

Executive Director's Report

Our staff continues to use the winter months to plan for the coming field season for projects large and small. Read on for details about what is ahead for work to restore Lake Tahoe Basin (Basin) watersheds, manage Conservancy lands, and improve forest health while reducing wildfire risk.

Jason Vasques, Executive Director
California Tahoe Conservancy

Program Updates

1. Land Management

Land Management Projects: The Land Management Division continues to plan 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 completed initial work with WRA Inc. to develop a future land management strategy. Staff is determining next steps based on state budget constraints, including technical studies to support rulemaking and planning, framework visioning, and conducting outreach to support this and future phases of the process. The process will take several years, producing a document to provide transparency to staff and the public about Conservancy land management policies.

2. Tahoe Livable Communities

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

Land Bank: The Conservancy banks and transfers development rights and land coverage for affordable housing, town center, and other infill projects in the City and El Dorado and Placer Counties. These rights come from acquisitions, such as the potential Motel 6 and Knox Johnson acquisition, as well as through restoration of environmentally sensitive land. 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.

3. Recreation and Public Access

Future Project Planning Continues: Staff is completing environmental analysis and preliminary plans for pedestrian and storm water improvements at Van Sickle Bi-State Park. Staff is also planning projects at North Tahoe, Patton Landing, and Carnelian West beaches to improve accessibility for people with disabilities. Staff has applied for three grants for the beach projects and is working with the Department of General Services to develop project plans.

4. Community Forestry

Upcoming Projects: Staff is developing agreements for multiple forest thinning projects on public open space parcels from Tahoe City to Tahoma on the west shore. Staff also expects to contract for a 150-acre mechanical and hand thinning project on the Conservancy's Lyons Ranch property in El Dorado County. Both projects will improve forest health and reduce wildfire risk.

The Conservancy has partnered with the Sierra Nevada Alliance to host an 11-month term Forestry Fellow. The Fellow will assist the Community Forestry program with outreach and communications and work with landscape-scale initiatives under the Landscape Resilience program.

5. Landscape Resilience

Wildfire Resilience Planning: Working together, the Lake Valley Fire Protection District, City, and Tahoe Resource Conservation District (Tahoe RCD) are meeting with landowners, including Lake Tahoe Unified School District, to identify and plan future projects to improve forest health and reduce wildfire risk. A capacity grant from the Conservancy is funding this planning. The partners will also coordinate to apply for federal, state, or other funding to implement those projects.

The Tahoe-Central Sierra Initiative (TCSI) is working with Environmental Science Associates to develop a web application to track projects and funding needs across the 2.4-million-acre TCSI landscape. This application will sync with the Lake Tahoe Environmental Improvement Program Project Tracker.

Biomass: Conservancy and Tahoe Fund staff are creating a Basin biomass group that will meet regularly 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): Staff worked with Basin partners to identify priority projects for Senate Bill 630 (SB 630) 2024 funding. Staff anticipates recommending approximately \$500,000 of SB 630 funding authorizations in June 2024, which will include Conservancy projects, and lake access and aquatic invasive species grants.

Tahoe RCD continues SB 630-funded work to survey and treat aquatic invasive plants at priority locations in Lake Tahoe. Tahoe RCD and Conservancy staff expect to provide an update on the Aquatic Invasive Species program to the Board later in 2024.

Budget, Accounting, and Administration

In January, Governor Gavin Newsom proposed a budget for Fiscal Year 2024/25 that included an estimated \$37.9 billion shortfall. The Legislative Analyst's Office estimated a \$58 billion deficit at the time the Governor proposed his budget and has since expanded that estimate to \$73 billion.

The proposed budget includes baseline funding that covers a portion of the Conservancy's staff and operations as well as use of existing bond funds for:

- Access Tahoe (\$100,000) for equitable access local assistance grants;
- Minor capital improvements (\$890,000) for small restoration projects on Conservancy land;
- Upper Truckee Marsh Restoration Project (\$300,000) for study phase of restoration;
- Trout and Cold Creek Watershed Restoration (\$500,000) for study phase of restoration;
- Van Sickle Bi-State Park Safety and Equitable Access Improvements (\$100,000) for study phase of improvement;
- Sunset Stables Reach 6 Restoration Project (\$250,000) for working drawings phase of restoration;
- Conceptual Feasibility Planning (\$300,000) for initial watershed and recreational project planning.