

## **GRIFF CREEK BRIDGE CONSTRUCTION AND RESTORATION PROJECT**

**Recommended Action:** Adopt Resolution 21-06-06 (Attachment 1) authorizing the Griff Creek Bridge Construction and Restoration Project (Project), including providing up to \$150,000 to the USDA Forest Service, Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit (LTBMU) to construct the Griff Creek Bridge (Bridge) on California Tahoe Conservancy (Conservancy) land (Placer County Assessment Numbers (ANs) 090-020-007 and 090-020-008), and executing all other agreements as necessary in support of the Project.

**Executive Summary:** Staff recommends providing up to \$150,000 to the LTBMU to construct the Bridge. The recommended funding serves as a match to a grant awarded by the California Department of Parks and Recreation, Off-Highway Motor Vehicle Recreation Division (OHMVR Division) to the LTBMU to replace the original bridge. The original bridge collapsed in 2013, forcing the public to traverse directly through Griff Creek. The Bridge will reestablish a critical creek crossing on Gas Line Road, a USDA Forest Service road, which runs through the Conservancy's property, and will help to avoid future resource impacts to Griff Creek. Following construction of the Bridge, the Conservancy and the LTBMU will stabilize the Griff Creek bank and will perform restoration activities within the Project site. The Bridge will provide critical access to both the Conservancy and the LTBMU lands for administrative, emergency, off-highway motor vehicles (OHV), and non-motorized recreational purposes. The improved access resulting from constructing the Bridge may increase use on Conservancy land. This recommended action supports the Conservancy's Strategic Plan Goals 1, 2, and 3 by stewarding the Conservancy lands, restoring the resilience of watersheds, and providing public access to all.

**Location:** The Project is located on the Conservancy's 642-acre Griff Creek property (Placer County ANs 090-020-007 and 090-020-008) along Gas Line Road, located north of Kings Beach (Attachment 2).

**Fiscal Summary:** Staff requests authorization to provide up to \$150,000 in Habitat Conservation Fund (HCF) funding to support construction of the Bridge. This funding does not include anticipated annual maintenance and related costs for the Bridge and surrounding roads, including Gas Line Road, on Conservancy land.

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## Overview

### History

The Conservancy acquired the Griff Creek property from Southern Pacific Land Company in 1987. At the time of acquisition, a log bridge spanned Griff Creek, connecting Gas Line Road through the creek crossing. That log bridge deteriorated over time and collapsed in 2013. In response, Conservancy and Placer County staff removed pieces of the bridge and closed the crossing for public safety in 2015. Without a bridge, recreational users moved boulders and added woody material in the creek to access the property beyond the bridge, which caused resource damage and water quality issues. Furthermore, without a bridge, emergency personnel must currently use a steeper and less accessible route, increasing incident response time when emergency access is required beyond the bridge.

Gas Line Road, the unpaved road that crosses Griff Creek, begins and ends on the LTBMU lands surrounding the Conservancy's property. Gas Line Road serves as access for emergency personnel, pedestrians, cyclists, and OHV to surrounding public lands, both federal and state. In addition, Gas Line Road provides recreational access from the Kingswood Home Owners Association to the south of the Conservancy's property. Gas Line Road is also an access route to the Kingsview Estates subdivision, which is comprised of five undeveloped private parcels, located to the north of the Conservancy's property.

In 2018, Conservancy staff interviewed key agencies and area stakeholders, and ultimately formed a partnership with the LTBMU to construct a new bridge. The LTBMU is interested in constructing the bridge because of the access Gas Line Road provides to its adjacent lands. Furthermore, the Lake Tahoe Restoration Act identified the Conservancy's Griff Creek property, including the bridge construction location, as a potential transfer to the LTBMU. The access to adjacent federal lands and the potential future land exchange prompted the LTBMU to apply for a grant from the OHMVR Division to construct the Bridge. In September 2020, the OHMVR Division awarded the LTBMU that grant.

### Detailed Description of Recommended Action

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

The recommended action authorizes Conservancy staff to provide up to \$150,000 to the LTBMU, for the LTBMU to construct the Bridge on the Conservancy's property. This funding will serve as a match to the OHMVR grant awarded to the LTBMU. The LTBMU plans to construct a concrete and steel, single-span, vehicular bridge approximately 30 feet in length by 14 feet wide. The Bridge will have the load capacity to allow access for wildland emergency vehicles.

This recommended action also authorizes the Conservancy to enter into all agreements as necessary to carry out the Project, including any necessary short-term license

agreements for the LTBMU to enter onto Conservancy land to carry out the Project, and any other agreements related to maintenance, access, implementation, and restoration in support of the Project.

Following the Bridge construction, the LTBMU and Conservancy crews will share responsibilities to perform minor site restoration and stabilization measures, including: 1) narrowing the road prism and restoring water bars to reestablish road drainage features and to reduce erosion and sediment loss, 2) decommissioning and restoring a user-path that was established through native vegetation that provided creek passage following the failure of the bridge, 3) restoring a small seep on the west side of Griff Creek that is not draining efficiently after having been damaged by OHV use, 4) stabilizing eroding creekbanks which release sediment into Griff Creek that damages aquatic habitat and water quality, 5) repositioning five to six boulders that were placed in the creek by public users for crossing and are resulting in restricted and altered natural flow of the creek, 6) riprap installation around the new bridge footings to prevent future scouring, erosion, and sediment loss, and 7) downstream debris removal to increase fish habitat and improve water quality. The Conservancy will obtain all necessary state environmental permits for the Project, while the LTBMU will obtain any necessary federal permits.

## 2. Overall Context and Benefits

The Project will reduce the current impacts to soil and water quality following the original bridge collapse by eliminating the current issues of public in-stream traversing and associated resource damage. The bank stabilization and minor restoration activities will directly reduce sediment loss into Griff Creek and enhance the natural resources on Conservancy land. Toward that end, the Project furthers the goals of the Lake Tahoe Total Maximum Daily Load Program.

The Bridge construction will improve community access to open space and will reduce water quality issues and aquatic resource damage. With improved access, emergency personnel will be able to respond to incidents faster, resulting in enhanced public safety and wildfire protection in the area. Additionally, a stated goal of the Project under the OHMVR grant is to reestablish the critical creek crossing to avoid future resource damage on Conservancy land and waterways.

The Conservancy's Griff Creek property and surrounding LTBMU lands are popular recreation areas. Through the Bridge construction, more people will use the Conservancy's parcel, including OHV use. The Conservancy will perform regular monitoring and maintenance on the Griff Creek property. The Conservancy will also work with the LTBMU to address any damage from this increased use to the Bridge and along access roads, including Gas Line Road on Conservancy land. In addition, the LTBMU, through its Annual Forest Order, manages access to Gas Line Road where it connects with State Route Highway 267, through a gate that is open for public use from

June through November. This access will help to regulate use over the Conservancy's parcel from December through May.

### 3. Schedule for the Recommended Action

Conservancy and LTBMU staff intend to secure the necessary permits associated with the Project starting in summer 2021. The LTBMU staff anticipate starting construction of the Bridge in fall 2022 during the low-flow period for Griff Creek. Working with the LTBMU, Conservancy crews expect to conduct minor restoration activities upon completion of the Bridge construction in fall 2022.

| <b>Task</b>                                     | <b>Estimated Timeframe</b> |
|---|----------------------------|
| Execute Agreement to Provide Funding to LTBMU   | Summer 2021                |
| Permitting and Planning for Bridge Construction | Summer 2021-Spring 2022    |
| Bridge Construction and Restoration Activities  | Fall 2022                  |

### **Financing**

Upon Board authorization, staff intends to provide up to \$150,000 from the HCF as match funding. Additional Conservancy costs will include incidental staff time related to preparing and processing the necessary agreements, applying for environmental permits, and conducting minor restoration activities.

Conservancy staff estimates costs for inspection and ongoing maintenance of the Bridge and of the access roads (including Gas Line Road through the Conservancy's property) could be up to up to \$10,000 annually.

### **Authority**

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

Implementation of this Project is consistent with the Conservancy's enabling legislation. Specifically, Government Code section 66907.10 authorizes the Conservancy to improve and develop acquired lands for a variety of purposes, including protection of the natural environment. Under Government Code section 66907.9, the Conservancy is authorized to initiate, negotiate, and participate in agreements for the management of land under its ownership and control with local public agencies, state agencies, federal agencies, nonprofit organizations, individuals, corporate entities, or partnerships.

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

The Conservancy intends to advance Goal 1, Strategies B and E, by increasing the Conservancy's presence on its lands and implementing and developing innovative financial partnerships and interagency agreements. As a result, the Conservancy's and the Basin's ability and capacity to manage and restore its lands will increase. The Conservancy also intends to advance Goal 2, Strategy B, by advancing multiple benefit projects that creatively combine restoring and building the resilience of forests and

watersheds with water quality protection and recreation. In addition, the Conservancy intends to advance Goal 3, Strategy A, by providing signature opportunities on Conservancy lands 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 Special Use Guidelines because the Project meets the following evaluation criteria: it is consistent with the Land Management program objectives and existing uses of Conservancy land.

### **Consistency with External Authorities**

The recommended action is consistent with the Lake Tahoe Environmental Improvement Program (EIP) because it implements EIP project #01.02.01.0067.

## **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. Pursuant to Public Resources Code Sections 21001(f) and 21082, the Conservancy has also adopted regulations to implement, interpret, and make specific the provisions of CEQA (Cal. Code Regs., tit. 14, § 12100 et seq.).

Staff evaluated this Project and found it to be exempt under CEQA. This Project qualifies for a categorical exemption under CEQA Guidelines section 15302 (Replacement or Reconstruction) and the Conservancy's CEQA regulations, section 12102.2, and CEQA Guidelines section 15333 (Small Habitat Restoration Projects). Staff prepared a notice of exemption (NOE) for the Project (Attachment 3). 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 21-06-06

Attachment 2 – Project Map

Attachment 3 – NOE

- Exhibit A – NOE Map

## Conservancy Staff Contact

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