



# WASHOE

*"The Lake of the Sky"*

## Washoe Stewardship of Lake Tahoe

### *The significance of Lake Tahoe to the Washoe Tribe*

Lake Tahoe, or *Da ow a ga* meaning "edge of the lake," has been the heart of our civilization and culture for thousands of years. Traditionally, our families came each spring from all parts of our vast territory to meet at the lake, reaffirming our tribal unity through shared cultural practices. We believe the sacred waters of this lake breathe life into the land, the plants, the fish, the birds, the animals and the people around it. *Da ow a ga* is the center of our world.

### *Water: An ancient interdependence*

Since time immemorial, our homeland in the Carson Valley has been a water resource paradise, providing our sustenance on the edge of the Great Basin desert. Water has always been an integral part of our lives, for both spiritual and practical reasons. Our legends include many stories about water and the sacred power that it holds.

### *A long history of environmental stewardship*

We have a proven record of stewardship of the waters of Lake Tahoe. When settlers first entered our lands in pursuit of gold and silver in the 1840s, they believed our lands were uninhabited. In fact, our people had camped along the shores of Lake Tahoe and fished from its pure waters for 10,000 years. Yet, within a hundred years of western expansion, Lake Tahoe was inalterably scarred by logging, ranching and mining.

Today, we are committed to conservation and restoration efforts that will help Lake Tahoe to recover from these injuries and thrive for future generations.

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## *Washoe traditions alive today*

Sacred sites and spiritual landmarks in and around Lake Tahoe continue to be used by our people for cultural and religious reasons. The preservation of these sacred sites for our children is our top priority.

Our elders continue to camp along the shores of the lake as their ancestors did for thousands of years. For our people, camping at Lake Tahoe is an important ritual that provides spiritual rejuvenation. In the traditional ways of our ancestors, our craftspeople still collect materials used for basket weaving from the shores of Lake Tahoe, preserving a priceless cultural heritage for future generations.

## *Partners committed to the preservation of Lake Tahoe*

Our unique knowledge and guardianship of the land, and its plants and animals, make us invaluable contributors to resource management planning. We are a committed partner, working with others to protect and preserve Lake Tahoe. We own this fragile treasure in common and we are all obligated to protect it.

We have created innovative conservation programs, developed community partnerships with our neighbors and taken an active stand against any practices that harm these waters. Some of these conservation efforts include:

- \* *Meeks Bay*, a resource management program promoting the cultivation of traditional plants
- \* *Eagle Valley Hydrologic Study*, in partnership with United States Geological Survey and Carson City
- \* *Jacks Valley Creek Watershed*, in partnership with the state of Nevada

## *Preserving Lake Tahoe for future generations*

To build on the progress we have made, the Washoe are continuing to work on ways to enhance and improve the Lake Tahoe region. Some of our current goals include:

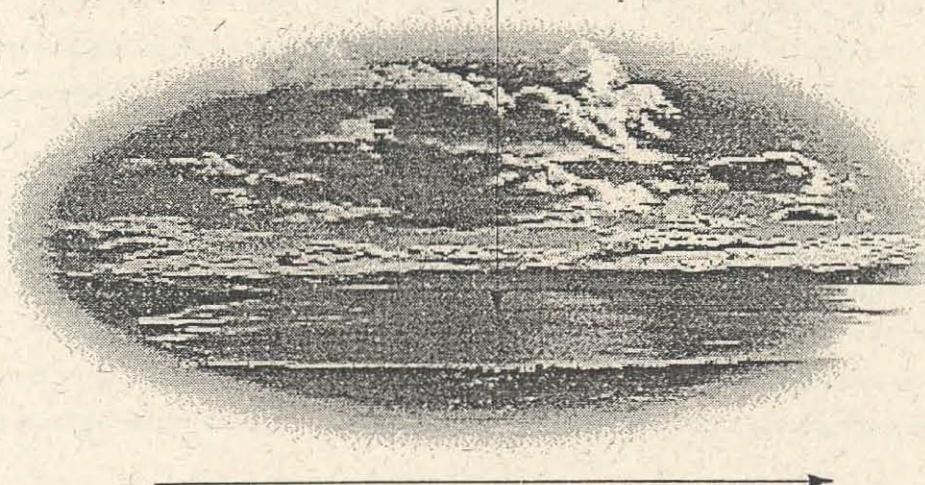
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- \* regulating the use of personal watercraft on the lake to preserve water quality and tranquility
- \* limiting commercial development to protect the wild and scenic qualities of this region
- \* creating comprehensive land use plans that emphasize water resource protection
- \* ensuring access to Lake Tahoe and other sites of spiritual and cultural significance for our elders
- \* recognizing Lake Tahoe's environmentally sensitive areas and their need for protection
- \* discouraging practices that pollute the water through runoff from erosion
- \* forging partnerships that promote the environmental health of Lake Tahoe

## *Lake Tahoe*

Maximum depth:  
1,645 feet



Elevation:  
6,225 feet

Size:

12 miles wide, 22 miles long, 72 miles around

Average temperature:

68 degrees in summer; 41 degrees in winter



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*“Wa She Shu E Deh”—Washoe Lands*

## A Commitment to Forest Ecosystem Restoration

### *The Significance of the Lake Tahoe Region to the Washoe Tribe*

Lake Tahoe has been the center of the Washoe world for thousands of years. Their ancestral homelands consisted of more than 1.5 million acres from Honey Lake to the north, Antelope Valley to the south, the Sierra Nevada mountains to the west and the Virginia and Pine Nut Hills to the east. In the 1800s, the Washoe lost most of this land as a result of westward expansion by the United States. Current Washoe holdings include approximately 72,500 acres of land.

### *Responsible Stewards for Generations*

For thousands of years, the Washoe lived off these lands. Every spring, they gathered on the shores of Lake Tahoe to hunt, fish, gather medicinal plants and celebrate tribal unity. In the fall, they moved to the Pine Nut Hills to gather pine nuts, one of their most valued foods and their sustenance during the long winters. Our ancestors lived in balance with their surroundings, taking care to preserve this sacred land and its resources.

### *The Washoe: Uniquely Qualified to Help Preserve Lake Tahoe*

The Washoe have unique and important knowledge about managing Lake Tahoe's resources and contribute greatly to efforts to maintain a healthy ecosystem. Washoe conservation practices are based on an ancient understanding of the region's ecosystem and on their belief that all living things are interdependent.

Their indigenous resources management experience includes Washoe pharmacology which involves the cultivation and harvesting of native plants for medicinal reasons. For generations, Washoe elders have passed down to younger members their vast knowledge of the tribes' traditional conservation practices in the Lake Tahoe basin.

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## *A Fragile Ecosystem*

Today, the environmentally sensitive Lake Tahoe basin is home to rare animal species - such as eagles and osprey - lush forests, and sacred cultural sites. However, these natural wonders are competing with the modern world. The effects of a population explosion in the last 30 years are visible everywhere. The crystal clear waters of Lake Tahoe are being muddied by algae, growing because of pollutants caused by increased traffic. Sacred cultural sites, like Cave Rock, are being desecrated by recreational activity. The health of the surrounding forests is suffering. Preserving this land requires a comprehensive approach involving all stakeholders in the region.

## *Cooperative Partnerships: Working Together for the Future*

The Washoe are committed to working with the federal and state governments to protect wildlife habitats, maintain water quality and preserve the scenic value of Lake Tahoe. Toward these goals, we have forged a strong working relationship with the Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit of the U.S. Forest Service. Together, we are engaged in many conservation efforts. Some of these efforts include:

- \* the management of cultural sites
- \* the Heritage Program, concerned with the protection of and accessibility to areas that are significant to Washoe pharmacology
- \* the use of aboriginal resource management techniques
- \* the Meeks Bay Bracken Fern Project which involves the re-introduction of Native plant management by Washoe elders
- \* the Washoe Native Garden, designed to preserve cultural identity

## *Preserving a Complex Ecosystem*

The Washoe believe that human existence is dependent on the health and survival of all other living things. Whether it involves issues related to water quality, economic development, forest ecosystem restoration or cultural preservation, the Washoe believe it is imperative to acknowledge this interrelationship of the natural world. The Washoe look forward to working in partnership to sustain this complex and beautiful environment for future generations.