

With Love, From Tahoe

*Stories About Simple Things We
Can Do To Protect Lake Tahoe*



Written & Illustrated by
KRISTEN SCHWARTZ

*With Love, From Tahoe - Stories About Simple Things
We Can Do to Protect Lake Tahoe*

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This is a work of fiction representing documented behavior. The characters are fictional. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, is coincidental.

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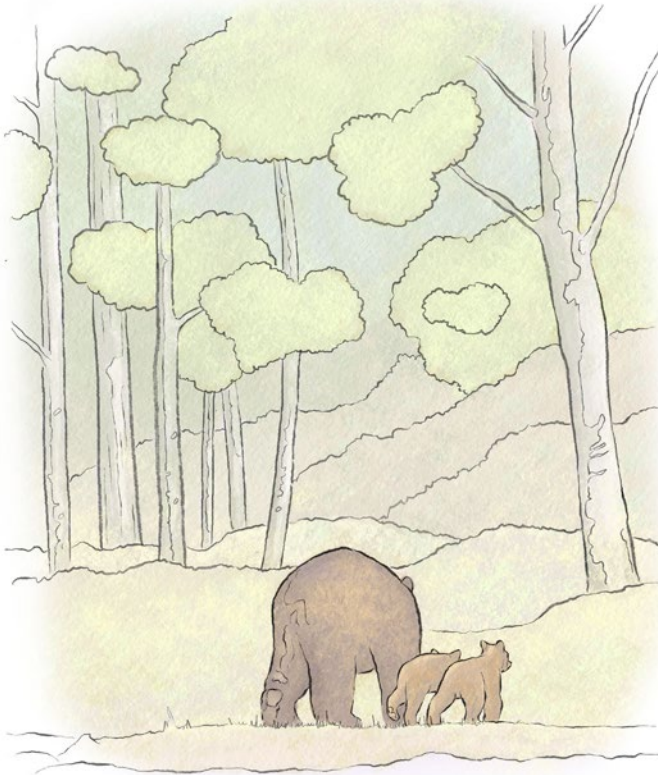
Book Design/Layout: Kristen Schwartz

First Edition: April 2024

This book was partially funded by a micro-grant from the City of South Lake Tahoe Arts, Culture, and Tourism (ACT) Commission.

With Love, From Tahoe

*Stories About Simple Things
We Can do to Protect Lake Tahoe*



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For Lake Tahoe

*To my family and friends who gave feedback,
spread the word, and encouraged me:
Thank you from the bottom of my heart. I
couldn't have done it without you.*



*I'm grateful to the South Lake Tahoe Arts, Culture,
and Tourism (ACT) Commission for the micro-grant
and everyone who contributed to this book.
I appreciate you all immensely.*

STEWARDSHIP

: the thoughtful and responsible protection of something entrusted to one's safekeeping and care.

INTRODUCTION

Lake Tahoe is visited by millions of people from around the world every year. It is the homelands of the Waší·šiw (*Wa she shu* - Washoe) Tribe—first people of Dáꞑaw ꞑága (*Da ow aga* - Lake Tahoe). The lake is approximately two million years old. At its deepest, it is 1645 feet and holds about 41 trillion gallons of luminous blue water. It offers a 75-mile shoreline, stunning views, wildlife, and vast trails to explore. But so much human activity threatens it. People are getting too close to wildlife. The lake has high amounts of microplastics. Volunteers recently pulled over 8000 pounds of litter from one mile of beach. If you love Lake Tahoe, you want to protect it from this harm.

That's why I created this book. I've been an illustrator and storyteller in Tahoe for over 35 years. I wanted to use those skills to help people understand our issues in a caring way. While much information tells us what not to do here, we're rarely told why. I included the reasons in this book because they're crucial for making wiser choices.

I read research and reports and spoke with

experts about what harms Lake Tahoe. I dove into why certain behaviors are harmful and what to do instead. Then, I surveyed locals about their experiences, observations, and feelings about each topic. From all this, I created short, illustrated stories with fictional characters. They offer a shift of awareness without being overwhelming and simple things we can do to protect Tahoe.

If you love Lake Tahoe, you're ready for stewardship. We can't get around the fact that we impact our environment. But we can be more mindful and lessen it in ways that fit each of us. In doing so, we will also develop a better connection and balance with nature in Tahoe and everywhere we go.

Whether you live in Tahoe or visit, I hope you learn something new from this book and share it. One of the most essential things people can do is talk about the issues and share information. I've also included references for each story and resources to explore further. Together, we can protect Lake Tahoe so future generations can enjoy it.

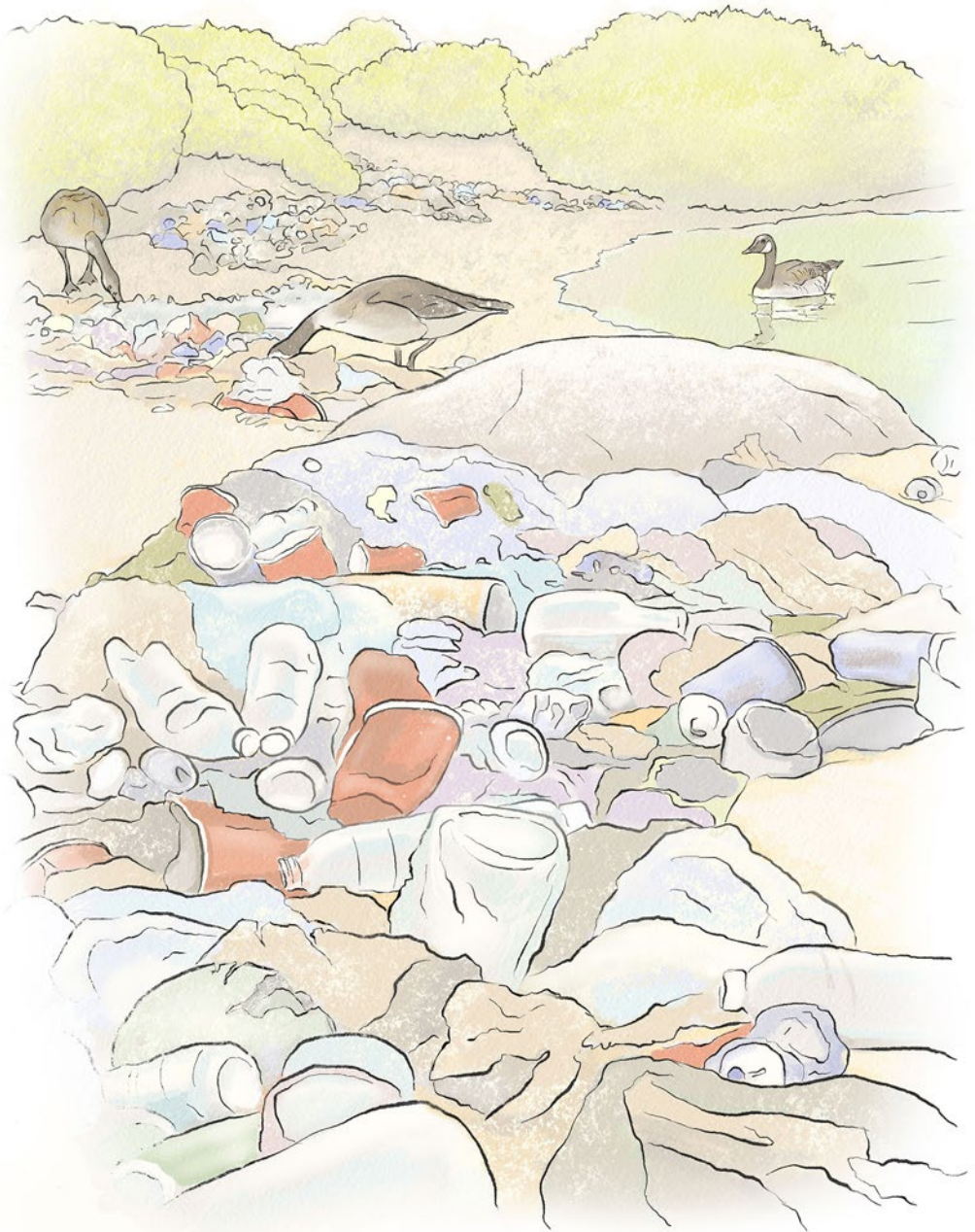
—Kristen Schwartz

SUSTAINABILITY

I have so many fond memories of visiting Lake Tahoe as a child. I wanted my kids to experience it, too. But I soon realized that it may not be the same beautiful place for much longer.



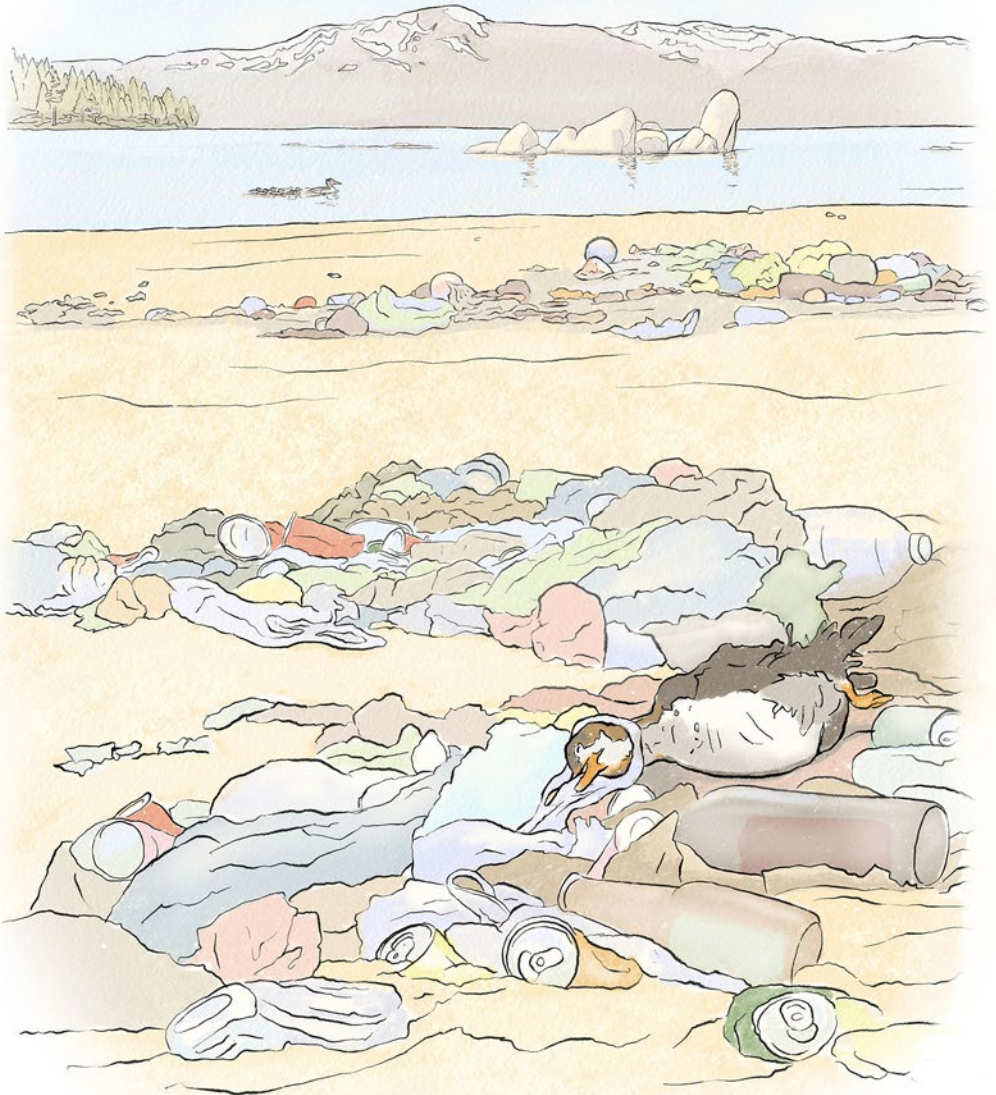
When we arrived at the beach, we were devastated.



Instead of heading down to the water for a swim,
we joined the beach cleanup.



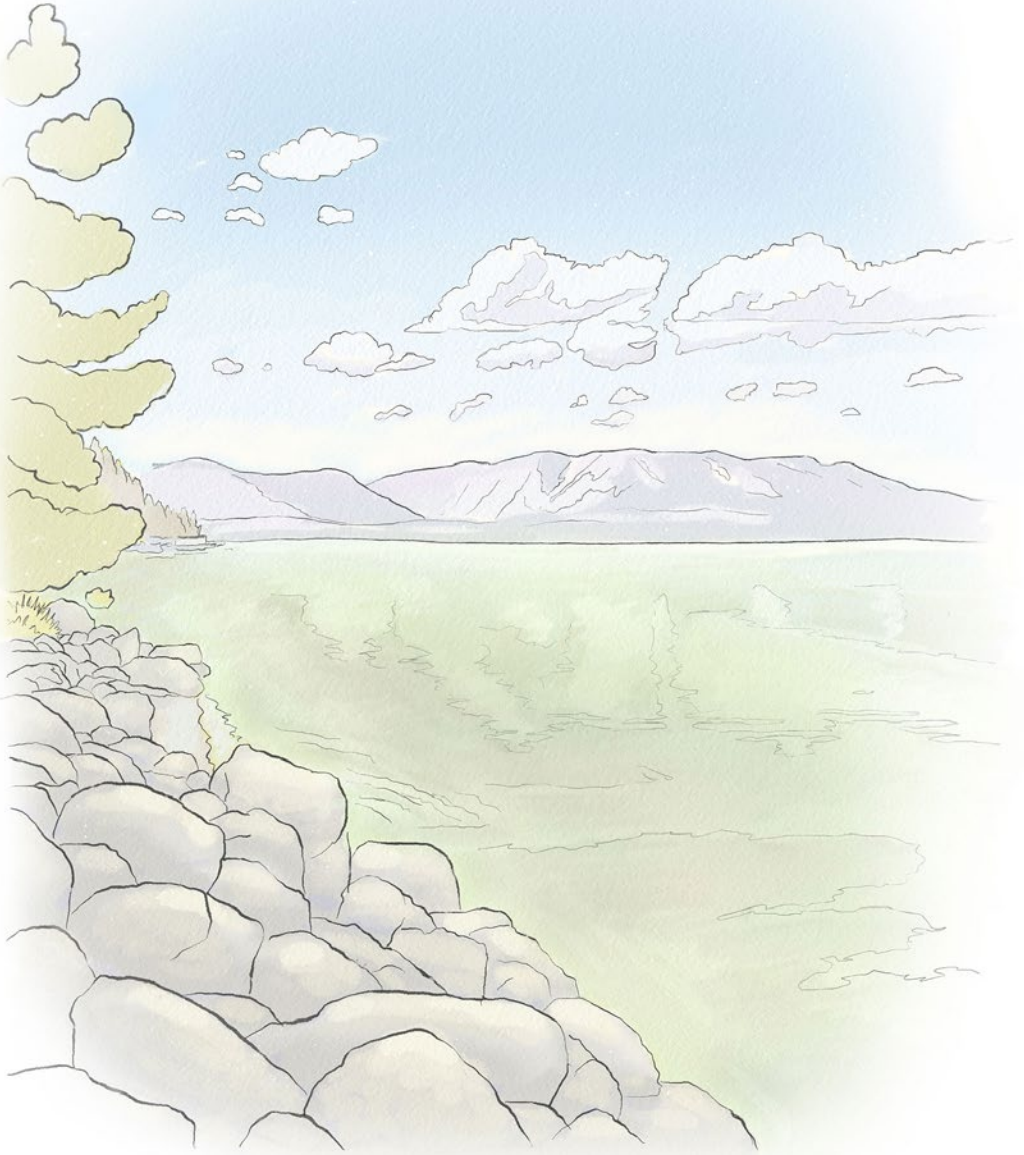
We picked up endless plastic bottles, cups, and wrappers.
The organizers explained that the litter can be deadly to
wildlife that eats it by mistake.



It also ends up in the lake, adding toxins, increasing algae growth, and decreasing clarity.



The color of the lake tells us a lot. It's essential to keep it blue because that means it's healthy. Too much algae makes it green and murky.



They also pointed out large amounts of cigarette butts—some still burning. We learned they're not just paper and tobacco. They contain long-lasting chemicals and plastic harmful to nature.



Seeing all that trash changed us. Now, we buy less plastic and carry reusable utensils and water bottles everywhere. And we decided to help clean up Tahoe whenever we're there.



Nothing will be left for future generations if we don't all pitch in.

VOLUNTEER FOR TAHOE AREA CLEANUP DAYS:

[North Shore](#)

[Tahoe City River Cleanup](#)

[South Shore](#)

[Various Areas](#)

[Sierra Club](#)

Search for more cleanup days online, or create your own with friends and family.

MICROPLASTICS

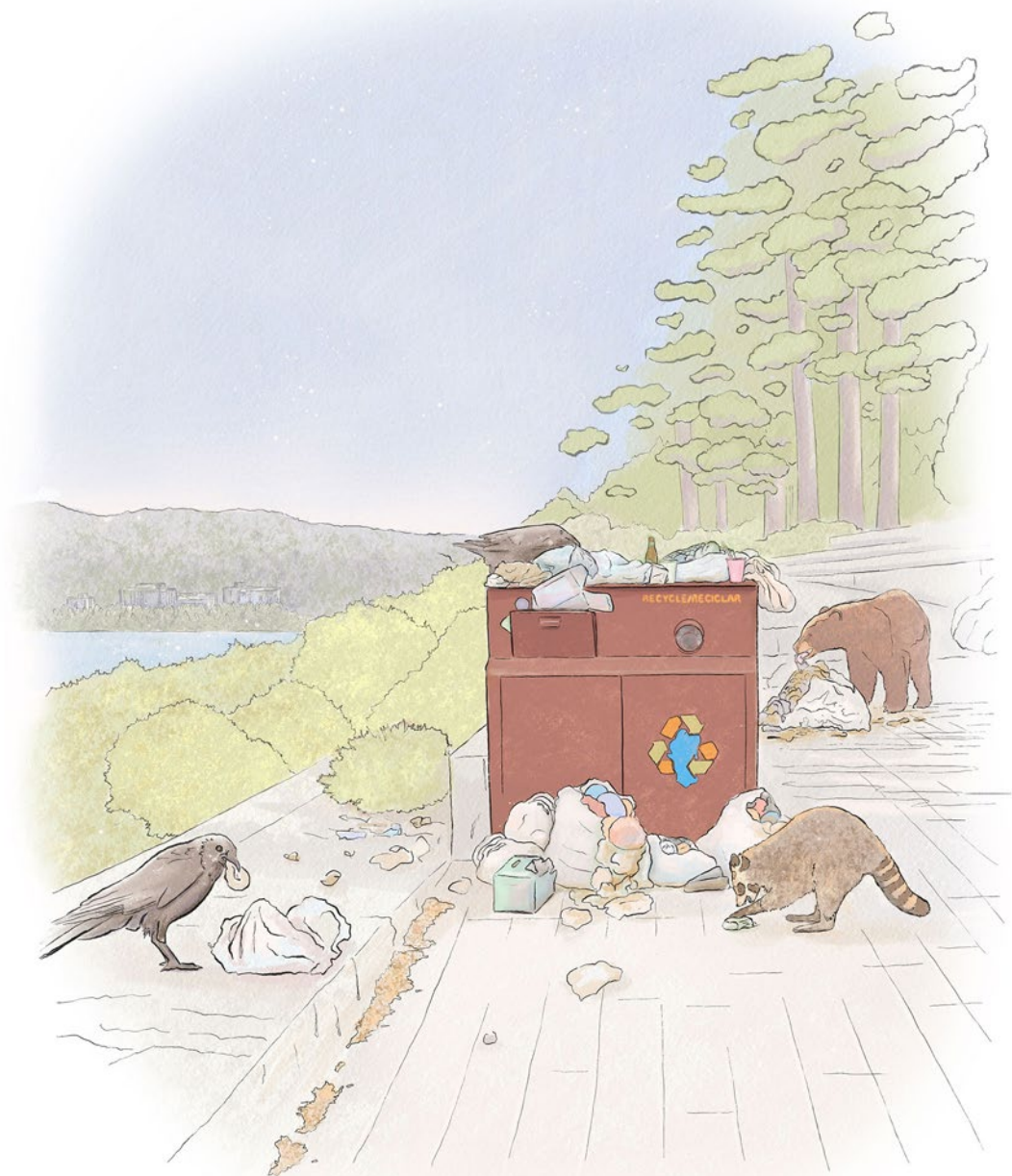
I didn't think we were littering. When a dumpster is full at home, you set your trash beside it, and someone takes it away.



But the next day, trash was scattered everywhere.
People gathered to clean it up, so we did, too.



While we worked, we learned a lot from the locals. They told us the wind scattered some trash, but bears, raccoons, coyotes, and ravens did the rest.



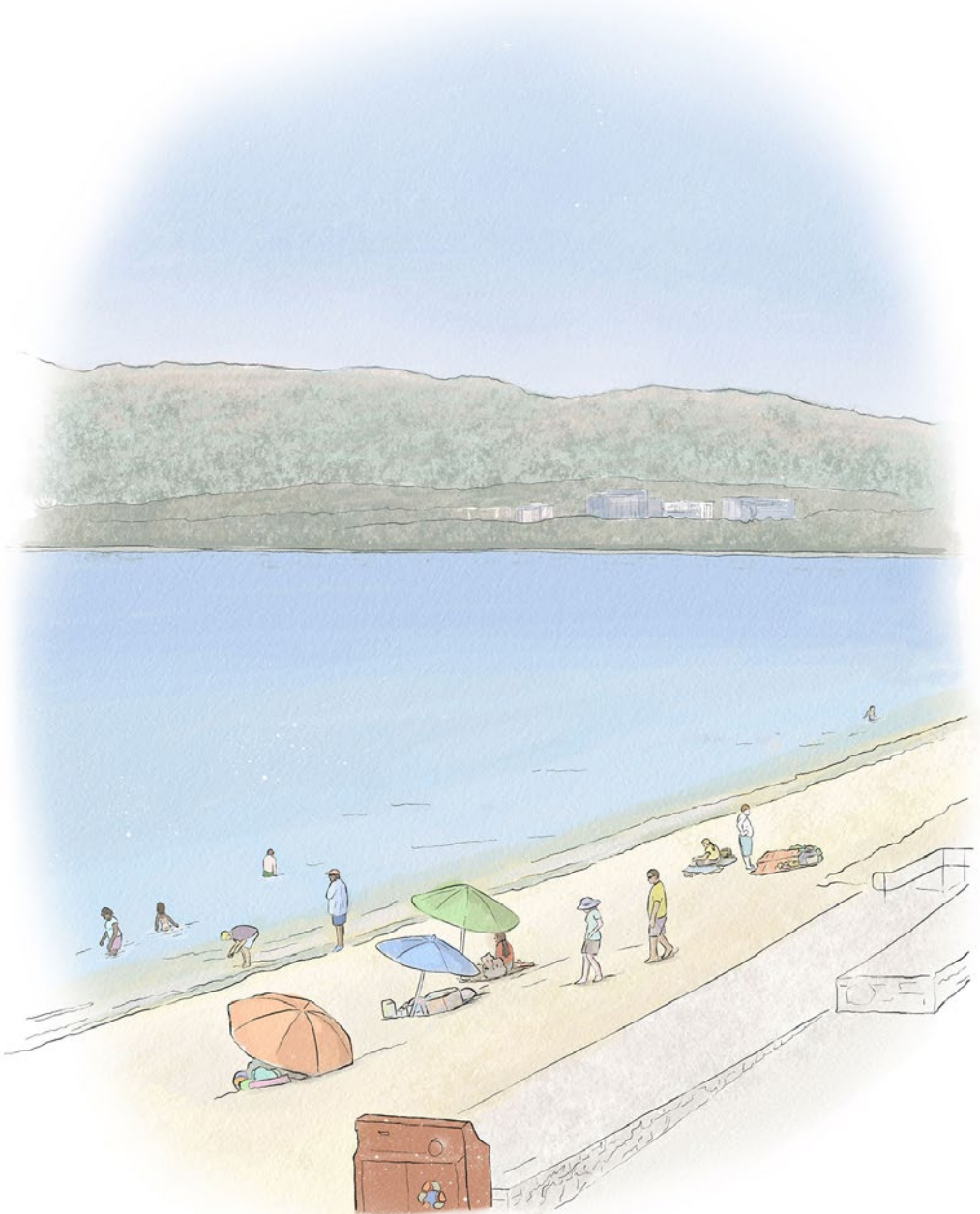
It smells like food, so they rip it apart and eat it, even if it's plastic. It's a dangerous habit that can make them sick or block their insides and kill them.



The plastic that stays in the sun breaks down into tiny pieces. Tahoe beach sand is full of it.



These microplastics act like sponges for other pollutants, harmful bacteria, and parasites. Microplastics are found everywhere now, including people and animals.



Of all the lakes in the world, Tahoe has the third most microplastics. It has higher concentrations than some of the huge garbage patches in the ocean.



That convinced me to carry a refillable water bottle and reusable trash bag everywhere. If receptacles are full, I use my bag until I find somewhere else to throw it away. And I pick up litter I find.



It's the least I can do!

TAKEOUT CONTAINERS AND SINGLE-USE PLASTICS FILL TAHOE DUMPSTERS.

Here are some ideas for alternatives:

- Use reusable containers for restaurant leftovers.
- Carry snacks in resealable/reusable bags.
- Skip the plasticware for takeout; use reusable utensils.
- Carry a refillable water bottle.

Share your ideas with others!

WILDLIFE

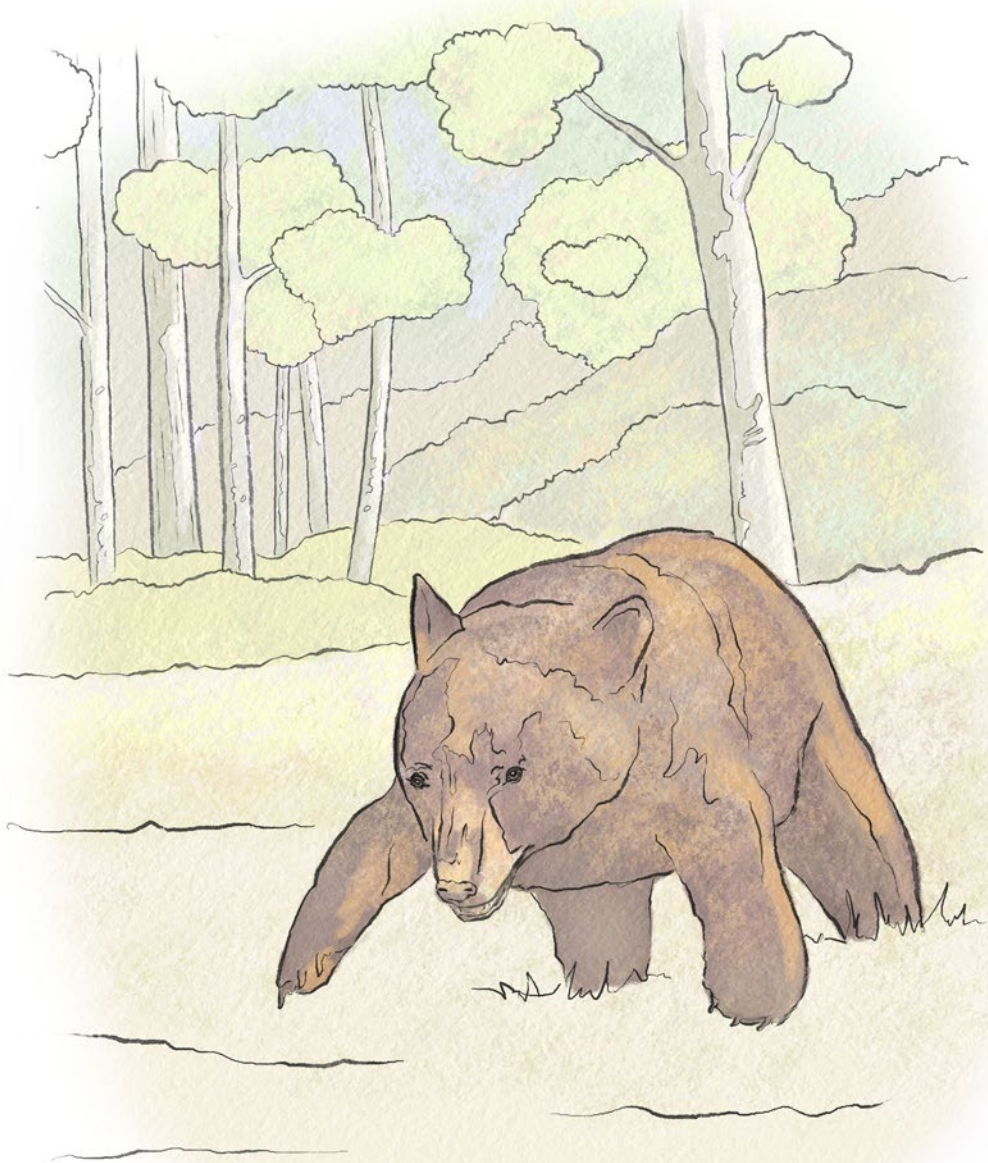
I did a challenge with friends to take as many selfies as possible with wildlife. We may have “accidentally” dropped food to get better photos.



In Tahoe, I got the most adorable photos of bear cubs.
They weren't afraid at all!



But then, out of nowhere, the mama bear came toward us, making scary noises!



Luckily, people nearby knew what to do. They also explained the problems with what we had done. Not only is it dangerous—it's against the law because it's harmful to wildlife and people.



When people get close to wildlife or feed them, they become too comfortable with us. It's called habituation. Habituated bears often break into homes, cars, and campsites for easy food.



But it prevents them from getting the foods from nature they need to survive.

Destructive bears that aren't afraid of humans are also dangerous. They are sometimes killed by authorities. Rarely does one get another chance in a sanctuary. That broke my heart.

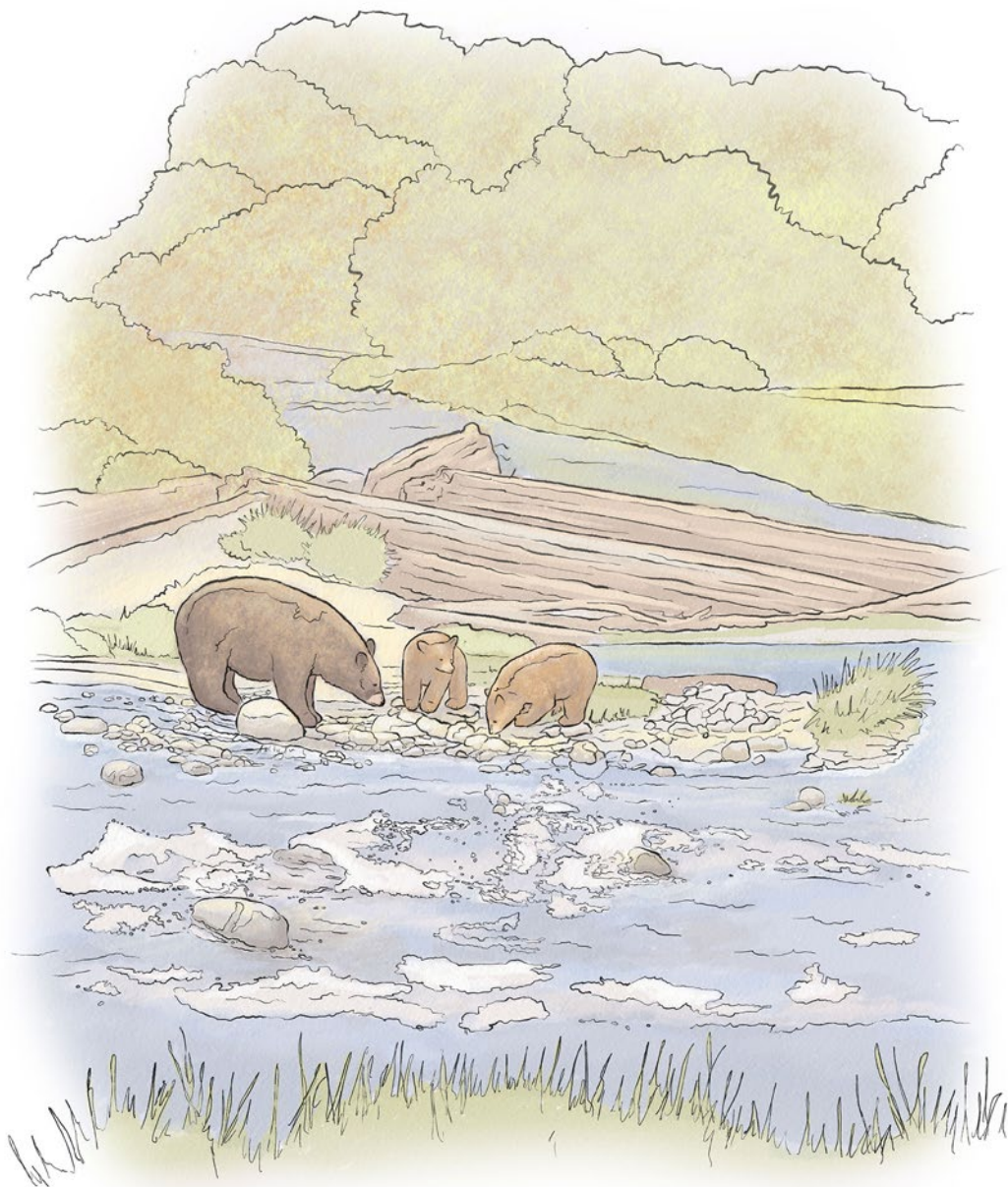


We saw so many others taking selfies like ours; it seemed harmless.



It wasn't.

Now, we keep our distance and zoom in for photos—
without food. Tahoe is a wildlife area.
It's essential to keep it wild.



**ALL WILDLIFE IS HARMED BY EATING
HUMAN FOOD AND TRASH.**

It can lead to ruined teeth, malnutrition, and death.
Learn more about storing food and garbage responsibly:

[National Park Service - You Can Help Keep Wildlife Wild
How to Keep Bears Wild](#)

Video: [Bear Facts & Tips](#)

CLEAN WATER

Never in a million years did I think I'd pick up my dog's waste in the forest. To me, it was natural; it would decompose and disappear. Coyotes poop in the woods, so why couldn't my dog?



But then I saw a dog poop bag in a bear's scat. I was shocked. It seemed unhealthy for a bear to eat dog waste and plastic. I didn't know what to think.

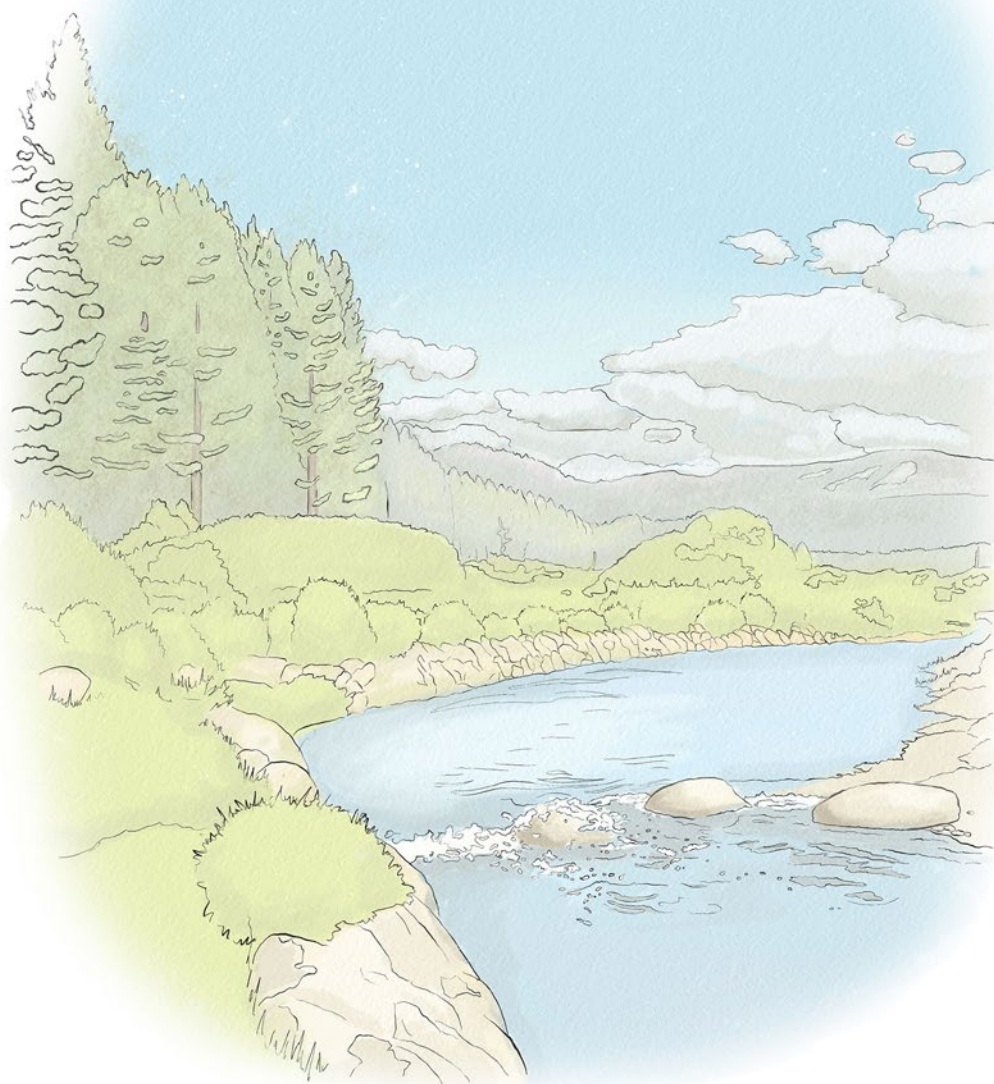


So, I asked a wildlife biologist. She said bears are attracted to what dogs eat, so their waste could be irresistible. But it's full of harmful bacteria, possible parasites, and diseases.

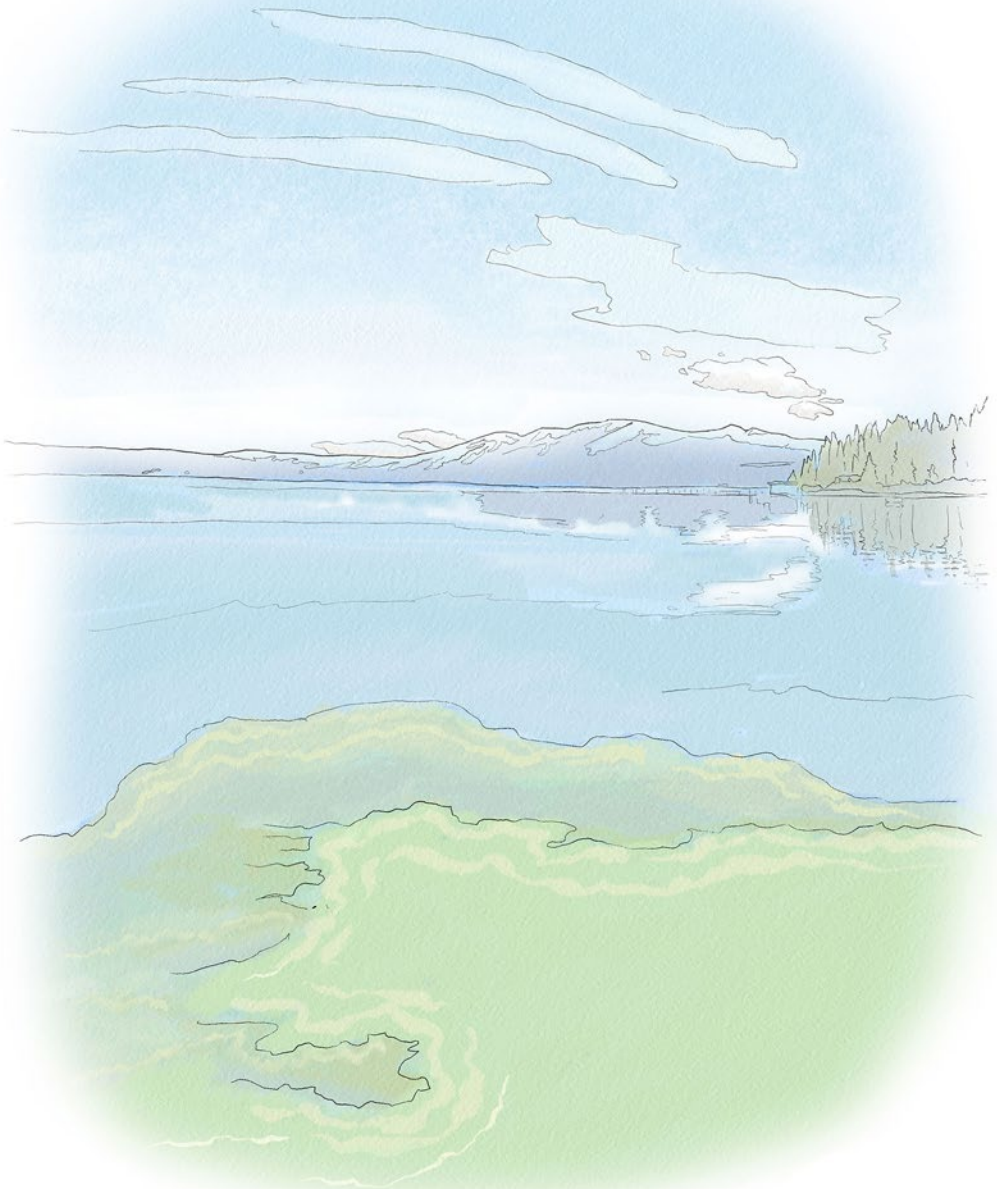


And eating plastic can be deadly.

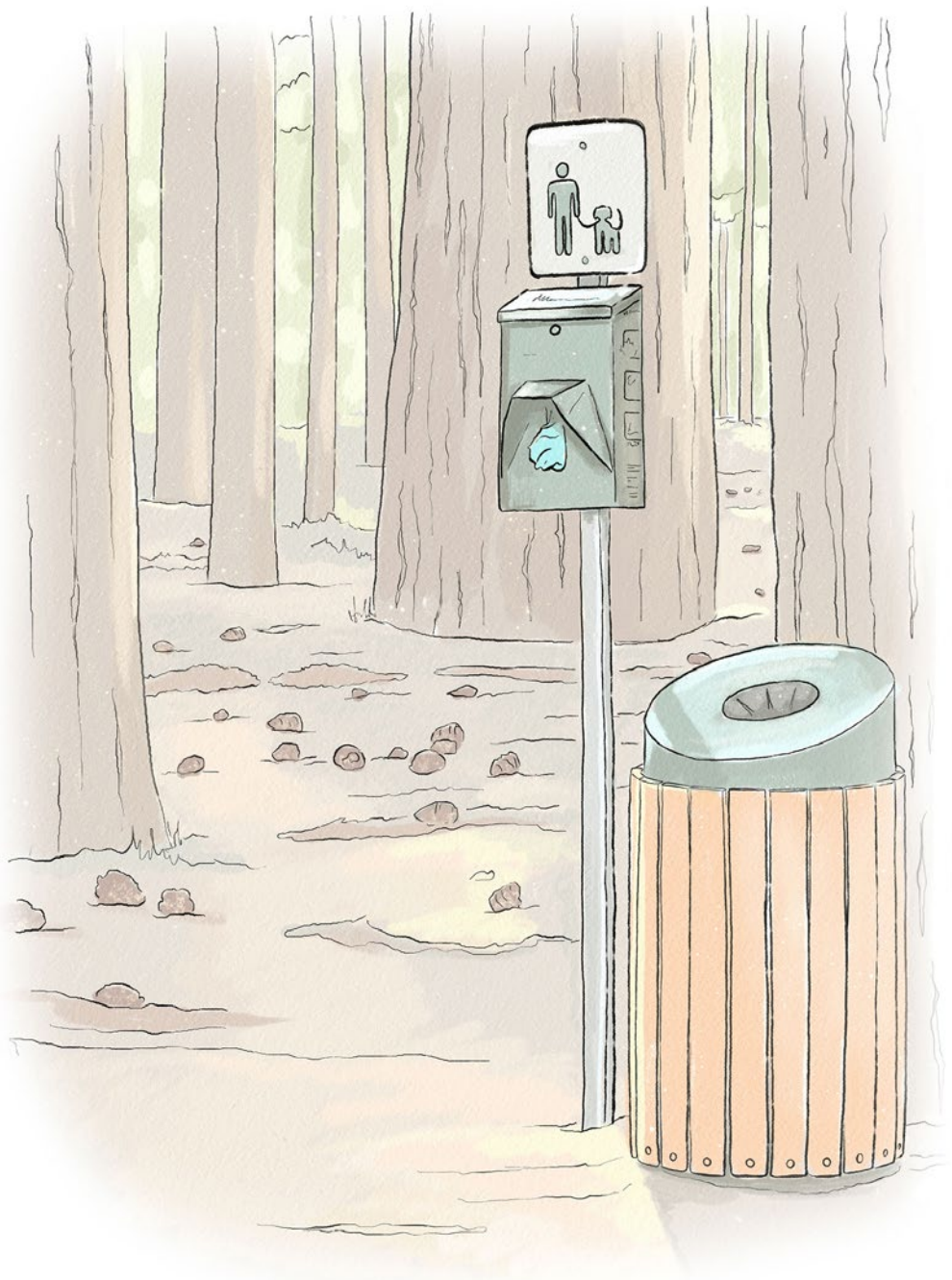
Plus, dog waste doesn't benefit nature, like scat from wildlife that eats from its environment.



Instead, dog waste seeps into our groundwater and adds nutrients supporting algae growth in the lake.



Still, I didn't want to use plastic dog waste bags because I avoid using single-use plastics.



Then she told me the Humane Society estimated that Tahoe Basin dogs create over 6 million pounds of poop annually! That's a massive burden on lake clarity and drinking water.



My mind was made up. Now I pick up my dog's poop—
but I use plastic alternatives whenever possible. And I
spread the word about everything I've learned.



SINGLE-USE PLASTIC DOG WASTE BAG
ALTERNATIVES:

- Plant-based compostable bags (industrially compostable)
- Plastic bags or wrappers already headed for the trash
- Paper

Come up with your own ideas, or
search online for more!

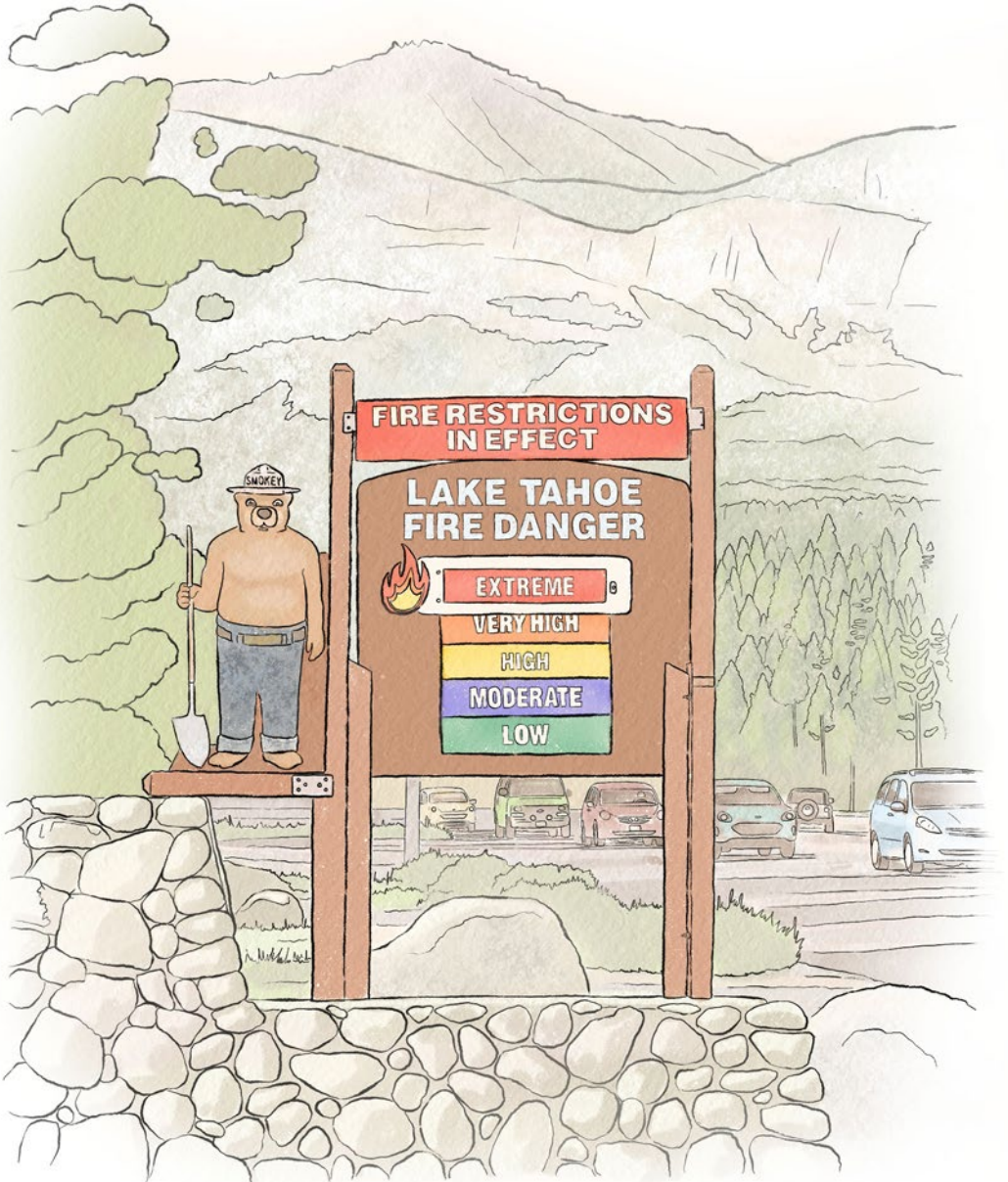
*If carrying full dog waste bags is difficult, use a special
pouch, cylinder, clip, or dog packs.*

WILDFIRE

Fire restrictions aren't for people like me. I know how to handle fire. Or that's what I thought before I rented a house in Tahoe.



Fire danger signs on the road said extreme, but the stores all had wood and charcoal for sale. How bad could it be?
It wasn't even windy.



So, I unloaded my firewood and got my campfire going.



I was only inside for a minute when a big gust of wind came up. The campfire erupted, and sparks rose into the trees.



I ran outside to get the fire under control, but the wind whipped around, fueling the flames.
I couldn't contain it.



Embers burning in the trees were too high up to reach. Flames continued spreading.



Luckily, neighbors reported the fire, and the fire department arrived in time. I got a big lecture about how fast wildfires grow and spread in these conditions—like the Caldor fire.



I also got a hefty fine and community service.

I had never lost control of a fire before. It was terrifying. Now I understand why fire restrictions exist.



I help others understand, too.

KNOW THE CURRENT FIRE RESTRICTIONS:

[Lake Tahoe Basin
Find Your Fire District](#)

SOAK, STIR, AND FEEL TO EXTINGUISH CAMPFIRES SAFELY:

1. Soak the fire with water.
2. Stir with a shovel.
3. Feel for heat with the back of your hand.
4. Repeat as needed. It must be cool to the touch before leaving it unattended.

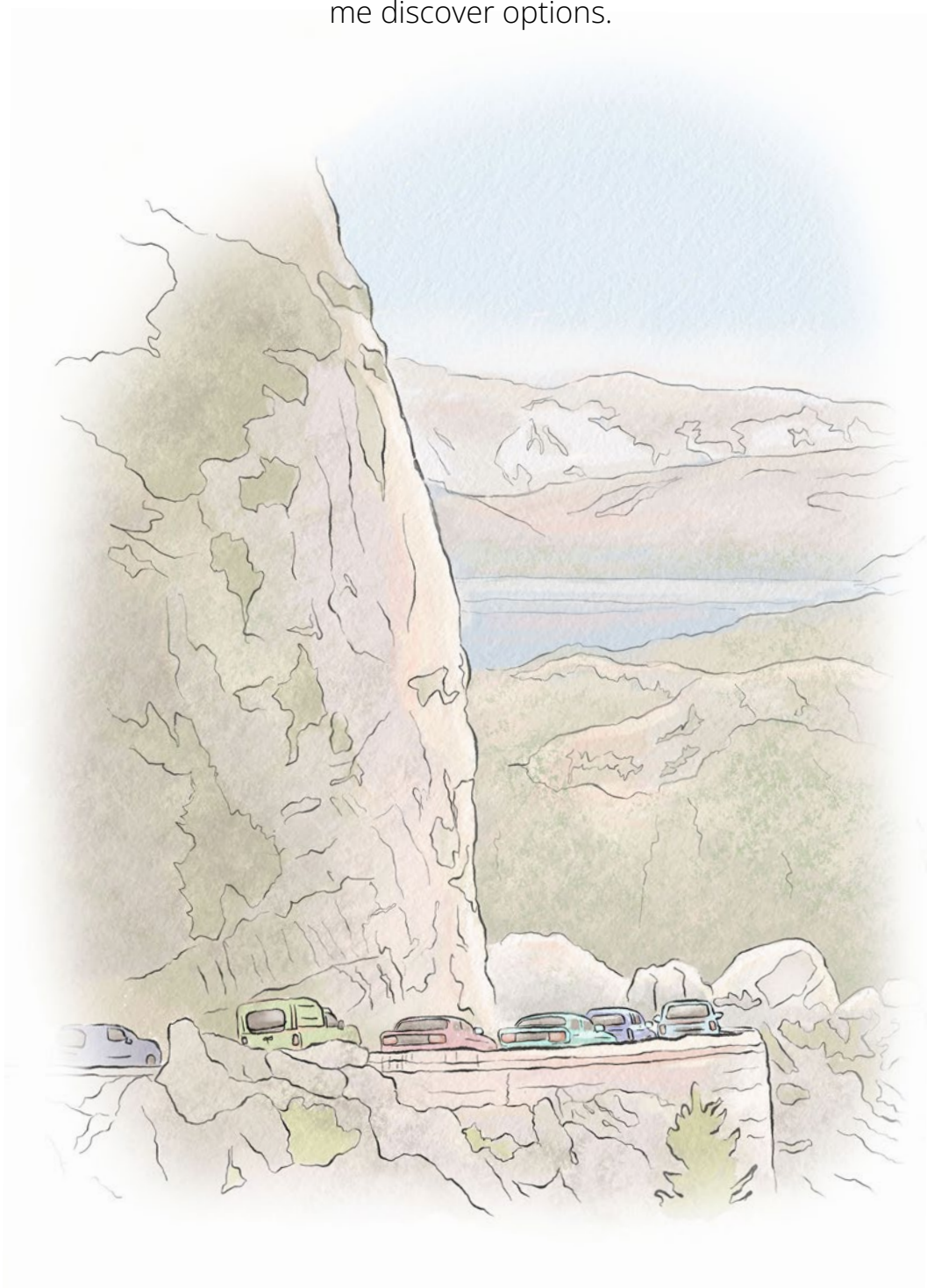
[Campfire Safety Tips](#)

FIRE DANGER LEVELS:

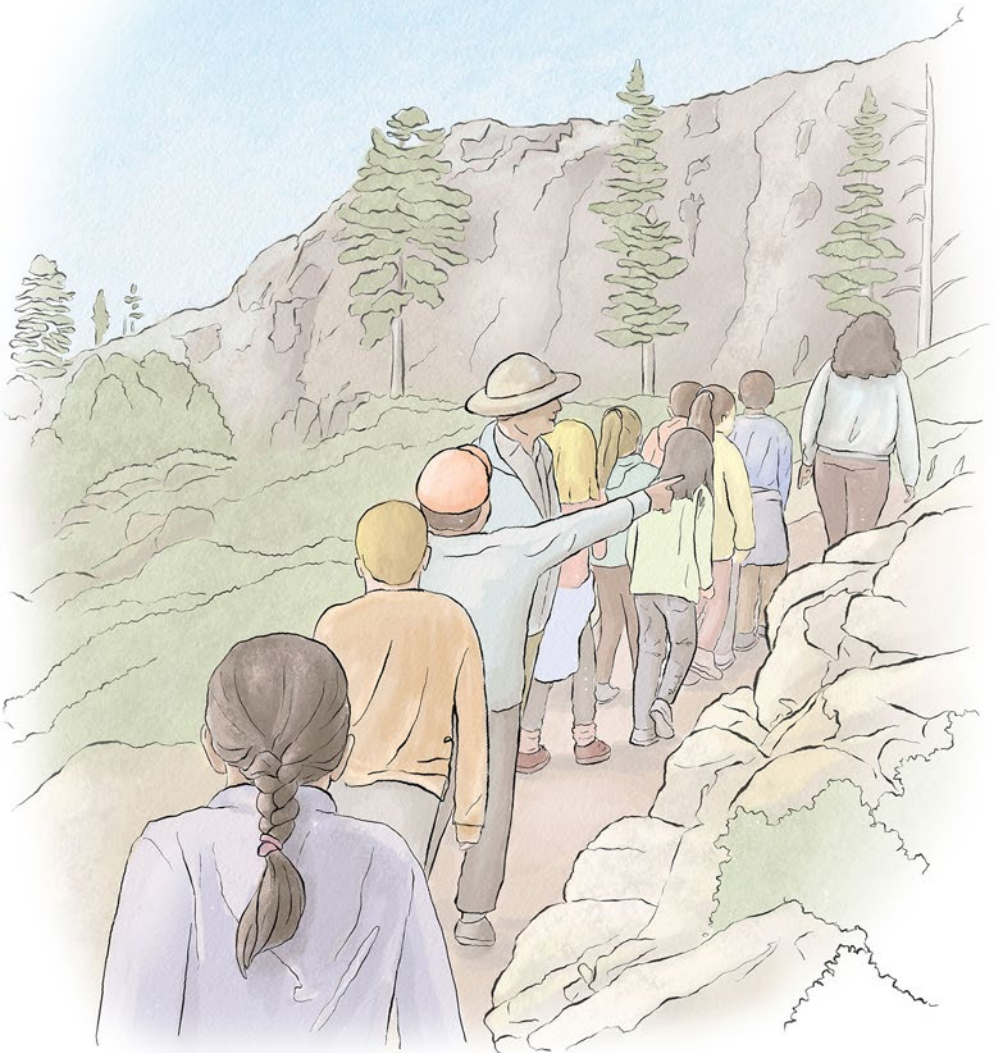
[National Fire Danger Rating System Explained
Understanding Fire Danger](#)

POLLUTION & CLIMATE CHANGE

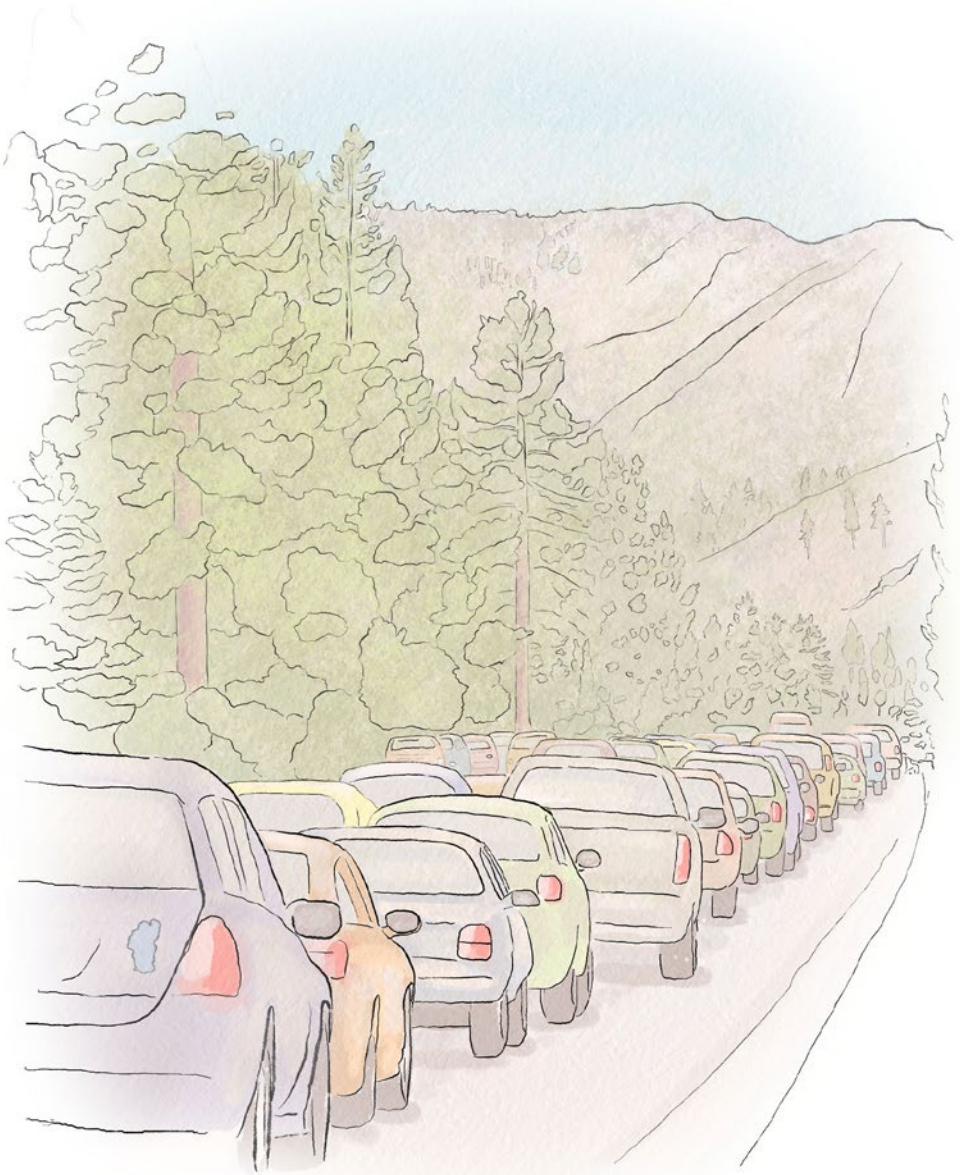
Climate change overwhelmed me. I felt terrible about driving. But it was how I got into nature to stay healthy. Last month, a group of Tahoe kids helped me discover options.



After being stuck in traffic for hours, I met my friends at the trail. We ended up behind a field trip discussing climate change.



They said gas-burning cars create carbon dioxide (CO₂) that heats the Earth. A hotter planet releases more CO₂, making it even hotter, which releases more CO₂—and so on.



It's changing Tahoe.

Fewer days are cold enough for snow. So, there's more rain and flooding in winter. Wildfires are bigger and happen more often.



Millions of people visit Tahoe in gas-burning cars that pollute the air. Rising temperatures increase pollution. This hurts people, wildlife, and lake clarity.

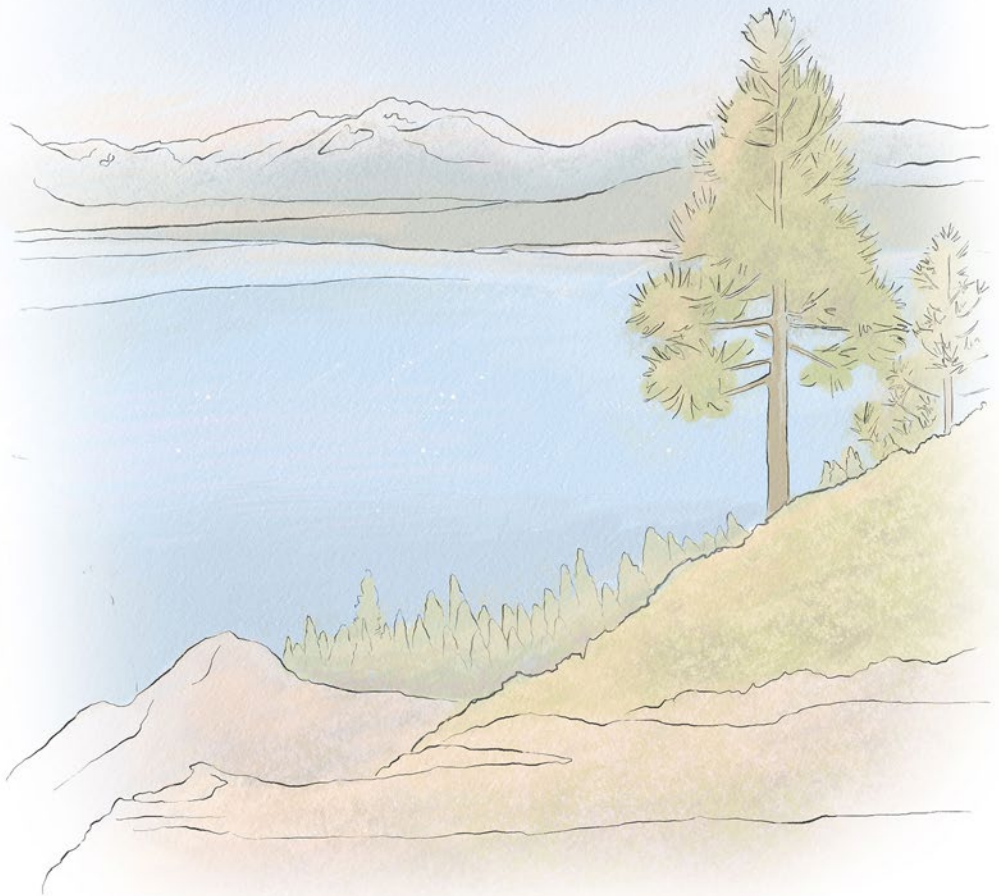


The kids shared ways to reduce CO₂ and pollution. Walking, biking, shuttles, buses, and avoiding traffic were some ways. The trail guide said some options aren't possible for everyone.

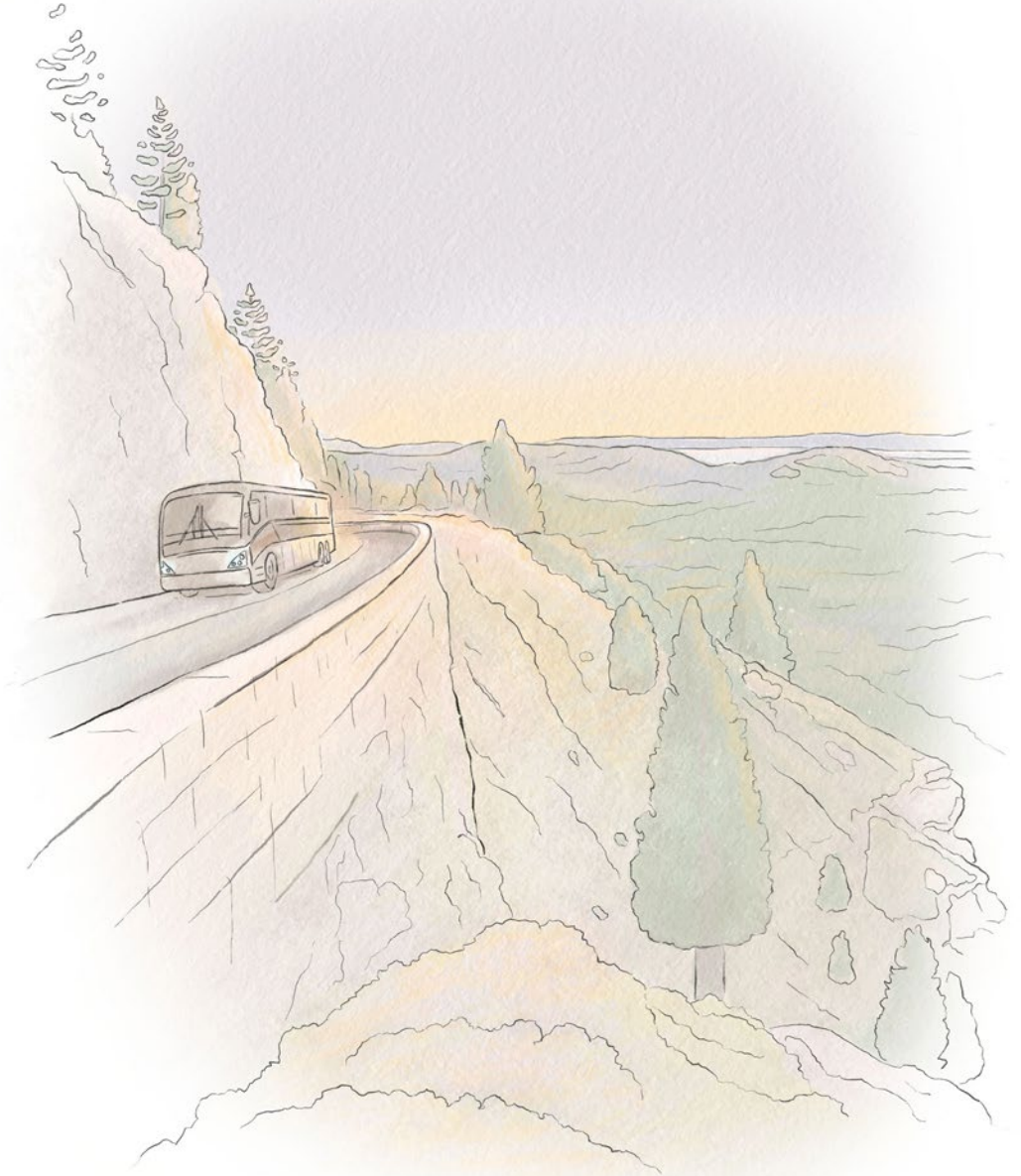


We all have to find our best way.

That's when I realized I could do better about driving
without giving up what's essential.



These days, my friends and I help each other use less fuel. We plan to carpool, group our errands, stay out of traffic, and use driving alternatives—especially in Tahoe.



RESOURCES TO HELP YOU FIND THE BEST WAY TO
BURN LESS FUEL IN TAHOE:

[Interactive map of bike trails, multi-use paths,
and bike shops](#)

[North Shore Interactive Transit Map](#)

[South Shore Transit Information, Travel Methods and
Route Planning](#)

[All Areas](#)

Search Online For More Resources.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR/ILLUSTRATOR

Kristen Schwartz has lived and played in Tahoe with her family for over 35 years. Her business is in web presence and SEO. After hours, she's an illustrator and storyteller, creating stories about how humans affect nature.

Connect:

[Instagram](#), [Website](#)

FURTHER EXPLORATION

FIRST PEOPLE OF LAKE TAHOE

[Herman Fillmore Washoe Presentation - Video](#)

[History and Culture of the Washoe Peoples - Video](#)

[The Homelands of the Washoe People](#)

[Wa She Shu: The Washoe People Past and Present](#)

[The Washoe: First People of the Lake](#)

[Washoe Stewardship of Lake Tahoe](#)

ORGANIZATIONS

[BearWise](#)

[California Environmental Protection Agency](#)

[California State Parks](#)

[California Tahoe Conservancy](#)

[Clean up the Lake](#)

[Clean Tahoe](#)

[Desert Research Institute \(DRI\)](#)

[Forest Service: Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit](#)

[Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board](#)

[Lake Tahoe Bicycle Coalition](#)

[Lake Tahoe Wildlife Care](#)

[League to Save Lake Tahoe](#)

[Leave No Trace](#)

[Nevada Department of Wildlife](#)

[Nevada Division of Environmental Protection](#)

[Nevada State Parks](#)

[Nevada Tahoe Conservation District](#)

[Reusable Reno](#)

[Sierra Club](#)

[Sierra Nevada Alliance](#)

[Sierra Wildlife Coalition](#)

[Sugar Pine Foundation](#)

[Tahoe Fund](#)

[Tahoe Institute of Natural Science \(TINS\)](#)

[Tahoe Interagency Bear Team \(Keep Tahoe Bears Wild\)](#)

[Tahoe Living With Fire](#)

[Tahoe Regional Planning Agency \(TRPA\)](#)

[Tahoe Resource Conservation District \(Tahoe RCD\)](#)

[Tahoe Rim Trail](#)

[Take Care Tahoe](#)

[UC Davis Tahoe Environmental Research Center \(TERC\)](#)

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

[Be a Citizen Scientist: Report Observations to Protect Lake Tahoe!](#)

[Lake Tahoe Summit](#)

[Tahoe Toogee](#)

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MICROPLASTICS

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WILDLIFE

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CLEAN WATER

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WILDFIRE

“I got a big lecture about how fast wildfires grow and spread in these conditions—like the Caldor fire. I also got a hefty fine and community service.”

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POLLUTION & CLIMATE CHANGE

“They said gas-burning cars create carbon dioxide (CO₂)

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