



## News Release

South Tahoe Public Utility District  
1275 Meadow Crest Drive,  
South Lake Tahoe CA 96150

Contact: Shelly Thomsen

[sthomsen@stpud.us](mailto:sthomsen@stpud.us)

530-543-6208

### OPINION PIECE: 2019 Highlights from your Water and Sewer District

South Lake Tahoe, CA (January 2, 2020) – Every day we wash our dishes, fill our water glass, and flush the toilet, likely without thinking much about the systems required to make this all possible. I'd like to think we are doing our job so you don't have to think too much about it. South Tahoe Public Utility District (District) works around the clock to maintain a complex water and sewer system in a challenging environment. We do this to ensure our community has access to safe, clean drinking water and reliable wastewater treatment that helps to protect Lake Tahoe. Looking back on my first year as General Manager, I'd like to share five key highlights of 2019.

- 1. Collaboration.** One of my initial goals was to work with my Board to evolve the District as a more visible and proactive community partner. With all of the agencies focused on protecting Lake Tahoe, it is imperative that we work together. This year the District worked with the City, County, and other partners to address affordable housing and modified our Administrative Code to decrease costs for new affordable housing developments. With our surrounding water suppliers and the Regional Water Quality Control Board, we helped bring in more than \$6 million in grant funds to address the groundwater contaminant (PCE) in the South "Y" area. We continue to partner with the California Tahoe Conservancy and other public utilities for basin-wide fuels reduction. We are also working with the TRPA, League to Save Lake Tahoe, and our other Tahoe Alliance partners to draft legislation and bond language to increase state and federal funding opportunities for Tahoe. We are working with nearly every local agency on climate change action planning and have just completed our first Climate Action Plan for the Capital Improvement Program.
- 2. Taking Care of our Water and Sewer System Assets.** Most of our water and sewer system was built in the 1950-1960s and needs significant upgrades which are extremely expensive. One of my initial goals was to work with my Board and staff to balance system needs with customer costs and staff capacity to do the job. This year we implemented programs that include better maintenance, thereby extending the lives of our assets. We are also making timely repairs to avoid expensive emergencies and are replacing or improving assets with a focus on value and efficiency. We are leveraging staff and using new technologies like never before, connecting our human intelligence with our system needs. The goal is to make quicker, better, more-informed decisions that protect the environment from system failures and allow us to operate in the most cost-effective manner possible.
- 3. Reliability.** We are upgrading our infrastructure to ensure we can treat wastewater during massive storms and provide water to fight fires during extended power outages. We worked to obtain two FEMA grants for more than one million dollars to install back-up power at 11 water tank storage sites and just completed a new emergency generator at the wastewater treatment plant. We also received a grant to complete fuels reduction on the 100 acres surrounding the wastewater treatment plant next summer.



4. **Conservation.** Just this past year, we purchased our first electric vehicle with grant funds, completed an energy audit of the wastewater treatment plant, and joined a regional effort to install large scale solar panels. We are currently completing a greenhouse gas assessment of our facilities, developing an energy efficiency tracking tool, and continue to look at ways to increase efficiency with operations and maintenance. By the end of next summer, our water system will be fully metered and all water customers will be able to view their water use and receive leak alerts by signing up at [mywater.stpud.us](http://mywater.stpud.us).
5. **Recognition.** In 2019, the District received multiple prestigious awards. Your wastewater treatment plant was recognized for Plant of the Year, Supervisor of the Year, and Laboratory Analyst of the Year by California Water Environment Association. Our Information Technology Department received the Excellence in Technology Practices Award from the Municipal Information Systems Association of California and our Finance Department received the Award of Financial Reporting Achievement by the Government Finance Officers Association. We also received the Transparency Certificate of Excellence from California Special District's Leadership Foundation. You have a talented, award-winning staff working for you!

Thanks to all for your support during my first year as General Manager. It has been a productive year and I am incredibly proud of our staff for their hard work to make sure our community has access to delicious Tahoe tap and reliable wastewater treatment. We perform an important mission in a challenging environment which requires a high performance work force, close alignment with our Board, and collaboration with other agencies and the entire community. This is your system!

Cheers to a wonderful new year and decade ahead!

John Thiel, General Manager

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