

Executive Director's Report

Last month we joined our federal, tribal, state, and local partners for the annual Lake Tahoe Summit. U.S. Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg noted the integral role of transportation solutions in building resilience—particularly solutions like shared-use paths, that make it easier and safer for people to walk, bike, and roll instead of driving. We look forward to continuing to collaborate with our partners to support trails that ease public access for all, while also serving as climate solutions.

Jason Vasques, Executive Director
California Tahoe Conservancy

Program Updates

1. Land Management

Land Management Projects

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

Knox Johnson and Motel 6 Demolition and Site Stabilization

Staff continues to work with the Department of General Services (DGS) to prepare preliminary plans for demolishing the motel and restaurant buildings and parking lot on the Knox Johnson and Motel 6 property. Staff will seek approval by the Public Works Board in October 2024. This winter a contract for demolition will be awarded. Demolition is anticipated to start in fall 2025. Staff will also continue to cooperate with the City of South Lake Tahoe (City) throughout the demolition phase, including the potential use of the site for fire and police training.

Facilities Management

The Conservancy will close the entrance gates to Van Sickle Bi-State Park and Tahoe Pines for the winter season, starting on October 31. The Conservancy ended the Upper Truckee Marsh closure to dogs on August 1. As of this date, visitors may bring leashed dogs into previously restricted areas of the Marsh.

Carnelian Bay Sewage Line Rupture Incident and Gratitude

Conservancy staff expresses the utmost gratitude for an expedient and comprehensive response led by the North Lake Tahoe Public Utility District (NTPUD) to an incident of a ruptured sewer line in Carnelian Bay on July 18, 2024. The NTPUD estimates that approximately 125,000 gallons of untreated sewage discharged from the ruptured line. Emergency response crews collected approximately 40,000 gallons of the spill at the site and returned it to the export system, with the remaining 85,000 gallons flowing through the nearby Carnelian West Beach, a Conservancy property, and into Lake Tahoe. Untreated sewage inundated Carnelian West, damaging the property's landscaping, storm water infrastructure, restroom facilities, and the beach. The Conservancy closed Carnelian West from July 18 until July 31, when water quality monitoring results demonstrated compliance with regulatory standards for safe water-contact at the site. The Conservancy also closed nearby Patton Landing Beach, another Conservancy property, from July 18 until July 25 because of the shoreline health advisory.

The response by the NTPUD to immediately stop the flow of untreated sewage, close the facility, remediate contaminated areas, foster a coordinated approach, and to provide frequent public updates is an outstanding display of public service and interagency partnership in direct benefit of Lake Tahoe and public health. Additional partner agencies that supported the response and deserve an equal expression of gratitude include the Placer County Division of Environmental Health, Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board, and all other emergency response personnel. The coordinated response to the incident demonstrates the importance of partnerships in the Lake Tahoe Basin (Basin) and exemplifies the increased capacity to respond to pressing issues when public agencies collaborate and work together.

2. Tahoe Livable Communities

Please refer to the Tahoe Livable Communities Update, Agenda Item 4 for recent information on the Tahoe Livable Communities Program.

3. Recreation and Public Access

Destination Stewardship

Conservancy staff co-leads a subcommittee of the Lake Tahoe Destination Stewardship Council focused on recreation infrastructure. The group has been meeting with public land managers Basinwide to identify opportunities for coordination on shared priorities, such as improving accessibility for people with disabilities, planning for periods of high tourism, and consolidating information on recreation opportunities at Lake Tahoe.

Lake Tahoe Science and Lake Improvement Program Grants Available

Conservancy staff is conducting outreach to public access-focused partners to solicit grant applications for the Lake Tahoe Science and Lake Improvement Program (also commonly known as the “Senate Bill 630 Program”). The Conservancy has approximately \$700,000 in available funding for projects that improve public access to the shore of Lake Tahoe or address aquatic invasive species. Staff plans to seek Board consideration of proposed grants at the December 2024 meeting.

4. Community Forestry

Multi-Ownership Project Progress

Conservancy contractors have made progress on multiple projects to improve forest health and reduce hazardous fuels on public open space parcels in El Dorado County on the south and west shores. The Conservancy designed these projects to provide more effective and efficient management by including all the public open space parcels located within the neighborhoods, regardless of ownership. Current projects comprise hundreds of parcels owned by the Conservancy, the USDA Forest Service, Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit (LTBMU), and El Dorado County. This season, Conservancy contractors have completed forest health and fuel hazard reduction project work on approximately 130 acres of land across ownerships. Staff continues to plan and prepare forestry projects. Upcoming forestry projects include additional multi-ownership community projects on the west shore, as well as projects using mechanical equipment on larger parcels of Conservancy land near Lake Tahoe Airport in the south shore and the Sunnyside area of the west shore.

5. Landscape Resilience

Tribal Engagement

On July 30, Conservancy staff attended a tour of the Máyala Wáta (Meeks Meadow) restoration project led by members of the Washoe Environmental Protection Department. During the tour, staff learned about the cultural significance of the site, the stewardship agreement with the LTBMU, and future restoration plans. The Washoe Tribe of Nevada and California, in partnership with the LTBMU, aims to restore 283 acres of the meadow by removing encroaching conifers and conducting culturally guided prescribed burning. The Conservancy has provided four grants to help support the project.

In addition, the Washoe Tribe recently filled the Washoe Liaison position for the Basin and this person started in late August. The Conservancy is partially funding the Washoe Liaison position through a grant that the Board approved at its June 2024 meeting.

Wildlife Connectivity

In 2023, the Conservancy provided a grant to study wildlife movement throughout the Basin to identify habitat corridors and potential barriers to wildlife movement to ensure management actions protect connectivity to critical habitat over time. Data collected from this study regarding roads acting as barriers to wildlife caught the attention of the statewide organization, Wildlife Crossing Fund, who then organized a full-day field tour to view and discuss opportunities to restore wildlife habitat connectivity at several road crossings in South Lake Tahoe last month. In a press conference held the next day with California's Natural Resources Secretary Wade Crowfoot, the Basin was highlighted as a priority area for the state. Conservancy staff and other Basin partners continue to work with the Wildlife Crossing Fund to discuss next steps.

6. Watershed Restoration and Water Quality

Upper Truckee River Restoration Project Tours

Conservancy staff recently led and participated in several significant project tours at Upper Truckee River restoration sites. On July 18, state and federal legislative staff visited the Conservancy's Knox Johnson and former Motel 6 property and the Upper Truckee Marsh. Conservancy staff and leadership highlighted the importance of these projects in advancing numerous state and federal priorities and objectives. On July 24, Conservancy staff showcased the Upper Truckee Marsh Restoration Project as part of the Watershed Education Foundation's "Sierra Headwaters Tour." This was an excellent opportunity to engage with water professionals and the public, while emphasizing the importance of wetlands and meadows in supporting downstream water uses and climate resilience.

On August 13, Conservancy staff led a project tour the day before the Lake Tahoe Summit. This event included staff and leadership from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, California Natural Resources Agency, Wildlife Conservation Board, California Department of Fish and Wildlife, California Conservation Corps, Tahoe Resource Conservation District (Tahoe RCD), and Tahoe Regional Planning Agency. The tour included stops at the Upper Truckee Marsh and the Knox Johnson and former Motel 6 properties, and Tahoe RCD's Johnson Meadow property. Discussions focused on restoration projects along the Upper Truckee River and the importance of funding partnerships to complete the remaining priority projects.

Budget, Accounting, and Administration

In June, Governor Gavin Newsom signed the approved budget for Fiscal Year 2024/25. The budget includes baseline funding that covers a portion of the Conservancy's staffing and operations as well as authorization of existing bond funding and General Fund. The budget includes funding 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 and Knox Johnson Restoration Project (\$300,000) for study phase of restoration;
- Van Sickle Bi-State Park Safety and Equitable Access Improvements (\$100,000) for study phase of improvements;
- Conceptual Feasibility Planning (\$300,000) for initial watershed and recreational project planning;
- Motel 6 Demolition (\$2,756,000).