

Senate Bill 630 Public Access Grants

Recommended Action: Adopt Resolutions 20-06-06.1 and 20-06-06.2 (Attachments 1 and 2) authorizing the following two grants:

1. A grant of up to \$150,000 to the Sierra Business Council (SBC) to support Lake Tahoe Water Trail (Water Trail) outreach and education activities; and
2. A grant of up to \$100,000 to the California Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) to implement Rubicon Trail re-construction and Emerald Bay facilities improvements.

Executive Summary: A visit to Lake Tahoe's shoreline provides an unparalleled perspective of the Lake's crystal blue waters, and offers extraordinary recreational opportunities. Maintaining and improving access to these special experiences is important, particularly for disadvantaged communities. The Recommended Action will authorize two grants to enhance public access at Lake Tahoe by (1) increasing the SBC's ability to produce and share Water Trail information; and (2) facilitating DPR trail and facility improvements at iconic Emerald Bay. The two grants, funded by the Lake Tahoe Science and Lake Improvement Account (Account), advance both the California Natural Resources Agency's "Access for All" initiative and the California Tahoe Conservancy's (Conservancy) Strategic Goal 3 by expanding opportunities for the public to enjoy California's open spaces and improving access to outdoor recreation in disadvantaged communities. The grants also continue the Conservancy's commitment to supporting Lake Tahoe Basin (Basin) partners by investing in priority recreation and public access projects. Upon Board authorization, Conservancy staff will work with both the DPR and the SBC to execute needed agreements and support project implementation.

Location: The Water Trail follows the entire shoreline of Lake Tahoe. The DPR Rubicon Trail re-construction and Emerald Bay facilities upgrade work will occur in Emerald Bay State Park, in El Dorado County (Attachment 3).

Fiscal Summary: Combined, the grants will allocate up to \$250,000 from the Account.

Overview

History

The two grants will be funded by the Account to improve public access at Lake Tahoe. The Water Trail provides unique paddle sports program support, while Emerald Bay remains a marquee destination for residents and visitors alike.

Lake Tahoe Science and Lake Improvement Account

The California State Lands Commission collects fees for public use of state lands at Lake Tahoe, most commonly for use of the lakebed by pier supports and buoy anchors. In 2013, Senate Bill (S.B.) 630 mandated that those fees be deposited into the Account to support a bi-state science advisory council and nearshore management. As one of three recipients of Account funding, the Conservancy directs these resources toward aquatic invasive species (AIS) control and public lake access projects. To date, the Conservancy has awarded nearly \$1.6 million in Account grants. The majority of those funds (approximately \$1.3 million) are for aquatic invasive plant control and the remainder support lake access projects.

Lake Tahoe Water Trail

The Water Trail is a 72-mile water route along the shoreline that connects public beaches with launch and landing sites, and is supported by educational wayfinding and interpretive signage. Paddle sports at Lake Tahoe offer cost-effective recreational opportunities for an estimated 2 million diverse visitors and residents. The SBC has developed the Water Trail and associated program to meet the needs of increasing numbers of new and diverse paddlers, and to manage their impact. Educational materials and outreach raise public awareness about stewardship, resource protection, responsible public lake access, and water safety. The Conservancy has supported the Water Trail since its inception. This includes developing initial signage (2006); leading an interagency assessment of paddler needs and trail improvements, known as the Lake Tahoe Non-Motorized Boating Framework (2009-2011); providing funding to the SBC for up to \$50,000 to improve the broader public outreach, update the Framework, and create a sustainable business model (2015); and providing funding to the SBC for up to \$75,360 for interpretive signage and developing a mobile phone mapping application (2018).

Emerald Bay and the Rubicon Trail

Emerald Bay is a National Natural Landmark known for its unparalleled views, natural beauty, geology, and unique history. Emerald Bay State Park is a popular visitor destination, particularly in summer months, and is one of Lake Tahoe's most photographed locations. In addition to the Lake, the Park's attractions include Eagle Falls and Vikingsholm, a 38-room mansion-turned-museum. The scenic Rubicon Trail for hikers wraps around Emerald Bay, with trailheads at Eagle Point campground, the museum, and D.L. Bliss State Park. Most visitors walk to the Lake from the Vikingsholm parking area along a paved access road and path, approximately one mile from the shoreline. Some visitors arrive by watercraft.

Years of heavy visitor traffic have taken a toll on the Rubicon Trail and the adjacent beaches. The lack of signage makes finding the best route to the Lake and other destinations confusing. User-created paths bypass the main Rubicon Trail and damage sensitive land and vegetation. The DPR has long sought to improve trail and picnic area conditions, but has lacked necessary resources.

Detailed Description of Recommended Action

1. Major Elements and/or Steps of the Recommended Action

Working with a stakeholder committee, staff identified the grants in this recommended action as priority, “shovel-ready” projects that (1) sustain unique lake access opportunities for paddle sports, and (2) improve conditions at one of the most heavily visited shoreline destinations, respectively.

Lake Tahoe Water Trail Outreach

The Water Trail outreach will help educate paddle sport enthusiasts about responsible lake access, environmental stewardship, and water safety. Activities funded by the grant will include:

- Update the Water Trail Map and Access Guide (Guide) to include more in-depth information regarding weather, water safety, boating regulations, camping and fire restrictions, resource protection, AIS prevention, out-and-back trips, transit, Americans with Disabilities Act-compliant (ADA) facilities, and designated access points.
- Update, print, and distribute the Water Trail Stewardship Brochure (Brochure). The Brochure provides local businesses, lodging facilities, and information centers with a ready resource that informs visitors about conservation and paddle sport opportunities at Lake Tahoe.
- Develop and distribute Spanish-language versions of the Guide and Brochure.
- Update the Water Trail website with the new Guide and Brochure, new imagery, video, and content, including Spanish translation, and to meet ADA accessibility requirements.
- Expand the use of social media with weather condition and access updates, and to gather usage and visitor needs information.

The SBC will provide approximately \$60,000 in matching resources through in-kind staff support, Guide sales, and Tahoe Regional Planning Agency Shoreline Education funds. Conservancy staff will execute needed agreements following Board authorization.

Rubicon Trail and Emerald Bay Facilities Upgrade

The grant will improve the visitor experience and address resource damage at Emerald Bay by improving the Rubicon Trail and facilities. The DPR actions funded by the grant will include:

- Re-construct approximately 800 linear feet of the Rubicon Trail, including removing redundant trail features to improve public beach access, re-route a small portion of the Trail out of sensitive land, improve safety, and restore sensitive areas.
- Enhance day-use facilities by installing two new park benches, directional signage, and fencing to protect sensitive natural resources.
- Enhance Emerald Bay views by trimming trees and removing brush (does not include the removal of trees).
- Educate users about the surrounding area and the history of Vikingsholm and Emerald Bay by installing interpretive panels.

The DPR plans to implement the activities described above during the 2020 and 2021 field seasons. The DPR will provide approximately \$25,000 in matching funds through in-kind staff support and labor from the California Conservation Corps. Conservancy staff will execute needed agreements following Board authorization.

2. Overall Context and Benefits

Lake Tahoe Water Trail Outreach

By supporting paddle sport enthusiasts of all levels, the Water Trail outreach and education promotes health and wellness through low-impact recreation that connects people with the Lake. Water Trail outreach needs are constantly evolving in response to user and local business feedback. Regularly updating, printing, and distributing, including through the website, the Guide and Brochure ensures that diverse populations of paddlers have the most current information about access, lake conditions, and environmental stewardship. Similarly, the SBC is increasingly using social media to reach mass markets. In addition to underwriting printed materials, this grant funding will give the Water Trail a larger social media presence. Outreach materials will thus reach larger audiences, and better support land management and conservation partners with Water Trail use information.

Rubicon Trail and Emerald Bay Facilities Upgrade

The grant will allow the DPR to re-construct portions of the Rubicon Trail, eliminate redundant pathways, and restore sensitive natural resources. The grant will also fund directional and interpretative signage that will guide users to the most convenient beach locations, non-sensitive lake access points, and other site attractions. The same signage will educate visitors about Emerald Bay's unique natural and human history. These enhancements will improve community access and foster enjoyment, understanding, and stewardship.

3. Schedule for the Recommended Action

Lake Tahoe Water Trail Outreach	Date
Secure new photos and video for outreach materials/website	2020
Update, print, and distribute Guide	2020 and 2021
Update, print, and distribute Brochure	2020 and 2021
Social media outreach	2020 and 2021

Rubicon Trail and Emerald Bay Facilities Upgrade	Date
Rubicon Trail re-construction	2020 and 2021
Bench and directional sign installation	2021
Interpretive panel installation	2021

Financing

The two grants will be funded by the Account, totaling up to \$250,000.

Authority

Consistency with the Conservancy's Enabling Legislation

The recommended action is consistent with the Conservancy's enabling legislation. Specifically, Government Code section 66907.7 authorizes the Conservancy to award grants to state agencies and nonprofit organizations for purposes consistent with its mission.

Consistency with the Conservancy's Strategic Plan

The recommended action is consistent with Strategic Plan Goal 3, Strategy 1: Provide signature opportunities for all people to experience and enjoy Lake Tahoe's beaches, rivers, wildlife, and mountains.

Consistency with the Conservancy's Program Guidelines

The recommended action is consistent with the Conservancy's 2009 Public Access and Recreation Program Guidelines. The two project grants advance the program objectives to increase public access and recreational opportunities, to provide a range of access opportunities, and to support environmental interpretation and wayfinding efforts that promote stewardship, provide information, and lessen confusion for recreationists.

Consistency with External Authorities

The recommended action is consistent with the authority given to the Conservancy through Senate Bill (SB) 630 pursuant to Public Resources Code section 6217.6.1. The Conservancy engaged the SB 630 stakeholder group to discuss these grants and the reasons for their selection.

Compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act

Lake Tahoe Water Trail Outreach

This grant does not involve any specific activity which has the potential to result in either a direct physical change in the environment or a reasonably foreseeable indirect physical change in the environment; therefore, this grant is not a “project” within the meaning of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).

Rubicon Trail and Emerald Bay Facilities Upgrade

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 of the California Natural Resources Agency to have no significant effect on the environment. Staff has evaluated this Project and has found it to be exempt under CEQA. This Project qualifies for categorical exemptions under CEQA Guidelines sections 15302 (Replacement or Reconstruction), 15303 (New Construction of Small Structures), and 15304 (Minor Alterations to Land). Each discrete portion of the Project is clearly and completely covered by one of the categorical exemptions listed above.

The Project is exempt under CEQA Guidelines section 15302 (Replacement or Reconstruction) because it consists of reconstructing the Rubicon Trail and rerouting a small portion of the Trail, which will be located in the same site and have substantially the same use and capacity as the current Trail. The Project is exempt under CEQA Guidelines section 15303 (New Construction of Small Structures) because it consists of installing small structures, including new interpretive panels, two park benches, directional signage, and resource protection fencing, which are considered appurtenant structures to existing Park facilities. Further, the Project is exempt under CEQA Guidelines section 15304 (Minor Alterations to Land) because it consists of restoring sensitive areas by the Trail and decommissioning portions of the Trail, trimming trees, and removing brush (but not removing trees). Staff has prepared a notice of exemption (NOE) for the Project (Attachment 4). If the Board approves the Project, staff will file the NOE with the State Clearinghouse pursuant to CEQA Guidelines, section 15062.

List of Attachments

- Attachment 1 – [Resolution 20-06-06.1 Lake Tahoe Water Trail Outreach](#)
- Attachment 2 – [Resolution 20-06-06.2 Rubicon Trail and Emerald Bay Facilities Upgrade](#)
- Attachment 3 – [Rubicon Trail and Emerald Bay State Park Map](#)
- Attachment 4 – [Rubicon Trail and Emerald Bay Facilities Upgrade Notice of Exemption](#)

Conservancy Staff Contact

Robert Larsen, Water Quality Program Manager

robert.larsen@resources.ca.gov