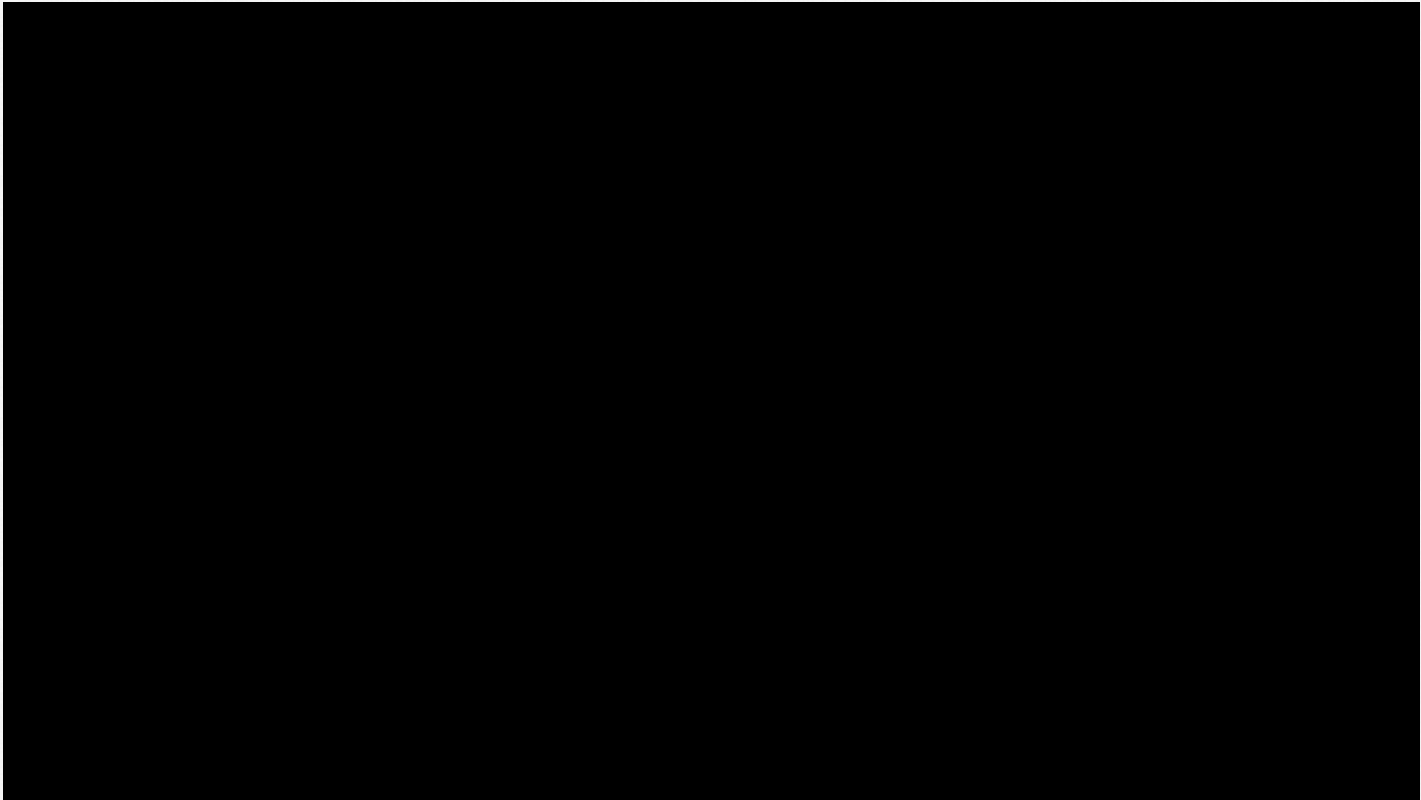


# Threats facing Tahoe include climate change, drought

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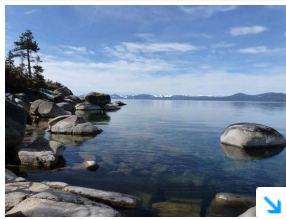
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Politicians, scientists and others convene to discuss the future of an endangered national treasure.

Jeff DeLong, RGJ 9:17 a.m. PDT August 20, 2014



(Photo: Paul Altrocchi/Special to the RGJ)

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A changing climate, worsening drought and catastrophic wildfires were among the top threats to Lake Tahoe cited Tuesday during the 18th annual Lake Tahoe Summit.

Federal and state officials joined scientists and land managers and noted successful efforts to restore Tahoe as well as major challenges that lie in the years ahead.

"What we do today, the determinations we make, are going to be the foundations for what happens to the lake in the future," Nevada Gov. Brian Sandoval told the crowd assembled on the south shore of the lake.

Chief among coming tasks will be efforts to reauthorize the Lake Tahoe Restoration Act, which would provide \$415 million for environmental projects around the lake. The act has bipartisan support from the Nevada and California delegations but could face

a tough time moving forward through a divided Congress, officials said Tuesday.

"As you might guess, we face an uphill battle getting the bill passed," said the host of this year's summit, U.S. Sen. Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif.

Tuesday's event was held 17 years after President Bill Clinton convened the first Lake Tahoe Summit in 1997, calling attention to a host of ecological problems faced at the landmark alpine lake. Since then, some \$1.74 billion has been spent on environmental projects around the Tahoe Basin — including erosion control, wetlands restoration and forest health improvements — with many positive changes accomplished, summit participants said.

Of the \$1.74 billion, some \$323 million was raised from the private sector and that revenue source will prove increasingly vital in the future with public funds "in short supply," Feinstein said.

A drought now three years long has produced conditions of concern at Tahoe, where "we see wide expansive beaches that shouldn't be there," and elsewhere across the West, Sandoval said. Nevada's governor was among several speakers that spoke of increasing concern over wildfire.

"If these drought conditions continue there will be more stressed and dying trees which will increase the risk of fire," Sandoval said.

And if fire is a growing danger, people may have only themselves to blame, said Rep. Tom McClintock, R-Calif. McClintock lashed out at policy he said has left far too much timber standing in overgrown forests that should be thinned. McClintock called fire the "greatest natural threat" facing Tahoe.

The danger was made clear by the Angora Fire that destroyed more than 250 homes outside South Lake Tahoe in 2007, McClintock said. And it was made clear last summer by the Rim Fire, the Sierra's largest, that chewed through 400 square miles of forest.

Many of the trees burned then should have been removed through salvage logging projects, producing millions of needed dollars for the government, McClintock said.

"Instead, that timber rots in place," he said. "The situation today calls out for the return of sound forest management practices."

Democratic California Gov. Jerry Brown, keynote speaker, said those tasked with protecting the lake must continue to take "baby steps" toward an ambitious goal he described as a decidedly challenging one.

"We are engaged in a great undertaking," Brown said. "It's going to take science, management, technology and learning how to live with nature because in the end of the day, nature rules."

At a glance:

#### ENVIRONMENTAL SPENDING

Between 1997 and December 2013, all sectors collectively invested \$1.74 billion in projects to restore Lake Tahoe:

FEDERAL GOVERNMENT: \$576.3 million

CALIFORNIA: \$654.6 million

NEVADA: \$112.5 million

LOCAL GOVERNMENT: \$74.9 million

PRIVATE SECTOR: \$323.7 million

Source: Tahoe Regional Planning Agency