

LAKE TAHOE WEST RESTORATION PARTNERSHIP UPDATE

Background

The Lake Tahoe West Restoration Partnership (LTW) is a multi-agency public private partnership that aims to restore and maintain the resilience of the forests, watersheds, recreational opportunities, and communities across over 59,000 acres of Lake Tahoe's west shore over the next ten years (Attachment 1).

A history of disturbance has altered the forest composition of the Lake Tahoe Basin (Basin). Today, persistent drought, overstocked forests, climate change, and bark beetle infestation further threaten the ecology and economy of the region. Recognizing the need to restore and protect Lake Tahoe's ecosystems, four public agencies, the California Tahoe Conservancy (Conservancy), the U.S. Forest Service – Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit, California Department of Parks and Recreation, and Tahoe Regional Planning Agency (TRPA) partnered with National Forest Foundation and Tahoe Fire and Fuels Team to launch LTW in 2016.

LTW represents a paradigm shift in how agencies plan, permit, manage, and protect land. LTW shifts from a project-by-project planning and management approach to an all-lands landscape scale approach. In other words, project implementation will cross-land ownership and jurisdictions without interruption. Through LTW, agencies look at the whole range of forest resources and plan projects that integrate vegetation, water, and wildlife to create multiple benefits. LTW will produce operational efficiencies by analyzing and implementing treatments across a much larger landscape. This will result in more effective and impactful treatments. Thus, LTW provides a basic model for future landscape restoration in other parts of the Basin.

The initiative uses a science-based, interagency, and stakeholder process to develop a comprehensive approach to addressing forest health and resilience, watershed protection and restoration, wildlife management, and community wildfire protection. The LTW process consists of five phases. Phase 1 involves a landscape resilience assessment (LRA). The LRA highlights parts of the landscape that are more or less resilient to key disturbances. Phase 2 is the development of a restoration strategy for the landscape. The strategy will focus on outcomes and operational efficiencies, and will

consider risks and tradeoffs as well as economics. Phase 3 is restoration project implementation planning and documentation. Phase 3 will take the landscape restoration strategy to a project specific level, as well as include the environmental review process. Phase 4 includes permitting and Phase 5 is project implementation, monitoring, and evaluation.

Status

Since August 2016, the agencies established numerous LTW work teams, including a stakeholder science committee and stakeholder community committee; completed a stakeholder assessment; defined the project boundary; developed the phased process design described above and a three-year work plan; developed a charter and a communication and education plan; identified essential management questions (derived from stakeholder and agency input); and developed future planning scenarios. The planning scenarios will be incorporated as assumptions into modeling and include climate change and management intensity scenarios.

Notably, the nearly complete Phase 1 LRA was presented to stakeholders on September 6, 2017. The LRA is built around the social and ecological values of the community, including forest, meadow, aquatic ecosystems, public health and safety, and recreation. The LRA specifies the various disturbance processes that shape the west shore landscape. For each ecosystem value, the LRA specifies indicators of resilience to associated disturbances, and a corresponding range of resilient conditions. Finally, it looks at how resilient the landscape is to specific disturbances and overall. Agencies will complete final work on the LRA in September and present it to stakeholders in October 2017. The LRA forms the foundation of Phase 2, which is now underway.

Project planning for Phase 3 will begin in the summer of 2018. The development of a strategy for jointly meeting the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), and TRPA environmental review requirements will overlap with Phase 2. However, the development of the NEPA, CEQA, and TRPA environmental document will begin in 2019, after stakeholder engagement is complete and they have recommended a draft Proposed Action, and will be completed in 2020. The agencies expect the permitting (Phase 4) and project implementation (Phase 5) to commence in the summer and fall of 2020 with implementation and monitoring to continue through 2025, or later, depending on project-specific needs.

List of Attachments

Attachment 1 – Project Map

Conservancy Staff Contact

Jason Vasques

jason.vasques@tahoe.ca.gov