

California Tahoe Conservancy
Agenda Item 11
September 16, 2010

NORTH TAHOE BIKE TRAIL PLANNING GRANT

Summary: Staff recommends authorization of a planning grant of up to \$435,000 to Placer County (County) for the North Tahoe Bike Trail (NTBT) project in order to increase and enhance recreational and alternative transportation opportunities on Tahoe's north shore.

Location: The project is located north of State Route 28 between Dollar Hill and Tahoe Vista in Placer County, California (Attachment 1).

Fiscal Summary:

Recommended Tahoe Conservancy Grant:	\$435,000
North Lake Tahoe Resort Association (existing funding):	<u>\$200,000</u>
	\$635,000

Source of Funds: Lake Tahoe License Plate and/or Proposition 84

Recommended Action: Adopt Resolution 10-09-07 (Attachment 2).

Background

The recommended action builds on prior California Tahoe Conservancy (Conservancy) authorizations to the North Tahoe Public Utility District (the District) for the NTBT. First presented to the Board in May of 1987 for conceptual review, the NTBT was envisioned as a Class 1 trail linking Tahoe Vista/Kings Beach to the Tahoe City trail system at Dollar Hill, filling in one of the last critical gaps on the north shore. In June 1988, the Conservancy authorized a grant of \$1,186,000 to the District for acquisition and related planning activities in support of the NTBT Project. This action was followed by two subsequent authorizations, in July 1990 (\$235,000) and July 1996 (\$80,000), funding additional acquisitions and evaluation of alternative routes for the trail. The acquisition grants funded easement purchases for a 30-foot trail right of way

at the 6,500 foot contour, as well as several full fee purchases of larger parcels to provide land coverage anticipated to meet the project's requirements.

The NTBT Project was approved by the District and permitted by the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency (TRPA) in 1991. The failure to secure construction funding caused the permit to expire and subsequent natural resources related issues triggered the need to evaluate the environmental effects of modifications to portions of the preferred route. In 2006, the Conservancy authorized an additional \$976,000 for continued project planning and preparation of a revised environmental document.

The eight mile NTBT comprises an important component of the Lake Tahoe Regional Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan and provides both recreation and transportation opportunities. The trail will provide access to natural areas on public lands, offer a route to scenic vistas, and – perhaps most importantly – provide an alternative transportation corridor, linking commercial areas, residential neighborhoods, and recreational facilities in the greater North Shore area.

In recent years, the State bond freeze, changes within the contracted consulting firm, and new planning requirements required revisions to the consultant's scope of work. The grant agreement with the District was set to expire in June of this year. As a result of these circumstances, on May 11, 2010, the District Board of Directors authorized its General Manager to "turn the task of obtaining environmental documents back to the California Tahoe Conservancy" for the NTBT project, while reaffirming that the District remains interested in supervising the construction and operation of the bike trail "if the environmental and funding hurdles for the project can be crossed." At the expiration of the grant agreement on June 30, 2010, \$587,892 reverted and staff has requested a re-appropriation of these funds through the budget process.

Staff is now recommending that the Placer County Department of Public Works complete an assessment and evaluation of the proposed project, as well as the environmental analysis and preliminary engineering phases of the project. The County staff has a long and successful history of completing projects in the Tahoe Basin with Conservancy funding. Currently, the County is constructing three Conservancy-funded projects, including one bike trail project, on Tahoe's north and west shores.

Project Description

The County is requesting up to \$435,000 to review all existing project documentation and recommend and implement a strategy for moving forward with the eight mile NTBT, or pursue a different and smaller, independent bikeway segment that extends the existing bike trail system or connects neighborhoods, communities, or destinations within the identified gap.

Previous planning for this project has resulted in identifying a preferred trail route alignment that has potential constraints and issues to address. An assessment and evaluation of the documents resulting from the past project planning efforts would include:

- 1) Confirming the preferred route alignment and trail type (or types), or proposing an independent smaller project, in consultation with project stakeholders;
- 2) Evaluating the constructability of the project with respect to topography, land coverage, land type and land use; and
- 3) Ascertaining the appropriate level of environmental documentation for the proposed action.

Following these steps, additional public scoping and preparation of environmental documentation pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and TRPA regulations is required. The potential need for environmental analysis prepared pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act depends upon whether portions of the trail are on federal land and construction funding sources. Once a CEQA decision has been furthered, the County will pursue engineering, design, and permitting for the project.

While the total eight mile length of NTBT comprises a component of the TRPA's Lake Tahoe Regional Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan, if the evaluation results in a shorter project that independently has value and bike trail network utility, it would also further the region's transportation goals. Consequently, a planning process that results in either the longer or shorter project furthers Regional Plan goals and meets the Conservancy's Public Access Program Guidelines and program objectives.

Initial Project Budget

Staff recommends Board authorization of a grant of up to \$435,000, with initial funding of the grant contract in the amount of \$300,000.

Direct project costs for a smaller project, as identified by the County, are as follows:

Task 1 – Assessment and Evaluation of Existing Materials; Development of Proposed Project Strategy	\$	30,000
Task 2 – Environmental Analysis	\$	100,000
Task 3 – Mapping, Engineering, Design, Specifications and Permitting	\$	140,000
Task 4 – Project Management/Administration, including contracting for consultants	\$	<u>30,000</u>
Total	\$	300,000

Up to \$135,000 can be added to the grant agreement should the assessment determine more extensive analysis is needed for a larger project and/or a more complex level of environmental documentation. Staff will inform the Board of any contract augmentation consistent with this staff recommendation and resolution in a future Executive Director's Report.

Project Implementation

Prior to signing a grant agreement for this project, the County Board of Supervisors will adopt a resolution as required by the Conservancy's grant guidelines. The County is prepared to commence work upon execution of the grant agreement. The Assessment and Evaluation phase is expected to take three to six months to complete, depending upon staff workload at the time of project initiation. If the County determines that an independent, smaller project is the preferred approach, the County anticipates completing the environmental analysis by December 2011, with design and permitting completed the following year. This schedule assumes that environmental documentation equal to a CEQA Initial Study/Negative Declaration and equivalent TRPA checklist will be sufficient to move the project into detailed design and construction permitting.

Should the County determine that the eight mile NTBT is feasible and the preferred project approach, then the type and complexity of the environmental analysis will likely require a higher level document. In this case, an additional year to complete the environmental analysis is anticipated (December 2012). Design and permitting could

then be completed the following year. A budget and scope review following the environmental analysis phase will determine whether the initial grant amount will be sufficient to carry out the design and permitting effort for the project.

Project Evaluation

The proposed project meets the Conservancy's Public Access and Recreation Program Guidelines and program objectives which were first adopted on December 19, 1986 and modified most recently on May 29, 2009. The project enhances significant regional public access and recreational opportunities by increasing and enhancing access to regionally significant areas and facilities.

The Conservancy seeks to fund projects that would help complete the regional bicycle network. While the Conservancy generally expects projects to meet the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) design standards, it may consider exceptions if a strong justification is made. In all cases, projects should seek to match the anticipated level of use with the environmental setting and desired recreational experience.

The project is consistent with the Lake Tahoe Region's Environmental Improvement Program, in addition to the the Regional Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan.

Completion of the NTBT can significantly enhance recreational and transportation opportunities by providing a linked series of bicycle trails from Tahoe City to past Dollar Hill, connecting TCPUD's ten mile Class 1 trail from Tahoe City to Sugar Pine Point State Park and the trail along the Truckee River. The project will also complement the Tahoe City Transit Center Project, which will provide bicycle connections to transit at the junction of these trails in Tahoe City.

Consistency with the Conservancy's Enabling Legislation

Implementation of this project is consistent with the Conservancy's enabling legislation. Specifically, Government Code sections 66905.2 and 66907.7 authorize the Conservancy to award grants to local public agencies, state agencies, federal agencies, federally recognized Indian tribes, the Tahoe Transportation District, and nonprofit organizations for purposes consistent with its mission, which includes providing public access or recreational facilities.

Compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA)

Pursuant to State CEQA Guidelines (Cal. Code Regs., title 14, § 15000 et seq.), certain classes of activities are statutorily exempt from CEQA or are exempt because they have been determined by the Secretary for Resources to have no significant effect on the environment. Pursuant to Public Resources Code section 21082, the Conservancy has also adopted regulations to implement, interpret, and make specific, the provisions of CEQA (Cal. Code Regs., title 14, § 12100 et seq.). Staff has evaluated this planning project, and has found it to be exempt under CEQA. This project qualifies for a categorical exemption under State CEQA Guidelines, section 15306 (information collection) and for a statutory exemption under section 15262 (feasibility and planning studies). A Notice of Exemption (NOE) has been drafted for the project (Attachment 4). If the Board approves the grant funding, staff will file the Notice of Exemption (NOE) with the State Clearinghouse pursuant to State CEQA Guidelines, section 15062.

List of Attachments:

Attachment 1 – Project Location Map

Attachment 2 – Resolution 10-09-07

Attachment 3 – Map of Possible Shorter Trail Alignment

Attachment 4 – CEQA Notice of Exemption

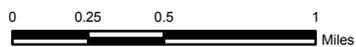
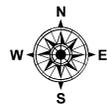
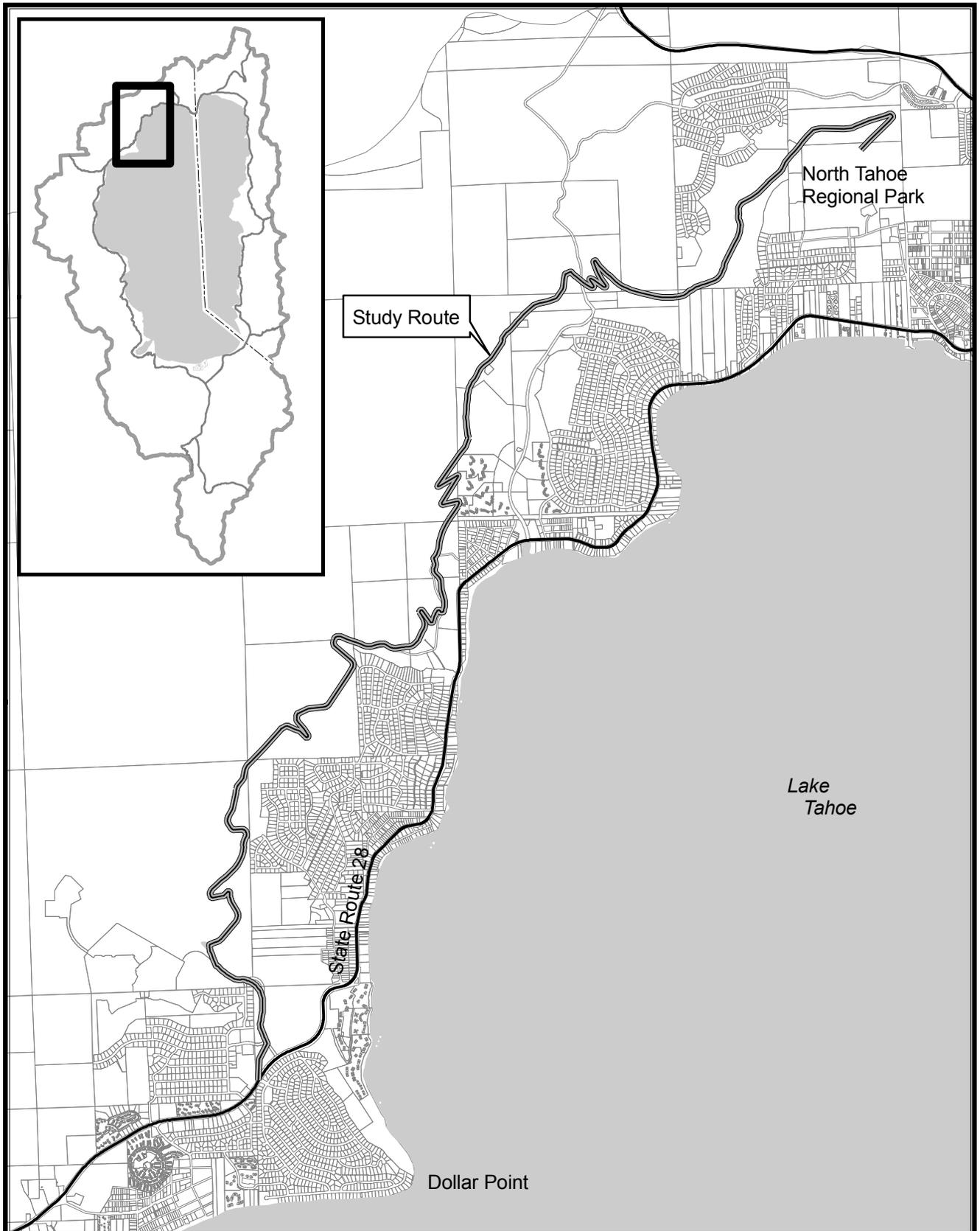
Conservancy Staff Contact:

Lisa O'Daly

Phone: (530) 543-6037

ATTACHMENT 1

North Tahoe Bike Trail



California Tahoe Conservancy

September 2010

Map for reference purposes only.

Sources: Placer County; TRPA



ATTACHMENT 2

California Tahoe Conservancy

Resolution

10-09-07

Adopted: September 16, 2010

NORTH TAHOE BIKE TRAIL PLANNING GRANT

Staff recommends the California Tahoe Conservancy make the following finding based on the accompanying staff report pursuant to Public Resources Code Section 21000 et seq.:

"The California Tahoe Conservancy has evaluated the project and has determined it to be categorically exempt from CEQA. The Conservancy hereby directs staff to file a Notice of Exemption for this project with the State Clearinghouse."

Staff further recommends that the Conservancy adopt the following resolution pursuant to Government Code sections 66905.2 and 66907.7:

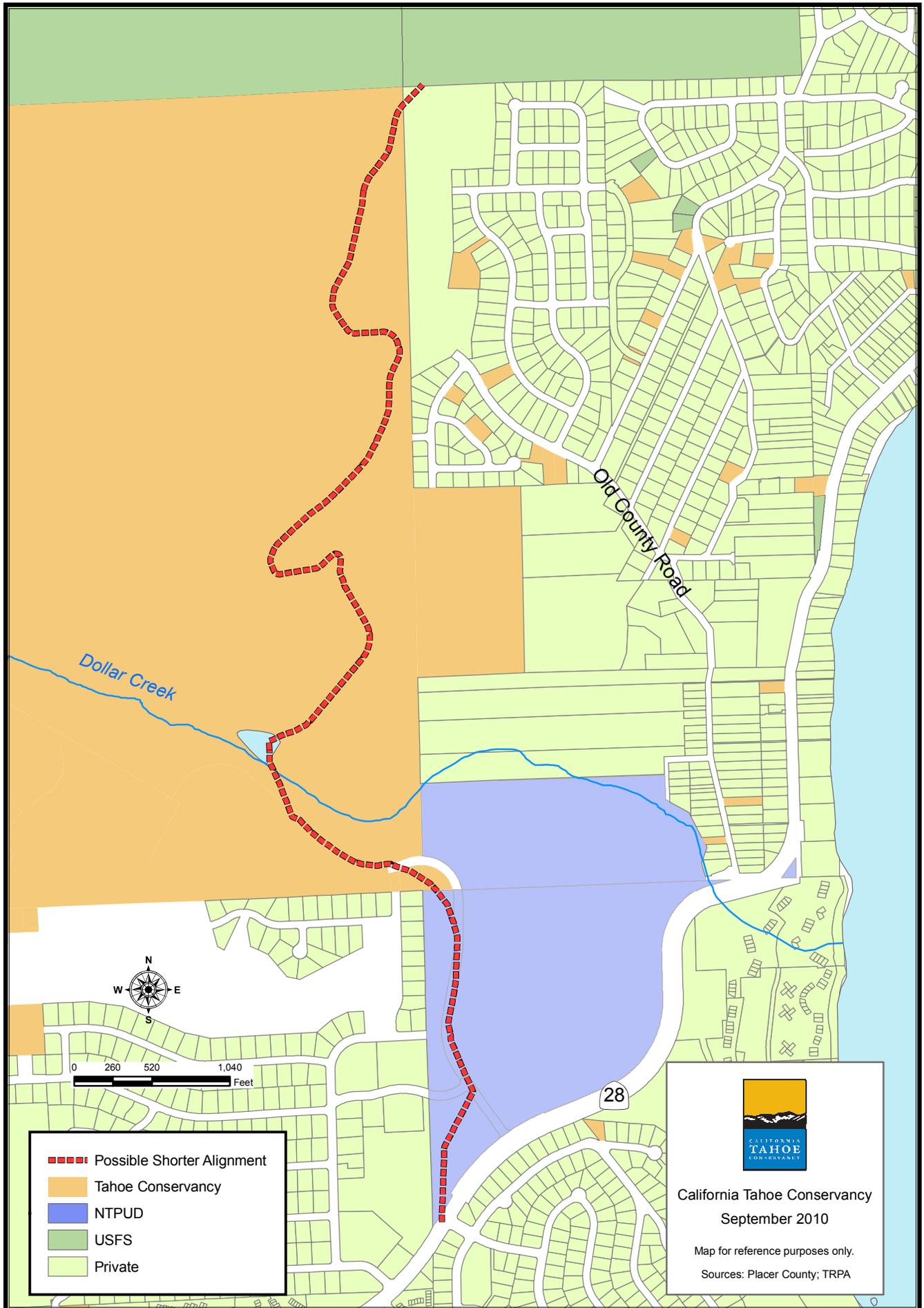
"The California Tahoe Conservancy hereby authorizes a planning grant of up to \$435,000 to Placer County to fund development of a preferred alignment and complete environmental analysis, design, and permitting of a bike trail located between Dollar Hill and Tahoe Vista."

I hereby certify that the foregoing is a true and correct copy of the resolution duly and regularly adopted by the California Tahoe Conservancy at a meeting thereof held on the 16th day of September 16, 2010.

In WITNESS THEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand this 16th day of September, 2010.

Patrick Wright
Executive Director

ATTACHMENT 3 Possible Shorter Alignment



ATTACHMENT 4

NOTICE OF EXEMPTION

To: Office of Planning and Research
1400 -10th Street, Room 121
Sacramento, CA 95814

From: California Tahoe Conservancy
1061 Third Street
South Lake Tahoe, CA 96150

Project Title:

North Tahoe Bike Trail

Project Location – Specific:

North shore of Lake Tahoe, Placer County, originating at the Dollar Point subdivision at State Route 28 and extending up to eight miles northeast towards Tahoe Vista.

Project Location – City:

Unincorporated Placer County, California

Description of Nature, Purpose and Beneficiaries of Project:

Authorization of a planning grant for preparation of environmental documentation and development of plans and permits for a bike trail located between Dollar Hill and Tahoe Vista in Placer County, CA. Grant of funding will plan a project which will improve the existing bicycle trail network connecting residential, commercial, and recreational areas of the North Lake Tahoe region.

Name of Public Agency Approving Project:

California Tahoe Conservancy (Conservancy Board meeting of September 16, 2010, Agenda Item 11)

Name of Person or Agency Carrying Out Project:

County of Placer Department of Public Works

Exempt Status:

Ministerial (Sec. 15073)

Declared Emergency (Sec. 15071 (a))

Emergency Project (Sec. 15071 (b) and (c))

Categorical Exemption, Class 6, section 15306 (information collection) and Statutory Exemption, section 15262 (planning and feasibility studies)

Reasons Why Project is Exempt:

Action involves information collection and planning for a recreation improvement project, and does not involve any discretionary actions with respect to project implementation.

Contact Person

Lisa O’Daly

Area Code Telephone

(530) 543-6037

Date Received for Filing:

Patrick Wright
Executive Director