

FORESTRY PROGRAM UPDATE

The California Tahoe Conservancy's (Conservancy) Forestry Program improves forest health and reduces wildfire risk on the Conservancy's 5,500 acres of forested land within the Lake Tahoe Basin (Basin). The Forestry Program convenes and collaboratively leads multiple partnerships to create efficiencies of scope and scale and more rapidly and comprehensively achieve resilience goals. In 2019, the Conservancy and other partner organizations of the Tahoe Fire and Fuels Team (TFFT) developed the Lake Tahoe Basin Forest Action Plan (Plan). Since that time, the Conservancy has focused its Forestry Program activities on advancing the Plan's three strategies that support completing and maintaining wildland-urban interface (WUI) treatments, and implementing large-landscape restoration:

1. Scale up to match the scale of the solution to the scale of the threat,
2. Build capacity for all phases of the forest landscape management cycle, and
3. Leverage technology for rapid, large-scale, and more efficient implementation.

The purpose of this update is to provide an overview of the Conservancy's Forestry Program 2022 activities and 2023 priorities that help advance the Plan. These activities include completing on-the-ground treatments on both Conservancy and partner lands, participating and providing leadership in collaborative initiatives, and entering into both outgoing and incoming grants and agreements to carry out Conservancy and partner work.

In addition to supporting the Plan, the Conservancy's Forestry Program implements the Conservancy's Strategic Plan Goal 1 (Steward Conservancy Lands and Protect Basin Communities from Wildfire) and Goal 2 (Restore the Resilience of Basin Forests and Watersheds).

2022 Program Activities

In November 2021, the Conservancy Board adopted Forestry Program Guidelines (Guidelines) and authorized up to \$50 million to implement activities consistent with the Guidelines. Since adoption of the Guidelines, staff has increased the pace and scale of on-the-ground treatments. Staff is also leading and supporting Basinwide and regional initiatives, advancing climate adaptation, and addressing workforce capacity issues. The following information summarizes program activities since November 2021, including on-the-ground treatments that were completed in 2022, collaborative initiatives the Conservancy led and participated in, and grants and agreements that

were entered into since November 2021. These activities include items undertaken pursuant to the November 2021 authorization as well as items that were separately authorized before and after the Guidelines were adopted. To accomplish the activities, staff relies on a variety of state and federal funding sources, including Climate Resilience and Wildfire Resilience general fund money, Nature-Based Solutions general fund money, California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection Climate Change Investment funding, Department of Conservation Regional Forest and Fire Capacity funding, and the Bureau of Land Management's Southern Nevada Public Land Management Act federal funding.

1. On-the-Ground Treatments

This work supports the Plan's first strategy to scale up to match the scale of the solution to the scale of the threat. The treatments include both WUI (typically larger WUI parcels adjacent to residential subdivisions) and community parcels (open-space parcels within residential subdivisions, that are generally about one-quarter acre in size).

WUI Treatments

Over the past year, using a combination of hand-thinning and pile burning, the Conservancy completed treatments on 442 acres to date. This includes 238 acres of Conservancy-owned property and 78 acres of Carnelian Woods Home Owners Association property. The Conservancy also worked with partners to burn previously constructed piles across 126 acres of Conservancy-owned property.

Community Treatments

The Conservancy hand-thinned 76 acres of Conservancy and USDA Forest Service open-space parcels within neighborhoods. The Conservancy chips brush and branches from open-space parcels and leaves cut rounds at the roadside for collection as free fuelwood for community members. Additionally, the Conservancy completed field preparation on over 300 acres for future projects, including in the Tahoe Keys and Gardener Mountain neighborhoods on the south shore and all Conservancy and USDA Forest Service open-space parcels spanning from Tahoma to Tahoe City on the west shore.

Citizen Reports

Program staff respond to all citizen reports relating to fire safety, vegetation management, and hazard trees. The Conservancy identified and removed approximately 450 hazard trees due to citizen reports received. A pronounced white fir die-off occurred in the Basin this year, likely due to a combination of factors including prolonged drought. As a result of this and heightened public awareness regarding fire safety, the program experienced the highest ever number of citizen calls related to vegetation.

2. Collaborative Initiatives

Forestry Program staff continues to participate in and provide collaborative leadership for local, regional, and state initiatives to connect the Conservancy's work to a broader

scale. This work supports two of the Plan’s strategies: scaling up to match the scale of the solution to the scale of the threat and building capacity for all phases of the forest landscape management cycle.

Local Initiatives

At the local level, staff continues to facilitate the operation of the TFFT, a partnership of 21 land managers, fire agencies, regulators, and the Washoe Tribe of Nevada and California, formed after the 2007 Angora Fire. The TFFT coordinates across land ownerships to implement the Plan.

Recently staff worked with South Lake Tahoe Fire Rescue staff to execute a memorandum of understanding with the City of South Lake Tahoe that defines coordination processes, roles, and mutually agreed upon vegetation treatment standards for Conservancy-owned parcels within city limits.

Regional

On the regional level, the Conservancy collaboratively leads the Tahoe-Central Sierra Initiative (TCSI)—a state, federal, and nonprofit partnership that is restoring forest resilience on approximately 2.4 million acres by strategically linking forest restoration collaboratives. The TCSI produced the Framework for Resilience, which included ten Pillars of Resilience. Numerous regional and local planning efforts, as well as the California Wildfire and Forest Resilience Task Force (Task Force), have adopted the Pillars. The Task Force is using the pillars as the foundation for its Regional Resource Toolkits. The TCSI is also developing a regional plan that identifies the partnership goals and targets to address state and federal priorities.

The Conservancy is also a stakeholder participant in Placer County Water Agency’s Tahoe-Central Sierra feedstock pilot program to streamline removal of biomass from forest lands and communities and identify sustainable end-uses.

State

At the state level, staff contributes to several Task Force workgroups, including those focused on resilient state lands, fire adapted communities, and regional prioritization and planning frameworks.

3. Grants and Agreements

In 2022, the Conservancy entered into outgoing grants and agreements totaling \$8,176,730 to support Forestry Program activities both on Conservancy and partner lands throughout the Basin. The activities carried out under these grants and agreements will build capacity for all phases of the forest landscape management cycle, and leverage technology for rapid, large-scale, more efficient implementation, as set forth in the Plan.

The Conservancy entered into several grants and agreements focused on **protecting Basin communities from wildfire and improving forest health**, including agreements with the following partners:

- Tahoe Resource Conservation District to coordinate the development of updates to Pre-Attack Plans and the Lake Tahoe Basin Community Wildfire Protection Plan.
- California Department of Parks and Recreation to conduct fuel reduction and prescribed understory burning at Burton Creek State Park.
- USDA Forest Service, Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit to remove hazard trees and reduce flammable fuels within the Caldor Fire burn area. The work includes mechanical and hand-thinning treatments on approximately 1,200 acres and native tree planting on 200 acres.
- South Tahoe Public Utility District, on behalf of the Tahoe Water for Fire Suppression Partnership, to complete a vegetation management plan and environmental compliance for protecting critical public water infrastructure from wildfire on the California side of the Basin.
- California Conservation Corps, Tahoe Center to provide a Conservancy-dedicated crew for three field seasons
- A local tree service for the Tahoe Keys/Gardener Mountain Project

The Conservancy entered into grants and agreements focused on **applying scientific advancements and innovative approaches to forest restoration**, including agreements with the following partners:

- VP Data Commons to curate Basin data into a dynamic vegetation map, to model disturbance and resilience, and to combine these into a decision support tool that will be used for planning and prioritizing forestry projects in the Basin.
- The Nature Conservancy to study how climate change and multiple disturbances across the TCSI landscape may impact California spotted owls and how forest management scenarios impact the amount and connectivity of their habitat.

The Conservancy entered into grants and agreements focused on **surveying, inventorying, and monitoring biological resources**, including agreements with the following partners:

- Institute for Bird Populations for long-term monitoring of bird and bumble bee abundance, community composition, and habitat composition in meadows in the Great Upper Truckee River Watershed.
- Tahoe Regional Planning Agency to develop a climate resilience dashboard to serve as a local reporting tool that tracks metrics related to climate resilience in the Basin.

The Conservancy also entered into a grant with Great Basin Institute to support TCSI data management, outreach, and capacity building as part of the Conservancy's **collaborative leadership and participation in partnerships**.

In addition to the outgoing grants and agreements, the Conservancy also entered into the following **incoming grant agreements**:

- A \$1.2 million grant from the Department of Conservation through the Regional Forest and Fire Capacity Program for capacity building, regional planning, project development, and project management activities in the Basin.
- A \$10 million grant from the Bureau of Land Management Southern Nevada Public Land Management Act division for reducing hazardous fuels on Conservancy and partner properties.

2023 Program Priorities

The Forestry Program activities planned for 2023 will continue to advance the three strategies of the Plan and the Conservancy's Strategic Plan. These activities include:

- Continuing to develop processes for more integrated and efficient project planning.
- Working with the Washoe Tribe of Nevada and California to support the Tribe's engagement and capacity to participate in forestry and watershed projects on ancestral lands.
- Surveying and monitoring biological resources across multiple land ownerships in the Basin to create efficiencies.
- Supporting partners including Placer County, El Dorado County, City of South Lake Tahoe, Lake Tahoe Unified School District, Lake Tahoe Community College, and others to build capacity and develop forest treatment projects on their lands.
- Coordinating, planning, and implementing projects that increase capacity for improving forest health and fire resiliency for Basin communities. These activities could include workforce development, regional planning and project development, and outreach and engagement.
- Integrating lessons learned from the Conservancy's community engagement and racial equity work into Forestry Program activities.

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