

California Tahoe Conservancy
Agenda Item 8
September 15, 2022

PUBLIC ACCESS AND RECREATION FOR ALL GRANTS

Recommended Action: Adopt Resolutions 22-09-05.1 through 22-09-05.4 (Attachments 1.2, 2.2, 3.2 and 4.2), authorizing the following four grants:

1. Adventure Risk Challenge (ARC): Up to \$100,000 for the Tahoe Community Leadership Program;
2. Gateway Mountain Center (Gateway): Up to \$150,000 for Youth Environment and Adventure Camps;
3. Lake Tahoe Unified School District (LTUSD): Up to \$99,000 for the South Tahoe Environmental Education Program; and
4. Tahoe Rim Trail Association (TRTA): Up to \$100,000 to improve inclusivity and accessibility on the Tahoe Rim Trail System.

Executive Summary: The recommended action authorizes four grants to non-profit organizations to facilitate and enhance equitable access to Lake Tahoe's beaches, trails, and mountains. Although Lake Tahoe is a world-class outdoor recreation destination, many people face economic, social, or physical barriers to accessing and enjoying its opportunities. Governor Gavin Newsom's Outdoors for All initiative is focused on equitably expanding outdoor access to all Californians through focused investments in outdoor programming, open space infrastructure, and improvements to state systems. The Conservancy's Strategic Plan prioritizes opportunities for all people to access Lake Tahoe and partnerships to promote diversity and inclusion, mentorship, and youth engagement and empowerment. Staff recommends these grants under the general Conservancy Grant Guidelines (Guidelines) to improve equity more broadly by investing in programs that serve people of all races, ethnicities, and backgrounds. The grants support low- or no-cost opportunities for underserved people to have outdoor experiences and receive nature-based healing. Funding supports guided backpacking trips and outdoor educational experiences like hiking, climbing, and skiing. The grants also help to remove language barriers and improve cultural understanding in Tahoe's outdoor spaces. Upon Board authorization, Conservancy staff will work with grantees to execute needed agreements and support project implementation.

Location: The four recommended projects are located throughout the California side of the Lake Tahoe Basin in Placer and El Dorado counties.

Fiscal Summary: The Conservancy will finance the four grants with General Fund allocated for climate resilience and community access, totaling up to \$449,000.

Overview

History

Deep inequalities exist in the racial mix of visitors to public lands. USDA Forest Service, National Park Service, and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service data show that between 88 and 95 percent of visitors to public lands are white. African American and Hispanic/Latinx visitors represent only 1-1.2 percent and 3.8-6.7 percent, respectively, which is much lower than the overall representation of those groups in the population. In California, four of every ten Californians have no access to open space within walking distance. According to data collected by the California Department of Parks and Recreation, large swaths of the City of South Lake Tahoe and Kings Beach are considered “park poor communities.”

Equitable access is inextricably linked to climate resilience and conservation, and further, experiencing the State’s diverse natural places is part of what makes California such a special place to live. However, climate change is threatening the State’s ecosystems, communities, and natural wonders. The California Pathways to 30x30 Strategy explains that the historical approach to conservation—setting aside lands proximate and welcoming to predominantly white and affluent communities—has been detrimental to ecosystems and the human communities that are part of them. Expanding meaningful access to conserved areas for all Californians will aid community well-being, promote healthy lifestyles, address historical inequities, and open doors for a broader and more inclusive community of conservation champions.

Despite Tahoe’s abundant recreational opportunities, many local underserved people face barriers to accessing public lands. These barriers can be economic (equipment, transportation, etc.), safety (knowing how to swim, having health insurance, language barriers in wayfinding signage, mental illness, etc.), social (feeling unwelcome in majority white spaces, cultural differences, etc.), or physical (lack of accessibility for people with disabilities, physical fitness, etc.).

Governor Newsom and California Natural Resources Agency Secretary Wade Crowfoot have prioritized policies and funding that increase access to public recreation destinations for historically underserved groups as part of the Outdoors for All initiative. The Governor and Legislature have supported this directive in recent years with funding from Proposition 68 (2018) and General Fund allocations. In 2013, the State Coastal Conservancy (SCC) began implementing a grant program intended to facilitate coastal experiences for people and communities who face challenges to accessing or enjoying the coast. The program has awarded over \$7.2 million in 265 separate grants throughout the California coast.

In 2020 and 2021, 12 Conservancy employees participated in a program to learn, engage, and implement actions that embed racial equity into agency culture, policies, and practices. Through the program, staff identified opportunities to advance racial equity in Conservancy programs and funding. One resulting priority action from that program is supporting equitable access to immediately begin addressing racial disparities at Tahoe.

In 2021, staff worked with several partners to develop the equitable access grant concept under the Guidelines. Staff coordinated with the Tahoe Fund to communicate with Basin nonprofits that lead equitable access programs. The Tahoe Fund has supported similar work at Tahoe for several years, and they helped notify potential applicants of the Conservancy's desire to support equitable access through grants. Staff also worked with the SCC to better understand its Explore the Coast grant program that increases coastal access for underserved groups. The SCC helped staff develop project evaluation methods and outreach strategies while considering state requirements.

By the end of 2021, nine organizations demonstrated interest in applying for Conservancy funding. Conservancy staff notified the applicants of the requirements in the Guidelines and provided ongoing support during the application process. By June 2022, six organizations submitted grant applications totaling \$766,129.

Staff evaluated each application based on requirements in the Guidelines and consistency with the Conservancy's Strategic Plan. In addition, staff considered applications based on the following:

- Percentage of participants from underserved groups. Underserved groups include people of color, people with physical disabilities, people with cognitive or emotional disabilities, low-income individuals or families, English language learners, and formerly incarcerated individuals.
- The extent to which the project reduces barriers for underserved people to access Tahoe.
- The extent to which the project provides long-term positive impacts on participants, such as multi-year programming, leadership training, family involvement, or career development.
- Organizational capacity and history.

Staff did not recommend funding for one application, submitted by the Sierra Business Council, because it did not adequately support Conservancy Strategic Plan goals. Another applicant, Lake Tahoe Waterman's Association, withdrew its application due to concerns about project readiness.

Major Elements and/or Steps of the Recommended Action

Attachments 1 through 4 provide details on each grant that staff recommends for funding, including a project description, information on the grantee, expected benefits, budget, and schedule.

The four grants support programs designed to expand access to public lands in the Tahoe region for a variety of underserved populations. The programs include guided outdoor experiences, including backpacking trips focused on nature-based healing, stewardship, and learning English. Funding supports environmental education school-aged students, translating wayfinding information on the Tahoe Rim Trail, and guided day trips for youth and families. Conservancy funding supports a variety of activities and programmatic services including transportation, rental equipment, and staff time for program development and implementation.

Staff will enter into agreements as necessary to implement the grants described in Attachments 1 through 4.

Financing

The Conservancy will finance the four grants with General Fund Climate Resilience dollars, totaling up to \$449,000.

Conservancy resources would leverage \$2,086,641 in additional funding from other grants, donors, and partners, including \$110,000 from the Tahoe Fund.

Project	Grantee	Leveraged Funding	Conservancy Funding
Tahoe Community Leadership Program	Adventure Risk Challenge	\$1,245,000	\$100,000
Youth Environment and Adventure Camps	Gateway Mountain Center	\$341,501	\$150,000
South Tahoe Environmental Education Program	Lake Tahoe Unified School District	\$70,140	\$99,000
Inclusivity and Accessibility on the Tahoe Rim Trail System	Tahoe Rim Trail Association	\$430,000	\$100,000
Total		\$2,086,641	\$449,000

Authority

Consistency with the Conservancy's Enabling Legislation

The recommended action is consistent with the Conservancy's enabling

Legislation. Specifically, Government Code sections 66905.2 and 66907.7 authorize the Conservancy to award grants to local public agencies and nonprofit organizations for purposes consistent with its mission.

Consistency with External Authorities

The recommended action is consistent with regional and state priorities. The recommended action supports Lake Tahoe Environmental Improvement Program (EIP) action priority 03.01.01 to improve public access. The recommended action also advances state priorities such as the Outdoors for All initiative, equitable access components of the California Pathways to 30x30 Strategy, and the Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan for 2021-2025.

Compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act

Pursuant to California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines (Cal. Code Regs., tit. 14, § 1500 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 the authorization of each of the grants and has found each of them to be exempt under CEQA. Attachments 1.1, 2.1, 3.1 and 4.1 explain the CEQA exemption applicable to each grant. Staff has prepared an NOE for each grant, as found in Attachments 1.3, 2.3, 3.3 and 4.3.

List of Attachments

Adventure Risk Challenge

Attachment 1.1 – Project description, budget, and schedule

Attachment 1.2 – Resolution 22-09-05.1

Attachment 1.3 – Notice of Exemption

- Exhibit A – Location Map

Gateway Mountain Center

Attachment 2.1 – Project description, budget, and schedule

Attachment 2.2 – Resolution 22-09-05.2

Attachment 2.3 – Notice of Exemption

- Exhibit A – Location Map

Lake Tahoe Unified School District

Attachment 3.1 – Project description, budget, and schedule

Attachment 3.2 – Resolution 22-09-05.3

Attachment 3.3 – Notice of Exemption

- Exhibit A – Location Map

Tahoe Rim Trail Association

Attachment 4.1 – Project description, budget, and schedule

Attachment 4.2 – Resolution 22-09-05.4

Attachment 4.3 – Notice of Exemption

- Exhibit A – Location Map

Conservancy Staff Contact

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