

## **COMMUNITY AND CLIMATE RESILIENCE UPDATE AND PANEL DISCUSSION**

For the past several years, the California Tahoe Conservancy (Conservancy) has dedicated its spring Board meeting to exchanging insights and discussing partnership opportunities with state, federal, tribal, legislative, and non-governmental leaders in Sacramento. At today's meeting, the Conservancy seeks input from an executive-level Resilience Panel (Panel) on key issues associated with building community and climate resilience in the Lake Tahoe Basin (Basin). The Basin is a microcosm of California; it combines urbanization and recreation pressures with sensitive resources. In this regard the Panel can also inform similar work around the State.

For context, the Conservancy is using its land, resource, and sustainable communities programs to regionally integrate state priorities. Regional integration can involve aligning funding, implementing multiple-benefit projects, ensuring the compatibility of policies, working across jurisdictions and sharing common field crews, and using ecoregional or watershed boundaries. State priorities include equitable access to outdoor recreation; biodiversity conservation; wildfire protection and fire-fighting infrastructure; tribal co-management; forest and watershed landscape resilience; walkable, bikeable communities with affordable housing; and climate change mitigation and adaptation. The Conservancy places special emphasis on stewarding its state lands. The Conservancy's 2018-2023 Strategic Plan aligns multiple state mandates; its corresponding 2021 annual operational plans foreground and accelerate regional integration of these mandates.

This update serves as the reference material for the Panel. It first reviews key state initiatives and mandates. Second, it reviews the Conservancy's major accomplishments in aligning its programs with these mandates. Finally, it highlights emerging challenges, opportunities, and questions for discussion among the panelists, board members, and other meeting participants.

### **Key Takeaways from 2020 Panel Discussion**

At last year's Conservancy Board meeting in Sacramento, panelists provided several insights that have helped to set the stage for today's discussion. These include:

- The Conservancy's programs provide a unique opportunity for connecting local action to state mandates.
- The Conservancy should build capacity for climate action by continuing to strengthen partnerships with federal, tribal, local government, and private partners.
- Sustainable government funding can inspire the private sector to invest in infrastructure and workforce development.
- Basin partners can better demonstrate the value of investments by using scientific metrics to track and report progress.

- Basin partners should involve the environmental justice community in forest and watershed restoration planning.

### **Key State Initiatives and Mandates**

The Conservancy's broad mission provides unique opportunities to advance statewide goals and policies. The Conservancy plays a range of roles in various projects and initiatives, from directly implementing projects on its own land and providing grants to local agencies, to leading or convening Basinwide initiatives. The Conservancy has the programmatic, operational, and financial flexibility to pilot new approaches to regional integration. Recent state initiatives and mandates include:

- Updating the **California Climate Adaptation Strategy**, which is the State's roadmap for protecting communities, infrastructure, services, and the environment from climate change impacts.
- The **30 by 30 Executive Order on Biodiversity** (N-82-20), which directs state agencies to increase the pace and scale of environmental restoration to conserve at least 30 percent of California's land by 2030.
- Developing the **Natural and Working Lands Climate Smart Strategy**, which will serve as a framework to advance the State's carbon neutrality goal and build climate resilience, as directed by N-82-20.
- Preparing the **2022 Climate Change Scoping Plan Update**, which is the State's strategy for reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 40 percent below 1990 levels by 2030, per Executive Order B-30-15.
- Preparing the **Fifth Climate Assessment**, which synthesizes cutting-edge climate research to promote action for safeguarding California from climate change.
- The **Wildfire and Forest Resilience Action Plan**, which is the State's strategy for increasing the pace and scale of forest management to meet its target of treating 500,000 acres annually by 2025, particularly on state-owned lands.
- The **Agreement for Shared Stewardship of California's Forest and Rangelands**, which establishes a joint framework for the State and USDA Forest Service to enhance science-based forest and rangeland stewardship in California.
- **Executive Order N-06-19** on affordable housing, which requires the State to identify and prioritize excess state-owned property, and aggressively pursue sustainable, innovative, cost-effective housing projects.
- **Executive Order N-15-19 and 2020 Native American Ancestral Lands Policy**, which reaffirms the State's commitment to engage in government-to-government consultation with California Native American Tribes.

## Key Conservancy Accomplishments

- 1. Sustainable Communities:** Over the last year, the Conservancy has partnered with the Department of General Services (DGS) and Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD) to plan for affordable housing development on Conservancy asset lands, revitalizing the Basin's town centers, and advancing Executive Order N-06-19 on housing. This has involved:
  - Aligning state policies, programs, and legislative authorities with local partners and developers to catalyze and accelerate private investment in solving the State's housing crisis.
  - Transferring Conservancy-owned land to HCD.
  - Conducting several stakeholder and community engagement meetings, which required targeted outreach to vulnerable communities.
- 2. Wildfire Protection and Forest Health:** Over the last year, the Conservancy has partnered with Basin fire agencies, land managers, and academic institutions to increase the pace and scale of forest management consistent with the Lake Tahoe Basin Forest Action Plan. This has involved:
  - Beginning to align National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) review across federal and non-federal lands, including through the Lake Tahoe West Restoration Project and the federal Good Neighbor Authority.
  - Increasing forest management work on Conservancy-owned lands by leveraging multiple grant sources, and by launching a new dedicated forestry crew with the Tahoe Resource Conservation District.
  - Growing the workforce of forestry professionals by helping to fund the Lake Tahoe Community College's pioneering Forest Health Training and Job Placement Program.
  - Partnering with the Washoe Tribe of Nevada and California and USDA Forest Service to support tribal restoration and co-management at Máyala Wáta, a large, culturally significant meadow on the west shore of Lake Tahoe.
  - Collaboratively leading the Tahoe-Central Sierra Initiative (TCSI), which is restoring forest resilience across 2.4 million acres by strategically linking forest restoration groups.
- 3. Watershed and Access:** Over the last year, the Conservancy has led or supported major watershed restoration and recreation projects that improve water quality, enhance wildlife habitat, protect biodiversity, sequester carbon, improve public access, and restore climate resilience. This has involved:
  - Collaborating with local jurisdictions, non-governmental organizations, and federal agencies to identify and pursue restoration and recreation opportunities, especially in the Upper Truckee Watershed.
  - Strategizing to secure and leverage multiple federal, state, and local funding sources across budget years.

- Engaging with communities and affected landowners to negotiate public access improvements.
4. **Climate Adaptation:** Over the last year, the Conservancy has continued to collaboratively lead a Basinwide climate adaptation initiative. The initiative covers all jurisdictions in the region, advances several state mandates, and integrates Lake Tahoe, the surrounding forested uplands, infrastructure, and communities. This has involved:
- An integrated vulnerability assessment that provides a state-of-the-art scientific foundation and dedicated economic analyses to inform planning.
  - An executive-level primer that highlights key assessment impacts and the corresponding initiatives that Basin partners are undertaking to adapt (forthcoming this spring).
  - A portfolio of ongoing projects to demonstrate the proactive commitments of Basin partners as well as the substantial funding needed to avoid climate change's worst impacts (forthcoming this summer).
  - A COVID-19-era list of state and local projects to promote green economic recovery on the California side of the Basin, including climate resilience and job creation benefits.

### **Crosscutting Challenges**

The Conservancy has encountered the following challenges in implementing programs that align and integrate multiple state mandates in the Basin:

1. **Securing dedicated funding to implement the Lake Tahoe Environmental Improvement Program (EIP)**, which is the Basin's strategy for protecting and restoring ecosystems and watersheds. Challenges include:
  - State funding sources are usually focused on single topics, making it difficult for the Conservancy and partners to link communities, infrastructure, and natural resources through integrated climate adaptation planning.
  - State and federal investments in EIP projects have declined substantially over the last three years.
  - Basin partners have not recently renewed the financial commitments to the EIP, which has limited their ability to request and secure sustainable funding.
2. **Coordinating stakeholders working on conservation, restoration, and infill development** to deliver projects that reduce greenhouse gas emissions along with environmental and community benefits. Challenges include:
  - Developers are not required to direct storm water into area-wide basins, reducing the overall effectiveness of storm water infiltration systems.
  - When town center land is expensive or otherwise unavailable, state requirements for minimum numbers of affordable housing units can encourage development within the wildland-urban interface, which puts

people at risk and can generate environmental impacts.

3. **Engaging with community groups and individuals that represent the diversity of the communities served by the Conservancy.** Challenges include:
  - The Conservancy is in the early stages of developing a racial equity action plan as part of the Capitol Collaborative on Race and Equity, and therefore has not yet identified the most important opportunities for promoting racial equity through its lands and programs.
  - The Conservancy has only recently begun building organization-wide skills to better engage disadvantaged and historically underserved communities.
4. **Enhancing collaboration with California Native American Tribes to include co-management and knowledge exchange,** in addition to the formal consultations and notifications required by state law. Challenges include:
  - The Conservancy's limited experience and relatively brief history in working with Tribes means that shifting from consultation to collaboration and co-management will require building trust and mutual learning.
  - The Conservancy must thoughtfully schedule and prioritize its activities because—as with any government—Tribes have limited time and capacity to respond to large volumes of requests.

### **Organizing Questions for Panel Discussion**

Conservancy staff will briefly present the preceding information and then facilitate discussion based on the following series of questions. For each question staff has provided examples of potential approaches that build on historical work in the Basin. However, the questions are meant only as a starting point for discussion; panelists are invited to provide insights and ideas that draw on statewide perspectives.

#### **1. Regional Integration**

As mentioned earlier, regional integration can involve aligning funding, implementing multiple-benefit projects, ensuring the compatibility of policies, working across jurisdictions and sharing common field crews, and using ecoregional or watershed boundaries.

- a. How can the State and Conservancy better configure climate plans so they complement and augment existing forest, housing, and transportation plans—instead of duplicating these plans, competing for funding, or requiring one master plan to bind everything?
  - i. For example, identifying and compiling common performance measures to show progress on multiple plans.
  - ii. For example, identifying measures of regional integration itself.
- b. How can the Conservancy contribute to state initiatives that will advance regional climate adaptation and resilience?
  - i. For example, co-leading regional engagement and co-authoring regional sections for the State's Climate Adaptation Strategy, Natural and Working Lands Climate-Smart Strategy, Fifth Climate Change Assessment, and Biodiversity Collaborative.

- c. How can the State and Conservancy leverage regional frameworks to more rapidly attain Shared Stewardship goals?
  - i. For example, sharing lessons learned and tools from the TCSI with other forest restoration groups.
  - ii. For example, ensuring the contributions from regional plans such as the Lake Tahoe Basin Forest Action Plan are accounted for when measuring progress toward statewide goals.
  - iii. For example, expanding work under Good Neighbor Authority agreements or Joint Powers Authorities.

## **2. Sustainable Communities**

- a. How can the State and Conservancy better align sustainable community and infrastructure policies and funding to achieve development projects that simultaneously promote community and climate resilience?
  - i. For example, combining U.S. Department of Energy funding for microgrids that use battery and solar technologies, Housing and Community Development funding for affordable housing, and Strategic Growth Council funding for sustainable communities. (The developer is doing this in the Sugar Pine Village affordable housing project in South Lake Tahoe, which uses a previous Conservancy-owned asset land.)
  - ii. For example, developing community resilience hubs on state lands to support residents and coordinate services before, during, or after a natural disaster.
  - iii. For example, promoting development in town centers through regional and area plan requirements.
- b. How can sustainable community programs better integrate equitable access to open space and outdoor recreation in land use, transportation, and housing planning?
  - i. For example, including affordable housing, recreational, and water quality features from the start of planning for sustainable communities projects, rather than later in the planning process.
- c. How can small, rural local jurisdictions, with limited local funding sources, provide matching grant funds that makes them competitive with major metropolitan areas?
  - i. For example, valuing not only money, but also in-kind contributions of staff time, consulting expertise, and community engagement efforts.

### 3. Racial Equity

- a. How can the State and Conservancy better combine racial equity and equitable access to public land—in both rural and urban areas—with land and biodiversity conservation?
  - i. For example, partnering with Basin communities to increase opportunities to participate in restoration projects and serve as community stewards.
  - ii. For example, partnering with primary and secondary schools throughout the region to increase opportunities for students to enjoy public lands and learn about stewardship.
- b. What kinds of guidance, training, and tools would help public land managers better understand and advocate for the linkage between racial equity and environmental justice?
  - i. For example, revising agency strategic plans to incorporate racial equity action plans.
  - ii. For example, developing an interagency staff exchange program to enhance skill and knowledge transfer among state employees.

### 4. Tribal Co-management

- a. How can the State and Conservancy align their climate plans and investments with the community and climate resilience work of California Native American Tribes, including the Washoe Tribe of Nevada and California?
  - i. For example, use state lands to help establish resilience gardens, which protect, restore, and expand habitat for culturally significant plants and animals.
  - ii. For example, developing joint training programs and hiring shared resource crews, both to expand the trained workforce and to facilitate knowledge exchange.

Following panelist opening remarks, the staff facilitators will invite board members to join the discussion. After a period of time, the staff facilitators will invite the public to comment, including partners from the Basin.

### List of Attachments

Attachment 1 – Biographies of Panelists

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