

TRPA plan update challenged by Sierra Club and Friends of the West Shore

FEBRUARY, 11 2013
STAFF REPORTS

A lawsuit was filed in federal district court today against the first significant update to environmental protection standards at Lake Tahoe since 1987.

The deadline for challenges to the plan was midnight Tuesday.

The plaintiffs, the Sierra Club and the Friends of the West Shore, filed suit against the updates to the Lake Tahoe Regional Plan that were approved by the TRPA Governing Board in December.

TRPA Executive Director Joanne Marchetta said the Sierra Club's action goes against current scientific and sustainability principles, including those that the National Sierra Club has endorsed in published reports, and delays policy improvements needed to save the lake and support more vibrant communities.

"The Sierra Club is challenging a plan update for Tahoe that incorporates the best of their own organization's adopted policies concerning compact, mixed-use land use patterns," Marchetta said. "Tahoe's updated plan goes even further and retains the strongest growth control system in the nation. It is difficult to know why they would oppose their own suggested policies."

A statement issued by the League to Save Lake Tahoe agreed with TRPA.

"The League is disappointed that litigation has been filed on the regional plan" said League Executive Director Darcie Goodman Collins. "This is the wrong move for Lake Tahoe. While litigation is a useful tool of last resort, in this case, it will only delay the implementation of any positive environmental benefits contained in Tahoe's new regional plan. While the plan is not perfect, it is a product of community collaboration and compromise, and is designed to be adaptive. It also ensures that we continue protecting the regional environment through a federally approved bi-state compact that contains important environmental thresholds. Any litigation will likely result in the dissolution of this compact and no compact means no regional environmental standards for Lake Tahoe. Preserving the compact and implementing the RPU will provide the greatest long-term benefit to the lake and its communities. We are hopeful that the unresolved concerns are small and that an agreement can be reached between the parties rapidly, so the plan can be implemented to ensure we can continue to collaborate for the lake."

TRPA Board Chair and Carson City supervisor appointee Shelly Aldean said a suit at this point is dismissive of the hard fought compromises that were made over the plan and is an affront to the level of cooperation achieved leading up to the plan's adoption.

"The Sierra Club's action goes against the broadest consensus ever achieved at Tahoe," Aldean said. "The updates were supported by both states, local governments, other environmental groups, businesses, scientists, educators, tourism and health advocates, and numerous private citizens. Regardless of litigation, this plan is the right plan for Tahoe and for threshold achievement."

TRPA Board Vice Chair and California Governor's Appointee Casey Beyer said the Sierra Club litigation could lock Lake Tahoe in environmental limbo with no measureable benefits that could reduce the impacts of existing development on the watershed.

"Solutions are hard to find in Tahoe with so many disparate interests at play," Beyer said. "It's unfortunate when a few discontented interests fight against change without bringing forward better solutions. What matters most is that we keep moving forward and produce positive changes for the Lake. The cost of doing nothing is too high."

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