

El Dorado Water Agency brings together water experts in Tahoe to discuss issues

News [News](#) | Oct 28, 2025



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SOUTH LAKE TAHOE, Calif. – The El Dorado Water Agency (EDWA) held its first-ever regional plenary on Thursday, October 23 to hear from water experts in Tahoe about what the issues are and what can be done to solve them.

A plenary is a large meeting attended by members of a smaller group. This plenary especially highlighted the unique challenges with water supply, water quality and public health.

General manager Rebecca Guo was excited about the plenary, as it represents a major step in the creation of a long-term blueprint to support water systems throughout the county. Guo said she was aware of some of the big picture issues like localized flooding, aging water systems and smaller water systems like Tahoe City Public Utilities District (TCPUD) and their infrastructure.

“We’re trying to see where we can step in, and trying engage with more staff so we know who to talk to and follow up with,” said Guo. “This is a space where we can have the technical experts dive in.”

EDWA has been putting on plenaries since about 2020, but this regionally focused one can help to leverage different projects and funding specifically for the Tahoe area.

Hannah Romero, water resources principal at EDWA, was also looking forward to the interactive portion, where people could get involved in conversations with people across diverse specialties.

At the plenary, there was representation from TCPUD, South Tahoe Public Utilities District (STPUD), Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board, the city of South Lake Tahoe, the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency (TRPA), small water systems, utility managers and nonprofits.

One of the major points of discussion was tetrachloroethylene pollution, also called PCE pollution, which affected wells at the Y in past years, and continues to affect other systems through a 400-yard plume. While the drinking water in Tahoe is safe, controlling and preventing PCE contamination is something that water suppliers are prioritizing.

The Tahoe El Dorado Area Plan, also called the TED Plan, was brought up as a primary planning document. Thea Graybill, planning manager at El Dorado County, said in a press release, “The Tahoe El Dorado Area Plan will be the primary planning document. It will include local policies for transportation, recreation, housing, environmental protection, and safety, and it will integrate the Meyers Area Plan.”

Other discussions focused on water supply, water quality and public safety.

A major challenge for all water systems is the aging infrastructure, which was top of mind for many at the plenary. Fire suppression and capacity was another concern for many, which has long been a topic for the Tahoe region.

Other forms of contamination such as naturally occurring arsenic and radium in the mountains or private sewers feeding into the lake were also highlighted. South Lake Tahoe also has challenges with water supply, as it serves the largest population in the basin.

One consensus that everyone came to: there has to be more funding for these projects. Many of these are critical, but cost millions of dollars. Several people referenced the old idea of having a toll to enter the Tahoe Basin, which would generate more revenue for one of the most popular tourist areas in the state.

Romero and Guo were both glad to participate in the plenary. “There’s a lot to process, but we plan to keep in touch as we develop our water blueprint,” said Romero.



EDWA has had success in the past in seeking and leveraging grants to ensure these projects get funded, and their commitment to exploring regional needs was well-received from participants.

“You realize how your work affects each other,” said Brianna Greenlaw, who was attending on behalf of the city. “There’s a lot of crossover in the work.”

Shay Navarro of TRPA agreed. “You realize that you all have the same goals.”

Shelly Thomsen at STPUD said, “It’s amazing to focus on the east slope and bring partners to tackle these complex issues. Tahoe has a history of epic collaborations and we’re looking forward to collaborating more with our partner agencies here.”

Eli Ramos is a reporter for Tahoe Daily Tribune. They are part of the 2024-26 cohort of California Local News Fellows through UC Berkeley. Learn more at <https://fellowships.journalism.berkeley.edu/cafellows/>.

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