

WRITTEN TESTIMONY FOR THE RECORD

OF

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ON

S. 612 (Sen. Cortez Masto), *“Lake Tahoe Restoration Reauthorization Act”*

BEFORE THE

UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES

SUBCOMMITTEE ON FEDERAL LANDS

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Good morning, Chairman Tiffany, Ranking Member Neguse, and members of the subcommittee:

I am Julie Regan, Executive Director of the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency. Our agency was formed by an interstate compact between California and Nevada and ratified by Congress nearly 55 years ago. Our mission is to protect Lake Tahoe, a designated Outstanding National Resource Water, while supporting our communities and economy.

Lake Tahoe is the ancestral and current home of the Washoe Tribe of Nevada and California and is truly breathtaking to behold. High in the Sierra Nevada, its nearly 200 square-mile surface straddles the borders of California and Nevada at more than 6,200 feet in elevation. It is the second deepest lake in the United States and one of the clearest large lakes in the world.

Nearly 80 percent of the Tahoe Basin is owned by the federal government and managed by the USDA Forest Service. Our small, year-round population of 55,000 swells to metropolitan levels on peak days and millions visit the region annually to enjoy the region's public lands. Tahoe also has a sizeable community of second homeowners who hail from more than two-thirds of the nation's congressional districts.

I appreciate the opportunity to address the committee today about the Lake Tahoe Restoration Act Reauthorization. This crucial legislation is the cornerstone of federal investment in restoring Lake Tahoe's world-renowned environment. I also want to recognize Tahoe's congressional representatives and co-sponsors of the House companion bill who have joined the sub-committee meeting today, Congressman Mark Amodei of Nevada and Congressman Kevin Kiley of California. Their leadership in the House has been key to our bipartisan and bicameral progress to date.

Let me offer some important context that's germane to this hearing item. In the 1990s, after witnessing a rapid decline in lake clarity and the surrounding environment, Lake Tahoe leaders came together to launch the Environmental Improvement Program, or EIP as we call it. This collaborative approach to solving Lake Tahoe's most pressing challenges has become a national model for conservation. Congress has delivered the federal share of the EIP through passage of the Lake Tahoe Restoration Acts of 2000 and 2016.

The Lake Tahoe Restoration Act is an example of bipartisan collaboration in practice that not only protects an irreplaceable natural resource but also generates jobs for local communities.

Today's hearing concerns the extension of the Act, which originally authorized up to \$415 million over 7 years. However, that legislation is expiring at the end of this month, and with only 29 percent of the original authorization having been appropriated thus far, we are simply asking for more time on the Congressional clock.

With the \$122 million appropriated since 2016, we have accomplished a great deal. EIP partners have treated 21,000 acres of forest to reduce wildfire risk, restored 342 acres of wetlands to protect biodiversity and the lake's clarity, and inspected 51,000 boats for aquatic invasive species. These federal funds have leveraged \$500 million in state, local, tribal, and private matching funds. Additionally, the program supports an average of 1,700 jobs a year and every \$1 million in spending generates \$1.6 million in economic output.

The Lake Tahoe Restoration Act goes beyond funding authorizations. Key policy provisions have called out the urgent need for forest management projects. The US Forest Service and other fire service agencies have accelerated work over the last several years. These projects helped protect our community during the 2021 Caldor Fire which burned more than 10,000 acres and forced the evacuation of 30,000 residents within the Tahoe Region. Previously treated areas of the forest reduced fire intensity allowing firefighters to directly attack the blaze resulting in zero homes lost, including my own which was directly in the path of one of the most powerful wildfires in California history. Federal support through the Lake Tahoe Restoration Act allowed the Tahoe Basin to demonstrate that active forest management can save lives and protect natural resources and personal property.

Finally, we know it is important to be good stewards of public funding. We have continued to invest in public transparency through a project tracker at **LakeTahoeInfo.org**. Using this online dashboard, the public can track Restoration Act investments from all sectors, individual projects, and performance-based results. More than 10,000 people visit this website annually.

The Lake Tahoe Restoration Act is essential to ensuring Lake Tahoe remains a national treasure. Without it, crucial support is in jeopardy for conservation projects aimed at protecting Tahoe's crystal clear waters, managing invasive species, and preventing wildfires. Without this work, Lake Tahoe's environment, communities, and economy will suffer.

Congressman Kiley said it best at our annual Lake Tahoe Summit this August. "We can get past the political divides by implementing projects of common importance at a local level. Tahoe is the perfect example. Spanning two states, multiple overlapping jurisdictions, and red and blue counties. Yet we can all agree on the goal of protecting something that is larger than us. That transcends political differences."

Thank you for your consideration today and I'd be happy to answer any questions.