

## PROPOSITION 68 FORESTRY GRANTS

**Recommended Action:** Adopt Resolutions 20-09-08.1 and 20-09-08.2 (Attachments 1 and 2) authorizing the following two grants:

1. A grant of up to \$75,000 to the USDA Forest Service, Pacific Southwest Research Station (PSW) for a Prescribed Fire Optimization Strategy (Strategy); and
2. A grant of up to \$351,000 to the Lake Tahoe Community College District (LTCC) for a Forest Health Training and Job Placement Program (Program).

**Executive Summary:** Wildfire, drought, and a changing climate threaten the Lake Tahoe Basin's (Basin) communities and forests. Forest treatments are necessary to restore resilience, but limited use of prescribed fire and limited workforce are major barriers to achieving the Basin's forest management goals. The grant to the PSW will fund research, analysis, and a strategic plan that will optimize the use of prescribed fire. The grant to LTCC will help establish a new forestry training and workforce development program within the Basin. The recommended actions advance the California Tahoe Conservancy's (Conservancy) Strategic Plan Goals 1 (Steward Conservancy Lands and Protect Basin Communities from Wildfire) and 2 (Restore the Resilience of Basin Forests and Watersheds), as well as the Lake Tahoe Environmental Improvement Program (EIP). The recommended actions also support Executive Order B-52-18, which calls for increasing the pace and scale of forest treatments.

**Location:** The Strategy will analyze forests and potential prescribed fire treatments Basinwide. The Program will be based in South Lake Tahoe and will provide training opportunities Basinwide.

**Fiscal Summary:** Staff seek authorization to award up to \$426,000 of Proposition 68 funding.

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### Overview

#### History

The Strategy and Program advance goals identified in the Lake Tahoe West Restoration Partnership's (LTW) Landscape Restoration Strategy (LRS) and the Lake Tahoe Basin Forest Action Plan (Forest Action Plan).

## Prescribed Fire Optimization Strategy

In 2016 the LTW was launched by the Conservancy, PSW, California Department of Parks and Recreation, Tahoe Regional Planning Agency, National Forest Foundation, USDA Forest Service, Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit, and Tahoe Fire and Fuels Team (TFFT). In December 2019, these partners released the LRS. The LRS provides a 20-year framework to increase the pace and scale of restoration across all ownerships on the west shore. Partners are now using the LRS to guide planning of the Lake Tahoe West Restoration Project, which totals 59,000 acres.

Since the inception of the LTW, the PSW has worked with agencies and stakeholders to ground landscape restoration efforts in science. Partners aim to make LTW scientific analyses and frameworks applicable to the entire Basin. The LTW has completed initial work on how to increase the use of prescribed fire. The PSW proposes to develop a corresponding Strategy for the entire Basin consistent with the LRS and Forest Action Plan. The Strategy will help land managers strategically time, locate, and sequence their use of prescribed fire to meet forest health objectives while avoiding significant public health impacts.

## Forest Health Training and Job Placement Program

The TFFT released the Forest Action Plan in 2019. Basin fire and land management agencies formed the TFFT in 2008 to coordinate Basinwide projects that reduce hazardous fuels, and to help prepare Basin communities for wildfire. The Forest Action Plan charts a path for collaboration across property boundaries to accelerate community wildfire protection and landscape restoration. Partners also use the Forest Action Plan to guide funding requests and aid communication and coordination with stakeholders.

The Forest Action Plan prioritizes establishing a Basin forestry training program to expand the workforce. The Program will provide long-term benefits by increasing the number of qualified professionals to meet the goals of Basin and State agencies.

In 2019 the Conservancy and LTCC coordinated on the LTCC's application for a California Climate Investments grant to fund a forest health training and job placement program. The LTCC did not succeed in obtaining the grant and now seeks alternative funding for the program. The LTCC has since secured \$570,000 in cost-share from the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) and the California Conservation Corps (CCC). The LTCC's Lake Tahoe Adult Education Consortium (ADVANCE) and the California Community Colleges Centers of Excellence for Labor Market Research are also contributing \$200,000 in labor.

## **Detailed Description of Recommended Action**

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

Staff seeks authorization to award two Proposition 68 local assistance grants to partners.

### Prescribed Fire Optimization Strategy

Staff recommends that the Board authorize a grant for up to \$75,000 to the PSW to develop the Strategy. The PSW will conduct analyses that build upon existing fire and smoke modeling conducted through the LTW. The PSW will host a stakeholder workshop with scientists, land managers, and regulators to designate potential treatment units and understand fire control strategies. The PSW will then synthesize the scientific analyses and potential treatment units in a plan that provides strategies for locating, timing, and sequencing prescribed fire, and for managing fires that are naturally ignited (e.g., lightning).

### Forest Health Training and Job Placement Program

Staff recommends that the Board authorize a grant for up to \$351,000 to partially fund the development of a Program for the Basin. The LTCC will use grant funds to manage the Program, which includes coordinating with Basin agencies and other employers to assess work opportunities, providing stipends for students to gain work experience, developing curriculums, and coordinating accreditation. The LTCC will establish a qualified instructor pool, recruit students, place students in jobs to fulfill work experience requirements, and develop online and on-campus courses. For CCC members located in the Basin the LTCC will also offer an initial Employable Skills Certificate in Forestry in 2020. The LTCC will then expand forestry certificate offerings, will develop a Forestry and Fire Prevention Associate of Science degree, and evaluate pathways for transferring to a four-year degree.

## 2. Overall Context and Benefits

The limited use of prescribed fire and limited workforce are major barriers to achieving forest treatment goals contained in the LRS and Forest Action Plan. The grants will build capacity through fire analysis and local workforce development. The grants advance Strategic Plan Goals 1 (Steward Conservancy Lands and Protect Basin Communities from Wildfire) and 2 (Restore the Resilience of Basin Forests and Watersheds). The grants also advance the EIP and Executive Order B-52-18, which calls for increasing the pace and scale of forest treatments.

### Prescribed Fire Optimization Strategy

Fire is a natural ecosystem process that is necessary for maintaining forest health. Naturally ignited fire that is managed for resource benefit and prescribed fire can be the best and least expensive tools for reducing fuels and restoring forests. However, multiple factors limit land managers' ability to use prescribed fire and naturally ignited fire. Through this grant, scientists and land managers will analyze how much of the Basin landscape is suitable for using prescribed fire and naturally ignited fire based upon fuel conditions, fire control locations, and weather. They will then prioritize and schedule potential burns in light of these operational constraints.

### Forest Health Training and Job Placement Program

The Program will enhance community access, education, and workforce development in a career pathway critical to building long-term capacity for forestry projects in the Basin. Land managers currently have difficulty recruiting and retaining qualified forestry staff to

plan and implement projects. Basin partners need to increase the skilled forestry workforce to support the treatment and protection goals of the LRS and Forest Action Plan. The Program will provide specialized training and employment opportunities for disadvantaged communities, enhancing local workforce capacity and thereby leading to improved health of Basin forests. Consistent with the demographics of LTCC and South Tahoe High School students, over half of the targeted audience for Program recruitment will be young adults who are socioeconomically disadvantaged. Additional target audiences include workers from the hospitality and tourism industries recently displaced because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

3. Schedule for the Recommended Action

Conservancy staff intends to execute the grant agreements in fall 2020. The PSW and LTCC will begin work once grant funds are received.

**Table 1. Schedule – Prescribed Fire Optimization Strategy**

<b>Activity</b>	<b>Completion Date</b>
Scientific analyses of potential fire behavior and smoke impacts	Winter 2020
Scientist and land manager workshop to guide potential operational delineations and strategies	Spring 2021
Synthesis of strategies and potential treatment units	Winter 2021

**Table 2. Schedule – Forest Health Training and Job Placement Program**

<b>Activity</b>	<b>Completion Date</b>
Develop and provide initial course offerings	Spring 2021
Initiate recruitment/job-placement program	Summer 2021
Offer full-time program and certify degree offerings	Spring 2022
Overall program management and coordination	Winter 2023

**Financing**

The recommended action will result in the expenditure of up to \$426,000 of Proposition 68 funds across fiscal years 2020/21, 2021/22, and 2022/23.

**Table 3. Budget**

<b>Grant</b>	<b>Proposed Grant Amount</b>	<b>Cost Share</b>	<b>Total Budget</b>
Prescribed Fire Optimization Strategy	<b>\$75,000</b>	\$0	\$75,000
Forest Health Training and Job Placement Program	<b>\$351,000</b>	\$770,000	\$1,121,000
<b>Total for All Grants</b>	<b>\$426,000</b>	\$770,000	\$1,196,000

### **Authority**

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

The recommended actions are consistent with the Conservancy's enabling Legislation. Specifically, Government Code section 66907.7 authorizes the Conservancy to award grants to federal agencies and nonprofit organizations for purposes consistent with its mission.

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

The recommended actions advance the Conservancy's Strategic Plan Goals 1 (Steward Conservancy Lands and Protect Basin Communities from Wildfire) and 2 (Restore the Resilience of Basin Forests and Watersheds).

#### **Consistency with the Conservancy's Program Guidelines**

The recommended actions are consistent with the Conservancy's Grant Guidelines. The recommended action for the Strategy is consistent with the Conservancy's Forest Improvement Program Guidelines.

#### **Consistency with External Authorities**

The recommended actions are consistent with the environmental goals of the EIP and the Forest Action Plan.

### **Compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act**

#### Prescribed Fire Optimization Strategy Grant

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 categorically exempt because they have been determined by the Secretary of the California Natural Resources Agency to have no significant effect on the environment. One such categorical exemption applies to information collection. (Cal. Code Regs., tit. 14, § 15306.) Staff has evaluated the underlying activities related to this grant and has found the grant to qualify for this exemption because it involves research, data collection, modeling, and evaluation of fire optimization strategies within the Basin, which do not result in a serious or major disturbance to an environmental resource. Staff

prepared a notice of exemption (NOE) for the grant (Attachment 3). If the Board approves the grant, staff will file the NOE with the State Clearinghouse pursuant to State CEQA Guidelines, section 15062.

#### Forest Health Training and Job Placement Program

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. One such exemption applies to educational or training programs involving no physical changes. (Cal. Code Regs., tit. 14, § 15322.) Staff has evaluated the underlying activities related to this grant and has found that the grant qualifies for this exemption because it involves forestry curriculum development, skills training, and job placement. Staff prepared an NOE for the grant (Attachment 4). If the Board approves the grant, staff will file the NOE with the State Clearinghouse pursuant to State CEQA Guidelines, section 15062.

#### **List of Attachments**

Attachment 1 – Resolution 20-09-08.1

Attachment 2 – Resolution 20-09-08.2

Attachment 3 – Notice of Exemption – Prescribed Fire Optimization Strategy Grant

Attachment 4 – Notice of Exemption – Forest Health Training and Job Placement Program Grant

#### **Conservancy Staff Contact**

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