

Advocates push to extend Lake Tahoe restoration for another decade

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Against the backdrop of the U.S. Capitol, Republican Rep. Kevin Kiley, R-Calif., and other local advocates called on Congress to extend funding to support environmental preservation in the cherished Lake Tahoe region for another decade.

The bipartisan group was advocating for an extension of the Lake Tahoe

Restoration Act, which allocates [federal funding](#) to a litany of local restoration projects and is set to expire on Sept. 30.

"Since its previous reauthorization 20 years ago, funds have gone to more than 700 projects in the Tahoe Basin, and waters are the clearest they've been in decades. Without these projects it wouldn't be the same," Kiley said at a Wednesday news conference. "Lake Tahoe is a national treasure, and we must honor our commitment to preserving it for generations to come."

An extension of the Lake Tahoe Restoration Act for 10 years was introduced last year by Nevada Sen. Catherine Cortez Masto, and has the support of all four Nevada and California U.S. senators. It would keep millions of dollars in federal funding flowing to projects tackling regional water quality, air quality, transportation, forest management and recreation.

The original LTRA was signed in 2000 and pledged \$300 million to restore the lake. A 2016 reauthorization effort allotted another \$415 million. This new reauthorization does not approve additional federal dollars but rather unlocks \$300 million in unspent funds.

Representatives of the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency, League to Save Lake Tahoe, and chair of the Washoe Tribe of Nevada and California also spoke in favor of reauthorizing the law to extend funding for key programs.

"The Washoe Tribe currently runs about seven projects out of Lake Tahoe for conservation and restoration," said tribal chairman Serrell Smokey. "These lands have given us life for thousands of years and it's our hope that we can continue to maintain them so that they will continue to do so for thousands of years to come."

Lake Tahoe restoration was a particularly important cause for the late Sen. Dianne Feinstein, who grew up attending summer camp near the lake and owned a vacation home there. She sponsored the initial legislation in 1999 and was central to the 2016 negotiations. Democratic Congressman John Garamendi introduced a bill last year to rename the law in her honor.

Since its inception, the law has funded hundreds of projects under the Lake Tahoe Environmental Improvement Program in conjunction with state, local and private funding. The program has also supported an average of 1,700 jobs per year, according to lawmakers.

Lake Tahoe is the largest alpine lake in North America, home to more than 55,000 people and a major tourist attraction. Historically, the region has suffered from loss of water clarity, air pollution and [invasive species](#) that pose a threat to the region's biodiversity.

According to scientists at the UC Davis Tahoe Environmental Research Center, growing urban areas have exacerbated pollution, and harmful algae growth has steadily increased in recent decades. Climate change caused by the burning of fossil fuels is also intensifying wildfire risk and stressing the lake's delicate ecosystems.

But the lake's water clarity made a remarkable improvement in 2023 thanks to the reintroduction of native zooplankton. With help from scientists, the zooplankton have provided a natural clean-up crew to help restore the lake's famous blue waters. However, those gains are expected to be short-term with the rise of other competing plankton species.

Kiley and other lawmakers aim to pass the reauthorization bill this year. It has not yet been scheduled for a committee hearing in the U.S. Senate.

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