

FAQs

Additional Information regarding Tahoe Clarity Report for 2020

Courtesy UC Davis Tahoe Environmental Research Center and Tahoe Regional Planning Agency

Did COVID-19 affect measurements in 2020?

Secchi measurements continued throughout the pandemic, although one desired measurement could not be taken in March due to safety precautions and the mandatory stay-at-home orders.

Did the weather, wildfires, or high levels of visitation and recreation affect clarity last year?

Long-term (decadal) clarity trends don't respond to changes in a single year. The fires of 2020 did reduce the amount of solar radiation at Tahoe in August and September, but this is not believed to be enough to change the annual average clarity significantly. The high visitation is not believed to have impacted clarity, but the relatively dry winter and generally warmer year are believed to have impacted the thermal stratification which in turn trapped fine particles closer to the surface.

What is the plan to restore historic clarity within Lake Tahoe?

The Lake Tahoe Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) Program was initiated to develop a rigorous, science-based plan to better understand the causes of clarity loss, determine how much pollution needs to be reduced to reinstate historic clarity levels, and develop a workable, cost-effective implementation strategy. The plan is now in the implementation and tracking phase, with controls being implemented to reduce pollutant loading to Lake Tahoe. The Lahontan Water Board and Nevada Division of Environmental Protection are working closely with project implementers to track progress, report accomplishments, measure effectiveness, and adaptively manage implementation efforts. Learn more about the plan and track implementation progress of the program at clarity.laketahoeinfo.org.

What do clarity measurements tell us about the overall health of the Lake Tahoe watershed?

Clarity is an important indicator of the overall health of Lake Tahoe, because it can track multiple environmental factors, such as the amount of pollutants entering the lake. While it aggregates multiple factors, no single indicator can tell the whole story of the region's health. TRPA tracks progress of over 140 environmental standards to measure the overall health of the Tahoe region. Threshold categories encompass a range of indicators from forest health and wildlife to transportation and communities that are used to monitor the ecosystem as a whole. The Tahoe Regional Planning Agency launched a new [online threshold dashboard](#) this year that captures the work of many partner agencies and property owners working to improve the environmental

health of the Tahoe Region. Additionally, UC Davis researchers annually publish the State of the Lake Report that looks at lake clarity and many other measurements and processes. The 2020 report is expected this summer.

How does the lake's temperature affect its water clarity?

Temperature, or more importantly the distribution of temperature with depth, is very important. The vertical temperature difference, or thermal stratification, allows fine particles and algae to stay in suspension longer, which reduces the Secchi depth. It also makes it more difficult for the lake to mix deeply in winter and to bring up clear, cold bottom water. In 2020 the deep mixing only extended to 476 ft., in the 1,645 ft.-deep lake.