



- Adam Jensen / Tahoe Daily Tribune

Senator wants to revive Tahoe Restoration Act

[ADAM JENSEN](#) / TAHOE DAILY TRIBUNE,

ROUND HILL — More than 10 years have elapsed since then-president Bill Clinton visited Lake Tahoe and launched a \$1.4 billion effort to restore the jewel of the Sierra, but the signature legislation that arose from that visit is about to be reinvigorated.

U.S. Sen. Dianne Feinstein announced during the 13th Annual Lake Tahoe Forum on Thursday that she, along with other federal legislators from California and Nevada, would re-introduce the act that has been critical to attempts to restore the health of Lake Tahoe.

But, with the U.S. staggering through the worst economy in decades, whether the second coming of the Lake Tahoe Restoration Act will have the same impact as the first remains to be seen.

The act — which could be re-authorized as soon as next month — would ask for \$390 million in federal money over the next eight years to support continuation of the Environmental Improvement Program, a public-private partnership that has included more than 300 restoration projects at the lake, Feinstein said during her comments from a podium erected on the beach at Round Hill Pines.

Reducing the threat of wildfire to the Lake Tahoe Basin, preventing invasive species from expanding their presence in the lake, encouraging progressive redevelopment, and reversing the lake's historic clarity loss will be some of the priorities for the money, Feinstein said.

"We look out and we see a lake that's still magnificent, but it is in trouble," Feinstein said.

And figuring out how to pay for the solutions to all of the lake's problems is likely the most troubling.

Nevada has already committed the \$100 million the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency estimates it will take from the state to fully implement the next phase of the Environmental Improvement Program, but where the rest of the \$1.4 billion will come from isn't entirely clear.

Although the \$390 million from the federal government envisioned by Feinstein is about \$100 million more than the federal government's share of the first Environmental Improvement Program, the amount falls short of the \$523 million in federal money the TRPA estimates it will take to implement the Environmental Improvement Program through 2018.

And dwindling demand for land around Las Vegas has decreased the amount of federal funding coming to the basin from the Southern Nevada Public Lands Management Act, a source that could potentially fill the funding gap.

The public lands management act has brought about \$260 million to the Environmental Improvement Program since 2003.

Round 10 of the public lands management act totals \$98 million for restoration projects around all of Nevada and the California side of Lake Tahoe. The amount of money generated under this round of the act is not as high as officials would have liked, U.S. Sen. John Ensign said Thursday.

How cash-strapped local governments will find room in their budgets for their estimated \$107 million slice of the pie is unknown and a commitment from California to fund the next phase if the Environmental Improvement Program has yet to be received.

"We still need to develop a strategy of how to raise those funds," said TRPA spokesman Dennis Oliver.

The planning agency estimates \$415 million is needed from California — a state that has issued nearly \$2 billion in IOUs since July 2 —for the next phase of the environmental improvement program.

Inclusion of Lake Tahoe into future state water bond programs is one way in which California may be able to meet the TRPA's estimates for the funds needed for Lake Tahoe, Oliver said.

"We just have to work with California because the state's budget is a mess," Oliver said.

The private sector must also contribute \$364 million to the next phase of the program, according to TRPA estimates.

Those investments, which include the money private property owners have invested to construct best management practices, are funded by a multitude of private sources and come in on a project-by-project basis, Oliver said.

Although financial concerns are still affecting those investments, the planning agency is hopeful economic conditions will turn around and this recession won't have a detrimental effect on the long-term success of the next phase of the Environmental Improvement Program, Oliver said.

Andrew Strain, Heavenly Mountain Resort's vice president of planning and governmental affairs, also signaled he was hopeful the private sector would be able to continue its previous investment in the health of Lake Tahoe.

The foundation for saving Lake Tahoe has been set, the science is available, but there's one aspect that still may be unresolved, Strain said.

"The question we have to ask ourselves is do we have the will," Strain said.

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