



Tipping point

Reno is at the tipping point. We can continue to promote growth by subsidizing corporate jobs and encouraging urban sprawl, or we can correct our course and acknowledge that uncontrolled growth is not sustainable and will lead to a steep decline in our quality of life.

We've already had a harsh preview of the first scenario courtesy of the tech-boom that ushered in thousands of new residents to take taxpayer-subsidized jobs that were sold as a way for us to keep our own kids employed. Instead, we've watched the newcomers scoop up our housing and clog our highways and then have the nerve to complain about homeless people camping in the park. Wait until the next drought comes and they learn what happens in the high desert when there's not enough water to go around.

Our policymakers acknowledge these issues but explain them away by pointing fingers at each other. But they remain united in not wanting to change

their ways. They'd do well to read the New Yorker essay by Sam Knight called "Betting the Farm: The obsessions of Jake Fiennes could change how Britain uses its land." Fiennes is the conservation manager of a private estate in England and a leader in environmental farming, which takes the long view of cultivating land by cutting back agricultural production courtesy of toxic pesticides and replacing it with more organic farming methods and designs that promote the reinstatement of healthy flora and fauna.

As Britain leaves the European Union, it's having a "reset moment" transitioning to a system that doesn't just subsidize agricultural products but also supports "public goods, such as water quality and biodiversity." Fiennes is credited as "one of the motive forces behind this new way of looking at the land."

We badly need a reset moment ourselves. One place to start is the latest reincarnation of the failed Washoe Lands Bill, opposed by residents for over a

decade, now rebranded as the Truckee Meadows Public Lands Management Act. If approved by Congress, the new version of the bill would free up more than 90,000 acres of public land to be sold to developers, creating sprawl all the way to Pyramid Lake.

Where will these new people live? Where will they work? What roads will they use to get to work? Who will pay for the infrastructure of wastewater management, police and fire services? Where will the water they need come from, especially in a drought year? What impact will all of this growth have on our wildlife?

Long-term residents know we've been here before. We had a chance at a reset back in 2008 when Washoe County voters approved a ballot measure, WC-3, mandating that local government land use plans be based on identified and sustainable water resources in Washoe County. The measure passed by an unheard-of super-majority of 73 percent of the

voters, but local elected officials scoffed at the measure—claiming they already factored in sustainable water during their approval process despite plenty of evidence to the contrary.

At the request of conservationists and with the assistance of local water experts, I sponsored Assembly Bill 119 in the 2009 Legislature to codify the people's voice into state law, requiring urban counties to include sustainability of water resources in their comprehensive regional plans. The bill passed the Assembly and Senate on party lines but was vetoed by Governor Jim Gibbons.

So here we are in 2020, preparing to embark on more reckless sprawl our natural resources cannot support and burdened by a tax structure with billions in uncollected taxes used to subsidize companies that continue to play us for fools.

It's campaign season. Let's demand a reset moment for our public lands before it's too late. □

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