



Photo provided

Chile and Tahoe teams stand in front of the U.S. Embassy in Santiago. Pictured from left is Cristóbal Valenzuela, Angela Delorenzo, Devin Middlebrook (TRPA), Geoff Schladow (U.C. Davis) and Jesse Patterson (League to Save Lake Tahoe).

# Lake Tahoe team returns from Chile

*This month's Guest Column is written by Devin Middlebrook, Sustainability Program Coordinator for Long Range and Transportation Planning at the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency*

Lake Tahoe has a long and storied history, from historic environmental degradation to recent environmental successes. While not always obvious, our successes and our failures have a global impact. This was highlighted during a recent trip I was fortunate to take to the Lakes Region of southern Chile representing the Tahoe Regional

Planning Agency, along with Jesse Patterson of the League to Save Lake Tahoe and Geoff Schladow of the University of California, Davis.

The Lakes Region of Chile is similar to Lake Tahoe in the 1960s. Growing popularity, economic development and tourism are leading to pollution, over-visitation and unregulated development. The mission of our trip was to share our experiences from Lake Tahoe to help the people of Chile better manage their environmental resources while supporting sustainable economic development and local communities.

The destination of our trip, Lake Panguipulli, is very similar to Lake Tahoe. With a population of around 40,000, tourism brings 150,000 people during summer months. Development to meet this demand is occurring in a rapid and unregulated manner. One example is a new project for 250 vacation homes along the shoreline, where natural wetlands were removed to create an artificial beach. This growing trend of development has sparked conversation among the locals about potential environmental and social impacts, including the discharge of raw sewage into the lake. Think of past development at Lake Tahoe – in our case it led to the creation of the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency to stop runaway development and to correct the environmental damage that had already been done.

The people of Lake Panguipulli and Chile are struggling with the same issues Tahoe faced and faces: How do we keep people from loving a place to death and balance the needs of people and the environment? They see the

damage being done and want to act before it is too late. They understand that economic prosperity is dependent on preserving their natural surroundings.

Our trip to Chile included meetings with the Ministry of Environment, Agency on Climate Change and Sustainability, United States Embassy, universities, local communities, indigenous tribes, non-governmental agencies, and more. The people we met along the way were creative, innovative and compassionate.

The cornerstone of our visit was a public seminar, dubbed Chile Lagos Limpios (Chile Clear Lakes). Over 230 people attended this standing-room only event, including local officials, governors, senators and community members. At the culmination of this event, an international partnership agreement was signed, joining Tahoe and Chile in a friendship based on stewardship and a sense of place. The energy and conversation sparked from this event was more inspiring than I

could have imagined. From here, we will be helping the region create a sustainable development plan that balances the economy, environment and community.

While our initial purpose was to educate the people of Chile, I humbly took away more inspiration than I left. There are many different stakeholders in Chile with differing opinions, but they have come together to do something for the greater good. As citizens of this beautiful place we call Lake Tahoe, let us not forget where we came from, where we are going and what we are working together to protect.

The world is watching.

*To learn more about this project, please visit [www.chilelagoslimpios.cl](http://www.chilelagoslimpios.cl) or [www.facebook.com/chilelagoslimpios](http://www.facebook.com/chilelagoslimpios). This program would not have been possible without the support of the many partner organizations based in Chile, including the U.S. Embassy, Land Arquitectos, Corporación Amigos de Panguipulli, Municipalidad de Panguipulli, Universidad Austral de Chile, and Maceteros Producciones*

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