

**FOREST HABITAT ENHANCEMENT, FUELS REDUCTION,  
AND PROPERTY RESTORATION**

**Summary:** Staff requests authorization to expend up to \$1,080,000 for forest habitat enhancement, fuels reduction, and restoration activities on Conservancy-owned lands.

**Location:** Throughout the California side of the Lake Tahoe Basin.

**Fiscal Summary:** Up to \$1,080,000 in Conservancy SEZ/Watershed Program funds, including Proposition 84 Bond Funds and Federal Trust Funds received as reimbursement.

**Recommended Action:** Adopt Resolution 11-01-04 (Attachment 1) authorizing up to \$1,080,000 for direct forest habitat enhancement, fuels reduction, and property restoration activities.

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**Background**

In July 2010, the Board authorized up to \$726,000 in support funds and \$274,000 in Conservancy-generated or external reimbursement capital outlay funds for direct property management, forest fuels maintenance, hazard abatement, aspen and meadow restoration, and property restoration on Conservancy properties during Fiscal Year (FY) 2010-11. At that time, staff was unable to recommend authorization to expend bond money for forest habitat enhancement activities due to the continuing effects of the December 2008 bond freeze. However, there are now bond funds available to the Conservancy for new project activities.

Consequently, at this time staff is requesting authority to expend funds to continue planning and implementing the Conservancy's ongoing forest habitat enhancement, fuels reduction, and property restoration activities for Conservancy-owned properties during the remainder of FY 2010-11 and the beginning of FY 2011-12.

Fire frequency, intensity, severity, and seasonality have a great impact on forest vegetation. Studies of fire frequency dating back hundreds of years, known as the fire return interval, have shown that prior to European settlement, each acre of conifer and ponderosa pine forest burned an average of every 11 to 15 years. In contrast, it may now be almost 200 years before each acre of this forest type burns as a result of fire suppression, causing forest fuels to continue to accumulate.

Interest in, and concerns about, forest health and fuels management have increased for many years. The Angora Fire, which burned 3,100 acres and destroyed or damaged more than 275 homes in June 2007, further heightened this interest and concern.

The Conservancy is conducting its forest health and fuels reduction activities consistent with the The Emergency California-Nevada Tahoe Basin Fire Commission (Commission) final report and recommendations. These activities include:

- Implementing the U.S. Forest Service, Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit's (LTBMU) "Lake Tahoe Basin Multi-Jurisdictional Fuel Reduction and Wildfire Prevention Strategy – 10 Year Plan" (10 Year Plan) for the Basin's forests;
- Facilitating the use of hand-thinning and low-impact equipment, and allowing pile burning, in sensitive stream environment zones and on steep slopes, while protecting these sensitive areas;
- Facilitating forest thinning practices and biomass processing as a means to reduce the intensity of future wildfires and resulting pollution to air and water resources; and
- Rapidly restoring and reforesting areas burned by the Angora Fire.

The Conservancy's objectives in implementing its forest habitat enhancement and fuels reduction activities are outlined in the Conservancy's Forest Resource Management Guidelines, adopted by the Board in November 1990. 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;

Provide for public safety and protection of property through fuel hazard reduction;

- Use both public and private resources to implement forest resource management activities; and
- Implement activities in a timely and environmentally sound manner.

Since 1990, the Conservancy has, either directly or through contractors, treated approximately 2,317 acres. Treatments included forest health improvements, upland and riparian habitat enhancements, fuels reduction, maintenance, and Environmental Improvement Program-related activities.

### **Project Description**

Staff recommends the authorization of \$1,080,000 to implement forest habitat enhancement and fuels reduction projects on an estimated 395 acres of Conservancy-owned lands within the Wildland Urban Interface, which encompasses both upland and riparian habitats. Funding under this request will also be used to implement property restoration activities on several small urban lots.

The Conservancy will directly plan, fund and implement project activities on up to 141 acres, including the McKinney-Chamberlands, Book 85 and Regency project areas, all located in Placer County.

In addition, Conservancy funding will be used to coordinate planning, implementation, and monitoring of treatments on up to an additional 254 acres of Conservancy-owned land, where the implementing activities are expected to be funded and performed by cooperating agencies. The North Tahoe Fire Protection District, Meeks Bay Fire Protection District and City of South Lake Tahoe Fire Department have either gained commitments or applied for external funding consisting of up to \$1,250,000 in Southern Nevada Public Lands Management Act (SNPLMA), Federal Emergency Management Act (FEMA) and the LTBMU Supplement funding. These federal funds have been provided to the Nevada Fire Safe Council for use by the fire protection districts and departments to treat high-priority projects identified in the 10 Year Plan and Community Wildland Protection Plans (CWPP). 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. In addition, the California Conservation Corps (CCC) Tahoe Center is seeking up to \$588,000 in Proposition 84 funds to continue forest treatment in the Meyers 5 Project area (Phases 3 and 4) in El Dorado County. The various districts and the CCC will know by spring 2011 if their grant requests are

successful. Coordinating its efforts with these partners will allow the Conservancy to leverage other federal and state funds to accelerate efforts in high-priority areas as identified by the 10 Year Plan.

To complete these activities, Conservancy staff may be assisted by the Tahoe Resource Conservation District (TRCD) and private, registered professional foresters when planning, administering, and monitoring future forestry and fuels reduction projects. Project implementation work may be performed by public and private entities, including the Conservancy's Forest Habitat Enhancement Crew, the CCC, local fire protection districts, private licensed timber operators, the Nevada Conservation Corps, and other private sector non-profit work crews. The Conservancy has entered into a Memorandum of Understanding with the California fire protection districts and the City of South Lake Tahoe Fire Department to allow them to treat Conservancy lands.

Staff is also requesting authorization to continue restoration activities in the Angora Fire area. This funding, provided by the United States Army Corps of Engineers, will allow for an additional year of reforestation, maintenance, monitoring, and invasive weed control activities using CCC crews and Conservancy staff on Conservancy land.

The Conservancy will maintain previously-completed fuels reduction work primarily by using a six-month seasonal CCC crew. Funding for this crew was authorized by the Board in July 2010 as part of the Property Management Authorization funded by Conservancy support funds.

### **Project Budget**

Staff is requesting authority to expend up to \$1,080,000. If the Board approves the recommended authorization, staff will implement the Conservancy's forest habitat enhancement and fuels reduction activities during 2011 within established budgetary limitations. This amount will be funded with previously-appropriated funds.

Expected expenditures of Conservancy funds for forest habitat enhancement, fuels reduction, and property restoration activities for the remainder of FY 2010-11 and the beginning of FY 2011-12 are summarized as follows:

Conservancy Forest Habitat Enhancement Crew	\$230,000
CCC Forestry Restoration Crew	200,000
Service Contracts: private sector, fire districts, and other	340,000
Post Angora Fire Restoration and Monitoring Activities	50,000
Project Planning and Monitoring	130,000
Materials and Supplies	30,000
Property Restoration	<u>100,000</u>
<b>Total Conservancy Funds</b>	<b>\$1,080,000</b>

As indicated earlier, the Conservancy’s partner agencies are seeking up to \$1,250,000 in additional federal funds and up to \$588,000 in additional State funds for forest habitat, fuels reduction, and restoration activities on Conservancy lands. The pace of treatment activity on Conservancy land will accelerate if some or all of the external funding is received.

The above amounts are estimates and reflect potential expenditures based on the Conservancy’s prior experience. Actual expenditures will depend upon need and management priorities. It should also be noted that these funds will supplement previous allocations of funds for forest habitat enhancement, fuels reduction, and property restoration purposes.

Staff will continue to report to the Board on the status of ongoing and planned forest habitat enhancement, fuels reduction, and property restoration activities at subsequent meetings and in the Executive Director’s report.

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

The recommended forest habitat enhancement activities are consistent with the Conservancy’s enabling legislation. Specifically, Government Code Section 66907.10 authorizes the Conservancy to improve and develop acquired lands for a variety of purposes, including protection of the natural environment. 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. Under Government Code Section 66906.8, the Conservancy is authorized to select and hire private consultants or contractors to achieve these purposes.

## **Compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA)**

All Conservancy forest habitat enhancement, fuels reduction, and property restoration projects fall within the purview of CEQA, and CEQA analysis is thus required. While the proposed action itself does not require CEQA review, each project implemented pursuant to this staff recommendation will be subject to CEQA review. Staff will evaluate each project prior to implementation to determine whether the project is statutorily or categorically exempt from CEQA, or whether the project requires a negative declaration or a timber harvest plan (the equivalent to an environmental impact report). 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 a timber harvest plan, 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 11-01-04

### **Conservancy Staff Contact:**

Brian R. Hirt

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**ATTACHMENT 1**

California Tahoe Conservancy  
Resolution  
11-01-04  
Adopted: January 20, 2011

**FOREST HABITAT ENHANCEMENT, FUELS REDUCTION,  
AND PROPERTY RESTORATION**

Staff recommends that the California Tahoe Conservancy adopt the following resolution pursuant to Government Code Sections 66905 et seq., 66906.8, 66907.9, and 66907.10:

“The California Tahoe Conservancy hereby authorizes staff to take all necessary steps and to expend up to \$1,080,000 on forest habitat enhancement, fuels reduction, and property restoration activities on property acquired by the Conservancy, including but not limited to forest fuels reduction, Angora Fire restoration activities, and property restoration as specified in 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 20<sup>th</sup> day of January 2011.

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

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Patrick Wright  
Executive Director