



Newsletter: August/September 2014

New resort developments threaten our water supply...

Recent news stories have focused on drought, diminishing water supply, our failure to conserve water, and California's over-allocation of surface water by 500%. In the Lake Tahoe Basin, although the effects of the drought are apparent, it is hard to comprehend the idea of truly running out of water when we see water remaining in the depths of the lake. But the threat is real, and even as we realize we need to be diligent with our own conservation, massive new and unsustainable resort developments are being proposed in the Region.



The impacts of drought near Kiva Beach, 8/25/2014

Surprisingly, resort developers, and agencies lining up to support their expansions, appear to be treating their developments as if they are exempt from the impacts of drought, climate change, water supply problems, and other issues that the rest of us cannot ignore. Even now, resorts are using our precious (and limited) drinking water to make snow (read below for more details).

Although the mission of FOWS is focused on the protection of the West Shore, protecting our environment and our communities requires looking beyond the West Shore, and beyond the Tahoe Basin. Please read below to learn more about current threats and issues to the West Shore, and the Tahoe Region at large.

Sincerely,

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

[Recent News](#)

The Tahoe Nearshore Dipper volunteers set a world record on July 4th!!

We began our new [Tahoe Nearshore Dippers](#) program this summer by setting a world record for the most volunteer measurements taken on one lake in one day; 135 different volunteers helped measure horizontal clarity on July 4th! Please [check out the results](#) to see how your favorite beach fared!

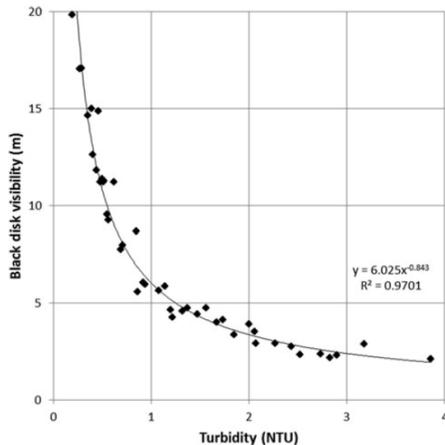


Figure 2.-Black disk visibility versus turbidity.

Although we are excited about setting the new world record, more measurements are needed! This is an extremely easy way to help gather information on Lake Tahoe's nearshore (view this [short instructional video](#)), and it can be done at your convenience. We provide the equipment and training, and will add your measurements to international and local databases.

In fact, [additional nearshore monitors](#) are being deployed by Tahoe's researchers from the Tahoe Environmental Research Center (TERC). Yet, the sites are limited, and researchers acknowledge the nearshore remains poorly understood and more information is needed. The horizontal secchi measurements being used by the Tahoe Nearshore Dippers program have been shown to [correlate](#) extremely well with turbidity, a technical measurement of transparency.

[Water supply, drought, climate change, and resort development:](#)

New resort developments and water supply:

FOWS is extremely concerned with the water supply impacts from the multiple large resort developments approved or proposed in and around our communities. Examples include, but are not limited to, the following large resort developments in various planning stages:

- Homewood Mountain Resort - approved;
- Boulder Bay Resort (North Stateline) - approved;
- Squaw Valley Expansion - proposed;
- Northstar Expansion - proposed;
- New large development on forested ridgeline - [[Martis Valley West Parcel Area Plan](#)]; and
- [Placer County's draft Tahoe Basin Community/Area Plan](#), which proposes to increase urban development.



Generalized map of large Projects and Plans approved/proposed around West and North Shore.
(FOWS Image using Google Earth)

Ski resorts say they are incorporating more development and activities to support year-round tourism. Some even acknowledge what researchers have forecast for years: climate change will reduce our snow pack. Resorts appear to be responding to this news by planning to make more snow - an extremely water-intensive use. As much as FOWS members and supporters love to enjoy our wintertime snow-based recreation, the facts are that [our winters are getting shorter](#) and this unfortunate [trend is likely to get worse](#). Making snow requires large amounts of water and electricity, and [California has already allocated five times more surface water than is available](#). How can we consider growing when we can't even support our current water needs?

- In fact, last winter Homewood Mountain Resort used significant amounts of water from Tahoe City PUD wells - which provide drinking water to those of us on the West and North Shore - for the purpose of snow-making. Yet Homewood's major expansion approved in 2011 has not even been constructed.

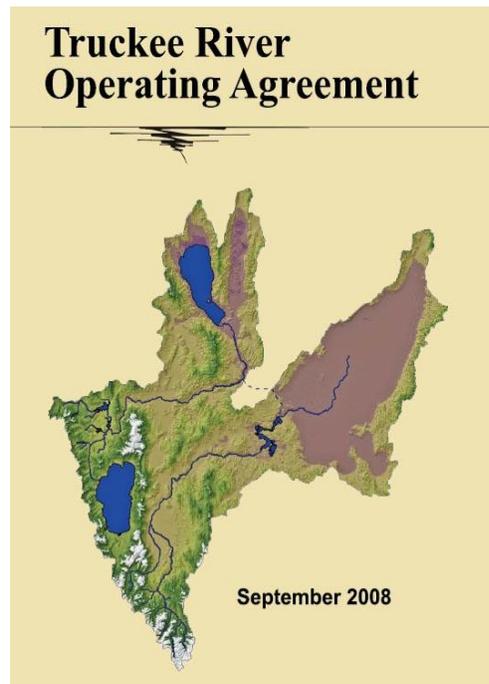
Drought:

Most people are aware that California is currently experiencing a major drought of historical proportions. As of July 31, [most of the state was classified as "Exceptional" drought](#) - the most extreme classification. The image below requires no explanation:



Although historically, California has experienced periods of extreme drought, the state did not have the population and development that we now have. All planning, especially in the Sierra Nevada watersheds which provide most of California's drinking water, must address the impacts of sustained drought. The proposed resort developments will not only demand more water than is available, but will also increase the impacts on already fragile mountain watershed ecosystems.

Lake Tahoe is not an endless source of water for resorts:



We have heard statements from some who assume more water can always be drawn from Lake Tahoe to support these developments. Yet there are legal and ethical reasons we can't do so - from Tahoe City, where Lake Tahoe's only dam exists, to the terminus of the Truckee River at Pyramid Lake, others rely on the river's water to meet their needs as well. In addition, the environmental impacts of drawing more water from Lake Tahoe would be substantial.

Recognizing the need to plan ahead and allocate water from the Truckee River, multiple agencies, stakeholders, tribes, and others developed the [Truckee River Operating Agreement](#) (TROA). The TROA allocates how much water can be taken by each state from Lake Tahoe, and then along the course of the Truckee River. Lake Tahoe's allocations are already maxed out. This means if we take more water from Tahoe for these large resorts, users down the line will not have enough water to meet their needs. Read more about TROA in our [recent comments to Placer County](#) (TROA discussion begins on p. 28).

True Sustainability for Tahoe's Communities:

Planners in California are beginning to realize that the 'smart growth' approaches used in large, urban areas (such as Los Angeles), and adopted by TRPA's 2012 Regional Plan Update, to promote sustainable, walkable communities, are not appropriate for rural mountain communities. In fact, "urban" areas for which these smart growth concepts were derived are generally defined as areas with over 100,000 full time residents.

Recently, FOWS detailed the unique issues our rural Basin communities are facing in our [6/12/2014 comments](#) to the Governor's Office of Planning and Research (OPR). We encourage you to read the full document. However, our recommendations to the OPR include:

"...that the OPR further engage our rural communities in the Lake Tahoe Basin to consider and address sustainability issues in our communities in light of the many unique issues we are dealing with. Topics include, but are not limited to the following:

- More engagement with rural communities to develop unique strategies for the sustainability of rural areas;
- The inclusion of a Tourism-related Element, which acknowledges the environmental and economic realities in tourism-dependent areas;
- A "Resort" Element to help rural mountain communities deal with unique development pressures not generally found in non-mountain areas of the state (e.g. Ski Resorts);
- A Water Quality Element which addresses snow-making demands and development in light of the unpredictability of the future water supply;..."

In the last two months since FOWS originally submitted this letter, the public has received more information regarding what future plans may lie ahead - and the larger and wider, new and expanded resort developments that would be promoted by new Area Plans, including the Placer County Tahoe Basin Area Plan and the Martis Valley West Parcel Area Plans, are not merely 'infill' or redevelopment. These are new, large resort developments on hundreds of acres of undeveloped land.

Update on Community/Area Plans:

Martis Valley West Parcel Area Plan - Placer County:

The proposed Martis Valley West Parcel Area Plan (MVWP AP) is also located in Placer County's jurisdiction within the Basin; however, the proposed Plan is being developed by the project's applicant - a private corporation. FOWS has been extremely concerned with this development, which aims to build 112 new luxury homes on undeveloped forested ridgeline above Tahoe's north shore - an area currently zoned primarily conservation under the RPU. The proposed project would also be visible from Lake Tahoe.



View of location where ridgeline development is proposed.

Presented by Placer County, TRPA, and applicant at a recent [July 17th MVWP AP Presentation](#).

[FOWS submitted comments](#) on the MVWP AP NOP, and more recently the draft Area Plan language. We also encourage readers to view a [new website](#) assembled by citizens in the North Shore area that are concerned about the impacts of this proposed Area Plan.

Tahoe Basin Area Plan - Placer County:

The development of Placer County's Community/Area Plan, which covers all of the Placer County portion of Lake Tahoe, continues to move forward. Most recently, the Notice of Preparation (NOP) for the Placer County Tahoe Basin Community/Area Plan was released (the NOP provides notice to the public that the agencies will prepare an environmental impact report to examine the environmental impacts of the proposed Plan and alternatives to the Plan). [FOWS submitted comments on the NOP on August 15th](#).

Due to extensive public concern regarding the lack of draft Area Plan language in the NOP's project description, the agencies agreed to release another NOP after the draft Area Plan is available to the public. Placer County has stated draft Area Plan will be released in early September. **Note the draft Area Plan is expected to include proposed changes in zoning and other requirements for West Shore communities.**

However, the proposed Placer County Community/Area Plan language included in the first NOP reveals several desired changes which will increase the large developments allowed along Tahoe's North Shore (even beyond the increases prescribed by TRPA's RPU). These impacts will not only affect North Shore communities, but drawing more tourists to those areas will create additional traffic on the West Shore, creating environmental, economic, and safety concerns for our communities.

FOWS will continue to follow these two Area Plans and update you as new information becomes available.

Meyers Area Plan - El Dorado County:

The efforts of concerned citizens have delayed the Meyers Area Plan update process. It is uncertain when El Dorado County plans to develop an Area Plan for the remaining portions of the County, which would include portions of Tahoma, McKinney-Rubicon, and Meeks Bay. However, El Dorado County has previously stated it does not intend to start a new Area Plan process until the Meyers Area Plan is complete.

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: jgtahoe@sbcglobal.net, or Susan Gearhart, FOWS President, at: susan@friendswestshore.org.