

Editorial: Protecting Tahoe is an unending job

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Even as serious advocates for Lake Tahoe argue about what's best for the future of the sparkling clear lake that just about everyone agrees is a gem, new threats to its legendary clarity continue to crop up.

The threat posed by development on the slopes surrounding the lake has been long recognized. It led to the creation of the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency nearly a half-century ago by Nevada, California and the federal government. Since 1969, it has tried, with varying degrees of success and seldom without controversy, to minimize the damage to the lake caused by human activities.

It's become increasingly obvious in recent years, however, that those human activities go far beyond those of the wood, concrete, steel and asphalt variety. Those who set goldfish free are also dangerous to Lake Tahoe's health.

Goldfish are, of course, just one of the numerous varieties of invasive species that have found their way into Lake Tahoe, usually with the help of humans.

The Tahoe Resource Conservation District, TRPA and other agencies have been working to combat populations of Asian clams and Eurasian watermillfoil that contribute to algae blooms in shallow areas of the lake. Boats are inspected when they're brought into the basin to ensure they don't carry quagga mussels that could significantly affect the lake's ecology. The commercial harvesting of crayfish, a nonnative species introduced in the 1800s, has been authorized to try to cut down on their population. And since 2011, 35,000 warm-water fish such as large-mouth bass and bluegill have been removed from water near the shore of the lake.

So, it shouldn't be surprising that there are goldfish, too, most likely the result of someone looking for a way to dispose of unwanted fish. (You can bury a dead guppy in the backyard, but what do you do with a 4-pound live goldfish?) Just one more invasive species for the experts to try desperately to stay ahead of.

Stop it, folks. Protecting the lake is complicated — and controversial enough already. Let's not add to its problems.