



## News Release

South Tahoe Public Utility District  
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### OPINION PIECE: 2020 Highlights from your Water and Sewer District

South Lake Tahoe, CA (December 29, 2020) – Back in the 1940s, before South Tahoe Public Utility District existed, sewage flowed directly into beautiful Lake Tahoe. Citizens rallied to sign a petition to form the District and this year marks our 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary. From a single septic field to an award-winning 7.7 million gallon per day wastewater treatment facility, with 100% recycled water and biosolids, a lot has changed over the years.

While 2020 has been a challenging year, the District made great strides in protecting our community from wildfire and improving the reliability, effectiveness, and efficiency of our system.

1. **Fire Readiness** – We made major progress toward protecting our facilities and our community from wildfire. We removed hazardous fuels on over 100 acres surrounding the wastewater treatment plant with grant funding and planning support from California Tahoe Conservancy. Our partnerships with the Conservancy and the US Forest Service continue to flourish as we develop fuels reduction plans at all remaining District sites for implementation over the next three years. We also installed 4,700 feet of new, upsized waterlines and new hydrants as part of our ongoing waterline replacement and fire flow improvement program.
2. **Community Partnerships** – This year we expanded our work with community partners to address challenging issues facing South Lake. We are working closely with the City, Tahoe Prosperity Center, and affordable housing developers to reduce project costs for new workforce housing. We are partnering with the Boys and Girls Club to reduce their new facility connection costs. Recognizing the future impacts of climate change in our region, we are working with the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency and the Conservancy on updating the regional green-house gas inventory and climate adaptation action portfolio. We continue to partner with Tahoe Keys and Lukins Brothers water districts to address PCE groundwater contamination at the Y as well as other water quality issues. And, we are actively working with TRPA, the League to Save Lake Tahoe, Tahoe Resource Conservation District, and fire agencies to advocate and obtain funding for local and regional interests at the State and Federal levels.
3. **Environmental Leadership** – Our Board adopted an Environmental Policy and initiated a System Efficiency Program to increase the cost-effectiveness and sustainability of the District's systems. We completed a green-house gas assessment which will serve as a benchmark for continued improvements. This year marks the 8<sup>th</sup> and final phase of installing 9,200 water meters on our system over the last ten years. Customers are now able to view their water use and receive leak alerts by signing up at [mywater.stpud.us](http://mywater.stpud.us). Our water conservation program has reduced water consumption by 20% over the last 10 years. Water is heavy and expensive to move, so saving water, also saves energy and money! We also completed our first major sewerline replacement project– fixing problems before they become expensive emergencies!
4. **Recognition** – You can be proud of the talented, high-performance staff working for you at the District. Just this past year, we received regional, state, and national recognition for exemplary



service. The American Society of Civil Engineers, Sacramento Section recognized our recycled water irrigation project in Alpine County with the Outstanding Engineering Project of the Year for 2019. The Tahoe Water Suppliers Association, of which we are a member, was recognized for both the 2020 Exemplary Source Water Protection Award from the American Water Works Association and the Spirit of TRPA award. We also received the prestigious Excellence in Technology Practices Award from the Municipal Information Systems Association of California for the sixth time and the Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting for the District's Comprehensive Annual Financial Report for the 25<sup>th</sup> consecutive year. An impressive set of accomplishments for sure.

5. **Looking Ahead** – At the District and for South Lake, I'm looking forward to 2021 with optimism and confidence - with a renewed strength built through the adversity of 2020. I see an acceleration of water system improvements, including fire suppression; an expanded fuels reduction program; more improvements and replacements to our 70-year old sewer infrastructure; and an expansion of our asset management program - connecting people with system data to make timely, cost-effective decisions and avoid expensive emergencies. I'm also excited about bringing a major solar project to reality in 2021 - a 4 Megawatt solar array that would provide our treatment plant with 100% clean, renewable power. We're also looking to expand this array to help provide a cleaner, more reliable power future for our community.

Like many of you, the pandemic has impacted our lives and our finances. As part of our COVID-19 response, as your community partner, our Board delayed rate increases, implemented a customer assistance program, and cut or delayed over \$2.3 million in current year spending. But our system continues to age and needs continued and expanding investments. We have a large, complex system for a little mountain town and financing improvements and replacements are a major challenge. So more than ever, we are looking for better ways to meet our challenges and deliver clean, reliable, uninterrupted, cost-effective water, wastewater, and recycled water services to you, your family, and our beautiful and sensitive environment.

With 70 remarkable years behind us, we are building on a legacy of world-class environmental protection and customer service. With your support and partnership, and with direction from our Board as your public utility, we will work hard for you every day towards continuous improvement to make the next 70 years our best ever. On behalf of District staff and our Board of Directors, we wish all of you a safe, healthy, happy, and prosperous 2021.

John Thiel, General Manager

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