

UPPER TRUCKEE RIVER RESTORATION MONITORING

Summary: Staff recommends authorization to accept up to \$150,000 from the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation to reimburse pre-project monitoring costs associated with the planning of Upper Truckee River restoration projects.

Location: Restoration projects planned or underway along the Upper Truckee River located in El Dorado County and the City of South Lake Tahoe (Attachment 1). These restoration projects include the Upper Truckee Marsh Restoration Project, the Johnson Meadows Reach Restoration Project, the Airport Reach Restoration Project, the Sunset Stables Reach Restoration Project and the Washoe Meadows Reach Restoration Project.

Fiscal Summary: Reimbursements from the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation for up to \$150,000 in previously authorized expenditures.

Recommended Action: Adopt Resolution 11-01-03 (Attachment 2).

Background

Numerous restoration projects are planned or underway along the Upper Truckee River (UTR) by various project proponents. The restoration objective of these projects is to improve the natural function of the channel by increasing overbank flow and sediment deposition on the floodplain and meadow surface. Expected benefits from these restoration activities include reduced bank erosion and fine sediment transport, improved riparian and meadow vegetation, higher groundwater elevations, and enhanced aquatic habitats. Upper Truckee River Restoration Monitoring (Project) proponents include the California Tahoe Conservancy (Conservancy), the City of South Lake Tahoe (City), the U.S. Forest Service Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit (LTBMU), and the California Department of Parks and Recreation (CDPR). The restoration projects (and associated project proponents) are: 1) Upper Truckee Marsh (Conservancy), 2) Johnson Meadows Reach (Conservancy), 3) Airport Reach (City), 4) Sunset Stables Reach 5 (LTBMU), 5) Sunset Stables Reach 6 (Conservancy), and

6) Washoe Meadows (CDPR). Project proponents plan to meet the restoration objectives by either enhancing existing stream channels along the UTR, or by building new stream channels and redirecting the UTR into these new channels.

The project proponents and other stakeholders regularly meet as part of the Upper Truckee River Watershed Advisory Group (UTRWAG) to coordinate restoration designs and anticipated pre- and post-project monitoring. To guide monitoring activities, the UTRWAG developed guidelines for Upper Truckee River restoration project monitoring. Through 2010, each project proponent conducted pre-project baseline monitoring based upon where the particular project was in the planning process.

In 2010, project proponents completed a coordinated, comprehensive benthic macro-invertebrate (BMI) survey for all restoration projects, with each project proponent funding their portion of the monitoring. Also in 2010, the Conservancy applied for a grant from the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (BOR) Tahoe Wetlands Grant Program for reimbursement of the costs of an additional two years of coordinated Upper Truckee River Restoration Project Monitoring (Project). This Project includes geomorphic, hydrologic, vegetation and fish surveys, in addition to the BMI monitoring. The BOR awarded the grant for the Project to the Conservancy in September 2010.

The Project will be implemented under funding authority granted by the Board in July 2008 when the Board authorized the expenditure of \$748,000 to support planning efforts, research and monitoring, environmental documentation, and feasibility analyses for the Stream Environment Zone (SEZ)/Watershed Restoration program. In September 2010, the Conservancy entered into an agreement for \$124,436 with the BOR for the Project using authority granted by the Board to accept up to \$1,162,000 in reimbursements from the BOR for the Upper Truckee Marsh Restoration Planning project, also granted in September 2010. The Conservancy will be entering into the agreement with the BOR for the Upper Truckee Marsh Restoration Planning project sometime after January 2011. In subsequent discussions with the Conservancy, the BOR has indicated there is the possibility of increasing the amount of the Project agreement in the future. Therefore, staff is now requesting additional Board authority to accept reimbursement of up to \$150,000 for the Project that is the subject of this staff report. This additional authority is required to ensure the Upper Truckee Marsh Restoration Planning project has sufficient authority at the time the Conservancy enters into an agreement with the BOR for that project.

Project Description

The recommended action will provide reimbursement of up to \$150,000 from the BOR to the Conservancy for the Project. Project activities include geomorphic, hydrologic, vegetation, fish and BMI surveys on active projects along the UTR. These activities will be coordinated through the UTRWAG to review the monitoring and data analysis protocols, identify those restoration projects that are lacking sufficient baseline pre-project data, and prioritize monitoring activities to leverage the resources from all project proponents. The BOR agreement will reimburse the Conservancy for monitoring activities conducted or funded by the Conservancy. Additional monitoring activities may be carried out by other project proponents. As part of the Project, the Conservancy will coordinate these activities, and Conservancy staff time will be reimbursed by the BOR. However, other project proponents will not be reimbursed for their activities under the BOR agreement. In addition, as part of the project, Conservancy staff will collect all available monitoring data from the other project proponents, organize the data, and make it available for use by all project proponents and other interested stakeholders. This pre-project baseline data will allow both project-level effectiveness evaluations and river-wide watershed assessments.

The Conservancy will contract with the LTBMU through an interagency agreement for up to \$45,000 to conduct a comprehensive fish survey in the UTR as part of the Project. This contract will be fully reimbursed to the Conservancy by the BOR through the reimbursement grant described above. LTBMU has a qualified in-house electrofishing crew, and has performed comprehensive fish surveys on many streams within the Tahoe Basin. The crew will collect data on species composition, size class, and location within the river during the summer of 2011. These data will allow project proponents to evaluate the post-project effectiveness of the combined UTR restoration projects in improving fisheries. The summer of 2011 is the final opportunity to conduct a UTR-wide pre-restoration fish survey, as the new Airport Reach channel is scheduled to be tied into the UTR at the end of the 2011 field season.

The Conservancy will also contract with an analytical laboratory to conduct the taxonomic analysis of the BMI samples. The Project may also require the purchase of miscellaneous equipment and supplies to support the field work. The Conservancy currently has a contract that funds Americorps staff for field support. Additional service contracts may also be required to supplement the Americorps field crew or to provide peer review of monitoring protocols and subsequent data analysis.

Project Budget

Up to \$150,000 will be provided by the BOR to reimburse the Conservancy for costs associated with the Project. Estimated Project costs are shown below. Costs per category may change, but the total amount for all categories will not exceed \$150,000.

<u>Activity</u>	<u>Amount</u>
1. Conservancy staff time	\$31,000
2. Americorps staff time	40,000
3. LTBMU fish survey	45,000
4. BMI sample analysis	8,500
5. Equipment/Materials	5,500
6. Miscellaneous service contracts	<u>20,000</u>
TOTAL	\$150,000

As explained earlier in this staff report, the Board has previously authorized the expenditure of Conservancy funds for these planning activities in a prior annual planning authorization.

Project Implementation

Conservancy staff will manage the Project in coordination with the UTRWAG. Conservancy and Americorps staff will conduct the geomorphic, hydrologic, vegetation and BMI surveys. Small service contracts may be necessary to supplement the field crew. Taxonomic analysis of BMI samples will be conducted by an analytical laboratory that participates in the California Department of Fish and Games Aquatic Laboratory Quality Assurance/Quality Control program. Conservancy staff will contract with the LTBMU to conduct the fish survey. The fish survey will be conducted in the summer of 2011, and the other monitoring is expected to be completed over a period of two years (2011 – 2012). Conservancy staff, in coordination with the UTRWAG, will consult with experts in the respective fields to ensure monitoring and subsequent data analysis protocols are appropriate to allow for both project-level and watershed scale evaluation. This may require placing small service contracts for peer review of specific activities.

Consistency with the Conservancy's Enabling Legislation

Implementation of this Project is consistent with the Conservancy's enabling legislation. Specifically, Government Code Section 66908 authorizes the Conservancy to receive reimbursements and other funds from public agencies. In addition, Government Code Section 66906.8 authorizes the Conservancy to select and hire consultants or contractors to provide services necessary to achieve the purposes of the Conservancy, including protection of the natural environment at Lake Tahoe.

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 exempt from CEQA 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 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). A Notice of Exemption has been drafted for the Project (Attachment 3). If the Board approves the Project, staff will file the Notice of Exemption with the State Clearinghouse pursuant to State CEQA Guidelines, Section 15062.

List of Attachments:

Attachment 1 – Project Location Map

Attachment 2 – Resolution 11-01-03

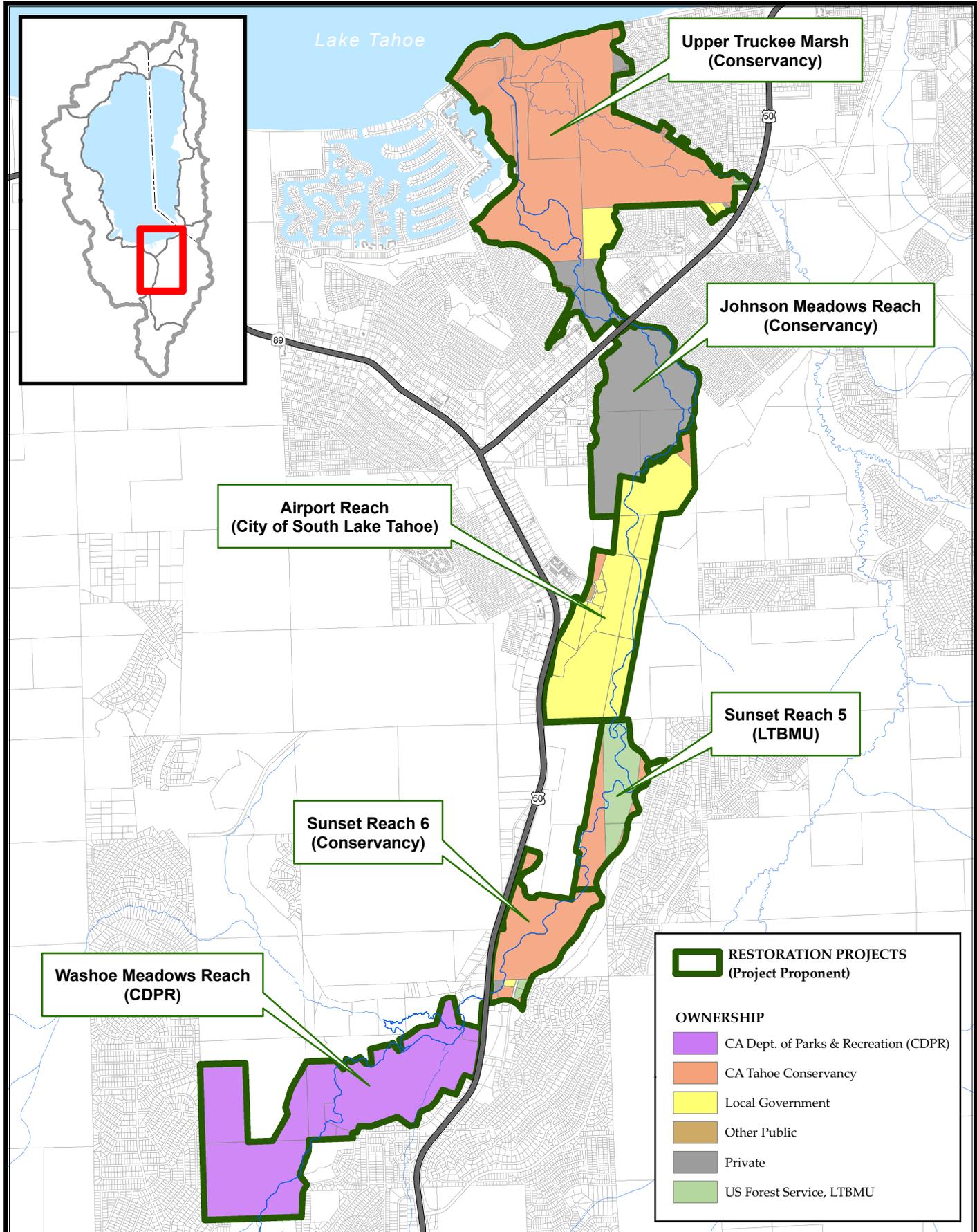
Attachment 3 – Notice of Exemption

Conservancy Staff Contact:

Tina Carlsen

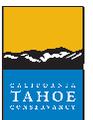
Phone: (530) 543-6064

ATTACHMENT 1 Location of Upper Truckee River Restoration Projects



California Tahoe Conservancy
January 2011

Sources: USGS; TRPA; El Dorado County
Map for reference purposes only.



ATTACHMENT 2

California Tahoe Conservancy

Resolution

11-01-03

Adopted: January 20, 2011

UPPER TRUCKEE RIVER RESTORATION MONITORING

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 proposed Upper Truckee River Restoration Monitoring Project and has determined it to be categorically exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act. 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 et seq., 66906.8 and 66908:

“The California Tahoe Conservancy hereby authorizes staff to accept up to \$150,000 for the Upper Truckee River Restoration Monitoring Project from the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation to conduct monitoring in the Upper Truckee River, and to take all other necessary steps in substantial conformity with the accompanying staff report.”

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 20th day of January 2011.

In WITNESS THEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand this 20th day of January 2011.

Patrick Wright
Executive Director

ATTACHMENT 3

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:

Upper Truckee River Restoration Monitoring

Project Location – Specific:

Upper Truckee River located in El Dorado County and the City of South Lake Tahoe

Project Location – City:

City of South Lake Tahoe and unincorporated areas

Project Location – County:

El Dorado County

Description of Nature, Purpose, and Beneficiaries of Project:

The project involves conducting geomorphic, hydrologic, vegetation, benthic macroinvertebrate and fish surveys along the Upper Truckee River (UTR) for the purposes of collecting pre-restoration project data. The project also includes reimbursement by the U. S. Bureau of Reclamation for funds expended by the Conservancy in conducting the UTR surveys.

Name of Public Agency Approving Project:

California Tahoe Conservancy (Conservancy meeting of 1/20/2011) (Agenda Item 7c)

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 (§§ 15306)

Reasons Why Project is Exempt:

Staff has evaluated this 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).

Contact Person:

Tina Carlsen

Telephone Number:

(530) 543-6064

Date Received for Filing:

Patrick Wright
Executive Director