

**California Tahoe Conservancy**  
**Agenda Item 7**  
**June 16, 2022**

**2018-2023 STRATEGIC PLAN INTERIM ASSESSMENT**

This staff update summarizes progress towards achieving the California Tahoe Conservancy's (Conservancy) 2018-2023 Strategic Plan (Plan) goals and provides an interim assessment of what the Conservancy can focus on in the final years of the current Plan. This update begins with an overview of the Plan and the social, political, and environmental context under which the Plan was developed and used. Following the overview, the update summarizes progress, highlights, and insights for each goal. In reviewing progress, staff considered the four key categories of performance measures as described in the Plan to determine how well the goals and strategies were implemented; the effectiveness of the strategies; the degree to which the Conservancy established processes to achieve desired outcomes; and how well the Plan provided functional guidance to staff. Finally, the update provides overarching considerations for how the Conservancy can focus its efforts to best achieve the results envisioned when the Plan was adopted and to inform development of the next strategic plan.

**Overview**

The Plan, adopted by the Conservancy Board in December 2018, describes how the Conservancy will address state, regional, and Lake Tahoe Basin (Basin) priorities in coordination with its many agency and stakeholder partners. The Plan includes 22 strategies designed to achieve five goals. The goals are:

1. Steward Conservancy Lands and Protect Basin Communities from Wildfire
2. Restore the Resilience of Basin Forests and Watersheds
3. Provide Public Access and Outdoor Recreation for All Communities
4. Foster Basinwide Climate Adaptation and Sustainable Communities
5. Strive for Organizational Learning and Excellence

The Conservancy designed the five goals to respond to climate change and the social and ecological context at the time. Climate change, drought, and the threat of wildfire remain overarching drivers of state priorities, as does outdoor access for all and sustainable communities. Since its adoption, numerous pressures have elevated the significance of these priorities and new mandates have shaped the Conservancy's actions.

In March 2020, the COVID pandemic halted ordinary life for Californians. Governor Gavin Newsom declared a state of emergency. Californians experienced a shift to a telework environment, mask mandates, and vaccine requirements to protect public health and keep businesses and the government open. The global COVID pandemic has affected every aspect of the Conservancy's operations and employee's lives.

Forest health and fuels management are among the highest priorities in the Sierra Nevada. In recent years, western wildfires have increased in size and severity, with increasing devastation. Two fires in 2021 directly affected the Conservancy and its staff. The Tamarack Fire (July 2021) burned 68,000 acres and forced Markleeville residents to evacuate, displacing several employees. The Caldor Fire (August 2021) burned 221,000 acres and was one of only two fires to ever cross the Sierra Nevada; both occurred in 2021. The Caldor Fire entered the Basin threatening homes in Christmas Valley and Meyers and causing all south shore communities to evacuate, shutting down the Conservancy office. The Caldor Fire halted field operations during the evacuation period, including forestry operations.

In addition to COVID and wildfire, new state mandates and plans have also shaped the Conservancy's focus since adoption of the Plan three years ago. For example, in 2019 Governor Newsom signed executive order N-06-19, which set the stage for state-owned lands to be developed for affordable housing purposes. In 2020, executive order N-82-20 set a goal of conserving 30 percent of California's land by 2030 and reinforced the urgent need to combat climate change and biodiversity loss. Executive order N-82-20 also called for expanding equitable outdoor access for all Californians as a central goal for the State. The Conservancy dedicated resources to respond to these executive orders.

Conservancy staff also worked closely with the California Natural Resources Agency and Basin partners to help shape state plans such as Pathways to 30x30, the Natural and Working Lands Climate Smart Strategy, and the Wildfire and Forest Resilience Action Plan. Thanks to the insights of staff, the Board, and Basin partners who all helped shape the Plan, staff's efforts to advance the Plan also advanced these state mandates.

Finally, diversity and racial equity are some of the nation's most prominent social topics and were not reflected in the Plan. The Conservancy is taking steps to more directly address these important topics.

Since the Board adopted the Plan, the Conservancy has consistently advanced the Plan's goals and maintained a strong stewardship ethic while adapting to the additional pressures of climate change, wildfire, and COVID. The following are highlights of the Conservancy's progress and challenges.

## Strategic Plan Progress

### Goal 1. Steward Conservancy Lands and Protect Basin Communities from Wildfire

The Conservancy owns and manages nearly 4,700 parcels—totaling about 6,500 acres—that provide open space, water quality, and recreational benefits. Staff routinely inspects, resolves encroachments, reduces flammable fuels, and maintains the infrastructure and condition of Conservancy properties. Despite the challenges of COVID and the Caldor Fire, staff continued to maintain Conservancy lands and treat forests to reduce the threat of wildfire.

#### Highlights

	<b>2019</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>2021</b>
Forestry Acres Treated	494	423	277
Hazard Trees Removed	192	254	200
Citizen Reports Addressed	229	284	341
Parcels Inspected	2,048	2,214	2,606
Encroachments Resolved	12	45	45

#### Forest Action Plan

The Conservancy led the development of the Tahoe Fire and Fuels Team’s (TFFT) Lake Tahoe Basin Forest Action Plan (Forest Action Plan) in 2019. The Forest Action Plan lays out a comprehensive strategy for scaling up forest restoration to address climate change and protect Basin communities from wildfire. Treatments in the wildland-urban interface (WUI) proved highly effective during the Caldor Fire as they helped improve conditions for firefighters protecting homes and neighborhoods. The Forest Action Plan was instrumental in the Conservancy’s success in securing \$48 million in state and federal funding in 2021 to reduce fuels and increase forest resilience and build capacity. Through the TFFT’s work, the Basin will be one of the first regions in the western United States to complete and maintain all initial WUI treatments. The TFFT and the Forest Action Plan serve as models for regional forest health planning and for implementing the goals of the Governor’s Wildfire and Forest Resilience Taskforce (Taskforce).

#### Alta Mira

In 2017 and 2018, the Conservancy’s Alta Mira property experienced significant shoreline erosion caused by extended high lake levels and wave action. This erosion occurred near a popular recreation area of South Lake Tahoe, creating a public safety hazard. Conservancy staff responded quickly, and in 2019 the Conservancy worked with the Department of General Services and other partners to stabilize the shoreline and remove hazard trees. This property now provides excellent access to Lake Tahoe and is better prepared for impacts from the changing climate.

## Caldor Fire Recovery

After the Caldor Fire, staff assessed damage to Conservancy properties and stabilized multiple sites. Staff continues to coordinate with the USDA Forest Service, Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit (LTBMU) and other partners on recovery and restoration efforts.

## Stewarding Our Land

Conservancy staff maintains urban parcels in their natural state, which furthers state and regional environmental goals. Urban parcels provide multiple benefits, including wildlife habitat and corridors, water quality and sensitive habitat protection, neighborhood open space, cultural resource protection, and scenic values. Staff inspects more than 2,000 parcels annually to identify maintenance needs and hazards. Conservancy lands have nearly 575 unresolved encroachments on approximately 500 separate parcels, often with multiple parties encroaching and impacting a single Conservancy parcel. These encroachments can be as simple as a car or RV parked on Conservancy property or can be significantly more complicated and involve built structures and landscaping. Over the past three years staff has increased the number of parcels inspected, citizen calls addressed, and encroachments resolved.

## Insights

Increasing storm severity and the prevalent threat of wildfire presents continuing challenges for the Conservancy. The Caldor Fire increased public awareness and sensitivity to forest fuels on urban parcels. Accordingly, community members' reports of hazard trees and requests for vegetation removal have doubled. The Caldor Fire also demonstrated the benefits of the Conservancy's and TFFT's work to keep Basin neighborhoods safe from wildfire. Aided by past fuels treatments, firefighters protected homes in Christmas Valley, Meyers, and the City of South Lake Tahoe. With the recent influx of funding the Conservancy will continue to work with its partners to treat all Conservancy lands and implement the Forest Action Plan and the Wildfire and Forest Resilience Action Plan.

Staff is taking steps to address maintenance needs on Conservancy lands, which includes developing a five-year capital outlay plan and using approximately \$1 million of a new, one-time appropriation that staff requested for facility improvements to meet Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) standards and the Conservancy's ADA Transition Plan. The number of encroachments on Conservancy lands can have a substantial impact on the environment, are an improper use of state lands, and are often costly to resolve. Staff continues to seek funding to resolve encroachments. While past efforts to secure additional funding through the budget process have not been successful, staff will continue to make the case for additional funds in future fiscal years.

As more and more people visit the Basin and use Conservancy lands to recreate and enjoy the outdoors, staff is increasingly concerned about wildlife interactions and natural resource damage. The Conservancy does not have dedicated law enforcement or regulations to help manage lands, mitigate impacts, and resolve encroachments. Historically, the Conservancy has contracted with local governments and the California Highway Patrol for law enforcement services. These arrangements have been inconsistent and often fall short of the need for continued management and enforcement on Conservancy lands. Staff continues to explore various options for shared enforcement and rulemaking to address undesirable activities and ensure adequate stewardship and public safety on Conservancy lands.

## **Goal 2. Restore the Resilience of Basin Forests and Watersheds**

Recognizing the scale and gravity of the challenges facing its forests and watersheds, the Conservancy is increasingly shifting to large landscape, multi-jurisdictional, multiple-benefit projects. By partnering in landscape-scale restoration initiatives, the Conservancy is scaling up its efforts to achieve restoration goals and improve resilience for the Basin's forests and watersheds. In recent years, the Conservancy has focused on several large initiatives to restore resilience to the Basin's forests and watersheds, which are summarized below.

### Highlights

- Completed landscape-scale assessments for the Lake Tahoe West Restoration Partnership (59,000 acres) and Tahoe-Central Initiative (TCSI, 2.4 million acres)
- Developed restoration strategies for Lake Tahoe West and TCSI
- Restored over 200 acres of the Upper Truckee River and Marsh
- Completed Aquatic Invasive Species Action Agenda

### Lake Tahoe West Restoration Partnership and Tahoe-Central Sierra Initiative

The Conservancy co-leads the Lake Tahoe West Restoration Partnership (Lake Tahoe West), a 59,000-acre holistic forest and watershed restoration initiative, and the Tahoe-Central Sierra Initiative (TCSI), a 2.4-million-acre, landscape-level effort to facilitate and streamline restoration and capacity development. Staff also participates on the Governor's Taskforce. Lake Tahoe West and TCSI have set a precedent for how the Taskforce views resilience. Both Lake Tahoe West and TCSI take a regional approach to scaling up restoration, an approach the State has adopted through the Taskforce and the Regional Forest and Fire Capacity Program. The science investments in Lake Tahoe West and TCSI resulted in landscape-level resilience assessments and restoration strategies and the TCSI Framework for Resilience, which identifies ten pillars of resilience. These pillars are basic elements in the Taskforce's resilience structure and are presented in the Wildfire and Forest Resilience Action Plan. The science investments also led to the streamlining of wildlife surveys needed to meet

environmental compliance requirements. The science also informed the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency (TRPA) code change for forestry operations on steep slopes.

### Greater Upper Truckee Watershed Restoration

The Conservancy and multiple partners are collaborating to restore the health of the Basin's largest and most ecologically significant watershed. In the last three years, the Conservancy restored over 200 acres of marsh. The Upper Truckee Marsh project included the creation of a new wetland by filling an artificial lagoon that once maintained populations of aquatic invasive species. The project also reconnects the floodplain via a series of pilot channels and provides ADA access with a new trail through the restoration area to Cove East beach. Recently, staff led the development of the multi-agency Greater Upper Truckee Watershed Restoration Accomplishment and Opportunities synthesis, which identifies ten strategies for restoring the Upper Truckee Watershed and creating sustainable solutions to climate change, including the completion of new sections of the Dennis T. Machida Memorial Greenway.

### Insights

The Conservancy and its partners are on the leading edge of change for the Basin and broader central Sierra region. For example, the Upper Truckee Marsh restoration is a significant climate resilience milestone for Lake Tahoe. Restoring the Marsh is enhancing ecosystem function, improving water quality, increasing carbon sequestration, protecting habitat, providing climate refugia for numerous species, and providing outdoor access for visitors and residents. Lake Tahoe West will result in improved forest and watershed resilience for the entire west shore of Lake Tahoe. Numerous projects within Lake Tahoe West are already underway including the LTBMU's West Shore WUI project, the Conservancy's Dollar Creek Forest Health project, a collaborative effort being led by the Washoe Tribe of Nevada and California (Washoe Tribe) to restore Máyala Wáta (Meeks Meadow), and several California Department of Parks and Recreation projects. Finally, TCSI provides a model by which regions can collaborate at meaningful scales. TCSI is working with the Taskforce to prepare a regional plan and project pipeline to improve how to identify and fund restoration priorities.

While the Conservancy is making significant progress, capacity to sustain scaled-up restoration is limited. Therefore, staff is focusing on partnerships that leverage resources and build capacity. For example, the Conservancy entered into a Good Neighbor Agreement with the LTBMU to complete forestry projects on LTBMU lots next to Conservancy lots for more efficient work. The Conservancy also provided a grant to the Lake Tahoe Community College to establish a forest health training and job placement program and certification course for workforce training. Through recent Regional Forest and Fire Capacity Program funding, the Conservancy is supporting the Tahoe Resource Conservation District in updating the Basin's Community Wildfire

Protection Plan and pre-attack plans. Staff is also exploring opportunities to partner with the Washoe Tribe to expand prescribed fire training and the use of cultural prescribed burns. Finally, the Conservancy and TCSI continue to explore opportunities to support a forest restoration economy and utilize biomass from fuels treatments to reduce the need for pile burning. These capacity building and leveraging opportunities will help create durable solutions for forest restoration and management.

### **Goal 3. Provide Public Access and Outdoor Recreation for All Communities**

Outdoor access for all is a key priority for the Conservancy and the State. The Conservancy has had substantial success in expanding public access and outdoor recreation through work with its partners. This partnership approach has allowed the Conservancy to act as funder, advisor, and collaborator, while shifting some implementation responsibilities to partners, such as local governments, who specialize in constructing and maintaining recreation facilities.

#### Highlights

- Completed phases 1b and 2 of the Dennis T. Machida Memorial Greenway with partners
- Completed an ADA plan for the most popular Conservancy recreation sites
- Restored the site of the former Tahoe Pines campground to provide new accessible features and river access
- Supported El Dorado County in improving river access at the Conservancy's Elks Club property

#### Dennis T. Machida Memorial Greenway

The Conservancy provided a grant to El Dorado County in 2018 for the Greenway. Between 2020 and 2021, El Dorado County completed approximately one mile of new Class I trail through the heart of South Lake Tahoe. The Conservancy renamed the trail to the Dennis T. Machida Memorial Greenway to honor the Conservancy's first executive director.

#### Tahoe Pines Restoration

The Conservancy restored the former Tahoe Pines campground in 2020. Restoration of the site included the creation of a half acre of new wetlands and habitat restoration along the Upper Truckee River. Additionally, the Conservancy reconstructed the parking area and built a new pathway, bridge, and stream overlook pad that meet ADA standards.

#### Funding Recreation and Public Access

The Conservancy supported several comprehensive multiple-benefit projects using funds from Proposition 1, Proposition 68, and the Lake Tahoe Science and Lake Improvement Account that support statewide priorities such as climate resilience,

recreational access, and water quality. This includes funding for the Kings Beach Pier Relocation Project, Tahoe Valley Water Quality and Greenbelt Project, 56 Acres Master Plan, Lake Tahoe Water Trail, and Country Club Erosion Control Project- Phase 3, along with improvements to the Rubicon Trail and recreational facilities at Emerald Bay. Staff also supports regional initiatives led by partners, including the TRPA-led effort to develop a destination stewardship vision plan.

### Insights

The Conservancy has excelled at supporting and collaborating with partners to create and enhance recreational access through physical improvements to recreation destinations. However, the Plan and the Governor's Access for All initiative highlight the need to improve access for underserved or underrepresented communities. The Conservancy is increasing its focus on equitable access, including through developing a new set of grants aimed at improving access to the Lake and other Basin destinations for historically underserved groups.

The Conservancy and the Nevada Division of State Parks are exploring options to improve joint management of Van Sickle Bi-State Park to better align and share resources.

The Conservancy also needs the ability to better regulate trails on its lands and integrate them with trail systems connecting from adjacent lands. Staff is developing a inventory of trails on Conservancy land to inform potential future rulemaking, help staff manage trail use, and coordinate allowed uses with partner agencies and adjacent landowners.

### **Goal 4. Foster Basinwide Climate Change Adaptation and Sustainable Communities**

The Basin faces unprecedented changes, including warmer temperatures, longer droughts, less snowpack, earlier runoff, and more severe floods, wildfires, and smoke. Starting in 2018, the Conservancy took a greater role in climate change planning in the Basin, working with the States of California and Nevada, in addition to the TRPA, LTBMU, and Tahoe Transportation District. The momentum from this planning process has led to additional climate planning efforts both within the Conservancy and broader efforts throughout the Basin.

### Highlights

- Completed an Integrated Vulnerability Assessment and Climate Adaptation Action Portfolio for the Lake Tahoe Basin
- Completed the Tahoe Climate Resilience Action Strategy
- With the TRPA, began integrating climate resilience into the Lake Tahoe Environmental Improvement Program (EIP)



- Transferred Conservancy property in South Lake Tahoe to support the Sugar Pine Village affordable housing and sustainable development project

### Funding Climate Resilience

The Conservancy has been aiding climate resilience in the Basin by funding climate planning grants through Proposition 68. Grants included a greenhouse gas inventory update, hydrology modeling of future climate scenarios, a vulnerability assessment of water and sewer infrastructure, a study of sugar pines resistant to climate change, and a feasibility report for a Tahoe climate lab.

### Aligning with State Priorities

The Conservancy's climate work closely aligns with state priorities from California's Climate Adaptation Strategy, Climate Smart Strategy, and Extreme Heat Plan. The Conservancy has contributed actions to these plans and integrates climate change into all its work. The Conservancy's work in climate planning boosts its credibility and aligns with the goals of the California Natural Resources Agency and the Legislature to take a regional approach to climate planning.

### Tahoe Livable Communities Program

The Conservancy has been expanding its Tahoe Livable Communities (TLC) Program. Staff worked with the California Department of General Services and Department of Housing and Community Development to transfer Conservancy property to support the Sugar Pine Village, South Lake Tahoe Affordable Housing Project. Through this process, staff strengthened TLC partnerships with other agencies and advanced executive order N-06-19 under which the South Lake Tahoe Affordable Housing Project is identified. In addition, staff developed TLC community engagement guidance for all asset lands projects.

### Acquisitions

The Conservancy continues to acquire properties with sensitive lands and aging infrastructure. In May 2022, the Conservancy demolished the former Tahoe Urgent Care building on a recently acquired property in South Lake Tahoe and stabilized the site. The Conservancy aims to acquire 31 acres of floodplain along the Upper Truckee River. This includes the Motel 6 property in South Lake Tahoe, where the Conservancy proposes to remove the buildings and pavement and stabilize the site. This work of acquiring sensitive lands and restoring them aligns closely with the goals of the State's 30x30 initiative.

### Insights

The Conservancy has successfully collaborated with state and regional partners to bring climate adaptation and affordable housing to the forefront of Basin priorities.

Staff has been leading an effort to improve baseline climate planning, engaging with stakeholders on adaptation actions, and providing momentum for regional agencies to track climate adaptation. The Conservancy also has played a key role in advancing affordable housing solutions in the Basin. Through its TLC program, the Conservancy helps meet the goals of the Lake Tahoe Regional Plan by acquiring developed properties on environmentally sensitive lands, restoring the land, and retiring or transferring the associated development rights to town centers. These efforts align with both state and regional priorities and serve as examples for new state initiatives.

### **Goal 5. Strive for Organizational Learning and Excellence**

The Conservancy's work is only as effective as the organizational structure and capacity behind it. Recognizing the ambitious goals set by the Plan, the Board and staff set forth a goal focused on learning and adapting to meet the needs of its staff, communities, and environment.

#### Highlights

- Managed transition of staff during changes in executive leadership
- Expanded staff positions and added key skills to its workforce
- Enrolled 11 staff in California's Capital Collaborative on Race and Equity (CCORE) program
- Transitioned to teleworking during COVID
- Supported Conservancy staff during wildfire evacuations
- Improved fiscal processes and finance systems to better integrate budgeting with programs
- Migrated parcel records for Conservancy property to an improved online platform
- Dedicated two employees to the State's contract-tracing effort

#### Human Resources

Over the past three years the Conservancy filled 11 positions, adding to or backfilling positions in the legal, administration, natural resources, and lands divisions. The Conservancy aligned its workforce with the Plan, consolidating its TLC and Land Management programs, as well as its Information Technology and Administration departments. Additionally, the Conservancy added a retired annuitant to increase workload capacity. These changes and hires have helped the Conservancy provide essential services and advance the Plan goals despite the COVID pandemic.

#### Diversity and Equity

Diversity and equity are among the highest priorities for the Conservancy and the State. The Conservancy enrolled 11 employees in CCORE. Employees completed the 14-month-long course and graduated in 2021. With support from the CCORE team, the

Conservancy made changes in hiring, procurement, and communications practices to more effectively reach people of different backgrounds and cultures.

### Adapting to a Remote Workspace

The Conservancy quickly adapted to the new work environment brought on by the COVID pandemic. IT and finance staff had already taken steps to upgrade Conservancy systems and IT platforms to help staff become more mobile and effective in the field. These steps made the shift to a remote work environment faster and more manageable than many of the Conservancy's peer agencies. Since the COVID pandemic began, staff developed numerous policies to align with state direction to ensure safety while remaining operational and maintaining productivity.

### Insights

Despite the effects of the COVID pandemic and changes in executive leadership, Conservancy staff maintained a high degree of productivity. Since the beginning of the strategic plan, staff faced numerous changes, including changes in leadership. In addition, the COVID pandemic created many uncertainties and challenges.

Executive leadership and the Human Resources Division provided 'change management' training in 2019 in response to an employee engagement survey. The timing of this training was fortuitous given the timing of COVID and leadership changes in 2020. Change management training provided staff with tools to better cope with these transitions.

With improvements in fiscal processes, and increased staffing, the Conservancy is well positioned to program, track, manage, and account for the additional financial resources provided through general fund allocations.

The Conservancy is taking steps to increase racial equity in working towards the goals of the Plan. The Conservancy is conducting racial equity action planning and is building organization-wide skills to better engage diverse communities. This will include community engagement, enhancing collaboration with Native American Tribes, and integrating actions into annual operational plans that better serve all Californians, regardless of race.

### **Considerations Moving Forward**

As described above, climate change, drought, wildfires, and a growing population threaten natural resources and communities in the Basin. To help mitigate these pressures, the Conservancy will continue to focus on achieving the Plan's goals. Staff has identified the following key takeaways from its efforts in implementing the Plan:

1. The Conservancy is in the early stages of racial equity action planning but lacks overall strategic guidance on how to advance racial equity within the

Conservancy's mission. Staff intends to propose amending the Plan to elevate strategies that will advance racial equity and better serve all Californians, regardless of race.

2. The Conservancy requires additional tools to effectively manage its lands, mitigate the impacts of increased visitation, and resolve encroachment issues. Staff is considering options to promulgate regulations for recreation on Conservancy lands, participating in Basinwide destination stewardship planning, and seeking funds to address encroachments.
3. Staff is considering the following in its current work with partners and to inform development of the next strategic plan:
  - a. Increasing the Conservancy's focus on restoring climate resilience and protecting biodiversity to help safeguard Lake Tahoe's environment and communities and contribute to the State's goal of conserving 30 percent of California's land by 2030.
  - b. Increasing the Conservancy's focus on equitable access to promote sustainable tourism and recreation in the Basin and advance the State's Outdoor Access for All initiative.
  - c. Refining Conservancy roles and responsibilities relating to affordable housing to maximize the Conservancy's impact on promoting sustainable communities.

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