

California Tahoe Conservancy  
Agenda Item 8.b.  
June 15, 2017

**LAKE TAHOE WEST NATIONAL FOREST FOUNDATION GRANT**

**Recommended Action:** Adopt Resolution 17-06-03 (Attachment 1) authorizing: 1) the acceptance and expenditure of a sub-award grant from the National Forest Foundation for up to \$238,884 for preparation of California Environmental Quality Act components of the Lake Tahoe West Restoration Partnership (Lake Tahoe West) joint environmental analysis; and 2) the execution of agreements and contracts, as necessary.

**Location:** The Lake Tahoe West planning area encompasses 59,000 acres of federal, State, local, and private land on the west shore of Lake Tahoe. (Attachment 2)

**Fiscal Summary:** Up to \$238,884 in reimbursements during the 2017/18 through 2020/21 fiscal years.

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**Overview**

**Description of Recommended Action**

The U.S. Forest Service, Pacific Southwest Region recently awarded a State Fire Assistance grant in the amount of \$300,000 to the National Forest Foundation (NFF) to support specific, non-federal components of the Lake Tahoe West planning effort. As part of this grant, the NFF has approved a sub-award grant to the California Tahoe Conservancy (Conservancy). The Conservancy, with the California Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR), requested funding to begin development of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) portions of the joint National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), CEQA, and Tahoe Regional Planning Agency (TRPA) environmental document for the Lake Tahoe West planning area.

Staff recommends the Board authorize the acceptance and expenditure of up to \$238,884. Staff also recommends authorization to enter into agreements and contracts, as necessary, to carry out the work.

The sub-award grant funding will be used to: 1) pay for Conservancy and DPR staff to participate in the Lake Tahoe West Documentation and Permitting Coordination Team (Team) that will define the type of CEQA documentation required as part of the joint planning process; 2) initiate the CEQA component of the joint environmental review process; and 3) begin developing the environmental document(s) to comply with CEQA.

Upon Board approval, staff will finalize the sub-award agreement with the NFF, and initiate an interagency agreement with DPR and any other contracts needed to implement the project.

## **History**

The Conservancy, with the U.S. Forest Service – Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit (LTBMU), DPR, TRPA, NFF, and the Tahoe Fire and Fuels Team, initiated Lake Tahoe West at the end of 2015 with the goal of restoring the resilience of Lake Tahoe’s West Shore forests and watersheds within ten years.

Lake Tahoe West represents a fundamental change in how agencies propose to plan, permit, manage, and protect their lands. This new paradigm of all-lands project planning represents a shift from the one-project-at-a-time-model that requires individual environmental documents and permitting for each project. The initiative is also shifting away from single-resource projects, and instead is using a science-based, interagency, and stakeholder collaborative process to develop a comprehensive approach to addressing forest health and resilience, watershed protection and restoration, wildlife management, and community wildfire protection. There are three primary drivers for moving from individual resource, individual landowner-scale projects to multiple-resource, landscape-scale planning:

1. The number of recreational visitors to the West Shore increases each year, meaning that more people are in the general forest, both heightening the chance of accidental ignitions and placing more people at risk during a wildfire.
2. The West Shore’s natural growth of vegetation and commensurate hazardous fuel is steadily outpacing the ability of land management agencies to complete project-by-project environmental reviews and treatments for the general forest.

3. Climate change is increasing the frequency of uncharacteristically large, high-severity fires in the Sierra Nevada.

Lake Tahoe West will produce the following milestone work products:

1. Phase 1: A quantitative assessment of the resilience of the West Shore's forests and watersheds;
2. Phase 2: A landscape restoration strategy to most effectively and economically restore a wide range of social and ecological values, based on linked climate, vegetation, fire, water, wildlife, air quality, smoke, and economic models;
3. Phase 3: A jointly-prepared environmental document that simultaneously meets NEPA, CEQA, and TRPA requirements that will lead to implementation of restoration projects that produce multiple benefits in the West Shore's general forest and Wildland Urban Interface;
4. Phase 4: Completion of project permitting that will allow for implementation of fuels and restoration treatments to begin; and
5. Phase 5: Implementation and monitoring of fuels and restoration treatments.

This NFF sub-award grant will support CEQA-related tasks under Phase 3.

## **Financing**

Conservancy staff will take steps to arrange any necessary augmentation to reimbursement authority in the 2017/18 Governor's Budget, as well as include the sub-award in any reimbursement authority requests submitted for the 2018/19 and/or 2019/20 fiscal years. Staff anticipate, subject to board approval, the \$238,884 will be spent over four fiscal years, beginning in the 2017/18 fiscal year and continuing through the 18/19, 19/20, and 20/21 fiscal years.

The Conservancy, through the California Department of General Services (DGS), currently has a professional environmental services retainer agreement in place with a consultant that specializes in the design and preparation of complex CEQA documents. Prior to drawing on any financial support from this sub-award grant for contractor support, the Conservancy plans to use the retained contractor to help the Team build a foundation for subsequent work by enumerating the components, critical path, dependencies, and timelines of CEQA analyses and materials, and providing a range of possible options for the strategic alignment of CEQA with the NEPA and TRPA review processes.

The NFF grant funds will support the participation of the Conservancy and DPR staff on the Team that guides the strategic alignment and all document preparation, and allow the Conservancy to support the environmental review process and the CEQA components of the larger Lake Tahoe West joint environmental document. The Conservancy may add some of these new tasks to the existing DGS environmental consultant retainer contract, or may work with DGS to solicit for a qualified contractor specific to the work.

## **Authority**

### **Consistency with the Conservancy's Enabling Legislation**

The recommended action is consistent with the Conservancy's enabling legislation. Specifically, Government Code section 66908 authorizes the Conservancy to receive funds in the form of "subventions, grants ... and other financial aids and funds ... from public sources." Additionally, section 66906.8 authorizes the Conservancy to select and hire consultants and contractors to provide services necessary to achieve the Conservancy's mission, including protection of the natural environment in the Lake Tahoe Basin. Finally, under section 66907.9, the Conservancy is authorized to initiate, negotiate, and participate in agreements for the management of land under its ownership or control with local public agencies, State agencies, federal agencies, nonprofit organizations, individuals, corporate entities, or partnerships.

### **Consistency with the Conservancy's Strategic Plan**

The recommended action is consistent with the Strategic Plan as the Conservancy is helping to lead the Lake Tahoe West interagency collaborative initiative (Strategy I.C) which is intended to result in planning and permitting efficiencies as well as coordinated forest fuels treatments in high priority areas on the west shore of Lake Tahoe (Strategy III.A). This action also helps to strengthen Conservancy operations (Strategy IV.A) by supplementing limited Conservancy funding with grant funds for project implementation.

### **Consistency with the Conservancy's Program Guidelines**

The recommended action is consistent with the Conservancy's Forest Improvement Program Guidelines. Lake Tahoe West intends to sustain adaptive and resilient forests, restore forest mixture and structure, reduce hazardous fuels, protect wildlife, wetlands, and sensitive areas, and reduce insect and disease outbreaks. Healthy forests and

watersheds, including meadows, are better equipped to deal with the effects of climate change, sequester carbon, increase visual appeal, and improve wildlife habitat.

### **Consistency with External Authorities**

The recommended action is consistent with the Environmental Improvement Program (EIP) because it implements EIP Project # 02.01.01.0116 (Lake Tahoe West). Actions resulting from this planning also implement the *2014 Multi-Jurisdictional Fuel Reduction and Wildfire Prevention Strategy*, as amended, and the *2015 Lake Tahoe Basin Community Wildfire Protection Plan*.

### **Compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act**

Pursuant to State CEQA Guidelines (Cal. Code Regs., tit. 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 Natural Resources to have no significant effect on the environment. Staff have evaluated the proposed planning activities and found them to be exempt under CEQA. These activities qualify for a statutory exemption under State CEQA Guidelines section 15262 (Feasibility and Planning Studies). A notice of exemption (NOE) has been prepared for the activities (Attachment 3). If the Board approves the acceptance and expenditure of funds, staff will file the NOE with the State Clearinghouse pursuant to State CEQA Guidelines section 15062.

### **List of Attachments:**

Attachment 1 – Resolution 17-06-03  
Attachment 2 – Location Map  
Attachment 3 – Notice of Exemption

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