

## FISCAL YEAR 2023/24 PROGRAM AUTHORIZATION

**Recommended Action:** Adopt Resolution 23-06-06 (Attachment 1) authorizing program expenditures of up to \$5,445,200 for fiscal year (FY) 2023/24.

**Executive Summary:** Staff requests Board authorization of up to \$5,445,200 in expenditures from existing funding sources for California Tahoe Conservancy (Conservancy) program activities during FY 2023/24 (Program Authorization). The Program Authorization allows Conservancy staff to initiate work as program needs arise and execute contracts to support day-to-day Conservancy program operations. The specific Conservancy expenditures will depend on the enactment of the State Budget and Conservancy priorities established throughout the fiscal year but will not exceed the total amount authorized. The Program Authorization advances Goals 1 through 6 of the Conservancy's Strategic Plan and each program's priorities, as described below.

**Location:** Program and project activities throughout the California side of the Lake Tahoe Basin (Basin).

**Fiscal Summary:** The requested FY 2023/24 Program Authorization is \$5,445,200 from various funding sources (such as Propositions [Prop.] 1, 12, 40, 50, 68, and 84, Habitat Conservation Fund, Environmental License Plate Fund, Tahoe Conservancy Fund, Lake Tahoe Conservancy Account, Lake Tahoe Science and Lake Improvement Account, and the General Fund).

Last fall, the Conservancy submitted a proposed budget to the California Department of Finance and the California Natural Resources Agency. Governor Gavin Newsom's proposed budget for FY 2023/24 included some of the Conservancy's proposals. To date, the Legislature is still preparing a final budget. Once the State Budget is enacted, funding will be available for the new fiscal year, starting July 1, 2023, to implement this Program Authorization (see Attachment 2).

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### Overview

#### History

The Conservancy's 2018-2023 Strategic Plan outlines the goals and strategies for how the Conservancy will fulfill its mission to lead California's efforts to restore and

enhance the extraordinary natural and recreational resources of the Basin. The Conservancy is currently developing the new strategic plan to succeed the 2018-2023 version. The Conservancy uses the Strategic Plan to guide its work and prepare annual operational plans, which provide detailed steps for program implementation. The Conservancy's Strategic Plan goals are:

Goal 1 – Steward Conservancy Lands and Protect Basin Communities from Wildfire

The Conservancy owns and manages nearly 4,700 parcels, totaling around 6,500 acres, including thousands of quarter-acre lots within the Basin's urban areas. These parcels provide open space, water quality, and recreational benefits, and have helped concentrate development in less environmentally sensitive areas. The Conservancy safeguards people and the environment by managing Conservancy land for multiple uses and benefits.

Goal 2 – Restore the Resilience of Basin Forests and Watersheds

The Conservancy plays a critical role in helping Basin partners fund, plan, and implement watershed restoration projects, including improvements to wildlife habitat, stream environment zones, and storm water quality, and removing aquatic invasive species (AIS). The Conservancy also collaboratively leads landscape initiatives that work across land ownerships and jurisdictions to increase the scale, pace, comprehensiveness, and efficiency of forest and watershed restoration in the Basin.

Goal 3 – Provide Public Access and Outdoor Recreation for All Communities

The Basin is one of the United States' premier summer and winter recreation destinations. The Conservancy supports public access and outdoor recreation projects for all communities. Benefits of such projects include open space; access for disadvantaged communities; shoreline access; community health, well-being, and connectivity; wildlife viewing; and habitat and water quality protection.

Goal 4 – Foster Basinwide Climate Change Adaptation and Sustainable Communities

The Conservancy addresses climate change in all its work. With its partners, the Conservancy is advancing assessments, planning, and projects to address climate impacts on Lake Tahoe and Basin natural resources and communities. The Conservancy further addresses climate impacts by acquiring developed properties with aging structures on environmentally sensitive lands and restoring the land; transferring or leasing vacant Conservancy property in town centers to support housing, multi-modal transportation, and economic development; and acquiring remaining private properties in roadless subdivisions to remove the threat of development.

Goal 5 – Strive for Organizational Learning and Excellence

The Conservancy seeks to fill key vacancies and to expand the agency's diversity to reflect the public it serves; provides professional development and mentorship; and upgrades its financial, recordkeeping, and other support systems to improve the accountability, transparency, and cost effectiveness of its programs.

## Goal 6 – Promote Racial Equity and Help Make the Basin a Safe and Welcoming Place for All

In September 2022, the Conservancy Board approved an amendment to the Conservancy's 2018-2023 Strategic Plan, adding a sixth goal. The amendment established four strategies that will advance racial equity, within the mission of the Conservancy, to serve all Californians, regardless of race. The strategies are:

- 1) conduct racial equity action planning and integrate actions into the Conservancy's annual operational plans,
- 2) participate in statewide initiatives to share best practices and align the Conservancy's work with the State's racial equity and tribal engagement goals,
- 3) engage the community and collaborate with partners to identify actions that better meet the needs of Native American tribes, Basin residents and visitors, and all Californians, and
- 4) increase internal capacity for engaging with community-based organizations and community members.

The Conservancy is implementing these strategies.

### **Background**

Since 1988, the Board has delegated annual authority to the Executive Director to enter into contracts for services needed to support Conservancy goals and programs. The specific activities covered under each annual authorization change depending on the needs of the Conservancy, the funds available, and the priorities for a given year. These authorizations have consistently allowed staff to carry out the daily management of Conservancy land and facilities and support Conservancy goals, while retaining the authority of the Board to approve projects.

Toward that end, this Program Authorization is solely a tool to allow staff to enter into contracts and conduct activities for day-to-day program operations to manage Conservancy lands, including land bank operations; coordinate and collaborate with partners; engage consultant and contract services; and analyze feasibility for potential future projects. The recommended action does not authorize individual project implementation. The Program Authorization supports FY 2023/24 program priorities and goals, as outlined below. These activities are part of the Conservancy's ongoing efforts to lead and participate in select statewide and regional initiatives, including 30x30, Nature-Based Solutions, the Lake Tahoe Climate Resilience Strategy, and the Lake Tahoe Environmental Improvement Program (EIP). The Conservancy also actively conducts racial equity action planning and community engagement to achieve racial equity in the Conservancy's operations, investments, and policies.

### Land Management:

Conservancy Land Management Program staff and Tahoe Resource Conservation District (Tahoe RCD) crews inspect, restore, and protect the Conservancy's nearly 4,700 parcels and roads. In addition, the Land Management Program staff manages 15 properties with recreational amenities, including nine popular beaches, and the largest wetland in the Basin, the Upper Truckee Marsh. Staff also provides public outreach and education at high-use sites, works to resolve encroachments on Conservancy lands, addresses hundreds of citizen reports of hazards and other land management issues on Conservancy properties, and has recently begun developing a land management strategy to manage Conservancy lands more effectively and efficiently to meet statewide and regional priorities.

### Tahoe Livable Communities:

The Conservancy addresses climate impacts and supports housing and sustainable compact development through its Tahoe Livable Communities (TLC) Program. The Conservancy acquires developed properties with aging structures on environmentally sensitive lands, removes the development, restores the land, and retires or transfers the development rights to town centers. The Conservancy also sells, leases, and exchanges vacant asset lands in town centers to support housing, multi-modal transportation, and economic development; and acquires remaining private properties in roadless subdivisions.

### Recreation and Public Access:

The Conservancy's Recreation and Public Access Program expands public access for all people to experience Lake Tahoe's forests, streams, beaches, and wildlife. The Recreation and Public Access Program staff manages and enhances Conservancy properties to provide high-quality recreational experiences for Tahoe's many visitors and residents. This includes supporting the Land Management Program in developing a land management strategy, planning recreation and public access improvements on Conservancy lands to improve safety, accessibility, and equity. The Conservancy also works with partners to enhance recreational access by investing in recreation infrastructure projects and supporting programs that help historically underrepresented people access Tahoe.

### Community Forestry:

Approximately 5,500 acres of Conservancy land is forested, with the majority located within and adjacent to communities and infrastructure. The Community Forestry Program staff improves forest health and reduces risks from wildfire on these Conservancy lands. This includes thinning vegetation and using prescribed fire on Conservancy lands within neighborhoods and in the wildland-urban interface, removing hazard trees and other threats to public safety, and coordinating with utility companies and water providers to address hazards to infrastructure. The Conservancy also coordinates with and provides technical assistance and funding to fire agencies and other land managers on projects on partner lands to achieve the goals of the Lake

Tahoe Basin Forest Action Plan. This complementary work enhances wildfire protection and reduces risks to communities and Conservancy lands.

#### Landscape Resilience:

The Conservancy and its partners are increasingly shifting to large-landscape, cross-jurisdictional, multiple-benefit projects to achieve resilience goals more rapidly and comprehensively in the Basin. The Landscape Resilience Program staff convenes and collaboratively leads multiple landscape-wide partnerships that create efficiencies of scope and scale. This work includes leading and supporting the Tahoe-Central Sierra Initiative, which is restoring forest resilience on approximately 2.4 million acres by strategically linking forest restoration collaboratives. In addition, Conservancy staff works to build capacity for forest management Basinwide. This includes increasing the pace and scale of forest health projects, strategically using prescribed fire, expanding the restoration workforce, and increasing biomass utilization. Staff also integrates biodiversity conservation, climate change adaptation, and greenhouse gas emissions reductions throughout the Conservancy's work. This includes supporting Basin partners by coordinating with state agencies and providing updated climate science to inform restoration planning and ongoing management.

#### Watershed Restoration and Water Quality:

The Conservancy improves water quality, enhances wildlife habitat, protects biodiversity, sequesters carbon, and restores climate resilience through the Watershed Restoration and Water Quality Program (Watershed Program). Watershed Program staff leads and supports watershed restoration projects on Conservancy lands. The Conservancy also partners with other agencies to plan, fund, and implement climate resilience and water quality improvements throughout the Basin. This includes leading the Upper Truckee River Watershed Advisory Group, supporting implementation of the Basin's AIS Action Agenda, which sets short- and long-term management targets to control AIS in Lake Tahoe, and supporting the Tahoe Science Advisory Council (Council). The Council provides science that informs policy and management and anticipates critical or emerging issues relevant to lake water quality and ecosystem health.

#### Organizational Learning and Excellence:

The Conservancy works to ensure that its staff has the requisite skills and resources to continue accomplishing innovative and ambitious programmatic work. The Conservancy also continues to work closely with partner state agencies to enact emerging gubernatorial and legislative mandates and fulfill its responsibility to represent the State in the EIP. This includes investing in professional and leadership development to enhance employee morale and satisfaction; integrating fiscal and budgeting, legal, and information technology operations within Conservancy resource and lands programs; seeking updates to the Conservancy's legislative authority for

implementing state priorities; and supporting external communications to help the public learn about and engage in the Conservancy's programs and projects.

### **Detailed Description of Recommended Action**

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

This Program Authorization allows staff to expend up to \$5,445,200 in FY 2023/24 for various program activities. Such activities may include the Conservancy's day-to-day operations to manage Conservancy lands, including land bank operations; coordinating and collaborating with partners; engaging consultant and contract services; and analyzing feasibility for potential future projects. Staff will return to the Board for project-specific authorization as needed.

The allocations described below reflect Conservancy staff's anticipated use of the requested funds. Staff bases these estimates on current needs and opportunities. Staff may adjust the actual allocation or expenditure of funds to meet changing circumstances and respond to emerging opportunities while remaining within the overall scope of the Program Authorization.

The projected program allocation would provide up to the following amounts to support ongoing work and collaboration with partners in each of the Conservancy's programs:

- \$1,270,100 for Land Management to maintain Conservancy lands and plan future restoration projects;
- \$295,000 for TLC to operate the land bank and plan and assess the feasibility of future projects;
- \$1,475,000 for Recreation and Public Access to plan and assess the feasibility of future projects; and
- \$1,281,000 for Landscape Resilience to survey, inventory, and monitor resources; conduct forest management activities; plan future forest management projects; and support climate and biodiversity research and monitoring;
- \$577,100 for Watershed to survey, inventory, and monitor resources; conduct watershed and water quality analyses; and plan future restoration projects;
- \$547,000 for the Conservancy's Organizational Excellence interdivisional work, including engaging with communities, providing training to employees, developing communications materials, and purchasing supplies.

<b>Budget Authorization</b>	<b>FY 2023/24 Funding</b>
Land Management	\$1,270,100
Tahoe Livable Communities	\$295,000
Recreation and Public Access	\$1,475,000
Landscape Resilience	\$1,281,000
Watershed Restoration and Water Quality	\$577,100
Organizational Learning and Excellence	\$547,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$5,445,200</b>

### **Authority**

#### **Consistency with the Conservancy’s Enabling Legislation**

The Program Authorization is consistent with the Conservancy’s enabling legislation. Specifically, Government Code section 66906.8 authorizes the Conservancy to select and hire consultants or contractors to provide services necessary to achieve the purposes of the Conservancy, including protecting the natural environment at Lake Tahoe. Government Code section 66907.9 authorizes the Conservancy to initiate, negotiate, and participate in agreements for the management of land under its ownership and control with local agencies, nonprofit organizations, individuals, corporate entities, partnerships, or other entities. Government Code section 66907.10 authorizes the Conservancy to improve and develop acquired lands for a variety of purposes, including protecting the natural environment, protecting public access and recreational facilities, preserving wildlife habitat areas, and facilitating access to and management of Conservancy-owned lands.

#### **Consistency with the Conservancy’s Strategic Plan**

The recommended activities are consistent with all the Conservancy’s 2018-2023 Strategic Plan goals and strategies.

#### **Consistency with the Conservancy’s Program Guidelines**

The recommended action is consistent with previous authorizations by the Board for the management of Conservancy programs, including the Conservancy’s Special Use Guidelines, Forestry Guidelines, Grant Guidelines, and Land Transfer Guidelines.

#### **Consistency with External Authorities**

The recommended funds allow the Conservancy to conduct feasibility and conceptual analysis, which may result in projects that fulfill EIP, sustainability, and other Conservancy and statewide resource and environmental objectives. The land management activities are consistent with the EIP, because they implement EIP project #06.01.03.0002 - California Tahoe Conservancy Land Management Program and facilitate the implementation of other individual EIP projects related to forestry and restoration.

## **Compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act**

The Program Authorization does not involve any commitment to any specific activity that has the potential to result in either a direct physical change in the environment or a reasonably foreseeable indirect physical change in the environment. The Program Authorization is therefore not a “project” within the meaning of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). Staff will evaluate all individual projects prior to implementation and will determine the appropriate level of CEQA review for each individual project.

### **List of Attachments**

Attachment 1 – Resolution 23-06-06

Attachment 2 – Fiscal Year 2023/24 Budget

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