

**VISITOR INFORMATION AND ENVIRONMENTAL  
INTERPRETATION PROJECT PLANNING GRANT**

**Summary:** Staff recommends that the Conservancy Board authorize staff to award an \$85,000 planning grant to the Tahoe Fund for development of conceptual alternatives for environmental education and interpretation on behalf of the Basin's key agencies and stakeholder groups.

**Location:** The project will involve partnerships with visitor-serving agencies and organizations on both the California and Nevada side of the Lake Tahoe Basin.

**Fiscal Summary:** \$85,000

Source of Funds: Proposition 12

**Recommended Action:** Adopt Resolution 15-12-06 (Attachment 1) authorizing staff to award an \$85,000 planning grant to the Tahoe Fund for this project.

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**Background**

The Tahoe Basin is home to several environmental education/interpretive facilities managed by a variety of federal, state, local, or private agencies and organizations. These facilities, however, are operated independently and lack a common set of messages or information for visitors and residents. In addition, funding for these facilities is extremely limited as agencies that serve visitors find these centers to be difficult and expensive to staff, maintain, and operate, particularly as visitors increasingly turn to mobile applications for information.

Approximately eighteen months ago, a group of citizens in South Lake Tahoe began to promote the development of a Lake Tahoe Discovery Center, modeled after other well-known centers, such as the Monterey Bay Aquarium and the Turtle Bay Exploration Park in Redding. They then convened a group of stakeholders involved in educational

outreach and interpretative programs in the Tahoe Basin to build support for this effort. But after an extensive series of discussions, the group concluded that they first needed a thorough assessment of the needs and desires of both residents and visitors for new or expanded facilities, and to explore alternative approaches to meeting those needs, given the enormous cost of building and maintaining educational and interpretative facilities. The Tahoe Fund (Fund) offered to coordinate this information gathering and assessment phase of the process.

### **Project Description**

Staff is seeking authorization to award a planning grant of up to \$85,000 to the Fund for the Visitor Information and Environmental Interpretation Project (Project). This Project provides an opportunity to continue the dialogue between the key agencies and organizations that provide environmental education and interpretative information in support of a common vision and new generation of facilities that better serve visitors and residents. Building upon the success of the recently launched Take Care campaign (i.e., a common stewardship messaging effort, focused on littering, etc.), the Fund will partner with these groups in a planning process over the next year to develop a set of alternatives and a preferred approach to the Project.

The Project will also seek to take advantage of lessons learned from the Basin's current facilities, environmental education programs, and existing mobile resources. This includes the Lake Tahoe Beaches application developed by the Fund on behalf of the Basin's land management agencies, and the University of California, Davis - Tahoe Environmental Research Center (TERC) "Citizens Science Tahoe," which encourages users of all ages to input water and lake-based observational data.

The major elements of the Project will be developed in coordination with key agencies and stakeholders, but are likely to include:

- Forming a steering committee
- Developing an outreach strategy
- Researching models from other areas
- Hosting a series of workshops
- Interviewing key leaders and stakeholders
- Developing a set of alternatives and potential funding strategies
- Holding a design charrette or workshop to help the agencies, key stakeholders, and the public visualize the key alternatives
- Developing a final report with a preferred approach

This Project may provide the foundation for a second phase, which is likely to involve fundraising, project plans or site selection, and a physical or business model.

### **Project Budget and Schedule**

The Project’s budget and deliverables are:

<b>Task 1</b>	\$12,000
Project/partnership coordination	
<b>Task 2</b>	55,000
Workshops and vision planning	
<b>Task 3</b>	28,000
Design Charrette and final report	
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$ 95,000</b>
<b>Conservancy</b>	<b>85,000</b>
<b>Tahoe Fund Match</b>	<b><u>10,000</u></b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$ 95,000</b>

The schedule for the Project is:

<b>Task</b>	<b>Completion Date</b>
Task 1 – Project/partnership coordination	January 2016
Task 2 – Workshops and vision planning	March 2016
Task 3 – Design charrette and final report	June 2016

The schedule, and budget may be adjusted, but will not exceed \$85,000. As shown above, the Fund will provide \$10,000 in matching funds, and several partners, including the Tahoe Institute for Natural Sciences, TERC, and others are expected to provide significant in-kind resources.

### **Project Evaluation**

The Project is consistent with and will help support the Conservancy’s Public Access and Recreation Program, the goal of which is to enhance significant regional public access and recreational opportunities involving lakefront, riverfront and natural areas. According to the Program Guidelines, a key objective is “to support environmental education, interpretation, and wayfinding efforts that promote stewardship, provide information, and lessen confusion for recreationalists.”

Consistent with these guidelines and state mandates, the Conservancy has invested funds from Propositions 12, 40, and 84 for environmental education and interpretation projects and facilities. Examples include the TERC Thomas J. Long Center and Fish Hatchery interpretive panels, Forest Service Meyers Visitor Center, the City of South Lake Tahoe Explore Tahoe exhibit at Stateline, and the Conservancy North Tahoe Beach.

The Fund is uniquely positioned to lead this effort given its track record in partnering with the Conservancy and other key agencies and stakeholders in funding priority Environmental Improvement Program projects, developing the mobile beaches app, promoting the Plate-For-Powder license plate program, the Green Bucks campaign with local businesses, and most recently, the basin-wide Take Care program that has been widely embraced and implemented by public and private organizations throughout the Basin.

### **Project Implementation**

If the Board authorizes the grant, Conservancy staff will enter into a grant agreement with the Fund. The grant agreement will require the Fund to develop a work plan including a more detailed budget and descriptions of specific needs, products and delivery dates. The solicitation and hiring of consultants, which will be necessary to complete this Project, is within the discretion of the Fund as a non-profit on the basis of best fit, cost, and qualifications.

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

The Conservancy is authorized under Government Code section 66907.7 to award grants to other public agencies and nonprofit organizations in order to further the Conservancy's general statutory purposes and mandate, including regional recreation and protection of the natural environment.

The Fund is a California nonprofit, public benefit organization, whose charitable purposes include the protection of the natural environment and the protection of land for scientific, historical, educational, recreational, scenic or open-space opportunities. Accordingly, the Fund meets the definition of a nonprofit organization under Government Code section 66905.9 and is therefore eligible to receive grant funding from the Conservancy pursuant to Government Code section 66907.7.

## **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 statutorily exempt from CEQA or are exempt because they have been determined by the Secretary for Resources to have no significant effect on the environment. Staff has evaluated this planning project, and has found it to be exempt under CEQA. This project qualifies for a statutory exemption under section 15262 (feasibility and planning studies). A Notice of Exemption (NOE) has been drafted for the project (Attachment 2). If the Board approves the grant funding, staff will file the NOE with the State Clearinghouse pursuant to State CEQA Guidelines, section 15062.

### **List of Attachments:**

Attachment 1 – Resolution 15-12-06  
Attachment 2 – Notice of Exemption

### **Conservancy Staff Contact:**

Patrick Wright

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**ATTACHMENT 1**

California Tahoe Conservancy  
Resolution  
15-12-06  
Adopted: December 18, 2015

**VISITOR INFORMATION AND ENVIRONMENTAL INTERPRETATION PROJECT  
PLANNING GRANT**

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 a planning grant in the amount of \$85,000 to the Tahoe Fund 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 18th day of December, 2015.

In WITNESS THEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand this 18<sup>th</sup> day of December, 2015.

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Patrick Wright  
Executive Director

**ATTACHMENT 2**

**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

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***Project Title:***

Visitor Information and Environmental Interpretation Project Planning Grant Authorization

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***Project Location – Specific:***

This project will involve partnerships with visitor-serving agencies and organizations within the Lake Tahoe Basin.

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***Project Location – City:***

N/A

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***Description of Nature, Purpose and Beneficiaries of Project:***

Authorization of a grant for visitor information and environmental interpretation project planning to improve public access and recreational opportunities at Lake Tahoe.

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***Name of Public Agency Approving Project:***

California Tahoe Conservancy (Conservancy Board meeting of December 17-18, 2015, Agenda Item 8d)

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***Name of Person or Agency Carrying Out Project:*** Tahoe Fund

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***Exempt Status:***

- Ministerial (Sec. 15073)
- Declared Emergency (Sec. 15071 (a))
- Emergency Project (Sec. 15071 (b) and (c))
- Statutory Exemption, section 15262 (planning and feasibility studies)

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***Reasons Why Project is Exempt:***

Action involves planning and feasibility studies for public access and recreation visitor information and environmental interpretation.

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***Contact Person***

Penny Stewart

***Area Code Telephone***

(530) 543-6013

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***Date Received for Filing:***

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Patrick Wright  
Executive Director