

Executive Director's Report

As 2023 ends, the California Tahoe Conservancy (Conservancy) has transitioned from summer field season to winter operations. Thankfully, we benefitted from a mild fire year, with no major wildfire crises in the Lake Tahoe Basin (Basin). This allowed the Conservancy and our partners to focus on executing priority forestry treatments and laying plans to increase forest and wildfire resilience for the years to come. I'm grateful to all that our seasonal field crews accomplished on Conservancy lands, and to all our staff for a year of progress with our Basin partners.

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. to develop a future land management strategy. Work includes conducting outreach to identify Conservancy land management issues, needs, and planning options. The process will take several years, producing a document to provide transparency to staff and the public about Conservancy land management policies.

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 in October. The Conservancy closed the entrance gates to Van Sickle Bi-State Park and Tahoe Pines to vehicles for the winter on November 13.

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 government agencies to promote recreational, housing, and area plan goals.

4. Community Forestry

Field season transitions: In November, staff wrapped up summer field operations and field preparations for future projects. Staff anticipates contracting next spring for a project to thin forest on public open space parcels from Tahoe City to Tahoma on the west shore. Staff also expects to contract for a mechanical and hand thinning project on the Conservancy's Lyons Ranch property, which will cover 150 acres adjacent to the Golden Bear subdivision in El Dorado County. The Conservancy designs such projects to improve forest health and reduce wildfire risk.

Staff is also working with contractors and partners to complete approximately 160 acres of pile burning operations at its Dollar and Carnelian properties on the north shore this fall and winter. The Conservancy will partner with Tahoe Douglas Fire Protection District, CAL FIRE, and the Washoe Tribe of Nevada and California to accomplish this work.

5. Landscape Resilience

Wildfire Resilience Planning: The USDA Forest Service, Pacific Southwest Research Station released a draft Potential Operation Delineations report, funded by a Conservancy grant. This document will help inform wildfire response strategies and support burn units for prescribed fire planning and implementation.

Tahoe Resource Conservation District (Tahoe RCD) is updating the Community Wildfire Protection Plan for the Basin, funded by a Conservancy grant. Tahoe RCD hosted a public meeting on October 17 to engage the local community about the update. Approximately 35 community members participated.

The Moore Foundation's Wildfire Resilience Initiative (WRI) and the Climate and Wildfire Institute are working with Tahoe-Central Sierra Initiative (TCSI) partners to develop a strategic roadmap to help guide WRI investments in future resilience work across the TCSI landscape.

Biodiversity: Conservancy staff participated in a panel on Biodiversity Conservation at the 2023 Tahoe Science Conference.

Climate Adaptation: Staff provided updates to the California State Adaptation Strategy and targets for the Natural and Working Lands Climate Smart Strategy.

Bioenergy: Conservancy and Tahoe Fund staff led a biomass meeting on September 22 to bring regional partners together to discuss the current state of biomass utilization and potential future opportunities.

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.

Lake Tahoe Science and Lake Improvement Account (Senate Bill 630): Conservancy partners have made significant progress with past Senate Bill (SB) 630 grant funding. The Tahoe City Public Utility District completed the Lake Forest Boat Ramp Restroom Replacement project to improve lake access facilities just north of Tahoe City. The North Tahoe Public Utility District completed the Tahoe Vista Recreation Area Facility Improvements to make this important recreational site accessible to all. Tahoe RCD completed SB 630-funded work to treat aquatic invasive plants in the Tahoe Keys offshore complex.

Staff is working with SB 630 stakeholders to identify future priority projects. At a future Conservancy Board meeting, staff anticipates recommending approximately \$500,000 of SB 630 funding authorizations, which may include Conservancy projects, and lake access and aquatic invasive species grants.

Watershed Restoration

Conservancy staff participated in a panel on the Maḡyála wáḡa (Meeks Meadow) restoration project at the 2023 Tahoe Science Conference. Other panelists included the Environmental Protection Department Director for the Washoe Tribe of Nevada and California and scientists from the USDA Forest Service, Pacific Southwest Research Station, and University of Nevada, Reno.

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 recreation 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.