

ATTACHMENT 3.7a

POLARIS CREEK AND WETLAND RESTORATION, FEASIBILITY STUDY

Grant Type: Planning

Applicant: Tahoe Resource Conservation District

Recommended Funding: \$282,000 (Attachment 3.7b)

Location: Polaris Creek and wetland is located northeast of Tahoe City, between State Route 28 and Lake Tahoe (Attachment 3.7c). The feasibility study area is located in the northern portion of the Lake Tahoe Basin between Tahoe City and Dollar Hill (Attachment 3.7d).

Overview

Description of Recommended Action

The Tahoe Resource Conservation District (Tahoe RCD) is requesting Proposition 1 funding from the Conservancy for the Polaris Creek and Wetland Restoration, Feasibility Study. The recommended planning grant will support the Tahoe RCD in exploring opportunities and constraints associated with restoring Polaris Creek and the adjacent wetland complex. Tahoe RCD will take into consideration the recreational uses of the feasibility study area and the potential to relocate and enhance recreational facilities. The feasibility study will include alternatives and conceptual plans for recreation facility relocation and site restoration.

Tahoe RCD will investigate the feasibility of relocating the Lake Forest Campground, Pomin Park Ball Fields, and selected parking. Tahoe RCD will not investigate the relocation of the Coast Guard station, boat launch, or restrooms, although they may consider some reconfiguration of the restrooms.

The relocation of recreation facilities would make possible a comprehensive restoration of a unique stream and wetland complex. Tahoe RCD will explore the various restoration opportunities, including removal of fill in a wetland, reconstruction of

stream channels, and re-establishment of native vegetation. These improvements would restore natural wetland processes and functions, improve water quality entering Lake Tahoe, and enhance aquatic and terrestrial wildlife habitat. The restoration has the potential to restore up to 13 acres of stream environment zone (SEZ) and 2,500 linear feet of stream channel.

Staff intends to enter into a Proposition 1 planning grant agreement with Tahoe RCD in the fall of 2017.

History

The Polaris Creek and Lake Forest Creek watersheds have a long record of significant anthropogenic disturbance. Construction of residential, commercial, and recreational development has impaired sensitive wetlands, wildlife habitat, and water quality. Development resulted in diverted creeks away from their natural paths and filled SEZs to support various land uses.

In the early 2000's, Placer County began planning a comprehensive restoration of the Lake Forest and Polaris watersheds. Placer County, and partners, have completed several water quality improvement, SEZ and wildlife restoration, and recreation projects in these watersheds. Tahoe RCD will develop the feasibility study to pursue the most significant remaining restoration opportunity in this large-scale watershed planning effort.

Prior to development, several streams converged into a lush and functioning SEZ known as the Polaris Creek wetland complex (Attachment 3.7c). The creation of a number of recreational facilities, including the Pomin Park Ball Fields, filled large areas of SEZ, wetland habitat, and stream channels. The boat launch, Coast Guard station, campground, and parking also involved significant disturbance, earthwork, and stream diversions. Relocation of recreational facilities, and associated restoration work, is necessary in the feasibility study area to re-establish the rare and valuable natural resources that once existed there.

The recommended grant includes extensive collaboration with the public landowners (California Department of Parks and Recreation, Placer County, and the California Department of Fish and Wildlife), as well as Tahoe City Public Utility District, the manager of the recreational facilities. Tahoe RCD will also engage with other agencies and stakeholders during the feasibility study to ensure early involvement in the process.

Financing

Proposed Grant Budget

The budget may be adjusted between line items, but total expenditures under the grant will not exceed \$282,000.

Activity	Amount
Feasibility Study	\$ 267,000
Administration	\$ 15,000
TOTAL	\$ 282,000

Proposed Schedule

Activity	Completion Date
Develop Request for Proposal	March 2018
Select Consultant	May 2018
Draft Feasibility Study	June 2019
Final Feasibility Study	September 2019

Authority

Consistency with the Conservancy's Enabling Legislation, Strategic Plan, and Program Guidelines

The recommended action to award grant funding for this feasibility study is consistent with the Conservancy's enabling legislation, the Strategic Plan, and the Proposition 1 Grant Guidelines.

Consistency with External Authorities

The recommended action is consistent with the Lake Tahoe Environmental Improvement Program (EIP) because it completes the implementation of EIP project #01-02-02-0040. The Tahoe Regional Planning Agency Regional Plan prioritizes acquisition and/or restoration of aging developed properties on or adjacent to environmentally sensitive lands. The feasibility study is consistent with the California Water Action Plan and the State Wildlife Action Plan because it will lead to improved water quality and wildlife habitat.

Compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act

Pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (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 of the California Natural Resources Agency to have no significant effect on the environment. Staff has evaluated the proposed planning activities and found them to be exempt under CEQA. These activities qualify for a statutory exemption under CEQA Guidelines section 15262 (Feasibility and Planning Studies). A notice of exemption (NOE) has been prepared for the activities (Attachment 3.7e). If the Board approves the acceptance and expenditure of funds, staff will file the NOE with the State Clearinghouse pursuant to CEQA Guidelines section 15062.

List of Attachments

Attachment 3.7b – Resolution 17-09-02.7
Attachment 3.7c – Project Map
Attachment 3.7d – Location Map
Attachment 3.7e – Notice of Exemption, Exhibit A

Conservancy Staff Contact

Scott Carroll

scott.carroll@tahoe.ca.gov