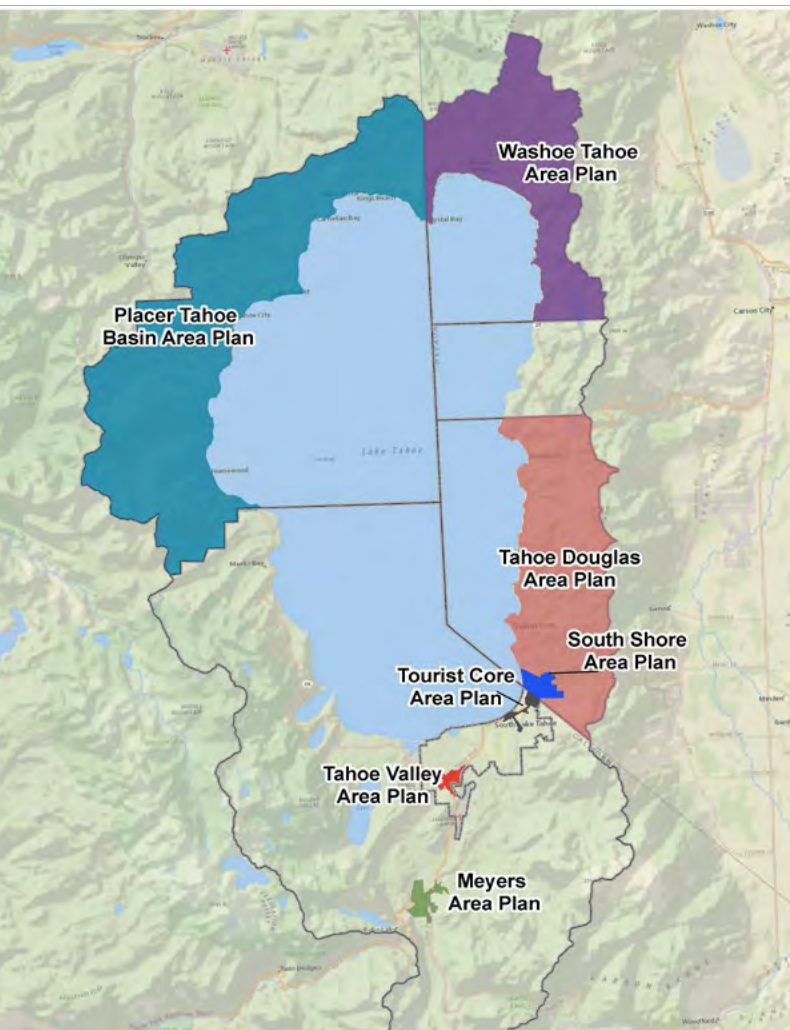


## Project Highlight



# Lake Tahoe Sustainable Communities Program

The Lake Tahoe region straddles the California-Nevada state line, spanning five counties and one city. The unique environmental and jurisdictional challenges facing the Tahoe Basin prompted the ratification of a Bi-State Compact by Congress in 1969, creating the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency (TRPA). This compact gave TRPA the authority to establish environmental quality standards (called “thresholds”) and adopt a *Regional Plan* to achieve those thresholds. In recent years, the focus of the *Regional Plan* for TRPA has expanded to address climate change and an evolving economic landscape. Unpredictable snowpack and lake levels, as well as increased greenhouse gas emissions, have forced the Tahoe Region to plan for expanding year-round tourism activities, adaptive lake access strategies, and innovative approaches to resource management.



Overnight and day visitors can more than triple the Region’s population during peak periods. The majority of the Tahoe region’s greenhouse gas emissions are attributable to transportation, as well as electricity and natural gas consumption. In addition, over the past decade more of the region’s housing stock has been converted to vacation rentals and secondary homes. From 2000 to 2010, the percentage of secondary residences used for recreation or seasonal use increased from 39 percent to 44 percent of all homes. Between 2000 and 2007, the Region lost almost 2,000 jobs, and currently has an unemployment rate of between 13 and 19 percent, depending on the area. Employment in the gaming industry, traditionally a major economic driver in the Tahoe Region, has declined by 50 percent since its peak in 1996. However, total employment in recreation and hospitality increased from 2000 to 2007.

*Map of the Lake Tahoe Region and area plan boundaries. Area plans give jurisdictions greater power over local planning while helping to achieve regional goals. Area plans implement sustainability practices by concentrating mixed-use development in bikeable and walkable town centers. Source: TRPA*

## The Project

The Lake Tahoe Sustainable Communities Program is a Basin-wide program, housed within TRPA but supported by a partnership of local agencies, organizations, jurisdictions and the community. This program was established with funding from both Round 1 and 2 of the Grant Program. Round 1 funding was used to establish the *Sustainability Framework and Vision*; create a GHG emissions inventory and reduction targets; create a *Sustainability Action Plan Toolkit* and *Economic Development Strategy*, devise a *Sustainability Indicators Reporting Plan*, and develop a framework and initiation process for local Area Plans. The second Round of funding has been used to develop Area Plans consistent with the *Regional Plan*; create an online development rights tracking system, produce a sustainability indicator dashboard; and publicize their inaugural *Annual Report* and a “long range business plan” for sustainability initiatives to be implemented by community volunteers.

Among this vast body of work supported by the Grant Program, a few components stand out. The work accomplished by TRPA is unique in its scale, as well as in its involvement of community members, not only in development of the plans, but in implementation as well. The use of a public-private partnership for implementation is unusual, but an appropriate match for the Lake Tahoe Region, where involved and passionate community members are willing to join forces with Agency staff.

The Lake Tahoe Sustainable Communities Program has far reaching benefits for California and Nevada residents, as well as for the global community of visitors for whom Lake Tahoe is a very special place. The work completed with funding from the Grant Program has helped to plan for better transportation, land use, and conservation decisions region-wide. The *Sustainability Framework* and supporting plans and programs provide the tools needed by staff, community members and decision makers to continue to work toward the achievement of State goals. Beyond these benefits, the formal institutional commitment made by TRPA in adopting an internal strategic objective to “become a leader in environmental and sustainability programs” as part of their *Agency Strategic Plan* helps to memorialize this important change.

## Local/Regional Connection

The jurisdictional complexity of the Tahoe Basin means that all sustainable planning decisions must be made considering the local and regional impacts and implementation options. While TRPA retains regional planning responsibility, it has delegated local land use decisions



Source: Design Workshop, Lake Tahoe

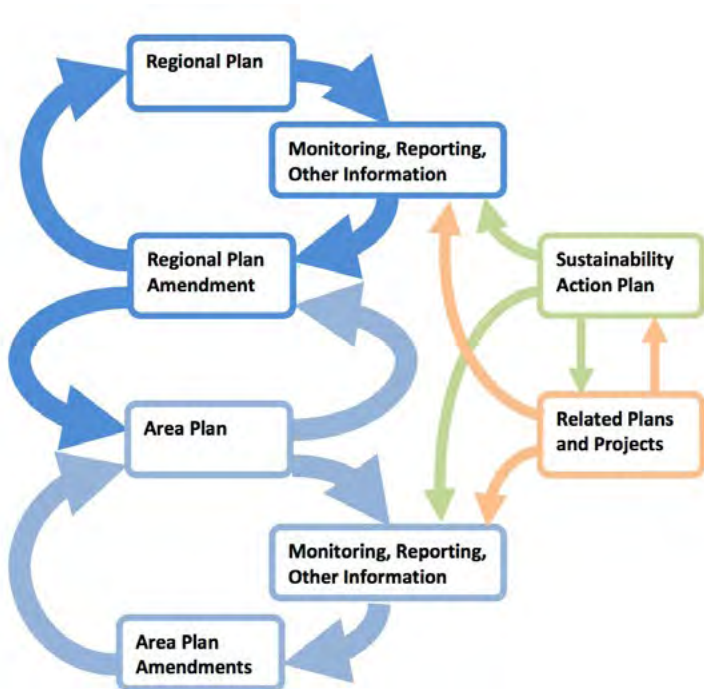
## Locally-Driven Solutions

- Balancing conservation goals and economic growth with a marketplace for development rights.
- Encouraging the concentration of development in town centers, in order to protect more sensitive areas from degradation.
- Creating an online development rights tracking system, helping to make this local solution more effective.

to the Counties and Cities within the Basin through a system of Area Plans to support the *Regional Plan and Sustainability Framework*. It helps remove barriers to economic development and revitalization, while also ensuring consistency with and progress toward regional goals.

### Agency Collaboration for Action

The coordination between TRPA and local government partners developing Area Plans is remarkable in its collaborative approach to community-based planning to impact local land use decisions. While interagency collaboration is essential for all of TRPA’s work, the Lake Tahoe Sustainable Communities Program is remarkable for its ability to collaborate and inspire progress in areas where it does not have jurisdiction or regulatory authority. For example, in order to achieve the protection of the Basin’s water supply, TRPA has partnered with downstream users in both California and Nevada to manage forest fuels and aquatic invasive species. Partnership—in many forms—has been a foundational tenant of TRPA’s success with sustainability initiatives.



*“Much of the recent success in improving transportation and energy infrastructure in Lake Tahoe has been a direct result of advocacy and on-the-ground action by the grassroots Sustainability Collaborative.”*

— Joanne Marchetta, Executive Director, TRPA

### Effective Community Engagement

The development of each component of TRPA’s sustainability framework relied on multiple forms of community involvement. However, what is most unique about the program is the role of the Lake Tahoe Sustainability Collaborative in implementing the Program’s plans. The Lake Tahoe Sustainability Collaborative was convened to serve as a grassroots organization that would implement long term sustainable actions, especially those associated with citizen behavior change. The Collaborative includes six working groups: Communications and Outreach, Community Mobility, Conservation of Natural Resources, Economy-Education-Culture, Energy-Water-Waste-Efficiency, and Human Health & Social Well-Being. The Collaborative membership is open to those who want to participate, with different levels of involvement offered. The working groups have been responsible for a variety of implementation actions, such as bike to school weeks, advocacy for alternative transportation projects, community solar and energy efficiency projects, and local food programs in the schools. The TRPA says, “Much of the recent success in improving transportation and energy infrastructure in Lake Tahoe has been a direct result of advocacy and on-the-ground action by the grassroots Sustainability Collaborative.”

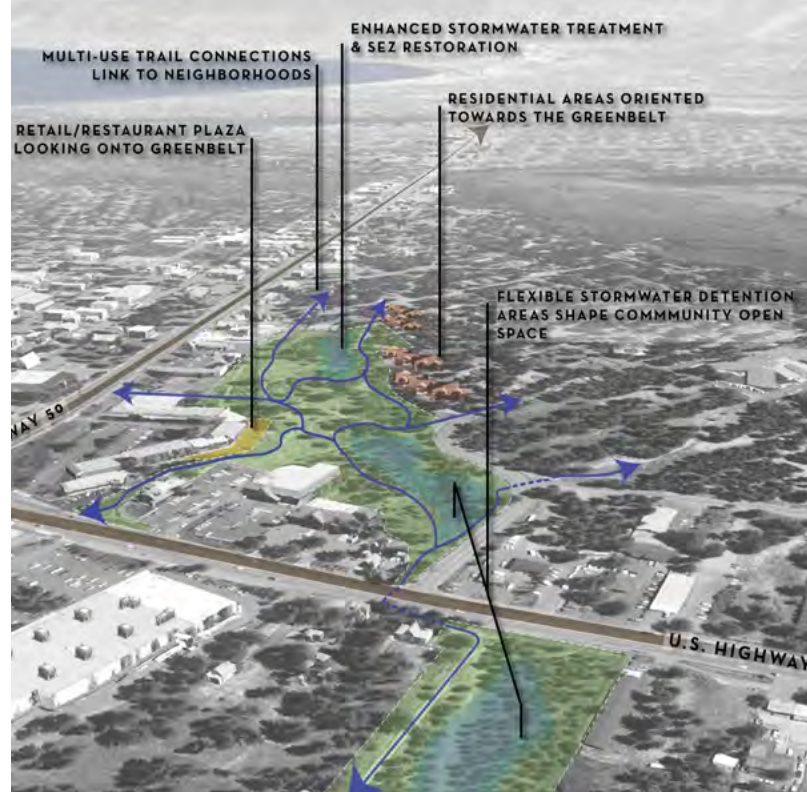
*The implementation framework for the Lake Tahoe Sustainability Action Plan. The plan addresses greenhouse gas emissions reduction, as well as climate change adaptation strategies. Recommendations for sustainability measures are then integrated into Regional and Area Plans. Source: TRPA.*

In the long term, it is anticipated that the Sustainability Collaborative will continue to function as a stand-alone organization. The role of Sustainable Communities Program funding in its inception cannot be overstated. It was essential for this group to have initial seed funding in order to develop the capacity it now has, thus extending the reach of the TRPA's sustainability program.

### Sustainable Benefits for California

Implementation of the *Sustainability Action Plan*, *Regional Plan*, and *Area Plans*, will help to advance many of California's sustainability objectives, particularly in the areas of:

- Clean air and water
- Economic Prosperity
- Energy efficiency and conservation
- Equity
- Improved infrastructure systems
- Infill and compact development
- Natural resources protection
- Reduced automobile usage and fuel consumption
- Reduced greenhouse gas emissions
- Water conservation



#### For More Information

Name: Devin Middlebrook, Sustainability Program Coordinator  
 Agency: Tahoe Regional Planning Agency  
 Telephone: 775-589-5230  
 Email: [dmiddlebrook@trpa.org](mailto:dmiddlebrook@trpa.org)  
 Website: <http://laketahoestainablecommunitiesprogram.org/>

Top to bottom: Aerial view of planned greenbelt in the Tahoe Valley Area Plan, designed to connect neighborhoods and commercial areas, treat stormwater runoff, promote open space, and connect multiple bike and pedestrian paths. Source: City of South Lake Tahoe.

Community members brainstorming a regional sustainability vision and goals during a collaborative workshop as part of the sustainability plan development. Source: TRPA.