

ATTACHMENT 3.2a

Johnson Meadows Acquisition

Grant Type: Acquisition Grant

Applicant: Tahoe Resource Conservation District

Recommended Funding: \$4,234,000

Location: This project is located on the Upper Truckee River Watershed, just south of U.S. Highway 50 and the Upper Truckee Marsh project area. (Attachment 3.2b)

Project Description

The Tahoe Resource Conservation District (Tahoe RCD) applied for Proposition 1 funding to assist in the acquisition of the Johnson Meadows Property (Property). The Property is situated in the floodplain of the Upper Truckee River (UTR) and is the largest privately owned meadow in the Lake Tahoe Basin. The Tahoe RCD plans to acquire fee title of the approximately 209-acre Property, comprised of El Dorado County Assessor Parcel Numbers 031-020-23, 031-020-46, 031-020-48, 032-090-12 and 032-090-14. The project includes removal of fences and an assessment of a pedestrian bridge over the UTR.

The total fair market appraised value is \$8,315,000, as approved by the California Department of General Services. The California Tahoe Conservancy (Conservancy) is assisting the Tahoe RCD to identify the remainder of the purchase funds. The Tahoe RCD is currently working with the owners to purchase the property before December 31, 2016.

Background and Context

The natural conditions of the UTR watershed have changed since its earliest discovery to the present day. Human activities such as logging, livestock grazing, gravel mining, fire suppression, and modern development (roads, golf courses, airport, and residential, commercial, and industrial developments) directly and indirectly affected the watershed. In the 1950s, the tourism economy expanded and increasing year-round and summer vacation populations occurred. The UTR was a major focus of this growth, as much of the surrounding valley floor, floodplains, and meadows were converted to

accommodate an airport, golf courses, subdivisions, and supporting infrastructure (e.g., bridges, sewer lines, roads).

This rapid development in the watershed began to take a toll on the ecosystem of the river and floodplain. Perhaps the most significant impact to the UTR was an underlying change to the natural processes that had formed and sustained the natural ecosystem and held the geologic landscape in equilibrium and relative stability over thousands of years. Originally, the UTR meandered through the middle of the Property's meadow and overtopped its banks regularly, depositing fine material onto the floodplain almost every year. Some time prior to 1940, the UTR was moved to the east side of the meadow and flows to the meadow were controlled for irrigation purposes.

Currently, most of the lower nine miles of the UTR before entering Lake Tahoe is in public ownership (Attachment 3.2c). The Conservancy originally acquired part of the Upper Truckee Marsh (Marsh) at the mouth of the river in 1988 through a legal settlement related to the Tahoe Keys development. The remainder of the Marsh was acquired by the Conservancy in 2000 from the Barton family. In 1999, the Conservancy acquired the Sunset Stables Property (Sunset Reach 6), which is contiguous to the Sunset Reach 5 portion of the UTR floodplain owned by the U.S. Forest Service. The City of South Lake Tahoe owns the Airport Reach and California State Parks owns the part of the UTR in Washoe Meadows State Park and Lake Valley State Recreation Area.

The Property is located between two large Conservancy owned parcels, the Upper Truckee Marsh and the Sunset Reach 6 property. The Property is the last large private property holding in the lower nine miles of the UTR. If acquired, the Property would connect over 1,000 acres of UTR floodplain in near continuous public ownership within the UTR's lower nine miles.

Project Evaluation

Acquisition of the Property is primarily for preserving wildlife habitat and public access to the UTR and surrounding public lands. Ancillary benefits will include cessation of prior grazing practices, preservation of open space, and removal of fences.

The Property forms a critical part of the UTR watershed and contains significant wildlife habitat, including river, riparian, meadow, and upland habitat areas. The Property also provides wildlife movement corridors that serve or could serve endangered and special interest species such as the willow flycatcher, bald eagle,

northern goshawk, osprey, black bear, deer, waterfowl, native fishes—Paiute sculpin, mountain whitefish, minnows (Lahontan redbreasted sunfish), speckled dace, Mojave tui-chub, Tahoe sucker, and the mountain sucker and Lahontan cutthroat trout.

Used as summer pasture in the family’s cattle business, the Property’s meadow has so far been protected from development (residential development is allowed by the current Tahoe Regional Planning Agency’s Plan Area Statement) due to staying in the family’s ownership. Recently, however, the family has discussed listing the Property for sale for residential development. Currently, the Property exists as the most substantial privately-owned segment of the UTR watershed.

Project Schedule

The Tahoe RCD is currently working with the owners to secure the property under a contract and anticipates completing the purchase on or before December 31, 2016.

Project Budget

| <u>Activity</u> | <u>Amount</u> |
|----------------------------------|--------------------|
| Property Acquisition | \$4,215,000 |
| Phase 1 Environmental Assessment | \$ 3,500 |
| Closing Costs | \$ 2,000 |
| Due Diligence | \$ 3,500 |
| Structural Assessment of Bridge | \$ 10,000 |
| TOTAL | \$4,234,000 |

The Conservancy funding will provide a match to leverage the remainder of the purchase price from other potential funding sources, including California Department of Fish and Wildlife and Wildlife Conservation Board. Authorizing the acquisition grant demonstrates to potential funding partners the importance of this project to the Conservancy, statewide and regional priorities, and the Lake Tahoe Environmental Improvement Program.

The final budget amounts may vary between individual items from those shown, but the total expenditures for the Project will not exceed the grant award.

California Environmental Quality Act Compliance

Pursuant to State California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines (Cal. Code Regs., tit. 14, § 15000 et seq.), certain classes of activities are statutorily exempt from CEQA or are exempt from CEQA because they have been determined by the Secretary for Natural 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., tit. 14, § 12100 et seq.). Staff has evaluated the project, and has found it to be exempt under CEQA. This project qualifies for a categorical exemption under CEQA Guidelines sections 15313 (acquisition for wildlife habitat and public access preservation) and 15304 (minor alterations to land), and the Conservancy's CEQA regulations, sections 12102.13 and 12102.4. A Notice of Exemption (NOE) has been prepared for this project (Attachment 3.2e). If the Board approves the grant funding, staff will file the NOE with the State Clearinghouse pursuant to State CEQA Guidelines, section 15062.

Attachments

Attachment 3.2b – Location Map
Attachment 3.2c – UTR Public Ownership
Attachment 3.2d – Resolution 16-03-03.2
Attachment 3.2e – Notice of Exemption

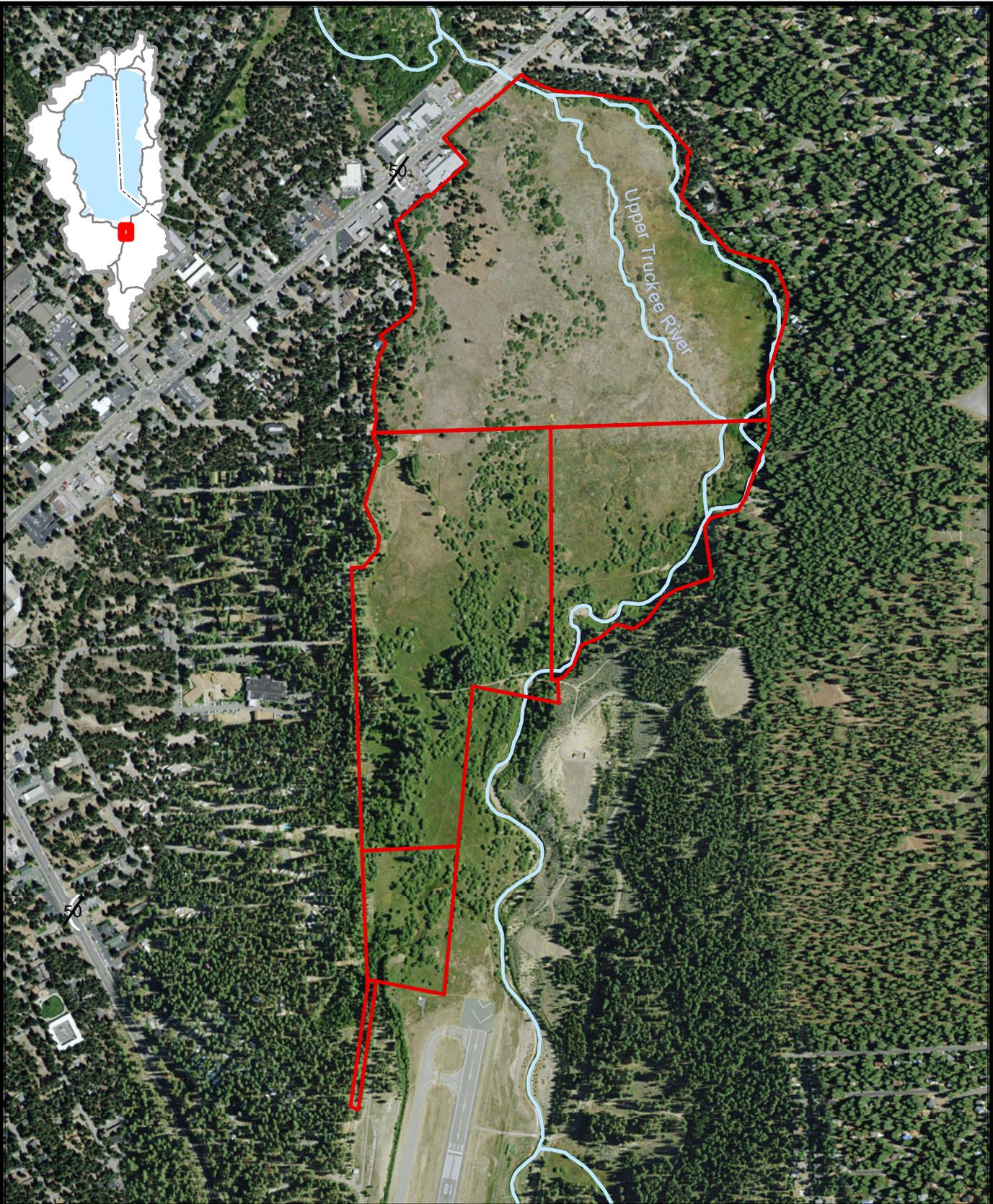
Staff Contact

Aimee Rutledge

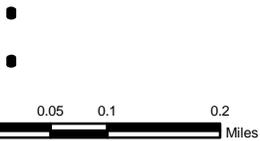
530-543-6067

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ATTACHMENT 3.2b
Johnson Meadow Aerial



 Johnson Meadow



California Tahoe Conservancy
March 2016

Map for reference purposes only.
Sources: TRPA; CTC



ATTACHMENT 3.2c

California Tahoe Conservancy

Resolution

16-03-03.2

Adopted: March 17, 2016

JOHNSON MEADOWS ACQUISITION

Staff recommends that the California Tahoe Conservancy adopt the following resolution pursuant to Government Code section 66907.7:

"The California Tahoe Conservancy hereby authorizes the award of an acquisition grant in the amount of \$4,234,000 to the Tahoe Resource Conservation District for the Johnson Meadows Acquisition and authorizes staff to take all other necessary steps consistent with the accompanying staff recommendation."

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 17th day of March, 2016.

In WITNESS THEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand this 17th day of March, 2016.

Patrick Wright
Executive Director

ATTACHMENT 3.2e

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:

Johnson Meadows Acquisition

Project Location – Specific:

This project is comprised of El Dorado County Assessor Parcel numbers 031-020-23, 031-020-46, 031-020-48, 032-090-12 and 032-090-14 which are located on the Upper Truckee River Watershed, just south of Highway 50 and the Upper Truckee Marsh project area as shown on the attached map.

Project Location – City:

South Lake Tahoe

Project Location – County:

El Dorado County

Description of Nature, Purpose, and Beneficiaries of Project:

Authorization of an acquisition grant to the Tahoe Resource Conservation District for the purposes of acquiring the Johnson Meadows property for wildlife habitat and public access purposes. The removal of four private encroachments will be required.

Name of Public Agency Approving Project:

California Tahoe Conservancy (Conservancy meeting of 3/17/2016) (Agenda Item 8a)

Name of Person or Agency Carrying Out Project:

California Tahoe Conservancy

Exempt Status:

- Ministerial (§ 21080 (b)(1); § 15268)
- Declared Emergency (§ 21080 (b)(3); § 15269 (a))
- Emergency Project (§ 21080 (b)(4); § 15269 (b)(c))
- Categorical Exemption, Classes 4 & 13, §§ 15304 and 15313 (See also Cal. Code Regs., title 14, §§ 12102.4 and 12102.13)

Reasons Why Project is Exempt:

The project provides a grant for acquiring approximately 200 acres to preserve wildlife habitat and public access to the Upper Truckee River and surrounding public lands. The removal of four private encroachments requires minor grading and removal of fences.

Contact Person:

Aimee Rutledge

Telephone Number:

(530) 543-6067

Date Received for Filing:

Patrick Wright
Executive Director

