

WRITTEN TESTIMONY FOR THE RECORD
OF
JULIE W. REGAN
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
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ON
S. 3695 (Sen. Cortez Masto), *“Santini-Burton Modernization Act of 2026”*
BEFORE THE
UNITED STATES SENATE
COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES’
SUBCOMMITTEE ON PUBLIC LANDS, FORESTS, AND MINING

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JULIE W. REGAN
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TAHOE REGIONAL PLANNING AGENCY

Good morning, Chairman Barrasso, Ranking Member Cortez Masto, and members of the subcommittee:

I am Julie Regan, Executive Director of the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency. Our agency was formed by an interstate compact between California and Nevada and ratified by Congress in 1969. Our mission is to protect Lake Tahoe, a federally-designated Outstanding National Resource Water, while supporting our local communities and economy.

I appreciate the opportunity to address the committee today about the importance of the Santini-Burton Modernization Act.

Lake Tahoe is the ancestral and current home of the Washoe people, or the Washoe Tribe of Nevada and California as they are known today.

Tahoe is also the second deepest lake in the United States and one of the clearest large lakes in the world. Tahoe's nearly 200 square-mile surface straddles the borders of California and Nevada at more than 6,200 feet in elevation in the Sierra Nevada mountain range.

Tahoe welcomes millions of visitors every year to our public lands. Outdoor recreation and tourism drive our five-billion-dollar annual economy. This in turn supports our small, year-round population of 55,000 people. Tahoe also boasts a sizeable community of second homeowners who hail from nearly every state in the nation.

Today, nearly 80 percent of the Tahoe Basin is owned and managed by the United States Forest Service. But it has not always been like this...

The first public lands in the Lake Tahoe Basin were established in 1899 as the Lake Tahoe Forest Reserve and totaled 37,000 acres with no access to Lake Tahoe's beaches. By 1960, just 50 percent of the Tahoe Basin was publicly owned.

The 1980 Santini-Burton Act was essential to Lake Tahoe's conservation and public lands success story. Under the law, funds from the authorized sales of federal lands in Clark County, Nevada were appropriated to the Forest Service to acquire more than 16,000 acres of land in the Tahoe Basin. Through conservation and ongoing management, these public lands protect Tahoe's famed clarity, are critical in community forest health and wildfire prevention, and offer world-class recreation opportunities.

However, changes to the law in in the 2000s inadvertently limited the law's scope so funds could only be used to acquire land, but not to manage them. The lack of management funding contributes to negative environmental, community, and economic impacts across the region.

If enacted, modernization would free up existing funding for ongoing land management, allowing the Tahoe Basin to complete more lake-saving Environmental Improvement Program projects. Projects that protect Tahoe's famed clarity, improve recreation access, manage forests, and reduce wildfire risk. The modernized bill enables the Washoe Tribe of Nevada and California to take a meaningful step toward advancing traditional knowledge for forest health management and restoring Tribal stewardship in their ancestral and current homeland.

Finally, the bill maintains the 1980 federal land sale boundaries in Clark County and adds no new costs to taxpayers.

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The Santini-Burton Modernization Act is the product of a multi-year collaboration by our agency, Tahoe's state and local governments, the Washoe Tribe of Nevada and California, non-profits, public, and the private sector. The bill also requires ongoing local input through an annual spending plan and partnerships with state and local governments.

In 1980, Congress had a bold vision, transforming Tahoe into the national treasure that it is today. Thanks to Santini-Burton, Tahoe's unique character continues to be of national significance, but the threats to the lake require new solutions – solutions that the Santini-Burton Modernization Act can help deliver.

Thank you for your consideration today. Hopefully you all have the opportunity to visit Lake Tahoe soon. Samuel Clemens, the American author better known as Mark Twain, is a local legend in Nevada and the Tahoe Basin. He described the power of spending time at Lake Tahoe when he wrote "three months of camp life on Lake Tahoe would restore an Egyptian mummy to his pristine vigor, and give him an appetite like an alligator."

Thank you for the opportunity to address the committee today.