

**SENATE BILL 630 AQUATIC INVASIVE PLANT SURVEILLANCE AND RAPID
RESPONSE GRANT AWARD**

Recommended Action: Adopt Resolution 23-03-02 (Attachment 1) authorizing a grant to the Tahoe Resource Conservation District (Tahoe RCD) for up to \$250,000 to conduct aquatic invasive plant surveillance and rapid response activities in Lake Tahoe. The resolution also provides the appropriate California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) determination, which includes making findings as a responsible agency and adopting a mitigation monitoring and reporting program (MMRP).

Executive Summary: The recommended action will support Tahoe RCD efforts to control aquatic invasive plants in Lake Tahoe. This grant provides funding for underwater diver surveys of previously treated areas and known “hotspot” sites and the rapid removal of new invasive plant infestations. The Lake Tahoe Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) Coordination Committee (Committee) identified ongoing surveillance and rapid response as critically important to program success. Reviewing treated areas and known hotspots limits invasive plant spread by catching infestations when they are small and less costly to remove.

This grant advances the Lake Tahoe Environmental Improvement Program (EIP) goals to control AIS and protect native species in the region. The grant also promotes the California Tahoe Conservancy’s (Conservancy) Strategic Plan Goal 2, Strategy B, by advancing a multiple-benefit project that pairs watershed resilience with water quality protection. Upon Board authorization, staff will execute the grant agreement and take all other necessary implementation steps.

Location: Sites previously treated for aquatic invasive plants and known invasive plant hotspots in the nearshore of Lake Tahoe in California. (Attachment 2).

Fiscal Summary: Staff seeks authorization to award up to \$250,000 from the Lake Tahoe Science and Lake Improvement Account (Account). Conservancy staff will process the grant agreement as part of its regular workload.

Overview

History

AIS threaten waterways throughout the nation, as they can impair drainage infrastructure, reduce water quality, and degrade wildlife habitat. In the Lake Tahoe Basin (Basin), the Committee leads prevention, detection, and control activities to reduce the introduction, spread, and extent of AIS. In 2019, the Committee developed the Lake Tahoe Region AIS Action Agenda (Action Agenda) to provide a comprehensive framework for AIS surveillance and control activities. The Action Agenda identifies Early Detection Rapid Response (EDRR) and Lake-wide surveillance to identify new/expanding AIS populations as critical to program success. Specifically, the Action Agenda recommends that funding be dedicated to annual surveillance activities to control documented infestations and prevent AIS spread. This proposed grant, funded by the Account, would advance identified aquatic invasive plant EDRR priorities.

Lake Tahoe Science and Lake Improvement Account

The California State Lands Commission (SLC) collects fees for public use of state lands at Lake Tahoe, most commonly for use of the lakebed by pier supports and buoy anchors. In 2013 Senate Bill 630 (SB 630) mandated that the SLC deposit those fees into the Account to support a bi-state science advisory council and nearshore management. As one of the three recipients of Account funding, the Conservancy awards grants for AIS control and public lake access projects. To date, the Conservancy has awarded over \$2 million in Account funds.

SB 630 requires the Conservancy to coordinate the selection of projects through a collaborative process with the participation of key stakeholders. The Conservancy previously funded AIS control projects with Account funds, including EDRR control work in 2019 and 2020, Tahoe RCD Program support in 2019, and invasive plant control at the Tahoe Keys Complex in 2021.

Surveillance and EDRR

The primary invasive plant species of concern are curlyleaf pondweed and Eurasian watermilfoil. Surveillance sites are primarily located along the shoreline of Lake Tahoe, in open water, marinas, and other embayments. A smaller number of infestations are in marshes and tributaries. Most of the sites are under one acre in size, with a few ranging from two to ten acres, and have been treated for previous infestations or are at risk of future infestation due to high boater recreational use, proximity to infested locations, or other risk factors.

Detailed Description of Recommended Action

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

Tahoe RCD will employ divers to assess sites identified by the Committee and remove plants using approved physical control methods. Removal activities will include diver-assisted hand removal, and/or plant barrier installation and removal. Tahoe RCD or its contractor will select the appropriate method based on site-specific conditions such as

plant species, lake level, and the size and density of the infestation. In addition to EDRR measures, Tahoe RCD will use the Account funding for planning and administration.

2. Overall Context and Benefits

Prevention and early detection and control are the best defenses against AIS and offer the best hope for successful management of aquatic invasive plant infestations in Lake Tahoe. Although invasive plants can be difficult and costly to control once widespread establishment has occurred, the Committee's strategy for Lake Tahoe has demonstrated efficacy in reducing infestations over the last decade. Currently, agencies are actively surveying, treating, or planning future treatment projects for all the known invasive plant infestations in Lake Tahoe. Assessing previously treated areas and known infestation hotspots, and rapidly responding to newly established invasive plants, is critical to the continued success of the Basinwide AIS program.

Without control it is likely that established Eurasian watermilfoil and curlyleaf pondweed infestations will grow and spread in new locations around Lake Tahoe. This could impact the significant investments to restore habitat made by federal agencies, the states of California and Nevada, nonprofit organizations, and private donors.

Climate change is resulting in warmer winter temperatures, more rain-on-snow events, and warmer lake water temperatures that increase the risk of invasive plant spread and new establishment. Increased rainfall and intense flooding events also heighten the likelihood of plant fragment transport that would potentially result in further infestations around the Lake and tributaries. Tracking treated locations and other known infestations and rapidly responding when changes are found provides efficient, effective management that will reduce future program costs.

3. Schedule for the Recommended Action

Tahoe RCD will complete all grant activities between spring 2023 and end of 2024.

Financing

Upon approval, the grant will total up to \$250,000, using funds from the Account. Conservancy staff will process the grant agreement as part of its regular workload.

SB 630 requires that Account funds be matched by the Conservancy or another public entity, but does not specify a match percentage. The recommended SB 630 grant contributes to the larger Basinwide AIS program described in the Action Agenda. The Lake Tahoe Restoration Act and other federal funding also support the Action Agenda and provide the match to SB 630 grants. Staff tracks the SB 630 grants and matching funds to achieve the Action Agenda.

Task	Amount
Project Management	\$27,040
AIS Surveillance and EDRR Measures	\$195,000
Equipment and Implementation Costs	\$11,960
Administration	\$16,000
Total	\$250,000

Authority

Consistency with the Conservancy’s Enabling Legislation

The recommended action is consistent with the Conservancy’s enabling legislation. Specifically, Government Code section 66907.7 authorizes the Conservancy to award grants to local public agencies for purposes consistent with the Conservancy’s mission.

Consistency with the Conservancy’s Strategic Plan

The recommended action is consistent with Strategic Plan Goal 2, Strategy B by advancing a multiple-benefit project that pairs watershed resilience with water quality protection.

Consistency with the Conservancy’s Program Guidelines

There are no Conservancy Program Guidelines for AIS. The recommended action is consistent with the Conservancy’s Grant Guidelines as the grant will leverage other financial contributions to multiply the value of the Conservancy’s investment, is consistent with existing plans and guidance from state and Basin agencies, and has stakeholder support.

Consistency with External Authorities

The recommended action is consistent with the authority given to the Conservancy through SB 630 pursuant to Public Resources Code section 6217.6.1. The Conservancy informed the SB 630 stakeholder group in advance of the proposal to award this grant and confirmed the group’s support. To cohesively address AIS in the Basin, the recommended action advances Action Agenda priorities and implements EIP project 01.03.01.0037. The grant is also consistent with the California Department of Fish and Wildlife’s California AIS Management Plan (January 2008).

Compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act

Tahoe RCD, acting as the lead agency, prepared an initial study/mitigated negative declaration (IS/MND) and an MMRP for the Lake-Wide Control of Aquatic Invasive Plants Project to comply with CEQA. Tahoe RCD adopted the IS/MND and MMRP (Attachment 3) on January 12, 2021 and filed a notice of determination (NOD) the same day.

A copy of the IS/MND and MMRP is available for public review on [Tahoe RCD's website](https://tahoercd.org/our-work/aquatic-invasive-species/publications-helpful-links/) at <https://tahoercd.org/our-work/aquatic-invasive-species/publications-helpful-links/> or upon request. The MMRP can be found in Section 4 of the IS/MND.

Pursuant to CEQA guidelines, section 15096, as a responsible agency, the Conservancy must review and consider the MND prepared by Tahoe RCD and reach its own conclusions on whether and how to approve the grant. Staff reviewed the MND and believes that the proposed surveillance and rapid response activities are within the scope of the MND and have been adequately analyzed. Staff has determined that the activities, as mitigated, would not cause a significant effect on the environment.

Staff recommends the Board review and consider the IS/MND adopted by Tahoe RCD as lead agency, together with any comments received during the public review process; make the findings as set forth in the attached resolution; adopt the MMRP (Attachment 1, Exhibit A) as a condition of approval; and authorize the grant. If the Board considers and concurs with the MND and authorizes the grant, staff will file an NOD with the State Clearinghouse pursuant to CEQA guidelines, section 15096 (Attachment 4).

List of Attachments

Attachment 1 – Resolution 23-03-02

- Exhibit A – MMRP

Attachment 2 – Surveillance Locations Map

Attachment 3 – Tahoe RCD's IS/MND and MMRP

Attachment 4 – Conservancy NOD

- Exhibit A – NOD Map
- Exhibit B – Filing Fee Receipt

Conservancy Staff Contact

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