

Executive Director's Report

This past winter's deep snow and prolonged cold will live on in the history books. The parade of storms tested the Conservancy and its staff. Our employees experienced multiple disruptions, as storms damaged roofs and made some roads impassable, at times for days. Throughout, staff kept up progress on Conservancy planning and operations, and watched out for one another.

Now that the big melt is underway, it appears that Conservancy projects are holding up well despite intense stream flows. Storms impacted our forested open space lots, but we have a plan to address impacts as the field season kicks off. And we will continue to monitor our projects and lands throughout the summer and adapt our management as needed.

Jason Vasques, Executive Director
California Tahoe Conservancy

Program Updates

1. Land Management

Land Management Projects and Contracting: The Land Management Program implements small-scale projects on Conservancy land. Projects include wetland and sensitive land restoration and water quality protection, property and facility maintenance, forestry and fuel hazard reduction, and encroachment resolution.

Winter Storm Impacts: The Land Management Program is seeing impacts to Conservancy properties from winter storms, including:

- Downed trees and limbs,
- Snow-covered trails into the summer, making it harder for the public to access,
- Flooded trails and properties,
- Blocked and filled storm water infrastructure,
- High lake level causing overcrowding and congestion on smaller beaches,
- Erosion on properties and trails,
- Delayed opening of seasonal recreational facilities, and
- Litter concealed by snow.

Seasonal Recreational Facilities: The Conservancy delayed opening to vehicles at Van Sickle Bi-State Park and Tahoe Pines (Meyers), which opened on May 15 and June 1, respectively. The Conservancy closed the Upper Truckee Marsh to dogs on May 1 to protect birds and wildlife during the breeding season; closure ends August 1.

2. Tahoe Livable Communities

Property Acquisitions: The Conservancy continues to pursue acquisition of the Motel 6 and Knox Johnson parcels in South Lake Tahoe.

Asset Land Sales: Staff continued planning and coordination of potential projects on Conservancy lands to advance mixed-use, affordable housing, and economic development in town centers. In April, developers submitted a project application to the City of South Lake Tahoe for development at 2070 Lake Tahoe Boulevard. The project application includes up to 70 units of achievable housing, commercial development, and green belt infrastructure.

3. Recreation and Public Access

Destination Stewardship Plan: Public and private sector organizations from the greater Tahoe region will soon be releasing a shared vision and stewardship plan to better manage the impacts of outdoor recreation and visitation. The plan will include goals to enhance regional stewardship messaging, address regional litter and parking challenges, bolster Tahoe's accessibility for all people, and create an ongoing destination stewardship governance structure.

Staff has been monitoring new sections of the Dennis T. Machida Memorial Greenway to see how the trail performed and provided access during the significant winter and runoff period. The City of South Lake Tahoe did an excellent job removing snow, and the new boardwalk and bridge sections are effectively allowing high flows to pass underneath and inundate the adjacent meadows. Thanks to these successes, the Greenway provided one of the few locations for walking and biking access for all throughout the winter and spring. Staff observed that the public used the trail extensively during this period.

4. Community Forestry

Lake Tahoe Basin Forest Action Plan Update: The Conservancy and its federal, tribal, state, and local partners are developing strategies to treat 3,500 acres of wildland-urban interface (WUI) in the Lake Tahoe Basin (Basin) per year. This pace would allow partners to achieve the Lake Tahoe Basin Forest Action Plan goal to complete initial treatments on 22,000 acres of WUI by 2025. Staff recently executed a grant agreement with Placer County to fund 71 acres of fuels treatment on Placer County property in the Basin.

5. Landscape Resilience

Capacity Building: The Conservancy is granting funds to the Lake Valley Fire Protection District and Tahoe Resource Conservation District to increase capacity in the Basin for forestry planning and preparation for implementation.

Tahoe-Central Sierra Initiative (TCSI): TCSI finalized its 10-Year Regional Plan, which identifies two overarching goals and six strategies for improving social and ecological resilience across 2.4 million acres. TCSI partners held a retreat in May to identify annual priorities to implement the 10-Year Regional Plan.

Biodiversity: The Conservancy recently released a two-page document highlighting efforts the Conservancy is undertaking to advance the State's 30x30 initiative.

The Conservancy is funding expanded biological monitoring to increase understanding of current levels of biodiversity and connectivity in the region and to allow land managers to adaptively manage lands in a way that protects biodiversity and ecosystem function.

Climate Adaptation: The Desert Research Institute released a final report on "Simulated Hydrologic Responses to Climate-Change Projections for the Lake Tahoe Basin." The Conservancy funded this work through a Proposition 68 grant. The results will allow for finer-scaled climate change planning for storm water infrastructure and watershed restoration for Basin partners, including utility districts and land managers.

6. Watershed Restoration and Water Quality

Future Restoration Projects: Staff continued feasibility planning for multiple potential future restoration projects, including at Ward, Carnelian, Trout, and Cold Creeks; the Upper Truckee River near Sunset Stables; and future phases at the Upper Truckee Marsh. Staff anticipates that this planning will lead to future projects. The Conservancy was recently awarded \$500,000 of Lake Tahoe Restoration Act funding to support the Trout Creek Watershed Restoration Project planning.

The past winter's extreme precipitation benefited some ongoing and past watershed restoration projects by providing drought relief to the vegetation and habitats as water spreads out over and inundates project sites, which demonstrates project success. High flows will continue through spring and into summer. Staff will monitor projects through this period to evaluate project performance and adaptively manage as necessary.

Budget, Accounting, and Administration

Severe weather impacted Conservancy operations and facilities more than usual this past winter. Vehicle repairs and outages increased by almost 200 percent compared with most winters. Heavy snow caused roof leaks at the office, rendering several workspaces unusable for a few weeks. The resourcefulness of our Administration Team, as well as our hybrid-remote work capabilities, minimized the operational and financial impact of the heavy winter.

In May, Governor Gavin Newsom revised his proposed budget for Fiscal Year 2023/24. The budget includes baseline funding that covers a portion of the Conservancy's staffing and operations as well as use of general fund and existing bond funding for:

- Conceptual feasibility planning (\$600,000) for initial watershed and recreational project planning.
- Sunset Stables Reach 6, Upper Truckee River Restoration (\$150,000) for project preliminary planning.

The Governor's budget also includes \$16 million to the Conservancy for Wildfire and Forest Health projects, and proposes to cut the \$8.375 million for Nature-Based Solutions that had been included in the Governor's January budget, which would have supported implementation of the Pathways to 30x30 and Working Lands Climate Smart Strategies and execute the Governor's nature-based solution agenda.