

SENATE APPROVES RECORD \$50 MILLION FOR LAKE TAHOE

Monday, November 3, 2003

Washington, D.C. – The Senate this evening gave final approval to the highest annual amount ever allocated for the preservation of Lake Tahoe, \$50 million, as part of the Conference Report for the Department of the Interior Appropriations Bill. The report contains \$12.3 million in environmental projects for the lake set aside by Senator Harry Reid and \$37.5 million from land sale proceeds from Clark County under legislation authored by Senator John Ensign.

“This legislation guarantees \$300 million for Lake Tahoe’s restoration, an unprecedented commitment to the future of the lake, which comes at a time when we have all been reminded of the danger fires can pose,” Ensign said. “Federal, state, and local agencies, as well as residents of Lake Tahoe and environmental groups, have come together on this bill to help ensure Lake Tahoe’s beauty is maintained for generations.”

“Our collaborative effort to save Lake Tahoe is paying off,” Sen. Reid said. “Real progress has been made improving the water quality at the Lake, and the trust fund Sen. Ensign and I secured will help build on those efforts. With the devastating fires raging in California, I think the fire risk reduction funds will be especially important in our efforts to protect the lake and the surrounding communities. Sen. Ensign worked especially hard to ensure that we are investing the full amount authorized in the Lake Tahoe Restoration Act.”

Ensign’s legislation amends the Southern Nevada Public Land Management Act of 1998, which he authored in 1998 as a member of the House of Representatives, so that restoration activities in the Lake Tahoe Restoration Act of 2000 can be funded by land auction proceeds in the Las Vegas Valley. The money derived from land auctions is paid by developers seeking surplus land in Clark County. Ensign’s legislation sets aside \$300 million over the next eight years for water clarity, erosion control, fire suppression, and other projects to reverse the decline of Lake Tahoe’s famous clarity.

Over eight years, the average annual expenditure will be \$37.5 million. Ensign’s legislation for the first time guarantees a dedicated revenue stream for Lake Tahoe, whereas the past process was subject to budget fluctuations, borrowing by the Forest Service to pay for firefighting, and annual congressional appropriations that varied.

“With this legislation, we’ve been able to maintain funding for the protection of environmentally sensitive lands in Southern Nevada, while using a small portion of that money to protect Lake Tahoe for the benefit of all Nevadans,” Ensign said.

Having been approved by the Senate, the legislation now goes to President Bush for his signature.