

# RECREATION ECONOMY

## Placer County, California<sup>6</sup>

Featuring **Jennifer Montgomery**

### Reliance on a nature-based economy

Nestled in the heart of Northern California's national forests near Lake Tahoe, Placer County's economy, culture, and communities all rely on thriving nature. However, many of their natural resources have been threatened with rising temperatures, drier conditions, and variable snow pack as a result of climate change. Local government and community leaders, worried about the ramifications for the recreation industry, local economy, and citizens, got together to plan for climate impacts, and climate solutions.

Placer County's Supervisor Jennifer Montgomery explains the county's concerns were primarily with fires, which continue to grow more intense year after year. Additionally, new reports revealed more climate impacts to the area, including rising lake water temperatures and steep declines in water clarity. "We recognized that we needed



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to grapple with these impacts and make plans for the future," Montgomery says.

### Navigating through rough patches

Home to many recreational areas, planning for climate impacts and solutions was critically important, but not always easy for Placer County. Montgomery says, "Communities in Colorado, Utah, and other areas that are dependent upon the ski industry have similar concerns. We need to figure

out how we change as a county, and as a community, working with conservation groups and business. And, we need to figure out how to prepare these very important businesses for change."

Working across sectors also meant across the political spectrum. Montgomery shared that it was difficult to align the goals and vision aligned to develop the Placer County Conservation Plan. "A lot of people were concerned that if we moved forward with the full conservation

plan we would get significant pushback from our communities and constituents. So, we first focused on the biomass facility, because that was, in many respects, the easiest sale to make," says Montgomery.

But the facility was not popular at first. Montgomery quoted Leslie Knope from the TV show Parks and Recreation "'When people yell at me, what I'm hearing is them caring at me very loudly.' That's something we all need to take to heart." Montgomery explains that it took numerous community meetings to find common ground with the development community and the conservation community. "By making the economic argument, we were finally able to move those things forward."

### Balancing growth, impact, and education

To balance a variety of stakeholders and opinions, Placer County's dual-purpose conservation and development plan has involved both sets of stakeholders to strike a delicate balance. Montgomery explains, "I've championed this dual-purpose plan because it's the right thing to do. We've needed to do it to ensure success." The county is also developing a Climate Action Plan.

To combat the spread and intensity of wildfires, the county is creating a biomass facility. This facility, which will use byproducts from forest thinning to generate electricity. "Our local air pollution control district has been a strong partner in the biomass facility project," said Montgomery. "Their interest is in rectifying air quality issues. This

demonstrates that, in many ways, moving toward carbon neutrality might even be a net benefit for us."

Montgomery attributes the success of both programs to educating the public on the benefits of the solutions they are working toward. They made progress by engaging the public, fully and transparently, early in the process.

### Recommendations

- Conduct an analysis on impacts and opportunities, from a scientific, economic, and personal/community perspective. Communicate impacts and benefits clearly and appropriately with the public.
- Be clear about project goals with all stakeholders, including the public.
- Invite stakeholder participation in the planning process, and create space for public comment and buy-in.
- Don't reinvent the wheel. Learn from other communities. Find draft climate action plans, and model them. Connect with other community leaders to share ideas.



Photo Courtesy of Placer County, California

### Key Metrics

- Placer County, California
- The Placer County Conservation Plan has taken 14 years to develop
- Has provided educational tools and resources to over 375,000 county residents and developed 8 committees and working groups to engage residents on habitat and conservation planning and implementation in association with the Placer County Conservation Plan
- Received \$3 million from the U.S. Department of Interior—U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Section 6 grant program awarded from the State of California for the Placer County Conservation Plan