

Editorial: New spirit of cooperation is welcome at Lake Tahoe

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Despite the Nevada Legislature's injudicious threat to withdraw from the Tahoe Regional Planning Compact -- or, perhaps, because of it -- there finally appears to be a commitment to a cooperative approach between Nevada and California to move ahead with the overdue update of the critical Tahoe regional plan.

There are no guarantees that the cooperation won't simply provide more of the same fodder for lawsuits that previous efforts have, of course. But we can hope.

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That's the nature of the challenge at Lake Tahoe, where Tahoe Regional Planning Agency board members and staff must carefully bridge several deep and divisive chasms -- from the different philosophies of governing in Nevada and California, to balancing support for the economy with protection of the lake's famous beauty, to support of property rights vs. the rights of the public. Far too often, the solutions to those difficult and complex differences have eluded elected officials on both sides of the

lake and found their way into court. The result: For more than 40 years, every bit of progress at the lake has been hard-won, as the various factions felt that their backs were against the wall and they had no choice but to fight back. So, last month's promise by the bi-state agency to affirm its December 2012 goal for completing the regional plan update, due every 20 years and last accomplished in 1987, is a welcome development. On Aug. 24, the governing board chartered a committee to consider "items crucial" to the update. It will, in the words of Chairman Norma Santiago, "be able to delve deeply into the most contentious issues while keeping alive the spirit of compromise between the states." The importance of that can't be overstated. For many years, the California attitude was that all the problems at the lake were caused by Nevada and its casinos on the north and south shores. The Golden State concentrated on preventing any

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expansion of gaming at the lake. Under the leadership of Jerry Brown, former and current governor, California's representatives on the governing board opposed even Nevada's efforts to construct a "ring road" around the casinos to ease traffic congestion and the casinos' efforts to build parking garages. Nevada eventually agreed to ban any expansion of the casinos, and two planned hotel-casinos in Stateline were never built. When that wasn't enough to satisfy California, Nevada got a lot less cooperative. Still, much progress has been made during the past 20 years -- at least until the recent disagreement over the redevelopment of a casino on the north shore. It's to be hoped that the new spirit of cooperation marked by Nevada Gov. Brian Sandoval and Brown at the recent Tahoe Summit will allow officials to concentrate on solving the most critical environmental problems at the lake, while local officials deal with the nuts and bolts in their communities. And, if it turns out that it took threats from the Nevada Legislature to finally get everyone's attention, good for Nevada.

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