California Tahoe Conservancy
Agenda Item 8c
July 17, 2014

ANNUAL FOREST IMPROVEMENT AUTHORIZATION

Summary: Staff recommends authorization of up to $1,184,711 for forest improvement projects and hazard tree abatement on Conservancy properties during Fiscal Year 2014/2015.

Location: Throughout the California side of the Lake Tahoe Basin

Fiscal Summary:

Source of Funds	
Conservancy Support Funds	$148,989
Proposition 84 Bond or Other Funds	603,000
Tahoe Regional Planning Agency Mitigation	205,000
U.S. Bureau of Land Management Southern Nevada Public Lands Management Act Round 13 and 14 Grant Funds	227,722
Total Recommended Authorization	$1,184,711

Recommended Action: Adopt Resolution 14-07-04 (Attachment 1).

Background

The California Tahoe Conservancy (Conservancy) has made significant progress developing and implementing a Forest Improvement Program. In November 1990, the Conservancy Board (Board) adopted the Conservancy's Forest Resource Management Guidelines (Guidelines). In March 2014 staff presented draft Guidelines to the Board and anticipates presenting them for adoption this fall following the adoption of the Basin's updated "Lake Tahoe Basin Multi-Jurisdictional Fuel Reduction and Wildfire Prevention Strategy – 10 Year Plan (10 Year Plan)." As described in Attachment 2, the Forest Improvement (FI) Program protects soil, water and habitat resources that are essential to a healthy and sustainable forest ecosystem following FI principles.

The Conservancy conducts its forest improvement activities consistent with the Emergency California-Nevada Tahoe Basin Fire Commission Report released in May 2008. This report's recommendations include:

- Implementing the 2005 10-Year Plan for the Basin's forests scheduled to be updated during the 2014 Environmental Summit;
- Facilitating the use of hand-thinning and low-impact equipment, and allowing pile burning in SEZs and on steep slopes, while protecting these sensitive areas; and
- Facilitating forest thinning practices and biomass processing as a means to reduce the intensity of future wildfires and the resulting pollution of air and water resources. A secondary effect of this process is the creation of a healthy forest that should be able to withstand the affects of climate change.

Since 1990, the Conservancy has, either directly or through contractors, completed projects on approximately 3,064 acres, including 264 acres in the past year. Projects consisted of forest health improvements, upland and riparian habitat enhancements, fuels reduction, maintenance, and Environmental Improvement Program related activities consistent with Attachment 2. In addition, the Conservancy completed the initial stages of restoration and reforestation of the areas burned by the Angora Fire. It is anticipated that a second treatment of the Angora Fire area will be necessary to reduce highly flammable chaparral which are competing with planted conifers. By releasing the competing chaparral, the planted conifers will be allowed to grow into a new forest stand.

As reported previously, the Conservancy expanded its role as a funding coordinator for forest health and fuels reduction projects on the California side of the Basin by submitting Southern Nevada Public Lands Management Act (SNPLMA) Round 13 and 14 grant nominations beginning in 2012 on behalf of four California Fire Districts/Departments (Lake Valley, City of South Lake Tahoe (City), Meeks Bay and North Tahoe), California Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR), and the Conservancy.

For SNPLMA Round 13, Conservancy staff submitted and was awarded two consolidated projects: 1) A south shore proposal requesting $250,000 for work by the City and Lake Valley on the City's airport land and adjoining Conservancy land, and 2) A north shore proposal requesting $250,000 for a project on the West

Shore (Sugar Pine Point State Park) and two projects on Conservancy parcels on the North Shore.

In June 2012 and 2013, the Board authorized staff to accept the U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM) SNPLMA grants and to enter into agreements with the implementing agencies. To date all agreements under Round 13 have been executed except the City's airport land project with Lake Valley which should be completed soon.

For SNPLMA Round 14, Conservancy staff submitted a grant proposal covering the same project areas as Round 13 but focused in the portions that did not receive funding in Round 13. The grant proposal on Round 14 amounted to $176,002, and the total amount was awarded. Conservancy staff is still awaiting an implementation grant from BLM for the Round 14 funding. Accordingly, staff is requesting Board authorization for this fiscal year to enter into agreements to implement the Round 14 projects, pending environmental review.

All direct costs and some Conservancy staff time will be reimbursed by the grant funding.

The Conservancy's partner agencies are continuing to seek funding for area-wide projects that would include Conservancy land. Of particular note are the North Tahoe Fire Protection District requests for up to $1,100,000 in Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) funds and LTBMU Supplement funding. These federal funds would allow the fire protection districts to treat high-priority projects on Conservancy lands identified in the 10 Year Plan and Community Wildland Protection Plans (CWPP). Recently, Conservancy staff has worked with the California Conservation Corps (CCCs) to stretch limited Conservancy funds with matching State Responsibility Area (SRA) funds.

The Conservancy's forestry project priorities are consistent with both the 10 Year Plan and the CWPP for the California portion of the Lake Tahoe Basin. Projects completed by partner agencies on Conservancy lands using other funding sources are implemented in accordance with a Memorandum of Understanding between the Conservancy and each of the fire protection districts on the California side of the Basin and the City Fire Department.

During the 2013 field season, completed project highlights on Conservancy-owned land included: Van Sickle Bi-State Park, General Creek, Windsor and Commonwealth Streets, Meyers 5, and Talmont 2.

Program Description

Staff recommends Board authorization to: 1) expend funds to treat and restore an estimated 225 acres of Conservancy-owned land within the Wildland Urban Interface, including both upland and riparian habitats; 2) coordinate the planning, implementation, and monitoring of projects on an additional 50 acres of Conservancy-owned land that are being funded and implemented by our partner agencies; 3) accept Tahoe Regional Planning Agency (TRPA) Aspen Mitigation Fund reimbursement; and 4) enter into agreements to complete implementation of the SNPLMA Round 13 and 14 funded projects.

The estimated 225 acres of land to be treated reflects a decrease from last year's 264 acres due to reduced funding levels and capacity from outside entities. Staff is planning several 2014 projects on Conservancy–owned land, including Grand Avenue Interface, Barbara/Lodi, Fairway/Bunker, Sunset Interface, Sunset Aspen, Meyers 6 and pile burning activities at General Creek and Mark Twain.

The Tahoe Resource Conservation District (TRCD) may continue to assist the Conservancy with planning, administering, and monitoring future forestry and fuels reduction projects. Public and private entities, including a seasonal Forest Improvement Crew hired by TRCD, (CCCs), local fire protection districts, private licensed timber operators, the Nevada Conservation Corps, and non-profit work crews may implement the projects. These projects are included in the project implementation contracts line item of the budget, except for the efforts contracted through TRCD which are listed separately in the budget.

The TRPA reimbursement is a grant designed to restore sensitive stream resources, such as the removal of encroaching conifers in aspen stands. These funds are derived from violations of TRPA Code of Ordinances which typically involve infractions within these sensitive resources. The Sunset Aspen Project meets the requirements of this grant, and Conservancy staff is working with TRPA staff to complete a grant agreement. Staff anticipates beginning treatment in the fall.

Program Budget

Staff is requesting Board authority to expend up to $1,184,711 in capital outlay, support, and TRPA and SNPLMA funding, as described below.

Forest Improvement (Support Funds)	
SNPLMA Reimbursement for staff and administration	$118,989
Wildlife Surveys (TRCD)	15,000
Hazard Tree Contract	15,000
Subtotal	**$148,989**
Forest Improvement (Capital Outlay Funds)	
Forest Improvement Seasonal Crew (TRCD)	$110,000
Project Planning and Wildlife Surveys (TRCD)	85,000
Equipment, Materials, and Supplies	8,000
Project Implementation Contracts	400,000
TRPA Aspen Mitigation Funds	205,000
SNPLMA Round 13 Grant –Lake Valley's Airport Project	96,145
SNPLMA Round 14 Grant – Meek's Bay's Parks Project, Lake Valley's Airport project, Conservancy's Fairway, Bunker, and Sunset Projects	131,577
Subtotal	**$1,035,722**
Forest Improvement Total:	**$1,184,711**

The above amounts are estimates based on staff's prior experience. Actual expenditures will depend upon the available funding, actual need, and relative management priorities as established throughout the fiscal year, but will not exceed the total funds requested.

Consistency with the Conservancy's Enabling Legislation

The recommended management activities are consistent with the Conservancy's enabling legislation. Under Government Code section 66907.10, the Conservancy is authorized to improve and develop acquired lands for a variety of purposes, including protection of the natural environment, protection of public access and recreational facilities, preservation of wildlife habitat areas, and access to and management of Conservancy-owned lands. Under Government Code section 66907.9, the Conservancy is authorized to initiate, negotiate, and participate in agreements for the management of land under its ownership and control with local public agencies, State agencies, federal agencies, nonprofit organizations, individuals, corporate entities, or partnerships. Finally, under Government Code section 66906.8, the Conservancy is authorized to select and hire private consultants or contractors as necessary to achieve these purposes.

Compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA)

The implementation of all forest improvement projects falls within the purview of CEQA. As part of the project planning process, staff evaluates each project to determine the appropriate level of environmental review pursuant to CEQA. Where staff determines a project is statutorily or categorically exempt from CEQA, staff will file a Notice of Exemption with the State Clearinghouse. Where staff determines a project requires a negative declaration or an environmental impact report, the project will be brought to the Board for adoption of environmental findings and authorization to expend funds to implement the project.

List of Attachments:
Attachment 1 – Resolution 14-07-04
Attachment 2 – Forest Improvement Program

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ATTACHMENT 1

California Tahoe Conservancy
Resolution
14-07-04
Adopted: July 17, 2014

ANNUAL FOREST IMPROVEMENT AUTHORIZATION

Staff recommends that the Conservancy adopt the following resolution pursuant to Government Code sections 66906.8, 66907.9 and 66907.10:

"The California Tahoe Conservancy hereby authorizes staff to expend up to $1,184,711 for direct management and restoration as described in the accompanying staff recommendation and take all other necessary steps, subject to the provisions and conditions discussed in the accompanying staff recommendation and attachments, in order to implement the Conservancy's Forest Improvement Program, including but not limited to the following activities: hazard reduction; project planning; ecological restoration; forest fuels reduction and maintenance; wildlife habitat enhancement; aspen and meadow restoration; execution of leases, licenses, and agreements consistent with adopted guidelines; execution of contracts and agreements to implement forestry projects with grant funding; and coordination of management arrangements."

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 July, 2014.

In WITNESS THEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand this 17th day of July 2014.

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Patrick Wright
Executive Director

ATTACHMENT 2

FOREST IMROVEMENT PROGRAM

Program Objectives: The Conservancy's objectives in implementing its forest improvement (FI) and fuels reduction activities are outlined in the Conservancy's Forest Resource Management Guidelines, adopted by the Board in November 1990. In March 2014 staff presented updated draft Guidelines to the Board and anticipates presenting them for adoption this fall following the adoption of the Basin's updated "Lake Tahoe Basin Multi-Jurisdictional Fuel Reduction and Wildfire Prevention Strategy – 10 Year Plan." These objectives reflect the need to:

- Provide for a healthier, more diverse forest environment;
- Enhance wildlife habitat;
- Stabilize soils and reduce forest habitat fragmentation through road closures and installation of best management practices, revegetation, and erosion control measures;
- Use both public and private resources to implement forest resource management activities; and
- Implement activities in a timely and environmentally sound manner.

The Conservancy allocates capital outlay and support funds for projects undertaken directly by the agency. In addition, the Conservancy seeks external funding that can fund either the Conservancy or its local fire protection district partners to implement projects on Conservancy lands consistent with regional priorities such as community wildfire protection plans.

The Conservancy owns nearly 6,500 acres of land, comprising nearly 4,700 separate parcels, of which over 5,500 acres are forested and considered necessary to review for possible management. These numbers may expand or contract depending on future land acquisition and possible land exchange transactions. Over time former meadows in the absence of disturbance can become encroached by lodgepole pine (*Pinus contorta*) and turn into a new forested area worthy of review and possible treatment.

Principles of FI Objectives

In order to achieve FI Program objectives, staff uses these guiding principles, presented in March 2014, to make informed forest management decisions based on site-specific goals and conditions. These guidelines are portrayed as a menu of options used to accomplish Program objectives while protecting the soil, water and habitat that are essential to a healthy and sustainable forest ecosystem.

A. Sustain Adaptive and Resilient Forests

1. *Climate Change*
   a. Continue to have forests act as "sinks," absorbing carbon from the atmosphere and storing it in biomass and soils
   b. Minimize the risk of catastrophic forest fire as a source of greenhouse gas emissions through appropriate forest management practices
   c. Reduce and adapt to climate change risks and impacts through monitoring and adaptive management

2. *Role of the Conservancy in Creating Resilient Forests*
   a. Optimize multiple resource benefits
   b. Promote technologies and practices that reduce emissions from prescribed burning, or non-burning methods of reducing hazardous forest fuels, when practical
   c. Reduce accumulated fuel load through thinning and brush removal and perform fuel reduction treatments
   d. Participate in the coordination of inter-agency reviews for fuels management adjacent to Conservancy property to improve forest health and reduce the risk of wildfire
   e. Increase wildfire hazard education, fire prevention techniques, human-caused ignition reduction programs, and forest fuel management education opportunities through collaboration with local partners
   f. Continue fire prevention activities on Conservancy property that help prevent the number of human-caused fires through public contact, education, and outreach

B. Restoration of Forest Species Mixture and Structure to Desired Conditions

Resilient forests will maintain different types and sizes of vegetation. Harvesting practices should maintain or improve representative patterns of

multi-age classes, diversity and composition of forest vegetation present in the stand prior to harvest. Forests that contain a variety of vegetative types and successional stages provide a rich, diverse habitat for plant and animal species. FI projects will also consider how a forest stand fits within the broader forest landscape.

1. ***Forest Health Thinning***
    a. Remove small trees which live in the understory and larger trees as necessary to allow larger, healthier trees room to grow
    b. Aim for historic stocking range (typically between 50 and 150 square feet of basal area per acre)
    c. Strive for a forest stand at desired stocking levels through thinning and/or reintroduction of fire

2. ***Small Group Openings***

Create small forest openings to allow new tree growth, forest structure diversity, and age diversity in forest stands over time

3. ***Riparian Restoration***

Restore riparian areas by removing most or all competing conifers

4. ***Prescribed Fire***
    a. As appropriate, thin large parcels or contiguous ownerships, greater than one acre in size, with long term prescribed burning.
    Note: This prescription is appropriate for large parcels that are not within communities and areas for which prescribed fire would not threaten public safety.
    b. As appropriate, thin small parcels through piling and burning of small slash piles.

C. Hazardous Fuel Reduction

1. ***Forest Health Thinning***
    a. Remove small trees and larger trees, as necessary, to allow larger, healthier trees room to grow
    b. Aim for historic stocking range (typically between 50 and 150 square feet of basal area per acre)
    c. Strive for a forest stand at desired stocking levels through limited thinning and/or reintroduction of fire

d. Remove larger trees when they appear to have health issues such as insect or disease outbreak (see Section E)
e. Separate tree canopies from chaparral plant communities
f. Phase treatments every ten years or as appropriate to achieve goals

D. Hazard Tree Identification and Removal

Inspect Conservancy parcels annually to identify and remove trees deemed hazardous to adjacent improvements.

E. Insect or Disease Outbreak

1. Forest Health Thinning

Thinning for forest health and fuels reduction purposes will usually mitigate the impacts of insects or disease and is generally seen by industry standards as the best treatment.

2. Active Forest Management

Active, and occasionally aggressive, forest management is necessary when quickly spreading insect or disease issues are identified.

F. Reforestation Following Catastrophic Events

Land management intervention, including tree planting and possible chaparral removal particularly within or adjoining urban areas, is recommended following catastrophic events.

G. Treatment of Sensitive Areas and Wildlife Considerations

Certain Conservancy lands are considered more sensitive to human impacts, or are of special value to wildlife, due to their unique placement within the Tahoe Basin or other special resource attribute. Lands which are not considered sensitive still require basic measures to protect its resources.

1. ***Coarse Woody Debris and Snag Recruitment Standards***

a. Urban Core and Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI)
   i. Defined as parcels within the WUI that are not considered riparian
   ii. Retain at least two of the largest non-hazardous snags per acre, all snags greater than 30″ in diameter at breast height (DBH) and all those greater than 24″ DBH in decay Class 6 or higher, meaning broken trees that contain multiple homes, unless they become so

numerous as to pose an unacceptable fire risk. Snags may be created by cutting hazard trees or other trees marked for removal to specified height.

iii. Retain at least three to five of the largest logs per acre in decay Classes 1-3, meaning newly fallen to limbless logs.

iv. Create coarse woody debris as necessary by leaving the boles of cut trees.

b. General Forest (Not Urban Core or Wildland-Urban Interface)

i. Defined as parcels not within WUI or within an identified riparian zone

ii. Retain at least five of the largest non-hazardous snags per acre, all snags greater than 30" DBH and all those greater than 24"DBH in decay Class 6 or higher unless so numerous as to pose an unacceptable fire risk. Snags may be created by cutting hazard trees or other trees marked for removal to specified height.

iii. Retain at least five to ten of the largest logs per acre in decay Classes 1-3, meaning newly fallen to limbless.

iv. Coarse woody debris may be created by leaving the boles of cut trees.

c. Riparian/Streamside Zones

i. Defined as portions of parcels that are wet or wet most of the year and are identified as a Stream Environment Zone (SEZ) or Watercourse and Lake Protection Zone (WLPZ)

ii. Retain all non-hazardous snags greater than 16" DBH and all snags of riparian species unless such snags are so numerous as to pose an unacceptable fire risk or interfere significantly with riparian vegetation and function.

iii. Retain all logs greater than 16" DBH and 20 feet long, unless so numerous as to pose an unacceptable fire risk or interfere significantly with riparian vegetation.

2. ***Riparian Habitat Identification and Protection***

a. Identify boundaries of riparian habitat through characteristics such as soil type (i.e., changes from heavy clay soil to silt soil) and indicator species (e.g., presence of meadow grasses and sedges, willow and alder).

b. Protect riparian habitat using methods acceptable to Tahoe Regional Planning Agency (TRPA), Lahontan Water Quality Control Board (Lahontan), and CalFire.

3. ***Sensitive Habitat areas***

a. Identify locations of threatened, endangered, special status, and regional indicator wildlife and biological species using the California Natural Diversity Database and surveys as required by federal, State and regional entities.
b. Protect these habitats using industry accepted methods for the enhancement of high quality habitat for sensitive wildlife and biological species.

4. ***Cultural Resource Identification and Protection***

a. Identify sites requiring protection through an Archaeological Assessment or literature or database review of available written resource information.
b. Conduct field assessments to identify known and new sites and determine level of significance. If new sites are identified or additional information discovered about a known site, the Archaeological database is updated. Mitigation measures are recommended for each site identified and reviewed by the appropriate regulatory authority.