

Client: League to Save Lake Tahoe; Department of Environmental Studies, U.C Davis  
Project: Narration Script for Tahoe Film

## **TAHOE: MOVING BEYOND THE CONFLICT**

The quality of the high altitude environment of the Lake Tahoe Basin is on a steady decline. Nutrients continue to flow into the lake and nourish it's growing algae, and the ever increasing traffic clogs thoroughfares and pollutes the air.

Meanwhile, Lake Tahoe is in the midst of bitter conflict that has gone on now for over 20 years. The conflict is between those who believe it is their constitutional right to build without restriction at Tahoe, and those who believe that the quality of Tahoe's water and environment is deteriorating as a result of poorly controlled development.

This conflict is only getting in the way of finding and enacting solutions to Tahoe's environmental problems. The lake and all concerned would benefit far more from people coming together to apply protective measures, support research, and agree on a plan for Tahoe's future. Now is the time to move beyond the conflict - before it's too late.

The agency charged with Tahoe's future is the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency. This fourteen member bi-state commission is empowered to set and enforce building restrictions throughout the Tahoe basin.

The TRPA regional plan has been based on a land capability study that classified all the land in the basin with regard to soil characteristics, slope, and erosion potential. Many of the lots were classified as fragile, allowing only one to five percent to be built upon.

Dwight Steele, a former member of the TRPA, has heard countless numbers of arguments for the right to build at Tahoe.

The League to Save Lake Tahoe represents those who want to defend the lake against the effects of development. The courtroom is the arena in which the league conducts its lengthy and expensive battles. Tom Martens is the League's executive director and chief spokesman.

The league uses the data as a tool in court. A federal judge, with no countervailing argument, ruled in favor of a temporary moratorium on building at the lake since

nobody disputed the evidence that there is a progressive deterioration of the water quality at Tahoe.

In addition to providing the facts used in court actions to protect the lake, scientific research is also providing solutions.

Dr. Charles Goldman is a professor of limnology at the University of California at Davis and is director of the Tahoe Research Group.

The work is done in cooperation with the United States Geological Survey, a groundwater research program, and a number of state agencies participating in what is know as the Inter-Agency Monitoring Program.

Primary productivity is a measure of the growth rate of algae in Lake Tahoe. Measurements began in 1959, and intensive studies were instigated in 1967. There has been almost a 7% increase per year in this growth. Concurrent transparency measurements indicate a decrease in transparency of almost half a meter per year since 1967. The growth of the population in the basin has almost exactly followed the

increase in algal growth and decline in transparency.

Federal agencies in the Tahoe basin have been active in the restoration of disturbed land purchased through the California Bond Act and the Burton-Santini land buyout programs.

A large problem at Tahoe caused by past construction is erosion. Julie Etra of the United States Forest Service has been working on solving and correcting the massive soil erosion problems at Heavenly Valley Ski Resort.

Al Todd has supervised the re-creation of habitats at Sawmill that demonstrate types of plants and erosion controls that can be used in the Tahoe basin.

The California State Attorney General, John Van De Kamp, has made several visits to Tahoe. With first hand knowledge of the environmental problems in the basin, he and his staff have enacted legislation that reflects concern and a firm commitment to the lake.

Scientists, public agencies, and private citizens are working at correcting the damage

done to Lake Tahoe and it's watershed by past development. New generations are being educated about the unique ecology of the lake. It is important now that this momentum be allowed to grow - rather than populations, development, and algae.

Limiting Tahoe's growth is a complex issue with a wide range of viewpoints. Yet it stands to reason that the Lake Tahoe basin can only withstand so many people and their cars without having to clear and pave more and more of it's valuable watershed.

There are conflicting opinions expressed by those concerned about the best way to secure Tahoe's future. Yet by focusing on what needs to be done to protect Tahoe's splendor, rather than the conflict, man's potential to live in harmony within this fragile ecosystem will be enhanced.

In the words of Henry David Thoreau, "A lake is the landscape's most beautiful and expressive feature. It is earth's eye; looking into which the beholder measures the depth of his own nature."

Resolving the conflict at Tahoe is not, after all, an impossible mission.