindset to meet what is ahead.

- A shift **much closer to what Helen Fillmore and the Washoe indigenous people believe:**
 - that literally **we are not separate, we are ONE with this place and ONE with each other, all things and all peoples are connected.**
- **What if we all behaved as if we were literally connected to one another?**

Future

So **why** am I dwelling on this mindset shift?

- **While we've had some success over 50 years** in protecting the lake and all its surrounding resources, and **making Tahoe a place where humans can coexist with the lake and the land**, **Climate change is a game changer.**
 - **Climate change compels yet another shift in mindset if we are to meet this new challenge. A changing climate supplies a whole new set of challenges.**
 - The **dynamics of the Lake and forest** around us **are changing**.
 - Our **visitation patterns are changing** as people escape the heat of nearby areas.
 - **Transportation and technology are changing** making the hidden places less remote.
 - **Our economy is changing**, disrupted by "smart phones" and sharing apps.
- So, we have **no choice but to ADAPT with the changes.**

And **when** I say adapt, I don't mean anyone other than **YOU** and me.

- Here's the **hard Truth**. **Not one of us believes that we are the raindrop responsible for the flood.**
- Think about what I said earlier. It's **more comfortable to believe we are firmly in the majority** who are **making the world better**.

- **But you and I are not “better than.” We are in the same boat with others who we think are creating problems.**
- **So, we each will have to sacrifice something of ourselves, our lifestyles, our expectations of entitlement, and we each will have to give up expecting others to adapt instead of adapting ourselves**
 - **If we want to go far, we must GO TOGETHER, in collaboration, not opposition.**

So where do we go from here for Tahoe?

The Clarity Challenge and Climate: First there is Lake clarity and climate ...

- **In the last 20 years we have stemmed the rapid declines in lake clarity thanks to the investments in the Environmental Improvement Program.**
- **We’ve reduced the amount of fine sediment particles flowing into the lake from improper land use and by catching and filtering roadway sediment.**

But what if that’s not enough?

- **But as new planetary temperature records are set each year and Tahoe air and water temperatures are on the rise, and as changing climate leads to more extreme weather events,**
 - **These are conditions that make the lake ripe for harboring and supporting new aquatic invasive species.**
- **Warming in the decades ahead may mean that at lake level, the snowpack becomes extinct.**
 - **If a large majority of yearly precipitation falls as rain... it means we may have to plan not on snow storage but on flooding and handling excess water.**
 - **Our own version of sea level rise right here at Lake Tahoe as the water expands beyond the Lake’s rim in the extreme wet weather years.**

Forest Health and Climate Change:

Then too, what of our forests and climate adaptation?

Prolonged periods of drought are stressing forests and grasslands. Extreme weather leads to stronger winds ... creating the conditions where a single spark from a cigarette or BBQ ignites catastrophic fires when they do start.

- **We doubled down on forest health initiatives after losing 250 homes in the 2007 Angora Fire.**
- **Nearly two dozen partners helped create the Tahoe Fire and Fuels Team.**
 - **We have already treated nearly 60,000 acres of wildland urban interface – the area where homes meet the forest -- since 2007.**
 - **And we continue to seek funds for additional hazardous fuels reduction projects.**

Still, it's not enough. In the **coming years we will increase the pace and scale of our forest health** initiatives.

- A landscape scale forest restoration initiative, **The Lake Tahoe West Restoration Partnership**, targets **accelerated forest thinning treatment on another 60,000 acres**, much of it **using modern mechanical methods even on steep slopes**, on Lake Tahoe's west shore.
- **Treating the landscape as a whole instead of by property ownership AND increasing the natural use of fire as a tool for forest restoration.**
- **Our goal is to create more resilient forests and better protect our communities.**

Linking Transportation, Housing, and the Economy: And yet another set of challenges ...

- One of the most progressive elements of Tahoe's **Bi-State Compact** is the **call to harmonize the natural and human-made environments.**
- This **requires TRPA to consider the Region's \$5 billion tourism-based economy** and our **local communities.**
- The **triple bottom line** – the environment, the economy, and the community – **all must improve** if we're to be successful.
- **Here too, we cannot separate the people from the land and the Lake, telling some to stay away while the privileged few enjoy the spoils.**

Linking Affordable Housing and the Economy: So, let's look at housing.

- **Most homes here are owned by 2nd homeowners**, some **who** only occasionally visit but **now rent to other visitors short term** to help pay the mortgage.
- **Tourism fuels our economy, the economy falters when workers who support the visitor services can't find an affordable place to live** that is close to employment **and employers can't find workers to fill available jobs.**
- **Workers are forced into longer commutes, emitting more greenhouse gases** into the atmosphere and **increasing stress on our already overburdened roadways.**

Available and **affordable housing supply is a growing crisis** here in Lake Tahoe and around the country.

- Locally, The **Mountain Housing Council** and the **Tahoe Prosperity Center** are two groups **working to create collaborative public and private solutions** that **increase the available inventory of affordable housing for our workforce.**
- At the **same time, county and city governments are grappling with how to enforce rules pertaining to vacation home rentals.**
 - **TRPA is committed to do its part** – the Agency now provides **incentives for the construction of deed-restricted affordable housing units.**

- Our **development rights initiative** is **breaking down barriers to redevelopment**. The 2012 Regional Plan Update calls for **concentrated development in town centers where housing is linked to transit and trails**.
- **What part are you willing to play?**
 - **Would you accept restrictions on vacation rentals to shift the system more toward benefitting workers?**
 - **Or is it someone else's problem, someone else's responsibility to be accountable?**

And then there is Visitation: Loving Lake Tahoe to Death.

- **And how should we feel about those visitors ...?** Do we wish they would go away so we can enjoy what we're lucky to "have" and they don't?
- **By some estimates, 15 to 20 million people a year are visiting the Lake Tahoe Basin.** During **peak summer and winter** seasons, **visitor numbers are reaching critical mass**.
 - There are **nightmare stories of massive traffic jams**, and three-hour drives that finally end nine hours later.

The question is, **how do we create sustainable recreation and tourism management?**

- **How can we continue to provide access to Lake Tahoe's most desired tourist destinations**, but at the **same time protect them from what's now known as "overtourism?"**
 - **Is overtourism because of "them" or are you part of it?**
 - **Destinations across the globe are in the same boat** – from Venice to Machu Pichu, travel is on the rise.
 - A recent **European Union report** identified **105 destinations around the world in some state of overtourism**.
 - **Solutions from transportation to technology are emerging** to prevent us from loving a place to death.
- **TRPA with recreation partners are planning a menu of changes to the systems that handle recreation enthusiasts** – possible system changers that may not be popular, like
 - reservations, shuttle-access only, congestion pricing, and occasional closures to allow a rest period.
- **Are you willing to accept going at a different time, going in a different way, or going to a different place, the kinds of adaptations needed to accommodate population increases, changing behavior patterns, and the impacts of overuse?**

Transportation Solutions:

And then there is the challenge we have worked on without full success **for decades**.

- Our **transportation system exists like a slice of swiss cheese**. It's there, but it's **full of holes**. While we have plans, we need bold implementation and skin in the game from everyone.

- **Realizing our goals of getting people out of their personal vehicles and reducing greenhouse gas emissions means we must provide reliable and timely transportation alternatives.**
 - We must **seek out new** transportation opportunities like on-demand transport (Uber & Lyft), and micro-transit shuttles to help fill the gaps.

One innovative approach is afoot. The **North Lake Tahoe Resort Association** will soon ask voters to create a **Tourism Business Improvement District... or TBID** for short. There are currently 95 TBIDs operating in California.

- Under the proposal, **\$3 million would be raised annually.**
- **Funds would go directly to support transportation and affordable housing priorities.**

Squaw Valley recently implemented a **TBID to fund a micro-transit program**. In the Squaw valley area, a **1% fee is levied on hotel rooms and on daily lift ticket purchases.**

- These fees are funding the MOUNTAINEER micro-transit system, which provides **free to the user rides throughout the valley.**
 - **Users can summon the door to door transit** system by using a **free mobile phone application.**
 - The **program will operate again with 4-wheel drive vans this winter** from December through April.

Conclusion:

So what will the Tahoe landscape look like in another 50 years? We can't be sure. But we can go together in collaboration toward a shared future starting now.

- **What will you DO, are you willing to DO?**
- It takes **COURAGE to admit that our mindset** until now and our actions have **contributed to the problem.**
- It takes **courage to stand up**, reach out to those we've not spoken to before, to **admit that we too could be contributing to the problem and may need to change our ways and our mindset.**

Since science confirms that you and I believe we are morally superior to those "average" folks down the ladder, it provides all the justification we need to hold tight to our well-worn ways.

- Let's learn from the Washoe – shift your mindset to being, “OF here, and OF one another... and Not FROM here, and separate from one another.”
- Because being OF a place, makes us accountable to one another in ways that our OLD mindsets never even imagined.

Thank you for your attention. I appreciate the opportunity.