



California Regional Water Quality Control Board Lahontan Region Media Release

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STATE WATER BOARD APPROVES STRATEGY TO IMPROVE LAKE TAHOE CLARITY

The State Water Resources Control Board (State Water Board) has approved a strategy designed to ultimately reduce the discharge of pollutants that are currently contributing to Lake Tahoe's decline in clarity.

The Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board (Lahontan Water Board) approved the Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) strategy in November. The State Water Board's action on Tuesday sets the stage for final approval of the plan by The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

"Our goal is to give future generations the opportunity to see for themselves what Mark Twain saw when he said, upon visiting Lake Tahoe for the first time, 'I thought it must surely be the fairest picture the whole world affords,' " said Lahontan Water Board Executive Officer Harold Singer, following the State Water Board's approval.

Singer said the TMDL incorporates advanced science in focusing and quantifying the significant efforts that local and state entities are using to improve Lake Tahoe's clarity.

The TMDL was developed collaboratively by the Lahontan Water Board and the Nevada Division of Environmental Protection. It identifies fine sediment and nutrients, such as nitrogen and phosphorous, as the primary cause of decline in Lake clarity.

Fine sediment is less than 16 microns in size, about one-third the diameter of a human hair. The sediment is carried by stormwater runoff from the developed areas of the Tahoe Basin, along with runoff from forested areas, erosion of stream channels and from air pollution. Over 70 percent of the fine sediment originates in the urbanized portions of the Lake Tahoe basin. Cities and towns, as well as highway and road departments in both states will be required to reduce the amount of fine sediment by 32 percent over the next 15 years, with the goal of achieving 78 feet of clarity, roughly eight more feet than exists today.

The 15-year goal is the first part of a 65-year-timeline set to return the lake clarity to 100 feet, as it was in the late 1960s and 1970s.

Actions to reduce fine sediment discharges will also reduce nutrient discharges that are likely contributing to increased algae growth in the near shore areas that adversely affect the public enjoyment of the Lake.

Critical to this effort is continued federal, State, local and private funding. Since 2001, these sources have contributed approximately \$10 million to develop the Lake Tahoe TMDL. The Tahoe Regional Planning Agency (TRPA) has developed a funding strategy that calls for a continued commitment of funding.

Representatives of U.S. EPA and TRPA appeared before the State Water Board in support of the TMDL, and expressed their continued commitment to pursue funding to meet the goals set out in the TMDL.

Lake Tahoe, known worldwide as the jewel of the Sierra Nevada Mountains, has been and continues to be a vacation destination for generations of families, and is an important and vital part of the economic health of the region.

For more information on this Water Board action, please visit the links below:

http://www.waterboards.ca.gov/board_info/agendas/2011/apr/041911_7_draftresolution.pdf

http://www.waterboards.ca.gov/lahtontan/water_issues/programs/tmdl/lake_tahoe/rspnse_cmnts031811.shtml