



Newsletter: June/July 2014

Lake Tahoe, our communities and quality of life, and our public safety are in jeopardy...

What draws you to Tahoe's West Shore in the summer, or all year long? Is it relaxing on beautiful beaches admiring views? Peace and quiet? An escape from the City? The rural quality of life we have enjoyed on the West Shore for generations?

For most, it's probably some combination of these. Most people expect our environment and quality of life to be protected by the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency (TRPA). After all, TRPA stopped the raging development of the 70's, and now regulates every square foot of property, right? But, at least they are protecting Lake Tahoe; they'd never approve the same kinds of big developments they were created to stop, would they?



Unfortunately, this is no longer true, but the façade that TRPA is still working on our behalf has created a false sense of security for many of us. For over two years, a careful and strategic public outreach campaign helped TRPA - and local governments like Placer and El Dorado County - successfully keep their new pro-resort approach from large public criticism. But the truth is in their [new projects](#) and [plans](#), and communities are now starting to learn about them - and are speaking up.

We live here, we visit here, we bring our families here, and expect to do so for generations to come. But TRPA is not looking out for our lake or our communities anymore. The new TRPA is focused on approving even more big corporate resort development. And Placer County is more than ready to comply. **Please read below to learn how these changes may impact the West Shore.**

Sincerely,

Susan Gearhart,
President, Friends of the West Shore (FOWS)

[Recent News](#)

The Tahoe Nearshore Dipper volunteers are gearing up to set a world record on July 4th!!

In our last newsletter, we told you about FOWS' new [Tahoe Nearshore Dippers](#) program starting this summer. Although we hope to encourage more volunteers to take ongoing measurements throughout the summer, we are starting the program off with a bang on **July 4th!** In an effort to raise awareness of changing conditions in Tahoe's nearshore clarity (measured as "transparency"), volunteers will be asking beachgoers around the Lake to help take a quick clarity measurement and set a world record for the most measurements taken on one lake in one day.



Although many volunteers have stepped up to the plate, **we still need a few more to help us cover beaches all around the Lake.** Please contact us and we'll get you set up to help out! In the meantime, once we have a full list of where our stations will be located, we'll send out an Alert so you can plan your day on the beach knowing you can take a few moments to help us help Lake Tahoe.

We are hosting a training on this Saturday, **June 28th** (if you can join, please get in touch with us ASAP). We can also meet you at another time if you are unable to attend on June 28, and we will gladly continue to provide more sets and training all summer long to those who become interested. Please [check out our website](#) for more information, including [a short instructional video](#) on how the measurements are taken and how you can sign up to become a Tahoe Nearshore Dipper!

[Update: Community/Area Plans for West Shore](#)

In this issue, we want to take a slightly different approach to our Community Plan update, and focus on how current plans and projects will impact our West Shore communities and Lake Tahoe. As TRPA has delegated more regulatory authority to the local governments, Placer County has taken the reigns and along with TRPA, the agencies are moving full speed ahead to implement new land use changes around the lake that are not good for our communities, our Lake, and our mountains. Here's a breakdown of what this could mean for West Shore:

1. Traffic:

The new Plans will draw more residents and visitors to Lake Tahoe's West Shore, congesting Highway 89 even more than we see today. In fact, even without the new projects already approved but not built, like the Homewood Mountain Resort, we are seeing traffic again increase on our roadways. The reduced traffic touted by TRPA in the agency's 2012 Plans were in large part a result of a bad economy. Guess what - it's recovering and we are seeing the visitor traffic that comes along with it. Yet extensive developments are being pushed for the North Shore and Tahoe City, which will mean more people in the area driving on Highway 89 towards Emerald Bay or South Shore. Placer's plans for increased developments in places like Squaw Valley and Northstar will only make this worse. Not only is this an environmental concern, but a huge problem for our public safety.



Traffic on Highway 89 (May 2014)



Angora Fire, SLT. 2007.
Image from: LakeTahoeNews.net

2. Dangerous impacts to our Public Health & Safety

How will ambulances get our loved ones the help they need in an emergency if the highway is clogged for miles? When another fire breaks out on the West Shore, such as the Washoe fire, how will we protect our families if we are stuck in a traffic stand-still on the highway? *Consider this: when they evacuated the Tahoe Keys for the Angora Fire, it was a traffic nightmare - yet the residents have multiple routes to get out of their neighborhood. Along the West Shore we have just one: Highway 89.*

TRPA says their new pro-development approach, which is now guiding Placer County's new Plan, will reduce the "Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT) around the Basin - but that's a play on words. They really mean that they will reduce the "per person" VMT (in other words, how many miles we each drive ourselves), but the overall VMT in the Basin will go up because there will be more people driving in the Basin. Changing from *overall* VMT to a *per person* VMT is an example of distorted messaging to the public. (In fact, the claim they will reduce per person VMT is itself not supported by the facts).

3. More buildings, Fewer Views:

You've probably heard TRPA refer to "environmental redevelopment" and talk about how they will remodel existing, run-down buildings. But what the new approach really does is support large resort hotels around the Lake - much like the Homewood resort expansion we'll start seeing in the near future. Tahoe City officials want to place new hotels upwards of four stories high around the Tahoe City Y - and TRPA's new approach would allow this. Another message we have heard often is that TRPA aims to protect natural land and encourage 'infill' in developed areas. But their new approach allows new resort buildings on 320 acres of natural, unbuilt forest land. Another 112 acres are being considered [right now](#) on the forested ridgeline above North Shore and TRPA's new approach would allow about 200 more acres to be rezoned for resort development in the next 2.5 years (and who knows how many after that).



We will see more of this replacing lake and mountain views.

4. Slimy, mucky shorelines instead of clear nearshore waters:



Unfortunately this is a recent image of Lake Tahoe. *Who wants to swim in this?*

Science tells us that to keep our nearshore clear, or to try to clean up areas already cluttered with algae, we need to reduce the development on lands closest to the lake so the soil can naturally filter out pollutants *before* water runs off into the Lake. But TRPA's new approach - now being carried forward by Placer County - actually encourages more developed land closer to the Lake. It's astonishing. Unless you're fairly new to Tahoe, you probably remember how crystal clear the nearshore water on our beaches has been. You didn't have to worry about slipping on underwater rocks because they weren't very slimy, if at all.

5. More City, less Rural:

Do you like being in a small, rural community on the West Shore? Have you heard the term "mixed-use?" The idea is to encourage zoning where our homes, stores, commercial uses, light industrial uses, and other land uses are all thrown together in the same place. But California and others have encouraged new developments in large urban areas - like LA - to build this way to reduce driving. But California knows it's not the right approach for small mountain communities. Sierra Nevada Alliance, Sierra Business Council, and others also know it's [not right for us](#). But TRPA doesn't get it - and their new approach facilitates and encourages more mixed use. A small grocery store on the corner is one thing; encouraging more mixing of a variety of uses together with our homes in Tahoma, Homewood, and Sunnyside is quite different.



Traditional "mixed use" zoning.
Image from Wikipedia.com

Citizens Uniting!

In fact, citizens around the Lake have become increasingly upset as they learn what TRPA and the local governments are pushing forward onto their communities. Now, they are uniting to raise awareness, encourage more community participation, and to tell TRPA and the local governments to **Stop Steamrolling Our Communities!**

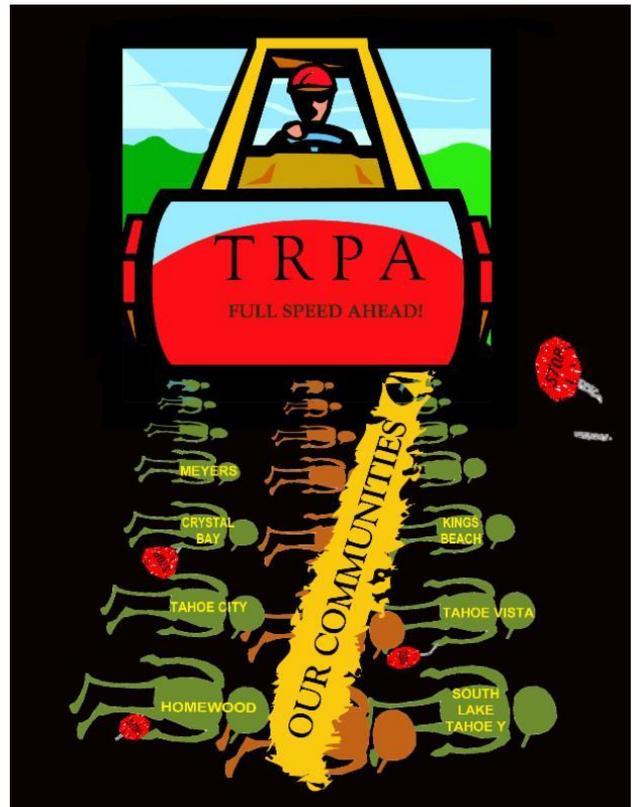


Image provided by: TRPAsteamroller@hotmail.com

Update on Challenge against TRPA's 2012 Regional Plan Update (RPU):

FOWS and the Sierra Club filed a Notice to Appeal on May 7th, so our case will be heard by federal judges in the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals, although the timing remains unknown. We will keep you updated when we learn more.

We invite you to contact us to learn more, ask questions, or simply get to know the FOWS Board.

Please write to Jennifer Quashnick, FOWS Conservation Consultant, at: jqtahoe@sbcglobal.net, or Susan Gearhart, FOWS President, at: susan@friendswestshore.org.