



# RACIAL EQUITY ACTION PLAN



**California Tahoe Conservancy**

In Collaboration with the Equity and Wellness Institute



**TOP IMAGE:** *The Lake Tahoe Basin as viewed from Van Sickle Bi-State Park, one of Tahoe's busiest recreation sites. The California Tahoe Conservancy co-manages the park with Nevada State Parks.*

**BOTTOM IMAGE:** *People enjoying the Dollar Creek Shared-Use Trail on Conservancy land in Placer County.*

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Photo courtesy of the Lake Tahoe Water Trail.

September 2024

## Letter from the Executive Director

This Racial Equity Action Plan (REAP) marks a milestone on our journey towards advancing racial equity within the California Tahoe Conservancy (Conservancy) and for the people we serve. Developing the REAP has been a challenging but rewarding task. Addressing equity has required our entire staff to consider the inequities that exist, and have existed for many years, within the Lake Tahoe Basin (Basin). We have evaluated our strengths and weaknesses, and have committed our agency to betterment with empathy, vulnerability, and conviction. I am proud to see the remarkable progress made during the process to develop this REAP, including through trainings for our Board and staff, engagement with community members and partners, and internal discussions that push us to improve on an individual and agency-wide basis.

I am grateful for the work of our staff, Board, and community, supported by the Equity and Wellness Institute (EqWI), as we have pursued racial equity advancements. We acknowledge that while the Conservancy has made great strides, we have much work to do. This REAP serves as our guide to advancing racial equity and will help ensure our accountability towards its goals.

Jason Vasques, *Executive Director*  
California Tahoe Conservancy



## What is a Racial Equity Action Plan?

This REAP serves two primary purposes, including to: 1) present challenges of the Conservancy’s current racial equity practices, knowledge of racial equity principles, and existing barriers to equity and 2) set goals to address the challenges and provide actions to advance racial equity through internal and external operations.

The REAP guides the Conservancy’s efforts to advance racial equity and support for people who are underserved by government through internal improvements, improved external collaboration, and increased equitable public engagement. The REAP also supports the Conservancy in undertaking “authentic” community engagement. Authentic engagement involves sharing power with individuals and local organizations, and recognizing them as fellow experts.

## Why We Need a REAP

Historical actions by federal, state, and local governments have created and maintained racial inequity through law, policy, funding, programs, and organizational culture. Institutionalized policies and practices continue to perpetuate injustice throughout the nation, the State, and the Basin. Government

agencies at all levels are increasingly reflecting on, assessing, and improving their policies and practices to rectify historical discrimination and avoid future inequities.

As a state agency that serves the community, it is important for the Conservancy to recognize the diversity among Basin residents and visitors alike. According to the Lake Tahoe Info website, [laketahoeinfo.org](http://laketahoeinfo.org), (based on 2020 Census data)<sup>1</sup>, racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic demographics have shifted significantly in the Basin over recent decades. Between 2000 and 2020, the proportion of individuals identifying as Latin American or of Caribbean descent has risen to 22% of the Basin population, up from 17% in 2000. (The increase aligns with trends in California's statewide demographics; the Census reported that nearly 40% of the state population identified as being people Latin American or people of Caribbean descent.) This population, along with other communities, such as Native/Indigenous (0.39%), African American (0.46%), Asian American (3.44%) and Native Hawaiians/Pacific Islander (0.13%), and other/mixed racial and ethnic (4.93%) comprise almost 30% of the Basin population. While the total population in the Basin dropped from 62,843 (2000) to 55,836 (2020), the total population of people of color rose from 15,082 (2000) to 17,309 (2020).

- The greatest percentage increase in persons identifying as being people Latin American or people of Caribbean descent has been in the north shore communities of Incline Village, Tahoe Vista, Kings Beach, and Brockway, and Tahoma on the west shore.
- The City of South Lake Tahoe had the greatest increase in residents who identify as being Latin American or of Caribbean descent, particularly in the Bijou neighborhood.
- Of 3,900 students within the Lake Tahoe Unified School District (LTUSD), 45.5% of students identify as Hispanic/Latino, 2.4% as Filipino, 1.3% as Asian, 0.3% as African American, 0.4% as Native/Indigenous, and 3.7% as mixed race. Altogether, nearly 55% of the students in the district identify as persons of color, predominantly people Latin American or people of Caribbean descent. Nearly 25% of LTUSD students identify as English Learners. Nearly 60% of all students qualify for the free and reduced cost lunch program.
- The **Lake Tahoe Destination Stewardship Plan** reported that 30-50% of Spanish-speaking residents in the Basin do not feel included in activities or programs because communications are often produced in English only. Rising rates of multiple languages other than English spoken in the Basin make language accessibility a priority for Basin-based organizations.
- Additionally, the percentage of Basin residents who are 65 years or older has increased to 20%, up from 13% in 2010.

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1 Caveats to this data: Informed by years of inequitable outcomes and ill intent by government agencies, communities of color have historically mistrusted government data collection methods and outdated racial and ethnic categories, which results in underreporting. Also, Census data cited in these reports are more than four years old.

## Why Lead with Race

The Conservancy recognizes its responsibility, as part of the government, to be accountable for the government's historical role in using race to establish structures and systems designed to deliver racist outcomes. In leading with race, we acknowledge the deep and pervasive racial inequities that exist in the United States. Across any measure of success—including health, income, housing, education, or criminal justice—significant and lasting differences in outcomes exist in the United States based on race. But race also intersects with many if not all other marginalized identities; and lifting up race has been shown to benefit other marginalized communities.

## State Direction

Governor Gavin Newsom established California for All as a core pillar of state government. The State of California's commitment to advancing equity is evident through executive orders (EO), including EO N-16-22, which directs state agencies to take additional actions to embed equity into their mission, policies and practices, and EO N-15-19, which acknowledges and apologizes on behalf of the State for the historical "violence, exploitation, dispossession and attempted destruction of tribal communities."

The California Natural Resources Agency (CNRA) has further pushed agencies to take meaningful and accountable actions towards racial equity. Advancement of racial equity and environmental justice is inherent and central to CNRA-led initiatives such as Pathways to 30x30 and Outdoors for All. The Pathways to 30x30 initiative seeks to protect and restore biodiversity, expand access to nature, and mitigate and build resilience to climate change. Outdoors for All champions expanding parks and outdoor spaces in communities that need them most, supporting programs to connect people who lack access, and fostering a sense of belonging for all Californians in the outdoors.

The Conservancy participates in monthly Environmental Justice Roundtables to collaborate with CNRA and sister agencies on equity improvements. CNRA provides guidance on environmental justice policies and sets goals for the agencies it oversees, such as the Conservancy, to meet. The Conservancy's REAP provides another avenue for the Conservancy to be accountable to state directives.





## Our Process and Journey

Prior to 2020, the Conservancy had taken steps toward addressing inequities, but such steps were often siloed within the work of our programs, and our staff had not benefited from extensive racial equity training or coordination. Following the murder of George Floyd, and the summer of racial reckoning that followed, the Conservancy joined many other California state agencies in considering racial inequity more intensively with respect to its mission, and initiated internal conversations that began its racial equity journey.

That same year, 11 Conservancy employees began participating in an 18-month racial equity training program through the Capitol Collaborative on Race and Equity. This spurred staff to engage with racial equity and community engagement principles and assess the Conservancy's needs. This group conducted internal trainings for staff and began sharing short teaching moments about racial equity during all staff meetings.

Much of the Conservancy's early work culminated in September 2022, when the Board adopted an amendment to the Conservancy's 2018-2023 Strategic Plan, adding a guiding principle, a strategic plan goal, and four strategies to advance racial equity and better serve all Californians, regardless of race.

During the first two years of internal trainings and discussion, the Conservancy recognized two major needs:

- To better understand and quantify the problem of racial inequity within the Conservancy jurisdiction, the boundaries of which follow watershed boundaries, not Census tracts or municipal boundaries, and
- To provide more Conservancy-specific support for racial equity and community engagement, including training for its staff and Board.

Such needs would better enable the Conservancy to engage the community in its equity work, and help craft a REAP. In September 2022, not long after amending its strategic plan, the Conservancy hired EqWI to work side-by-side with staff on these efforts. As summarized in the Methodologies section below, the development of the REAP was a comprehensive and holistic effort by staff, the Board, the Washoe Tribe of Nevada and California, community leaders, and many other partners.

At its June 2024 Board meeting, the Conservancy approved its new 2024-2029 Strategic Plan. A commitment to the Washoe Tribe and racial equity principles are at the forefront of the plan, and remain key drivers of the Conservancy's work. The Conservancy has designed the REAP and Strategic Plan to complement each other. The Strategic Plan provides the Conservancy's overarching equity vision as it sets out the goals and strategies in support of its mission. The REAP sets more detailed strategies to work within the Conservancy's mission to ensure our actions reduce, not perpetuate, inequity.



## Methodology

To build a REAP that is data-driven and solution focused, the Conservancy and EqWI used several data collection methods throughout the development process. Each method revealed patterns and data that were reflected in themes, findings, and strategy recommendations that EqWI initially provided to the Conservancy, which evolved through additional staff input. These serve as the basis for the REAP.

### Data and Document Review

EqWI reviewed Conservancy-provided documents, such as relevant reports from other agencies, guidelines, press releases, and some existing racial equity work. EqWI identified emerging patterns to conduct a thematic analysis, as is typically done with these types of qualitative data.

### Internal and External Interviews

EqWI took multiple steps to gain an understanding of the Conservancy's baseline knowledge of racial equity principles, and learn about its goals and vision, and concerns. Such steps included individual interviews with Conservancy Board members, Conservancy employees, and key community partners, and an all-staff survey.

### Best Practices Research

EqWI researched other local, state, and federal environmental agencies and conservation-focused entities who are committed to racial equity and authentic

community engagement. EqWI reviewed this agency information to see how those entities incorporate racial equity into their work, and to identify any best practices and lessons learned from those efforts.

## **Community Listening Sessions**

In coordination with Conservancy Staff, EqWI conducted listening sessions with the Washoe Tribe, traditional Conservancy partners, community-based organizations, individuals who represent communities facing the greatest inequities, and underrepresented visitors to Lake Tahoe. In the listening sessions, EqWI solicited feedback from participants on preferences regarding engagement practices, awareness of the Conservancy's efforts around racial equity, current involvement in Conservancy affairs, preferences regarding engagement practices, and ideas for improvement.

## **Community-Based Participatory Research**

Community-based participatory research (CBPR) means that members of the community develop and lead research related to their community. This approach focuses on collaboration and empowering communities. As a more equitable approach to studying an issue, CBPR can find solutions that are driven by those who are most affected. To engage community members, EqWI collaborated with the Washoe Tribe and four regional community-based organizations (CBOs): ADVANCE, Bread and Broth, Gateway Mountain Center, and Live Violence Free. The partners participated in three trainings, selected their topics of interest, developed their preferred data-collection method (focus groups, key informant interviews, surveys, and town halls), and analyzed their data. Each CBPR partner drafted a report and presented their findings at a public meeting. The recommendations and findings are incorporated into the REAP.

## **Professional Learning**

EqWI facilitated six all-staff equity trainings and two division-specific trainings. Each training included follow-up professional development assignments that EqWI used to further inform the themes and recommendations incorporated into the REAP. Additionally, EqWI conducted two Board training sessions to discuss critical components of equity-focused community engagement, including the practical sharing of power, resources, stewardship, and decision-making, and how to recognize and overcome individual and organizational bias.

## **REAP Development Sessions**

All staff participated in additional REAP development sessions. During each discussion staff from each division evaluated and refined each theme, finding, and strategy.



## Overview

The REAP guides the Conservancy's commitment to advancing racial equity through actionable strategies.

The REAP begins with five major goals, derived from the data collection described above. Each goal is accompanied by challenges faced by the Conservancy and actions the Conservancy will take to address the challenges and accomplish the goals. Through the actions, the Conservancy aims to advance racial equity and improve community engagement.

Because there can be significant shifts in resource availability, budget and state-led priorities, the Conservancy will evaluate the timing and feasibility of each action. Some actions may be easily implemented, and others will require planning, policy, or process changes before implementation. Therefore, the Conservancy must allow for some flexibility but will also be accountable for the goals of this REAP, the tribal relations commitments of the 2024-2029 Strategic Plan, and equity reporting to CNRA.

## A Note on Evolving Language

As we strive to create processes and systems that are rooted in racial equity and justice recognize that language constantly evolves. The Conservancy will continue using inclusive language as a simple and constructive way to approach new concepts with humility and empathy. Such terms may change over time. The REAP uses current best language practices but also references federal and state resources that continue to use less inclusive terminology, such as the U.S. Census.



## Goals

Informed by the data collection and community engagement processes detailed above, the Conservancy has set five goals:

1. Embed Racial Equity in the Conservancy's Culture
2. Enhance the Conservancy's Capacity to Address Racial Equity
3. Improve Equity in Hiring and Retention
4. Maintain and Strengthen Commitment to the Washoe Tribe of Nevada and California
5. Improve Community Engagement and Communications

Each of these goals represents an overarching set of actions to address problems and challenges identified through the Conservancy's baseline assessment. The Conservancy synthesized the data and research conducted by EqWI, including from its community outreach and the community-based participatory research. The Conservancy used the findings from EqWI's research to derive the challenges under each goal and to develop the actions. Each action provides a specific step the Conservancy will take to advance racial equity within its work and advance the REAP goals.

# 1. Embed Racial Equity in the Conservancy's Culture

## Challenges

While the Conservancy is making progress in pursuing racial equity work, the agency does not yet have a clear vision of how to embed racial equity work into its mission and how it may impact employees' day-to-day work. The Conservancy is a majority-white agency serving a diverse community. As such, we must continue to improve our understanding of institutional racism and historical regional inequities, and their implications for Conservancy work.

We face challenges in ensuring cultural understanding and humility when engaging with the public—including with people who may value nature or recreate in the Basin differently from our employees—or while discussing difficult topics internally. Via this REAP, the Conservancy commits to providing clear direction and guidance to staff through policies, trainings, and community leadership to embed equity into the Conservancy's culture.

## Actions

***To improve internal procedures and conversational guidelines, and ensure leadership towards equity efforts the Conservancy commits to the following actions:***

### 1.1 Establish a REAP Implementation Committee

The Conservancy will establish a REAP Implementation Committee (Committee), comprising employees from multiple levels of the organization, to meet regularly to lead REAP efforts and evaluate REAP implementation. A fundamental role of the Committee is to help plan the operationalization of the actions within the REAP. The Committee will rotate leadership to ensure various perspectives are represented and to share the workload. In the future, the Conservancy may consider whether further representation or input from Board members or community representatives is desired to help with implementation and accountability.

### 1.2 Develop Racial Equity Policies and Procedures

The opening section of the Conservancy's 2024-2029 Strategic Plan includes a commitment to racial equity, with emphasis that we interweave racial equity throughout the plan's goals and strategies. Taking this commitment a step further in terms of detail, we intend to incorporate racial equity existing policies, guidelines, and procedures. Further, we will determine what new policies, guidelines, and procedures are needed to advance racial equity. To help achieve, this, the Conservancy will establish clear guidelines for staff to have effective and respectful discussions about racial and social equity issues facing the Conservancy.

**1.2a Incorporate Racial Equity Policies and Procedures into Conservancy Operational Plans**

Conservancy divisions, departments, and programs develop annual operational plans to guide their work to accomplish the goals of the Strategic Plan. Division directors will ensure each operational plan incorporates goals and actions of this REAP, including adhering to resulting racial equity policies and procedures.

*To grow staff understanding of racial equity principles the Conservancy commits to the following actions:*

**1.3 Set and Track Equity Goals**

The Conservancy will develop a protocol for yearly equity-focused goal setting, using the REAP as a guidepost for areas of improvement. The Conservancy will develop a staff survey that identifies growth in understanding of antiracism, racial equity, and community engagement. The survey results will help inform decisions about REAP implementation.

**1.4 Continue Training Conservancy Staff and Board**

The Conservancy will evaluate agency-wide training needs and opportunities every year.

**1.4a Train Staff**

Based on the Committee’s recommendations, division directors and supervisors will develop a training schedule for each employee that includes racial equity best practices and cultural awareness and competency. This may include additional training on how to effectively and respectfully navigate conversations about racial equity in the workplace.

**1.4b Train New Employees**

The Conservancy will provide training on racial equity best practices and cultural awareness and competency for all newly hired employees.

**1.4c Seek Training from the Washoe Tribe and Community-Based Organizations**

Engage with the Washoe Tribe and organizations based in and serving the communities facing the greatest need to educate Conservancy staff on cultural competency and best engagement practices.



## Racial Equity Training

All Conservancy staff have completed at least eight racial equity and community engagement trainings. Many employees have participated in additional trainings or workshops. During Conservancy all-staff meetings, various employees take turns

presenting micro-learning sessions on equity topics. Also, leaders from the Washoe Tribe have joined Conservancy Board and staff meetings to provide information on the Tribe's history and culture.

### 1.5 Increase Team Building Opportunities

Include support for agency-wide team-building sessions and interactive workshops that focus on personal relationships to build an inclusive work environment. The Conservancy may partner with other Basin agencies for broader relationship building and networking opportunities.

### 1.6 Bring Diverse Perspectives to the Conservancy Board

Evaluate mechanisms to bring diverse perspectives and decision-makers to the Board (e.g., community advisory board, special committees) to reflect the diversity of California and incorporate Washoe Tribal representation.

## 2. Enhance the Conservancy's Capacity to Address Racial Equity

### Challenges

The Conservancy needs additional support and direction for staff to more readily and easily incorporate racial equity and community engagement into their full workloads. Much of the REAP and many of the Conservancy's racial equity goals are relatively new, and are not yet broadly integrated into all the Conservancy's work. As such, the Conservancy will enhance its capacity to implement the REAP.

### Actions

*To help reduce workload impacts of implementing the REAP, the Conservancy commits to the following actions:*

#### 2.1 Develop a Conservancy Lead for Racial Equity

The Conservancy will continue to dedicate staffing to lead racial equity efforts, support the Committee, and help staff implement the REAP strategies. This may be met through a new or existing position that has regular communication with leadership.



*Paddlers using Lake Tahoe Water Trail signage at the Conservancy's Patton Landing Beach. Photo courtesy of the Lake Tahoe Water Trail.*

## **2.2 Dedicate Sufficient Resources to Address Equity**

Dedicate specific funding and staffing resources towards community outreach, relationship-building with community representatives, and REAP implementation. Staff will reevaluate periodically to ensure there is sufficient dedication of resources.

### **2.2a Provide Project Funding for Community Outreach**

To provide additional support for employees designing and implementing projects, the Conservancy will ensure that project budgets include funding for community outreach. This may include additional funds for language interpretation and translation, and design and distribution of information in ways that will reach communities facing the greatest inequities. This relates to action 5.10, as both aim to incorporate equity lenses into Conservancy and partner projects.

### **Overcoming Language Access Barriers**

The Conservancy has made progress providing interpretation and translation services in Spanish. Starting in June 2024, the Conservancy offers live interpretation of Board meetings in Spanish. Many Conservancy documents, including outreach, agenda materials, and the 2024-2029 Strategic Plan

are also available in Spanish. The Conservancy will track requests for information in languages other than English and consider additional language services for the community, including American Sign Language

## **3. Improve Equity in Hiring and Retention**

### **Challenges**

The Conservancy's staff and Board do not reflect the diversity of the State of California. The Conservancy and its Board are majority-white, whereas 30% of Basin residents are people of Latin American or of Caribbean descent, African American, Asian American and Native Hawaiians/Pacific Islander, and other racial and ethnic groups. According to the 2022 American Community Survey: 40% of Californians are Latino, 35% are white, 15% are Asian American or Pacific Islander, 5% are Black, 4% are multiracial, and fewer than 1% are Native American or Alaska Natives.

Such disparity between the demographics of the Conservancy and the demographics of the community it serves could drive racial inequity. One example is it may lead to cultural insensitivity or micro aggressions towards employees who identify as Black, Brown, Indigenous, people of color, multi-lingual, and persons experiencing financial insecurity. As a state agency that serves local community members and visitors from around the State and world, the Conservancy is striving to diversify its internal demographics to better reflect the diversity of the Basin and California. We have improved hiring practices, and seek further improvements, while taking steps to retain employees from diverse backgrounds. The Conservancy recognizes that this goal and challenge are intimately tied with other goals, particularly Goal 1 and Goal 5.

### **Actions**

***To improve recruitment and hiring, and to support staff career development and retention, particularly for staff of color, the Conservancy commits to the following actions:***

#### **3.1 Improve Recruitment**

Increase funding for recruitment and create a recruitment strategy to better attract candidates from communities facing the greatest inequities, Washoe Tribal members, and students at the local community college and high schools. For example, the Conservancy may host "Lunch and Learns"

or similar casual learning opportunities to connect with and support potential employees with the state hiring and examination process.

### **3.1a Support Alternative Employee Pathways**

Create connections with local community organizations, schools, colleges, nonprofits, or other agencies that have feeder programs or pathways to state and environmental employment for priority populations, such as Black, Brown, Indigenous, People of Color, multi-lingual, and persons experiencing financial insecurity.

#### **Progress in More Equitable Recruitment**

For years, the Conservancy has implemented hiring practices aimed at removing implicit bias, including redacting names and other identifying information from applications, and standardizing scoring for

applicants. Additionally, within all duty statements, the Conservancy requires that a minimum of 5% of an employee's duties be dedicated to racial equity work.

### **3.2 Improve Retention**

Reevaluate and develop retention strategies that create a culture of inclusivity and address historical racial and gender bias. This action is closely tied to the improvements to Conservancy culture made under Goal 1, as an agency's culture must be welcoming and supportive of all its employees to thrive.

#### **3.2a Onboarding/Offboarding**

Create an onboarding framework that provides a mentorship or buddy system for new hires. Ensure that the offboarding process includes questions about racial equity at the Conservancy and any experiences that can inform REAP progress or areas of needed growth. For the Board, include racial equity training as part of Board onboarding practices.

#### **3.2b Employee Evaluation**

Include REAP-related goals in employee performance reviews and individual development plans. Evaluate the impact of cost-of-living increases on staff and to the extent possible, continue to offer creative solutions to retain employees such as flexible work options.

## 4. Maintain and Strengthen Commitment to the Washoe Tribe of Nevada and California

### Challenges

Tribal engagement and racial equity should continue to serve as a foundation for the Conservancy's future strategic planning processes. In full recognition of tribal sovereign nations, the Conservancy must commit to uplifting tribal voices, including within the Conservancy's day-to-day operations. Within the Basin, the Washoe Tribe are the original stewards of the Basin. As a sovereign nation, the Washoe Tribe continues to advocate for the protection and preservation of *waší-šiw ʔítdeʔ* (the Washoe people's homelands).

As part of its 2024-2029 Strategic Plan, the Conservancy commits to creating and finding opportunities for the Washoe Tribe to reestablish and grow their presence in the Basin through land ownership and management, access, representation on Basin boards and committees, language and cultural revitalization and reclamation, and capacity building of a Tribal workforce. Additionally, through the REAP development process, the Washoe Tribe has specifically requested support to practice cultural traditions in a safe and uninterrupted space, to have more Tribal Elder involvement when the Tribe meets with Basin agencies, and for the Conservancy and other agencies to assess the influx of tourism and the expense for Tribal members to spend meaningful time in the Basin.

In addition to the actions below, many of the actions identified in Goal 5 interrelate to tribal support and are also designed to further the Washoe Tribe's presence in the Basin.

### Actions

***To improve visibility of the Washoe Tribe, support Tribal practices, and increase Tribal involvement in the Basin, the Conservancy commits to the following actions:***

#### **4.1 Enhance Tribal Support**

Build upon the Conservancy's work to provide funding for the Washoe Tribe's stewardship of Basin lands and participate in decision-making about Basin resource management.

#### **4.2 Increase and expand Tribal access and land acquisition across the Basin**

Work with the Tribe and partners to identify opportunities for expanded Tribal access to and management of public land in the Basin. Continue to seek funding and legislative and policy changes needed to support the Washoe Tribe's presence and land acquisition within their homeland.

#### **4.3 Include the Washoe Language**

In coordination with and to the extent desired by the Washoe Tribe, update Conservancy signage to include the Washoe /'wɔʃoʊ/ language.

#### 4.4 Promote Tribal Recruitment for Employment Opportunities

Ensure that employment and consultant recruitment strategies reach members of the Washoe Tribe and other local tribes.

#### 4.5 Prioritize the role of the Washoe Tribe in the Conservancy's Community Engagement and Communications

See section 5 for details on challenges and actions to uplift the Washoe Tribe.

### Government-to-Government Relationship with the Washoe Tribe

The Conservancy has a longstanding, strong relationship with the Washoe Tribe and seeks every opportunity to support the Tribe's leadership and work in the Basin. In 2016, the Washoe Tribe and Conservancy entered into a Memorandum of Understanding that formalizes their government-to-government relationship. Since then, the Conservancy has provided several grants to the Washoe Tribe to increase capacity and stewardship. For example, in February 2024, the Conservancy

awarded a \$600,000 grant to the USDA Forest Service, Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit, for forestry operations as part of its joint project with the Washoe Tribe to restore Máyala Wáta (Meeks Meadow). And, in June 2024, the Board awarded a \$220,000 grant to help fund the creation of a new Basin liaison position for the Washoe Tribe. The Washoe Tribal Liaison position will help ensure meaningful Tribal participation in Basin land management decisions and actions.



*Staff with the Washoe Environmental Protection Department host Conservancy staff on a tour of the Washoe Tribe's Máyala Wáta (Meeks Meadow) Restoration Project.*

## 5. Improve Community Engagement and Communications

### Challenges

Tahoe residents and visitors have limited awareness of the Conservancy's mission and its work in the community, but also limited ability to connect with the Conservancy and Basin agencies. The Washoe Tribe has expressed concern about Tribal members lacking adequate access to their homeland, and Tribal members for many years have been left out of conversations about the Basin and its future. The people the Conservancy serves need better and more convenient access to information about Conservancy programs and operations, particularly in languages other than English.

Language barriers persist in the Basin. For example, as stated above, a quarter of LTUSD students are enrolled in the English as a Second Language program. Also, according to the 2020 census, 29.6% of households in the City of South Lake Tahoe speak a language other than English. Moreover, according to the Lake Tahoe Destination Stewardship Plan, 30-50% of Spanish-speaking residents in the Basin do not feel included in activities or programs because communications are often produced only in English. Accordingly, community members seek information in other languages, particularly Spanish. Without such information, people cannot as easily participate in decisions the Conservancy Board and staff make that have consequences for their communities. And, as discussed under Goal 4, the Washoe language is absent from most official signage and communications throughout the homeland of the Washoe People, including within the Basin.

Coordination among Basin agencies to more holistically and efficiently communicate with the community is also needed. From the community-based research reports and community outreach, the Conservancy learned that many community members seek additional family-based and youth-centered activities that are accessible and affordable, and have concerns that tourism is prioritized, making it unaffordable to live in and enjoy Tahoe. A key finding and reminder for Basin agencies is to avoid assumptions about how various individuals, communities, and cultures value the outdoors, as not all people enjoy Tahoe or recreate in the same way. Better cultural awareness by Basin public agencies is needed to improve engagement with and welcomeness for community members of color.

### Actions

***To foster greater community involvement and awareness of the Conservancy's work, the Conservancy commits to the following actions:***

#### **5.1 Coordinate Joint Community Meetings**

Work with the Washoe Tribe, community leaders, and partners to meet and coordinate regularly to share Conservancy and partner efforts, updates, and partnership opportunities. This is intended to serve as an opportunity

for the community to learn more about the various entities in Tahoe, better understand the Conservancy's role as it relates to other agencies, and learn about new projects and uplift important community needs in a manner that is more efficient and respectful of the community's time.

**5.1a Support Equity Community Meetings**

Coordinate or support regular meetings with the Washoe Tribe, local organizations, community partners, and schools to create synergy around racial equity work in the Basin, and limit burden on individual agencies and community organizations.

**5.1b Seek Basinwide Equity Trainings for Multi-Agency Staff**

In collaboration with the Washoe Tribe and Basin CBOs, coordinate multi-agency opportunities for cultural competency training and best engagement practices that will serve communities facing the greatest inequities.

**5.2 Designate Internal Leaders for Community Outreach**

Designate an employee, group of employees, or the Committee, to lead staff from all departments in community outreach and engagement. The lead will support staff to achieve improved community engagement, such as increasing Conservancy presence with local community-based organizations, schools, and employers.

**5.3 Seek Opportunities for Conservancy Funding to Enhance Equity**

Evaluate projects and initiatives using a racial equity lens to open opportunities and develop relationships with new grantees and contractors, specifically for businesses owned by Washoe Tribal members, Black, Brown, Indigenous, and People of Color, and women. This may include a tracking system to ensure partnerships and funds reach the communities that are facing the greatest inequities.

**5.3a Include Racial Equity and Community Engagement Requirements in Financial Agreements**

This includes developing agreement processes that include racial equity and community engagement in the Conservancy's application criteria and evaluation process.

**5.3b Improve Advertisement of Contract or Funding Opportunities**

Improve outreach and advertisement of available funding opportunities to reach the Washoe Tribe and communities facing the greatest inequities.



## **Expanding Equitable Access**

Although Lake Tahoe is a world-class outdoor recreation destination, many people face barriers to accessing and enjoying its opportunities. As in the rest of California and across the country, outdoor access and its benefits are not equitably distributed to all communities. Race and income

often determine access. In September 2022 and December 2023, the Conservancy Board awarded a total of eight grants, totaling \$858,000, to nonprofit organizations to improve equitable access to Lake Tahoe's beaches, trails, and mountains.

***To enhance community communication and to better meet community members where they are, the Conservancy will undertake the following actions:***

### **5.4 Tailor Communication Strategies to Serve Diverse Communities**

Establish and strengthen Conservancy communication strategies that meet the communities where they are physically, in the appropriate language, and discuss items that are priorities to those communities. Examples of communities to establish relationships with include: school districts, CBOs affiliated with local houses of worship, local businesses, non-local organizations, and underrepresented visitors.

#### **5.4a Diversify Outreach Strategies**

Enhance community outreach through tabling at cultural events where Washoe Tribal members or communities who face the greatest inequities meet; conducting educational and experiential outreach at local educational programs; coordinating with other governmental or community entities to expand outreach outside of the Basin; and exploring the possibility of implementing a Conservancy Internship Program.

### **5.5 Dismantle Language Access Barriers through Translation and Interpretation**

Aspire to translate all Conservancy public statements, advertisements, and external communications in most languages of the Basin. Continue providing Spanish-language interpretation services for Board meetings, and evaluating other language needs. Ensure that Conservancy public meetings meet the language needs of the public.

### **5.6 Support Basin Community Ambassador Programs**

Explore partnerships with existing ambassador programs that provide opportunities for ambassadors to reach out to the community at parks, beaches, and other public spaces to provide information and education about various environmental initiatives, and connection to resources. Ambassadors help make the Basin a welcoming place and ensure that visitors are knowledgeable about recreation-related environmental

impacts and best practices (e.g. Leave No Trace principles). Community ambassador programs already operate in the Basin, supported by nonprofit and philanthropic organizations. The Conservancy will explore support for ambassadors that represent the demographics of the state and to further engage with underrepresented visitors and communities facing the greatest inequities.

### **5.7 Report Progress on this REAP**

Every two years, the Conservancy will provide the public with reports on REAP implementation.

*To improve community connection and better serve communities facing the greatest inequities the Conservancy commits to the following actions:*

### **5.8 Fund organizations serving communities facing the greatest inequities**

Prioritize contracting with or providing funding for programs and initiatives that serve the Washoe Tribe and organizations from communities facing the greatest inequities.

### **5.9 Develop Community Engagement Best Practices for Staff and Board**

Develop best practices for the Conservancy staff and Board to engage residents from the priority populations, including those identified in the community-based participatory research.

### **5.10 Add Equity Lens and Authentic Community Engagement to Project Development**

During the development phase of projects, consult with local community-based organizations that serve communities facing the greatest inequities and use various engagement strategies throughout the process. This relates to action 2.2a when applied to Conservancy projects.

### **5.11 Build Community Capacity**

Partner with or provide funding for other agencies and local organizations (e.g., ADVANCE, Lake Tahoe Community College, Sierra College, California Conservation Corps, and local schools) to create and support environmental employment pathways for young, diverse, and local community members that are under-resourced. This may include collaboration with Basin partners who use fellowship and student assistant models to diversify the candidate pool to support community engagement efforts. This interrelates with Goal 3, actions 3.1 and 3.1a, and implementation of both will have connected and synergistic effects.

# Appendix

## Appendix A: Community-Based Participatory Research Project

■ CBPR Reports

### Acknowledgements

The Conservancy thanks all who contributed their knowledge, information, and perspectives to help us improve this REAP, including the Washoe Tribe of Nevada and California, partner organizations and agencies, and many community members and visitors. Special thanks to the entire team at the Equity and Wellness Institute, who collaborated closely with Conservancy staff over two years on work that has informed this REAP and leaves the Conservancy better equipped to implement it.



*Equity and Wellness Institute*  
Cultivating Well-Being in Communities





**FRONT COVER:** People enjoying the Dennis T. Machida Memorial Greenway in South Lake Tahoe. **BACK COVER:** A couple walks along the Lake Tahoe shoreline on Conservancy land on the north shore.