

Executive Director's Report

As the California Tahoe Conservancy (Conservancy) continues to develop our next strategic plan, we are building from our history, mission, and input from our board, staff, partners, and the community. A partner recently pointed us to a Lake Tahoe Watershed Assessment from 2000, written when the Conservancy was just 15 years old. The authors wrote in the social, economic, and institutional assessment section that:

“One of the reasons the [Conservancy] is highly regarded in the basin is because of its position as an interagency and community facilitator.”

This position remains a core element of how Conservancy staff works to achieve our mission to protect and enhance natural and recreation resources in the Lake Tahoe Basin (Basin). Today, interagency collaboration is the norm—the not-so-secret sauce for achieving impactful results in the Basin. The Conservancy continues to play a critical role, where we help our federal, tribal, state, and local partners through our lands, our grants, and our staff expertise. And with support from the Equity and Wellness Institute, we are reinvesting in our community engagement. We are developing the relationships we need to advance our mission in a time of climate crisis, and we are working effectively on behalf of all Californians. We look forward to learning from you as we make plans for the years ahead.

Jason Vasques, Executive Director
California Tahoe Conservancy

Program Updates

1. Land Management

Land Management Projects: The Land Management Program implements small-scale projects on Conservancy land. Projects include restoring sensitive lands, protecting water quality, maintaining properties and facilities, reducing fuel hazards, and resolving encroachments.

Land Management Planning: Staff continues to work with WRA Inc., conducting outreach to identify Conservancy land management issues, needs, and planning options to develop a future land management strategy. Staff anticipates the process to take

several years, producing a document to provide transparency to staff and the public regarding Conservancy land management policies.

Fourth of July Management: Conservancy staff, seasonal crews contracted through Tahoe Resource Conservation District (Tahoe RCD), and California State Parks personnel successfully managed visitor impacts during the busy Fourth of July holiday weekend. Conservancy staff closed Van Sickle Bi-State Park early and partnered with State Parks to have increased staff support on the north shore beaches.

Seasonal Recreational Facilities: With the California Department of General Services, the Conservancy finished remediating lead paint on the historic barn at Van Sickle Bi-State Park. The Conservancy will close the entrance gates to the Park and Tahoe Pines to vehicles for the winter on October 31, weather dependent.

2. Tahoe Livable Communities

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

Land Bank: The Conservancy continues to bank and transfer development rights and land coverage for affordable housing, town center, and other infill projects in the City of South Lake Tahoe and El Dorado and Placer Counties. For example, the Conservancy sells rights to members of the public to help them meet permitting requirements. The Conservancy also exchanges rights with governmental agencies to promote various recreational, housing, and area plan goals.

3. Recreation and Public Access

Destination Stewardship Plan: In June, Lake Tahoe destination management, land management, and nonprofit organizations released the first Lake Tahoe Destination Stewardship Plan. The plan includes goals to enhance regional stewardship messaging, address regional litter and parking challenges, bolster accessibility for all people, and create an ongoing destination stewardship governance structure. The Plan is available at stewardshiptahoe.org.

Dennis T. Machida Memorial Greenway (Greenway): Staff is monitoring new sections of the Greenway to assess whether the significant winter storms and early summer runoff impacted the trail and access. The new boardwalk and bridge sections are effectively allowing high flows to pass underneath and inundate the adjacent meadows, as planned. The Greenway continues to be heavily used. Additionally, the Conservancy has installed new wayfinding and informational signs near the Trout Creek bridge, which include background on the trail's namesake, Dennis T. Machida, the Conservancy's first executive director.

4. Community Forestry

Tahoe Program Timberland Environmental Impact Report (PTEIR) Update: Staff recently completed the Conservancy's first environmental review under the PTEIR for the North Upper Truckee fuels reduction project. The project consists of 164 acres of Conservancy and USDA Forest Service open space parcels in the North Upper Truckee area in El Dorado County. Work on the project began in August 2023.

The Conservancy and other California partners worked with CAL FIRE to complete the PTEIR in 2020. The PTEIR is a programmatic environmental compliance document that meets both the California Environmental Quality Act and the California Forest Practice Act requirements. The PTEIR helps to streamline environmental review of forest health and fuels reduction projects on state, local, and private lands on the California side of the Basin.

Communicating Community Forestry Priorities: In response to increased public inquiries about forestry and open space lots, the Conservancy has expanded its communications including on-air programming with Outside Lake Tahoe TV. These activities complement ongoing outreach about Community Forestry operations via regional media, social media, and other online outreach.

5. Landscape Resilience

Capacity Building: The Conservancy granted funds to the Lake Valley Fire Protection District and Tahoe RCD to build partner capacity for forest and wildfire resilience projects across the California side of the Basin. This includes planning and overseeing projects and providing professional forestry services to complete environmental review and prepare prescriptions and layout for forest resilience projects.

Tahoe-Central Sierra Initiative (TCSI): TCSI partners are implementing priorities to achieve the goals outlined in the TCSI 10-Year Regional Plan. These priorities include developing a 10-year implementation plan across all lands; analyzing the capacity and needs of forest infrastructure in the TCSI region; increasing outreach and engagement to agencies, tribes, and organizations; and identifying opportunities to diversify funding.

Biodiversity: The Conservancy funded a grant to the Wildlands Network for a Basin wildlife corridor survey. This survey will increase understanding of current levels of biodiversity and connectivity in the region and allow land managers to adaptively manage lands to protect biodiversity and ecosystem function. This study will benefit forest health and fuel reduction projects by identifying dispersal corridor locations, allowing landowners to create forestry prescriptions that accommodate wildlife movement.

Climate Adaptation: Staff presented at the California Adaptation Forum in Pomona, California in August on the Tahoe Climate Adaptation Action Portfolio.

Bioenergy: The Conservancy granted funds to the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency (TRPA) to develop a Lake Tahoe Regional Biomass Feasibility Report. The TRPA will assess regional opportunities to build community resilience through small-scale biomass utilization as part of hazardous fuels reduction projects, as well as for energy resilience. Depending on the report's findings, the TRPA may consider amending its code to allow these small-scale technologies in the Basin.

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. Staff has also been working closely with funding partners, including the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, to secure funding for these ongoing projects.

Adaptive Project Management: Staff is monitoring and adaptively managing completed projects, including the Upper Truckee Marsh Restoration Project. Researchers from the University of Nevada, Reno are monitoring the Marsh to assess how the project sequesters carbon and reduces greenhouse gases. Native vegetation has successfully established in project areas at the Marsh.

Budget, Accounting, and Administration

In June, Governor Gavin Newsom signed the approved 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. The budget includes 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 approved budget also includes \$16 million to the Conservancy for Wildfire and Forest Health projects. However, the approved budget did not include the \$8.375 million for Nature-Based Solutions that had been in the Governor's January budget.