

## **PLATES FOR PROJECTS GRANT AWARD**

**Recommended Action:** Adopt Resolution 17-06-10 (Attachment 1) authorizing approval of up to \$20,000 for a Plates for Projects grant to the League to Save Lake Tahoe to fund the Eyes on the Lake Program with Lake Tahoe Conservancy Account (LTAC) funds.

**Location:** The California portion of Lake Tahoe and its tributaries.

**Fiscal Summary:** A total of up to \$20,000 in LTCA funds.

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### **Overview**

#### **Description of Recommended Action**

Staff recommends the Board authorize \$20,000 in LTCA funds to the League to Save Lake Tahoe (League) to fund its Eyes on the Lake Program as part of the Plates for Projects pilot campaign.

The League launched the Program in 2013 and implements it annually from May through September. The Program is a citizen science program designed to help prevent the spread of aquatic invasive species (AIS) in Lake Tahoe. League staff train water recreationists to identify aquatic invasive plants and native plants in Lake Tahoe and surrounding tributaries, record their findings, and report what they find. If people find new infestations, League staff verify and report them to the Nearshore Aquatic Weed Working Group (NAWWG) and the Lake Tahoe AIS Coordination Committee (LTAISCC). Since the Program's inception in 2013, the League has helped identify five new infestations of AIS plants in Lake Tahoe and surveyed 35 new sites.

For 2017, the League has set several goals for the Program. Among those goals are to conduct eight trainings, certify 100 volunteers, receive 300 surveys from certified volunteers, design a new Eyes on the Lake handbook specific to marinas, and make

improvements to the online map showing existing AIS plant infestations. Funding requested would support the League in achieving these goals. Success will be measured using several indicators including number of: volunteer trainings offered, volunteers certified, surveys completed, unique sites surveyed, and new infestations reported to the NAWWG and LTAISCC.

In addition to the above benefits, the League will promote the sale of new Lake Tahoe License Plates (License Plates) as part of the Plates for Projects campaign. The campaign seeks to capitalize on the ability of organizations to promote License Plates to their members and supporters by linking License Plate sales with their own projects.

## **History**

At the March 2017 Conservancy Board meeting, staff provided an overview of the status of License Plate sales and explained that it was exploring new ways to stimulate License Plate sales during the summer months when sales typically decline. In an effort to increase summertime License Plate sales, staff explained that it was working with its License Plate marketing contractor, SDBX Studio, LLC, to develop a new campaign called "Plates for Projects."

The primary objective of the campaign is to support environmental projects that achieve both the Conservancy's mission and the statutory requirements of License Plate funds. Projects affiliated with the campaign will be evaluated by Conservancy staff as stand-alone projects independent from License Plate sales and outreach proposed by the applicant. Additional benefits of the campaign include publicity for the Conservancy and partner organizations, public education about projects supported by Lake Tahoe License Plate funds, and increased summertime License Plate sales.

Originally, Conservancy staff had planned to seek Board authorization of proposed grants *after* License Plate outreach was complete. However, based on direction from the Board at the March 2017 meeting, Conservancy staff decided to seek Board approval of the grants *before* License Plate outreach activities commence. This allows partners to more clearly link a project with secured grant funding and ensures that projects are evaluated separately from the results of License Plate outreach efforts.

To implement the grants portion of the Plate for Projects campaign, staff solicited applications from three non-profit organizations. These groups were specifically targeted because their work is consistent with the Conservancy's mission and they have a large number of members and supporters.

The Conservancy received applications from the League and the Tahoe Area Mountain Biking Association. The Tahoe Rim Trail Association chose not to submit an application for this funding round. Conservancy staff evaluated the applications to determine consistency with several criteria, including:

- Consistency with the Conservancy's enabling statute (Government Code title 7.42) and its mission "to restore and enhance the extraordinary natural and recreational resources of the Lake Tahoe Basin";
- Consistency with Vehicle Code section 5075 which authorizes expenditure of LTCA funds "for the exclusive trust purposes of preservation and restoration projects in the Lake Tahoe area and for the purpose of establishing and improving trails, pathways, and public access for nonmotorized traffic in that area";
- Consistency with the Lake Tahoe Environmental Improvement Program (EIP) and any applicable State or local regulations;
- Ability for the project to provide tangible benefits consistent with the Conservancy's mission, the EIP, and Vehicle Code section 5075;
- Project feasibility and readiness;
- Leveraged funding; and
- Public and stakeholder support.

Conservancy staff recommend developing a pilot Plates for Projects campaign in partnership with the League designed around promoting the Eyes on the Lake Program.

AIS are a major threat to Lake Tahoe's ecological health. AIS plants can increase algal blooms, outcompete native species, disturb the natural food web, negatively impact recreation, and alter the nearshore environment. The *Lake Tahoe Region AIS Management Plan, May 2014* (Plan) explains that "substantial changes to the Lake Tahoe Region's economy, pristine water quality, aesthetic value, and recreational pursuits are occurring, partly due to the harmful impacts of non-native aquatic plants, fish, invertebrates, and other invaders." The Plan also explains that surveying for new AIS plant infestations and educating the public about the impacts of AIS are important components of successful prevention and control/eradication programs.

In addition, the *2015 Lake Tahoe AIS Implementation Plan* identifies the need for a comprehensive surveillance program to identify new introductions or establishment of AIS in Lake Tahoe and explains that citizen science efforts may increase the ability to respond to and control AIS populations. Increasing the amount of people trained to identify AIS plants will increase the detection of new or spreading infestations. Early detection often results in less expensive and more effective treatment.

The objective of the Program is to reduce the threat of new and spreading infestations of AIS plants in Lake Tahoe by detecting them early and implementing control projects quickly. This is consistent with Vehicle Code section 5075 and the guiding AIS documents because reducing the threat of invasive species contributes to the preservation of Lake Tahoe. In 2016, the Program completed ten trainings, certified 105 volunteers, completed 294 surveys, and identified three new infestations.

The Program provides valuable information to public agencies seeking to control and eradicate AIS in Lake Tahoe. Due to limited resources, public agencies cannot adequately monitor the entire Lake Tahoe Region for new or expanding AIS infestations. Addressing plant infestations when they are small through rapid response is less costly over the long-term than using control measures after AIS plant populations are well-established.

This fall, Conservancy staff will evaluate the pilot campaign to determine whether it effectively stimulated License Plate sales and helped raise awareness of the types of projects LTCA funds support. If successful, Conservancy staff plans to implement a competitive process to solicit partner organizations for the summer 2018 campaign.

## **Financing**

Conservancy staff are recommending an award of up to \$20,000 in LTCA funds to the League for the Program.

The Program begins in May and runs through September. Grant funds will be used for Program activities in June through September 2017 according to the following budget:

<u>Activity</u>	<u>Amount</u>
Personnel	\$13,250
Equipment and supplies	\$3,875
Marketing Outreach	<u>\$2,875</u>
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$20,000</b>

The final budget amounts may vary between individual items from those shown, but the total expenditures will not exceed the grant award.

## **Authority**

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

Implementation of this grant is consistent with the Conservancy's enabling Legislation. Specifically, Government Code section 66907.7 authorize the Conservancy to award grants to nonprofit organizations for purposes consistent with its mission.

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

The recommended action is consistent with the Strategic Plan because it will invest in a high priority EIP project (Strategy II) and strengthens Conservancy operations (Strategy IV) by increasing sales of Lake Tahoe License Plates.

### **Consistency with External Authorities**

The recommended action is consistent with the EIP because it supports implementation of EIP project # 05.01.01.0014.

The Program is also consistent with the *2015 Lake Tahoe Aquatic Invasive Species Implementation Plan*, which lists stakeholder involvement such as citizen science efforts as an important component of building a comprehensive surveillance program for the Lake Tahoe Basin.

The Program also meets the requirements of Vehicle Code section 5075, which governs the use of LTCA funds, because it contributes to the preservation and restoration of the Lake Tahoe area.

## **California Environmental Quality Act Compliance**

Pursuant to the 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 the California Natural Resources Agency to have no significant effect on the environment. Pursuant to Public Resources Code sections 21001(f) and 21082, the Conservancy has also adopted regulations to implement, interpret, and make specific the provisions of CEQA. (Cal. Code Regs., tit. 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 CEQA Guidelines section 15306 (information collection), and the Conservancy's CEQA regulations section 12102.6. A notice of exemption (NOE) has been prepared for the project (Attachment 2). If the

Board approves the grant funding, staff will file the NOE with the State Clearinghouse pursuant to CEQA Guidelines section 15062.

**List of Attachments:**

Attachment 1 – Resolution 17-06-10

Attachment 2 – Notice of Exemption

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